

Working Group 5: South Asian Security

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The South Asian region is going through some serious challenges. The working group gathered to identify these challenges and discuss possible solutions. The discussions were particularly focused on two issues in the region: the challenge of building peace and stability in Afghanistan and India-Pakistan relations.

Building Peace and Stability in Afghanistan

Talks and Reconciliation Process

- Afghanistan remains in turmoil. The complex problems in Afghanistan will need a long-term vision and not ad-hoc policies. A reconciliation process between the Afghan government and the Taliban is a key element in the long-term resolution of the Afghanistan problem.
- The working group was of the consensus view that the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan would have to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. For this, the first step would be direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The group acknowledged that Pugwash has played an important role in trying to facilitate such talks. However, currently, the Afghan government does not want to talk to the Taliban and demands that it give up violence. Powerful lobbies within the government push for status-quo ante.
- There cannot be outright victory for either the Taliban or for the Afghan government party in the Afghanistan situation. This means that the accommodation of the Taliban in the legitimate political processes of Afghanistan appears to be the only viable option. The Taliban could be amenable to working in the lower jirga, however that would mean the loss of power for the current government. Any new arrangement of power-sharing in Afghanistan would have to be broad-based and multiethnic.
- The reconciliation process can be built upon the successes of the Quadrilateral process and the Kabul process.

Mainstreaming the Taliban

- There is a need to distinguish between the political leadership of Taliban and the military forces of Taliban. At the same time, it is important to make a distinction between the Taliban and groups like the Daesh, ISIS and Al Qaida. The Taliban might share ideological roots with the Daesh, including a harsh interpretation of Islam; however the political and geographical objectives of the Taliban are limited to Afghanistan and do not share organisational links with the other groups.
- The two demands of the Taliban – the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and the amendment to the Afghan constitution – are deliverable.

- The four bases of negotiations with the Taliban could include no monopoly of power, observance of human rights, assurances of withdrawal of foreign troops and no extremism in Afghanistan. At the same time, the Taliban will have shown greater flexibility toward negotiations with the Afghan government. These negotiations should be value-based and guarantee-based.
- The mainstreaming of Taliban in Afghanistan’s political process is an important step toward the stability of Afghanistan.

The Role of the US, Pakistan and India

- The United States of America (the US) remains one of the most important extra-regional players in Afghanistan.
- The Trump Administration’s Afghanistan policy, announced in August 2017, puts an end to the uncertainty to what the US would be doing in Afghanistan – politically and militarily. The policy is not radically different from that of the earlier Obama administration and indicates a focus on military operations before going on to political efforts in Afghanistan. This basically means a US strategy of strengthening the Afghan government and sufficiently weakening the Taliban before bringing them to the negotiating table.
- President Trump’s preceding speech was meant primarily for a domestic US audience and indicated that the new administration
- The challenge consists of convincing the US of the urgency of negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The aversion to hold political talks with the Taliban is a serious impediment to peace in the region. This has given an impression to the Afghan citizens that the US might be interested in continuing the war in Afghanistan for its own gains. At the same time, there is concern in the US about the resurgence of the Taliban and the fall of the Afghan government after the withdrawal of its troops.
- Pakistan is also an important player in the peace and stability of Afghanistan. The Pakistan –Afghanistan relations suffers from serious mistrust. This has manifested in many areas of the bilateral relations, including trade and transit restrictions. The sealing of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is not a viable solution to the security problem.
- While improved Pakistan-Afghanistan relations are key, the expectation that Pakistan would be able to bring Taliban to the negotiating table seems unrealistic. The Taliban rejects mediation through Pakistan and wants to talk to the Afghan government directly.
- Moreover, the solution to the Afghan problem and the security in the South Asian region are also closely connected with the improvement and deterioration of the India-Pakistan relations.

India-Pakistan Relations

- The India-Pakistan relations have again come to a stand-still with the breakdown of dialogue between the two countries at an official diplomatic and political level. Although

violence and terrorism are now at low ebb compared to that a decade ago, there are constant cross-border firing on the LOC and the boundary in Jammu.

- It is most important that India and Pakistan should resume a dialogue on a comprehensive range of issues, including Kashmir, terrorism, trade and transit and environmental cooperation; dialogue in one issue area should not be precondited on dialogue in another issue area.
- There should be a general understanding that while dialogue is absolutely vital, it should take place without the backdrop of violence. There is a need to build these norms in the context of South Asia.
- It was pointed out that currently, there is consensus across Pakistan’s political spectrum and the military establishment about the need and urgency to stabilise relations with India and to resume dialogue with India. This could be an important opportunity for India and Pakistan to re-establish a Track I and Track II channels to address their bilateral security issues. At the same time, it is important to note that unlike in Pakistan, in India, the military does not play a significant role in the foreign policy decision-making.
- While acts of terrorism cannot be allowed to impede dialogue, Pakistan should also make demonstrable efforts of cracking down on groups based in Pakistan who carry out acts of terrorism and sabotage in India.
- A number of confidence building measures can be carried between India and Pakistan before resuming negotiations on the Kashmir dispute. Cross-LOC connectivity could be an important area for building confidence. In the past, the Muzaffarabad road connectivity sent a very positive message to the valley. The next step could be to restart discussions on Kashmir, and one suggestion would be to discuss along the four-point formula negotiated earlier between the Indian and Pakistan leaderships.
- India and Pakistan should also process to resolve disputes like the Sir Creek.
- Trade, transit and environment are important potential areas for cooperation between India and Pakistan. The Indus Water Treaty (IWT) is an excellent example of a successful ongoing cooperative agreement and arrangement for water sharing between the two countries. Beyond the IWT, the two countries could look at proceeding on watershed management, glacier monitoring and environment and climate change-related cooperation activities.
- The convergence of interests, the ability of the leadership to take bold decisions to end hostilities and the responsible role of the media are other important factors in for improving and stabilising India-Pakistan relations.