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Report – International Conference

“Perspectives on the Evolving Situation in Afghanistan”

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The Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) held an International Conference titled, "Perspectives on the Evolving Situation in Afghanistan", in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung on March 28, 2022. The speakers in the inaugural session included, Ms. Amina Khan, Director CAMEA, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General ISSI, Dr. Niels Hegeswisch, Country Director FES, Pakistan. Honourable Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Foreign Minister of Pakistan and General Zubair Mahmood Hayat, Former Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee were Keynote Speakers and Honourable Shah Farman, Governor KPK was the Chief Guest at the occasion.

Honourable Shah Farman, the Chief Guest at the occasion stated that we need to understand the Afghans better as they feel betrayed. He said that the Afghan Jihad and the Nebraska University syllabus have changed mindsets and so many Afghans have given up their lives and have received nothing in return. Afghans have suffered enough over the decades and this has been the greatest dilemma of the past few decades. This is a great game which the Afghan people remember very well. Money was spent on wars instead of reconstruction which further alienated the Afghans and the war psychology was converted into a hate phenomenon, which has led to terrorism. He said that creating and justifying the institutions in Afghanistan to battle communism laid the foundation of Islamophobia so we cannot discuss the solution of Afghanistan in seclusion. He said that if the interdependent economy of any country goes down, everyone feels affected and we have no option but to accept that we are all human we have to rise and fall together because we are interdependent so we cannot isolate the countries that will go down if Afghanistan fails. He was of the view that we should stop segregating and dividing things as it is not possible that one country or one nation will go down without affecting the others. He further said that we must think about the Afghan situation and ask the question: are the Afghans responsible for this situation? The global community is responsible and we cannot look at the Afghan situation in seclusion as the world is interconnected, he concluded.

Honourable Shah Mahmood Qureshi, while giving his keynote address stated that the watershed event of August 2021 has changed much in Afghanistan. There are several challenges like weak institutions, a nonexistent economy and a continuing humanitarian crisis and a liquidity crunch. Afghanistan stands at a critical juncture and it is hoped that Afghanistan can move towards a

viable solution. He went on to say that the gains can be reversed so we must not allow that to happen and Pakistan has always promoted consistent engagement as the situation has wide ranging impacts on the region and beyond. Besides the immediate need to avert the humanitarian crisis, we need to focus on other aspects he stressed. Pakistan has always and continues to strive for a peaceful neighborhood and Pakistan is the most important regional player that has always been directly affected by events in Afghanistan and has helped build a regional consensus. Stability in Afghanistan is critical for the region as well as the international community. He said that four decades of war and bloodshed are over and there has been a demonstrable decrease in corruption leading to increase in revenue, hence there is hope that Afghanistan has the potential to move towards a viable and sustainable future, therefore the immediate task that the international community in general and regional countries, in particular, need to focus on is the stabilization of the country. He underlined that Pakistan has always advocated consistent engagement with Afghanistan at this decisive juncture and the importance of de-linking humanitarian assistance from political considerations cannot be overstated.

He said that Pakistan hosted the troika plus meeting and the 17th extraordinary session of the OIC on the situation in Afghanistan. Moreover, he said that Pakistan has pledged humanitarian assistance of rupees 500 billion that is around 30 million dollars to Afghanistan. He further said that Pakistan is acting as a channel to facilitate the flow of international humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and has even enabled India to supply 50,000 metric tons wheat to Afghanistan by allowing it a transit facility. He said that stability in Afghanistan is critical for prosperity of South Asia and the wider world and Afghanistan must not be seen through a regional prism but as a shared and collective responsibility as instability in Afghanistan will have negative consequences for the entire world. Failure is not an option and if the world community fails Afghanistan yet again, it will result in a fresh influx of refugees, enhanced space for terrorism and a rise in drug trafficking, he said. The Afghan conundrum has far reaching consequences and if not dealt with in time, the country may fall victim to terrorist elements. This can serve as a catalyst for instability in the region and specifically for Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, particularly Pakistan, he concluded.

General Zubair Mahmood Hayat, while giving his keynote address stated that Afghanistan is Afghanistan and must be seen in that context. He went on to explain that the geography and

culture of Afghanistan have not changed along with the culture which has remained constant; however, the environment has altered. However, the context has altered as has the construct, which have impacted the political and geopolitical dimension. In the current circumstances, the world's attention has been diverted from Afghanistan which is not a good development. He went on to say that we have witnessed some substantive changes as we have seen the SCO and OIC dealing with Afghan matters directly and the initial political engagements are more nuanced. Regarding the pledges made at the OIC meeting, he said that it is discouraging to note that not much has been done. Talking about the role of geography in the future of Afghanistan, he said that regional countries will have a greater role in Afghanistan due to regional connectivity, which remains vital to Pakistan as well. For the future, he said that there will be a greater discussion on the notion of neutrality with regard to Afghanistan rather than the notion of the erstwhile buffer state of Afghanistan that is seen. The debate on neutrality has opened up very acutely in Ukraine, he remarked. According to him, the notion of what constitutes neutrality and how it impacts the red line of certain powers is very vital and if and when the concept of neutrality is to take shape in Afghanistan, there requires a greater clarity on these core aspects. Talking about the challenges being faced by Afghanistan, he said that the country struggles with a weak economy as well as hunger and poverty along with an uncertain security situation. Regional engagement remains the best bet and that we must respect the Afghan future and the world must release the blocked funds and consider recognition, he concluded.

