

# Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS)

## Afghanistan, India and Iran Trilateral Dialogue-II

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### Conference Report



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## **The Second Round of “Afghanistan, India and Iran Trilateral Dialogue”**

The Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) held the second round of “Afghanistan, India and Iran Trilateral Dialogue” in Kabul, Afghanistan. The one-day meeting, held on August 01, 2017, was attended by scores of high-ranking government officials and experts from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India. Representatives of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) also shared their views on the expansion of relations between the three countries in political, security, economic and cultural spheres.

In this conference, four working sessions were organised under following themes: 1) An Overall Assessment of the Situation in Afghanistan & Respective Bilateral Relations 2) Connectivity; The Arduous Journey of Chabahar, 3) Terrorism: Common Enemy; Divergent Approaches and 4) External Stakeholders: Emerging Geopolitical Dynamics.

The first round of Trilateral Dialogue was successfully held in Tehran, Iran in 2016.

The second trilateral was co-organised by AISS in partnership with Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) of the Indian Ministry of Defence, and the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Opening Session:

Welcome Remarks by Director General, Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS), Kabul, Dr. Davood Moradian

Dr. Moradian thanked the distinguished guests for participating in the conference. Emphasising that Afghanistan, Iran and India shared the same cultural heritage, he said that the three countries need to recreate a platform for cooperation. He further added, “In other parts of the world they talk about ‘creation’ of a board of cooperation, but in our case it’s about ‘recreation’. When we talk about cooperation and connectivity, we notice that our ancestors were far more successful than us in terms of connectivity and interaction. We have to follow our ancestors.”

### ***Introductory Remarks by Director General, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi, Ambassador Jayant Prasad***

In his introductory remarks, Ambassador Prasad thanked AISS for initiating last year the whole idea of a trilateral dialogue, which is free and unencumbered by formalities. He stated that the conflict we are seeing in Afghanistan, to put it in President Ashraf Ghani’s words, is due to undeclared hostilities between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Ambassador Prasad emphasised that Asian countries are not fated to be engaged in conflicts as some Asian countries have proved otherwise. Elaborating the point, he stated, “Some Asian countries have shown a remarkable ingenuity and innovativeness in transforming their economies in ways which was considered unimaginable. The Chinese for example have lifted half a billion people out of poverty in a generation and a half, and we are trying to emulate that example now. So, if that same inventiveness were to be applied to the political arena- which has not so far been the case, then we can avoid conflicts not just in wider Asia but also specifically in our part of the world that straddles South Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf and West Asia. It is a very critical part of the world.”

Ambassador Prasad remarked that Afghanistan is not a case of strategic stagnation. It is a case of slow unravelling of state structures painstakingly put together since 2001. There has been no insurgency or terrorism in any part of the world that has been mastered without support, sustenance and sanctuary from the contiguity being completely ended, and that unfortunately is an area that has not been addressed adequately by Afghanistan’s partners.

Ambassador Prasad said that India has two major objectives in Afghanistan: “We have a short-term objective and we have a medium to long-term objective. Our short-term objective has always been for Afghanistan to stand on its feet and make its own decisions, and we are doing everything in terms of our development partnership – maybe not so successfully, because we don’t have the resources required to do it by ourselves, but our whole effort has been in that direction. If

Afghanistan becomes self-sufficient, our strategic objectives are fully met. But, in the long-term, development in Afghanistan cannot be sustained without the country becoming a hub for trade, transportation, energy and minerals; without becoming what President Karzai used to say ‘a cross-roads’, or what President Ghani says ‘a roundabout’ between Iran and the Central Asian states and China and South Asia and India. This is the historic role of Afghanistan. Our effort should be to restore it.”

Ambassador Prasad described Chabahar Port as a major regional platform which will provide Afghanistan with better opportunities to develop and sustain its economy. According to him, India could not earlier ship 1.1 million tons of food grain to Afghanistan across Pakistan due to the fact that Pakistan would not allow it. So, India decided to convert part of the consignment into high-protein biscuits that went into the World Food Programme’s school feeding effort in 32 out of 34 provinces in Afghanistan. India is planning to ship the remaining consignment of 170,000 ton through Chabahar as the first major utilisation of the port.

India is engaged with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) in bringing Uzbek electricity to capital Kabul. Several Afghan professionals and technocrats including military personnel have been trained in India. He added, “India is the country where the maximum number of Afghan officers are commissioned into the army outside of Afghanistan; including closest Afghan military allies. And the distinction between our training and other’s training is that Afghan officers who go through our system are trained with Indian officers. There are no separate training facilities or separate programmes for Afghanistan. So, our effort is to enable the Afghan state to function by itself.”

He emphasised that India is not going to disengage from Afghanistan. “When the whole world had disengaged from Afghanistan — except in a perverse way three countries that had recognised the Taliban regime— there were only three countries helping Afghanistan then, and India and Iran were two of the most prominent ones amongst them.” He concluded his remarks asking the participants to look at the conference as a learning session where they can find the way forward.

***Introductory Remarks by President, Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), Tehran,  
Dr. Seyed Mohammad Kazam Sajjadpour***

Dr. Sajjadpour hoped that this trilateral dialogue would achieve: (a) analytical exchange on regional issues (b) build human ties, and finally (c) cooperation between states., Highlighting his personal expectations in alphabetical order, he stated: “For me, ‘d’ is discovery; discovery of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan I found out how we are connected culturally. ‘e’ means emotions matter; not all emotions are bad. We live by our emotions and we need our emotions. And ‘f’ is friendship.”

Dr. Sajjadpour emphasised that the three countries are also connected by history. He said that “Here it is a region by all definition; Iran being one end of it, Afghanistan in the middle and India on the other end. I think this region can play much more significant role if there is a combination

of natural elements and human agency. We must not always look at it through global competition. I hope this roundtable will contribute to this idea both in terms of intellectuality and practicality.”

***Keynote Speech by Former Foreign Minister and National Security Advisor of Afghanistan, His Excellency Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta***

Dr. Spanta outlined the key issues impacting regional and global developments and also bilateral relationship between the three countries - Afghanistan, Iran and India. He started his speech emphasising that we are facing a global crisis of world political system. He stated: “First, this crisis has to do with the downfall of the US leadership. The confrontation between Western Europe and the United States and the stepping back by the United States is an evidence for that. Second, fragmentation of the European Union impacts our efforts towards building a regional cooperation and integration both negatively and also positively. Third, the collapse of Middle East or West Asia caused a lot of trouble in this part of the world. Fourth, the continuation of international terrorism from al-Qaida to other international cooperating terrorist groups impacts the cooperation between us, and fifth, the emergence of new global economic powers and subsequent rise of rivalry in our continent is another factor.”

Dr. Spanta identified migration crises and environmental problem as other global threats. He stated that “our region is in the center of global geopolitics which is located in one of the main conflict epicenters. The political environment fabricated by global relations and regional rivalries affects the relation between Afghanistan, Iran and India. In this context I mean the problems in Yemen, the rise of Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries in the form of supporting some conservative Islamic movements.”

Arguing that the main challenge before Afghans is security, he stated that “The continuation of unprecedented terror and killings in the last four decades led to this situation and that is the main determination of our security in foreign policy.” He said that despite the ongoing tension in Iran’s relations with the global community, Iran always defended Afghanistan’s stance in all international conferences and contributed to building of Afghanistan. Furthermore, the rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the spread of its activities in Afghanistan’s western borders have caused some concerns. In his opinion, we should look at our relations from a historical perspective and not through anti-terror activities. He added, “From this perspective, Afghanistan has the most commonalities for integration with Iran. The perspective of the policy-makers of both countries should be based on bilateral and multilateral relations of each country rather than regional strain sand their relations with great powers. In my view, we should build our relations based on our civilisation and economic cooperation and keep this relation away from the sphere of ideological tensions.”

With regard to Afghanistan’s relation with India, he suggested that both countries need to protect their relationship from regional rivalries, namely, tensions between Indian and Pakistan and rivalries of China and the United States. He stated, “Mutual relations between the two countries

which have roots in our history and civilisation are shaped through the process of economic, intellectual, cultural and deep strategic relationship.”

With regard to trilateral relations, he recommended that the three countries can structure their relationships through a feasible context in compliance with political and geopolitical and regional integration frameworks such as the Chabahar project. He added, “Implementation of this project has vast economic benefits for the three countries, as it is a great step towards developing regional integration and enhancing connectivity. From Afghanistan’s view, realisation of this concept is not only getting access to sea in the long term, but also it creates opportunities and prospects so that we could inspire other countries such as Pakistan, to reduce barriers in the way towards the regional integration.”

