



**Report**  
**IRS Webinar on**  
**'Intra-Afghan Dialogue: Roadblocks and the Way Forward'**  
*by*  
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## **Overview**

On June 25, 2020, Institute of Regional Studies organized a webinar titled 'Intra Afghan Dialogue: Roadblocks and the Way Forward'. The purpose of the webinar was to initiate a debate over the possible outcomes of the recent intra-afghan dialogue in the post-deal scenario.

Recent power sharing deal between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah and the US' support to have a quick solution are believed to be the most striking developments in the peace process. Hopes are high, since Dr. Abdullah Abdullah is leading the negotiation from the Afghan government side. Nevertheless, sporadic outbreaks of violence, role of spoilers, and trust deficit among the stakeholders, are still potential impediments in the way forward.

Main speakers of the Webinar were Mr. Aziz Ahmed Khan, former Ambassador to Afghanistan and High Commissioner to India, and Mr. Imtiaz Gul, a senior security analyst, Executive Director of Center for Research and Security Studies. The discussants were Mr. Amir Rana, a senior security analyst and the columnist and Dr. Salma Malik, Assistant Professor at Quaid e Azam University. The session was moderated by Ambassador Nadeem Riyaz, Acting President of the Institute of Regional Studies.

## **Welcome Notes**

Ambassador Nadeem Riya warmly welcomed all the participants of the maiden webinar of the institute. He especially thanked main speakers; Mr. Aziz Ahmed Khan, and Mr. Imtiaz Gul to deliver a talk on a very important subject, the Intra-Afghan dialogue. Ambassador Riyaz also thanked Dr. Salma Malik, and Mr. Amir Rana, being part of the webinar.

## **The Talks**

Ambassador Riyaz while highlighting the importance of the topic told the audience that peace in Afghanistan is tricky considering the decades-long infighting among the several factions. Recent developments, however, provided a window of opportunity for all the stakeholders to lay foundation of peaceful Afghanistan. After a brief introduction of the theme, Ambassador Riyaz gave floor to main speaker, Amb (ret'd) Aziz Ahmed Khan.

Ambassador Khan began with describing historical background to the recent dialogue process and highlighted Pakistan's untiring commitment for the peace in neighboring country since Taliban's ascendancy back in 90s. Ambassador Khan stressed that today's environment has changed significantly. Taliban appears to have realized their own strength and limitations. The US' resolute on the other hand, to have a quick solution, is indeed a breakthrough. Having said, peace negotiations are not easy as mostly Afghans are tough negotiators, he added. The selection of Dr. Abdullah to lead peace negotiations from the Afghan government side is a positive development as Dr. Abdullah is experienced, and non-controversial entity and acceptable to all factions, Ambassador Khan told. On a prescriptive side, Ambassador Khan emphasized that odds in Pak-Afghan relations need be sidelined and the entire focus should be towards the intra-afghan dialogue process. Islamabad has to play a more active role to have a successful outcome.

Ambassador Riyaz thanked Amb Khan for an enlightening speech on Intra-Afghan dialogue. He gave floor to the second speaker Mr. Imtiaz Gull.

Mr. Gull thanked Ambassador Riyaz for giving him opportunity to talk from IRS platform. He also thanked Amb. Khan for a comprehensive talk and endorsed his views on Dr. Abdullah. Mr. Gull was also of the view that this is indeed an opportunity to clinch a deal as Taliban has also showed seriousness probably because of realizing their strengths and weaknesses. Mr. Gull added that selection of Ambassador Muhammad Sadiq as Pakistan's special envoy at this critical time would greatly help efforts to a successful negotiation as he is experienced diplomat having deep knowledge of bilateral relationships. Amid constructive role of the US and the Islamabad, the future of Intra-Afghan dialogue is bright, he concluded.

Ambassador Riyaz thanked Imtiaz Gul for expressing his thoughts on the subject. One can easily infer from the talks that there is consensus upon Dr. Abdullah' selection as the right person to lead the talks. Ambassador Riyaz after the speeches by Amb Khan and Mr. Gull, opened the floor for discussion and asked Dr. Salma to share her views.

Dr. Salma thanked Ambassador Riyaz to invite her to the interesting webinar. She began with congratulating Ambassador Riyaz on assuming charge of the IRS and wished that the institute may regain its lost prestige under his leadership. She also appreciated IRS team for conducting a successful webinar on the hot topic.

Dr. Salma presented a realistic paradigm while highlighting Pak-Afghan relations. She was of the view that still much more needs to be done to mend ways. Chinese and Indian factors are very important in the Afghanistan question. Islamabad has to guard its interests with the increasing involvement of both China and India in Afghanistan. It would be difficult for Pakistan to manage, if Indian and Chinese' interests converge in the Kabul, she added. Thus, Islamabad need to revamp its bilateral relations with the Afghanistan. Apart from security relationships, Islamabad needs to invest in education and the youth development, for instance, she concluded.

In contrast to Dr. Salma, Ambassador Khan stressed that the focus must not be diverted to the odds and irritants between Islamabad and the Kabul as bilateral relations is a broad subject that involves lot of effort and time. Thus, all the efforts must be towards the success of Intra-Afghan negotiations.

After Dr. Salma's remarks, Mr. Amir Rana started highlighting the role of spoilers in the peace process. Mr. Rana was of the view that all the stakeholders need be cautious about the sporadic outbreaks of violence and spoiler's role in reversing the progress achieved as it has happened in the past many time. Beside, Mr. Rana stressed the importance of parliamentary debate in Pakistan over intra-Afghan dialogue and its implications.

After Mr. Rana's remarks, the questions answered session was held. Mostly questions were related to the future of the Intra-Afghan dialogue and Pakistan's role in brokering a peace deal. The webinar lasted for about 2 hours.