
International Conference **Afghanistan Beyond 2014: Implications for South Asia**

Conference Report



Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies
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CHAPTER ONE

INAUGURAL SESSION

Welcome Remarks by President, BIPSS Major General A N M Muniruzaman ndc, psc (Retd)

President, BIPSS Major General A N M Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (Retd) extended a warm welcome to all the participants of the international conference on “Afghanistan Beyond 2014: Implications for South Asia”. He noted that the subject of the conference “was of critical importance and relevance not only for Afghanistan but also for the whole South Asian region.” He also illustrated the complex historical problems in Afghanistan in which major powers got involved. Due to the lack of understanding of the Afghan intricacies, these are often termed as the “Afghan maze”.

Such a recent international involvement in Afghanistan brought the USA and ISAF into the scene in the beginning of the century when the USA led multinational operations was at the peak, with about 100,000 troops deployment in June 2011, which later was reduced to “pre-surge” level of about 66,000 on September 2012. Under the current strategic drawdown, the number will come down to 34,000 by February 2014, with the bulk of that drawdown to take place in the winter of 2013-2014.

President, BIPSS identified three crucial elements associated with success of the post-NATO Afghanistan strategy: the capacity and transparency of Afghan government; capabilities of Afghan National Security Force (ANSF); and the Taliban factor. All the three factors raise serious concerns about the future of Afghan domestic environment, as well as its spill over to South Asian and its neighbouring countries.

2014 is a watershed moment in the Afghan security landscape as it will mark multiple transitions in that country. It will not only see the withdrawal of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), but will also usher in a political transition and see an end of the Hamid Karzai era through general elections in April 2014. The transition in the security sectors will also be massive as the Afghan security forces will take over the responsibility for the security of the entire country for the first time.

How Afghanistan manages this triple transition being in its existing fragile condition is something that the South Asian and international communities will watch carefully. The issue of Afghan complexity and the current transition is of specific significance because of its critical geo-strategic location and its impact on the region. President, BIPSS opined that, as the USA withdraws from Afghanistan, a massive strategic competition among both regional and extra-regional powers will emerge. Each of these countries would cherish a strategic foothold in Afghanistan.

In the South Asian context, according to Gen Muniruzzaman, there is vicissitude of increased Indian interest in Afghanistan’s strategic space. For instance, the country has already contributed a large amount of development funds of USD 2 billion in 2012 to get a foothold in the country and Indian security training team will continue to train Afghanistan’s security forces. Moreover, the vision of potential new Silk Road linking the Middle East and Central Asia with South Asia may bring new strategic dividends. In addition, geo-strategic proximity and potential strategic depth will lead both Pakistan and India to compete for their sphere of influence. Pakistan, which was the dominant strategic player in the Afghanistan affairs, is looking for renewed state of linkages and space of influence in their bilateral relationship.

Finally BIPSS President illustrated the influence of the countries beyond the region. In particular, Afghanistan's neighbour Iran, that also was looking at an increased political and physical presence in the country. Besides Iran, the Central Asian Republics and their new engagement with Afghanistan bring another dynamics into the power play. The most significant feature to watch would be the new role and engagement of China in Afghanistan. It watches the Afghan security situation with caution because of the potential nexus of insecurity that it can spread to its Muslim separatist groups in North Western Chinese region. A resurgent Taliban therefore is a matter of concern not only for South Asian region but also for other neighbors of Afghanistan.

Address by the Chief Guest H.E Robert Gibson CMG, British High Commissioner to Bangladesh

British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Robert W Gibson CMG addressed the conference as Chief Guest. He extended a special welcome to Mr. Rishi Datta, Senior Resident Director, National Democratic Institute (NDI) of the United States and Former Political Advisor to the NATO Senior Civilian Representative (SCR); Ms Martha Willcocks, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom; Mr. Shafqat Munir, Associate Research Fellow, BIPSS; Lieutenant General P. K. Singh, PVSM, AVSM (Retd.), Director, United Services Institution of India (USI); Mr. Imtiaz Gul, Director, Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), Pakistan; Major General A N M Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc (Retd.), President, BIPSS; and Ms Heather Cruden, Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh.

Mr. Gibson provided an overview of the post-NATO Afghanistan situation. As part of his discussion, he mentioned issues related to security concerns of Afghanistan, threats of terrorism, major powers' rivalry in taking strategic advantages from the country, and impact on South Asian politics particularly India-Pakistan relations.

"Long term stability in Afghanistan is of great importance to the UK and, of course, to all countries in the South Asian region", said Mr. Gibson. He also added that Bangladesh has been an important development partner and active contributor to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. So the issues covered in the conference are of importance for the Bangladesh.

In his speech, Mr. Gibson illustrated the plans of the UK for Afghanistan in the coming days. He announced that the UK will continue current development assistance to Afghanistan that started since July 2012, of £178 million a year, until 2017. This support will help the Afghan Government to tackle extreme poverty, create employment and achieve sustainable economic growth for long time. For instance, UK aid programme has created 20,000 jobs since 2011 and it will help to create over 50,000 new jobs in the country by 2015. In addition, UK troops will support the development of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) by providing training at the new Afghan National Army Officer's Academy.

Mr. Gibson concluded his speech by urging the Afghan Government and the international communities to work for an inclusive political settlement, improved governance, strengthened democracy, and to uphold human rights and women's rights in the country. He said that the direction of travel of Afghanistan over the next 18 months will have significant implications for the country's internal stability, international counter-terrorism efforts and regional dynamics within South Asia.

Executive Summary

The International Conference on 'Afghanistan Beyond 2014: Implications for South Asia' organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) at La Vita Hall of Hotel Lake Shore in Dhaka provided a unique opportunity for the intelligentsia, civil society, academia and media of Bangladesh to develop an understanding of the scenario evolving in Afghanistan today and the implications for South Asia following the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2014.

Concerns in Afghanistan have evolved over the years and have become more intricate. Both the primary focuses, Afghanistan itself and implications for South Asia were further elaborated to the relevant sub-field by the speakers which turned the conference to a comprehensive exercise of related issues. Probable courses of actions on part of international, Afghan and regional actors were also explored.

The inaugural session focused developing on a wider picture of the situation in Afghanistan including historical trends, current conundrum and future projections. Regional dynamics were also discussed. The relevance of Bangladesh, a populous yet moderate Muslim majority nation of the region, in this milieu was also highlighted in this session.

The speaker of the **first session** spoke on the intricacies of the current state of affairs in Afghanistan. The success and lapses of combined ISAF civil-military components and Karzai administration/ alliance were delineated which included democratic institution building, elections, administration, functional aspects of working together, security situations and their handling by ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The speaker suggested that security and diplomatic system building are the current concern in Afghanistan. As things stand now, the projection for future is inconclusive. The future would largely depend on how the politico-military environment evolves. The initiative to influence the future of the country lay with both the Development Partner-Afghan government coalition, who has some useful tools like ANSF and the supply of funding, and also with the resurgent, though not as strong as before, Taliban. External and domestic factors that influence events in Afghanistan were also touched upon in the session. The discussion also covered the propriety of external interference in Afghanistan, level of outreach of the conducted elections in the delicate security situations and the pluralistic nature of Afghan impasse.

The **second session**, focused on two themes. The first speaker elaborated on historic links between Afghan conflict and terrorism in the region with special attention to Bangladesh settings. He depicted the probable scenario in Bangladesh if the old linkages between Afghan terrorist and their Bangladeshi followers, of whatever size, are revitalized and also touched on some precautionary 'need to do' aspects. The second speaker dilated on the general terror trends and tactics of Afghan and Afghan encouraged terrorists outside Afghanistan. Counter terror philosophy at functional sphere and endeavor of the NATO allies of the Karzai administration were described which included the impediments faced and an assessment of success. A more flexible approach to include the Taliban in a political compromise was also mentioned alongside the suggested security measures.

Indian and Pakistani perspectives of the Afghan imbroglio were the prime concern of the **third session**. The versions each speakers of the panel, one from India and one from Pakistan, put forward, differed greatly. The first speaker emphasized the honest objective of Indian intent in engaging with the moderate Karzai administration was to assist a moderate political system and essential developmental activities to flourish. The second speaker saw game of influence and anti-Pakistan element in Indian posturing in Afghanistan citing, for example, India's intimacy with the northern non-Pashtun politico-military entities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

and 2 billion USD worth developmental efforts in cooperation with the Karzai government. The probable fault line of future regional competition in Afghanistan became crystalized in this session.

Session four covered developmental, economic and governmental issues in Afghanistan; including effect of the security situation on these functions. The speaker expanded on the way developmental and economic schemes were planned and conducted and where and how some of those faltered. The speaker stressed that the deterioration of security situation badly affected the economic and developmental operations coupled by poor governance and lack of capacity building by Afghan administration. She admitted that lack of proper cultural knowledge of Afghan society was another area where the external developmental partners fell short. There were dynamic exchanges of views on developmental strategy in Afghanistan which was a prime takeaway. The speaker suggested for more holistic, fine-tuned and subtle security and developmental efforts with optimum possible sync in the complex conflict situation of Afghanistan with the aim of taking that nation forward.

In the **closing session** the importance of continuing constructive engagement with Afghanistan was stressed alongside cooperation among all progressive stakeholders, domestic and external, in the coming days.

CHAPTER TWO

SESSION ONE: UNDERSTANDING THE AFGHAN IMBROGLIO

Mr. Rishi Datta, Senior Resident Director in Bangladesh, National Democratic Institute (NDI) of the USA and Former Political Advisor to NATO Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) in Afghanistan

Based on his experience in Afghanistan, Mr. Datta explained the current Afghan situation through the barometer of electoral effort, success level and related security concerns.

In 2005, electoral community in Afghanistan had a very successful electoral process. During and after the election, the international community provided strong support as well as cohesive efforts for ensuring successful democratic, developmental and electoral process in Afghanistan. 2009 was a very difficult year for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Security had been adverse for seven years with a continuous deterioration in South, East, and North Afghanistan. Governance had stalled completely. The 2009 Presidential Election was entirely divisive and damaged the trust between international community and Afghan political leadership.

2010 was also a turning point. The government's domestic policies posed several challenges. But with leadership of senior diplomats, who engaged with different strategies of counterinsurgency, public relations were improved. The focus during 2010 was about understanding where the problems rested upon and addressing those. This was done through a number of confidence building measures initiated by some stake holders including NATO Senior Representative's Office to reduce the gap among military forces, Afghan government and civilians.

As already mentioned, during 2010, a number of civilian diplomatic efforts were undertaken to push back insurgency and take them back in the political process. In Helmand and Kandahar, several operations were designed with the aim of delivering governance to the population through *Clear, Hold and Build* tactic. In addition, at that time, parliament was also active to ensure independence of Election Commission. That was the first time the parliament had taken some initiatives to highlight the wrongs that was actually happening in the country. NATO was also improving its ability to meet the number of Afghan national police and Afghan national army targets. Completion of the training of targeted figures of 170000 police and 165000 army personnel was massively undertaken. The US provided 1 billion dollars a month alone on training. In terms of governance, the Afghans needed to demonstrate ability. In this way, the process of transition started getting crystalized.