In the end, Dr. Spanta stated that the rapid economic growth and the growing need for energy have provided necessary cooperation space for all countries in the region. He was of the view that “Integration of transportation and economy and eventually building a common market in the long-term are the main precondition for a desired regional integration.” He also highlighted the importance of international legal system for solving conflicting issues including water problem. He concluded stating that the historical and cultural connectivity between the three countries is a valuable heritage that must not be overlooked.

### **Working Session One: An Overall Assessment of the Situation in Afghanistan and Respective Bilateral Relations**

In this session, all the three panelists emphasised the need to further strengthen relations between the three countries as they shared many commonalities in terms of cultural heritage and economic opportunities. (This session was held off the record; therefore, details are not provided here.)

### **Working Session Two: Connectivity: The Arduous Journey of Chabahar**

The first speaker of the panel, an Indian participant, spoke about various regional routes, including Chabahar Port, from India’s perspective. According to the speaker, Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan Railway route, Chabahar Port project, India- Iran- Afghanistan- Central Asia route, Central Asia-Persian Gulf Corridor, the Turkey – Iran – Pakistan Corridor, Iran-Afghanistan-Tajikistan route and Iran-Turkmenistan route are some of the connectivity drives that are significant from India’s perspective. There are many prospects and opportunities as one looks at them. These routes provide a viable connectivity with the Eurasian region.

According to the Indian speaker, once Chabahar Port becomes operational, it will not only provide India with a shorter shipping route but will also pave the way for economic integration of the entire Eurasian region with the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. These new routes will reduce the travel time between Istanbul and Mumbai by 14 days. Turkey has offered to provide necessary information for linking up the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) to the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The utilisation of this network would be beneficial for all

countries in the region and hopefully the missing links will be completed soon. There are some bottlenecks though, but they are being addressed by many working groups which have been created to deal with tariffs, customs and other related issues.

Talking about specific challenges, the Indian speaker said that beside some missing links, INSTC unlike other international organisations does not have a strong authority to address operational issues on the ground. This is also related to the fact that there is lack of information on this issue with the business community. The issues related to the funding are important, but there is an understanding that the involved countries would probably pool in and share the finances. Lack of common border crossing rules among the member countries was another issue which was noted. There are also some security fears that probably would continue.

The speaker also highlighted some of the forward movement on INSTC including expert group and coordination council meetings that have been taking place. It has been decided that for the effective implementation of this corridor, the member countries would implement some of the steps like creating a focal point to coordinate the INSTC, the working group on customs, the working group on commercial and operational issues, etc. These are some of the issues which normally were not discussed and highlighted in the past. Now they are being identified and there is an attempt to address them. With regard to INSTC website, it will be devised by India. And if one looks at the numbers, there has been an increase in the membership of INSTC.

Regarding the Chabahar port, the speaker said that despite delays in the process there are forward movements. "I think the turning point came with the Indian Prime Minister Modi's visit to Iran and the signing of trilateral agreement... today there is an understanding that if we don't move fast on this, probably we would lose the opportunity in future." In order to push the project forward, there is a need to look at Chabahar as a "strategic regional project."

According to the speaker, the other positive development has been that India has now ratified the international road transport convention (TIR) which helps India to access transnational multimodal connectivity, and plays an important role in the proposed transportation architecture in the entire region and beyond in the backdrop of India recently ratifying the trade facilitation agreement of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This is one significant development when we are looking at the connectivity issues. On the western front it will enable India to move cargo along the INSTC via Chabahar Port to access landlocked Afghanistan and the region. The decision to implement the TIR system will have far reaching benefits for trade. It will also help save significant time and money.

The Indian speaker concluded with points for further forward action: "First and foremost is the will to implement the agreements faster. Second, is related to the security issues; we need to look at the geo-economics more than geo-politics. The availability of funds is an important factor. Another factor to consider is managing the competitive interest of the regional powers. The other important point that we cannot ignore is how to engage the regional actors constructively. The technical challenges also must be addressed. Unless you sell the project to the private sector or to

the business community, things are not going to work. A lot of business communities feel that there is lack of information. The other hurdle is the external impact of the sanctions on Iran. This is something that the three countries will have to sit and work out.”

The second speaker of the panel, an Iranian participant, focused on the geo-economic aspects of the Chabahar project. The speaker said that the agreement on Chabahar between the three countries is viewed by many scholars as a matter of changing geography by economy. To elaborate the point, the speaker said: First, by implementing this mega project Afghanistan is no more a landlocked country and it will change to a country as a hub for trade, services and transit in the region. This mega project prepares the ground for India to have a viable access to a great part of Afghanistan, to Central Asia, and beyond. This mega project changes one of Iran’s very strategically located ports into an important port that would bring some source of development to the eastern part of the country. By materialising this mega project at this stage, our traditional narratives with regard to Afghanistan- development first slogan - will be somehow materialised. Of course development has its own logic. The logic of development in my point of view is having geopolitical approach on implementing every mega projects as rightly mentioned before. This project should have a source of commercial logic to be viable and to be sustained.” The speaker added that this project would encourage others to join and Japan has already shown interest in this project. As Indian Prime Minister Modi stated in his speech, the implementation of this project will reduce time and costs by 50 per cent with regard to having access to the north.

The speaker mentioned that the Iranian leadership has created two instruments to implement this project: “One is to increase the capacity of the port from existing 2.5 million ton per year to 7.5 million ton per year in the first phase. And prepare the ground for putting some exclusive financial support for that part of the project. The second instrument is to prepare the ground to somehow create a credit line of almost five hundred million dollars to support the whole port.” However, there is a need for some investment to increase the level of trade between the three countries. As of now, 90 per cent of the infrastructure is ready and by meeting the timeline for equipping the port by the relevant Indian institution, Iran will immediately increase the capacity of the port to 7.5 million ton per year. This initiative has the capacity to enhance the potential of the trade in the entire region.

The Chabahar-Delaram mega project has a kind of competitor in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). If other countries reach out to CPEC, the logic of this mega project somehow will be undermined. Therefore, we need to move fast on Chabahar and for that greater coordination is required among the three countries. The speaker concluded saying that “Chabahar-Delaram mega project should be seen within a geo-economic framework. Every geo-economic approach has its own logic; it should be implemented fast. I think all of us should use our capacity to engage the current capacity of the port and the road to enhance trade among the three countries. We need to use roads for the first phase and then move on to the railway phase. The infrastructure is under construction but it takes time. With our present speed of action it will take years for the project

to be executed and by then the project will lose its value. We need to focus on that and meet the timetable that our leaders have agreed upon.”

The last speaker of the panel, a participant from Afghanistan, talked about the strategic choices of Afghanistan in the Chabahar project.

### **Original Text of the Presentation**

As a landlocked country neighbouring China, Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian countries, Afghanistan is positioned at the junction of several nuclear powers aiming to be regional leaders, such as China, Pakistan, India, Russia and Iran. The latter, despite not having an atomic arsenal, wants to be treated as a nuclear power as it has the uranium enrichment technology, necessary to develop its nuclear capacity.

Afghanistan has significant geostrategic and geopolitical importance. It is the only country in the region which gives open access to the United States (US) and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The Khyber Pass, located between Afghanistan and Pakistan, has long been one of the most important trade routes and strategic military locations in the world. Moreover, the Silk Road passes through Afghanistan. This prehistoric network of trade routes, 4000 miles long, is known as the cultural crossroads of the Indian, Persian and Chinese civilisations. Insecurity and instability in Afghanistan would destabilise the region and provide generative ground for terrorist groups.

Afghanistan also faces huge economic and development challenges. The country is rich in natural resources, gas, minerals and oil (worth more than a trillion US dollars according to some estimates). But insecurity and war has limited the opportunities to explore and extract these resources, and Afghanistan remains among the poorest countries of the world. Combined with insecurity, lack of economic opportunities is driving many Afghans to flee the country. According to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than a quarter of the one million refugees and migrants who arrived in Europe were Afghans (second to the Syrians). Helping Afghanistan to establish peace and develop its economy could help stem the flow of refugees, averting a major brain drain from Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is important both for the global economy and for regional, even global, security. The main reason is its position, at the crossroads of South and Central Asia, and, also, China and the Middle East. Afghanistan connects these regions. Connections can be both good and bad. On the one hand, Afghanistan could become a crucial link in an Asia-wide trading network, oil pipelines, etc. On the other, it could be a source of instability. The natural resources and markets of Afghanistan are another crucial factor, making it an important country in itself.

As for security, most problems in Afghanistan have been created by outside interference, with other countries trying to control Afghanistan, for reasons described above. The strategic position of Afghanistan will continue to draw outside powers in the foreseeable future as well.

