

# BEYOND BOUNDARIES V

ENGAGING RELIGIOUS AND TRIBAL LEADERS  
ON REGIONAL STABILITY AND BILATERAL  
COOPERATION

(May 2022 - March 2023)



**Center for  
Research &  
Security  
Studies**

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*Rule of Law - Security - Governance*



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(May 2022 - March 2023)

An initiative of the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) and  
the Organization for Economic Studies and Peace (OESP)



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Preface.....	3
2. Engagement with Religious and Tribal Stakeholders .....	5
3. Outreach and Constituency .....	8
4. Challenges.....	13
5. Summaries and Recommendations of Dialogues .....	14
I) 1st Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference .....	14
II) 1st Learning Workshop (on 1st Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference).....	17
III) 2nd Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference .....	18
IV) 2nd Learning Workshop (on 2nd Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference).....	21
V) 1st Pak-Afghan Tribal Stakeholders Dialogue - Peshawar.....	24
VI) 2nd Pak-Afghan Tribal Stakeholders Dialogue – Quetta .....	26
VII) Pak-Afghan Stakeholders Dialogue on Regional Stability and Economic Connectivity .....	30
6. Way Forward .....	33



## 1. Preface

*Since its inception in 2015, Beyond Boundaries has played a pivotal role in fostering goodwill and cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This pioneering diplomacy initiative brought together an array of key actors, including civil society representatives, political leaders, community figures, government officials, artists, and media personnel from both countries. By facilitating dynamic discourse and policy-making, Beyond Boundaries sought to address crucial regional issues such as peace and stability, cultural exchange, trade, and economic connectivity, youth capacity building, political participation, and women's empowerment.*

*Through a series of engaging meetings and consultations spanning Beyond Boundaries I-IV, the initiative successfully engaged pro-republic and democratic stakeholders from Pakistan and Afghanistan. These sessions aimed to tackle bilateral acrimony, de-escalate heightened tensions, and explore collaborative opportunities between the neighboring nations. Critical subjects, ranging from peace and stability to civic activism, cross-border security, democratic reforms, women's political participation, youth empowerment, and bilateral trade and economy, formed the core of the extensive discussions. The valuable discourse and recommendations that emanated from these iterations not only informed but also shaped pivotal policy reforms in the region.*

*However, with the changing political environment in Afghanistan, Beyond Boundaries had to adapt to ensure that communication channels remained open and conducive.*

*On August 15, 2021, Afghanistan saw an apparent peaceful transfer of power. Since then, the country has been going through a worrying, unstable political, humanitarian, and socioeconomic crisis. A stable and prosperous Afghanistan was certainly not guaranteed after the US and its allies withdrew from the country. The realities on the ground are distinct and abrasive. The magnitude of Afghanistan's issues hasn't changed much; if anything, they've gotten bigger. Present-day Afghanistan is under international sanctions. Though improving gradually, its economy is still unsustainable, and the populace is crestfallen due to a lack of livelihood opportunities and the government's stringent measures. Girls' education and women's rights remain key concerns for the Afghan population and international community and are the major impediments to the Taliban's recognition. The de facto group has repeatedly said it is not against either of the two fundamental rights.*

The Center, in this regard, deemed it essential to identify and engage with stakeholders across the border who could work in synergy with their Pakistani counterparts and advocate the Taliban administration on the persisting issues and challenges concerning the region, subsequently paving way for the amelioration of its political and social landscape. As part of *Beyond Boundaries V*, CRSS remained engaged with relevant stakeholders, namely religious scholars and tribal leaders, and chieftains, to discuss and offer solutions to crucial bilateral issues of peace and security, governance, trade and economic connectivity, and human rights.

## Total Actors Engaged

### Beyond Boundaries I-V





## 2. Engagement with Religious and Tribal Stakeholders

The engagement with tribal and religious stakeholders enabled the Beyond Boundaries implementing entities (CRSS and OESP) to remain updated with the on-ground realities in Afghanistan through targeted and relevant interventions. Since the Taliban takeover of the country, the nature of relevant stakeholders had changed. The Center, through Beyond Boundaries, had to ensure that the extent and seriousness of engagement with track 1.5/II actors remained as substantial as it had been previously - hence, it was imperative that we now speak to those who are the actual plenipotentiaries and influencers to advocate for issues that call for timely and pragmatic measures - girls' education, regional security, trade, and connectivity, economic repatriation of Afghanistan being few of the most crucial and recurrent issues.

Secondly, these dialogues also helped bust certain myths regarding the religious and tribal actors (how they perceive women's rights, girls' education, social development, etc.) as well as establish trust with them so they can work in collaboration with the Center on the project themes as the context allows.

It has also helped us understand the Taliban's stance on bilateral matters. As apparent, the Taliban faces challenges in ensuring peace and security. However, their tenor on Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) seems neither antagonistic nor supportive. But they are open to collaboration on key matters. The iterations, in no way, have advocated for the undue recognition of the de facto authority, but rather helped the relevant and concerned stakeholders understand how the Taliban have evolved for the better in certain areas, i.e., they highly prioritize the economic strength and capital generation while also striving to create a transparent system, monitoring and discouraging corruption.

