



Indian Council of World Affairs
Sapru House, Barakhamba Road
New Delhi

ICWA International Seminar
on

'Heart of Asia'

(10-11 November, 2016)

Key Recommendations

Inaugural Session

The Inaugural session addressed by DG, ICWA, Secretary (West) and the Afghan Ambassador to India set the tone for discussions in various sessions of the Seminar. The salient points were:-

- India has consistently matched its professions of friendship and partnership with Afghanistan by undertaking mutually agreed projects and extending other forms of assistance. This is an ongoing and sustained process.
- Security challenges in the region are primarily due to the menace of terrorism. The role of cross border actors in fanning acts of terror by providing secure zone to terrorists cannot be overlooked. Zero tolerance on terror is the policy of the present Government of India.
- To meet the security related challenges in Afghanistan, there is a need for international actors to collaborate. India hopes that the UN Security Council will adopt the comprehensive convention on terrorism, and take action as per its 1267 committee resolution. Afghanistan centric donors conference at Brussels and another one on security related at Warsaw are laudable initiatives.
- In the first meeting of Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process in November 2011 at Istanbul, many measures were adopted but none have been completely implemented at the ground level. One such measure was about non-interference. This was agreed by all members. It is to be ensured that the adopted measures get implemented.
- SAARC and SCO are two major regional groupings in the region which can play a significant role in Afghanistan. The need for regional cooperation to address situation in Afghanistan cannot be over emphasized. In this context, Chabahar

Port and TAPI gas pipeline were mentioned as excellent examples of regional cooperation which will promote connectivity.

- Afghanistan shares India's concern on cross border terrorism supported by a neighboring country. The present government of Afghanistan is also engaged with Pakistan. Pakistan is yet to deliver on its part in "Quadrilateral" initiative. The role of India, China, Russia and others in Afghanistan's development was appreciated.

Session-I: Afghanistan's Development – Role of Heart of Asia Members

The first technical session outlined the objectives of the process and the achievement so far. The participants from six member countries highlighted the need to enhance the dialogue. HOA is one of the richest areas in the world, but the region failed to forge multilateral and bilateral partnerships for economic development, due to lack of political will.

- In the last five years Afghanistan has been more of a means to achieve individual ends of member countries. A common consensus on Afghanistan is still to be achieved. Divergent political and economic capacity of HOA members, role of Non State Actors, International fatigue and regional diversions are some of the weaknesses of the HOA. At the same time, stability in Afghanistan, energy corridors, ongoing Afghan peace process are some of the opportunities that can be put to optimum use.
- China has played a minimal role in Afghanistan, owing to factors such as internal dynamics of China's foreign policy which is more reactive than pro active. Domestic development is China's national priority. For China to play bigger role in the future, integration among the countries of the region is a necessity. China is adjusting its foreign policy and the initiative of the OBOR might be an opportunity to enlarge China's role in Afghanistan.
- Terrorism continues to remain a threat and new threats are emerging with IS. Therefore, there is a need for sustained mutual cooperation.
- Need to have effective partnership if the HOA process has to succeed. Significant progress has been made. However, need to considerably expand the support in terms of connectivity, confidence building and capacity building measures.
- Development of agriculture needs special attention. HoA process has to develop effective partnership to preserve and promote historical economic and cultural linkages, and transportation and regional infrastructure projects which will enhance connectivity and trade in Afghanistan and the region. Afghanistan desires for private sector led economic growth and international investment to explore its virgin markets.
- Setting up of strong regional financial organisations to facilitate development such as IMF and World Bank will have to be explored.

Session-II: Status of CBMs

The second session took stock of the developments and the work that has been done by the CBMs. While outlining historical trade routes, it projected Afghanistan as the cauldron of cultures and trade. The discussion in the session evaluated the characteristics of the Afghan problem which were lack of coherent and effective processes of national reconciliation, growth of terrorist groups, split among the political elite and clashes between ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Russian foreign policy has also drifted and Russia wants to strengthen CSTO to protect Central Asia from destabilisation. The major recommendations from the session were :-

- ISIS (Daesh) is the biggest problem the world is facing today and has further aggravated security situation in Afghanistan. Peace and development are inter-linked. While peace is a pre-condition for development, the two need to grow together as lack of development and employment opportunity and large scale poverty make youth vulnerable to being lured by terrorist and extremist groups.
- Political problems between countries should not bring development cooperation between them in Afghanistan to a halt. India and Pakistan are the main countries in Afghanistan's trade structure, which cannot make significant progress unless both countries work together.
- Various Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) of HoA Process are interconnected. For example, a comprehensive integrated approach is needed for achieving tangible gains in trade in goods and services, investment, regional infrastructure and education.
- In the area of capacity building and educational cooperation and exchanges, one needs to ensure that there is recognition of each others' courses, degrees and educational certificates. In this regard, more opportunities should be explored for cooperation between educational institutions at border for logistical ease.
- Large infrastructure connectivity projects such as trans-national gas pipeline, electricity transmission lines and rail and road networks; and more investment in education and training were identified key sectors.