## Goals

The strength of a country can be determined by various factors, above all its economy, and if a state possesses strong economy then the international community too gives attention to its concerns. Industry is an important component of the economic development. Besides industrial development, effective policy mechanism, bureaucratic structure of decision-making and other such mechanisms determine the economic strength. Afghan economy with massive natural resources and manpower also has massive economic growth potential. Chabahar as a transit point will be the center of regional trade, investment and transportation hub with links stretching from the Indian Ocean to Central Asia. Chabahar will for the first time provide Afghanistan with an access to the sea through friendly nations.

Structural changes in international trade and evolution of maritime transport would have a direct impact on port growth and expansion, globalisation, production and trade.

Globalisation, or the expansion of markets and hence the economic prospects of societies, is taking place not only because of the supra-national nature of markets, but also because of the flow of foreign investment and the strategies of multinational enterprises. These multinationals today account for two-thirds of global exports of goods and services and nearly 10 per cent of domestic sales worldwide. In this environment of increasing interdependence in the world, the international division of labour is changing as a result of structural changes in trade and unprecedented mobility of international capital.

However, while the integration of goods and services and capital is progressing at a rapid pace, integration of the labour market is much slower. In addition, ever more sophisticated technologies are being disseminated, in a framework of spectacular streamlining in communications and telecommunications.

The development of information technology has, in turn, boosted productivity and, in many cases, the worker's income. In general, electronic transactions and communications technology have been the necessary complement to full internalisation and globalisation and their impact on production and world trade.

As per the MoU signed between India and Iran in May last year, India is to equip and operate two berths in Chabahar Port Phase-I with capital investment of US\$ 85.21 million and annual revenue expenditure of US\$ 22.95 million on a 10-year lease. Ownership of equipment will be transferred to the Iranian side on completion of 10-year period or for an extended period, based on mutual agreement. Besides the bilateral pact to develop the Chabahar Port, for which India will invest US\$ 500 million, a trilateral agreement on Transport and Transit Corridor has also been signed by India, Afghanistan and Iran.

## **Investments in Afghanistan via Chabahar**

The Afghan law guarantees foreign companies the same investment opportunities as domestic enterprises. However, political violence, weak regulations regarding property protection, lack of skilled labourers, under-developed financial markets and insufficient infrastructure limits the country's potential for attracting foreign investors.

Chabahar will provide Afghanistan a magnificent opportunity, a strategic option to further expand its trade and commerce. Logistically, Chabahar is the closest harbour to Afghanistan. It is 700 km closer than the other Iranian port at Bandar Abbas. It is also 1,000 km closer than Karachi Port in Pakistan. Chabahar is a strategic game changer in the region, and countries hope that Chabahar project will transform Afghanistan into a regional and economic hub and further boost the growing ties between Afghanistan, India and Iran. Sectors that are likely to receive more investment via Chabahar include agriculture, extractive industries, mineral/petroleum, energy, infrastructure development and preferential trade agreements.

Afghanistan has bilateral trade and transit agreements with neighbouring countries. Its objective is to promote trade with neighboring countries as it is a land locked country, which also makes it more dependent on them. Afghanistan is now moving on from bilateral to regional frameworks as it aspires to be a “land bridging link” between these countries.

## **Transport Corridors**

The entry points mentioned below are some of the official border crossing points that have regular traffic throughout the year. As per the regular practice, customs and immigration rules apply. Customs department checks all relevant papers for cargo that is cleared for entry but only passengers or trucks having valid visa and license can pass the border; otherwise trans-shipment at border crossing needs to be arranged.

### **Top Two Routes**

A north-south corridor connecting Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan with Pakistani ports in Karachi, Port Qasim and Gwadar, and further on via Wagah, Pakistan towards India and South Asia.

An East-West Corridor connecting Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan with the Iranian ports of Chabahar and Bandar Abbas.

These corridors carry significant potential for trade between energy-rich Central Asia and energy deficient South Asia but with high export capacities of manufactured goods. A recent study by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) suggests that the development of these two corridors could result in a major shift in trade transit routing from and to Central Asia, with the potential for a very positive impact on both employment and production in the region.

Iran and Pakistan are investing heavily in their transport systems to meet transit potential through Afghanistan. Afghanistan itself is in the process of completing the rehabilitation/reconstruction of the ring road, the circular road linking Kabul to Kandahar, Dilaram, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Pul-e Khumri, and Kabul. Similarly, connectivity with neighbouring countries through the ring road is also progressing well. However, even if Afghanistan's infrastructure improves, the possibility of increased investment resulting in reduction of operating costs will remain limited as long as the facilitation of transit and trade is deficient.

The new transit hub at Chabahar Port will boost trading with Afghanistan once IRCON International builds a railway track connecting Chabahar to Zahedan on Afghanistan border. Chabahar will also reduce the dependency on Pakistan for trade with Afghanistan and neighboring states. Chabahar will help India compete with Chinese presence in Gwadar Port of Pakistan which is just 70 km away. Chabahar's strategic location on the Gulf of Oman is of huge political significance as well. After sanctions removal, it is a new beginning for Iran.

### **Significance of Chabahar Port for Iran**

Iran is a large country. Its southern and eastern parts are under developed and are marred by insurgency. Development of Chabahar Port will bring great benefits for these under developed areas. Connecting Chabahar with Afghanistan and Central Asia will boost Iranian economic growth and development. It will also help link India to Iran's railway network. Moreover, Afghan market is important for Iran because Afghanistan imports most of the product from other countries.

### **Importance of Chabahar Port for India**

Chabahar Port offers access to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe and India got involved in building this port in 1990's to gain access to these regions. Chabahar Port is important to India's economic ambitions. India is busy constructing roads in Iran and Afghanistan in order to connect Chabahar with Afghanistan and Central Asia. Between 2005 and 2009, India had spent \$100 million to construct a road from Delaram in Afghanistan to Zaranj at the Iran-Afghanistan border.

Iran has also constructed a road between Chabahar and Milak which is close to Zaranj. Through Milak, Zaranj and Delaram, connectivity has been established with the Afghan Garland Road which connects the major cities of Afghanistan including Herat, Kandahar, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif. Once this port is integrated with INSTC, India will have access to Russia and Europe. This port will also provide India the access to Middle East. Studies indicate that the corridor at Chabahar could bring down costs as well as time taken to transport cargo to Europe by approximately 50 per cent for India.

### **Expected Results**

An effective transit and trade system will benefit the Afghan economy and the Afghan people. Chabahar must be geared towards strengthening the productive sector in Afghanistan first. Afghan producers need more outlets for Afghan goods and services both nationally and internationally,

which would also lead to creation of more employment opportunities. Afghan traders could expand their trade to the international markets via Chabahar and with it avail more opportunities.

Regional and global integration will provide additional markets for Afghan goods and a wider range of goods and services in the country. The former will lead to more employment that will reduce the level of poverty and the latter to opportunities for better living conditions.

Development of Chabahar also means greater opportunities for private sector growth. Reviving the “Afghanistan label” in key areas will attract additional investment and interest in the country. Both can expand employment and provide opportunities for gender empowerment. To ensure a cohesive plan for the implementation of trade strategies, a national strategy must be articulated and followed. This ensures trade strategies have the widest impact on national goals.

## **Conclusion**

Economic integration is crucial for Asian economies to counter future shocks as well as to sustain their growth paths. Well-developed institutional as well as physical infrastructures are necessary for regional integration. Regional integration and connectivity without regional and global security is impossible. Security is crucial for facilitating smooth movement of labour, goods, capital and information, while their development requires huge investments and international coordination. Cooperation through better coordination, implementation, management and evaluation of cross border infrastructure networks may promote regional stability and peace.

## **Q/A Session:**

Question 1: How can we deal with Pakistan in this project? How can we improve this trilateral relationship without sensitising Pakistan?

Question 2: Iran’s military and financial support to Taliban causes insecurity in Afghanistan. How can India reach Central Asia through an unstable region?

Comment by an Afghan participant: We are talking about two ports, Chabahar and Gwadar. Gwadar is 75 km away from Chabahar. Gwadar has a huge inflow of money from China as they are linking CPEC to Gwadar for their trade corridor. And then we have Chabahar where development is quiet slow. If we don’t move quickly on Chabahar, it will lose its quality especially for Afghanistan. Of course if we have an open border with India from Wagah, nobody will go to Chabahar. They will go directly to Wagah. This is the easiest route for Afghan traders by road because if we start in the morning, by the evening we will be in New Delhi. That’s why we have to move quickly on Chabahar to utilise it. Of course India can utilise it for their trade with Iran, Central Asia and other places. We can utilise it for the region west of Afghanistan, linking to Gulf of Oman and moving on to other Gulf countries.

Secondly, you are talking about the Silk Road; but I think we are forgotten in the Silk Road at the moment. On one side, the CPEC has bypassed us and, on the other side, China is accessing Iran through Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. We were not able to build our own infrastructure in the

last 15 years. That's why the route was diverted from Afghanistan to other countries. China could easily access Afghanistan and Iran by only going through one country, instead of going through two countries.