These engagements are crucial to keeping the door of non-governmental communication channels open, so the non-recognition of the Taliban does not prevent the key actors (Pakistan being one of them) from remaining informed and equipped with the necessary insight and collaborating bodies to address issues that Afghanistan and the region are facing today.

Another noteworthy feature of these dialogues was that they led to the viability of the perception that tribal stakeholders can serve as an impetus to advocating for crucial matters in the border regions and hence need to be involved and capacitated to make the most of their clout in the respective geographies. As tribal leaders on both sides, especially in the Chaman border region,

are more connected with Qandahar, their engagement in the bilateral discourse has become more significant than ever. Among the Taliban, the Qandahar group has been known to have the final say on consequential matters. The international perception is that the major impediment to girls' education is the staunch stance of Qandahar. Hence, close communication with the respective actors may bring affirmative results if they exercise their true potential.

What stands out throughout these iterations is that religious stakeholders from both sides have demonstrated a concrete commitment to bilateral concerns and normalization of girls' education - which is a watershed development as this commitment emanated in the form of a joint statement, also known as fatwa/decreed, that called for the reopening of schools of Afghan girls and bilateral coordination and cooperation in key areas. Other institutions and fraternities also followed the practice and issued similar statements in favor of girls' education and cooperation for peace and security in the region. The most cogent decree, along similar lines, was issued recently (in January 2023) in light of rising militancy and Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP)'s rampant terror attacks. The 14-page document was signed by 16 religious scholars, including Maulana Tayyab Qureshi, and Maulana Salmanul Haq Haqqani, who also contributed vitally to the CRSS-held religious scholars' conferences and came up with prudent recommendations. Mr. Qureshi was also one of the signatories of the joint statement - that emanated as an outcome of the BB dialogues.

پاک افغان دو طرفہ تعلقات کو مضبوط کرنے کے لئے دونوں ممالک کے علماء دین کی  
جانب سے مشترکہ اعلامیہ:

افغانستان میں موجود اقصائی، انسانی اور انتظامی بحران کے تناظر میں پاک-افغان مذہبی برادری نے  
افغانستان میں امن و استحکام کی بحالی اور خطے میں خوشحالی کو یقینی بنانے کے لئے درج ذیل اقدامات کے فوری اطلاق کا  
مطالعہ کیا ہے:

☆ افغانستان کی جانے کے لئے ملک کی معاشی بحالی عالمی برادری کی ترقی دہنی چاہئے۔

☆ افغانستان اور پاکستان کے مذہبی قائدین کا ایک پاک-افغان وقت فرم تشکیل دینا چاہئے جس کے تحت دو  
طرفہ درج ذیل مشکلات اور مواقع کے حوالے سے اسلام آباد اور کابل میں ملاقات اور بات چیت کی جائے۔

☆ مذہبی قائدین اور سربراہان کا مشترکہ قدم لے کر کہ جہز جان، ہرات، مزار شریف اور قندوز میں بچیوں کی پھٹی  
پارہوں میں تعمیرات تکمیل کے لئے سکول کھلوانے کی بات چیت کی جائے۔  
باقی سوشل میڈیا ایئر اور سرگرمی سے بچیوں کی تعلیم کو سہول کے مطابق جاری رکھیں۔

☆ خطے میں اقصائی استحکام کو یقینی بنانے کے لئے دو طرفہ تجارت کو تیز کرنا چاہئے۔ اس ضمن میں دونوں  
اطراف کو کوئی قید و پابندی نہیں لگانے اور پابندیوں کے ذریعے درمیان میں آگئی پورا کرنے چاہئے تاکہ  
مواثق بنانے یا کسی جن سے دونوں ممالک کو اقصائی فوائد حاصل ہوں اور خصوصاً افغانستان کے زبانی  
ذمہ لے کر مضبوط بنایا جائے۔

Signatories Pakistan:

S.No	Name	Designation	Signature
1.	Mufti Noman Naem	Chancellor - Jamia Binoria Karachi	
2.	Mufti Husain Ahmed	Nazim ul Uloom - Wafaq ul Madaris, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	
3.	Molana Tayyab Qureshi	Chief Khateeb, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	
4.	Mufti Shokatullah Haqqani	Spokesperson - Dar ul Uloom Haqqania	
5.	Dr. Faryal Umreen	In charge Dawah Centre for Women, International Islamic University Islamabad	

Signatories Afghanistan:

S.No	Name	Designation	Signature
1.	Mr. Abdul Hakeem Mujahid	Former Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations	
2.	Mr. Abdul Wahid Wahid	Pak-Afghan Analyst on Religious and Political Affairs	
3.	Mufti Shams-ur-Rehman Protan	Chairman of Sharia Board, Afghanistan International Bank (AIB)	
4.	Mr. Raza Khan Serati	Senior Anchorperson, Shamsah TV	

(The Joint Statement)

Beyond Boundaries V emerged as the only platform that first engaged religious stakeholders from both sides to discuss and recommend solutions to bilateral issues post-Taliban takeover. After attending the 1st Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference in May 2022, Dr. Qibla Ayaz, Chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), visited Kabul as part of a high-level delegation led by the Organization for Islamic Countries (OIC). This delegation had a one-point agenda – advocating the Taliban on the reopening of girls’ schools for grades 6-12. As Dr. Ayaz had already attended the BB dialogue on the same agenda, he retained some insights from the dialogue and put forth the collective view (of the religious scholars (from both sides in favor of reopening the schools) to the OIC-led forum.

