

Round Table Discussion on **Pak-Afghan Relations: Future Prospects**

Organized by
MUSLIM Institute

MUSLIM Institute organized a Round Table Discussion on “Pak-Afghan Relations: Future Prospects” on Monday 13th October 2014 in Islamabad. The round table discussion was attended by foreign diplomats, professors and students of different universities and research associates of think tanks. Public Relations Coordinator of MUSLIM Institute Tahir Mehmood mediated the round table discussion.



Senator Arifullah Pashtoon

Chairman Foreign Relations Committee, Senate of Afghanistan

Pak-Afghan relations began from 1947 and both the two brother Muslim countries have many similarities including religion, culture, traditions and ethnicity. Pakistan is like my home and I come to Pakistan to learn from here because we have the same culture and here people welcome me warmly where as I may not receive likewise in other countries. When I go back to Afghanistan, I mention these things in our media. Pakistan and Afghanistan have very robust and strong relations. After Soviet attack on Afghanistan, millions of people came to Pakistan. Soviet left Afghanistan due to Pakistan's continuous support to Afghanistan on which we are very thankful to Pakistan. We want new relations among Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Nowadays some other countries are trying to create problems in our relations and we have to stop these problems.



Afghanistan has signed BSA (Bilateral Security Agreement) with USA and NATO will leave Afghanistan but US will be strategic ally here and they will maintain nine bases in Afghanistan. These bases are there because they are thinking about Iran, Russia and China. Iran and China are our neighbors and we want good relations with all of our neighbors. Current President of Afghanistan is focusing to improve relations with neighboring countries of the world. Focus of his foreign policy is neighboring countries, Muslim countries and also some Asian countries and then other countries. We are importing many things from Pakistan nowadays. Recently Pakistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan signed CASA-1000 power supply project which is proof of our coordinational relations. Without Pakistan, Afghanistan is not complete and it is the time that we need Pakistan's support. Today Afghanistan has youth about 53% of total population and we need to focus them and they should be invited to Pakistan for exchange of views and to observe education, political and economic system. ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) is an important organization in the region and it could bring a lot of changes in the region in future.





Ambassador Munawar Saeed Bhatti

Former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan

Pakistan and Afghanistan are at crossroads of South, Central and West Asia. Pakistan is bridge between South and Central Asia whereas Afghanistan is heart of Asia as it was mentioned by Allama Muhammad Iqbal and also he related peace of Asia with peace of Afghanistan. Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan actually date back about nine thousand years to the time of ancient civilization of Mehargarh (7000 BC) in Baluchistan near Bolan Pass. Even today we have not only Pak-Afghan relations but people to people contact is much stronger as compared to countries' relations. There are millions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan but there is never social unrest or any other problem between them and local population due to commonalities among people. Rather Pakistani people accepted them as part of a family. Afghan former president Hamid Karzai mentioned the fact that Pakistan and Afghanistan are like conjoined twins. Former Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar also mentioned that most important capital of world for her is Kabul and she paid most visits to Kabul as compared to any other capital in the world. On our border, about sixty thousand Afghans cross on daily basis only on Torkham and Chaman crossing points.

Before the USSR intervention in Afghanistan, there was no security problem in Pakistan and Afghanistan and huge numbers of foreigners were seen in Peshawar and Kabul. The instability and radicalization had caused great human and economic loss to both the countries. Unless Afghanistan is stable, Pakistan cannot be stable. Afghan nation has a lot of capacity, and reconciliation in recent elections shows the fact. After withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan, they will show their potential to world. Through reconciliation Afghan people can solve their issues themselves. Pakistan has remained impartial in Afghanistan elections and today Pakistan has good relations with all of the Afghan leaders. Afghan National Army has crucial role in future and if it gives feeling to people that it has controlled the security of country, Afghanistan will progress rapidly.