Director CAMEA, Amina Khan, while expressing her views stated that circumstances in Afghanistan have drastically evolved and continue to do so since the Taliban came into power followed by the US withdrawal. She said that in the absence of a negotiated settlement, a takeover by the Taliban was certainly expected at some point; however such a quick transition was definitely not anticipated. Even within the confines of the current interim set up, the real test for the Taliban began the day they assumed office, which is by no means limited to securing power, but revolves around legitimacy, acceptance, and performance and of course recognition, she said. Moreover, the group has not only inherited weak institutions but a nonexistent economy and now an ongoing humanitarian crisis and can be called a work in progress. She went on to say that ambivalence surrounding the future of international assistance has strained the Afghan economy. The provision of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan by regional countries is certainly reassuring; however, it is not enough to stabilize the economy let alone sustain the Afghan

population. If the Taliban are not able to consolidate their position, and ensure some semblance of stability, the fear is not so much of a civil war emanating but rather of transnational terrorist elements taking advantage of the situation and filling the vacuum such as the ISKP, she said. In such circumstances, the Afghan population not only continues to struggle for survival but at the same time becomes vulnerable to transnational terrorist groups; therefore this also calls for the international community to revisit the question of engagement and recognition.

Now that the Taliban are in power, it is imperative that they deliver on all accounts, and ensure that they honour their pledges of reform pertaining to governance, human/women rights, a representative political framework which is not only limited to an inclusive government but rather a diverse and robust opposition. She concluded by saying that It is imperative for the group to realize that if they do not honour their pledges of reform, particularly when it comes to fundamental yet basic issues such as a human rights including education for all; it will lose the support and recognition the group so badly needs from the international community, and more so from regional countries to legitimize their rule. At the offset she said that while there were concerns about lack of female representation, let me assure you that we at CAMEA are an all women's team who strongly support and advocate female empowerment and representation and while we did approach several prominent Afghan women to share their views as speakers, unfortunately for one reason or another could not take part in the conference.

Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry in his welcome remarks, highlighted the work of CAMEA at ISSI on the evolving situation in Afghanistan and stressed on the importance of such discussions.

Dr. Niels Hegeswisch, Country Director FES, in his remarks stated that we live in a wave of multiple crises and Afghanistan seems like yesterday as we have several other crises globally. He went on to say that the European Union has a responsibility, although there is insecurity in Europe and it must consider what can be its contribution.

WORKING SESSION I

The first working session was titled the 'Evolving Political Situation in Afghanistan' which was moderated by Ms Amina Khan, Director CAMEA. The distinguished speakers in the session

were: Sardar Nadir Naim, Chairman, Kabul Institute for Peace (KIP); Mr. Rupert Stone, Independent Journalist ; Dr. Alexander A. Kornilov, Prof. Dr. at Lobachevsky State University of Nizhni Novgorod, Head of Region Studies of Foreign Countries ; Mr. Adam Weinstein, Research Fellow, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft and Dr. Vladimir Paramonov, Researcher at the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan.

Sardar Nadir Naim, in his remarks, began by providing a historic perspective to the current and evolving situation in Afghanistan. He remarked that Afghanistan has always been a victim of its own geopolitical position at the crossroads of Asia and the corridor to the warm waters of the Indian ocean. He said that before the inception of modern Afghanistan this region was coined as the highway of conquerors or conquests as the invasions ventured and Afghanistan immediately became a buffer zone between British India and Russia and then the British decided to venture into Afghanistan. He then referred to the Anglo-Afghan wars and the historic events of the time of the Great Game. He mentioned that half million Afghans lost their lives during the withdrawal of the Soviet Union after which the Soviet Union also collapsed. Thereafter, a new terminology was coined as Afghanistan being the graveyard of the empires. He said that foreign occupations have always left a trail of devastation in. He remarked that Afghanistan is currently facing a similar scenario whereby the US's exit and the premature collapse of Ghani's government has left Afghanistan in a very fragile state. The economy that relied 70 to 85 on foreign aid collapsed overnight, he said, and the banking system came to a standstill and this created a humanitarian disaster.

Mr. Naim further said that there are several steps and issues that need to be seriously addressed. First is the prevention of state failure and second is the continuation of the humanitarian aid flow without discrimination. Thirdly, he said, approaching the Taliban de facto administration in a non-confrontational way is important in order to convince them of the universal declaration of human rights. Moreover, Mr. Naim said that it is surprising that the Taliban are the most misunderstood movement in the history of Afghanistan. He then pointed out that the removal of sanctions which actually are hurting the Afghan people is important. He also said that unfreezing Afghanistan's assets is essential because right now the Afghan economy is in a meltdown and it has affected the private sector. He further underlined the importance of a mutually agreed mapping for the road to political recognition regionally and internationally. He said that the

Islamic Emirate must fulfill their promises that they made in their first press conference when they took over Kabul. Moreover, he said, there must be inclusivity and legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people. Human and civil rights of both men and women must be protected, he remarked. He expressed his grave disappointment that the girls secondary schools in Afghanistan have remained closed.

