**The Strategic imperative of Sustainable Peace in Afghanistan**

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The long awaited maiden visit by Prime Minister Imran Khan to Afghanistan is significant in terms of timing and outcome. In the past two years Pakistan played the role of an &quot;Strategic Facilitator&quot; in bringing rapprochement between Taliban and The U.S .The Taliban ; Once termed as terrorists and a threat to international peace in general and to the peace and stability of Afghanistan have emerged as legitimate interlocutors and major stakeholders in the future dispensation in Afghanistan . While Taliban’s Diplomatic trench was located in Qatar; from where they launched their diplomatic campaign; nonetheless it is recognized by all stakeholders that without the strategic diplomatic support of Pakistan the US – Taliban dialogue was almost impossible The cardinal positive role played by Pakistan in the current Afghan peace process has been acknowledged not only by the US ,but the world at large .

The premier &#39;s visit was also significant in terms of optics as well as content. The Prime Minister was accompanied by his civilian setup which included his Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Mr Mohammad Sadiq the former Ambassador to Afghanistan and now special envoy of the PM on Afghanistan . PM Imran Khan was not overshadowed by some big Military Brass as was the practice in the past . In terms of the content the two countries jointly issued a document titled &#39;Shared vision between Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and Islamic Republic of Pakistan to support peace and stability in both countries and the wider region.&#39; As per the document the two sides affirmed that both countries &quot;should look towards a future relationship built on trust, aiming to achieve tangible outcomes from that relationship&quot;.

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Some of the core elements of the shared vision that officials agreed for Afghanistan and Pakistan include:

● That Afghanistan and Pakistan should enjoy a &quot;special relationship&quot; founded on predictability, transparency, mutual and full respect for one another&#39;s sovereignty, and on expanding and furthering their mutual interests through state-to-state mechanisms.

● That Afghanistan&#39;s posture of &quot;multi-alignment&quot; with other countries, pursuing a number of friendly relationships, &quot;presents a real opportunity for the two countries to exploit and conversely presents no threat&quot;.

● That neither country&#39;s territory should be used for &quot;malicious purposes&quot; against the other&#39;s territory, and that both countries should work together to &quot;identify and tackle enemies of peace&quot;.
● That regional connectivity should be broadened and deepened, with an emphasis on trade, free movement of people, goods and services, opening of trade and customs posts, and transport and energy infrastructure development, aiming for regional development dividends greater than what each country might expect to achieve alone

● That a safe, time-bound and dignified return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan would help the two countries address the humanitarian and socio-economic challenges associated with population displacement.

The document issued by the Foreign Office also stated that Afghan and Pakistani representatives agreed that timely progress to meet the &#39;shared vision&#39; would require &quot;close coordination, a structured dialogue, and willingness to take difficult and courageous decisions&quot;.

They agreed to take rapid action on three main strands of activity:

● By December 15, 2020: Re-energising joint intelligence services-led work on analysing, mapping and cooperating against &quot;enemies of peace and those undermining the peace process&quot;.

● By January 1, 2021: A joint proposal for refugees&#39; return; elevating and intensifying treatment of this issue, to the point where credible and progressive action can start to be taken.

● By January 1, 2021: A joint proposal to further regional connectivity, in a way that strengthens both Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as the wider region.

● The joint vision is a very creative document that will require politicalcommitment of all stakeholders in Pakistan . However , there some pitfalls that need to be avoided by the two countries which include. In order to achieve the lofty objectives of the” shared vision” some visible and invisible pitfalls have to be avoided . The two countries should undertake concert steps so that their respective territories do not become safe haven for hostile non-state actors and terrorist outfits. Pakistan will have to engage all Afghan factions and avoid giving an impression of any preferred group/faction. Pakistan will have to make sure that the hostile regional countries especially India,who potentially could play the role of an spoiler are kept under check in Afghanistan . A well calibrated public diplomacy has to be undertaken to neutralize anti Pakistan propaganda by hostile elements within Afghanistan.

The future Sustainable Peace Architecture in Afghanistan has to be development driven and should contain a major international political and economic stake.

Afghanistan should be integrated into China’s OBOR Initiative. Pakistan in collaboration with China should initiate Joint Connectivity projects under OBOR .

Afghanistan and Pakistan are two intertwined brothers and the two will have to survive the vicissitudes of the current history as they have done it in the past. Pakistan in collaboration with Afghanistan and other international stakeholders should embark on a grand global effort of rebuilding the war ravaged country . Investing in Peace in Afghanistan today is indeed an investment in sustainable peace for tomorrow in Afghan , the Region and the world at large.