**Afghanistan needs Regional Convergence**

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The irresponsible withdrawal of the US and NATO military forces from Afghanistan has created an undeniable necessity for the regional countries to play a key role in strengthening security and stability in the war-torn country.

It has been frustrated by four decades of deadly war, violence, terror and poverty. Now, Afghanistan is experiencing a historical juncture. Forced to stand at a turning point where the Americans are pulling their troops. But without any tangible efforts for the Afghans’ safety and security.

Concurrent with the military retreat, the government in Kabul has remained weak in dealing with insecurity. While it has no control of its own country, the Taliban is taking the reins of most parts of Afghan soil.

In such a difficult situation, the only factor that can save the country and its people is the convergence by neighbouring states by taking joint decisions and pursuing constructive initiatives.

Obviously, neighbouring countries would profit the most from the security and stability in Kabul. Therefore, regional players should naturally think of their neighbour’s security. A safe, secure and stable Afghanistan is what its neighbours and all regional players are looking for.

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States, including China, Pakistan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Iran, have common interests in seeing the country safe and secure. Now that the US and NATO are pulling out of the territory, they can increase collaborations and try to restore peace and security in Afghanistan.

China and Russia are quite worried about the recent developments in Afghanistan as they are well aware of how insecurity in one country can affect the stability of the whole region. Moscow has even asked the Taliban to prevent any threats against neighbouring states.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov recently warned of the risk of the violence in Afghanistan spilling over into neighbouring countries.

“The threat of such a scenario remains a serious obstacle to the involvement of Afghanistan in regional cooperation,” Lavrov said at a high-level international conference in Tashkent on Friday; adding that the situation in Afghanistan had been “rapidly degrading” in the last few days.

Moscow is well aware that any spillover of violence into Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan would, sooner or later, have negative impacts on Russia.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met his Afghan counterpart, Mohammed Haneef Atmar, in Dushanbe to note how the hasty drawdown of the US and NATO had escalated tensions and wars in Afghanistan; bringing the Afghan issue to crossroads. Holding an “Afghan-led and Afghan-owned” principle, China was said to support the building of an inclusive political structure in Afghanistan through dialogue and negotiations. The foreign minister claimed to support Afghanistan to stand as an independent and neutral nation observing moderate Muslim policies, its battle against all forms of terrorism and its co-existence with all its neighbours.

Yi said that the pressing task at present remained to prevent civil wars and resume negotiations within the Afghans; to work out solutions for political reconciliation and, in particular, prevent any terrorist forces from invading Afghanistan.

Both Pakistan and Iran have long borderlines with Afghanistan. Each hosts over three million Afghan refugees and would, undoubtedly, be affected the most by any deterioration of tension in the war-stricken country. Afghanistan is a great trade partner for both Pakistan and Iran. Thus, a more stable and secure Afghanistan would definitely be more beneficial for both countries.

Tehran and Islamabad are both worried about the spillover of violence and terrorism to their soils, as the war-torn country could potentially be a safe haven for ISIS terrorists.

On the other side, Iran and Pakistan, with over six million registered and unregistered Afghan refugees, have their own economic challenges and a grave joblessness problem. A new flow of refugees could burden them far beyond their capacities. The Afghan safety predicament would not impact these two countries alone. Rather the peace of the whole region is at stake here.

The current situation should be considered as a warning call for China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran. Creating a multilateral initiative for a better future and a more secure region remains the only way out.

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