He went on to talk about the evolving politics of Afghanistan in terms of foreign relationships and the most important relation, he said, is that of Afghanistan and Pakistan. He said that Pakistan's recent desire and need to focus in shifting its emphasis from geopolitics to geo-economics could pave the way to a new chapter in Afghanistan and Pakistan's relationship as strategic partners as both are placed in the crossroads of Asia and as a great hub of connectivity. He also said that the two countries share common strategic challenges such as extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking, regional security and also balancing acts with superpowers such as US and China who have their economic rivalry intensifying. With the rise of China and Asia as the future economic hubs, he said, Pakistan and Afghanistan would do well to align themselves for a potential future. He then said that there are also some prerequisites that are needed to be looked at. He said that first and foremost, it is really important to have a peaceful co-existence and security in this region and secondly, a permanent trade agreement between the two countries so that the goods will flow in a fair and just way. According to Mr. Naim, there must be an immediate stop to border hostilities because border hostilities always create tension between nations and countries. He finally underlined the significance of addressing big important issues such as climate change, food, water, and energy security.

Mr Rupert Stone talked about the illicit trade in Afghanistan since the Taliban came into power. He said that the takeover of narcotics is a concern not only for regional countries like Pakistan but also for Europe, as the vast majority of the heroin on European streets originates in Afghanistan. He first gave some historical context and highlighted how opium production in Afghanistan really took off in the late 1980s and initially flourished during the Taliban's previous regime peaking in 1999 but then in 2000 the Taliban briefly banned drug production causing poppy cultivation to collapse. The ban was unpopular with Afghan farmers and was already failing by the time the US invaded in 2001. Under the NATO occupation, drug production and trafficking boomed like never before, cultivation reached almost 200,000 hectares in 2007 and an

eye-watering 328,000 in 2017 according to the UN. Soon after their takeover in August 2021, the Taliban stated that they would ban drug production and trafficking and they staffed their anti-drug police, established a drugs court and rounded up addicts who were publicly beaten doused in water and paraded around with shaven heads. However, despite some occasional drug seizures there has not been much sign of eradication which has made analysts skeptical on whether the Taliban would make good on their promise to ban narcotics due to the Afghan dependence on the illicit drug trade for their livelihood. Their reliance on the illegal economy was only set to grow after the NATO withdrawal factors such as foreign aid sanctions sent Afghanistan into an economic death spiral leaving drugs as one of the only productive economic sectors. Moreover, drought also favors opium as poppy does not need much water to produce a yield and evidence suggests that opium cultivation has not only continued but also increased under the Taliban. According to the UN, production rose by 8 percent.

While Afghanistan is notorious for heroin, it has in recent years also been diversifying into methamphetamine made cheaply using an abundant local plant ephedra which grows at high altitudes. Ephedra has been used to make ephedrine, a key meth precursor since 2016 and the ephedra trade appears to have expanded under the Taliban according to research by David Mansfield and his colleagues using satellite imagery. However in a seeming attempt to honor their pledge to wipe out drugs, the Taliban banned the federal cultivation earlier this year but the ban was limited to certain provinces and was imposed only at the end of the planting season so it will have to be seen until the harvest later this year to see if the Taliban really implements their ban. He said that it is possible that the move is nothing more than market manipulation since the price of meth and ephedra had fallen so low that they were becoming unprofitable. After the ban prices skyrocketed and this not only benefits those Afghans directly involved in the ephedra meth business, but it also brings much needed revenues to the Taliban through the high taxes they have imposed on the trade. While evidence points to rising drug production in Afghanistan, the same is true for trafficking which appears to be booming along various long-established highways such as the Balkan route through Pakistan, Iran and Turkey to Europe. Seizure data points to intensified trafficking out of Afghanistan. Since August, customs authorities at Torkham claimed to have seized an unprecedented amount of drugs since the takeover and October saw a record 80 kilogram crystal meth bust in Peshawar. Balochistan is likely to see the largest trafficking volumes and there have been sizable seizures in recent months with 300 kilos

of opium and 15 kilos of crystal meth seized in Gwadar in November. In recent years, meth and heroin have been trafficked from the Makran coast via the Indian Ocean to Africa and elsewhere in the region. This trend is continuing with seizures in Sri Lanka for example. The emergence of an expensive meth supply in Afghanistan has severely negative ramifications for Pakistan because there is reportedly growing abuse of ice in this country, especially among students. While Pakistan has largely completed its fence on the Afghan border which will reduce trafficking, it can not stop smugglers entirely who rely on corruption and their own ingenuity to get through.

The expansion of regional narco-trafficking is not only a concern for Pakistan but also for Iran where vast quantities of drugs have been seized since August last year. There has already been a spate of large drug seizures in Iran so far in March 2022. It is almost inconceivable that the Taliban will stamp out drugs in present circumstances and even if they did it might create new problems for European governments for example exacerbating poverty, hunger and the exodus of people out of Afghanistan. A drug ban might also cause a heroin shortage in Europe as it did in the 1990s and this could push dealers and the users they supply to shift to synthetic opioids such as fentanyl which is 50 times as potent as heroin and has been fueling record numbers of overdose deaths in the US. The solution to Afghanistan's drug crisis is not prohibition per se but long-term economic development that will give Afghans opportunities other than drug production and trafficking and European states and others should provide aid to help facilitate this outcome, he concluded.

