

Pakistan Launch of the Joint Declaration on Regional Peace & Stability

Afghanistan's Region: 2014 & Beyond

Wednesday 15th January 2014 to Thursday 16th January 2014

POST EVENT REPORT

How Afghanistan and the region around will adjust to the withdrawal of US and ISAF forces by end 2014? This question inspires interest and a degree of awe everywhere from Washington to London, from Brussels to Berlin, from Istanbul and Tehran to Delhi but nowhere - after Kabul - has it inspired greater angst, anxiety and uncertainty than in Islamabad. Reasons for this nervousness are easy to understand. No country, since the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, in 1979, has suffered more from its neighbor's misfortune, instability and turmoil than the neighboring Pakistan. Both countries and their people share a unique historical, geographical and cultural interdependence. Pakistan launch of the 'Joint Declaration on Regional Peace & Stability – Afghanistan Region: 2014 & Beyond' was thus an important event for Islamabad's think tank, media, civil society and diplomatic communities. Ground work for the launch was done weeks in advance as the policy makers, journalists, foreign policy experts were sensitized due to pre-conference TV and radio programs, newspaper editorials and articles that discussed the event (See Annex I), and active dissemination through popular social media sites – Facebook, Twitter and chat boards- focused on national and regional issues where thousands participated to discuss the event and the related issues.

The launch was hosted at the Marriott hotel in Islamabad in Pakistan. Inaugural event attracted key diplomats¹, foreign policy experts, prominent TV anchors and select journalists from both print and electronic media (See Annex II & III). Joint Declaration was presented by conveners of the Policy Groups from Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Central Asia, to Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Advisor to Prime Minister, on Foreign Affairs and National Security (de facto Foreign Minister of Pakistan). The event was covered live on TV channels as well as in prime time bulletins of that evening (See Annex IV). The following day, on 16th Jan, the event was primarily attended by a wide cross section of media, civil society, think tank community and academia (See Annex V & VI).

¹ Apart from German Ambassador, Dr. Cyril Nunn, Ambassadors of EU, Belgium, Japan, Egypt, Argentina, Deputy Chiefs of missions, US, France, Denmark and political counselors from several embassies attended the inaugural event on 15th.

Moderator, Dr. Moeed Pirzada, initiated the proceedings by welcoming and asking Mr. Sartaj Aziz to join the panel at the platform and invited *Mr. Philipp Kauppert, Resident Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)* for the Welcome Address. Philipp warmly thanked Prime Minister's Adviser, Sartaj Aziz, for gracing the occasion, the international panelists for travelling to Pakistan and the audience for their participation. He emphasized the relationship between common security and national security and its importance in today's world and how FES guided by principles of social democracy in Germany believes in providing platform for such a dialogue to support regional peace – he then invited Sarah Hees to the podium.

Ms. Sarah Hees, FES Regional Coordinator, Peace and Security Policy, who had travelled from New Delhi to participate, explained the evolution of the project, its inspiration, guiding principles, incipient ideas and its gradual and at times tedious progression between four policy groups and their affiliates in Tehran, Istanbul, Beijing and Moscow, over the past 18 months. She – with the help of flow charts-provided an overview of what happened, how and where: from Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Berlin to its national launch in Kabul and international launch in Istanbul before its regional launch now in Pakistan. She explained that FES has attempted to employ national policy groups and Track II dialogues to provide a platform and environment where the trust could be built between competing ideas to enable formulation of this joint declaration. And she hoped that platform of trust may help in fostering a climate of mutual cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbors allowing them to participate more fully and effectively in the stabilization of the war stricken country in a realization of larger regional interest.

Sarah concluded by inviting moderator, Dr. Moeed Pirzada, to conduct panel discussion. Dr. Pirzada introduced Mr. Sartaj Aziz and reminded the audience of his long standing commitment to foreign policy and regional development issues as Pakistan's Ex- Foreign and Finance Minister in 1990's. He then gave a brief overview of the profiles of the conveners of the policy groups and their contributions to national discourses in their respective countries.