I am very optimistic about ECO. If we look at European Union, the unity in EU stands on basic philosophy which joins all the people on common grounds. In our ECO region whether it is Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Pakistan or Turkey such fundamental and joining philosophy for people is of Allama Iqbal and Maulana Rumi. Their philosophies can bring together all regional countries to enhance the cooperation and cause progress. In 21st century the fate of nations is being determined by knowledge based economies not by guns or bombs. We have to educate our people and invest in youth. Future of both countries lies in modernization and education. We have this great tradition of research and education as we see our great scholars came to this region from Central Asia and Afghanistan e.g. Al-Beruni who wrote book Kitab-ul-Hind.

Govt. of Pakistan is offering 3,000 scholarships for Afghan students to study in Pakistani colleges. Currently there are 300,000 graduates of Pakistani universities working in Afghanistan. In Pakistani primary and middle schools, we have half a million Afghan students and they are treated as Pakistani students. Afghanistan cricket team is also a contribution from Pakistan to Afghanistan's sports. Afghanistan is Pakistan's largest export partner. Pakistan is contributing a lot for reconstruction in Afghanistan despite of its own economic problems.

Before 1979, Afghanistan was an economic dead end. But today whole of this is a free region because Afghanistan is neighbor with Central Asian Republics and thus Afghanistan has become a charring cross

for Asia. Afghanistan has resources of trillion of dollars including huge deposits of Lithium. Afghanistan and border areas of Pakistan have also deposits of rare earth metals which are precious deposits. This region is full of resources and will become international highway in future but important thing is peace in the region. TAPI (Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India) gas pipeline can bring jobs to hundreds of thousands of people which will help achieving peace in Afghanistan. In past ten years there are many changes in Afghanistan e.g. number of students and teachers has increased as US has spent \$700 billion in Afghanistan but if this amount was spent properly on Afghan people, each Afghan could also have an excellent flat, car and first class facilities with good infrastructure. China is also investing in Afghanistan.

From Pakistan's point of view, every sovereign country has right to have relation with any country in the world and so does India. Till relations are bilateral for mutual benefit, it doesn't matter for others but problem comes when relationships start becoming against a third country. Problem in Baluchistan have across the border roots as some trouble-mongers find sanctuaries there and that's why Pakistan shows concerns over Indian consulates in Afghanistan near Pakistani border.



Interactive Session

Answering a question about Allama Iqbal's idea about rail track from Kabul to Turkey via Central Asia, Ambassador (R) Munawar Saeed Bhatti said that we are looking for the same in future. Now we are working to have roads there. Iqbal gave these ideas in 1920s, we got independence in 1947 and had our problems and thus we had hardly any time to work on it. But there is no other way out, we have to do that. Building of Gawadar port is to meet needs of the neighbors through it.



In reply to a question about consistency of Afghan economy after NATO withdrawal, Ambassador (R)

Munawar Saeed Bhatti said that Afghan GDP might drop by 40% after NATO withdrawal which seems very scary. Not only on economic side but on military side, Afghanistan is not on a stage to pay for equipment and meet other needs. But ultimately Afghanistan has to work to achieve economic and financial sustainability. Afghanistan needs to explore its own wealth and by it, it can soon stand on its own feet. Similarly trade transits can bring change.



Answering question about ECO, Senator Arifullah Pashtoon said that ECO can enhance the cooperation among the countries of the region. Ambassador (R) Munawar Saeed Bhatti said that a lot of paper work has been done regarding ECO but so far all the countries have not ratified the things. Once the situation in Afghanistan is stabilized, everybody will realize that they need to give these things priority. Iqbal and Rumi have given their inputs in spiritual and intellectual atmosphere and now we have to make them practical. If we look at Ottomans or Mughals, they were having many Madrasas which were teaching diversified fields and Muslim scholars were coming out of those Madrasas. Pakistan having good institutions and educational system should help the brothers and sisters in the region. Today in the world, regions are emerging and we need to adopt regional approach as well.

Discussing about security of different projects Ambassador (R) Munawar Saeed Bhatti said that it is possible to secure territory being used for projects e.g. the area from where the TAPI pipeline will pass, that can be secured. After the completion of project the betterment in economic condition in Afghanistan will realize people about benefits of peace and security and also it will provide jobs to youth and engaging them for betterment of country.