Adam Weinstein, while giving his perspective stated that even though we find ourselves at peace when it comes to armed conflict in Afghanistan, we now face an economic disaster and the Afghan people will face the brunt of that. He said there are things that the international community can do regardless of what the Taliban choose to do because nobody has control over the Taliban's actions so the political situation in Afghanistan should be approached by learning some of the lessons of the past, particularly during the last 20 years. He said that the United States and the international coalition did not pay enough attention to culture and ground dynamics during its intervention and it became a taboo to talk about ethnicity in Afghanistan and yet, we know that conflict hardens ethnicity and hardens ethnic loyalty as a source of identity. He also said that it is important to recognize the sources and limits of legitimacy in Afghanistan and

the Afghan government that was completely aligned with the United States and the limits of inclusivity in the last republic and the limits of inclusivity in this future government. It is also important to discuss how to increase inclusivity while also acknowledging that real limitations exist especially with the Taliban in charge, he remarked.

He went on to say that it is a mistake to underestimate the Taliban and their resilience. He further explained that the Taliban are cohesive and resilient and it would be a waste of time to focus on a potential split in the Taliban movement. We should instead deal with the Taliban as they exist, he underlined. He said that the international community must not suffer from the same short-term thinking, stubbornness, lack of compromise, lack of pragmatism and refusal to accept the situation as it is on the ground. Going forward, he said, one of the primary barriers results from the Taliban's own positions especially concerning al-Qaeda and women's rights. Adam mentioned that the U.S special representative Thomas West has publicly stated that he's confident that the Taliban is genuinely fighting IST which presents a genuine threat to the region as we saw in Peshawar. However, from the United States' perspective, al-Qaeda remains the primary concern and the Taliban still maintains a relationship with al-Qaeda. He said that the closing of girls schools after they were briefly reopened is incredibly detrimental to the future of Afghanistan as it also prevents the international community from engaging either economically or diplomatically to the extent that the Taliban themselves have stated that by closing those school, it places western governments and the Biden administration in a very difficult position.

He further said that the United States treasury department recently released general license 20 which allows commercial trade even if incidental transactions related to that trade such as customs duties and taxes end up in the hands of the Taliban and this was a brave step on the part of the treasury department and the Biden administration but more is needed. Moreover, he said that it is crucial that the international community walks lockstep and that there is more coordination because one of the failures of the US intervention in Afghanistan was ironically our lack of coordination with our own partners. He said that the Americans sometimes forget that other countries have domestic politics and other countries have their own legal processes so in the future, it is absolutely crucial that the international community is coordinated in its approach to Afghanistan. Another important way forward, he said, is to not turn a blind cheek to the misdeeds of the Afghan government, the rampant corruption, human rights violations, and

nepotism. It is important to call out the Taliban and demand transparency and opening up of schools and make the Taliban understand that aid is tied to their actions as well, he remarked. He concluded by saying that the international community needs to think about what it wants Afghanistan to look like in 2032 because we cannot think short term anymore. He said that if the Taliban does not evolve in their governance methods they will not stay in power and the question for the international community is: 10 years from now whoever is in control of Afghanistan, whether it is an evolved Taliban or a new government altogether, are we going to leave Afghanistan with institutions or are we going to leave Afghanistan as a failed state because disengagement, regardless of its intent, will impact the Taliban behavior.

During his remarks, Dr. Vladimir Paramonov raised the question of whether security or economy should be a priority for Afghanistan. He said that even though theoretically both approaches are deemed equally crucial, in the western-centric traditional approach security and politics come first. However, this he deemed as the wrong approach. With regards to his country, Uzbekistan, he pointed out that for Tashkent the priority is now increasing economic linkages with not only Central Asian states but with South Asia as well. The key fact is that Afghanistan is vital for regional connectivity. Both economic development and regional integration are crucial for promoting domestic and regional stability. He also stated a number of regional projects which include the Belt and Road Initiative; Uzbekistan-Afghanistan railway and its proposed links to Iran (Herat) and Pakistan ; Iran-Afghanistan (Khaf-Herat) railway; India (sea)-Iran-Afghanistan transport corridor; the International North-South transportation corridor; the proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway; the Lapis Lazuli international transit corridor; the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline; the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) natural gas pipeline; the Central Asia - South Asia (CASA-1000) electricity grid and the Wakhan Corridor. He went on to outline how the projects under the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are the most effective ones. He said Afghanistan needs intellectual help. In this regard, scientific- based projects on key issues should be discussed. He said that the international community should not over-criticise, over-teach, over-guide the Afghans and instead be more focused on issues of economic development. This will bring peace and prosperity for not only Afghans but the regional countries as well.

