



## **Paper Title: Pakistan's Role in Shaping the Character of Security in Afghanistan**

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## **Pakistan's Role in Shaping the Character of Security in Afghanistan**

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Now in its 18th year, the post-2001 conflict in Afghanistan is considered the U.S.'s longest war. The renewed peace negotiations with the Taliban, which began in September 2018 with the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad as the U.S.'s Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation, has witnessed six rounds of talks between the US and the Taliban as of the first week of May 2019. Of these six rounds of talks, two were highly crucial as they resulted in an "agreement in principle" and an "agreement in draft" in January and March 2019, respectively. The January 2019 talks between the U.S. and the Taliban ended in an "agreement in principle" and generated optimism regarding the prospects of a successful peace negotiation. Equally, it triggered widespread debate on the implications of a hasty U.S. withdrawal and concerns regarding the prospects of the security situation in Afghanistan in the aftermath of a U.S. withdrawal. The fifth round of peace talks between Taliban Deputy Chief, Mullah Baradar, and the U.S. diplomats, ended up in an "agreement in draft" on the withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan and assurances from the Taliban that Afghanistan will not be used by terrorist groups against the U.S.<sup>2</sup> So far, the Afghan government has not been part of these talks and has, at times, complained that the details of these talks are not shared with it.

Given the momentum in the efforts for a political solution to the Afghan conflict, this essay attempts to analyze the role Pakistan plays in shaping

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2. "US 'agreed in draft' with Taliban on Afghanistan troop withdrawal – envoy." RT, March 12, 2019. <https://www.rt.com/news/453652-us-withdrawal-afghanistan-taliban/>

Afghanistan's security dynamics and the current peace process. The essay discusses the Pakistan-India rivalry, Pakistan's security concerns *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan, and the potential role of multilateral frameworks to bring Pakistan on board towards ensuring security and peace in Afghanistan.

### **Pakistan and the Current Peace Process in Afghanistan**

Among other stakeholders in the region, Pakistan as a strategic neighbor has always had great interest and influence over Afghanistan. Pakistan's policies with regard to security in Afghanistan has varied with broader geopolitical trends, at times in close alignment with the government in power in Afghanistan (such as when the Taliban was ruling Afghanistan) and at other times supporting rival factions (such as the mujahideen), always prioritizing its own strategic interests in the region. In the early 1980s, Pakistan supported the mujahideen in their fight against the Soviet forces, while they were funded by the U.S. and its Western allies. In the 1990s, Pakistan supported the Taliban regime, opposing the mujahideen government. Post 9/11, Pakistan joined the U.S. led coalition in the 'Global War on Terror', and since then, Pakistan's interests and influence in Afghanistan have been swaying depending on geopolitical trends, regional order, and its economic situation. In March 2019, Pakistan's newly elected Prime Minister, Imran Khan, was heavily criticized by the Afghan government when he suggested that an interim government setup would help break the deadlock in the ongoing peace talks with the Taliban.<sup>3</sup> Since an interim government set up has been a staunch demand of the Taliban, this statement indicated Pakistan continuing support for the Taliban's position during peace talks instead of that the Afghan government. Many feel these statements by Pakistan signal its promotion of a peace agreement in which the Taliban gain a heavy footprint in the affairs of the Afghan state, and by extension, an attempt to secure its influence in Kabul while increasingly restricting India's role.

In the past 18 years, Pakistan's support for the Taliban has been cited as one of the major impediments to peace in Afghanistan. By cultivating and supporting militant groups as proxy actors, Pakistan has been able to maintain influence over Afghanistan to keep its rival (India) at bay. When asked if Pakistan has a constructive role to play in the Afghan peace process during an interview

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3. Noori, Hikmat. "Pakistan PM's remarks on Afghan peace process stir diplomatic row." Aljazeera English. March 29, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/pakistan-pm-remarks-afghan-peace-process-stir-diplomatic-row-190328115121755.html>

with the BBC on in January 2019, Afghanistan's former Minister of Interior and former Chief of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Amrullah Saleh, referenced Trump's South Asia Strategy, which lists Pakistan as a deceptive system that supports terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Saleh stated that Pakistan's influence over Afghanistan must be legitimized (maintained through a legitimate means) and acknowledged in order to move forward with the peace process.<sup>4</sup>