The panelists then discussed their vision and thoughts for the Declaration. *Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal, Convener Afghan Policy Group*, emphasized upon three issues: One, need for strong internal security policy for Afghanistan, Second, forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections and third, Economic policy and sustainability. Ambassador Saikal thought that the strong security policy will be fundamental to fight militants and to ensure stability. He highlighted the need to resolve the trust deficit between Pakistan and Afghanistan to resolve the militancy that has affected the peace process. On the domestic political front he said elections are going to be held and Afghanistan is working towards making these peaceful and ensuring that a strong government and leader appears that will have the mandate to rule for next five years and to provide economic stability apart from national security.

Mr Khalid Aziz, Convener Pakistan Policy Group, started his discourse with the reference to the '*Between Dreams and Realities: Some Milestones in Pakistan's History*', an autobiography written by Mr. Sartaj Aziz in 2009, that among other issues also dealt with his experiences as ex-foreign minister in late 1990's. Khalid Aziz reminded the minister and the audience that in that book, written in the late 1990's, Sartaj Aziz on the eve of becoming foreign minister had outlined three key challenges for himself: Peace

with India; maintaining durable relations with the US and handling the civil war in Afghanistan. Reference was to underscore the historic and continuing nature of the challenges and Afghanistan's centrality in Pakistan's foreign policy. Mr. Khalid Aziz then asserted that along with other policy group members he spent the last 18 months as 'eating, drinking and sleeping Afghanistan'; the final launch of the Joint Declaration in his view will be a template to build durable peace between Afghanistan and its neighbors. It will avoid, what he described the "the negative consequences of geography" in a region that has been open to a lot of threats since the British left in 1947. He asserted that regional efforts directed towards a stable Afghanistan, will need to remove trade barriers between: Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia.

Maj Gen. Retd. Ashok Mehta, Convener, India Policy Group, drove home the essential point on the Joint Declaration saying: 'declaration has Afghan ownership and is Afghan driven'. He described the document as being exceptional; because it was put together through regional cooperation and talked of collective security for the region. The Joint Declaration, he declared, has set out a code of conduct for the neighboring countries which should ensure that there is no interference in Afghanistan. He addressed the Pakistan – India relationship by saying that the proxy war in Afghanistan is a problem. Afghanistan has been on the bilateral agenda of the two countries since 2011 but has never been discussed. He saw the forthcoming Indian elections coming at a fortunate time in that it allowed the new Indian government to address these unresolved issues. However, he pointed out that two things were needed to ensure success of this Joint Declaration – the first was the need for a regional leadership of the process and the second for the 'declaration' to make the switch from being child of the Track II process to obtain parenthood of Track I ownership.

Dr. Sanat Kushkumbayev, Convener Central Asian Policy Group, brought forward a totally different regional view. He argued that we don't see any military solution to the challenges in Afghanistan, and this needs a careful patient political process of engagement. He emphasized that Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan are deeply interested in the peaceful transformation of Afghanistan but unlike other states our stakes may not involve what he described as 'competing interests'; he explained that we see Afghanistan as an important energy and trade corridor towards Pakistan, India and Iran and therefore are focused on the importance of economics in the revival of the Afghanistan region. The priority he thought was to develop the trade, infrastructure and economic growth. Projects should be mutually beneficial. He also advocated strong involvement of Iran as necessary for the implementation of this trade and economic vision – a view earlier echoed by Khalid Aziz, convener of the Pakistan Policy Group.

Ambassador Haron Amin, Facilitator, Afghan Policy Group, said he was looking forward to 2014 as an interesting mix of challenges and opportunities; and he thought it will bring answers to many a major questions. For instance – he raised this as question- will the international community be able to meet its promised commitments and financial assistance packages and pledges towards Afghanistan? He felt that while military spending must go down in Afghanistan, strong stable security forces were essential for the well being of the country and the region; he dismissed often repeated western and Pakistani fears of their weakness and emphasized that he did not expect the AFNS structure to collapse post the US withdrawal. Similarly, survival of the government was not an issue post aid and assistance withdrawal.

Like Ambassador Saikal, before him, he also thought that the issue or threat of Taliban insurgency, in terms of its size and quantum and reach is widely exaggerated. He concluded by saying something different: let's forgive each other, forget and move ahead!