Speaking from the Russian point of view, Dr. Alexander A. Kornilov stated that from the very beginning Russia has stood for an inclusive approach to resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan where all members and ethnic and religious communities and groups can have equal access in the governing of the country. He went on to say that the Russian leadership considered the events of 2021 in Afghanistan akin to another case of what can happen when the system of Western democracy is applied to traditional oriental society with its tribal and Muslim mentality and practices. Russian diplomats stressed that in order to address the question of officially recognizing the Taliban-led government, “we need to wait until the new government is formed representing all political forces, including ethnic minorities”. In order to help stabilize the situation in the country, Russia already then, in September, proposed to develop an international mechanism of mediators, known as the extended three (troika) format that included Russia, the United States, China and Pakistan. He further explained that along with forming a new inclusive government in Kabul, Moscow expected the new regime would fight terrorism and drug trafficking. All these proposals were announced while the Russian Defense Ministry arranged evacuation flights for some 400 citizens of Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan who asked the Russian Embassy in Kabul for help. Many Russian citizens, as well as citizens of the CSTO and CIS countries who have found themselves in a challenging situation were returned home. The August-September period was a time of reactive policies rather than active ones. Reiterating Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov’s speech at the United States General Assembly, he said that in order to bring peace to Afghanistan, first, any transitional government of Afghanistan should represent the whole spectrum of the Afghan society in its ethnic, religious and political diversity. An inclusive government, which fully reflects the interests of all ethnic and political forces in the country, is the key to achieving sustainable peace. Second, it is unacceptable that extremism spills over into neighbouring countries, and the terrorist threat must not persist on Afghan soil. Third, he said that the development of national education, public healthcare and other socially important areas, especially with very limited funds, certainly requires vigorous efforts but considerable funds remain to be frozen in international banks. It is time to mobilize the resources of the international community for efficient financial, economic and humanitarian aid, in part, with a view to preventing a humanitarian crisis and stopping migrant flows.

In the Moscow format consultations on Afghanistan in Moscow, Dr. Kornilov said that President Putin attributes high importance to this mechanism and considers it one of the most valuable ones in helping bring stability to Afghanistan. This format helps to develop regional consensus and common understanding of the path to settlement in Afghanistan. It can do so because it unites Afghanistan with all neighbouring countries and other influential states of the region without exception. He also said that Russia in its turn is helping this process on the regional level acting together with the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Commonwealth of Independent States. On Russia-Pakistan relations, he said that Russian diplomats have confirmed that they are actively interacting with Pakistan on the Afghan agenda both on the bilateral level and as part of multilateral mechanisms such as the “expanded trio” (Russia, China, the US and Pakistan) and the Moscow consultations format on Afghanistan. “We consider Pakistan one of the key regional players with great influence on the developments in Afghanistan”, he concluded.

Q&A:

During the question answer session Dr Sajjadpour asked a question from both Russian and American speakers regarding decision-making in Afghanistan.

Responding to the question, Adam Weinstein said that the decision-making takes place in the White House and the National Security Council and President Biden's advisers in some sense are the primary crafters of US policy in Afghanistan. However, things change due to the political system every four to eight years. He went on to say that more inter agency coordination is required which was missing during the withdrawal process. Lastly, he also mentioned the influence of the Treasury Department and Office of Foreign Asset Control in carrying out the President's policy prescriptions.

Responding to a question posed by Dr Kazem Sajjadpour on Russian decision making on Afghanistan, Dr Karlinov added that final decisions are made by President Putin in the Kremlin surrounded by his Security Council members. There is a special presidential envoy on the issues related to Afghanistan but final decisions are made by the president who attentively listens to what security council members tell him.

Ambassador Masood Khalid questioned what is holding the Taliban to come forward in meeting the expectations of the international community?

Responding to the question Adam Weinstein said the Taliban are still ideologues and the West looks at the Taliban's lack of decision making power as against their (Taliban) own long-term interests. Taliban do believe in their ideology and they have a strategic patience. He was of the view that Taliban are just making the same miscalculations that previous governments did in Afghanistan. For instance ignoring the matter of inclusivity. There are hardliners in the Taliban regime that want Afghanistan to be in poverty and for it to return to the era of the 1990's.

Sardar Nadir Naim added that some of the reactions that could be surprising for the international community is the Taliban's absolute idea and concept about not being dictated on what to do. It may take a bit of time for any kind of cohesive relationship to be developed between the Taliban and in the International Community and in the meantime the Afghan people again will be the victims and the suffering.

Responding to a question on drug trafficking, Rupert Stone said reducing drug supply is futile as there is always demand because traffickers will always find a way around restrictions etc. He said that demand for Afghan drugs is really a European issue as most of the heroin in Europe comes from Afghanistan. Again, most of the money and the drug trade comes from trafficking and of course trafficking is an international phenomenon by definition so it calls immediately for a more regional international solution. He went on to say that the international community needs to engage with the Taliban whether it likes or not for pragmatic reasons on the drug issue. The issue of licensing opium for illegal opium trade is, as things stand, unlikely to work in Afghanistan for the simple reason that it is very hard for the Taliban, Iran and Afghanistan.