From 2011 to 2013, the overall political and security environment of Afghanistan was eased by the transition process whereby ANSF, both police and military assumed responsibility of security. The aim of the transition was not only to hand over security to the Afghans in order to enable them to conduct security forces, but also to ensure sustainable deployment of the ANSF to secure Afghanistan beyond 2014. The international community needed to ensure that the Afghan national forces were able to secure and stabilize Afghanistan. In 2011, as transition was taking place, NATO also needed to consolidate those gains owned by international community and by Afghan partners. Providing governance and development along with assisting Afghan forces were also necessary to ensure security and to move the country forward.

Two NATO summits in Lisbon and Chicago committed to a sovereign, secure and democratic Afghanistan. At Chicago, both the NATO and the ISAF focused on shifting its combat machine and providing training to Afghan national forces. The future of Afghanistan beyond 2014 depends on two key areas; **security** and **governance**.

It is anticipated that the 2014 election will be a real task for Afghans not only in managing the electoral process but also in providing security. According to Mr. Datta's experience, security has always been a highly challenging aspect and the electoral process is now almost entirely dictated by security environment i.e. whether people have the confidence to go out to the polling booth to vote safely. In early days, the electoral process was working with relative success due to high number of international advisers; but now the process has been largely handed over to the Afghans. In 2005, the Afghans played supporting role. In 2010, they were leading the process. In the last five years, they had been able, to a great degree, not only to understand technical capacity of the management of election but also to use and continue it beyond 2014. However, there are number of challenges for the next election that have to be dealt seriously. While the Election Commission requires greater degree of independence, the electoral process needs to be strengthened.

Convergence of number of factors like election, transfer of power to a new leader with no clear cut front runner is in sight, and completion of the transition of the security responsibility from ISAF to ANSF would make Afghanistan vulnerable in 2014. Ordinary performance of Karzai administration in the second term did not help the situation much.

It is very difficult to say where Afghanistan is heading. Due to the challenges of the upcoming electoral process and the transition process there is a potential for previous mistakes to be repeated. Yet, it is hoped that the steps taken by international community have done a lot to ensure Afghanistan's democratic and security environment.

Twitter Feedback-1

There were some instantaneous tweeter feedbacks:

"Are there lessons for Syria from Afghan experience?" by a twitter follower.

"What do you think of dollar for peace with the Taliban? They were bought back by the US", by a twitter follower.

"Do you think the US has outsourced security responsibility to warlords?" by a twitter follower.

"No political solution would follow the Afghan instability" by a Bangladeshi twitter follower.

"Afghan economy is addicted to inflow of security related money. How can it survive after the US withdrawal?", by another twitter follower.

Mr. Rishi Datta's Response was:

Afghanistan is not an easy challenge. After ten years of International engagement, and billions of dollars that have been spent on war, it did not herald the ideal state where the situation should have been at. However, the Afghans themselves have proven to be resilient and, in ten short years, they have taken over security lead of the country, which was not an easy task. Now the process of transition and the process of election, indicate that inputs are going towards the right direction. For the ongoing transition to be successful and in order make itself a viable state in the long run, Afghanistan must continue to receive the support of the international community.

Question and Answer/ Open Discussion

Chair of the Governing Body of a well-known think tank questioned about the source of the problems in developing peace and security in Afghanistan. It may be the external interference, he opined. What he observes about Afghanistan does not seem to render any optimism that things will change very soon. It appears that all the neighbors of Afghanistan and many others are looking forward in making spheres of influence in the vacuum expected to be created by the drawdown of the ISAF presence. Is the international community going to leave the country to the Afghans themselves to solve their problems?

The other question he raised was related to electoral process of Afghanistan. He requested for a bit more explanation on electoral process, its outreach, and the level of participation as well as the impacts that it had in domestic politics and to economic development of Afghanistan.

Mr. Rishi Datta responded that; generally, the electoral process from 2004 to 2011 is considered as massive progress in Afghanistan. Elections are a technically complicated matter in a country like Afghanistan as the country's history lacks any good practice of democracy e.g. single ballot and single vote. In 2010, all international and Afghan stake holders, related to election were proud of successful attempts despite the intricate security environment. Elections were technically successful, although politically unsuccessful; because the election commission demonstrated a great deal of courage and independence to ensure a, considerably, proper process. The election of 2011 was considered as decisive in order to renew partnership with Afghanistan and also to establish good governance. There were check and balance within the system. There was a highly computerized system to ensure anti-fraud measures. For example, the relevant civilian components of international presence offered some mechanisms to provide ideal ballots in an appropriate manner and as a result, election was very credible. The difficulties of presidential elections in 2009 were due to the failure of international community in providing enough support in that election. Is there any capacity building, to conduct an election, for the next election commission from 2010 to 2014? If this capacity building is ongoing, the electoral process will be successful technically. Politically, it will be challenging as it depends on security. And security is slowly improving in Afghanistan which is expected to be much better than what had been in the past.

It is not only the external forces but also the internal forces that dictate events in Afghanistan. There is ethnic diversity in Afghanistan. That is something else to worry about. International community also needs to watch carefully what would be happening and how good governance can be ensured in the country. Problems cannot be solved individually, or by Afghanistan itself. It needs comprehensive assistance and a historic developmental effort from the international community.

Brig. General Shahedul Anam Khan (Retd), Editor of Defence and Strategic affairs, The Daily Star said that when we speak about Afghanistan; it is not singular political, economic and social constant. When we discuss about the solution of Afghanistan, we overlook the internal dynamics and impediments that create challenges against cohesive and coherence development of the country. Does Karzai have the credibility to lead the country successfully? The nation may face an uncertain scenario. It is hoped that Afghanistan will emerge, after 2014, as singular entity and take some steps for solid future. The credibility of Afghan security forces is susceptible to threats from Taliban. How much Afghan forces will be dependent on western assistance in post-2014?

Mr. Datta replied that, only time will tell about future prospects, but it can be said that the Afghan national army is better trained than the police. They have long term training experience as they are selected through deeper means of checks than the Afghan national police. They are provided with better equipment and

training. There are some problems in policing sector. Police forces have some problems in their conduct with the civilians. It will take time to get things right.

Prof. Ataur Rahman, President, Bangladesh Political Science Association raised the issue of the current state of security in Afghanistan that remains a critical post-conflict fragile state after 12 years of US engagement. The situation did not change much in terms of democratic governance i.e. bringing about people's confidence in the system. What will happen after 2014? Will President Hamid Karzai continue as the ultimate leader? Who would be his successor as President? Transition of leadership is very important a part from security. When the foundation of democracy is in crisis, nothing good will happen. The whole security is still in the hands of the US and international forces. The withdrawal of the US forces will create a very difficult situation. Though international donors have taken successful initiatives, the disconnection between the people and the governing authorities would continue after 2014. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) spent 1 billion dollar in Afghanistan over the last 10 years without much success. He expressed his concerns about the scenario beyond 2014 unless people are involved meaningfully in the governing process.

Mr. Datta said that, 2014 is an opportunity not only for election commission to prove its ability to conduct successful election but also for the administration to maintain security in the country. The ANSF will have to take the leadership. Further more, time will tell whether the Afghans are ready to take those challenges.

A participant from the audience said that, geopolitical consideration and strategic planning are two important components. When the USA came, did they consider the geopolitical factors of Afghanistan? If the prevailing consideration is only domestic politics, can the Afghan army now completely undermine geo-political factors?

A Student from Department of International Relations of a prominent university argued that election may not be the only part of democracy; rather rule of law, a general sense of accountability and freedom of media are also very important. How are the international organizations and other institutions working for democracy and for the real time development in Afghanistan? **Mr. Datta** replied that, several attempts were taken for real time development; for example significant works has been done in Kandahar through the process of development, democracy and defense. International community did and will definitely consider for developmental projects. For example there were, *Clear, Hold and Build* initiatives in the country in 2010 and 2011 where developmental activities followed military operations in the regained territories.

Another student of Department of International Relations of the same university opined that, with the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces, there will be power vacuum in Afghanistan. As the political institutions are newly built and fragile, is there any possibility of involving the Taliban in the next election? What would be the result if they are involved? **Mr. Datta** replied that, not only the Taliban but also other opposition groups may create problems. So it needs a political solution.

A Head of Coordination and Communication of an International NGO said that, BRAC of Bangladesh has been working in Afghanistan since 2002 and their main target is progress of women in basic education, health, poverty alleviation of the ultra-poor women and capacity development. How would you explain women's participation in the next election? How do you ensure women's security and their access to education and health care if things go wrong? **Mr. Datta** responded that, international communities are working hard in order to ensure women's rights in Afghanistan. It is an extremely challenging issue due to existence of various cultures in the country. Whereas Northern Afghans are a bit liberal, it is very difficult to operate initiatives for women in South and Southeastern areas.

A Participant from the Audience argued that, 2010 marked a turning point. In all these years of involvement, without understanding geography and social intricacies of Afghanistan, military operations were conducted and there were colossal losses of lives, resources and money. What is the ethnic composition of Afghan army? Is it going to be stable force in future? How shall it run the whole military operation after withdrawal of the NATO forces? Were the NATO operations successful? Or, those were unsuccessful operations? In **Mr. Datta's** opinion, both Afghan police and the Afghan national army are different entities. They require different capacities and mindset. Afghan national army is more educated than the police. The police are regionally based. Every year there are some conflicts within. There is a need to ensure that ethnic communities are not left behind. Afghanistan is still working in the direction of progress. The problem was the high expectations, that after 10 years, the country would be like Western Europe, which cannot happen.

A Professor from the Department of Political Science of a private university commented that, Afghanistan's scenario is very complex. Their internal actors are fighting each other. As an internal factor, they have Hamid Karzai who no longer holds any political value in the country. He has failed due to corruption. Who actually are the pillars of Afghan government? The US will have to negotiate with the Taliban. They have emerged as the most important actor in Afghanistan. Besides, China could be concerned about the left over US bases after the ISAF withdrawal from the country. The US will not leave the country without establishing a residual power in Afghanistan, because the US's intervention in Afghanistan has not been too altruistic as Afghanistan is full of rich oil resources. The US will try to stay there to exert its domination in that area. **Mr. Datta** responded that, there may be some sorts of international engagement in both transition and post-transition period. Afghanistan is no easy challenge. It will need security assistance. Efforts are going to show the right direction in order to make Afghanistan a viable state. The country needs to be provided with continuous support.

An official from a Commonwealth organization questioned whether the international community fulfilled its commitment in Afghanistan? Have the US led NATO forces been able to improve the standard of living of the Afghans? As mentioned that there were failures in part of the international community in between the elections. Was the failure deliberate? Or was it the result of ignorance? What is the actual status of corruption in Afghanistan? **Mr. Datta** was unsure about the level of corruption and whether it was deliberate or accidental. But he admitted that corruption is still a huge issue in the country.

Comments from the Chair, Ambassador Ashfaqur Rahman

Former Ambassador Ashfaqur Rahman, said that the overview helped a great deal in understanding the scenario of Afghanistan and assisted in predicting the aftermath of 2014 ISAF withdrawal. It informed how the US led NATO forces have taken several initiatives in order to ensure successful election in the country. Though some of the electoral processes were very complex and were not very successful, the elections of 2010 and 2011 were remarkable. Most of the current and future problems have been highlighted generally. Though the United States led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces and its partner countries have planned to withdraw forces from Afghanistan within 2014, not all the troops will be removed. It is crucial to negotiate with the Taliban. Unless the international community is successful to make comprehensive dialogue with the Taliban and other extremist groups, the peace process will be hampered creating severe challenges not only for the country but also for the whole region.