Ambassador Cyril Nunn, German Embassy, congratulated FES for its work towards the creation, propagation and launch of the 'Joint Declaration' and commented on the importance of Pakistan's commitment to the Declaration. It will move forward due to trust and good will, however, he pointed out that given international community's experiences in the region there were no easy fixes; Afghanistan had seen 11 years of military engagements, but major stability issues still remained. He promised that Germany and international community will meet its commitments to Afghanistan post-2014.

Q&A session saw an animated debate, with questions and counter-counter questions flowing between the audience and the panelists. Questions came from a number of foreign affairs analysts and journalists. *Brig Retd. Masood Aslam* thought the 'Joint Declaration' in his hand² - which he displayed - did not incorporate any discussion on the multi-ethnicity of Afghanistan or that it had a Pashtun majority not adequately represented in its power structure; also he argued that any references towards Taliban insurgency and the need for political reconciliation appear to be missing altogether or under-emphasized. The Afghan panelists felt that multi-ethnicity was an internal discourse in Afghanistan and did not relate to the region. Brig Alam, himself a Pashtun, vehemently disagreed pointing out that the presence of large dissatisfied Pashtun population straddling across the Pak-Afghan border makes a hash of these arguments and represents a continuous source of political instability and the situation demands a political solution. Amb. Haroon Amin pointed out that the Taliban was a small issue in the larger discourse of unresolved issues between Pakistan-Afghanistan since 1947, and it was these issues that needed to be addressed and in doing so the Taliban issue would also be resolved.

Ambassador Saikal argued that Taliban insurgency is not, and will not be a big challenge for Kabul post-US withdrawal and this continues only because of support from Pakistan from across the border. Human right and civil society activist, *Tahira Abdullah*, raised the issue of not involving women in policy groups and missing point in the declaration by saying "no one is talking of the 'role of the real elephant, Saudi Arabia' in the region". Khalid Aziz responded by agreeing that panel and policy groups have lacked adequate female participation but many prominent ladies who were approached had refused joining in. Ambassador Saikal pointed out that Saudi Arabia – whatever role it is playing – is only possible because some countries may be providing it a space and opportunity and this needs to be resolved amongst the neighbors.

TV Anchor, *Batul Rajput (News One)* and *Mateen Haider*, (Foreign Policy Correspondent, The Dawn) brought up respectively the questions of theory and practicality of non-interference and the role of the Indian establishment in Afghanistan; with Mateen pointing out the difficult attitude of Indian establishment on the issue of Kashmir raising doubts about any effectiveness of dialogue on the new challenges in Afghanistan –as Gen. Mehta had earlier argued for. *Maj Gen. Ashok Mehta* reverted with

² Copies of Joint Declarations and Policy Group Profile book-lets were placed on all tables which were thoroughly read by many participants.

the argument that stability in the region was important for all surrounding countries. In responding to Batul's "theory and practicality" he offered the example of how Congo has been democratized and stabilized; and that it should be an example for the players in this region how it could be done. He thought India and Pakistan both needed to play their parts in ensuring that sanctuaries are not allowed and with the new government expected to be formed later this year would be a good opportunity for new beginnings. He also argued that much progress was made on Kashmir – in Track II process – during the Musharraf government but the Zardari regime could not follow it up.

Chief Guest *Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Advisor to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs and National Security*³, complimented FES and the policy groups for their work and promised to examine the 'Joint Declaration'; he then pointed out that Pakistan Foreign Office was also devoting a lot of time, energy and focus on this issue and that 'we are seeing improvements in relations.' He divulged that regular phone conversations are taking place between President Karzai and PM Nawaz Sharif. He added that history of the region has proved that outside powers (US, UK, or Russia) will come and go but Pakistan is Afghanistan's neighbor – and this is a relationship that cannot be altered. He cited increasing trade involvement between the two countries and mentioned several projects under consideration or on drawing board including: Peshawar- Kabul Motorway; rail links and power projects and said in terms of political solution inside Afghanistan, Pakistan believes in an Afghan owned and Afghan lead peace process in the process of FES's Joint Declaration and has adopted a clear 'no-favorite policy' and once this becomes a regional policy it will benefit all.

After the Q&A session while most guests walked to the adjacent dining hall where heated discussions continued over the day's session, Mr. Sartaj Aziz was surrounded by print and electronic media with series of questions about the Pak-Afghan relations. This interaction and his statements from his earlier comments and his media interaction were covered extensively by tv channels the same evening and by most newspapers the next morning.