*“Hear us out”, say the tribal leaders*

Tribal stakeholders expressed worry that their roles and regions have been neglected despite their enormous importance. Throughout the dialogue series, they underpinned the need to be heard vis-a-vis the problems and challenges that have long impeded regional stability and peace.

The Center’s engagement with them also bore momentous results. In February 2023, the border authorities decided to issue special cards to enable hassle-free cross-border travel for those of Pakistani nationality living in border regions of Afghanistan. The cards are meant to facilitate movement from Afghanistan into Pakistan. This came as a piece of auspicious news since during the Center’s recent series of engagements between January and February with tribal stakeholders from the Pak-Afghan border regions, the dialogue participants – besides underscoring core governance and socioeconomic concerns – echoed the demand for ‘special cards’ to facilitate their cross-border movement and revision of the easement rights.

Another highlight on the sidelines is CRSS Executive Director, Mr. Imtiaz Gul’s visit to Kabul in October 2022. During the visit, Mr. Gul met and interviewed key Taliban officials. The visit helped Mr. Gul and CRSS establish trust with the Taliban authorities. Though not official, the visit brought auspicious results for the Beyond Boundaries program and its partakers, and also enabled Mr. Gul, as representative of CRSS, to present the recommendations of the religious scholars’ dialogues directly to the Taliban. The Taliban officials welcomed the recommendations, and their overall tenor on the highlighted issues was affirmative. Based on his firsthand experiences, Mr. Gul extrapolated that there is (tense) peace in Kabul because of economic restraints and the looming terror threat. However, there are some auspicious developments. For instance, primary

school girls and boys are attending classes. The majority of the Taliban are in favor of education, but they are currently working on resolving infrastructural and curricular impediments, concerning female adult school-going and university students. Besides, the Taliban seem to have developed a threshold upon assuming power for the second time. They do not entirely silence the opposition groups. For example, Hamdullah Mohib's interview was aired for two days on Shamshad TV (after two days, the Taliban ordered to stop its transmission).

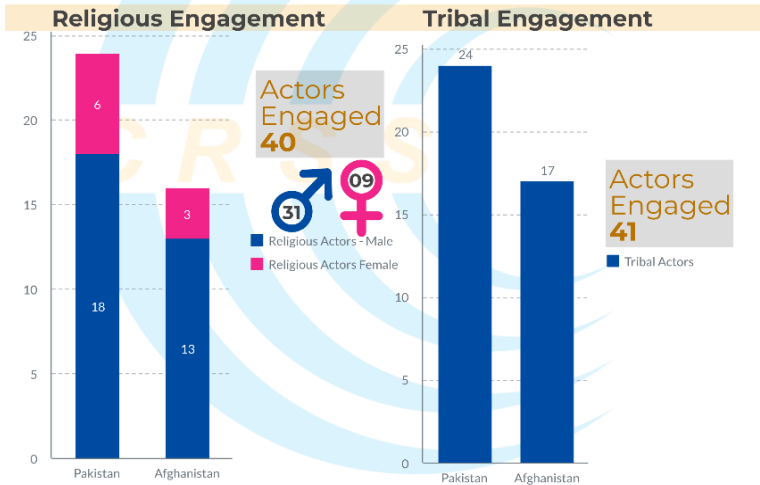
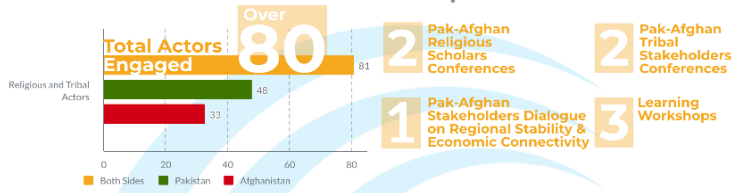
### **3. Outreach and Constituency**

Through this intervention, the Center successfully formed a concrete constituency of 40 religious and 41 tribal stakeholders hailing from various regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The religious scholars' dialogues included participants from 9 provinces of Afghanistan, 4 provinces, and Pakistan's federal capital. The tribal stakeholders' dialogue in Peshawar brought participants from 9 districts of Pakistan and 4 of Afghanistan, while the one held in Quetta targeted 8 tribes hailing from Chaman and as many as 6 from the Qandahar region. The infographics below depict the overall geographical, tribal, and district-wise outreach; and measured outcomes of the overall engagement.

# Beyond Boundaries - At a Glance

## Religious and Tribal Engagement

Actors - Countrywide | Region Wise  
- April 2022 to March 2023



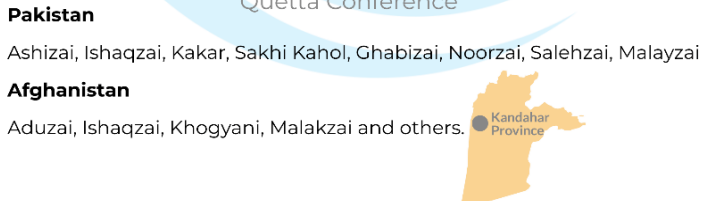
### Actors Representation - By Province | Religious Engagement