The other project that can support the cause of Chabahar Port is the Turkmenistan-Iran-India pipeline.

Regarding the issue with Pakistan, we, and especially India, can go for WTO settlement process of which Afghanistan is a member because they are stopping Indian export to Afghanistan. The TIR issue is quite interesting. Unfortunately, Pakistan did not notify Wagah as a TIR corridor. It means TIR won't help us.

With regard to issues with Iran, it may be noted that Afghanistan had applied for the membership of TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia), but for last three years Iran has been blocking it. TRACECA will link us through Iran to Turkey and Azerbaijan and then all the way to European countries. I think it is needed when we talk about connectivity. The other issue is that for movement of goods and vehicles, we need movement of people and that is somehow restricted when we talk about going to Iran. Most of the businessmen who want to go to Iran have to travel by air, having a booked ticket from an Iranian airline, because Iran won't let them cross the border by land. These things are creating difficulties for the movement of people. It will have negative impact on trade and connectivity.

Comment by an Indian participant: I agree that with regard to Chabahar we need to speed it up, but please remember that Chabahar is already a functional port. We are going to ship our first consignment through Chabahar to Afghanistan soon. But we need not be stuck by bureaucratic slowdown.

Comment by an Iranian participant: The main reason for the slow progress of this project has been the slow bureaucratic system of Iran and India. Recently, there have been some reports that India is retarding the project – especially after Prime Minister Modi's visit to the US.

Comment by an Afghan official: The importance of Chabahar is obvious. We need to have practical solutions to the problems related to utilisation of this project.

Response of the Indian speaker: When you look at the Chinese scholars, the media within China, there are indications of the challenges which not only the CPEC but the other Belt and the Road initiative face today. So, it is not given that if China is doing it, it's going to be a success. More importantly, as far as the corridors and infrastructure development is concerned, these are long-term projects and therefore it is difficult to foresee. With regard to Pakistan, I think it is up to Pakistan. Nobody is depriving Pakistan. In fact Pakistan is the one who is creating more obstacles. I don't see any sensitivity when it comes to the issues where it would be a win-win situation economically. So, it is for the Pakistan to see. There is very little one can do about Pakistan when we talk about economic integration.

Response of the Iranian speaker: If we justify for everybody in the region that this project has a geo-economic logic into it, being beneficial for all governments, we will get our answers. The logic of this project is enhancing regional cooperation. We should think of development for all. So, everybody should bring their resources and capability to improve the regional cooperation based on a geo-economic logic. With regard to visa problems, I think these are minor issues that eventually will be solved. We need to focus on the main project. Furthermore regarding practical solutions, we have already talked about some forward steps that must be taken to increase the level of trade using the actual capacity.

Response of the Afghan speaker: CPEC without Afghanistan's involvement is a dream. Regarding Afghan investment in Chabahar, there are technical issues when it comes to Iran facilitating Afghan business.

The moderator concluded the session emphasising that there are many imaginary problems that must be recognised. According to him, "Once a road is built – let's say a railway is built with Chinese assistance between Mashhad and Tehran, then Mashhad and Herat are connected; it is for Iran to decide how to use that railway. Whether it is built by Indian money or Chinese money, it can be used bilaterally or multilaterally. He said that Pakistan's political obstacles in the way of economic connectivity cannot be addressed through a dispute settlement mechanism. The moderator added, "We could have taken Pakistan to a dispute settlement mechanism in WTO for not observing the first article of WTO; but this is a political decision. There is no point taking things to a dispute settlement mechanism when you know that the problem is not law or economics but the problem is politics. We have to work about those issues and see how Pakistan views its interests."

### **Working Session Three: Terrorism: Common Enemy; Divergent Approaches**

The moderator of the panel emphasised the need for a common definition of terrorism in order to fight terrorism. Raising the question "What is the role of non-state actors and state sponsored terrorism?" she stressed that Afghanistan being a victim of terrorism needs to know its neighbors' point of view.

The first speaker of the panel, an Indian participant, began by saying that terrorism is linked to the internal situation of each country. The speaker talked about India's democratic experiment as a unique experiment in history that could bring together people of different cultures and religions. He said that despite having some problems here and there, India is not suffering from major internal conflicts. There are 170 million Muslims, 40 million Christians and about the same number of Buddhists, apart from Hindus, living together in one common home in a democracy; with an equal right to vote and guaranteed equality. We have problems, but nothing we can't take care of. We had an insurgency in the north-east when East Pakistan became independent, but now generally we don't have a problem there. We don't have a problem of resident Muslim extremism in India. Roughly 35 to 40 million are Shias but we don't have sectarian clashes.

Referring to Pakistan's role in supporting terrorism in the region, the speaker pointed out that in any discussion about terrorism one would have to focus on Pakistan. Pakistan is a country founded on a religion but that ideology failed when Bangladesh was created. It established that religion alone cannot unite people.

Pakistan army has been dominating Pakistan politics. Civilian authority barely exists in Pakistan. And what happened in Nawaz Sharif case is the judiciary pursuing a common cause with the military against the Prime Minister. With regard to dealing with the Taliban, the speaker urged that Taliban should not be considered as believers for they are killing people and causing destruction in the good name of Islam. Every time powers like the United States, China and Russia try to equate the Taliban and the Afghan government, the government must not allow itself to be equated with the Taliban in any negotiations. Afghanistan has an elected government in place, but during negotiations government fails to make it clear that it is not there to sit with the Taliban as equals, but to negotiate a democratic constitutional structure for the country.

Emphasising that Afghanistan and India are both victims of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, the speaker assured that India will continue to support Afghanistan in international arena. India will not relent on terrorism. India may at some stage hold talks with Pakistan, but that would be through formal channels. Americans and others are working on stopping the funding for the Haqqani Network. India took up the case for effectively curbing the activities of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad and Pakistan was asked to stop them. Dealing with state-sponsored terrorism is going to be difficult. Therefore, there is a need to stay firmly focused on the issue.

While stating that India's involvement in Afghanistan is going to be primarily economic, the speaker concluded by suggesting some areas for future cooperation. One is space and cyber – security. The other common ground is our good relationship with Iran. We have shared civilizations. Any cooperation project that benefits all the three countries - Iran, India and Afghanistan - is appreciated by India. It is crucial for the three nations to continue to collaborate on issues of common concern and interest.

The second speaker of the panel, an Iranian participant, explained Iran's point of view with regard to the problems of instability and insecurity in Afghanistan.

### **Original Text of the Presentation**

I express my sincere appreciation to the organisers for all their efforts in the path of implementation of this trilateral meeting at this current critical situation. I hope such gatherings would help bring common understanding on a very complicated issue of Afghanistan in order to bring a step closer to security and peace.

The Middle East is currently burning in the fire of extremism and radicalism. Extremists are threatening our neighbourhood by resorting to violence and bloodshed. What is important is that, they have come to this region from around the world. However, they do share a single ideology, which is "violence and extremism", resulted in destruction of civilisation and rise of Islamophobia.

The strategic mistakes of the West in the Middle East have made these parts of the world a safe haven for terrorists and extremist groups. For the most part, military strategic approach in the region targets the lives of ordinary people, such a devastating situation results in adverse psychological and behavioral consequences that we see today and are manifested in the form of savagery and atrocity in the Middle East.

Stability, peace and security in Afghanistan, since many years ago, have been the consequence of consensus at three levels: internal, regional and international level. Afghanistan's developments could be managed only if we have a minimum agreement at these three levels, particularly after 9/11 and when there hasn't been an agreement on one of these levels, the issue of state building, nation building, stability, peace and security were challengeable to say the least.

Iran's cooperation in strengthening of consensus-building through comprehensive government in Afghanistan has always been apparent. Given that Iran supported the idea of unity government with the participation of a broad range of Afghan groups, we firmly believe that there is no better alternative. A strong and democratic government in Afghanistan has always been Iran's policy.

Iran's regional policy emphasises collective cooperation in the region in collaboration with major powers.

We believe in ensuring the security of region through protecting the sovereignty of states and their respective governments. We have acted according to both international law and our own principles to support central governments to prevent them from failing, but some of the Western countries continue to unjustly criticise Iran.

Iran has supported the central government of Kabul several times in the past especially during Shaheed Burhanuddin Rabbani's tenure. When the Taliban tried to topple the Kabul government, then based on Afghanistan's request we had supplied arms, equipment and other necessary materials to the central government in Kabul.

On the contrary, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia had officially recognised the Taliban regime and actively supported it against the central government of Afghanistan. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – a monarchy which sees the prevalence of democracy as a national threat – is destabilising the region, by funding terrorism and promoting Wahabist ideology as ISIS is following Wahabism. They were seeking to overthrow the governments of Iraq and Syria and posed a national threat to Iran. That is why we reserve every right to counter terrorism by any means as we have done so until now.

