

**Report on the International Conference on  
Afghanistan Crisis and Reconstruction:  
Domestic, Regional and International Dimensions**

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India International Centre, New Delhi

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A two-day International Conference on *Afghanistan Crisis and Reconstruction: Domestic, Regional and International Dimensions* (31 January – 1 February 2008) was held at the India International Centre, New Delhi at the initiative of Canadian Studies Programme of the Centre for Canadian, US and Latin American Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University and supported by the Canadian Studies Development Programme (CSDP) of the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute (SICI), New Delhi and the Canadian High Commission. The Conference discussed and debated upon the present gains and future prospects of a democratic multiethnic Afghanistan; the pace and content of the reconstruction process; the geo-strategic value of a democratic Afghanistan in terms of regional security and international peace; and the challenges of religious fundamentalism.

A large number of academics, diplomats, media persons and policy planners from universities and institutes across India, Canada, Pakistan, Afghanistan, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia and other countries were present at the Conference. We are grateful to Mr. Jean Labrie for sending his representative Ms. Caroline Laplante of Foreign Affairs Canada, for not only registering their support but also encouraging the Canadian Studies Programme. The Canadian High Commissioner, H.E. Dr. David Malone played a prominent role giving the inaugural address, chairing sessions and actively participating in the discussions. H.E. Mr. Arif Lalani, Canadian Ambassador to Kabul presented one of the keynote addresses. Among diplomats from the various embassies in India were Dr. Ahmed Salem Al-Wahishi, Ambassador, Arab League; H. E. Ms. Ebyan Mahamed Salah the Ambassador of the Embassy of Somalia; Mr. Sayed A.N. Yousof from the Embassy of Afghanistan; Mr. Abdel Khaliq Al Zamli the First Secretary of the Embassy of Palestine; Mr. Guillaume Bazard from Embassy of France; the military attaché to the Pakistan High Commissioner in Delhi and representatives from the German Embassy. Also present were representatives from non-governmental organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

A number of universities outside and within India were also represented. Mention may be made of a few universities such as University of Sindh, Bahauddin Zakriya University, Multan, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad in Pakistan; Monash and Deakin University in Australia; School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; University of Waterloo and University of

Montreal in Canada; Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Institute of Defence Studies Analysis, Indian Institute of Public Administration, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Delhi University in Delhi; Hyderabad Central University, Kurukshetra University, Haryana and Jadavpur University in Kolkata.

The Inaugural Session of the Conference held on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January commenced with the welcoming remarks made by Prof. Abdul Nafey, Chairperson, Centre for Canadian, US and Latin American Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He underlined that the present Conference was the third international conference held under the aegis of the Canadian Studies Programme of Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Delivering the Chairman's address, Shri T.C.A. Raghavan, Joint Secretary (PAI), Ministry of External Affairs, India, set the pace for the two day long scholarly discussions and debate on crisis and reconstruction in Afghanistan. In his address, Shri Raghavan argued for a greater international commitment and understanding of the events in Afghanistan. His presentation provided a brief overview of India's reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, highlighting the obstacles that thwart the reconstruction process. The most crucial reason according to him, was the absence of a direct travel route between India and Afghanistan as transit through Pakistan is not permitted. He argued that success in Afghanistan was not possible with a troubled border in Pakistan. Further, he argued that the role of Iran is critical to the entire international effort in Afghanistan and underscored the need for regional cooperation in mitigating the human disaster in Afghanistan.

H.E. David Malone, High Commissioner for Canada in India, in his insightful presentation, talked about the lack of comprehensive international media coverage on Afghanistan. He pointed out that attention had only been focused on the casualty counts and not on the various positive developments taking place in the country. Reminding everyone present not to lose sight of the positive developments such as return of many refugees to Afghanistan (mostly from Pakistan), the political experiments of electoral governance under way, and the recognition of President Hamid Karzai as the leader in most of Afghanistan, he argued that Afghanistan remains a united country. Talking about Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, H.E. Malone argued that it was the 9/11 event that brought about a desire in Canada, a country that had so far confined itself to multilateral diplomacy and limited economic relations with Afghanistan, to join in responding to that attack. He talked about the deep political similarities between Canada and India and the mutual understanding shared by both the countries in peacekeeping undertakings of the UN. He pointed out that it is for the first time, India with its own programme of reconstruction and Canada are working together. In fact, India, for the first time, is actively involved in something that NATO is involved in. He, however, stated that success in Afghanistan would not be a reality if one fails to take into account Afghan aspirations. Thus, strategies have to be tailored accordingly. Terming the Afghan neighbourhood as a "shifting range of geo-strategic power", H.E. Malone argued that the significance of the role of neighbours like China and Russia should not be undermined. Further, focusing on the ongoing debate in Canada on the issue of involvement in Afghanistan, he argued that it is new to Canada to send an expeditionary force to a country so far away and experience such a large number of casualties. He maintained that democracy is about political debate on such issues.