The support mission that will stay behind in Afghanistan post 2014 will not necessarily be small nor will it be for combat mission as it will primarily have some assisting roles. There are less than 100,000 Al-Qaeda left today and there are 600,000 Afghan and international forces to counter them. According to an Institute

related to Afghan index, there are about 100,000 from the NATO and US for 'Operation Endearing Freedom', 344000 of the Afghan security forces, who have been trained by now. There are over 90,000 personnel of defense contractors, 2000 personnel of other private contractor and in Pak-Afghan borders Pakistanis have approximately 150,000 soldiers. This is a huge number against tentatively 100,000 Al Qaeda. All have to be very careful about the repercussion of drone attacks in North Waziristan. The uneven friend and foe force ration seem to be the result of disproportionate mobilization involving huge cost. This massive mobilization can be reduced if there is a political certainty or a political game plan for the future. He commented that, presence of Al Qaida in Afghanistan is the result of highly disturbed political environment of that country.

Ambassador Rahman also revealed that no timetable has been scheduled for the future withdrawal of residual forces; this in turn has impinged the peace negotiation process. No one has come up with a decisive timetable for withdrawal. Next, he acknowledged the activity of the Afghan Taliban as well the activity of the Afghan government. Lastly, with the announcement of withdrawal there is expected to be a ripple effect on all other troops withdrawal- German and Italians are likely to withdraw right after the US.

CHAPTER THREE

SESSION TWO: IMPLICATIONS FOR TERRORISM AND SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA

Ms. Martha Willcocks, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK

Ms. Martha Willcocks described the evolving terror situation in Afghanistan and its implications for south Asia and beyond through the prism of efforts undertaken by the Afghan government and International alliance and also by assessing the tactics of the terrorist groups and newly emerged challenges. According to Ms Willcocks, examining the opportunities and risks can provide understanding of the changes that could occur in Afghanistan beyond 2014. Finally, she offered suggestions on how to avoid worst case scenarios.

Multiple terrorists groups are operating in South Asia, many of whom have long standing links in Afghanistan. Terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda have singular focus, seeking to target the West or other neighboring states. Some groups such as Pakistan Taliban have internal anti-state agenda, seeking to oust their own government from power. And some groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi in Pakistan have a sectarian agenda, seeking to target sectarian minorities and corresponding ethnic groups. Other groups have similar elements of all of these traits, varying in capabilities significantly. Al-Qaeda attacked the US in 2001 and then London in 2005 and is responsible for the failed trans-Atlantic airline plot in 2006. The Taliban has caused a huge number of attacks and deaths in Pakistan. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has targeted civilians, particularly the Shia minority. Linkages to Afghanistan vary according to the group, but most claim to have some role during the Afghan jihad of the 1980s.

Many extremists from the West are seeking to travel to Pakistan because these individuals want to take part in Jihad in Afghanistan. Therefore any group that can offer this would be rewarded with steady flow of recruits not just from the West but also from wider South Asia. There are a few terrorists groups that can claim to be based in the Afghanistan. Since 2001 Al Qaeda has predominantly made its base in Pakistan's tribal region. The same could be said for main Central Asia's extremists groups the Islamic Jihad Union and the other Islamic outfits, both of their senior leadership are also based in Pakistan. Even the Haqqani network, an off-shoot of Afghan Taliban and a group that dominates Eastern Afghanistan has a bulk of senior leadership in Pakistan. None of the major terrorists groups are wholly operating in Afghanistan. But the space that might become available to them in Afghanistan again in the coming days; it seems likely that an increase in their presence will occur after 2014. So there will be more terrorist groups trying to operate in the region, particularly since counter terrorism activities will be weaker after the withdrawal of ISAF forces. The key is to find the strength of increased Islamic extremists' presence of the likes the Taliban, extension of the Haqqani network as well as the warlords occupying territory to the East of the country.

Much of the discussion around the Peace process with the Taliban has focused on the opportunity to desegregate them from Al-Qaeda and other global Jihadists groups. Mullah Omar, the leader of Afghan Taliban, always has the final say on whether the Taliban will turn their backs on the Pashtun tribal code or like in 1996 offer sanctuary to Al-Qaeda. Some commentators say Omar is more inclined to distance himself from Al-Qaeda, but nothing can be said for sure. It is certain that any non-Afghan group seeking to operate

in the country will need blessing from the local hosts. It may be noted that, Taliban public relation has generally been poor.

In the East of Afghanistan, it is mainly the Haqqani network that has kept any contact with Al-Qaeda and other terrorists groups. They tend to have much closer working relationship with these groups. Also warlords in the region may favor the company of terrorists' organization as opposed to the controlling influence of Kabul.

Ms. Willcocks posed the questions regarding the kind of threat that might appear if the terrorists groups do occupy more territories in Afghanistan. To understand this, one must look at the drivers of threat in South Asia. Regardless of their varying ideological motivation most terrorists groups have common set of basic requirements. The most fundamental of these is a desire to conduct violent attacks. These groups don't mere possess the intent of terrorism; they also have the capability to do so to achieve their respective radical aims. These hostile activities can range from the sophistication of Lashkar –e-Taiyeba during the 2008 Mumbai attacks to the Pakistan Taliban's attempted assassination of a school girl on a bus. Weapon and explosive training can be obtained through internet communications or by face to face interactions. But for an attack to be planned, terrorists need space from which they can operate.

Today's terrorist groups operate on smaller scale, mostly in an attempt to avoid being disrupted. Their base can be in either urban or in rural areas, governed or ungoverned, as long as it is away and free from counter terrorism efforts for length of time required to plot an attack. Terrorist groups also require bases with relative ease of access. This allows them to get their operatives to receive training and subsequently re-locate to conduct attacks. In cases, where a group seeks to project there threat to the West it needs foreign fighters. So it is the foreign fighters instead of the local operatives who carry out such task. For host government, tackling terrorism is an issue connected to many things. In some cases, South Asian governments have been forced to prioritize their counterterrorism efforts, favoring activity against those groups that pose threat to their state and not focusing on groups that might have a more external goal. It is in these situations some groups thrive, benefiting substantially from the lack of will or capability of the host governments to do anything against them. In other situation in South Asia, an external power may offer their assistance such as through the provision of Unmanned Ariel Vehicle (UAV) to carry out targeted strikes. These can off-set the host government's activities; but that may bring up a lot of connected issues such as the question of sovereignty and resultant radicalization. These have serious impacts. So it is not just the space but also availability of other factors which can combine with greater accessibility of operating space and can present significant concerns.

Some groups will be jubilant about the coalition force's withdrawal. Certainly, the Afghan Taliban will present this as the second victory of Afghans over a super power. These groups will continue with their efforts and attack the remaining western targets in Afghanistan. Other groups will use the opportunity to re-prioritize their activities and in some cases this could mean targeting their own greatest enemy. For example, Central Asian groups could refocus their efforts. Some would refocus on India or on Kashmir and could increase attacks in the line of control or even against Indian mainland targets. Returnees from Afghanistan having affiliation with various terrorist groups and their fighting experience may pose greatest threats to countries like Bangladesh and Maldives.

It is unlikely that any of the major Afghan or international terrorist groups would cease to conduct attacks after 2014 in Afghanistan. There will be no major changes in their strategies. They still have many viable targets within Afghanistan in the embassies or in the residual coalition presence or beyond. In terms of

terrorist's capabilities to conduct attacks, the situation is not clear. These groups have access to training alongside their fighting experience in Afghanistan. The quality of the training available in Afghanistan and Pakistan is relatively basic. All terrorist groups in South Asia know how to construct Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). They can continue to share their knowledge before and after 2014; that would also indicate no major changes in their tactics. However, the quality of the operation of these groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal areas will be changed after 2014. In rest of the South Asia, the quality of their operation basically will be affected by internal conditions and is not likely to be changed markedly. In border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, terrorist groups will have more space but the ease with which they can be accessed is unclear. So the Afghan government and its military will be the key to counter this influx of terrorists. If this is not countered effectively then terrorists groups from South Asia will be encouraged to relocate in Afghanistan seeing it to be the best place to continue their work. This could include groups from within Bangladesh where counter terrorism actions have been able to curtail the activities of such groups. But if they seek to move to Afghanistan they could potentially get involved in the fight of their local host there.

ISAF also guarantees security assistance to Afghan national army and Afghan police till 2017. The biggest factors would be Afghanistan's own capability to work competently with the level of residual Western military presence, availability of UAV/ drones and the capability of Afghan government to make use of them. It also raises related questions; who will replace President Karzai and whether the US-Afghan bilateral security agreement would be signed before the October, 2013 deadline.¹ While there is still some uncertainty of the key elements impacting the overall quality of space that would be available to the terrorist groups, but there are some certainties as well. There will be independent US capabilities. This would probably include the use of drones; however, we don't know the probable scale of it. The Afghan military will continue to be supported by ISAF contributors. While there would likely be more terrorists in Afghanistan in 2014 and after, but no way it would be allowed to become pre-2001, terror safe haven.

There will be significant counterterrorism activity, but the question would be of prioritization of threats posed to the Afghan state against the threat to wider South Asian region and also the West. There are some groups who would gain more than others after the withdrawal of the ISAF forces. Al-Qaeda will gain in this scenario with lesser CT pressure and use the space to train new recruits. Al-Qaeda is currently moving its forces to eastern Afghanistan and will continue to do so. The ISAF mission tried to ensure that Afghanistan was no longer heaven for terrorists. Al-Qaeda would be benefiting from troops withdrawal. Kashmir violence could increase after 2014 and that could impact India-Pakistan relationship. Central Asian extremist groups are also major elements of concern. Again broader success depends on peace talks with both Pakistani Taliban and Afghan Taliban. The Pakistani Taliban may also pose significant threats to Afghanistan through their Jihadi motivations. It may have links with other terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which is also a growing concern in Pakistan.

Ms. Wilcocks also put some light on certain suggested measures for various stake holders which may be undertaken to help the situation in future. Firstly, there should be support for inclusion of Afghan Taliban in the peace process, as it reduces the likely hood of civil war in Afghanistan. Neither the Afghan government, nor the Afghan Taliban will ever be able to control the country alone, so compromise is necessary. Stable Afghanistan means International assistance can help strengthen the country and continue to strengthen counterterrorism activity. Secondly, the peace process needs to be inclusive to the effect that, not only local players but also regional players are involved. If the surrounding states have nothing to

¹ Despite some significant progress the bilateral security agreement hasn't yet been approved by the Afghan President and Parliament. The Afghan President is demanding certain debatable security guarantee on which the US doesn't seem willing.

fear from the future Afghan state; then, even if one neighbor have more influence than another, they are less likely to support proxy groups in Afghanistan. Thirdly, inclusion of Taliban in the government does not mean terrorists groups would be allowed to be back in the Afghanistan and would be using the country as their safe haven once more. Fourthly, there is a need to recognize that the continuation of ISAF presence in the country reduced terrorist threats but have not removed it completely. If allowed the terrorist will grow again. Finally, South Asian countries need to solve their domestic terrorist problems and not blame it all on Afghanistan.

Mr. Shafqat Munir, Associate Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS)

Mr. Shafqat Munir delved into the historic terror links of Afghan groups and how Bangladeshi terrorist have ties with them. He also projected in detail the future scenario of terrorism in Bangladesh post 2014.