Regional and international cooperation for countering terrorism is a necessity. After ISIS's defeat, many of their members would scatter around the world. Naturally, Yemen and Afghanistan will be among their destinations.

Daesh in Afghanistan consists of separated members of the Taliban such as the Afghan Taleb or Tahrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or the Haqqani Network. We should not consider Taliban a seamless and disciplined organisation.

Estimates about the number of Islamic State - Khorasan (IS-K) fighters in Afghanistan vary widely. One analyst claimed in 2016 that IS-K strength in Afghanistan alone could be as high as 8,500 fighters including support elements. By contrast, some other sources estimated 1,000 to 4,000 fighters with almost entire active cadres concentrated in eastern Nangarhar Province. Fighters were a mixture of Afghan or Pakistani nationals and also other “out of area” foreign nationals. The majority of these out of area fighters are from Central Asia, including individuals associated with the Islamic Jihad Union, the Turkistan Islamic Party, and militants from as far away as Azerbaijan. IS-K and Islamic State Central had increased their communication, including discussions about IS-K receiving Arab trainers in an effort to increase its capabilities.

IS-K’s area of influence in Nangarhar has access to safe havens in Khyber and Orakzai Agencies of Pakistan. The IS-K has appointed shadow governors in the eastern Afghan provinces of Kunar, Laghman and Logar.

The largest presence of ISIS among these three provinces is likely to be in Kunar, where a combination of terrain, support networks, and access to both Pakistan and northern Afghanistan exists.

IS-K has appointed recruiters in nine other provinces, four of which (Kunduz, Samangan, Sar-e Pol, and Faryab) are located in northern Afghanistan—perhaps a telling allocation of resources, and an indication that IS-K’s strategy is to recruit from outside of areas of traditional Taliban influence and move northward from their current base along the Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af-Pak) border through northern Afghanistan into Central Asia.

IS-K’s number two, Shahidullah Shahid, was IS-K’s primary spokesman. He spent at least a decade in and out of Saudi Arabia, and is considered the main facilitator that linked IS to the Orakzai-based former TTP contingent that has dominated IS-K senior leadership thus far.

IS-K’s leadership is notable for its lack of Afghans, even as most of its operations have occurred inside Afghanistan. The highest ranking Afghan within IS-K was “deputy governor” Abdul Rauf Khadim of Helmand Province. Khadim, a former Taliban regional commander and Guantanamo Bay detainee, held his post for only three days before he was killed in a U.S. drone strike, and his southern force was routed a month later. Terrorist attacks carried out by IS-K in Afghanistan and Pakistan this year have caused hundreds of casualties.

### **Efforts for peace**

Previously, negotiations with Taliban have been done at both national and international levels. The first overture by Mullah Omar was his declaration on the occasion of *Eid al-Fitr* in 2011 in which he showed readiness to sit on a table in order to end Afghanistan’s problem. Meanwhile, President Hamid Karzai began to call Taliban “our dissatisfied brothers”, who need to be included in national dialogue. Internationally, since 2010 there have been some covert international efforts to establish contacts with the Taliban.

After 2012, we see a surge of such conferences where Taliban delegations were invited to participate in the talks. The last important attempt was Kabul Process which was held in June 2017. I believe that security will be achieved through a security mechanism that involves all the neighbouring countries and regional powers. However, trans-regional powers in Afghanistan must not pose a threat to neighbouring countries. We expect a proactive role from the United Nations to make a joint effort with the Afghan Government for a regional dialogue on peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The last speaker of the panel, an Afghan participant, spoke about the current status of terrorist groups active in the region and in Afghanistan. "To give you a general picture, I will be speaking about three general issues: first I will talk about the composition of the terrorist groups that are currently active in this region; then I will talk about three important analytical points that follow directly from this composition of terrorist groups. And finally, I will talk about three widely held myths in the region and in the world about Afghanistan and about terrorism." According to him, from the government of Afghanistan's point of view terrorist groups are categorised into four distinctive categories:

*We put them into concentric circles; the first circle or the inner circle Afghan terrorist groups. If you look at the Afghan terrorist groups, it's mainly The Quetta Shura and then we have the Peshawar military commission, we have the Miranshah military commission, and now unfortunately we have the Zahedan military commission, which is a recent one. The Miranshah military commission is also synonymous with Haqqani Network.*

*The second category is of Pakistani terrorist groups like Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Harkat-ul-Jihad wal Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Jaish-e-Mohammed. These are groups that have physical presence inside Afghanistan.*

*The third category is what we call "regionally oriented" terrorist groups. The reason we call them regionally oriented terrorist groups is that their objective is not positioned in Afghanistan. They would like to do harm to countries other than Afghanistan. They use Afghanistan as a platform to stage and conduct attacks in the region. There are four of those; we have IMU or the so-called Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, we have ETIM or The East Turkistan Islamic Movement, we have Jamiat-ul-Ansarullah, and Jundullah. These are the main terrorist groups.*

*The last category of terrorist groups or the outer circle terrorist groups are the globally oriented groups: we have al-Qaida- the general version, we have al-Qaida in Indian Subcontinent, and then we have got the so-called Islamic State of Khorasan. From the total number of fighters they got, at least 25 per cent of them are non-Afghan nationals. A lot of them are Pakistanis and we have the Uighur Chinese to Russians, to Chechens, to Uzbeks and Tajiks and fighters from Iran.*

According to the speaker, based on actual facts, three points are to be mentioned including: (i) Symbiotic relationship among the terrorist groups. They are all connected to each other. They all need each other and they are helping each other. They need each other for local knowledge, for the passage, for connections outside the region, for financial support, etc. (ii) Symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the trans-border organised criminal networks which includes everything from narcotic trafficking, to human trafficking, to mineral mines, to other criminal activities. The two industries help each other. (iii) Symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the regional sponsorship of terrorism are well-known.

The speaker concluded talking about three existing myths about Afghanistan and terrorism: “The first myth is that the war in Afghanistan is an internal war. It is no longer a civil war going on in this country. It is a regional threat, it’s a global threat. We happen to be at the front of it unfortunately. Please don’t look at terrorism as an Afghan problem. The second myth is the notion that a distinction can be made between the so-called good terrorists and bad terrorists. This is a snake that cannot be trained only to bite others. The third myth is that terrorism is associated with Islam. While terrorism today fights under the name of Islam, it has absolutely nothing to do with Islam.”

#### **Q/A Session:**

Question 1: How can we sensitise Pakistan’s establishment not to interfere in developmental projects?

Comment: With regard to terrorism, in India – except for a few people, Muslim population does not have sympathy with ISIS. Handling terrorism is a domestic issue. You can overcome it by education and development.

Question 2: We have a common threat but not a common agenda to fight that threat. How can we draw a common agenda to fight terrorism?

Question 3: Is there any counter-narrative against the terrorists?

Comment and Question 4: You listed various elements of terrorist groups and you started with the Afghan terrorist groups. But so often I have heard and seen in conferences and documents that there is reluctance on the side of the Afghan Government to even call them terrorists and that creates confusion in the minds of others. That might be one of the reasons that even after all these years the US officially is only helping in combating al-Qaida and now ISIS, whereas you and I know that the larger threat on a daily basis to Afghanistan are the Afghan groups, the Taliban. Why is this? Don’t you think this is a problem, a sort of self-inflicted confusion by Afghans themselves?

Question 5: There are reports indicating that Russians and to some extent Iranians have stepped up their support to anti-government elements within Afghanistan to weaken the Afghan Government, a strategic ally of the United States. So, in that way they are trying to score against Americans for what they do in Syria and other places. What advice do you have for the Afghan Government?

Question 6: During the past years we have tried a lot for betterment of our relationship with both India and Pakistan. What do you think about Afghanistan's effort for balancing its relationship with these two countries?

Question 7: Some people say that the problem of Afghanistan is related to Kashmir's problem between India and Pakistan. Would you please clarify it for us?

Comment: Terrorism is such a complex phenomenon today. Even a country like Pakistan says that terrorism is a challenge and we are a victim of terrorism. I think we need to talk about the reality and the myth with regard to counter narrative. For the counter narrative, one has to look at ideological aspects of it, there are issues with the government not fulfilling the social contract, there is an issue of lack of governance, and there is an issue of great games over either retaining the influence or expanding it.

I think when people talk about the great game in Central Asia the great game is being played in Afghanistan. The difference between the old great game and the new one is that in the past there were only two players who played the game. Now, the countries where the great game is taking place also have some leverage. They are in a way participating in the great game. I think that is the new aspect of the great game.

With regard to counter narrative, I think the counter narrative has to come from the within. It cannot be an imposed one. Each region and each country has different problems on the issue. Therefore, the solution has to be at the local level, at the national level, at the regional and the international level. You have to address the problem in different levels depending on the scope of the issue. The responses have to be framed that way.