Prof. A. S. Narang, Vice President of the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute made the felicitation remarks and Prof. Christopher S. Raj, Centre for Canadian, US and Latin American Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi gave the vote of thanks.

The second half of the Inaugural Session was chaired by Ambassador Rajagopalan. Two brilliant presentations were made by Prof. D. Gopal, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi and Prof. Kalim Bahadur, School of International Studies, JNU on the issue of crisis and reconstruction in Afghanistan. Highlighting the challenges to nation building in Afghanistan, Prof. Gopal argued that there has only been a moderate progress in nation building in Afghanistan and the country continues to remain a site of sustained humanitarian crisis. The Karzai government relied on the political good will of the international community and local community leaders. However, key problems remain: there has been a very slow transfer of real power from the old warlords; in large measure, aid has been relatively slow to arrive into the country leaving many Afghans in poverty, dependent on old clan networks, or else on cultivating opium; non-military aid has been slow to arrive; there have been controversies in the way aid is monitored and spent; and there have been tensions between aid donors and Afghan authorities. Prof. Gopal argued that it would be important to see whether political and peace-time leaders can gradually replace the traditional ‘warlord syndrome’ by a more national and democratic approach to political power. His presentation stressed that Afghanistan is not yet a successful case of international intervention. There are serious lessons to be learnt for further intervention, both military and humanitarian.

Prof. Kalim Bahadur’s presentation focused on the role played by *Jamiat –i-Islami* in Afghan politics. Defining Islamic fundamentalism as a religio-political movement, he talked about the different streams of fundamentalism in different Muslim countries owing to different historical, cultural, religious and political factors though there is commonality of Islamic heritage. He pointed out that as opposed to the common perception, Afghan fundamentalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the result of the influence of the Al Azhar and the Muslim Brothers and not that of Jama’at-i-Islami of Pakistan. His presentation provided a lucid account of the formation and evolution of the *Jamiat-i-Islami* in Afghanistan that gave an account of its internal splits, dissatisfaction with the leadership of Rabbani and sub-regional rivalries in the North. Talking about the new phase of the country’s history, Prof. Bahadur argued that the party is facing new challenges in this new phase. It has to be seen how *Jamiat-i-Islami* under Rabbani faces these new challenges.

The inaugural session was followed by six working or business sessions spread over two days. The first working session (Working Session I) on ‘Domestic Crisis in Afghanistan’ was chaired by Dr. S. Zafar Mahmood, OSD, Prime Minister’s High Level Committee on Inter-Faith, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India. This session saw two interesting presentations: first one focused on the current situation in Afghanistan and the second presentation provided an overview of the challenges to the Afghanistan reconstruction.

In the first presentation on the “Current Situation in Afghanistan”, Lt. Gen R.K. Sawhney, former DGMI, Indian Army, historically traced the current crisis in Afghanistan drawing

immensely from his experience as a soldier of the Indian Army. He argued that there has been a lack of commitment and lack of sincerity by the international community in Afghanistan. He argued that there was lack of harmony between the NATO, the ISAF and the US in Afghanistan and whatever little has been achieved in terms of reconstruction lost its purpose due to the military problem. The key problem in Afghanistan was the presence of 37 countries involved in providing security, each one of them guided by the politics of their own home country. The presentation focused on the need of a regional initiative including Pakistan and Iran to create a particular environment that would be conducive for the development of the country. India, it was argued, wished for a stable Afghanistan, as any adversity in this country would affect India directly. What was required was sustained economic development.

