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PRESS RELEASE **DAY 2 (11 May 2017)**

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

'Peace and stability in Afghanistan is an important objective for us. Effective Pak-Afghan border management is required in order to curb malicious terrorist activities and is the need of the hour.' This was emphasized by **Ms Tehmina Janjua**, Foreign Secretary of Pakistan in Islamabad today at the concluding session of the international conference on 'Achieving Peace in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospects' organized by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) in collaboration with the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF).

Addressing a packed hall of delegates from Kabul, Washington, Tehran, Beijing, Belfast, and Moscow, Ms Janjua stressed that Pakistan desires meaningful engagement with Afghanistan as both have shared history, culture, ethnicity and religion.

She said that 'Pakistan is focusing on enhancing people-to-people contact between the two countries. High-level officials have visited Afghanistan to show their overtures for peace, and we have recently started training Afghan medical doctors and paramedic staff in Pakistan, alongwith awarding 3000 scholarships and launching 3000 more for Afghan youth.' Ms Janjua also shared that under the Afghan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), Pakistan has been providing transit route



for Afghan trade. However, she cautioned that ungoverned spaces are at the risk of becoming safe havens and sanctuaries for terrorists and militants. She pointed out that 'TTP and JuA use these sanctuaries to undertake terrorist attacks in Pakistan through our 2,611 km long border. Hence, an effective border management strategy is the need of the hour.' The Foreign Secretary also stressed that Pakistan wants that the Afghan refugees return to their country with dignity and honour. For this, the government is supporting the reintegration of Afghan refugees in their homeland. 'Lasting peace in Afghanistan can only be achieved through the political reconciliation of which Pakistan has always supported Afghanistan', she concluded.

In the session on 'Peace Initiatives by Regional Partners and Coalition Countries', **Dr Omar Zakhilwal**, Ambassador of Afghanistan to Pakistan presented his keynote address and called for the need to understand what peace is and then to understand it in the context of Afghanistan specifically. He stated that since 'Afghanistan is at the centre of the conflict, it is the Afghan people who have the sincerest wish for there to be peace. Anyone else's commitment to peace can be doubted but not that of the people of Afghanistan. Unfortunately the international engagement in Afghanistan at the moment is for all the wrong reasons.' According to him, in 2001, the coalition came to Afghanistan with a lot more clarity but over time their focus has diluted. However, back then, there was little room for reconciliation as the mind-set was more focused on revenge. His Excellency remarked that there is no shortage of misconceptions and conspiracy theories about his country forcing all those involved into a very dangerous prisoner's

dilemma of 'to cooperate or not to cooperate'. Dr Omar said that in 2001, there was unity among regional countries, but in 2017, that unity is gone. 'The way the war was fought perhaps created more difficulties



than it resolved making terrorism more complex than before.

Afghanistan could be a test case for great power cooperation between state actors who traditionally do not get along like India-Pakistan, Saudi Arabia-Iran, Russia-US

because if nothing else, peace in Afghanistan benefits everyone. At the minimum, there will not be any conflict spillover', he concluded.

On the 'US Vision of the End State in Afghanistan: A Critical Evaluation of the Obama Policies and Key Recommendations for President Trump', **Dr. Marvin G. Weinbaum**, Professor Emeritus, and Scholar-in-Residence, Middle East Institute from Washington D.C. shared that while Barack Obama sought to implement a new strategic approach in Afghanistan which featured a military surge that was expected to clear the way for the disengagement of US forces from the country, his administration was left with pinning its hopes on a strategy designed to buy 'enough time' for the Afghan state 'to put its act together.'

Like Obama's administration, Dr Weinbaum suggested that all major stakeholders need to do the same and lower their sights for an end-state, and be willing to settle for an Afghanistan whose security, stability and governance is just 'good enough.' He also pointed out that Pakistan's influence over the Taliban is overestimated and misunderstood; and that the Taliban's vision of an end-state for Afghanistan is different from that of the US and its allies. He opined that the 'Taliban seek the recreation of an Emirate in a *Sharia* state, not a Western-styled democratic constitutional state. Trying to get the Taliban to agree to power sharing has ignored what the Taliban's core leadership regularly states: that it has no interest in power sharing within the prevailing political system.'