Today Pakistan as a fragile state, fearing an attack from India, and in light of its withering relationship with the U.S.,<sup>5</sup> appears to be continuing to cultivate and support proxy actors in the country, which can be detrimental to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan and the region.<sup>6</sup> The prospects and success of a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict depends on Pakistan putting end to harboring and employing its proxies against Afghanistan. Parallel to the talks between U.S. diplomats and the Taliban leadership, Pakistan has constantly undermined the peace process.<sup>7</sup>

In 2018, in what was considered as a positive step forward, Afghanistan and Pakistan drew up and agreed to the implementation of, the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS). The APAPPS articulates Pakistan's support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. It identifies measures for the two countries to undertake effective actions against fugitives and the irreconcilable elements posing security threats to either of the two countries. It also includes commitment to deny the use of their respective territories, networks, group or individuals for anti-state activities against either country. Additionally, the APAPPS calls for the creation of a joint supervision, coordination, and confirmation mechanisms

4. Amrullah Saleh, former General Director of National Security, interview by Shaun Ley. BBC Hardtalk, January 30, 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/n3ct4fb5>

5. Khokhar, Riaz. "What Pakistan Will Gain from Peace in Afghanistan." *The National Interest* February 10, 2019. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/what-pakistan-will-gain-peace-afghanistan-43922>

6. Pandey, Shubhangi. "Exploring the prospects for a negotiated political settlement with the Taliban: Afghanistan's long road to peace." Observer Research Foundation, February 22, 2019. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/exploring-the-prospects-for-a-negotiated-political-settlement-with-the-taliban-afghanistans-long-road-to-peace-48411/>

7. "Afghanistan writes to UNSC on violations by Pakistani military." *Tolo News*, February 23, 2019. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-writes-unsce-violations-pakistani-military?fbclid=IwAR3V0r2H8g0N0mh12ND5-OjYSHjFYldf8fJBbYQFrUIrl2m6cOoP4vY00>

by designating Liaison Officers to implement the agreements.<sup>8</sup> The two sides also operationalized five working groups on politico-diplomatic, military, intelligence, economic and trade and refugees issues, under this action plan to oversee the full implementation of the APAPPS.<sup>9</sup>

For Afghanistan, the implementation of the APAPPS is essential for pursuing the peace process and bringing about overall stability to the region. In September 2018, Afghanistan's then Permanent Representative to the UN, Mahmoud Saikal, told the UN Security Council that advancing the peace process was a key element of APAPPS and that the "key determinant in validating that commitment will be the full and effective implementation" of the APAPPS.<sup>10</sup> However, the principles of the Plan, much like those of others in the past, have not yet been fully implemented. Addressing the Asia Society in New York in March 2019, Afghanistan's National Security Advisor, Hamdullah Mohib, said, "APAPPS which was agreed by the governments of the two countries for peace has not been implemented by the current administration in Islamabad."<sup>11</sup> The lack of implementation of the APAPPS has allowed room for continued mistrust and impediments to peace efforts in Afghanistan.

## Fearing Close Afghanistan-India Ties

It has been argued by many researchers of and in Afghanistan and South Asia that Afghanistan has been a battleground for India and Pakistan since Pakistan's formation in 1947.<sup>12 13</sup> The beginning of the hostility between these two countries dates back to 1947, when Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali

8. "Joint Statement inaugural session of the APAPPS working groups." Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, July 22, 2018. <https://www.mfa.gov.af/press-releases/joint-statement-inaugural-session-of-the-apapps-working-groups.html>

9. Ibid.

10. Statement of Mahmoud Saikal Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Security Council Debate on the Situation in Afghanistan. Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the United Nations, September 19, 2018. <http://afghanistan-un.org/2018/09/security-council-debate-on-the-situation-in-afghanistan-23/>