Dr. Faridullah Bezhani, Senior Research Fellow, Monash University, Australia, presenting on the “Challenges of Solutions to the Afghan Crisis”, raised the critical question of what is to be done with Taliban--Fight them or Negotiate with them? He argued that a new kind rhetoric is emerging both on the part of the Afghan government as well as the Taliban whereby the idea of negotiation has been mooted. Karzai publicly supported a dialogue with Taliban to overcome the present deadlock on the country. Dr. Bezhani pointed out that that since Karzai’s political survival is being questioned, if Karzai could negotiate with the Taliban, he might survive. The question of negotiation with the Taliban has also resulted in many alliances and re-alliances within the Northern Alliance. Although negotiations with the Taliban does not appear attractive to the US, the British seem to be supporting the idea. As for the neighbouring Pakistan, since the day Taliban collapsed, Pakistan government has been trying to convince the US to enter into a political settlement with the Taliban. They pushed the idea that the Taliban is a national movement and have been lobbying for the inclusion of moderate Taliban in the Afghan government. Having outlined the varied contours of the crisis, the presentation posed the question as to whether negotiation was a solution or a crisis. It was pointed out that negotiations would not yield the desired results as long as Taliban continue to receive support from Pakistan. The policy of dividing Moderate and Extremist Taliban by the US and Pakistan also has not worked. Moreover, the question of negotiation has brought about deeper gulf between the ruling coalition of Karzai and the Northern Alliance. Most importantly, the presentation brought out that there are huge gaps between the governing coalition parties regarding politics and ideology. And neither Taliban nor the ruling coalition is willing to sacrifice its politics and ideology in which case reaching a political settlement is highly unlikely.

The theme of the second working session (Working Session II) of the inaugural day of the conference was ‘Reconstruction of Afghanistan’. Mr. Shashank, former Foreign Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, India, chaired the session. The first presentation of the session focused on Governance and Process of Reconstruction in Afghanistan where Prof. Guha Roy, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, provided a first hand experience of rebuilding administrative institutions in the country. He argued that the aim of reconstruction in Afghanistan has been three fold: nation building, economic progress and social reconstruction. However, due to multi-pronged challenges, the process of reconstruction has been slow, especially in the economic sector. For achieving these goals in a war ravaged Afghanistan, Prof. Roy argued, there is an urgent need for an efficient and effective administration in a democratic framework. The presentation outlined the various weaknesses of the present state of governance in Afghanistan and gave an overview of the various reform initiatives such as the establishment

of Civil Service Commission, the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) initiative, and the visionary 2004 official document titled *Securing Afghan's Future*, that followed the end of the Taliban regime and the installation of elected governments ushering in a new era of administrative reform initiatives in Afghanistan rejuvenating socio-economic growth. However, he advocated utmost care in striking a balance between tradition and modernity with due regard to the Afghan tradition, culture and geo-political realities.

The next presentation of the session by Ms Mariam Safi, Iranian Researcher at Toronto University and currently a Researcher at Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, focused on the reconstruction of Afghanistan through the application of traditional and contemporary mechanisms of conflict management. The presentation focussed on reconstructing local institutions of self-government (Jirgas) as they cut across ethnic and cultural divisions. It was argued that the Jirgas have the potential to bring together modernity and tradition and could possibly be the instruments that would lend stability to crisis-torn Afghanistan.

Ms. Satbir Silas, Chief Election Officer, Government of Delhi, in her presentation gave a brief overview of ground realities in Afghanistan giving anecdotes from her personal experiences of being a part of a team conducting the elections in Afghanistan. She highlighted the security issues as the most serious challenge faced during the conduct of elections. Other challenges occurred in the form of inadequate infrastructural support and lack of basic understanding of democracy among Afghans. However, she also pointed out that despite these challenges elections were largely free and fair. People took interest in the elections and there was an overall feeling of joy and hope. She argued that in order to bring about real changes in the country, one has to understand the real aspirations of the people of Afghanistan.

The second day of the conference commenced with Working Session III the central theme of which was the issue of Taliban. The session was chaired by Manohar Singh Batra, former Deputy Director General, All India Radio and a Pushto Scholar. The session included four presentations that approached the Taliban question from four varied perspectives. Ms. Kathy Gannon, Bureau Chief, Associated Press, in her presentation "Afghanistan: Squandered Opportunities (Taliban, Post-Taliban to Present)", argued that the international community had missed successive opportunities to make allies of the Afghans and the reality of Afghanistan today is that the NATO and the US are seen as supporting a government that is weak, incompetent and rife with corruption. She further argued that the squandering of opportunities began with the Bonn Agreement of November 2001 whereby the very people whose relentless killings and greed for power gave rise to the Taliban were appointed to positions of power. This approach of the international community has effectively alienated the Afghans throughout the country. The presentation emphasized that Afghanistan would continue to deteriorate unless strategies are rethought and the international community discovers how to capitalize on opportunities, most of which have already been squandered.