Response of the Afghan speaker: Collective action is extremely difficult to achieve anywhere in the world. When it comes to contentious issue like regional terrorism, personally I'm not optimistic that we can come to a common understanding in near future. There are certain countries in the region that have been using terrorism as a major tool of foreign policy for decades. The first step is that we see it as a common threat that already exists. The second step would be to acknowledge it as a common threat. We face all kinds of rivalries going on in Afghanistan. It is very difficult to get everybody aligned for a collective action.

To be honest with regard to counter narrative against terrorism, the Afghan Government fights terrorism at three levels: "first level is to avoid terrorist actions from happening and if they happened how to mitigate its negative impacts. At the second level, we go through operational counter terrorism which is fighting terrorism on the ground. The third level is what we call strategic counter terrorism. In this level we try to tighten up the strategic environment against the terrorists. Terrorism is a tactic, like bombardment, etc. Our declared policy is that we will never negotiate with terrorists. With regard to Iran, the government of Afghanistan has a very good relationship with the Iranian Government. I want to highlight that what goes on as a rumour necessarily cannot be true. With regard to Pakistan, to me it's very difficult, almost impossible to see Pakistan as a friend. The issue of Pakistan using terrorism as a tool of foreign policy is not a

new thing. If they don't give it up, how they can be our friend? I personally don't believe that terrorism can be defeated through mere talking. Unless big players change, we cannot change the situation by ourselves."

Response of the Indian speaker: Pakistan's establishment is a complex affair. It depends on the strength of the government and the relationships vary. For example in a government headed by Mr. Zardari, the president did not even have access to the national nuclear arsenal. The nuclear strategy and policy is determined by the army. Islamic groups are managed by the ISI. There is nothing the civilian government can do about it. Pakistan views Afghanistan as its strategic depth. But you have to remember, you cannot blame every Pakistani citizen for this. So, you have to nuance policy in terms of context.

With regard to regional countries interfering in Afghanistan, what worries me are the rivalries in the Arab-Islamic world which are both civilisational and sectarian. I hope that Afghanistan is kept out of it; because it is a fact of life. My personal view is that foreigners must not be present at the room where the Afghan Government and the Taliban talk to each other because you are a sovereign government talking to your own people. Indian will not interfere in Afghanistan's affair. If you have good relations with Pakistan we will be very happy. That is your business. Please don't regard our relation with you as a zero-sum game.

Response of the Iranian speaker: Iran has been supporting the Afghan Government from day one. We have a very good relationship with the Afghan Government. We have some contacts with Taliban, not relationship. This is not something that we deny. We do not recognise Taliban as a legitimate political actor inside Afghanistan, but to fill intelligence vacuum, we need to have some contacts with them.

The moderator concluded the session saying that "maybe it's time to redefine our narrative about terrorism by redefining some of our own values with regard to democracy. What is wrong with our values that we cannot motivate the people to stick to the values of democracy? Something is wrong and we have to address it by redefining our values."

#### **Working Session Four: External Stakeholders; Emerging Geopolitical Dynamics**

In his introductory remarks, the moderator of the panel emphasised that "You cannot talk about Afghanistan's security and foreign affairs without talking about external stakeholders. We are in a region where there are rivalries going on between regional countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and India, and international superpowers - such as the United States, Russia and China."

The first speaker of the panel, an Afghan participant, appreciated the conference describing it as very helpful for policy-makers inside the Afghan Government. He emphasised that the complexity of situation in Afghanistan must be considered as an important factor when talking about fighting terrorism. According to him, "People of Afghanistan in the past were fighting communism and now the people and government of Afghanistan are fighting various terrorist groups. People of Afghanistan are facing international terrorism. They are fighting for the world order, therefore,

international contribution to fight against terrorism is for common end.” He stressed that terrorists are the enemies of Afghan people and having any connection with them is not acceptable.

The moderator asked if there is any common definition of terrorism among external stakeholders of Afghanistan.

The second speaker of the panel, a United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) official, started his speech by answering the above-mentioned question. He said that while the UN wants to reenergise the “Heart of Asia” process and support the Afghan Government doing that, lack of common definition of terrorism is a challenging problem. In his opinion, “We have to be very careful, because there is no common definition of terrorism. This problem has become very important; so widespread and effecting so many countries. Maybe it’s time to try and push and find a global consensus. Even the countries that use terrorism as a tool of foreign policy have realised that it is being used against them as well. This is a problem that affects everybody.”

The third speaker of the panel, an Iranian participant, dealt with the question “how global dynamism impacts the region and what can we do about it?” According to him, “there are different external actors and those who are linked with these actors regionally. The most important actor externally is the United States which I call a “confused superpower”. Even after years of presence in Afghanistan, the purpose of the United State in this country is not clear. Of course we try to rationalise the American foreign policy, but we are seeing so many fluctuations, change of policy, and change of lines. There are different actors in the Unites States. I think the United States is acting with so much confusion not just here but globally as well. And we are not dealing with an easy super power. We are dealing with the most militarised supper power.”

He named Russia and China as the other important actors. According to him, contrary to the United States, Russian foreign policy is consistent. “Russia did a great job in the Middle East and filled the vacuum there. Nowadays Russia is everywhere in the Middle East. I think Russia is back again; of course with different agenda and different policy line of implementation. China is more active now with much more economic posture strategically at the heart of it.” He said although European actors are present in different platforms but Europe as a unit cannot be an active actor because of various challenges it has.

The speaker observed that, beside international actors, regional actors too are increasing their role in international politics. Of course they have different agendas and sometimes their interests are conflicting. Along the governmental actors, there are non-state actors. He added, “I don’t think non-state actors are just tools of regional and global powers. The global and regional powers may use them but the global and regional powers also are being used by them. It’s a dynamic process. We have so many non-state actors. But the way they act is very asymmetrical.” According to him, a sense of unpredictability, lack of vision by global powers and having different narratives are some of the characteristics of today’s international politics.

He then talked about another aspect of global dynamism using the phrase “Blocks and Buildings”. “We see blocks of international issues that may build decisions negatively or positively. First of all you see the transformation of instability in the Arab World. I call it the block of instability of the Arab World. Arab World is the center of disaster. Arab World is weak and the Daesh reflects the reality of the Arab World, but it goes beyond the Arab World. You have also globalisation of tension as another block. For example, look at the US-Iran tension. We are not in favour of tensions; but the new US administration is looking for confrontation. It is increasing tensions. You see Saudi Arabia that is a very major player in terrorist activities. We have now good relationship with them, but Saudi Arabia’s Salafism is the major cause of all terrorist activities. Not today but in last 30 years. Saudi Arabia is increasing tensions with Iran. We are looking even for regional cooperation. But we cannot ignore these increasing levels of tensions caused by Saudis and Americans. The other block of issue is that this region consists of three security arrangements: the first one is Central Asia, the second one is Middle East and the third one is South Asia. All of them converge here.”

The Iranian speaker concluded his remarks talking about the positive perspective of “containment and cooperation”. According to him, “We, as the people of this region, can contain instabilities; at least part of it. We can contain the situation, not to get worst. We can contain tensions not to be imported to decision. We can contain others, not to make more challenges and difficulties for us; we have enough of them. But, we can contain through cooperation. So, more regional cooperation is needed. When I say cooperation I mean bilaterally and multilaterally.” He suggested three projects which according to him reflect an ideal combination of containment and cooperation. “Firstly, I think we can work on the immunity project. I think we should immune our relations and decisions from regional and international conflicts. This is an idea, but we should develop this idea. Secondly, we should focus on management of differences. I think India has been able to do this job democratically. It is possible. I think management of differences is based on this assumption that first of all there are differences. Finally I propose connectivity idea project. This region should be more connected together, especially through ideas.”

The fourth speaker of the panel, an Indian participant, started his presentation pointing out two facts about India’s relations with Afghanistan. He emphasised that India’s policy toward Afghanistan is based on respecting Afghanistan’s sovereignty and independence as a multilingual and multiethnic country in accord with its own genius. He stated that “We are not saying that they (Afghans) must follow this constitution or that, this policy or that. They should take their own decisions and what we are doing is to try our best to get Afghanistan to stand on its feet. What we are doing here is specifically in response to Afghan request.” He said that India has never asked for Afghanistan’s help in any international platforms to resolve Kashmir dispute with Pakistan. India also never extended support for Afghanistan’s claim on Durand Line. Fortunately, Afghanistan also treated India as an independent sovereignty.

