**Engage Afghanista**

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Afghanistan is facing a humanitarian crisis. More than 28 million Afghans are now in need of humanitarian aid, of whom more than half are women and children. Sanctions by the US and EU have further hampered the delivery of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. Taliban authorities have called Washington to return US$ 3.5 billion belonging to Afghanistan’s Central Bank. In 2021, the US took control of the assets after the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan. A group of Afghan families who years earlier sued the Taliban for their losses and won have since moved to seize the funds to pay off the judgment debt. According to Judge George Daniels of the Southern District of New York, the federal courts lack the jurisdiction to seize the funds from Afghanistan’s Central Bank. The Taliban, not the former Islamic Republic of Afghanistan or the Afghan people, must pay for the Taliban’s liability in the 9/11 attacks. Daniels also said he was “constitutionally restrained” from awarding the assets to the families because it would effectively mean recognizing the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has been plunged into an economic catastrophe. For many years, the Afghan government relied on aid from foreign countries. Following the Taliban’s takeover, several of the countries have discontinued the aid. The US has donated more than US$ 1.1 billion since the Taliban formed the government. However, the contribution is far less than Afghanistan’s humanitarian requirements. Due to the fragile economy, the Afghan government is struggling to address the needs of its people. Diplomatically, the Afghan government is facing recognition challenges. Many Western countries, including the US, have closed down the diplomatic offices in Afghanistan. They have refused to recognize and establish diplomatic ties with the Afghan Taliban government. The United Nations General Assembly has indefinitely postponed a vote on who can represent Afghanistan at the UN. The reasons cited for sanctions, frozen assets, and refusal of recognition by the US and the Western nations are the Afghan government’s extremist policies towards women’s rights. It is very right that Islam encourages women to get educated and putting restrictions on female education is opposed to Islamic teachings. However, the solution is not to isolate Afghanistan. In this way, the isolation will provide room for other extremist elements to step in and exploit the situation to their advantage. Meanwhile, when the West criticizes the Afghan government for women’s rights, why is it so that the ongoing atrocities in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) are not being criticized? Why is India not being questioned or isolated for the inhumane policies in IIOJK? Probably, because India is a strategic ally of the US and a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) that places the South Asian hegemon on a higher pedestal.

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Despite having no recognition from the international community, the Afghan government has been able to make inroads diplomatically. Afghan diplomats are serving in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, China, Qatar, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia. Taliban officials have visited Norway, Qatar, Turkey and UAE. Taliban have negotiated an agreement with Dubai to have an Emirati corporation manage the country’s airports. Taliban seek to end their global isolation as they are engaging with Central Asia and across the Middle East. On enhancing engagement with Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has very rightly stated:

“It is an extremely complicated situation we can’t wash our hands and turn our backs on Afghanistan it is time to create consensus and not a fanciful utopian consensus but a consensus based on the realities of Afghanistan. Continue their humanitarian aid, open up their banking channels, unfreeze their funds so their economy can function.”

It is critical that the world community creates a consensus and up-scales its efforts to reach out to the Afghan people on an urgent basis to help address the humanitarian crisis and stabilize the economy. The international community, in particular, the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan should extend their efforts in support of the fraternal Afghan people for a stable Afghanistan as it is essential for regional peace and security.

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