Mr. Mahendra Ved, writer and columnist with the *New Straits Times* (Malaysia), in his presentation focused on India's Afghanistan policy arguing that India's primary interest in

Afghanistan is to further its ties that go back to centuries. In a larger perspective, the presentation outlined two broad interests of India in Afghanistan: containment of conflict in its extended neighbourhood and a stake in the energy resources and trade opportunities in the region. Talking of India's unstinted support to the US-led "war on terror", the presentation pointed out that the reasons for the Indian elite's anxiousness to involve itself in Afghanistan is due to the desire to limit the extension of US geo-political and military influence into what it perceives as its backyard. Providing a brief outline of India's engagement in the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and the challenges faced therein, Mr. Ved in his presentation argued that India needed to decide whether it wants to go deeper into Afghanistan or it wants to remain in the periphery.

Giving a theoretical orientation to the ongoing discourse on Afghanistan, Dr. Rafida Nawaz, Lecturer (Political Science), Higher Education Department, Government of Punjab, Pakistan, in her presentation provided a postmodern reading of Talibanization. The hypothesis of the presentation was that development operates as an arena of cultural contestation and identity construction. Talibanization signifies an underdeveloped 'Other', providing media images of misery, poverty, illiteracy, backwardness. These representations implicitly assume Western standards as the benchmark against which to measure the situation in the third world; perhaps indicating towards a threat for prosperous nations of the world. The aim, as the presentation outlined, is to disentangle the web of rules that first legitimized these ghosts now haunting the civilized world and then declare this dissonant voice (religio-political movement) as illegitimate. Talking of narratives as being at the heart of colonial production of knowledge about strange regions in the world, the presentation pointed out that in case of Afghanistan, narrative told us the story of forces of modernity fighting the darkness of tradition. However, the paper lucidly delineates how Afghanistan, in reality, has been used as a stage for a great game for promoting the vested interests of the great powers. The paper argued that the Afghans are losing faith in the development experts whose job is to reconstruct and rebuild their country; and a failed development paradigm is going to produce a new generation of Taliban that is in the process of being formed.

Dr. Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, Associate Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, in her presentation spoke of the changing dynamics of the relations between the US and the Taliban from "friends to foes". The presentation argued that at the end of the Cold War, Afghanistan was no longer a priority area for the United States, and it welcomed the Taliban victory march in Afghanistan with muted silence. Interestingly, the presentation pointed out, that the US seemed to have been guided by Pakistan's assurance that Taliban would be able to bring the much needed peace and stability in the war-ravaged region. The presentation offered a brief overview of the events running up to 9/11 and argued that the event of 9/11 was responsible for turning the tide with US declaring the 'Global War on Terrorism'. Military action commenced in Afghanistan with Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) primarily targeted at decimating the Taliban-Al Qaeda combine and depriving the Al Qaeda with territorial base for carrying out future attacks. Giving a brief overview of the situation following military action in Afghanistan, the presentation maintained that the US policy towards Afghanistan appears to be floundering as witnessed by its inability to quell the raging insurgency wrecking the country. Predominance of conventional approach of troop surge, and 'clear and sweep' operations, the presentation pointed

out, proves to be counter productive resulting in collateral damage, hurting the cultural sensitivities and thereby alienating or tipping off popular support. Further, the presentation underlined the need for the US policy makers to realize the importance of regional effort through increased trade and economic linkages and joint political and security endeavours in South Asia in order to reach a lasting solution to the crisis in Afghanistan.

The theme of the fourth working session (Working Session IV) of the conference focused on 'Canada's Role in Afghanistan'. The Session was chaired by Prof. Abdul Nafey, Chairperson, Centre for Canadian, US and Latin American Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. The session commenced with an insightful presentation by Prof. Andrew Cooper, University of Waterloo, focusing on the varied contours of the ongoing debate in Canada on its foreign policy, most specifically in relation to Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. A sub-set of the first debate, that Prof. Cooper underlined, was regarding the questions – "Who should Canada be with?" and "Should Canada disentangle itself from Afghanistan?" The issue of engagement in Afghanistan has perhaps launched the strongest domestic debate in Canada regarding the country's foreign policy. The presentation further highlighted the positions of the various political parties and ideological concerns on the issue of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. However, it was pointed out that due to the massive sacrifices made by Canada both in terms of blood and capital, Canada, all of a sudden, had for the first time in decades, found itself enjoying enhanced credibility in foreign policy. This was very much an unanticipated activity of the Canadian foreign policy and the presentation argued that whether it's an aberration in terms of foreign policy or a turning point needed to be examined closely.