There is likely to be a considerable impact in Bangladesh as scenario in Afghanistan evolves. It is to be seen now whether South Asian countries can cooperate with each other for more effective regional counterterrorism strategy. South Asia is an important region in the international arena nowadays. It is home to 1/5th of the world's population and not only that; it is also the home to some emerging economic and military powers. South Asia's importance at global sphere has increased many folds in last two decades.

The post-NATO scenario in Afghanistan is a matter of concern shared by all South Asian countries. The national and transnational extremist and terrorist groups in Afghanistan are mostly the left over from Afghan conflict that rose in the 1970s and through the 1980s. The rise of transnational extremist and terrorist groups in rest of South Asia can clearly be seen, at least partly, as a spill-over effect of the Afghan conflict. The activities committed by transnational extremist and terrorist groups in South Asia are not only confined to classical terrorism like bomb blasts, attacks, abductions, but also spread in organized crimes. There is an increased crime-terror nexus in South Asia that involves drug trafficking, money laundering and illegal arms trade.

The regional impact of Taliban resurgence would be profound. Firstly, it could translate into broadening and strengthening the areas of extremists and terrorist activities across the region, revitalizing old networks. A look into history reveals that, all these groups whether Al-Qaeda or JBM, IJU, and IMU in Central Asia or the Abu Saiyaf in the Philippines, not to mention the South Asian ones, are actually linked to the Afghan Jihad. This aspect of this particular network is very important to have an understanding of its wider spread.

There is a need for objective projection of the likely spill-over effect as the bulk withdrawal of the ISAF takes place in 2014 and final withdrawal scheduled for 2017 approximately. These withdrawal events may bring about unstable scenario in Afghanistan and further development of events inside Afghanistan would dictate how the spill-over could likely take effect in rest of South Asia. The potential triumph of the Taliban after more than a decade of insurgency may also send dire signal to the rest of the world and encouraging message to the terrorist and militant organizations that the latter ultimately can triumph over liberal democracy. That is the kind of message that sensible people don't want to see spreading.

The symbolic aspects of Taliban resurgence are also needed to be looked upon. In Afghanistan beyond 2014, there is a need to focus on the probable situation where the worst case scenario appears in Afghanistan and the consequences that are likely to be played out. There are two sides of Afghanistan; one Afghanistan in north and the other in south and southeast. Afghanistan is also an agglomeration, not a conglomeration. Although the Taliban is not a political actor in a classical sense, the re-emergence of

Taliban as a dominant factor in Afghan politics is required to be taken into account. The potential spread of Taliban ideology in other South Asian countries is another issue that demands serious pondering.

In the 1900s, many of the foreign fighters returned from Afghanistan to their respective countries. For example, Mufti Hannan came back to Bangladesh; some of the Filipino Jihadist in Afghanistan who formed Abu Sayyaf later returned to the Philippines in the same period. These Afghan returnees played pioneering role in forming terrorist groups across different regions of Asia. So, the potentiality of returned militants with radical ideologies and sophisticated training they received had been a cause of concern for Bangladesh at that time, as well as, now. There are some notable Islamist groups in Bangladesh who have had some affiliation with Taliban right from their inception. The leaders of JMB, *Jagrata Muslim Janata* and HUJI Bangladesh had been in Afghanistan. In the case of Mufti Hannan, he was in Pakhtia province of Afghanistan in the mid-1980s and he received trainings both in weapons/IED handling and ideological indoctrination of recruits. The result was simultaneous bomb blasts in 2005 in 63 different districts out of 64 in Bangladesh within 50 minutes. There was also a deadly bomb blast in August 21 in 2004, in which current Prime Minister of Bangladesh was the target. So, terrorism is an ongoing danger for Bangladesh. These terrorist groups have broken the traditional model of classical terrorism and have increased their linkage with transnational criminal organizations and gone into other areas. These include human trafficking, small arms trafficking, illicit drug trafficking and money counterfeiting. These issues also should be taken into account.

The emergence of three splinter groups in Bangladesh, in the name of Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), Tamiruddin and BEM is currently causing concern. A large number of sophisticated materials have been recovered including literature, weapons and IED materials. The weapons include small arms, which terrorist groups in Bangladesh have never used before. Small arms proliferation is increasingly becoming another issue of concern. A trend can be identified in the formation of new terrorist and extremist groups. It could result in possible increased militancy in Bangladesh. Questions may be raised that there are no terrorist attacks in Bangladesh now; so, why should there be talks about terrorism. Absence of any terrorist attack for some time does not mean absence of terrorism. Terrorism in this region is very complex and dynamic.

The state of capacity building is of high importance in relation to counterterrorism effort in South Asia. Capacity gap often leads to mistrust among state actors as well as a lack of capacity per se. Despite the pre-existence of a common South Asian cultural heritage and broader South Asian identity, bilateral mistrust disabled counterterrorism efforts. South Asians have not been able to make coherent counterterrorism strategies. In South Asia, terrorism for one may not mean terrorism for other. Countering the financial sources of terrorism has not been successful. Bangladesh has taken some important steps, such as enacting amendments to money laundering act and some apprehensions of terror related culprits by law enforcing agencies. The international community is now very active in assisting South Asian countries by creating regional and international mechanisms for checks and balance; but there are still gaps in the procedures. Countering the financing of terrorism is linked to counterfeiting as well, as it has been observed in India and Pakistan.

Non states actors also influence bilateral relations. So, after a terrorist attack in one country, rather than formulating joint counterterrorism strategy, the nations concerned immediately start the blame game. This culture should be changed. There is a need to have a proper cooperative mechanism. Counterterrorism was talked about in SAARC in mid 1980s for the first time. Despite this, SAARC charter limited space for comprehensive regional counterterrorism initiatives. The absence of coherent regional strategy is also major obstacle in our path.

There are some strategies that should be taken into consideration.

First, terrorism and militancy need to be identified and agreed as being common security problems for South Asian region. The operational capacity of counterterrorism of all eight South Asian countries is poor and fragmented. There are many opportunities as there is a lot of trained manpower that can be put together in effective action through regional cooperation and sync.

Second, there is a need to build trust among nations in the region. It will take time but the nations should reach some fundamental common ground from where further trust and confidence building measures can be launched in relation to countering terror together.

Third, there is a need to delink terrorism from local politics and other issues of bilateral relations. Unless there is disconnect between bilateral discord and terrorist threat, all cooperative efforts will go in vain.

Fourth, all South Asian countries should work together to ensure complete denial of space for terrorist groups in their territory. Regional architecture should also be built to counter transnational militant organizations in order to counter militancy holistically. Regarding this, workable frameworks are needed to be identified first.

Bangladesh also needs to cooperate with other nations in capacity building. The country should also contribute in comprehensive regional strategy.

Terrorism and militancy are not always caused by ideological reasons. There are also economic reasons. There is also a need for holistic consideration about counterterrorism strategies in South Asia and particularly in Bangladesh. It is very imperative for both operational and strategic counterterrorism efforts. Reforming aspects of border management in order to combat transnational militancy is also important.

Twitter Feedback-2

More questions and comments, on the issues under discussion in the conference, received through Twitter were:

“The death of Holbrooke was the turning point in Afghan history and the present problem is a complex one for the Afghans” by The Council for Foreign Relations (CFR),

“What about the poppy economy in Afghanistan? And its connection to the finance of terrorism in that country”, question asked by World Policy think tank.

“Pakistan is a victim of Afghan crisis”, by a Twitter follower.

“There will be heightened border tension in South Asia after the US withdrawal” and “How would Kerry shape post-Afghan foreign policy?” by CFR.

“I liked the idea of Counter Terrorism being divorced from local and electoral politics” by a Twitter follower.

And “Afghanistan’s security is also linked to Central Asia. Obama’s goals in Afghanistan have been achieved”, by US Embassy in Brussels.

Question and Answer / Open Discussion

A former high official from the Foreign Ministry of Bangladesh said that, in Afghanistan is there a fear about liberal democracy? He mentioned that, after Mumbai attack, Bangladesh proposed to form regional CT task force for South Asia. But there were already existing protocol signed by the previous govt (not the interim one) which could have been adhered to. That has already laid the framework for cooperation. As terrorism has become transnational, meaningful regional cooperation is necessary.

A veteran journalist opined that terrorism is a complex issue. Despite the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet forces many years back and recent decade long presence of the US led NATO forces, why a group like the Taliban is still active in the region and not wiped out? And, exactly when did the resurgence of the group take place this time around after their depletion in early years of the decade?

One of the Speakers replied that, Afghans do not have fear of liberal democracy. It will take time to establish democracy in the country. Some support for the Taliban does not mean hatred for democracy. It is true some Afghans do support the Taliban. It will also take time to make constructive changes in the country. The rise of terrorist activities in tribal regions is a major issue of concern but efforts should be taken both nationally and regionally.

Mr. Shafqat Munir mentioned that, regional cooperation is absolutely necessary. SAARC has already provided some framework especially post-9/11. The South Asians have the opportunity to strengthen regional cooperation. The question now is how the member states will translate that into action? UN's global counterterrorism strategy and its aspects regarding South Asia have clearly been highlighted in Dhaka last May which reveals that SAARC has already provided a framework. The implementation of global CT strategy and regional CT strategy may be possible through SAARC framework now. It is a question of how to make it happen and fruitful.

He stressed that there is a need to look at Syria very closely. It doesn't matter whether people go to Afghanistan, Syria or any other country, radicalization takes place only when the extremists spread their radical ideas. It is also required to focus on how radical elements in Syria behave in future. That is a big question. There are questions whether the current struggle in Syria justifiable or not. It is important to look at probable post-conflict situation in Syria. It is also important to mention what might happen when migrant terrorist, who went to Syria, comes back to respective country and how it may pose a threat to national security of that country.

In order to understand major causes of terrorism, look at terrorism in South Asia could be helpful. It is not only for ideological reasons that terrorism spread but also for other major factors that play key roles in it. Economic insecurity is one of the major causes. All states in South Asia need to take very hard look at things. State of human development, level of capacity development and the extent of governance gap are also crucial to ascertain how this vacuum is used by militant and terrorist organizations to propagate their extreme solutions.

An ex-Ambassador questioned why these terrorist groups come to being? Apart from poverty, there are some other deeper reasons. If we look at kids in Gaza, we have to understand why they are choosing other path rather than going to school. Terrorism is not a disease per se; rather it is symptom of a deeper disease. There were many in the West who were called terrorists in past, but later they were called freedom fighters. There is no alternative of having democratic society where people can express their will without any hindrance. Obviously, absence of terrorist activities for some time does not mean that there is no terrorism. Where there is no democratic institution, security forces must be very vigilant. Fighting terrorism becomes a political factor in domestic political game. So, it should also be delinked from internal politics. Suppression of people's aspiration also becomes big factor behind the emergence of terrorism. When states uses old and oppressive state apparatus it becomes one kind of state-centric terrorism.

A Chair of the Governing Body of a think tank opined that, no one really wins in a war. It is always lose-lose. Hatred and violence burgeons more hatred and violence. We should raise love, peace and development. BRAC is playing very effective role. There should be a practice of sacrifice. International

coalition should be more seriously engaged in the region through effective initiatives in order to ensure peace and security. It would definitely be less expensive and more productive.