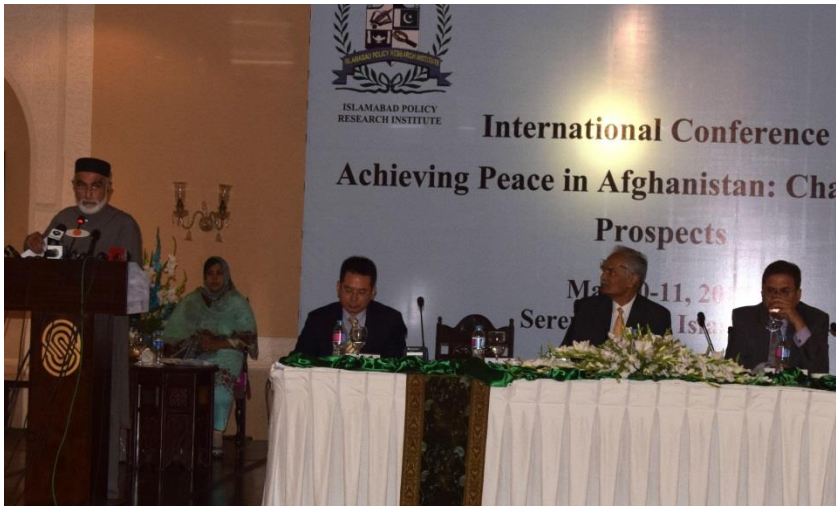
Regarding President Trump, he was of the view that during his campaign for the presidency Donald Trump seldom mentioned Afghanistan, 'it is doubtful that the new administration's vision for Afghanistan or its strategies in the region will deviate very far from those during the Obama years.' He, however, cautioned and lamented that development assistance stands to be cut sharply in an overall defunding of soft power in American's foreign policy towards this region.

Presenting possible international cooperation scenarios for normalization of the situation in Afghanistan, **Dr. Grigory Tishchenko**, Deputy Director, Russian Institute of Strategic Studies (RISS) said that Moscow supports the legal government in Afghanistan, and noted that since Pakistan is the key country for ensuring its stability, it is important to continue the present Russian-Pakistani interaction. He warned that destabilization of the situation in Afghanistan could seriously complicate functioning of the Chinese One Belt One Road passing through the region. Any aggravation in the region threatens Russia as well, he pointed out. He was of the view that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can make an essential contribution to normalizing the situation in Kabul through coordination of Russian, Chinese, Pakistani and Indian interests. 'Russia and especially China are already huge sponsors of the Afghan government,

both in the military and economic sphere. Therefore, it is essential to add the situation in Afghanistan to the agenda of the SCO,' he urged. Dr Tishchenko warned that the fight against terrorism and religious extremism is complex. He also recommended advance preparations for international cooperation in case ISIL activities go beyond Afghanistan. 'Search of forces interested in peace-making and ready to sit down at the negotiating table, including direct dialogue of the Afghan Government with the Taliban is also necessary as is strengthening of borders, modernization of armed forces of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, involvement of the CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Force (KSOR) and the SCO Anti-terrorist center in the region', he concluded.

Reviewing the current Afghan situation from the Iranian perspective, **Dr. Seyed Rasoul Mousavi**, Advisor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Vice President Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) from Tehran was of the view that the US as the main security guarantor has no specific strategy for Afghanistan, while the Taliban believe the US has been defeated militarily and so the number of terrorist attacks and with them civilian casualties are increasing, along with massive opium production. He said that Afghanistan's 'trilemma' lies in 3 main and key problems: Stability, Security and Development. 'Unfortunately, none of the governments and political parties in Afghanistan have been able to find a balanced solution for these three crises', he reflected. According to him, the Bonn Conference was a failure because it focused on removing Taliban from the Afghan equation and fixated only on the security dimension, ignoring the social and political dimensions which led to renewed strength in the Taliban. According to Dr Mousavi, another mistake made by the Bonn process was relying on the military forces of US and NATO while disregarding the importance and role of regional countries in attaining this goal. He recommended that Afghanistan needs a 'Power Re-sharing solution' in which there is participation of all Afghan major political and social players in the central government and local administration, without excluding anyone. He also suggested looking at the present-day Taliban with a new lens as 'neo-Taliban' rather than the one worn during the previous years. The session was chaired by Mr. Muhammad Sadiq, Pakistan's former National Security Secretary and former Ambassador to Afghanistan.