Dr. Gerald Schmitz, Principal Analyst, International Affairs, Parliamentary Information and Research Service and Research Director, House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, Ottawa, Canada, in his comprehensive presentation examined the state of debates over Canada's engagement in Afghanistan in its historical and international context. Having outlined the context, the presentation went on to provide a brief overview of the three phases of Canadian involvement in Afghanistan, from secondary to primary foreign policy goals. The three phases were outlined as: first, the post 9/11 years, 2001-2004; secondly, the shift to Kandahar and Canada at War, 2005-2006; and thirdly, Afghanistan in the Headlines, 2006-2007. Talking of the way ahead, the presentation discussed in detail the *Report of the Prime Minister's Independent Advisory Panel in Afghanistan* and *The Preliminary Report on Afghanistan of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development*.

Dr. Rukhsana Qambar, Quaid-i-Azam University and Amjid Quamber, in their presentation throwing light on another aspect of Canadian engagement in Afghanistan, focused on the role of Canadian Mounties in providing safe transit through roads that plays a significant role in enhancing transit trade. The presentation through the use of maps brought out the importance of safe roadways and argued that Canadian Forces (ISAP) had a huge role to play in it. Providing Kandahar as an instance, it has been brought forth that the unlike what is perceived normally, Kandahar is a peaceful province and in fact road movement and life is safe. Although nighttime

travel is not recommended, life is as normal as it was before the Soviet invasion. This, the paper argued, is a huge achievement for the Canadian forces.

Dr. Marc Andre Boivin, Deputy Director, Peace Operations Research Network, International Studies Centre, University of Montreal, in his presentation on “Canada and Afghanistan: The Accidental Renewal of Canada’s Outlook on International Intervention in Crisis Areas”, argued that Canada’s foreign policy today has come to be dominated by its intervention in Afghanistan. The paper put forth the view that although currently a major political debate about Canada’s engagement in Afghanistan has been launched, as long as casualties were limited, Afghanistan was not a significant issue in the Canadian debate. The presentation further argued that beyond the rhetoric, the primary Canadian objective in Afghanistan is commercial. Canadian intervention in Afghanistan, Dr. Boivin pointed out, also reaffirms the absolute centrality of Canadian relations with the US. It was also argued that in case of Afghanistan, short-term policy orientation was prioritized over long-term goals. The presentation raised the question of what a return of Canada on the world scene imply?

The Session was followed by a keynote address by H.E. Arif Lalani, Ambassador for Canada in Kabul. Talking of Afghanistan as Canada’s largest military operation since the Korean War, the largest development assistance programme and most intense diplomatic activity, H.E. Lalani argued that Canada’s involvement in Afghanistan is a national priority. He further outlined the various challenges that act as stumbling-blocks in Afghanistan such as lack of governance capacity, international community’s own management and coordination inadequacies, lack of strategy, border challenges, and the fact that Afghanistan, due to its history of 30 years of conflict and invasion suffers from extremely low level of development and hence the reconstruction task in hand becomes tougher to handle. However, he urged that the success achieved in Afghanistan so far should not be underestimated. He further highlighted that Canada is responsible for the most successful micro-finance programme in the country, and is the single largest donor to education in the country. He also spoke of the creation of independent Directorate for Local Governance in Afghanistan as a big success story. He argued that in the case of Afghanistan, Canada has taken a tough decision and Canadians are showing tremendous resilience and leadership and a tremendous capacity to continue leading.

This keynote address was followed by the fifth working session of the conference (Working Session V) that was chaired by Prof. Pushpesh Pant, Dean, School of International Studies, JNU. The session included two presentations-- one evaluating the case of NATO’s intervention in Afghanistan and the other examining the Central Asian perception of Afghan crisis and reconstruction. Elucidating the implications of NATO’s intervention in Afghanistan on international relations, Dr. Mohd. Moazzam Ali, University of Hyderabad, in his presentation argued that despite the confidence exuded by the US President George Bush, the ground realities of NATO’s intervention in Afghanistan are extremely grim. Criticizing the role of NATO, the presentation argued that NATO is currently overshadowing the UN, which is being sidetracked, ignored and forced to follow the US and do NATO’s bidding. This kind of a development, he pointed out, had adversely affected the international relations and even the tenuous basis on which international relations run have been seriously undermined.