The speaker acknowledged that Afghanistan is a country in which external actors determine its situation. He stated that “Afghanistan is a unique country. In all the troubled parts in the world,

the core issues are determined by local factors. Afghanistan is one country in the world whose determining factor is the external environment.” He stressed that a positive point in Afghanistan is that the country’s ethnicities are patriotic. With regard to the external stakeholders, he named the United States as the main external stakeholder in Afghanistan. According to him, after coming to Afghanistan the US has become number one stakeholder in the country and then Pakistan promised its cooperation. But Pakistan’s alliance in war against terror has not been serious and on the other hand the US didn’t fulfill its promises for building a strong Afghan National Army. The Afghan National Army is poorly equipped. “You don’t have to teach Afghans to defend their sovereignty and fight for them. They can do it themselves. They need support, they need food, fuel and fire power. With sufficient and continued support we will get there.”

According to the speaker, Pakistan is the second important stakeholder who has the best chance for improving the situation. “Pakistan provided support for mujahedeen in Peshawar and Taliban government created in Pakistan. Then post 2001, Pakistan promised full assistance with Afghanistan problem. Pakistan and Afghanistan naturally could have the best relationship. One-third of the Pashtuns live in Afghanistan and two-third live in Pakistan. But why they don’t have a good relationship? The answer is because Pakistan refused to treat Afghanistan equally. Pakistan at the same time wants to ignite a fire and play the role of a fire fighter. These are difficult to combine together.”

The speaker condemned the US strategy for ignoring Iran as a regional player in the stabilisation of Afghanistan. He emphasised that the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) can play a positive role in building regional cooperation for the stabilisation of Afghanistan. “Security, governance and economic development are three important issues that Afghanistan faces. Now security trumps the other two. So, the TAPI is not going to work if there is no security in Afghanistan. Afghanistan needs to be self-sustaining. The option is to develop Afghanistan the way it existed historically; as part of the Silk Road, as a link between Iran, Central Asia, South Asia, China and as a hub for energy, for minerals and for trade in the region. All five elements of connectivity (trade, transportation, energy, ICT, and people to people relations) can work in Afghanistan if there is peace and stability.” He concluded his remarks saying that “stabilisation of Afghanistan still can happen because countries of the region are connected by culture and commerce and that can replace the existing conflict and combat. This needs a long-term commitment.”

The last speaker of the panel, a NATO official, talked about NATO’s commitment toward the stability of Afghanistan. He appreciated the growing capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the achievements made by the Afghan government. He stated that “We don’t see the deterioration of situation. But I would say that it’s insufficient to establish peace only by military means. If the number of troops in the country guaranteed peace, we must have achieved peace by now, but we didn’t. Instead, peace in Afghanistan is only possible when all stakeholders inside and outside the country agree to resolve problems through dialogue and consultation. This is why NATO supported the Kabul Peace Conference. We believe in an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. I’m happy that Iran is participating in this process. Iran and India have a very

important role to play next to other regional players. Ending the conflict and enabling peace and security to return to the region should be a shared mutual interest.”

He emphasised that given its central location, peace and prosperity in Afghanistan would mean peace and prosperity for the entire region. We should work to make it a win-win scenario. “Connectivity is very important, but if we want to see development we have to establish security in this country. Without security there can be no development.” He hoped that peace process in Afghanistan lead to success and one day Afghanistan can benefit from the Silk Road connectivity. “It’s time that all parties match rhetoric with action. What we are aiming at is regional cooperation with management of differences and difficulties.”

The NATO representative stressed that “setting the conditions for peace also has a strong domestic dimension. After all, there must be a consensus that is acceptable to all Afghans.” Mentioning China and United Kingdom’s involvement in mediating between Afghanistan and Pakistan, he said that meaningful intervention can help to improve the situation. “We ask that all parties to the conflict act in good faith and in accordance with international law. With this in mind, we call for the removal of external sanctuaries that give insurgents the safe haven they need. A terrorist is a terrorist. All groups who pose armed threats to an elected government must be considered as terrorists.” He concluded his remarks saying that “Afghan conflict is in many ways a proxy conflict that reflects the competing interests of regional and global powers. For that reason, all stakeholders must come together and act transparently to promote an end to the violence.”

#### **Q/A session:**

Comment by a UN representative: I want to highlight two points: first, as long as there is uncertainty in the region about certain key actors, it will be very hard for countries to make extra investment and effort to get over the problem. We have to create a sense of confidence. Second, after 2014, for the first time Afghanistan took responsibility for its foreign policy. We used to have 40 heads of states around the table telling the Afghan Government what to do. Now there is an opportunity for the Afghan Government to reclaim Afghan sovereignty in the international arena. That could be also considered as a confidence building measure in the region.

Comment by an Afghan participant: There cannot be an Afghan-led peace process when this is not an Afghan-led war. Peace in Afghanistan is contingent on many other settlements outside of Afghanistan. For one, there has to be a dialogue between the US and the Taliban. And many other rivalries too need to be settled. Peace process between India and Pakistan, peace process between Iran and America has to take place. It’s not really an Afghan war.

Question by an Afghan participant: What to do if external stakeholders are not interested in reaching a consensus?

Response of the Indian participant: Diplomacy is about making consensus. There is no easy solution. Military efforts have to be complemented by diplomatic efforts. I think it’s very obvious and commonsensical that a stable region is ultimately in the interest of each and every player. But,

we have to be creative. We have to expose our interests and this is important. What can we do to improve the relationship between all the different players? I believe that in the end long lasting solutions can only be achieved if there are agreed positions. It takes time, but you have to persuade your partners. I believe that Track II initiatives are key. So, this is the only way forward.

Comment by an Indian participant: Very often we tend to complicate the situation for ourselves. Very often the so-called regional conflicts are an excuse for failure. Because we don't want to admit our failure we want to blame something else. The problem of Afghan situation - like the problem of India with Pakistan, is terrorism. If you don't focus on the same issue, you will not come up with solutions.

Comment by an Iranian participant: If it is a shared responsibility to bring back stability, peace and development to Afghanistan, then it should be a team work. It should be a collective responsibility of all stakeholders, international and regional.

Comment by an Indian participant: It is an interesting observation, how can there be an Afghan-led peace process when it is not an Afghan-led war. But since it is Afghan men, women and children who are suffering the most, Afghanistan has to take the lead. Rivalry is a part of politics. It's going to be there. There is no point in putting the blame on rivalries all the time. Afghanistan itself is part of rivalries that involve other countries. It's a normal thing. I don't think Afghanistan has the time to wait for a comprehensive regional consensus to emerge. The Afghan Constitution is a good platform for pushing for strategic decisions. The constitution itself is a big achievement. Afghanistan, India and Iran can work together to counter the forces of extremism and terrorism at the ideological level too.

Response from the NATO official: "There is not only one big elephant in the room. There are a number of small, medium and big sized elephants in the room. I think it's important to bring them together and to let them talk, so they can settle their issues. And don't forget that there is a domestic dimension to the Afghan conflict too. Very often, I observe the tendency that certain interlocutors in Afghanistan only point to the foreign dimension of Afghan conflict. There is a domestic dimension too. We have a society which is undergoing modernisation conflict. We have segments of society defending the vested historical interest, we have a young generation pushing and asking for their claim. So, there are lots of internal conflicts in this country and they have to be addressed too. If you want to make it attractive for the insurgents to come to the negotiation table, you have to be a better Afghanistan; corruption free, rule of law, equal opportunities, security, etc. So there is a lot of homework to be done. This brings me to my second point: the shared responsibility. We are here not to dictate anything. We are here because we are impressed by the Afghan people, by their hospitality. They deserve our support. Surely it's a shared responsibility. But it should be Afghan-led. We also need your criticisms. We are here to support your own effort, it's a question of leadership, it's a question of education and it's a question of your political ambition."

The NATO official named Germany and France as a good example of countries once at war with each other and now being partners. "It was civil society in the east which understood its responsibility. If people in Afghanistan protest against the violence and articulate their wishes, you will see developments. You should do whatever you can do. You should not wait for others to take on the initiative."

Response of the Iranian speaker: (a) Analysis matters; I think the whole American invasion of Afghanistan was based on bad analysis. Still I think a good analysis is a rare commodity. I think we need good analysis and not replace analysis with ideologies and perceived notions. (b) The worst that can happen is blame game. There is a tendency to blame internal actors, external actors, individuals, personalities, etc. It is wrong for the sake of analysis to just narrow down our outlook based on blame game. (c) Common interest. It should be constructive common interest, not slogan. I think it requires a type of inclusiveness and rejection of the zero-sum game. The zero-sum game is the base of all these policies and situation that we see. We can recreate and construct common interest. I remain positive that this can happen through discussion.