### Actors Representation - By Districts | Tribal Engagement



### Actors Representation - By Tribes | Tribal Engagement



# Beyond Boundaries - At a Glance

Religious and Tribal Engagement

Learning Workshop  
- October 2022 to March 2023

## RESULT 1

### **Beyond Boundaries seen as credible, relevant and trust worthy multitrack diplomacy platform before formal and informal actors**

#### **Supporting Examples**

1. Dr. Qibla Ayaz, Chairman CII who chaired our first religious dialogue was later part of the OIC delegation to Afghanistan
2. Several members of our dialogues were part of the 3 different delegations that went to Afghanistan. The first one which was headed by Mufti Taqi Usmani in July, and the other two in the months of November and December to Kandahar province.  
(2nd order catalytic effect; members acted as independent ambassadors)
3. Members who were part of the process of issuing Fatwa (decree) were contacted by the state institutions to issue a similar fatwa against TTP.
4. Only initiative post Aug 15 2021 which is participated by the female religious scholars.
4. Governor of Kandahar allowed the Afghan participants to be part of the CRSS dialogue after he was asked for his approval. MOFA on both sides facilitates our process through timely visa issuance.

#### **Contribution and Investment**

Tribal and religious stakeholders who in different capacities voiced the core demands and needs post participation.

ED CRSS visit to Kabul to articulate to the Taliban leadership the recommendations coming of the dialogues and highlight the importance of multitrack diplomacy in IR.

# Beyond Boundaries - At a Glance

Religious and Tribal Engagement

Learning Workshop  
- October 2022 to March 2023

## RESULT 2

**Joint Statement issued by the eminent religious stakeholders and institutions from both countries – underscored the need for cooperation and normalizing education for girls and women. Date: Jan. 07, 2023**

### Details

Joint statement issued – with signs and stamps of these actors – ulema and religious institutions – was proposed during Beyond Boundaries 2nd Learning Workshop held from October 11-12, 2022, as an attempt to showcase to the Taliban leadership the consensus that exists among the Ulema on both sides.

This is also an achievement in a way that previously, there was hesitation on both sides to jointly issue a statement on these lines. However, after several months lasting engagement with the religious stakeholders cultivated much-needed confidence among them for joint articulation of public demand.

Involved participants approached by state institutions to issue a similar Fatwa against TTP shows the relevance of the instrument of advocacy, engagement, and stakeholders part of the process.

Fatwa published in 40 national and international newspapers.

# Beyond Boundaries - At a Glance

Religious and Tribal Engagement

Learning Workshop  
- October 2022 to March 2023

## RESULT 3

### Issuance of Travel Passes to Pakistanis Living in Afghanistan

#### Details

In February 2023, the Pakistani border authorities decided to issue special cards/ passes to enable hassle-free cross-border travel for those of Pakistani nationality living in border regions of Afghanistan. This was one of the recommendations of the participants of the 1st Pak-Afghan Tribal Stakeholders Dialogue held in Peshawar earlier in December 2022. The dialogue participants – besides underscoring core governance and socioeconomic concerns – strongly echoed the demand for 'special cards' to facilitate their cross-border movement and revision of the easement rights.



CRSS believes that these iterations have led to direct and indirect catalytic changes vis-a-vis the focus and objective of the Beyond Boundaries program, and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). However, it is eminent to note that holding these dialogues, identifying the relevant actors, bringing them here from across the border, and coordinating with our Afghan counterparts was one arduous and high-risk journey. Despite the non-recognition of the Taliban, diplomatic and economic sanctions on Afghanistan, and the uncertain political landscape in the region, the Center has managed to tread carefully and beat the odds. The Pak-Afghan track 1.5/II diplomacy initiative under Beyond Boundaries remained intact and agile throughout; its current partakers hold more ascendancy in their respective communities than we had once hypothesized while mapping and chalking out the plan for religious and tribal leaders in the bilateral colloquy.

#### **4. Challenges**

CRSS and OESP were confronted with a multitude of critical challenges while executing the project activities. These challenges necessitated careful navigation and strategic adaptations to ensure smooth operations and continuity of the discourse on stability and prosperity in the Pak-Afghan region.

**Visa Delays:** Obtaining visas for participants and coordinating cross-border travel was hindered by delays, affecting the timely engagement of stakeholders. However, CRSS was able to obtain visas on time due to its contacts at the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul as well as Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), in Pakistan.

**Restrictions on Female Travel:** The Taliban's policy of not allowing females to travel without a male guardian (mehram) posed significant barriers to the participation of women in project activities and limited the number of female participants (though we managed to have a ratio of nearly 30:70).

**Opposition to Girls' Education:** The Taliban's opposition to girls' education presents a major hurdle in advocating for the reopening of schools. This necessitates delicate diplomacy, thoughtful and focused discussions, and strategic approaches.

**Unstable Political and Socioeconomic Landscape:** The unstable political, humanitarian, and socioeconomic crisis in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover created an uncertain environment, making it challenging to garner active participation and engagement from stakeholders. Hence, it was necessary to identify and include those stakeholders who hold substantial influence and agency in their respective communities and were keen on sharing the dialogues' key takeaways with track 1 actors on both sides.