During the session on 'Achieving Peace in Afghanistan: A Way Forward', **Mr. Owais Ahmed Ghani**, Senior Research Fellow and Member Board of Directors, Global Think Tank Network (GTTN), National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, and former Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



and Balochistan, delivered his keynote. He candidly shared that relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are strained due to past seven decades of Pakistan's run-of-the-mill policies, and that Gulbadin Hikmatyar's inclusion in Kabul's political circles testifies to Pakistan's stance that Afghan Taliban can be part of political power-sharing. He predicted that the US will not exit Afghanistan due to its grand strategy to contain China. The former Governor

categorically stated that the US is unwilling to stop India from terrorist activities in Pakistan. 'The fact is that India today is enjoying strategic depth in Afghanistan and it is using Afghan soil to launch terrorist activities in Pakistan,' he remarked. It has become a strategic imperative for Pakistan's and Afghanistan's political and military leadership to work more closely to prevent future violent threats and conflict. He proposed free visa regimes, Preferential Trade Agreements to increase trade volume, common customs facilitation to reduce smuggling and to bridge the trust deficit between the two governments. 'Provision of education and health care facilities can also go a long way in reducing the trust deficit between the two peoples, he concluded.

Mr Muhammad Sadiq, Pakistan's former Ambassador to Afghanistan while speaking on 'Optimizing Afghanistan Relations with All Regional Countries' said that the country has been one of mystery for outsiders since times immemorial but one fraught with perpetual conflict. This Afghanistan, he felt, is now changing. The new Afghanistan has new realities and cultures with new sub-nationalities much stronger than the existing ones. According to him, even the way Afghans interpret their own history has changed. 'Afghanistan's current leadership highlights this new reality and unless they are accepted, neither regional nor international actors can come up with any working strategies for peace. He pointed out that the way the world today wants reconciliation in Afghanistan is not the way acceptable by those within the Republic. He reminded the audience that with Pakistan having more Afghans than Afghanistan itself, it has the most at stake in wanting a peaceful and prosperous neighbour.

On building consensus among major stakeholder countries, **Dr. Liu Zongyi** from Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) in China, said that Pakistan's position on Afghanistan and the insight it can offer about peace in the country should be respected. The eminent scholar emphasized that China considers the Afghan people as the major stakeholders of the Afghan issue. He was of the view that regional connectivity can help Afghanistan and lay the foundation for future regional engagement. However, he recommended that 'diverse regional connectivity efforts of individual stakeholders in Afghanistan must be synergized, and the US should support Russian efforts for establishing peace in Afghanistan.' He pointed out that many great empires declined after they reached this land and hence, every stakeholder needs to keep this history in mind when developing any policy for the people of this region. He noted that there are many contradictions between the policies of various stakeholders with respect to the future of the country. Dr Zongyi urged that 'there should be international consensus on an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process that accepts the Taliban as a legitimate stakeholder. Western democracy cannot be transplanted in Afghanistan,' he concluded.

In his video conference from Belfast on 'Reconciliation and Confidence Building Measures in Afghanistan', **Mr Michael Semple** from Queen's University reminded the audience that the Taliban see themselves as different from the Kabul elites and wish to run an Islamic Emirate. He was of the view that the most important step should be to ask the Taliban to forego violence since there is moral authority behind negotiating an agreement on that premise. He warned that while the Taliban are now more fractured, their various wings have become more autonomous than ever before. 'While the Taliban have found their transition from their last Emir to be quite a challenge, the idea of the Taliban Islamic Emirate is still potent', he stressed. According to him, there is paucity of decision making on Afghanistan due to trust deficit on all fronts which leads to failure of the reconciliation process. Mr Semple suggested more focus on CBMs among all stakeholders to bridge the trust deficit among all warring parties of Afghanistan. This session was chaired by **Dr. Syed Rifaat Hussain**, Head of Department, Government & Public Policy, NUST, Islamabad.

The two-day Conference ended with Acting President of IPRI **Brig (R) Sohail Tirmizi** acknowledging the wealth of ideas and solutions put forward by the renowned speakers. The Conference delegates unanimously agreed that an inter-connected and economically integrated South Asia is not possible without a peaceful Afghanistan for which greater coordination of efforts by the Afghan Government itself, the neighbouring and regional countries as well as the broader international community including the US, Russia and China is needed.