So, if we want to start peace process in the region, what kind of initiatives can be taken? Only large scale rehabilitation of marginalized groups in mainstream may be a real solution. Crime-terror nexus in Bangladesh is not the product of spill-over impact of Afghanistan. Actually, we saw the beginning of such kind of nexus soon after our liberation and years of early 1970s.

A Professor from Department of International Relations of a well-known university expressed that terrorists have very distinct vision of life. There is something which makes them unique. Before considering them terrorists, it is required to look at the facts. Within the context of Islamic world, injustice, for example, to the Palestinians draws immense compassion in their favor. We also need to look at the distinction between western perspectives of the Taliban compared to the South Asian notion towards Taliban. There should be alternative ways of thinking.

Mr. Shafqat Munir argued that, absence of terrorist attack for some time does not mean the absence of terrorism. It means, if it is considered there is no terrorism in such a situation it will be wrong. Vigilance must be very high. There is a need to constantly update state capacity, be strategic in approach and only then initiation of effective counterterrorism efforts are possible. Though there are no visible terrorist attacks in this country at present, or no very big and successful terrorist attacks have yet taken place, Bangladeshi administration should take the issue with grave concern as there are other clear signals of existences of terrorist minds.

In case of crime-terror nexus, it is obviously very old issue and there are several causes behind that, but to the CT outfits there ought to be clear information and understanding about the relationship between terrorist organizations with transnational criminal groups.

One of the Speakers said that, obviously there are severe reasons for the emergence of terrorism but economic factor is a major issue of concern. The presence of the ISAF is also very concerning issue for the Taliban. Regarding solution, there should be peace process and also strong and steady foreign policy formulation by the states of the region in relation to CT.

A distinguished military historian and senior research fellow from a European university said that the dominant presence of Taliban in spite of all efforts by US led NATO forces is a serious matter. Unless India and Pakistan come into agreement, no initiatives would be successful and no real peace process would take place. What is the current position of the US-NATO on this and more importantly of India and Pakistan?

A participant from the audience commented that, there are obviously some positive aspects of the withdrawal of the US led NATO forces from Afghanistan. Today, Kandahar is a safer place than Peshawar. If genuine peace dialogues among the major Afghan stake holders are arranged, perhaps peace can be established in the country.

Another participant from the audience opined that, Bangladesh has a very important role to play in counterterrorism. There is a need to be more involved in it. There are Afghan students who are happy to stay back in Bangladesh. It would be useful if Bangladesh provides more scholarship and train their teachers. There should be cooperation between Kabul University and Dhaka University. Investment can also be a major link. Organizations like *Hizbut Tahrir* are very dangerous. University students are being

targeted by them. Today students of affluent background are targeted and it is a new danger. Also organizations like *Hefazat-e-Islami* are big worries. Their thirteen point demand is the prescription for *Talibanization* of Bangladesh. So, the kinds of problems created by both *Hifazat-e-Islami* and *Hizbut-Tahrir*, should be addressed.

A Youth NGO activist argued that, in the rural areas of Bangladesh, the anti-liberation forces and the opposition parties use religion as a tool to win the mayoral elections/ local government elections. Whether South Asian politics can separate itself from faith and if not what are the probable issues that the national leadership should take into account. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, regional competition in the South Asia should be noted as well. Security cooperation should be of primary concern. One example in recent time would be British Prime Minister's initiative in the House of Commons about Syria which was rejected by the Tory backbenchers barring him from initiation of any substantial British involvement. But the point was not to help people who were running mischief in Syria; it was about settling things down there. But that was prevented. The point here is, South Asia has diversified cultural clusters and there are a host of related issues as well. The political motivation behind letting Afghanistan in the SAARC fold and the ways security and terrorism issues are to be dealt with will also face strong debate in regional discourse. And the terrorist alumni network, that was discussed, is a primary issue of concern as well. Since faith has already entered politics, it is difficult to separate it; particularly because of the level of education in the society.

Another participant commented that, students of elite background were targeted by *Hizbut Tahrir* and other similar organizations. Faith issue is not only affecting the rural people, but the affluent as well. In this complex situation, what is the priority? Are the South Asian nations going to strengthen the security cooperation so that the youth do not get contaminated psychologically or are they going to implement total regional cooperation including other aspects like SAFTA and let all the stake holders come together in a bigger way?

A retired Major General and distinguished security commentator said that, without a stable relationship among Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India and also Bangladesh to some extent no country in South Asia will ever feel secure. Already there is an indirect contact between Afghan Taliban and different western countries regarding pursuing the Taliban to give up on terrorism, accept constitution, abandon Al Qaeda and talk to Afghan government. India may never feel secure until Kashmir crisis is solved. We can understand if the Taliban spread militancy, as they did earlier, that would definitely affect Bangladesh. Bangladesh's militant groups are not purely like Afghan Mujahedeen. We should separate terrorism in Bangladesh from local politics. Many political parties are using faith to influence domestic politics.

A Professor of the Department of International Relations of a well-known University asked whether there was any possibility of the end of terrorism. How terrorism can be removed from the societies? What would be the best solution?

Prof. Ataur Rahman of Dhaka University and President of Bangladesh Political Science Association, commenting on Mr. Shafqat Munir's presentation maintained that distinction must be made between political violence and terrorism. There is a lot of political violence that is widespread in the Middle East, Bangladesh and other South Asian countries, but all cannot be termed as terrorism. Regarding transnational crimes of financial nature, we should be concerned about money laundering, smuggling and drug trafficking. Prof. Rahman raised the question about the Taliban model in Bangladeshi context? Governments or states should be careful in branding the resurgence of religious identity or ethnicity as

terrorist model; such branding might have been motivated by a particular regime in power for its political interests. Prof. Rahman wanted to know as to what extent counterterrorism policies had been effective, and whether it would be possible to determine the exact time by which terrorism could be eradicated.

One of the Speakers said that, it is not impossible to eradicate terrorism. It is not a direct UK concern that what sorts of security level is acceptable to other countries. For example, Canada has invested so much in Afghanistan over the years; it got to a stage where the Canadian public would not probably accept terrorist attacks originating in Afghanistan. If that happens they would think it was wastage of resources. In that region, risks for a western country like Canada now may generate from elsewhere outside Afghanistan. Looking from the UK perspective, no attack in the region these days originates from Afghanistan. The problem with the region is that border is highly fluid, so it is hard to tell whether the threat is from Pakistan or Afghanistan.

India is concerned about groups like Lashkar-e-Taiyeba and Sikh extremists. Pakistan is also concerned about alleged Indian support to Pakistani Taliban. The hostility is from both sides. There is a need to get to a stage where, there is no blame game.

Regarding policies, planning should be done for all scenarios including the worst ones. Regional cooperation should be the main motto. It is not only about India and Pakistan, but also countries like Iran and others from central Asia, all those who are at stake if something bad happens in Afghanistan. So it is not only US working with UK and other known partner; the effort includes a range of individual countries so that terror can be eliminated widely, as well as, related organized crimes. Another question is how quickly the policies can change if the situation gets worse. It may not be flexible at the moment but certainly for the next few years or so, the continued residual presence of the ISAF will help to do something about the increased presence of terrorist groups. Beyond 2017 or 2018, there is a difficult situation up ahead.

Mr. Shafqat Munir opined that, Afghanistan's takeoff point in 2001 was very low, since then it has made progress but it still has a long way to go. Organizations like BRAC are doing well. Bangladeshi personnel were present in all the provinces of Afghanistan. They were one of the first ones to go into Afghanistan right after 2001. Bangladesh can play a positive role in education in Afghanistan. Some spectacular initiatives had been taken by BRAC.

Bangladesh-Afghan cooperation can also be expanded into security cooperation. Bangladesh possess the good will to become the driver for regional counterterrorism in South Asia. Radicalization of urban youth is a very significant and relatively new concern for Bangladesh. The nature of radicalization has seen a shift. Now a specter of urban youth radicalization is visible especially in private universities. The government needs to address these issues. Regarding the issue of splinter groups and Afghan factor, both are equally important. Be it is Ansarullah Bangla Team or BEM, through proper investigation, it should be made clear whether they were or are part of another organization. The old bigger groups are mutating into smaller outfits and reemerging under new names.

Regional cooperation between India and Pakistan would result in a greater stability not only in India and Pakistan but also in greater South Asian region. Regarding the end of terrorism, he said that, it is not completely possible to eradicate terrorism. But it can be brought to a manageable level.

Comments from the Chair, Brigadier General Shahedul Anam Khan ndc, psc (Retd), Editor Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star

It is very important to look at the current crisis in Afghanistan and its probable implications on South Asia. It is also necessary to mention its impacts from security perspectives. As a country of South Asia, the impact of transition in Afghanistan on Bangladesh cannot be avoided. After the presentations, the audiences have come to know about both present and future scenarios of terrorist activities in Afghanistan and whole South Asian region. There has been this particular concern about the security implications of post-NATO Afghanistan on South Asia.

In an attempt to define terrorism, it can be seen that there are different forms of terrorism but none is universally accepted. There is, of course, a working definition of terrorism provided by the UN which can be the point to start from. Problems arising from various kinds of terrorism have to be addressed. There is an uncertainty in relation to establishment of peace and stability in Afghanistan. Mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan will hamper comprehensive peace process across the South Asian region. After ten years of, somewhat, unsuccessful intervention, the US and NATO forces are leaving Afghanistan to an unstable condition. This unstable scenario will surely bring about a lot of big challenges for security and prosperity in South Asia.

CHAPTER FOUR

SESSION THREE: REGIONAL COMPETITION VS SECURITY COOPERATION

Comments from the Chair, Professor Ataur Rahman, President, Bangladesh Political Science Association

The war in Afghanistan is not simply the war between ISAF and Taliban. There is a perception that it also involves Pakistan, India and China who compete for influence in the area. The long historical differences between Pashtun Afghans and the Northern ethnic people have also come on to the surface in the context of this conflict with renewed vigor. In such a complex stage of conflict, the US is sometimes unable to identify its friends and allies from its foes. Such intra-state and inter-ethnic cleavage and rivalry in Afghanistan led to the heightening and lingering of the Afghan war. Afghanistan has immense strategic value for contending nations, especially for regional states - India and Pakistan after 2014.

Lieutenant General P.K Singh, PVSM, AVSM (Retd), Director, United Service's Institution of India

Gen Singh brought in the Indian perspective of Afghanistan beyond 2014 in the conference. Gen Singh suggested that two events will mark the turning point of Afghanistan in post 2014; the presidential election and the smooth transition of power between two presidents. For the first time in Afghanistan an elected leader is set to conduct a presidential election. A free and fair election without the influences of Washington, London, Islamabad or any other power is very important for the Afghans. Gen Singh clarified that no department of Indian government or non-government agency of India will intervene in this process.

At the very beginning of his presentation, he briefly observed that Afghanistan is located in the helm of sectarian cleavage, tribal rivalry, extremism, fundamentalism and all types of terrorism ranging from erstwhile state-sponsored terrorism to narco-terrorism, ethno-terrorism and even there are fears of nuclear terrorism. Security dimensions are always focused in the region while tremendous economic potential is unfortunately neglected, which can be an ultimate game changer. He also talked about trans-regional security architecture that includes South Asia, Central Asia and other adjacent regions. However, he stressed that, before thinking about security architecture in the region, it is necessary to define the region first.