Responding to a question on the issue of inclusivity, Sardar Nadir Naim said that this is always being debated and what is really surprising is that there is so much dictation that is coming from the outside of what inclusivity in Afghanistan should be and it is never clear. Another question should be what is inclusivity for the Afghan people? He said that the Taliban are the most misunderstood movement in Afghanistan. It is always extremely difficult to judge exactly what they are thinking as well. The question of legitimacy and inclusivity goes hand in hand. One thing is clear that some of the elements, especially the elements who were against the Taliban are

not likely to return. Answering questions on women rights he said the situation of women in Afghanistan is a kind of a very broad subject because there is a divide between the rural and urban Afghanistan. Of course the people who are affected the most are the women in education and the women who are working, especially the ones who are working in the government.

Responding to a question, Adam Weinstein said that Afghanistan is a landlocked country and it does sit in one of the most sanctioned regions of the world. We see these same mistakes being repeated now that we have transitioned from a war in Afghanistan to trying to develop US economic and diplomatic policies. I hope that we unlearn these mistakes. The last 20 years of intervention did create bubbles of extremely rapid progress, economically or in terms of the civil society and these were underwritten by immense violence and poverty in the rest of the country. Development in Afghanistan and genuine sustainable human rights progress in Afghanistan would have gone much slower and that is what is going to happen today. He went on to say that the US is reducing its presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There was a flaw in US intervention from the beginning. Iran had provided intelligence as an example at the very beginning of the US invasion but unfortunately the Bush administration squandered that budding era of cooperation because they included Iran in the axis of evil. Moreover, according to Zahid Hussein's account in his book No Win War, the Pakistanis had warned the Bush Administration if you are going to invade Afghanistan at least do not let the northern alliance take control of Kabul. The NA did not listen so there is this web of conflicting interests in Afghanistan as well as in the region.

INAUGURAL II

The second working session was titled the Evolving Economic Situation in Afghanistan and was moderated by Hamayoun Khan, Program Coordinator FES. The distinguished speakers in the session were: Mr Tamim Asey, Founder & Executive Chairman of the Institute of War and Peace Studies (IWPS), Kabul; Dr. Kazem Sajjadpour, Former President, DG IPIS; General. Levent Gozkaya, Former Turkish Commander of Kabul Regional Command and Dr. Haiyun Ma, Assistant Professor at Frostburg State University. Ambassador Mansoor Ahmed Khan, Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan was the Keynote Speaker and Senator Anwar Ul Haq Kakar, was the Chief Guest at the occasion.

WORKING SESSION II

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In his keynote address, Ambassador Mansoor Ahmed Khan stated that we see certain changes in Afghanistan since August 2021. He explained that we have to see how the Afghan economy was running since the last few years, which was already under immense pressure. He explained that almost two hundred people were dying every day unfortunately and a large part of the Afghan territory was not accessible to businessmen. The Afghan economy was fragile and Covid also had an impact and the restrictions due to the pandemic in neighbouring countries also affected Afghanistan resultantly. The drought in Afghanistan has also been a factor and many Afghans live below the poverty line as there is a gap between the income and expenditure, which was previously being met by foreign aid. After the Taliban takeover, foreign aid was discontinued and the reserves were frozen, banking restrictions emerged, the economy started crippling as a result. He further said that the government servants and entrepreneurs started leaving Afghanistan which further contributed to the freefall. As a result, the economy nosedived. Afghanistan is a trading country, with 800 to 900 million dollars' worth of exports, with 7 to 8 billion dollars' imports, with a large gap between revenue and expenditure. Post-August 15, 2021, there has been no funding injection and the GDP has contracted by 30%. Between the years 2013 to 2021, the size of the Afghan economy was 20 billion dollars and it started contracting, with employment rates going down. Ambassador Khan further said that the solution to the problems in Afghanistan is recognition, issue of CT, capacity building, terrorist challenge and all of these issues have to be addressed effectively.

The US and UN have provided some humanitarian aid but this has certainly not been enough. He further explained that recognition through dialogue is the answer. Similarly, he said that greater transit trade, connectivity, with trade and transit corridors emerging, will all receive a boost

whenever the Afghan economy recovers. He also said that the focus should be on reviving the rail projects as well, which can provide great advantages. Talking about Pak Afghan trade, he said that Pakistan is one of the largest export destinations for Afghanistan whereas Pakistan is the third largest export destination for Afghanistan. He concluded by saying that we must ensure that Afghanistan does not go into isolation again.

Senator Anwar Ul Haq Kakar, while expressing his views said that if there is chaos in Afghanistan, there will be chaos in the region. He went on to say that the outside region is interested in their own advantage. Responsible withdrawal did not take place and the international community has spent so much on conflict in Afghanistan, however, there has been no nation building or investment in infrastructure. Pointing out the contradictions, he said that when the NATO/ISAF forces were in control, there was not so much insecurity about security as there is now. Six million children in Afghanistan are on the brink of starvation, therefore priorities should be reset in Afghanistan. Talking about the Afghan government, he said that if it is not a legitimate government, then how can it be held accountable. He said that communities should be allowed to grow naturally and there are certain questions regarding several issues and talking about girl's education, he pointed out that how many girls had access to education previously. He said that we have a moral responsibility to rebuild in the better interest of Afghanistan and the Afghan people, he concluded.