**High-Risk Engagements:** Navigating the complexities of engaging with the non-recognized Taliban, comprehending their stance on crucial issues, and addressing sensitive matters required

delicate diplomacy and posed risks. While CRSS and OESP deemed the changing power dynamics in Afghanistan as an opportunity, it also presented a complexity to the project execution, requiring constant adaptation and agility amidst a challenging environment. International rules and regulations vis-s-vis non-engagement with the Taliban and other risks were duly noted while identifying and shortlisting the relevant participants for the dialogues.

**Diplomatic and Economic Constraints:** The diplomatic and economic constraints on Afghanistan, including sanctions and stringent government measures, further complicated the execution of project activities as it was impossible to transfer funds to OESP or make any project-related payments to Afghanistan.

## **5. Summaries and Recommendations of Dialogues**

### **I) 1st Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference**

CRSS hosted 1<sup>st</sup> Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference on May 16, and 17, 2022. Representatives of the leading madrasas including Jamai Haqania, Jamah Banoria, Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Authority, Council for Islamic Ideology, and several other distinguished institutions participated in the two-day conference.

The conference centered on the following themes: the Islamic system of governance in Afghanistan under the Taliban- ongoing thinking on the system of governance and legitimacy, peace, and stability in the region, the rights of women and minorities; Pak-Afghan relations - prospects and challenges.

Based on the discussions held over two days, it was extrapolated that the religious scholars on both sides believe in an Islamic system of governance that is inclusive and all-encompassing. The participants agreed on the idea of the Pakistani ulema issuing a joint statement (fatwa) urging the Taliban government to normalize girls' education and uphold women's rights under Islamic Shariah law. The participants' recommendations and responses to agenda questions also depicted that religious scholars on both sides believe in an Islamic system in Afghanistan that prioritizes the welfare of all citizens, including women, and ethnic and religious minorities. The discussion also busted certain myths and stereotypes on the question of limited civil liberties in Islamic Shariah law. The participants underscored that no matter what sect Muslims belong to and what kind of Islamic law exists in a Muslim country, Islam encourages the pursuit of knowledge by both men and women and in women's equal representation in public spheres - given that they adhere to gender-specific guidelines the religion has set for them, but, in no way, Islam preaches about curtailing women's freedom.



The Afghan religious scholars opined that Pakistan could play a better and more significant role in advising the Taliban to develop a moderate system that represents all Afghans and is acceptable to the international community. The scholars and heads of Pakistan's eminent religious schools are revered by the Taliban as most of the Taliban were educated at the religious seminaries in Pakistan. There is promising speculation that if these individuals form an advisory delegation with the relevant government representatives from Pakistan and initiate talks with

the Taliban, some positive developments could occur vis-à-vis the law-and-order situation and women's rights in Afghanistan.

The Ulema from both countries specifically talked about the current security situation in Afghanistan and its impact on Pakistan. They were of the view that terrorism on both sides should be dealt with with zero tolerance. They also stressed the need for intel-sharing between security agencies to fight ISIS, TTP, and other common enemies of both countries. Ulema from both sides assured their full support in playing their role in sensitizing the local communities on deradicalization and propagating the message of peace and harmony.

Emphasizing the need for further bilateral cooperation, the scholars suggested that Pakistan should advocate for the current regime's recognition by maintaining diplomatic relations with IEA and ensuring further assistance in health, education, and economic matters.

The following recommendations emanated from the two-day discussions:

### **1. Basic Humanitarian Support and Girls' Education**

- Pakistani ulema and eminent religious schools should issue a joint fatwa urging the Taliban to prioritize and normalize girls' education in Afghanistan under an Islamic system of governance. A group of Pakistani religious experts and government officials should travel to Afghanistan in an advisory delegation, but they should not wait for the Taliban's invitation. Hence, both sides can have a rational and transparent discussion.

- Pakistan Ulema should proactively urge the Taliban to normalize girls' education. The Afghan government can increase the number of female teachers for female students.
- *Allah says in Quran: Fulfill your promises.* Being true followers of Islam, the Taliban should fulfill the promise of a better and prosperous Afghanistan they made to the people when they formed the government. They owe it to the Afghan people

## 2. Inclusive Governance

- Taliban should form an all-inclusive Islamic system of governance that protects all religious and ethnic minorities and upholds human rights
- The government of Afghanistan should also have an institution like the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII)
- Taliban need to bring reforms in governance and law: constitution-making is an important task in the backlog
- Top-priority matters for the Afghan government should be: i) economic crisis, ii) girls' education
- If elections cannot be held on time, the Taliban should at least call a Jirga to discuss urgent matters and develop solutions.

## 3. Peace and Stability

- Intel sharing between security agencies to fight ISIS, TTP, and other common enemies
- Terrorism on both sides should be tackled with a "zero-tolerance" approach
- Tribal leaders on both sides of the border should be consulted on important security matters.

## 4. Bilateral Coordination and Cooperation

- More interactions and exchange of ideas between Ulema from both sides to identify issues and devise strategies to fight mutual enemies.
- The Pakistan government should arrange free medical camps to help the patients from Afghanistan as primary and short-term medical assistance; visas should be made more specific and issued as per the urgency of the need, keeping patients as a priority.
- Pakistan should play the role of an elder brother while keeping the communication channels open with the Taliban, paving way for their recognition by maintaining diplomatic relations with IEA and ensuring further assistance in health, education, and economic matters.
- Pakistan should arrange exposure visits for Afghan Ulema to interact with their counterparts to seek guidance and support on basic humanitarian law and the Islamic system of governance.