11. Chaudhury, Dipanjan Roy. "Pakistan speaks brotherhood but sends terrorists: Afghanistan." The Economic Times, March 13, 2019. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/pakistan-speaks-brotherhood-but-sends-terrorists-afghanistan/articleshow/68388393.cms>

12. Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbaou. "South Asia and Afghanistan: The Robust India-Pakistan Rivalry." Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 2011. [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/133496/Tadjbakhsh,%20S%20\(2011\)%20South%20Asia%20and%20Afghanistan.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/133496/Tadjbakhsh,%20S%20(2011)%20South%20Asia%20and%20Afghanistan.pdf)

13. Nicholas Howenstein and Sumit Ganguly, "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan." Journal of International Relations, University of Columbia, March 25, 2010. <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/india-pakistan-rivalry-afghanistan>

Jinnah, believed India sought the collapse of the now separated and newly created nation, a conviction that laid the foundation for Pakistan's foreign policy in the region.<sup>14</sup> Since then, there have been claims that the two rivals are using the same proxy violence strategy against one another with Afghanistan becoming their battleground.<sup>15</sup>

When the erstwhile Soviet Union withdrew its troops from Afghanistan in 1989, Pakistan's military establishment and intelligence agencies began sponsoring, recruiting, training, and sheltering groups like the Taliban and the Haqqani Network as foreign policy tools in the years to come.<sup>16</sup> By supporting these groups by providing safe havens, arms, and intelligence, Pakistan made sure that India remained largely outside of Afghanistan and had limited influence on the country's affairs compared to Pakistan. All this changed in 2001, when the Taliban were toppled by the U.S. and the Northern Alliance forces and a democratically sponsored Afghan government emerged from the rubble. As a member of the international community engaged with Afghanistan, India began to assert its soft power as a key development partner and donor in the democratization process in the country. Since 2001, India has pledged approximately USD 3 billion in assistance to Afghanistan, allocated towards four areas-humanitarian assistance, major infrastructure projects, small and community-development projects, and education and capacity development-becoming the biggest regional donor.<sup>17</sup> Islamabad, fearing India's gradually increasing influence in Afghanistan, interpreted this as an encirclement of Pakistan (which shares a border with an India friendly Afghanistan to its west, an India friendly Iran to its south-west, and its rival India to its east) and began claiming that India was supporting anti-Pakistan militant groups such as the Baloch separatists and the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) using Afghan soil.

Over the years Pakistan has furthered instability in Afghanistan in order to

14. Pervaiz, Faisal. "In Afghanistan, the U.S and Pakistan fight a conflict of interests." Stratfor, November 21, 2017. <https://www.stratfor.com/article/afghanistan-us-and-pakistan-fight-conflict-interests>

15. Azhar, Aman. "Experts warn: India- Pakistan proxy war detrimental to Afghan peace." VOA News. April 06, 2018. <https://www.voanews.com/a/experts-warn-india-pakistan-proxy-war-detrimental-afghan-peace/4336623.html>

16. Howenstein, Nicholas and Ganguly, Sumit. "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan." *Journal of International Affairs*, Columbia University, March 25, 2010. <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/india-pakistan-rivalry-afghanistan>

17. Palrecha, Nandita, and Tourangbam, Monish. "India's Development Aid to Afghanistan: does Afghanistan need what India gives?" *The Diplomat*. November 24, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/indias-development-aid-to-afghanistan-does-afghanistan-need-what-india-gives/>

prevent the state from becoming India's strong ally. At present, as the U.S. explores ways to facilitate its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, a factor linked to a successful peace agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan state, leaving behind a stable Afghanistan would require both India and Pakistan to play constructive roles in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan has expressed disagreement with "the US view that India has a role to play in bringing peace to Afghanistan."<sup>18</sup>

### **The Doctrine of Strategic Depth**

The concept of 'strategic depth' was first articulated by the Pakistan Army in the 1980s after the U.S. left Afghanistan at the end of the Cold War. However, Afghanistan, still grappling with civil war, saw Pakistan support different mujahideen groups in the country with the help of the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. It was in this backdrop, that Pakistan's then Chief of Army Staff, Mirza Aslam Baig, articulated the term 'strategic depth'. Strategic depth, in military terms, refers to the internal distance within a state from the frontline to its center of gravity or heartland, its core population areas or important cities or industrial installations.<sup>19</sup> Given its sense of insecurity pertaining to Indian influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan adopted the doctrine of strategic depth to allow its army to regroup in Afghanistan for defense in case of an all-out attack from their nemesis, India.