The greatest asset of Afghanistan is the Afghan youth. They are dynamic, nationalist and they have dreams. It is important to invest for the youth to fulfill their potentials. Instead of concerning over the military forces, it is necessary to talk about resources that can change not only the fortune of Afghanistan but wider region also. Afghanistan's Geo-strategic location as a land is much talked about but nothing is done to make this bridge functional.

In the last decade, Afghanistan had made tremendous progress in social and political domain, but that has not come in focus; instead the country is looked at with pessimistic inclination. The major step of the Afghan government in post-2001 had been ingenuous in ensuring that everyone is listened to even those who were overtly opposed to the leadership of the country and have a direct or indirect involvement in the power game.

Afghanistan cannot forget the violent past mainly due to two reasons; handover of Karzai's power to a new leader by the year 2014 and the withdrawal of the NATO, collectively will create a security vacuum in the country. The question is who will fill the vacuum? Although it is unclear who will come to power, it is clear that the Afghan government will not allow the Taliban to occupy this space and the ANSF will fill the space to the best possible capabilities that it has.

The speaker raises a concern regarding the contribution and responsibility of international community towards Afghanistan. He then suggested that it needs non-interference in its internal affairs by its neighbors. From its strategic partners, Afghanistan mostly needs assistance in economic development and reconstruction of infrastructure.

Three issues that came to attention regarding US influence towards Afghanistan. **First**, the US is undoubtedly an important player in Afghanistan and successful transition of power largely depends on some of their actions in that country. During the last twelve years, the US diplomacy followed mainly military objectives and this policy led the US to engage with the Taliban and Pakistan relegating or even neglecting engagement with India, China, Iran, and Central Asian Republics. This policy hindered regional cooperation. However, the US is now crafting more imaginative diplomatic approach. The US- India-Afghanistan, as well as the US-China dialogue on Afghanistan is being discussed and those may take place in the near future.

Second, while nobody expected that the US or ISAF to stay in Afghanistan indefinitely now there is evidently a rush towards a date for withdrawal.

The **last** matter is the point of deterrence. Deterrence, as we know is an important leverage for any meaningful peace negotiation. A meaningful peace accord is unlikely by 2014. So what deterrence will America bring to table beyond 2014 by dealing with its counterparts? The speaker strongly voiced this question. This is required against Al-Qaida, Taliban, and Haqqani Network or other state and non-state actors. A credible demonstration of this deterrence has now been delayed. Some of diplomatic initiatives may be taken in this regards.

He quoted Mr. Syed Akbar, the Official Spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India who said in a media briefing on 3rd April 2013, "as far as India is concerned, the engagement with Afghanistan is something that goes back to millennia. We have people to people contacts. Our engagement, our interest and our involvement in Afghanistan is neither transitory nor transient. Our focus is continuing on Afghanistan's reconstruction and supporting Afghan people in their desire for peaceful and stable Afghanistan."

It is undeniably true that India has geopolitical and strategic interest in the sub-region where Afghanistan is located because it is part of India's strategic neighborhood. India has sovereign right to decide what its national interest is and how to promote regional peace, prosperity and stability. As part of its achieving national interests, India is actively supporting international initiatives that support peace, stability and development in Afghanistan. It neither interferes in Afghanistan's internal affairs nor allows Indian territory to become a safe haven of anti-Afghan activities.

He covered the subjects of post-2014 Afghanistan and its direct or indirect impact on the region and the rivalry or cooperation among the three countries India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Gen Singh said that India has invested in the construction of infrastructure and committed to work for peace and stability in

Afghanistan. India expects a reasonably free and fair election for transition of power in Afghanistan. It delivers assistance to Afghan security forces in terms of funding and training. If the forthcoming election is not reasonably meaningful, then the proxy assets of many regional actors will be prominent in regional calculation. A significant portion of Afghan population views Pakistan as an obstacle. However, negative aspect of India's strategic partnership with Afghanistan was discussed without deeper analysis.

While India is building capacity of Afghan Security Force and contributing to Afghanistan's developments; one cannot deny the fact that the root cause of extremism in Afghanistan is the external support given to the Taliban, and also the fact that Pakistan's military ambition is directly linked to Afghanistan. Does Afghanistan not have right to protect its national interest by strategic partnership with the US, India or any other states- he asked.

The current Afghan problem is a direct result of the activities of Taliban government that ruled Afghanistan for a short period of time, and a subsequent rejuvenation of Al- Qaida, Taliban and Hakkani Network through the support provided by Pakistan. He illustrated a speech of Fazlul Karzai in 2013, in responding to a question which refers that India-Pakistan rivalry is the root cause of Afghanistan's problem, where Mr. Karzai said "They are very wrong in thinking that. That is an excuse to continue violence in Afghanistan. Such a view is not shared by the people of Afghanistan."

As per the Indian perspective to Afghanistan is concerned, it has been maintained that the reconciliation, reconstruction, socio-political advancement and economic development in Afghanistan should generally be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Finally he suggests some ways and means by saying, "We support Afghan-led, Afghan-owned initiatives in their country. We guarantee the neutrality towards Afghanistan and also support Afghanistan in strengthening the Afghan National Security Forces."

- a. Giving national security guarantees to Afghanistan and Pakistan to ensure that neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan should use each other's territory for terrorism. Marginalize and then root out the harmful state or non-state actors and ban any state-sponsored terrorism.
- b. Ask the Islamic state to clearly define "Jihadi terrorism". It will help to marginalize the Jihadi terrorism.
- c. Ensure continued economic support to Afghanistan.
- d. Revamp the UN mission in Afghanistan to give the UN more substantive role.
- e. The last but not the least, to ensure free and fair democratic presidential election in 2014 and the smooth transition of power.

In conclusion, Gen Singh stressed that Afghanistan is a key place for struggle against Jihadi terrorism. At the same time, it has potential to facilitate regional integration as well as connectivity with Central Asia, China, and Iran. The Indian model of partnering Afghanistan needs to be dispassionately studied and allowed to be implemented for the best of Afghanistan.

Mr. Imtiaz Gul, Director Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), Pakistan

Mr. Gul articulated the Pakistani understanding of the Afghan sphere of influence. His narrative is in much opposition to the Indian explanation of Afghan crisis.

Mr. Imtiaz Gul introduced his speech with a suspicion that the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan looms as a big anxiety and uncertainly. According to him, "The thinning-out of US-led troops is expected to throw up more crises, more for regional countries than for the US-led NATO." He also mentioned the

probability of various proxy wars that are currently playing out particularly between India and Pakistan and their purported proxies. Mr. Gul identified four crucial issues those will exacerbate the proxies in post-NATO period i.e. hostility and mistrust between India and Pakistan; mistrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan; mistrust between the US and Pakistan and; Iran-US rivalry on the issue of uranium enrichment.

The Afghan security forces are not capable of taking the responsibility of ensuring law and order situation in absence of NATO troops though the size of the forces are rapidly expanding and have reached 350,000. These national forces are struggling to attain support for themselves in areas varying from logistics and planning to intelligence-gathering and also for back-ups in difficult battles. Mr. Gul mentioned that recent losses of the Afghan security forces to militants, as well as, desertions in these forces and a 24 per cent surge in violence this year so far, are also adding to the worries. He also referred to General Joseph Dunford, the US and NATO commander in the country, who expressed his grave concern over the Afghan forces' weekly death toll topping 100.

In the backdrop of this precarious situation, Mr. Gul considered four possible scenarios accompanying the discourse on withdrawal:

- i. Push Kabul more towards New Delhi, particularly by the forces of status quo who have developed a stake in the war economy, and who would try – the way they have thus far – to keep whipping and projecting Pakistan as the bad guy, the spoiler, and use it for perpetuating their own narrative. This means huge vested interest within Afghanistan for continuation of the conflict – government officials, ministers, Taliban, warlords, the service industry i.e. US/Afghan cargo/security contractors/truckers etc.
- ii. The western combat troops' pullout may rekindle and reinforce Pakistani fears and send the Pakistani security establishment – already skeptical of the perceived threats from the Indo-Afghan-American nexus - into a more offensive position, and thus forestall progress on the Afghan peace and reconciliation. This may also mean holding back whatever support it may be ready to lend to the reconciliation process, for reasons that while Karzai signed some 20 bilateral strategic and security partnership deals with friendly countries including India and the United States, his government never responded to the one Pakistan offered a year ago.
- iii. The drawdown of US-led troops may consequently also force Pakistan to review its hands-off-Kashmir policy as well as prompt it to stitch up new alliances with new Afghan partners from among the non-Pashtun Afghans to offset the impact of the growing Indian influence, particularly over the Afghan security apparatus, which is repeatedly reflected in scathing, contemptuous statements on Pakistan by Karzai and cohorts.
- iv. The NATO exit may result in the unraveling the 350,000 Afghan security forces, unleash a new form of civil war, and thus trigger a fresh influx of refugees from Afghanistan (already 3.5 million). On the other hand, it may also trigger intensification in the Indo-Proxy war.

“The hostility between India and Pakistan lies at the heart of the current war in Afghanistan”, Mr. Gul argues. In the current situation in Afghanistan, he emphasized on the hostility between the two regional powers, India and Pakistan; instead of the struggle between the U.S. and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) on one hand, and al-Qaida and the Taliban on the other. India-Pakistan rivalry is particularly flammable as they vie for influence over Afghanistan. Compared to that prolonged and deadly

contest, the U.S. and ISAF are playing little more than a bit part—and they, unlike the Indians and Pakistanis, are heading for the exit.

Keeping above factors in mind, the speaker described that Afghanistan is currently hostage to competing and conflicting narratives that flow from geo-strategic considerations. The US Narrative on Afghanistan is premised on the urgency of the pullout as soon as possible in view of domestic pressures. For instance, James Dobbins, Special Envoy and Bruce Riedel, former CIA official and advisor to President Obama – have indicated that for achieving these objectives Washington is probably unwillingly to take Pakistan along.

Yet, Ambassador Dobbins in an interview with the Voice of America underscored the growing synergy of thought with Pakistan: “We have Pakistani support for that, I think Karzai felt his visit to Pakistan was helpful. He feels, I think, that he was well received, and the Pakistani government reaffirmed that their support for reconciliation for a process that would be Afghan-led and so we are looking forward to continue to collaborate. The Taliban are reluctant to talk to the Afghan govt but we and the govt of Pakistan are doing what we can to persuade them to do so.”

Secondly, the Indian narrative shaped by concerns, misplaced to a certain extent, like ‘Afghanistan turning into a Pakistani satellite’, and thus they oppose the US-Pakistan led peace process. Writing for rediff.com, Ajay Shukla said that the Taliban’s resurgence and Pakistan’s growing role in brokering talks between the insurgents and President Hamid Karzai’s government have sent New Delhi into an undisguised sulk. The report also recounts what Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid said at a closed-door seminar in New Delhi on August 23, wherein he repeatedly lamented that Kabul was talking to the Taliban and said “Certain elements in the [reconciliation] process are not very comforting to us. We are not sanguine about some of the armed groups that Afghanistan is talking to, but that is for Afghanistan to decide.”

Mr. Gul admitted that in spite of the comment, surely Khurshid was not suggesting that President Karzai should confine his dialogue to groups other than the Taliban. But he maintained that, to what extent does this Indian view play into Hamid Karzai’s position on the peace talks is also worth taking a critical look at. With its over 2 billion infrastructure and social development aid, India certainly is entrenching itself in Afghanistan, apparently in a move to prevent Afghanistan from falling in the hands of what it considers pro-Pakistan Pashtun forces.