Tamim Assey was of the view that it is the age of multipolarity and in this age it is important that regions grow and engage in interdependent geo-economics. He said that the situation in Afghanistan, whether positive or negative, always has a spillover effect in the region. It is imperative to use Afghanistan's assets rather than liability and use Afghanistan as a roundabout of cooperation for regional countries. He mentioned that now Taliban are in power and it is highly dependent on the leadership in Afghanistan to generate a vision for the country and develop management capabilities. On the humanitarian aspect, he said Afghanistan is on the verge of a humanitarian crisis and both internal and external factors are driving the crisis. He highlighted that freezing of assets and sanctions have badly impacted the economy of Afghanistan. In order to deal with the crisis, the Afghan leadership should develop a legitimate vision and long term solutions for the looming situation. Along with this, any long term economic development should have the private sector to be involved to tap maximum benefits.

Kazem Sajjadpour while talking about the evolving situation in Afghanistan highlighted three important aspects. Firstly, actor ship and hegemony, secondly balance and management and lastly, compass and cooperation. He said that Afghanistan has been defying everyone's simplistic approaches towards it for the last century. He further said that everyone in Afghanistan has been playing the blame game for decades now so the question is, how do we analyze Afghanistan? He highlighted that many actors including international, regional and local actors have been involved in Afghanistan. He stressed that it is wrong for any group in Afghanistan to think that it can dominate Afghanistan while ignoring the other actors. He further said that at this stage we should help Afghanistan to get out of the current situation. For that there is a need to focus on the managerial side so that balance can be brought into Afghanistan. He also underlined the importance of the crucial condition of Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis because it will result in major human and economic catastrophe. While talking about the security he mentioned that security of Afghanistan is interlinked with the security of the regional countries as well so it must be ensured. Moreover, he said that regardless of whatever has happened in the past, all countries should have a working relationship with the Taliban in order to fill the gaps that have been created. In this regard, Iran has done a commendable job while working on the bilateral relationships between Iran and Afghanistan especially in the past 8 months, he concluded.

General Levent Gozkaya, said that during the last twenty years Turkey's approach towards Afghanistan was that if anyone leaves Afghanistan Turkey must stay there to support Afghan people, contribute security and stability in the region. Talking about stability and security in Afghanistan he mentioned that it is imperative to look at the significant events in the history and lessons learnt from those practices. International community has spent billions of dollars for security and stability projects in Afghanistan but unfortunately the expected outcome could not be obtained. If Pakistan's efforts in this regard have been recognized then results could have been different. He highlighted that in order to reach the desired goal in Afghanistan security has to be guaranteed in the region.

Dr. Haiyun Ma was of the view that Afghanistan is a hotspot and because of its geographic location, it is called a stabilizer in Eurasia. When US invaded Afghanistan it engaged all the regional countries in an anti-terror war and with the US exit from Afghanistan; this war seems to be over. Now it is important to understand the response of the regional countries whether they

have stopped their so-called anti-terror war either domestically and regionally. He said that when we talk about economic reconstruction it does not have that kind of regional mechanism which is a major challenge. He also mentioned that Afghanistan does not have a unified government which is one of the major issues at this stage. Because a number of international companies and other institutions want to invest in Afghanistan but they cannot do so because of the looming situation. He said that it is important to understand that all the regional countries should have economic mechanisms for Afghanistan's economic reconstruction. While talking about the extension of CPEC to Afghanistan he highlighted that Pakistan is not a great economic power and in order to change its geopolitical framework to a geo-economics framework, it has been encouraging China to include Afghanistan in CPEC.

Q&A:

During the question and answer session, Amir Durrani asked about the role of the United Nations (UN) in Afghanistan and what role the UN is playing in Afghanistan?

Responding to the question Dr Sajjadpour said that the UN is a multilateral institute and it can not act in isolation. The role which the UN is playing in Afghanistan has a proper mandate and the mandate is collectively renewed by a group of states which means that the international community has not forgotten Afghanistan. The UN has a special representative of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan; which indicates that Afghanistan is an important issue for the international community. Moreover, UN involvement in Afghanistan is in the interest of Afghanistan and regional players.

While responding to the same question Mr Tamim Assey said that Afghanistan is on the verge of a humanitarian crisis and should not be turned into a UN protector. Afghanistan is a sovereign country and it has its own problems but the lesson of the 1990s is that the UN has become a business model for certain quarters whether it is within the EU in bureaucracy or outside. The UN in Afghanistan should have a clear-cut mandate with certain authorities with resources.

Ms.Amina Khan Director Centre for Afghanistan Middle East and Africa asked a question from Dr Hai Yu Ma, about the possible extension of CPEC to Afghanistan as President Ghani government was reluctant but with the condition of extending it or first providing the Wagha

route to India and then possibly thinking that Afghanistan could be included. Taliban are very interested in such investment but are the Chinese serious on this front?

Answering the question Dr Hai Yu Ma said that Pakistan and Afghanistan have been discussing with China the possibility of extending CPEC projects. CPEC has contributed to infrastructure development, energy sector projects in Pakistan and their connectivity with Afghanistan. During the recent visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister to Islamabad and then to Kabul, this issue was further discussed and we will have more discussions in this respect. The forthcoming meetings in China between neighbours of Afghanistan and representatives from the interim government will also be present. It is expected that they will make good progress in terms of moving forward practically on connectivity between CPEC and Afghanistan.