Pakistan has long denied that it seeks strategic depth in Afghanistan. Time and again, government officials from Pakistan have rejected claims that Islamabad is implementing strategic depth as a policy and have claimed that the option of strategic depth is irrelevant since Pakistan developed nuclear weapons.<sup>20</sup> However, the long-standing animosity, cross-border skirmishes, and attacks on military bases on both sides of the border since the creation of both countries have pushed Pakistan to resort to relying on seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup>

18. "What's Behind Baloch Insurgency in Pakistan?" TRT World, April 18, 2019. <https://www.trtworld.com/asia/what-s-behind-the-baloch-insurgency-in-pakistan-259821>

19. Siddique, Qandeel. "Pakistan's future policy towards Afghanistan." Danish Institute for International Studies, August 2011. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/59843/1/66870022X.pdf>

20. Jamil, Mohammad. "Strategic Depth is a misnomer." Daily Times, October 05, 2017. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/113937/strategic-depth-is-a-misnomer/>

21. Haque, Raheem. "Strategic Depth: Does it Promote Pakistan's Strategic Interests?" Centre for Public Policy and Governance, April 2011. <http://cppg.fccollege.edu.pk/strategic-depth-does-it-promote-pakistans-strategic-interests/>

For instance, recently, as a gesture of goodwill and as a confidence building measure, Pakistan released Taliban Co-founder, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, in late 2018. However, this came at the behest of U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, whereas Kabul's repeated calls for his release had not resulted in this outcome over the years. Pakistan was praised for this effort by both the U.S. and the Afghan government as having taken a genuine step towards bringing peace to Afghanistan. The reality, however, shows that Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan has not changed significantly, at least not in a substantial manner. Despite denying influence over the Taliban, Pakistan admittedly still maintains influence and close ties with the Taliban,<sup>22</sup> providing them with financial and medical support. More importantly, the enmity between India and Pakistan continues to prevail. After the recent attacks by Pakistan supported militant groups in Indian administered Kashmir, Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan claimed that any retaliation from India would impact the Afghan peace process significantly, risking squandering of the peace efforts.<sup>23</sup>

### **The India Factor in Pakistan's Foreign and Military Policy Towards Afghanistan**

The Afghan conflict is closely monitored in India, and New Delhi has been investing heavily towards developmental assistance in the country in the post-Taliban era. India as the biggest bilateral donor in the democratization process in the country has advocated for an Afghan-owned, Afghan-led and 'Afghan-controlled' reconciliation process. The current trajectory of U.S.-Taliban peace talks which prioritizes troop withdrawal over a ceasefire agreement has not been well received in India and adds to the anxiety as India would not want the Taliban to revive the Islamic Emirate the group established in the 1990s. Meanwhile, as strategic partners in the subcontinent, the U.S. and India have maintained a close relationship over the years. In his new South Asia Strategy which was announced in 2017, U.S. President, Donald Trump, urged India for additional economic, medical and civic support, referring to India as Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner and largest contributor of development assistance.