Session-III: Integrating Afghanistan: Promoting Connectivity

The third session focused primarily on connectivity and recognised that Heart of Asia represents multi-structural process. Realisation of Heart of Asia has led, to a certain extent, to the marginalisation of other regional arrangements like SAARC. There are many opportunities to strengthen local level cross border cooperation, such as between Tajikistan part of Badakshan and the Afghanistan part of Badakshan in sectors such as oil and gas, infrastructure connectivity, education, Healthcare development, harnessing energy, irrigation projects and human capacity building. The recommendations from the session are as follows:-

- Connectivity will not only benefit the development process in Afghanistan but also other countries like China, India, Iran, Pakistan in terms of seamless connectivity.
- There is competition between Gwadar and Chabahar port. Development of Chabahar port, together with already developed India- assisted Zaranj – Delaram road, will help built critical infrastructure connectivity for Afghanistan.
- OBOR is a great regional opportunity. OBOR should also look at East-West connectivity, in addition to North-South.
- Enhanced and coordinated international efforts, local participation, multi-channel development are prerequisites for integrating Afghanistan into the region.
- There is also a need to change the zero-sum mindset and build mutual partnerships and trust for restoring regional identity and cooperation.

Session-IV: Progress on Counter Terrorism Efforts in Afghanistan

In the fourth session, terrorism was recognised as the most important challenge facing Afghanistan. Taliban have expanded their insurgent activities and conducted complex attacks after death of Mullah Omar. They have increased their geographical presence. Present leadership of Taliban does not seem to be interested in the peace process. Afghanistan is central to regional security. Afghanistan is not only fighting for its own national security but also for all “Heart of Asia” countries. Therefore, regional support and contribution is very crucial. The primary recommendations of the session are:-

- There needs to be collective and unified definition of terrorism. The categorization of ‘good Taliban’ and ‘bad Taliban’ must be stopped.
- There is need to adopt a Regional Counter Terrorism Strategy. In this regard, Afghanistan will circulate paper to HoA member countries with a view to get it adopted at the upcoming HoA Ministerial meeting in Amritsar in December 2016.
- Afghan National Security Forces need to be trained in much more robust manner and they should be equipped with modern arms and technology.
- Internal cooperation among the “Heart of Asia” members can be enhanced in terms of posing a counter narrative to ideology of terrorism, sharing intelligence and developing a pool of financial resources.
- In counter terrorism measures, economic approach should not be overlooked because growing poverty, increasing unemployment and dearth of opportunities are equally contributing in rise of ISIS.
- Cutting off and draining the financial and logistical sources of terror groups should be given equal consideration in strategy of fighting terrorism.

Session-V: Promoting Regional Stability

The session saw diverse opinion and debate about the regional security scenario in the regional and how to promote peace and stability. The participants acknowledged that SAARC could have evolved into a major forum but it could not do so because of certain reasons. Instead extra regional powers but got involved in the country's internal and security issues. The multiple vectors and factors have jeopardized the rebuilding process.

- Many countries of the Central Asia support the Afghan led and Afghan owned process. Central Asian countries are keenly active in education and connectivity.
- In the Afghan peace building process, UN should play a more active role. The engagement of neighbouring countries would also defuse the evolving crisis.
- In the counter terrorism process Afghanistan is the weakest point. There is diminishing interest of major powers to assist Afghanistan both economically and militarily. HoA countries should evolve a common definition of terrorism on priority basis.
- Expansion and involvement of SCO in Afghan peace building process might give dividends.

Concluding Session

- Participants did not question the importance of regional approach during the discussions over two days. Moreover, the importance of this approach was underlined. It was noted that sometimes distinct and disparate national interest may have impact on the whole process. Therefore, the Heart of Asia process is significant aimed to set aside our differences and come to a common consensus. The two day discussion at Sapru House was successful in this regard and it discussed two important subjects such as addressing challenges and achieving prosperity.
- Terrorism was recognized as big issue. It was noted that while there may be individual bilateral arrangement for collaboration against terrorism and for intelligence sharing, there is not yet a regional approach. Therefore, the Afghan proposal for the concrete regional counter-terrorism strategy which Afghanistan is expected to present in Amritsar was highlighted. It was suggested that Afghanistan may consider sharing draft of the strategy with the member states of Heart of Asia process in advance to ensure a meaningful discussion at Amritsar.
- The link between economic development and fight against terrorism came out very clearly during the seminar. India's impressive record was noted in this regard. It was highlighted that India has spent more than two billion dollar in

doing agreed projects. Significantly, these are the projects which were implanted as per the wishes of Afghan people and the government rather than the donor's wish.

- The international seminar called for not just Heart of Asia member states but the international community, bodies like European Union, United Nations and International funding agencies to put in more resources into Afghanistan and help stabilize Afghanistan and to ensure that Afghanistan has a democratic future which is not only good for Afghanistan but for all.
- The participants of the seminar agreed that they have common objective of promoting peace, stability, security and democracy in Afghanistan - to which they are all committed.