## The Way Forward for Future Engagements

- The Pak-Afghan scholars suggested that a joint committee of Ulema must be devised to formulate and issue "Joint Fatwas" on matters of due importance. This committee could meet

time and again to review the situation and act accordingly. Furthermore, they suggested that CRSS should initiate and lead the formation of the said committee drafting joint fatwas.

- A committee of Ulema to be constituted in Pakistan by CRSS to discuss issues of mutual concerns- peace and security, safeguarding basic rights, bilateral cooperation- with the Afghan Ulema in Kabul.

## **II) 1st Learning Workshop (on 1st Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference)**

With a proportionate focus on learning as much as on engagement, each round of the Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference during this pilot period of engagement is to be followed by a learning workshop. In this regard, CRSS conducted the first learning workshop on June 28-29, 2022, at Marriott Hotel, Islamabad, to assess and gauge the impact of the previously held religious scholars' conference; maiden engagement with religious actors of influence on both sides and that how much influence the stakeholders have been able to exercise on the current regime by sharing and lobbying for the recommendations of the conference. Furthermore, CRSS was keen on comprehending the challenges and lessons learned to inform future engagements as part of the initiative/ partnership.

As part of the first day's agenda, selected Afghan and Pakistani participants of the religious scholars' conference shared their insights on the positive developments in the relationship - post their huddle in May – besides feedback on the conference. It was participated by four Afghan religious scholars Mr. Abdul Hakim Mujahid, Mr. Abdul Wahid Wahid, Mr. Shams ur Rehman Frotan, and Mr. Mawlavi Syed Abdul Hamid, and three Pakistani religious scholars including Dr. Qibla Ayaz (Chairman Council of Islamic Ideology (CII)), Mr. Hussain Ahmed (Spokesperson Jamia Binoria), Mufti Shoukatullah Haqqani (Spokesperson Dar ul Uloom Haqqania). The overall response of the participants was quite promising. They also informed me about receiving appreciation and encouragement from relevant stakeholders of both countries for such engagements.

### **Key Takeaways**

The learning workshop highlighted the achievements of the religious scholars' conference and takeaway points that can inform the future course of engagements aimed to address the contentious issues between two countries and improve cooperation in the mutually concerning areas of the relationship, encapsulated below:

- The most promising outcome of the religious scholars' conference reported/ discussed during the workshop was the initiation of the process of issuing a Joint Fatwa by Pakistani ulema and religious schools - under the leadership of Jamah-e-Banoria Karachi, for girls' education and work in Afghanistan as per Islamic law and Shariah. The participants applauded the efforts of CRSS along with the religious scholars involved in the process.
- The Afghan scholars, whilst agreeing with and shedding light on the significance of the Fatwa, stated that as most of the Taliban have studied from Pakistani Madrassas and consider Pakistani

religious scholars as their mentors. Therefore, given such influence of the Pakistani religious community over the Taliban and how they are seen with immense respect and credibility, the Fatwa (decree) can act as an extremely important determinant of the Taliban's policy and behavior towards girls' right to education and women's right to work.

- In response to the recommendation of the Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference, the Chairman, the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), Pakistan, endorsed the idea of the formation of a joint committee of Pakistani and Afghan Ulema, under the institutional leadership of CII, and with the mandate to meet periodically, review situation, deliberate mutually concerning issues and act accordingly.
- The participating religious scholars suggested that the thematic focus of dialogue as well as the constituency of the religious scholars to be part of the process should be widened going forward with the engagement. They believed that prominent religious scholars can play an integral role in mitigating challenges and issues faced by both countries. For widening the constituency of the religious actors, they suggested allowing participation from all over the country.
- Female religious scholars should also be included in the process just so the deliberations of such critical nature are not exclusive of their meaningful perspectives on the issue, as well as to make the most of their peacebuilding potential. Furthermore, sideline meetings between Afghan women scholars with their Pakistani counterparts should also be held regularly, recommended by the participants.

### **III) 2nd Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference**

The Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) held the 2nd Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference as part of Beyond Boundaries V, track 1.5/II initiative, on September 19 and 20, 2022 in Islamabad. The agenda focused on a critical analysis of the one-year Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the state of governance, security, human rights, girls' education, and the inclusion of all ethnic and religious groups in governmental and societal spheres. The conference was attended by a diverse group of religious scholars hailing from different provinces of Pakistan and Afghanistan representing different schools of thought and sects.

As a follow-up to the 1st Pak-Afghan Religious Conference, updates were shared by the participants on the status of the preliminary document of the Joint Declaration (Fatwa) issued by Pakistani religious scholars in the favour of girls' education in Afghanistan under an Islamic system of governance. Mufti Noman Naeem and Mr. Hussain Ahmed of Jamiah Binoria stated that the initial step for the Joint Declaration had already taken place with the relevant authorities, but it will take time to build consensus among all the religious stakeholders to issue a public statement as they are also waiting for feedback on some of the questions from the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan.

Spread over four thematic sessions, the two-day conference centered around a meticulous review of developments that occurred since August 15, 2021; the Taliban's treatment of women and views on girls' education; the inclusion of minor and major ethnic and religious groups in the current

government; and the state of peace and security - with a keen focus on repercussions of Al Zawahiri's killing, its impact on the regional security, and the potency of the extremist groups such as Al Qaeda, ISKP (Islamic State of Khurasan Province), TTP (Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan), etc., and how it all affects the global visage and clout of the Taliban.