He further stated that the primary country that should be responsible for Afghan reconstruction is the United States which really sets the tone and no other country would contribute more than the United States. When you talk about CPEC you have to look at why you need CPEC or extend the CPEC to Afghanistan without looking at Iran or Turkey. At least, for Turkey you already have Kazakhstan or this Northern Line, for Iran you have very cheap Marine passage. The only possibility if China extends CPEC to Afghanistan is more like a political reason.

Dr Ma Haiyun further stated that if you talk about the extension of CPEC then I think Pakistan's rulers will try to persuade China to do it due to the United States factor. I don't think it's feasible to build or extend CPEC from China to Afghanistan. If China wants to do so it is so easy. China can build a real way in Tibet which is not a technical issue but China has not done so because of the security concerns in Central Asia and the Middle East such as the resurgence of ISIS in Afghanistan. They may build some kind of infrastructure from the Afghanistan border to connect to Pakistan but I don't think they can build something like a Trans Afghan Railway or infrastructure to connect with Iran or Turkey.

Amina Khan also asked about the regional interlocutor who could engage with the Taliban. The Chinese have reservations and they are putting it on the Americans since they blame the Americans for the entire situation in Afghanistan and so do the Russians. Can you please comment on it?

Replying to a question of Amina Khan, Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan said, foreign presence has been there in Afghanistan for the past four or five decades and it has shown that there has been no solution for peace and stability in Afghanistan. The other factor during the 1990s when foreign forces were not present in Afghanistan, it could also not find an indigenous solution. I think it is important that this time an indigenous solution for Afghanistan will have to be long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan. In this endeavor, neighbours can definitely render assistance to Afghanistan and there is no need for any regional interlocutor as the countries of the region should come together engage constructively with Afghanistan and hold a comprehensive dialogue with Afghanistan on political, security and economic issues. There is a need to find a regional economic solution and it will be a win-win situation for Afghanistan and the entire region along with international peace and stability.

Dr. Sajjadpour was of the view that every time one neighbour wants to do something even out of good intention the others all get sensitive. A good example that could be followed is that Afghanistan's good neighbourly declaration came then at the heart of the Asia process. Later, it got politicised because others brought their problems from outside of Afghanistan. Those two models are very good models to follow as long as we should not set maximalist goals on certain minimum security economic trade and transit issues.

She also asked a question from Ambassador Mansoor the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has always been viewed through the security lens or through a very narrow prism. During the peace process, the positive statements emanated from Afghanistan and if they went wrong, Pakistan was held responsible for the ills in Afghanistan. My question is since the Taliban took over, has the relationship somewhat changed? In addition, there hasn't been any strategic agreement with any Afghan dispensation even though the Iranians and Indians do have it. Are the Taliban interested in pursuing such a relationship with us?

Replying to this question, Ambassador Mansoor said that the Pakistan Afghanistan relationship has been a very comprehensive relationship. It has been a deep-rooted relationship. It doesn't have just one dimension of security or economics, it is a people-to-people relationship like Afghanistan has good relations with other neighbours such as Iran. Our border which is 2600 km long, thousands of people cross every day for social and economic activity. They also travel for

medical treatment. We should not see this relationship from a single lens. Although, there are security issues because we have a long border and we have a history of past four or five decades of instability in Afghanistan due to which Pakistan has also been affected. At the moment we are having a very constructive interaction between our two government and securities institutions. There is an understanding of our governments and our security institutions that all these matters relating to border security counter-terrorism will be addressed through official channels and official engagement. Moreover, interaction and dialogue on these issues will be deepened and enhanced. I will reiterate that the region should come forward and try to help Afghanistan constructively. It should also engage with Afghanistan in terms of ensuring that the situation in Afghanistan moves towards a longer-term peace and stability.

Dr. Kazem Sajjad pour responded with divisions in three sections, for Taliban and for the region. First is attitude. My sensuality of attitude is very important, still, Taliban have not developed. With a comprehensive attitude toward statehood, they think of themselves as a movement or a tribe or society but when you are in power you need to have a type of state-framed attitude. This leads to the second point which is behaviour that sets your attitude not just about the education of girls about everything so the behaviour of a state and still they are not in a situation to be recognized because of the attitudes and the behaviour. This brings us to the third part which is common language when you have an attitude and you have a certain standard of behaviour people can talk with you with a common language and with your responsibility as a state who is just responsibility as let's say people in charge of the society and the way they look at themselves they look at the society the to the other. This is very important with the link between attitude behaviour and common language as the same applies to religion.

In conclusion, he said we should adopt a regional attitude which I think is possible if we act as regional players because the acting and behaviour of regional actors also matter when you are a regional actor. Afghanistan has always been looked at from an International prism that is a war-torn country where the U.S. is involved.

In concluding remarks Hamyaoun Khan thanked all the speakers and participants for very interesting debates and very interesting points were raised by all the respective speakers. All the points were self-explanatory and a lot of good points were raised. He once again thanked all,

especially the Institute of Strategic Studies, for providing such an amazing opportunity to understand and to learn. He said that he is hopeful that the proceedings of the conference when published will generate more debates.