The Next day's seminar (16th Jan) took off where the launch session had concluded – with panelists addressing issues raised the night before including the "missing elephant in the room". *Ambassador Mahmoud Saikal* talked of conflict resolution strategies and said our aim is 'to turn Afghanistan into an asset for all.' He said two kinds of concerns were repeatedly raised yesterday: One, Why not mention the "elephant in the room" in the Joint Declaration and Second, What is India's role in Afghanistan? He explained that Talib traditionally, in Afghanistan, was a term for a peaceful madrassa student; question is: who gave them arms? Who imported these armed Taliban into Afghanistan? He then asserted that this "elephant in the room" – Taliban - missing from the Joint Report is not that big inside Afghanistan as it is perceived in Pakistan. He added only 20,000 people picked up arms in the country and they were trying to define the agenda through violence. He said Afghans will not surrender to gun power and Afghanistan needs good governance, elections will show people they can gain and will all help to reduce militancy. Ambassador's assertions prompted heated questions from several members of the audience who enquired: why the planet's most powerful army has not been able to curb the 20,000 Taliban so

³ Sartaj Aziz, is Pakistan's *de facto* Foreign Minister; it is expected that with Senate membership he will be given the title. He has been ex-Foreign Minister (1997-99) & Finance Minister (1990-93) under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

far? And Ambassador retorted that they have; he pointed out that once Taliban controlled 80% of the territory and now they have been reduced to non-entities. The incredulity on part of the audience continued with this line of reasoning.

Mr. Khalid Aziz considered Americans responsible for not pursuing peace when the right opportunity had presented itself; he pointed out that now clear evidence exists that when Karzai, after the Bonn Conference, had met Mullah Umer in Kandahar on 7th December 2001 he had announced to end the war on the condition that they be allowed to live in peace in Kandahar, but Donald Rumsfield, the then US Secretary Defense, said the 'Taliban will not be allowed to live in peace.' From this point onwards, instead of peace the US funded military operations. But he concluded that the lesson learnt for the world was to let Afghanistan alone to grow and develop in its own manner.

Maj Gen Retd. Ashok Mehta began by responding to the observation made by Gen. Masood Aslam the day before - that the 'Joint Declaration' is an impractical wish list of everything – and argued that basically the declaration has three main recommendations: One, Non-interference; second, leave Afghanistan to the Afghans and third, let words become deeds. He said India respected Pakistan's concerns on Afghanistan and pointed out that Karzai has come to India 14 times with several wish lists and even demanded weapon supplies but that India mindful of Pakistani concerns has not agreed to. However, India and Pakistan needed to talk about Afghanistan which Pakistan was not doing since it did not want to legitimize India role through a track 1 process.

Dr. Sanat stressed on similar points as he did on the day of launch on the importance of good neighbors which would encourage economic growth, trade and infrastructure for Afghanistan. Bilateral and multilateral efforts are needed between countries to improve security in the region and Iran should also be included in the talks given the long border it shares with Afghanistan. Amb Haron Amin, emphasized that outstanding issues of Afghanistan needs to be resolved with its neighbors, for instance the border issues pending with Pakistan since 1947. Regional countries must guarantee and practice "non-interference" and a "Code of Neutrality" should be created that can be backed by the international community. He asserted that to ensure stability and neutrality Afghanistan needs a strong army as well.

A variety of heated questions were asked over a number of different issues that touched upon among others: the role of India, its claim to be considered as "neighbor to Afghanistan", issue of Afghan refugees, how to define neutrality and non-interference and the future US role in the region. In answering why refugees are not returning back to Afghanistan if situation has normalized; Mahmood Saikal argued that those continuously residing inside Pakistan are economic migrants and may only return when the livelihood situation improves in Afghanistan. Jan Achkazai, a JUI-F politician questioned why the Indians have invested money in the election and how much influence do they want? Gen Ashok Mehta responded that India needs to make sure the right people are in government and it is the right thing to do.