The first session focused on “One year of Taliban rule in Afghanistan.” Dr. Huma Baqai, an academican and Pak-Afghan political analyst, gave a thorough and critical overview of the state of governance, human rights, economy, and peace and security under the de facto Taliban government. Former Pakistan’s Ambassador to Afghanistan, Ambassador Mansoor Khan also shared his experience during this session and suggested that the although the Taliban have restored peace in Afghanistan, still they need to come up with a concrete strategy to overcome issues of governance. The second session was on girls’ education and women’s rights. All participants agreed that the Taliban’s prolonged closure of girls’ schools was undue and called for the immediate reopening of the institutes. The third session focused on the inclusion of all ethnic groups in the governance. Participants showed consensus that the Taliban have been negligent and inattentive towards the needs of their people and have not fulfilled the predicates of the Doha Agreement, and that they must live up to the promises they had made when they assumed power. The promises included but were not limited to amnesty, welfare, opportunities, and education for all. They had also assured the international community that they would not let radical elements operate on Afghan soil against other countries, but the presence of terrorist groups has demonstrated that the Taliban either have a feeble will or capacity to tackle terrorism.

Overall, major emphasis was made on normalizing girls' education, the Taliban's due compliance to the Doha agreement, continuous engagement of the international community with the Taliban, and potent measures by the de facto government to tackle terrorism to secure stability and peace in the region and earn a favorable stature among the international community.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The last session was dedicated to formulating policy recommendations based on the two-day discussion and agenda themes. Participants of the conference agreed upon the following recommendations.

#### **1. Girls' Education and Women's Rights**

- Girls' education isn't a demand of the public only, but it is also crucial to the future of Afghanistan. The Taliban should deal with the issue as a priority as Afghan girls can not afford to lose more academic years.
- Religious scholars from both sides should convene a meeting and demand for normalizing girls' education under an Islamic system of governance
- There should be exposure visits for capacity building of Afghan female teachers and school administrators to Pakistan as Pakistani religious institutes have a very sophisticated system of education for girls and women as per Islamic Shariah
- Instead of leaving Afghanistan, women, and girls on their own should start the practice of home-schooling or virtual learning to avoid losing academic years
- The Afghan community and the world should solely stick to one demand from the Taliban as of now: girls' education

#### **2. Inclusion of Different Ethnicities/Minorities in Governance**

- Religious and ethnic minorities should be protected, ensured mobility, and given equal key portfolios in the current cabinet
- The Taliban should devise a legislative setup that ensures the inclusion of all ethnic groups
- Afghan people should be given the freedom of religious expression, and that can be ensured only if the Taliban demonstrate a flexible and broader will as a ruling authority
- Afghan participants (religious scholars) should advocate for the inclusion of Shias and other religious minorities in the governance via interviews, op-eds, TV shows, etc.

#### **3. Peace and Security**

- The Taliban should abide by the Doha Agreement and adopt a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism
- Peace and security measures should be taken to ensure people's welfare and safety
- The Taliban should treat the public with dignity and kindness to establish trust and confidence and earn people's goodwill.



- Through inclusive and favorable policies and demeanor, the Taliban should uphold public service and tackle the authoritarian narrative that the majority holds against them
- Pak-Afghan religious scholars should continue meeting to strengthen people-to-people ties and eliminate sentiments of mistrust as well as underline the importance of non-interference
- Despite certain bilateral differences and challenges, state-to-state cooperation should be ensured. Both countries should ensure necessary security measures to preserve regional peace and promote friendly relations

### **The Way Forward for Future Engagements**

- A committee of female religious scholars should be formed with the assistance of CRSS and relevant religious institutions in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This committee should meet occasionally and discuss matters of mutual concern as well as advocate for girls' education and women's rights in the light of Islamic Shariah.
- Dialogues such as Beyond Boundaries between the religious scholars of the two countries should be held regularly to nurture this process towards sustainability. These iterations could also be held in a third Muslim country – which possesses a certain influence on both countries' scholars- to increase the magnitude of the platform and its message.

### **IV) 2nd Learning Workshop (on 2nd Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference)**

With a proportionate focus on learning as much as on engagement, each round of the Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference during this pilot period of engagement is to be followed by a learning workshop. In this regard, CRSS conducted the second learning workshop on October 11-12, 2022, at Serena Hotel, Islamabad, to assess and gauge the impact of the second religious scholars' conference that took place in September and how much influence the stakeholders have been able to exercise on the current regime by sharing and lobbying for the recommendations of the conference. Furthermore, CRSS was keen on comprehending the challenges and lessons learned to inform future engagements as part of the initiative/ partnership. The program also focused on the future of iterations with the Afghan stakeholders, ways to strengthen their magnitude, and ensuring the sustainability of the achieved and intended outcomes.

The significant development as a result of this workshop was that religious scholars from both countries agreed to issue a joint statement calling for regional and international collaboration on the economic repatriation and humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, formulation of a “*friendship forum*” comprising prominent scholars to discuss and advocate on issues of mutual concerns, enhanced economic connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and reopening of girls' schools. An initial draft of the joint statement has already been shared with the scholars for their approval. CRSS will disseminate the joint statement formally once signed by all the participants.