Thirdly, The Indian narrative feeds into the Afghan narrative which is still frozen in the fears that Pakistan wants to turn Afghanistan into its strategic backyard drawing an analogy to what Z.A. Bhutto had pushed in the 1970s as strategic depth. For the Afghan establishment, the Haqqani Network or the Afghan Taliban – are Pakistan’s preferred tools for securing the strategic depth. The United States have given up – may be temporarily but both India and the Afghan establishment are still parroting this narrative and using this as the yardstick for judging Pakistan.

But one must be clear that, tactical relations with certain groups or persons must not be confused with strategic partnerships. Such partnerships are defined, not only by geo-political considerations but also by geo-commercial interests and by also the depth of such interests. Hekmetyar, Rabbani and Mujaddedi and Sayyaf are nothings but a few examples of how Pakistan’s nexus with these leaders hardly went beyond a tactical relationship.

Finally, Pakistani narrative is rooted in the growing Indian influence, particularly over the Afghan security apparatus, which repeatedly reflected in scathing, contemptuous statements on Pakistan by Karzai and cohorts like Chief of Staff Karim Khoram and Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta. Pakistani fears also driven by the specter of a renewed influx of refugees from Afghanistan (already 3.5 million). Pakistan also realized the futility of its past reliance on Pashtuns, and thus, has reached out to non-Pashtuns as evidenced by increased Pakistani interaction with non-Pashtun Afghan leaders.

In conclusion, Mr. Gul remarked that the future hardly looks promising as long as both India and Pakistan remain at daggers drawn, and the biggest challenge confronting the region is how to disengage India and Pakistan from the intense geo-political competition through intelligence and proxy wars. How to dissuade them from viewing Afghanistan as a strategic pawn in their geo-political matrix? This is the only way to preempt renewed covert hostilities among India, Afghanistan and Pakistan. And if both India and Pakistan can find a way out of their present face-off, which could provide the key that is needed for securing peace and stabilizing Afghanistan, which again is the key to expansion in regional trade and energy networking.

Question and Answer/ Open Discussion

A retired Major General and former Director General of a think tank asked both the speakers for their opinion on the necessity of the Afghan war. He also enquired in particular about the country whose national security interest had been served better by this particular war and if peace can loom over South Asia after the war.

A young Journalist asked Mr. Gul that recently Pakistan has released seven Afghan militants, mostly leaders, as a part of present peace process. He asked whether it will help to bring Afghan Taliban in the negotiation table. He also seeks the speaker's opinion on Pakistan as the prime cause of Taliban violence in Afghanistan. **A military historian and fellow from a European university**, questioned Mr. Gul on the same note about the ultimate possibility of peace in South Asia.

Mr. Gul said that general people of Afghanistan don't think that the war was necessary. The war did not serve the security interest of any particular state. The perceived Afghan Safe Haven of terrorist is a huge area and big part of it is mountainous with complex paths and cave system. Pakistan cannot build a fence in Pak-Afghan border for various reasons like the US did in US-Mexico border. Pakistan is still dealing with the legacy of anti-Soviet jihad, for which Pakistan received widespread support at that period.

To the answer to the military historian's question, he said that, this will indeed remain as a big question in coming days whether peace is ultimately possible in South Asia or not. He said that when Taliban was in power, Pakistan wanted to construct highway connecting communication centers of Pakistan to south and eastern Afghanistan. Pakistan allocated funds and mobilized machineries in 1996. Despite the funds and mini mobilization, the Taliban proposed Pakistani government that once the machineries move into Afghan border, Afghanistan will take over; they will not allow Pakistan to interfere. The reason being, other Afghans will accuse them of compromising the Afghan's century old position on Durand line. Afghans don't accept this as a border. Fast forwarding to 2004, the US decided to set up Tri-party Commission consisting US, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Even then there has been no initiative on the part of either side to bridge the gap. The Pashtun Nationalists consider the area up to KPK as occupied lore of Afghanistan in a national narrator. Most of the Afghan Pashtun Nationalists do not consider Durand line as a border. That's why Karzai had been objecting to it; he does not even want to consider fencing the parts of the border most frequented. Canada wanted to assist but it did not work out.

A Professor from Department of Govt. and Politics of a prominent University raised a concern regarding India's otherwise preference about Taliban's role in the peace negotiation process. India is not in position to instruct Karzai about his probable talk with Taliban as it would amount to be interference in an Afghan decision. India should not have an issue whether Karzai talks to Taliban or not.

General Singh answered to the Professor's question saying that, there should be some defining parameter for both sides like the Afghan constitution for negotiations process to occur. India is not in position to instruct Karzai about talking to Taliban as that would be an interference. India has no problem about negotiations between Karzai and Taliban. The Taliban is an amorphous body now. It is impossible to distinguish good Taliban from bad ones. Indeed, the Taliban those who are in Afghanistan will be treated as per the constitution for their rights.

As to Pashtun dilemma, he said, there are Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Pakhtuns in Pakistan. They are clearly different. How do the Pakistani Pakhtuns look at this scenario? Are the Pakistani Pakhtuns and Afghan Pashtuns going to form a different state for themselves? No, because Pakhtuns in Pakistan do not think joining the other side of disputed border will offer them any sort of advantage.

A student from the Department of International Relations of a University stated that, to solve the problem in Afghanistan, India-Pakistan cooperation is very important. He asked Gen Singh whether India, as the largest South Asian power, would take any initiative in future to bring a comprehensive dialogue regarding India-Pakistan issues and for the security of South Asia as a whole.

Gen Singh responded that India has no problem going into discussion with Pakistan on the issue of Afghanistan or such attempt by anyone else will be welcomed by India. Dialogue among the Russians, Chinese, and the US on Afghanistan is a good progress. Before initiating dialogue, it is important to see who are in the driving seat at present and who will be in the same seat in future in Afghanistan- it is very difficult to identify that right now.

CHAPTER FIVE

SESSION FOUR: DEVELOPMENTAL, ECONOMIC, GOVERNANCE AND RELATED SECURITY ISSUES

H.E Heather Cruden, Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh

Ms. Cruden was Canada's head of aid in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2011. In her speech she shared her experience and analytic observations in the gauge of overall success and failure. She also shared her observations on developmental, economic, governance and related security issues of Afghanistan. She said that the issues of development and governance are indispensable to Afghanistan. It is impossible to develop a country without sustainable economic conditions. Good governance is very important for social and economic development.

Afghanistan was the single largest recipient of Canadian bilateral aid and now it is in top four. It is also the largest recipient of Canadian military aid.

Since 2010, building on the experience gained during the last 10 years, the Government of Canada identified four key areas of focus to guide its work in Afghanistan until 2014: securing the future of children and youth; security, the rule of law, and human rights; regional diplomacy and humanitarian assistance. Canada's international development objective for Afghanistan is to meet the basic needs and reduce the vulnerability of the Afghan people, especially the women, girls and boys in partnership with the Government of Afghanistan, Afghan civil society, and other donors.

There has been much progress in Afghanistan in last decade; the percentage of population with access to pure water has increased from 22% in 2000 to 50% in 2011. The child mortality rate has decreased and maternal health has improved. The availability of education for girls and boys has increased with the improved capacity of local, provincial, and national institutions in delivering basic education services.

Still the country is facing various challenges in developmental and governance sectors. Due to constitutional barriers women still do not take part in political life. Poor governance is hampering the country's overall development in a big way. Canada is assisting in increasing participation of women and inclusion of their concerns in the decision-making processes at the national and provincial levels. Moreover, it enhanced effectiveness of human rights and civil society organizations to promote human rights and investigate and act on human rights violations, especially those against women and girls.

Humanitarian assistance of Canada in Afghanistan focuses on saving lives, alleviating sufferings and maintaining human dignity in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters. The attention is also put in strengthening the preparedness of the Afghan people to respond to these situations. As part of such assistance Canada helped in enhancing responsiveness of humanitarian assistance provided by international aid agencies and Afghans themselves to address the basic human needs of crisis-affected populations. Also Canadian assistance improved resilience of crisis-affected vulnerable populations, with a focus on women and girls and enhanced performance of national and provincial organizations in disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness.

Canada is also assisting in Afghanistan's capacity building to strengthen its law and order situation. As part of the process, Canada is working with international community for capacity building of Army and Police.

According to Ms Cruden, development process in Afghanistan is more complicated than Bangladesh. Humanitarian projects, reconstruction and long-term financial support- all these are necessary but the implementation is the most complex part in the Afghan context. Absence of good governance in the country is adversely affecting the overall progress. Security is another obvious challenge for the country. Canada lost 150 soldiers and many more were severely injured, she illustrated.

Question and Answer/ Open Discussion

The Head of the International Desk of a prominent NGO stated that BRAC is conducting its international operation in Afghanistan for last ten years. Even now it has 1800 members of staff working in the country. It is a beneficiary of Canadian government's grant in the sectors of microfinance, education, health. Currently in education advancement projects, BRAC has 19 million USD Canadian grants. As a result, more than 10 million children are now going to school, compared to 1 million in 2001. There are also more than 4000 schools in the country. Many schools are following BRAC model of education. He discussed about both bilateral and multilateral aid in Afghanistan. He questioned how these two types of aid can bring flexibility to work in the development of the country.

Major Sarwar Jahan Chowdhury (retd), Associate Research Fellow, BIPSS opined that the entire developmental effort in Afghanistan looks a top down exercise. It is quite a time period, about more than a decade, that the development effort got going and that brought a huge amount of cash flow from the West. As the Top Down system wasn't delivering the end result, Major Chowdhury questioned whether other developmental strategy was considered at any point of time in Afghanistan e.g. Bottom Up or Horizontal or any other approach. He inquired from Ms Cruden that Afghanistan being a highly traditional tribal society, whether there were any scheme to impart proper cultural sensitivity to the external developmental staff and officials in Afghanistan.

A student from the department of International Relations of a university asked about possible scenario of development in Afghanistan, after the NATO withdrawal, considering the Karzai administration's involvement in large scale corruption.

A journalist said that the main allegation against Taliban government was repression, regress and violation of women's right in Afghanistan. He visited Kabul in 2004. He observed that women in Kabul are travelling by taxi cab and they are sitting in cargo area as not inside the cab, even though their husband is with them. The rule is that women are not allowed to sit inside. He asked Ms Cruden that so many socio-economic developmental projects were undertaken in Afghanistan including ones regarding women's rights; however, why this issue about the rights of Afghan women to sit inside the cab and not in cargo area remained unresolved?

Ms Cruden informed that, Canada engages in policy dialogues with multi-lateral stake holders. In Afghanistan they have Afghanistan Construction Trust Fund. Canada initiated conversations between donor agencies that support the trust fund, and the government to ensure that ongoing development programs met the challenges in relation to context, needs and difficulties. It is an on-going process of dialogue. Being a donor agency in a conflict zone is a challenge and development is a risky business. In a conflict zone

they have to deal with human lives; other diverse issues become more difficult to deal within a conflict zone.

