

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE INTRA-AFGHAN DIALOGUE

Thursday 25 June, 2020

Since President Trump would ideally want to be able to send the US troops back home before the November Presidential election in the US, this provides a window of opportunity for the intra-Afghan dialogue. These were the views expressed by the participants of a webinar organized by the Institute of Regional Studies here in Islamabad on Thursday, says a press release.

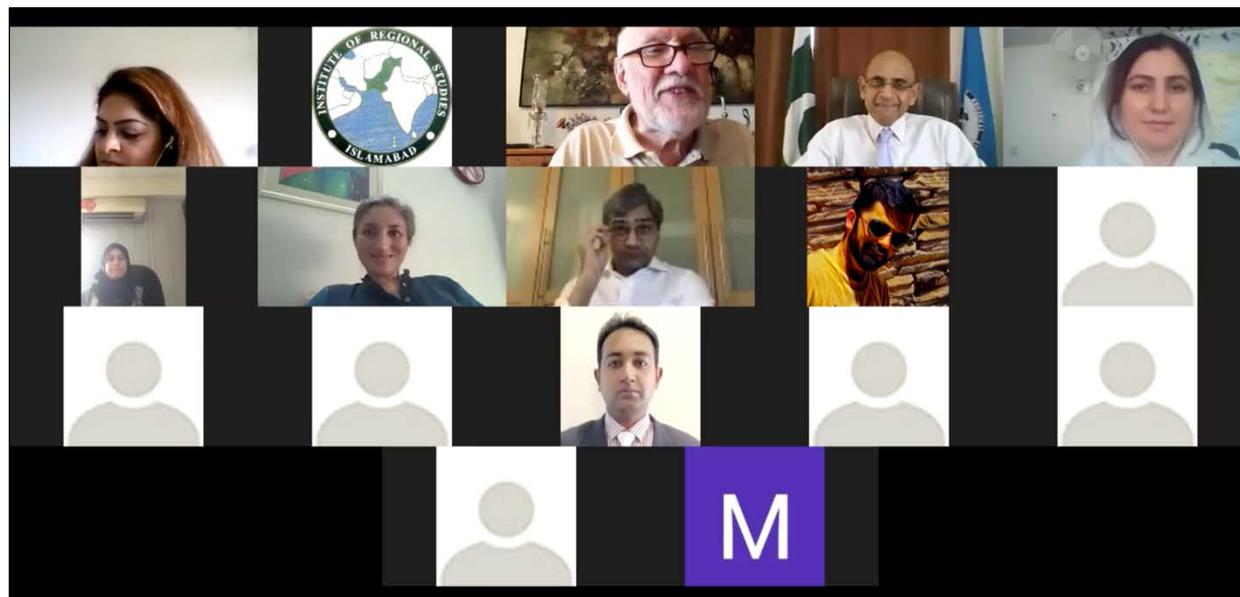
They urged the Taliban and the Afghan government not to miss this opportunity. Speaking on the occasion, senior diplomat Ambassador (r) Aziz Ahmed Khan said that Pakistan had continued to support intra-Afghan dialogue in Afghanistan for a long time, even at the time when Taliban were controlling 90 percent of Afghanistan. Referring to the positive developments after the conclusion of the agreement between the Taliban and the US government, Ambassador Khan said that prisoner swap had already started and that Dr Abdullah Abdullah was the right person to lead the negotiation from the side of the Afghan government. Ambassador Khan forewarned, however, that the peace negotiations could drag on for long because, one, Afghans on all sides were tough negotiators; and two, the Taliban would be under the impression that they have won the war militarily and would not be too amenable to a compromise not to their liking. Therefore, he urged the UN and other relevant stakeholders, including Pakistan, to persistently keep playing their role for the dialogue to succeed.



Senior security analyst Imtiaz Gul was of the view that the time was ripe for clinching a deal because the Taliban ranks were also fatigued because of a long drawn-out war. He urged the Afghan government to seize the moment and conclude a historic peace deal for a bright future of Afghanistan. He also urged the Afghan government to exhibit a greater level of trust toward Pakistan after all the role Pakistan had played in concluding a peace deal between the Taliban and the US and now playing a constructive role in the intra-Afghan

dialogue. He called on the Government of Pakistan to keep the communication lines open with the US and the Taliban. Mr Gul strongly appreciated the decision of the appointment of Ambassador (r) Muhammad Sadiq as Pakistan's special envoy for Afghanistan. Mr Gul was of the view that Ambassador Sadiq had a deep understanding of the multifaceted bilateral socioeconomic connections between Afghanistan and Pakistan, such as the Afghan transit trade, visas, refugees, etc.

Assistant Professor at Quaid-i-Azam University, Dr Salma Malik called for making the Pakistani efforts toward the intra-Afghan dialogue more inclusive by generating a more broad-based debate on the future of Afghanistan and its implications on Pakistan. She also emphasized a more gender-balanced approach toward peacebuilding in Afghanistan and urged for greater participation from all segments of the Afghan society in it. She urged the Government of Pakistan to capitalise on its longstanding brotherly relations with Afghanistan. “The deep historic, people-to-people contacts should not be washed out,” she said.



Senior security analyst and columnist Amir Rana cautioned against spoilers in the way of the peace process in Afghanistan. He urged a parliamentary debate on the intra-Afghan dialogue and its implications for Pakistan. There was a general consensus among the panelists of the webinar that although the US-Taliban agreement had generated a lot of hope for the prospects of peace in Afghanistan, all the concerned stakeholders would need to be cautious as well as persistent in their efforts to make it a success and not let it fall prey to the spoilers. Acting President IRS Ambassador Nadeem Riyaz who was moderating the session, thanked all the participants for their valuable contributions.