Annex I

Articles

Sunday 12th January 2014

The Nation

Topic: **Afghanistan Beyond 2014?** by Dr Moeed Pirzada

Link: <http://www.nation.com.pk/columns/12-Jan-2014/afghanistan-beyond-2014>

Monday 13th January 2014

Pakistan Today

Title: **Growing Question: Afghanistan & Region Beyond 2014?** By Dr Moeed Pirzada

Link: <http://hotnewsinternational.com/2014/01/12/growing-question-afghanistan-region-beyond-2014/>

Annex VIII

Post Conference Print Media Coverage

Thursday 16th January 2014

The Dawn

Title: End to Interference in Afghanistan Urged

Link: http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=16_01_2014_016_002

Pakistan World News

Title: FES organized Pakistan Launch of Joint Declaration on Regional Peace & Stability in Afghanistan post 2014

Link: <http://pakistan.worldnewsviews.com/2014/01/15/fes-organized-pakistan-launch-of-joint-declaration-on-regional-peace-stability-in-afghanistan-post-2014/>

Pakistan Tribe

Title: FES organized Pakistan Launch of Joint Declaration on Regional Peace & Stability in Afghanistan post 2014

Link: <http://www.pakistantribe.com/story/5151/fes-organized-pakistan-launch-of-joint-declaration-on-regional-peace-stability-in-afghanistan-post-2014/>

Daily Express (Urdu)

Title: We will Negotiate with those Taliban who are Ready for Dialogue

Link: http://express.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow.aspx?newsID=1102070697&Issue=NP_ISB&Date=20140116

Dunya News (Urdu)

Title: We will encourage those Taliban who are Ready to Talk

Link: http://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2014-01-16&edition=ISL&id=831924_95443581

Kashmir Post

Pakistan and Islamabad Declaration

Jammu & Kashmir

Pakistan and Islamabad Declaration

Friday 17th January 2014

Express Tribune

Title: **US Withdrawal: Envisaging a Charter for Regional Peace, Post-2014**

Link:<http://tribune.com.pk/story/659730/us-withdrawal-envisaging-a-charter-for-regional-peace-post-2014/>

The Nation

Title: **Sartaj for Pak-Afghan Joint Efforts to Improve Border Management**

Link:<http://www.nation.com.pk/islamabad/16-Jan-2014/sartaj-for-pak-afghan-joint-efforts-to-improve-border-management>

Pakistan Today

Title: **Leave Afghanistan on its Own**

Link:<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2014/01/16/leave-afghanistan-on-its-own/>

BBC Urdu: (Urdu)

Title: **Future of Afghanistan: Negotiations Started Between India and Pakistan**

Link:http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/2014/01/140116_pak_india_diplomacy_afghanistan_z.shtml

Dunya News (Urdu)

Title: **Track One Diplomacy Needed between India and Pakistan on the Issue of Afghanistan**

Link:http://e.dunya.com.pk/detail.php?date=2014-01-17&edition=ISL&id=833760_59193440

DW

Title: **Germany will not Abandon Afghanistan**

Link: <http://www.dw.de/germany-will-not-abandon-afghanistan/a-17370442>

Daily Heights

Title: **US withdrawal: Envisaging a License for Informal Peace, Post-2014**

Link: <http://heights.com.pk/story/4424>

Saturday 18th January 2014

Rising Kashmir

Title: **India, Pakistan and Afghanistan endgame**

Link: <http://www.risingkashmir.com/india-pak-and-the-afghan-endgame/>

Daily Nada – i- Khalq (Urdu)

<http://www.nadaikhalq.com/>

Daily Jang

Sartaj Aziz Picture with Dr.Moeed at Pakistan Launch of the Joint Declaration on Regional Peace & Stability

Saturday 18th January 2014

Daily Times

Title: **Foreign intervention in Afghanistan's affairs risky, moot told**

Link: <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/18-Jan-2014/foreign-intervention-in-afghanistan-s-affairs-risky-moot-told>

Sunday 19th January 2014

Kashmir Times

Sartaj Aziz Picture with Dr.Moeed at Pakistan launch of the Joint Declaration on Regional Peace & Stability

Mahasib

Sartaj Aziz's Group Photo With Dr.Moeed Pirzada ,Amb.Cyril Nunn and Amb.Haron Amin

Kashmir Express

Sartaj Aziz's Group Photo With Dr.Moeed Pirzada ,Amb.Cyril Nunn and Amb.Haron Amin