22. Panda, Ankit. "Afghanistan rebukes Pakistan ambassador for linking India and Taliban talks." *The Diplomat*, February 21, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/afghanistan-rebukes-pakistan-ambassador-for-linking-india-and-taliban-talks/>

23. Ibid.



India's influence in Afghanistan comes from soft power while remaining non-interventionist. This is manifest in India's signature investments towards constructing the Afghan parliament complex and Salma Dam, and other development projects. Furthermore, India does not benefit from an unsafe and unstable Afghanistan. India, despite not intervening as a major player in the peace process, opposes the return of a fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan for it fears internal insecurity and anti-government insurgency outbreaks in Kashmir. On the other hand, despite India's limited role in the peace process and security matters, Pakistan has repeatedly accused India of using the war-torn country as a base to undermine Pakistan using the government as its proxy.<sup>24</sup> In 2018, Pakistan's former military ruler, General (Retd) Pervez Musharraf, warned that upon the departure of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the country will once again become a battleground for the two nuclear armed neighbors. Additionally, he had previously admitted that while he was in the office, Pakistan's military had used proxy warfare in Afghanistan against India.<sup>25</sup>

### **Pakistan's Role in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group**

The Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) comprised of Afghanistan, Pakistan, US, and China, was formed to revive the peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban to find a political solution to the protracted Afghan conflict. The purpose of the QCG was to bring the "reconcilable" Taliban to the negotiating table with the Afghan government to work towards lasting peace. The four countries pledged their commitments to facilitate an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process with a focus on adopting a clear and realistic assessment of the opportunities for peace and reconciliation. Though six rounds of talks were held under this framework (with the last meeting in October 2017 in Muscat, Oman), the framework hit its first major roadblock when the news that Taliban's founding Chief, Mullah Omar, had been dead since 2013 surfaced in the media, shortly after the round of talks in Murree, Pakistan. The final nail in the coffin for this process was the

24. Riedel, Bruce. "The 3 Wars in Afghanistan." Brookings, August 30, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/08/30/the-3-wars-in-afghanistan/>

25. Kay, Chris. "Pakistan's Musharraf warns of proxy war in Afghanistan if U.S. departs" Bloomberg, October 04, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-04/musharraf-warns-of-proxy-war-in-afghanistan-if-u-s-departs>

killing of the Taliban's new Chief, Mullah Akhtar Mansour (who was formally appointed to the post after the news of Mullah Omar's death became public) in a U.S. drone strike in Balochistan, Pakistan. The Afghan government's invitation to the Taliban's "authoritative" representatives, which sounded like an ultimatum, was not welcomed, and the group refused to hold talks before its principal demands were met. The Taliban's demands included the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan; official recognition of the group's Doha office; the removal of the Taliban members' names from the UN sanctions list; a halt to the "arrest and elimination" of Taliban fighters; the release of Taliban inmates from prisons; and a stop to what they call "anti-Taliban propaganda," including labelling them as "terrorists." The Taliban continued to harden their position, eventually sealing the QCG's fate.

Given its ties with and influence over the Taliban, Pakistan's role in facilitating peace talks in Afghanistan has always been pivotal. Despite the initial apparent effort of bringing the Taliban to the table and facilitating talks under the aegis of the QCG format, Pakistan was not inclined to play a constructive role expected of it. In fact, the death of Mullah Mansour was viewed as having been orchestrated by Pakistan to sabotage the talks. Additionally, excluding India from the talks was also another step by Pakistan in deceitfully maneuvering their strategic interest by keeping India out and limiting its influence in Afghanistan.

### **Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity**

The APAPPS is a bilateral framework between Afghanistan and Pakistan aimed at enhancing cooperation and coordination between the two countries, including reducing hostility and violence by employing working groups on both sides. The framework became operational after the fourth meeting in Kabul attended by Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Tehmina Janjua, and Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, Hekmat Khalil Karzai. It is important to note that this framework is supported by the U.S. and China, based on their shared interest of bringing an end to the conflict in Afghanistan and preventing the country from becoming a haven for terrorist groups.

The effectiveness of the framework is under serious scrutiny in the wake of recent statements from the leaderships in Kabul and Islamabad. In a recent

statement, Afghanistan's President, Ashraf Ghani, said "the undeclared war between Afghanistan and Pakistan must end," and asked for Pakistan's support for facilitating direct talks between Taliban and Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup> In line with what APAPPS has put forward as mechanisms for reinforcing trust and deepening interaction, Ghani stated the two countries must move forward from talking to action. His statement, which argued that there has not been a sense of urgency from Pakistan's Prime Minister, Imran Khan, revealed a sense of continued mistrust that could affect the implementation of the framework.