In terms of Top Down approach, development engagement changed over time, she said. From 2009 to 2011, there has been surge in development as well as a rise in the military side. The international community, on the donor part, did engage regularly with the respective ministries; like with Ministry of Financing for development of programs. The capacity to provide security for developmental work constrained the latter to certain extent; that in turn dictated the bottom up or top down developmental approach in many situations. One of the programs that were implemented by the government was, Afghan National Solidarity Program (NSP), which is a bottom up approach and that was implemented by the ministry. And other programs were top down; some were more successful than the others. Over the time government departments like Ministry of Finance, with which Canada had frequent engagement, became more assertive in terms of the model of engagement with the international community. And other ministries such as the Ministry of Education became very clear of what they wanted of the International community.

On the issue of Cultural sensitivity training; it has not been given much importance. A donor agency does not directly provide such training. Canada would hire organizations like BRAC, CARE and other NGOs to do this. There were certain societal issues where both donor agency and military were hesitant to take an initiative because these were culturally complex matters to understand.

Ms. Cruden thought there was going to be some disruption in developmental endeavor in these transitional times. But the International community is not leaving Afghanistan; the military is leaving. The donor agencies will still be there and many programs by the donor agencies will continue. There is going to be instability, she understood, but she was not sure whether there is going to be civil war. As far as women's right is concerned, Afghan women should start demanding their own rights. And in reality, it is starting to happen on individual basis.

Chair's Comment- Major General A N M Muniruzzaman ndc, psc (Retd), President, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies

Afghanistan is a classic case of sibling interface. It is not very often seen that a large military operation can interface with civilian operation, which includes, beside other, electoral, political and large developmental components. Bangladesh is interested to see more developmental efforts in Afghanistan, especially more big and impressive operation by BRAC- who had been development partner in Afghanistan from the very beginning, and had been in the most difficult areas of the country. Bangladesh and Afghanistan can become greater partners in the progress and development of the latter. Development in socio-economic arena of Afghanistan is of special significance to Bangladesh. It is also admirable that the military planners in Afghanistan also understood the critical importance of development oriented nation building alongside counter insurgency operations in that country.

CHAPTER SIX

CLOSING SESSION

Closing Address by Special Guest H.E Heather Cruden, Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh

Ms. Cruden thanked BIPSS and Major General A N M Muniruzzaman (Retd) for arranging this conference. Different issues were covered in the conference, highlighting the complexities of challenges both for Afghanistan and South Asia. Moreover, the conference highlighted the interconnectedness of these issues of Afghanistan and its broader effects. Participation and engagement of people from other countries show the relevance and importance of today's sessions. Also, the depth of questions asked by the audience show the level of engagement in the topics concerned. She finally thanked everyone for participating and expressed her hope that, in future, there will be more sessions like this.

Vote of Thanks by President, BIPSS

Major General A N M Muniruzzaman (Retd) thanked the participating speakers and the chairs who had contributed immensely to the deliberations of the day. He was grateful to the speakers who have travelled long distance and brought great insights to the conference. He also thanked the audience who kept the sessions lively through their participation. Finally he said that despite it had been a one day conference, it was highly enriching and fruitful.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RECOMMENDATIONS

The suggestions in this part are not based on any clear agreement in part of the presenters/speakers in the conference in regards to the action needed in post 2014 scenario in Afghanistan or in South Asia or specifically in Bangladesh. However, BIPSS has attempted to pick the thread of commonality from the contents of each or most of the speakers and held that as the premise for these recommendations.

Although the intricacies of widespread terror of diverse pattern does not equally effect all the countries related to Afghanistan. Apart from Afghanistan itself, Pakistan is perhaps the worst sufferer. India also faces terror actions every now and then if not at the frequency of the formers. Terror threats in the West, emanating from Afghanistan, seem to be low these days. The situation in Bangladesh appears to be under control, by and large, at least for now, but the potential for terror actions persists with the emerging trends of splinter terrorist groups linked to veterans of Afghan Jihad.

The recommendations are constituted for strategy and actions in four interrelated spheres i.e. international/trans-regional, Afghan, South Asian and finally Bangladesh. There are overlapping of some recommendations from one sphere to another and also there are necessities for cooperation among actors of different spheres.

Suggested Strategies and Actions: International /Trans-regional Level

- a. Afghanistan, being a special country in terms of being the locus and also the source of spreading violence and terrorism both in the past and obviously in the present day situation; there is a need of forming a platform that brings all important stakeholders in this regards. NATO basically has been working on an ad hoc understanding basis with the Pakistanis, Chinese, Indians, Central Asians, Russians and few more, mostly, developmental partners, which is a fragile and lesser effective arrangement. An international body/ forum of Afghan security and development partners may be formed with certain fundamental yet essential consensus for at least couple of future decades to facilitate helping Afghans in a holistic manner to have a reasonably secured and livable environment that would sustain and won't fall apart. American- Chinese joint initiative could be crucial to reach such a covenant.
- b. The Afghan Government and the international community should work in an inclusive political system which can strengthen democracy, improve governance, and uphold human rights and gender rights in Afghanistan. BIPSS predicted that, the next 18 months will have significant implications for the country's internal stability, international counter-terrorism efforts and regional dynamics within South Asia.
- c. The assistance to Afghan government in security, developmental and governance capacity building and capacity maintenance should be continued but with effectiveness through lessons learned from past mistakes. Agreement on flow of funds and resources is a must to keep the moderates afloat in Afghanistan until they entrench themselves firmly.

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- d. There is a need to recognize the continuation of ISAF presence in the country, of course in a lesser degree after the bulk withdrawal in 2014, to ensure that terrorists get the signal that international presence is still there and international commitment to counter terror in that region stands.
- e. The International community should be paying attention to sustainable peace process with Afghan Taliban. Compromise is required for comprehensive peace. Stability in Afghanistan would require aid and developmental support provided to the country uninterrupted and simultaneously the counterterrorism activities carried out. Political engagement with the Taliban to be initiated by the Afghan government at the appropriate moment. The strength of Afghan government may require to be demonstrated, especially in the post 2014 time, in its overall functioning, to lay the ground work for an acceptable compromise.

Recommendations in Relation to Afghanistan

- a. Rendering of national security guarantees to Afghanistan and Pakistan to ensure that neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan use each other's territory for terrorism. Marginalize and then root out the harmful state or non-state actors and ban all state-sponsored terrorism.
- b. A clarification of the definition of "Jihadi terrorism" from the Afghans. It will help to marginalize the Jihadi terrorism.
- c. Ensure continued economic support to Afghanistan through the incumbent moderate Afghan government.
- d. Revamp the UN mission in Afghanistan to give the UN more substantive role.
- e. Ensure free and fair democratic presidential election in 2014 and the smooth transition of power.

Suggested Ideas and Actions at South Asian Regional Level

- a. Pakistan is the country where the spillover effect of Afghan conflict is heavy and direct. Again Pakistan can influence politico-military courses in Afghanistan to a considerable extent. Pakistan has a complex relation with Afghans. Pakistan considers dominant position of the majority Pashtuns in Afghanistan is of Pakistan's interest both for keeping Afghan Pashtun's focus on Kabul instead of Pakistani Pashtun province of Kyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Pakistan seemingly aspires for acquiring a strategic depth as well, against any probable Indian military aggression in an escalated situation, with the help of a friendly Afghanistan. Addressing Pakistan's concerns by ensuring a proper and dignified position of the Pashtun in Afghanistan and reevaluation of Indian approach towards Pakistan in this light would help solving Af-Pak complications and that would facilitate addressing the terror export / link issues in a holistic way for almost the entire South Asia especially India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- b. The spread of Terror is potentially more serious a crisis for South Asian countries than their bilateral disputes. A pervasive terrorism in a society cause grave harm to a society and make it crippled to a great degree. Terror phenomenon heralded by extremist discourse is already destroying Pakistan's social harmony, increasing insecurity and hampering normal activities of public life. Similar things are happening in Bangladesh and in parts of India to a lesser degree though. This

socio-political cancer seems to have the potential to permeate further and paralyse South Asian societies and engender widespread social and communal unrest. It might isolate Muslim majority nations or communities from the rest of the world or rest of the communities unless the issues are addressed comprehensively. The fallacies and distorted articulations of Jihadi Narratives in public discourse must be replaced by truth and fact based moderate yet culturally sensitive narratives. For such and explicit or tacit understanding in south Asia among the establishments, security agencies, civil societies, medias, intelligentsia, academia and all other moderate/ liberal entities to flourish, the other contentious and divisive bilateral disputes have to be solved or set aside for a longer period.

- c. Functional level cooperation on sharing intelligence on cross boarder terrorism is imperative. Such hotlines should be established among intelligence communities instead of sporadic gestures.
- d. Actions of non-State actors across the border binds the hands of the political leadership of the affected nation tight as such actions evoke grave domestic public pressure. Their space for constructive engagement with neighbors gets reduced. Mumbai attack was as a case in point. Better understandings among South Asian governments and their security and intelligence agencies are needed.
- e. It can be observed that operational ability in countering terrorism in all eight South Asian countries combined are meager and split. But there are prospects of enhancing this capacity with existing availability of trained manpower with combat training in the armed forces and para-militaries. They can be utilized through further training on counterterror intricacies and technicalities.
- f. The charter of SAARC should be reformed so that it provides the clear platform for all necessary multilateral dialogue, communiqué and coordination on counter terror issues. An effective, honest and all-nation Counter Terror Coordination Cell should be established in SAARC HQ and made functional as soon as possible.
- g. All SAARC nations should form counter terror policies and guideline in line with UN and other international conventions and blend it with its own national interest. This policies and guidelines should be common on principles and have similar directions for regional counter terror cooperation. An endeavor to diffuse that through all the state organs and to the society as a whole should follow.
- h. Finally building solidarity, through the hard work needed, between India and Pakistan could provide the key that is essential for securing peace and stabilizing Afghanistan, which again is the key to expansion of trans-regional trade and energy supply network that would bring dividend for all.

Recommendations for Bangladesh

Bangladesh is already fraught with many other socio-economic and political impasses. Bangladesh can't simply afford another toxic phenomenon like persistent terror. That would be a disastrous scenario. Bangladesh needs grand strategy and corresponding ground actions to prevent slipping into such a situation.

- a. Jihadi Narrative of terrorism must be wiped out from all corners of public sphere through constructive opinion building. Public vigilance, awareness and cooperation with the security

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agencies should be encouraged and facilitated. Moderate nature of Bengali Muslim, relatively solid civil society and liberal media are useful assets in this regard. The other positive catalyst in Bangladesh is that, most major political parties of the nation are moderate and the fundamentalists are electorally negligible, so are their radical comrades. Now the challenge would be to face the threat the latter pose in terms of physical propaganda and opinion building effort through their relatively well-organized cadres. On social front, counter-terror social movements are needed to be initiated and pursued.

- b. Inception of well thought out and well-coordinated counter terror architecture is imperative which would avoid unnecessary duplication of effort and would increase sync. The design of the new security and intelligence architecture should have an eye on the Afghanistan linked post 2014 implication for Bangladesh and the already emerging splinter terror groups of Bangladesh.
- c. Capacity of structural adaptation of Security and intelligence system is required to be able to work with regional and international security and counter-terror partners effectively when there are needs for collaborative actions and coordination.
- d. Simultaneously, although a bit difficult to achieve, an effort is needed for an overt political consensus on counter-terror policy of the country, leaving the issue beyond the disputes of everyday power politics.

