**In the Name of Peace, Prosperity and Progress**

[Dr Shabnam Gul Wazir](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/dr-shabnam-gul-wazir/)

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On Thursday, July 8, President Joe Bidden clarified his narrative on the US troops’ withdrawal from Afghanistan and said, “I will not send another generation of Americans to war in Afghanistan with no reasonable expectation of achieving a different outcome. We did not go to Afghanistan to nation-build.”

The UN is concerned that the withdrawal will cause “more suffering,” while Former President George W Bush calls the move “a mistake.”

President Bidden concluded his speech as he termed the War on Terror “unwinnable.”

The United States of America has left Afghanistan in a state of war, Pakistan in a tough predicament, and the world in a state of utter confusion.

The ongoing Afghan saga is a painful reminder of Prime Minister Imran Khan’s proclamations from 20 years ago when he had publicly discouraged the US decision to wage war and Pakistan’s decision to join it. Now, the world has joined Imran Khan’s narrative and supports his political wisdom, especially about resolving the Afghanistan and Taliban scenario peacefully and through comprehensive political dialogue.

Once again, the premier has publicly voiced his concerns over the current situation in a series of statements and urged the global and regional powers to address the situation seriously. As Afghanistan is pushed to the edge of another civil war and its economy halted, regional peace and prosperity have become of utmost concern.

I believe that every citizen of Pakistan must be acquainted with a truthful picture of the current situation. Our media and political think tanks must stand behind the leadership and unanimously support Afghanistan’s peace for a stable Central and South Asia.

We must attempt to demystify this utter state of confusion, and ponder over what must be done to achieve regional stability.

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Central and South Asian regions are beginning to realise their true potential as the intricate net of commerce and trade begins to widen and strengthen. According to the World Bank, East Asia’s GDP is increasing and expected to grow to 7.3 percent by the end of 2021 and 5.1 per cent in 2022. Also, as China and Russia increase their bilateral relations, leaders in the neighbouring countries begin to appreciate the true trading potential in the region and explore more common grounds for trading.

Pakistan has achieved the right blend of leadership, strategy, and geo-economic policies in over 70 years and is on a high trajectory with optimistic numbers. The country is also host to over three million Afghan refugees and has been badly scarred both by the false Indian and Afghanistan accusations of terrorism and by suffering financial and human losses. However, presently, Pakistan is at the heart of Chinese investment with billion-dollar projects like CPEC and BRI and is expanding its regional trading potential. We are also focused on creating the right synergies within the region to support our economy with ventures such as Pak-Afghan and Uzbekistan railway project, CASA-1000 Project, improving relations with Russia and 35 per cent increase in exports to China. The thought of turmoil in Afghanistan is spine-chilling.

At the same time, Indian influence in Afghanistan is a well-known fact. They seem to be losing leverage and its $3 billion investment in the face of rising Taliban control. India has invested in over 400 projects across Afghanistan and the trade between the two stood at $1 billion in 2020. India constructed even the $90 million parliament building – so while Indian thinktanks contemplate a scenario that works in their favour; logic would prefer a peaceful resolution to the Afghanistan and Taliban differences. But you never know with India. It might just resort to a more cynical solution driven by its RSS ideology.

On a macro level, the strengthening quad between the US, India, Australia and Japan means that India is officially part of the “Team USA,” leaving Russia to forge its troika with China and Pakistan – not too bad for the region, one would argue.

However, things are not as simple as they seem. Time and again, India has proven to be an unstable trading partner and is driven by its pure hatred for Pakistan. Also, the Taliban may not be as easily swayed for a peaceful resolution. Like the Prime Minister rightly pointed, the right time to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table was when there were 150,000 American soldiers on Afghan soil. The task has become magnanimous, especially when the Taliban “are sensing victory.” Apart from this, the Anti-China campaign by the US and its allies is the start of a cold economic war brewing against China and its strategic allies – and Pakistan is caught right in the middle of it.

A more effective way of introducing stable regional peace is by developing a Central & South Asian Economic Unit. Like I said, the trade and commerce relations are weaved into an intricate net of economic affairs, the Economic unit would ensure to safeguard the geo-economic interest of each member country. Similar to the European Union, this could also lead to multi-lateral trading relations, economic progress, technology transfer, knowledge-sharing platform between businesses, better integrated financial markets, promote democracy and most importantly, regional peace and prosperity

Ever since taking office in 2019, PM Khan has made efforts towards regional peace and prosperity. However, the responsibility does not only fall on Pakistan’s shoulders. Regional leaders like China and Russia must share this burden and take every step to safeguard their economic interests in the region. The Afghanistan turmoil is bad news for Central and South Asian countries and potentially a threat for the entire world in the larger picture as it threatens the geopolitical landscape and jeopardizes economic ties.

As Imran Khan leads the way through this challenging situation, the Asian leaders must come together in the name of peace, prosperity, and progress.

*The writer heads the IR Department at Lahore College for Women University. She can be reached at shabnam.gul@lcwu.edu.pk. She tweets @Dr.ShabnamGulWazir*