## Annexes

### Agenda

#### Monday July 31<sup>st</sup>

09:00	Departure to Panjshir, Sightseeing and Meeting with Local Dignitaries
20:00	Reception hosted by H.E Ambassador Bahrami, Ambassador of the I.R of Iran (Venue: Embassy of I.R of Iran)

#### Tuesday August 1<sup>st</sup> (Trilateral Meeting)

##### Opening Session

9:00-9:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sufi Praying</li> <li>Welcoming remarks by AISS DG, Dr. Davood Moradian</li> <li>Introductory remarks by IDSA DG, Ambassador Jayant Prasad</li> <li>Introductory remarks by IPIS President, Dr. Seyed Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour</li> <li>Keynote speech by H.E. Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, Former Foreign Minister and NSA of I.R Afghanistan</li> </ul>						
<b>Working Session I: An Overall Assessment of Situation of Afghanistan &amp; Respective Bilateral Relations</b>							
09:30-11:00	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">Chairperson</td> <td>Dr. Seyed Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, President, IPIS</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Speakers</td> <td> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mr. Amrullah Saleh, Chairperson, Afghanistan Green Trends (AGT)</li> <li>2. Dr. Vishal Chandra, Research Fellow, IDSA</li> <li>3. Dr. Ali Reza Gholipour, Director Asian Studies, IPIS</li> </ol> </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"><b>Open Discussion + Tea Break</b></td> </tr> </table>	Chairperson	Dr. Seyed Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, President, IPIS	Speakers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mr. Amrullah Saleh, Chairperson, Afghanistan Green Trends (AGT)</li> <li>2. Dr. Vishal Chandra, Research Fellow, IDSA</li> <li>3. Dr. Ali Reza Gholipour, Director Asian Studies, IPIS</li> </ol>	<b>Open Discussion + Tea Break</b>	
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<b>Open Discussion + Tea Break</b>							
<b>Working Session II: Connectivity; The Arduous Journey of Chahbahar</b>							
11:00-13:00	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">Chairperson</td> <td>Ambassador Jayant Prasad, Director-General, IDSA</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Speakers</td> <td> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour, Head, International Education and Research Center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the I.R of Iran</li> <li>2. Dr. Meena Singh Roy, Research Fellow, IDSA</li> <li>3. Abdul Qadir Mutfi, Researcher, AISS</li> </ol> </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"><b>Open Discussion</b></td> </tr> </table>	Chairperson	Ambassador Jayant Prasad, Director-General, IDSA	Speakers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour, Head, International Education and Research Center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the I.R of Iran</li> <li>2. Dr. Meena Singh Roy, Research Fellow, IDSA</li> <li>3. Abdul Qadir Mutfi, Researcher, AISS</li> </ol>	<b>Open Discussion</b>	
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<b>Open Discussion</b>							
13:00-14:00	<b>Lunch</b>						
<b>Working Session III: Terrorism: Common Enemy; Divergent Approaches</b>							
14:00-15:30	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">Chairperson</td> <td>Ms. Fawzia Koofi, Member of Parliament</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Speakers</td> <td> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mr. Arian Sharifi, Director of Strategic Threat Assessment, Afghanistan's Office of the National Security Council</li> <li>2. Ambassador Gopalaswami Parthasarathy, Former Ambassador of India to Pakistan</li> <li>3. Mr. Mohsen Rohisefat, Deputy Director General, IPIS</li> </ol> </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;"><b>Open Discussion</b></td> </tr> </table>	Chairperson	Ms. Fawzia Koofi, Member of Parliament	Speakers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mr. Arian Sharifi, Director of Strategic Threat Assessment, Afghanistan's Office of the National Security Council</li> <li>2. Ambassador Gopalaswami Parthasarathy, Former Ambassador of India to Pakistan</li> <li>3. Mr. Mohsen Rohisefat, Deputy Director General, IPIS</li> </ol>	<b>Open Discussion</b>	
Chairperson	Ms. Fawzia Koofi, Member of Parliament						
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<b>Open Discussion</b>							
15:30-16:00	<b>Tea/break and Joint Press Conference</b>						

<b>Working Session IV: External Stakeholders; Emerging Geopolitical Dynamics</b>	
	Chairperson Mr. Sami Mahdi, Journalist
16:00-18:00	Speakers <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dr. Seyed Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, President, IPIS</li> <li>2. Ambassador Jayant Prasad, Director-General, IDSA</li> <li>3. Mr. Musa Arefi, Director General of the First Political Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs</li> <li>4. Ambassador Cornelius Zimmermann, NATO Senior Civilian Representative</li> <li>5. Mr. Scott Smith Director of Political Affairs Department of the UNAMA</li> </ol> <p><b>Open Discussion</b></p>
19:30-21:00	<b>Reception by H.E Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan Ambassador Manpreet Vohra (Venue: Ambassador Residence)</b>

<b>Wednesday August 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	
9:00-10:00	Exclusive Round Table TOLO TV
10:00-11:30	Meeting with Mr. Tamim Asey, Deputy Defense Minister (Policy & Strategy) <b>(Venue: MoD)</b>
12:00-14:00	Working lunch hosted by H.E Hamid Karzai, former President of I.R Afghanistan <b>(Venue: His Office)</b>
14:00-16:00	Visit to Afghanistan National Museum
17:00-19:00	AISS-IPIS Bilateral Dialogue <b>(Venue: AISS HQ)</b>
19:00-21:00	<b>Reception hosted by H.E Dr. Abdullah Abdullah , Chief Executive Officer, of I.R. of Afghanistan (Venue: Sepidar Palace)</b>

## List of Participants

Name	Designation	Organization
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan		
Arefi, Musa	Director General of the First Political Division	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Asey, Zia	Director General for Monitoring & Evaluation	Ministry of Interior Affairs
Balochzada, Ajmal	Member	Mehvar-Mardum Afghanistan
Fahim, Najib Aqa	Director General of Law of Treaties Directorate	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Khaled, Abdul Hadi	Research Fellow / Senior Advisor to the Minister	AISS/Ministry of Interior Affairs
Koofi, Fawzia	Member	Afghan Parliament
Mahdi, Sami	Journalist	Tolo Tv
Mastoor, Mostafa	Deputy	Ministry of Finance
Moradian, Davood	Director General	Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS)
Mutfi, Abdul Qadir	Researcher	Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS)
Niazi, Rafiullah	Director	Academy of Sciences of Afghanistan
Rafiee, Azizullah	Executive Director	Afghanistan Civil Society Forum
Rahimi, Sardar	Deputy	Ministry of Education
Mohammad		
Raz, Adela	Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Affairs	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Saleh, Amrullah	Chairperson	Afghanistan Green Trends (AGT)
Sharifi, Arian	Director of Strategic Threat Assessment	Afghanistan's Office of the National Security Council
Shinwari, Mozamil	Research Fellow/Former Deputy Minister	AISS / Ministry of Commerce and Industries
Shirjan, Hassana	Founder and CEO	Aid Afghanistan for Education

Spanta, Rangin Dadfar	Former Foreign Minister and NSA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs / National Security Council
Toghra, Mohammad Yunus	International Relation Advisor to the 1 <sup>st</sup> Vice President	Afghanistan Unity Government
Republic of India		
Chandra, Vishal	Research Fellow	Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)
Parthasarathy, Gopaldaswami	Former Ambassador	External Affairs Ministry
Prasad, Jayant	Director-General	Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)
Ravi, Vasudev	Second Secretary Political and Information	Embassy of India
Singh Roy, Meena	Research Fellow	Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)
Vohra, Manpreet	Ambassador	Embassy of India
Islamic Republic of Iran		
Bahrami, Mohammad Reza	Ambassador	Embassy of Iran
Gholipour, Ali Reza	Director of Asia Studies Group	Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS)
Rohisefat, Mohsen	Deputy	Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS)
Sajjadpour, Seyed Mohammad Kazem	President	Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS)
Soleimanpour, Hadi	Head	Center for International Research and Education of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs / University
Husseini, Mohammad	Deputy Ambassador	Lecturer Embassy of Iran
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)		
Zimmermann, Cornelius	Senior Civilian Representative	NATO
United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)		
Dchowski, Maciej	Team Leader for Regional Cooperation	UNAMA
Smith, Scott	Director of Political Affairs Department	UNAMA

Photos of the Second Round of “Afghanistan, India and Iran Trilateral Dialogue”



*Indian and Iranian delegation visited Panjshir province and met with the governor*



*Conveying respect at Ahmad Shah Massoud's Minaret by Indian and Iranian delegation*



*Second Round of "Afghanistan, India and Iran Trilateral Dialogue"*



*Second Round of "Afghanistan, India and Iran Trilateral Dialogue"*



*Second Round of "Afghanistan, India and Iran Trilateral Dialogue"*



*Meeting of the Indian and Iranian delegation with Mr. Tamim Asey, Deputy Defense Minister*



*Meeting of the Indian and Iranian delegation with the former Afghan President H.E Hamid Karzai*



*Reception hosted by H.E Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Chief Executive Officer of Afghanistan*



**\*End\***

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