Focussing on the regional dimensions to the crisis in Afghanistan, Senior Fellow Mr. P. Stobdan, Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, in his presentation discussed the way the Afghan crisis is perceived by Central Asia and the implications it has for the region. The presentation argued that the Afghan conflict encouraged a trend among the Central Asian countries to diversify their security ties and orientations away from their traditional security guarantor, Russia, offering military base and facilities to the US to fight against terrorism and promote stability in Afghanistan. The presentation further brings forth the way Russia and China are attempting at changing the scenario through the platform of SCO and the counter-measures launched by the US under its “transformational diplomacy” thus underlining the need to view the Afghan situation not in isolation from the larger regional dynamics.

The afternoon session started with a keynote address by H.E. Ahmed Salem Al- Wahishi, Ambassador, Arab League, New Delhi. His presentation was a well-documented piece on the phenomenon of terrorism and the international coalition against terrorism. The first part of the presentation gave a detailed account of the various international as well as some regional legal instruments for fighting terrorism such as Convention against Taking Hostages, Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and others. The second part of the presentation brought forth the cultural and social aspects of international terrorism and argued for building mutual understanding between different parts of the world so as to avoid the clash of civilizations.

The final working session of the conference (Working Session V), chaired by Prof Andrew Cooper, University of Waterloo, focused on the International Dimensions of the Crisis in Afghanistan. Prof. Pushpesh Pant, Dean, School of International Studies (SIS), JNU, in his presentation argued that Afghanistan has become a stage for big powers to play their own power games. Prof. R.S. Yadav, Political Science, Kurukshetra University, on the other hand, focused on the Russian perspective of the Afghan crisis and argued that no lasting solution to the crisis would be possible without involving Russia. He further elucidated that Russia’s interests in Central Asia and CIS states are also going to be influenced by the developments in Afghanistan. Highlighting the Chinese perception of the Afghan crisis and reconstruction, Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli, SIS, JNU, in his presentation argued that China’s goal posts have changed over a period of time in this area from a relatively less, even though positive, contact in the formative stages of bilateral relations to an active role in Afghanistan recently; from replacing Soviet/Russian influence in the region to replacing US influence. He argued that the recent Chinese bilateral political, diplomatic, economic and military contacts with Afghanistan points to the fact that China has been exploring “strategic opportunities” in Afghanistan. Prof. Shirin Akiner, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London, underlining the policy dilemmas of ISAF questioned the use of the term ‘reconstruction’ and argued that owing to history of conflict and invasion, what Afghanistan requires is ‘construction’. She urged for the need to launch a dual project of state building, i.e., establishment of institutions of governance and nation building and establishment of cohesive national identity. Talking of the alienation of the middle class, growing drug addiction among women and children, the blurring of distinction

between aid and debt, she spoke of Afghanistan as leading the life in a zoo where it is being taken care of by the donor countries, however, whether the country would ever be ready to return to its natural habitat is the question that looms large. Throwing light on the widening rift between the US and its EU partners on the issue of approaches to peace in Afghanistan, Prof. Partha Pratim Basu, Jadavpur University, in his presentation identified the areas of divergence and explored the factors underlying this widening chasm examining its implications for the Afghanistan imbroglio as well as for India's policy making community. Speaking from her experience in Afghanistan, as a South Asia Correspondent, Initiative Freie Presse (IFP) Ms. Britta Peterson of Germany, in her insightful presentation described the efforts undertaken by various international organizations to train journalists and to build Afghan media despite the challenges involved. The session ended on a hopeful note as Ms Peterson highlighted the enthusiasm and dedication with which the Afghans are responding to such efforts and the fact that a number of women radio stations are also in operation show that a change, albeit slow, is in the offing.

Each session of the conference was followed by a discussion (Q&A) that saw ideas being freely exchanged and elaborated upon. Such sessions helped in clearing the doubts and opening up the mind towards varied perspectives on the Afghan crisis and reconstruction and the enthusiastic participation of all in the debates and discussion bore testimony to the fact that the conference succeeded in its purpose of providing a platform for evaluating an issue that holds not only domestic or regional but also tremendous international significance.