In the meantime, Afghanistan has been accused of harboring anti-Pakistan militant groups in the recent months.<sup>27</sup> There have been reports of several cross-border attacks carried out by Afghanistan-based terrorists. Pakistan views these attacks as the Afghan government's failure to prevent such incidents and carry out efficient border management. Contrary to what had been deemed constructive in advancing peace talks in Afghanistan, despite the backing of U.S. and China as "overarching authority" influencing regional stakeholders, the APPAPS has failed to deliver on its core objectives even as intensive negotiations between U.S. officials and the Taliban carry on.

## Conclusion

While Afghanistan is often referred to as the "graveyard of empires," Pakistan has been called the "graveyard of U.S. strategies" in Afghanistan. Unless there is a fundamental change in how Pakistan deals with militant groups, no framework will result in lasting peace. Despite demonstrated cooperation and efforts towards peace in Afghanistan by Pakistan, there has been no guarantee of an end to Pakistan's support to militant groups in Afghanistan now or in the future. While the Taliban are currently participating in peace related talks, Pakistan has taken credit for their influence in bringing the group to the negotiating table. However, regardless of where the peace process ends, there is a need for a strategic shift on Pakistan's part towards viewing Afghanistan as an ally, and an independent modern country. As senior Afghan officials have stated on several occasions, Pakistan's "flawed" policy of proxy warfare

26. "Undeclared war" between Afghanistan, Pakistan must end: Ashraf Ghani." *The Economics Times*, November 15, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/undeclared-war-between-afghanistan-pakistan-must-end-ashraf-ghani/articleshow/66630756.cms>

27. F.Z. Khan. "APAPPS and cross-border attacks." *Daily Times*, October 05, 2018. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/306362/apapps-and-cross-border-attacks/>

with regard to Afghanistan must end and Pakistan must tangibly and credibly assure the Afghan government that they will have an independent Afghan policy separate from their enduring rivalry with India. Much like other frameworks in the past such as the QCG, the APAPPS too will fail to deliver on its purpose if Pakistan is not held accountable for its destructive role in the peace process.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- Pakistan's destructive policy towards Afghanistan's security must be countered through building a strong national consensus across all parties on key national interests, priorities and threats to the peace process. In order to move forward towards a common narrative of peace, Afghans must come together to discuss the pre-conditions to the peace talks, power sharing arrangement, and post-agreement implementation mechanisms.
- For the Afghan government to gain leverage in the talks, the Afghan government representatives, opposition groups, women's groups, and educational, religious and cultural institutions must be engaged to form a national level coherent message of what a political settlement with the Taliban would look like. This will also send a message to Pakistan, which has been acting as a spoiler, to alter its policy towards Afghanistan and understand that they must stop granting political legitimacy to the Taliban to counter India in Afghanistan.
- India has always advocated for an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process with the Afghan government present. India was kept out of both the APAPPS and QCG due to Pakistan's maneuvering. The two key instances where India was present were the preliminary consultations in 2017, and during the Moscow talks in November 2018. India has described the latter as "non-official" engagement.
- The current momentum towards a peace deal, brought about via the talks between U.S. and the Taliban is considered unprecedented. Engaging regional countries who have strategic interests in Afghanistan's stability is vital and they should be engaged in an effective manner to ensure stability in exchange for safeguarding their national interests. As mentioned above, engaging China and the U.S. and international authorities is important for oversight of the implementation of any agreement.

- The India-Pakistan contestation and conflict in Kashmir is not only hurting Afghanistan's economy, but also India and Pakistan. This state-of-affairs points to an additional reason to actively engage India and Pakistan in the Afghan reconciliation process. Afghanistan's trade access to India through Pakistan can be negotiated in exchange for Pakistan's access to Central Asia through Afghanistan.