As part of the first day's agenda, selected Afghan and Pakistani participants of the religious scholars' conference shared their insights on the positive developments in the relationship besides feedback on the conference. It was participated by four Afghan religious scholars, Mr. Abdul Hakim Mujahid, Mr. Abdul Wahid Wahid, Mr. Shams ur Rehman Frotan, and Mr. Raza Khan Seerat, and five Pakistani religious scholars including Mufti Shoukatullah Haqqani, Molana Tayyab Qureshi, Mufti Noman Naeem, Mufti Hussain, and Dr. Faryal Umbreen. The overall response of the participants was quite promising. They also informed about receiving appreciation and encouragement from relevant stakeholders of both countries for such engagements. As part of the second day's internal agenda, the entire project team discussed the significant outcomes that emanated from the discussions and the future course of action.

### Key Takeaways

The learning workshop highlighted the achievements of the religious scholars' conference and takeaway points that can inform the future course of engagements aimed to address the contentious issues between two countries and improve cooperation in the mutually concerning areas of the relationship, encapsulated below:

- Religious scholars from both sides should issue a joint statement calling for international and regional collaboration on the economic repatriation and infrastructure strengthening of Afghanistan as a priority, ameliorated Pak-Afghan economic connectivity, and the importance of an educated lot of women and men for the region, especially Afghanistan.

- The participants welcomed the decision of opening girls' schools in four provinces -Kunduz, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Jawzjan- in Afghanistan. They urged the representatives of the IEA and governors of other provinces to adopt the model of girls' education from these provinces to ensure the uninterrupted provision of girls' education throughout the country.
- A delegation should visit Afghanistan to meet the Qandahar group. This delegation should include religious scholars and leaders of religious, and political parties who are closer to the group.
- Future dialogues should also focus on the economic challenges and opportunities.
- An increased collaboration with the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) on conferences focusing on the Islamic Shariah perspective on girls' education can be very useful. Such dialogues should also highlight the regional and international issues concerning the region.
- The forum should also include policy experts, technocrats, public office holders, and academicians to expand the program's scope and address other bilateral issues such as trade and economy, political and diplomatic challenges, peace and security, climate change and disaster management, etc.
- The future programs should depict themes based on the cultural, religious, and economic commonalities between the two countries.
- The prospective programming and discourse should also have a keen focus on the themes of climate change and disaster management - noting recent catastrophes such as floods, earthquakes, droughts, etc. to strengthen layman's knowledge, gauge countries' readiness, and improve legislation and accountability on the issues.

### Participants' Contributions and Challenges Faced Post 2nd Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference

The Afghan participants briefed the forum on the road-map activities they took part in and the challenges they faced while performing the tasks- based on the recommendations which emanated from the 2nd Pak-Afghan Religious Scholars Conference.

**Mr. Abdul Wahid Wahid** said that he has written articles/op-eds on the issue of girls' education and the governance crisis in Afghanistan. His essays regularly get featured in Matrix magazine, Taand, Nunn, Asia, and 8 am. af. Mr. Wahid further said that media appearances and op-eds can help the participants get the message across. "However, we must note that these issues are sensitive and there is always a possibility that we can be questioned or treated harshly by the Taliban authorities because of what we say or do," added Mr. Wahid.

**Mr. Shams-ur-Rehman** said that he highlights the importance of girls' education in his sermons at the local mosque and has also spoken on TV on the same issue on different occasions. He also held a seminar on girls' education and women's rights in Kabul, which was attended by a large audience. Mr. Frotan said that the Taliban do not appreciate his opinions usually.

**Mr. Raza Khan Seerat** hosts religious programs on Shamshad TV. On the eve of International Teachers' Day, he conducted a program on the importance of education, and the need for both

male and female teachers in the educational system of Afghanistan, underpinning the need to reopen girls' schools in the country. He also spoke on the issue on the eve of Eid Milad-un-Nabi (Prophet Mohammad's Birthday) and highlighted that the Prophet's entire life is an example of the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of civilization and prosperity – implying that the IEA should follow the Islamic guidelines. with time. It is worth mentioning that post this program, several anchors working for various channels also conducted programs with similar content with a special focus on girls' education.

**Mufti Noman Naeem** stated that soon after the dialogue, he met with the Counsel General of the IEA in Karachi and shared the event's recommendations with him, which he later shared with the relevant ministers in Kabul.

**Mufti Shoukatullah Haqqani** shared that a delegation of the second-tier leadership of the Taliban came to Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqania in Akora Khattak and inquired about the two conferences soon after the dialogue. The leadership of the Haqqania informed them regarding the significance of the two conferences and advocated that the discussions were held to map out all the pertinent issues being faced by the people of Afghanistan and to assist the IEA in understanding the importance of these persisting issues.

## **V) 1st Pak-Afghan Tribal Stakeholders Dialogue - Peshawar**

### **Context**

The 1st Pak-Afghan Tribal Stakeholders Dialogue was organized to elicit Stakeholders' (tribal leaders and chieftains from Pakistan and Afghanistan's border areas) opinions on girls' education, women's right to work, and inclusive governance regime as these issues remain the major hurdles since the Afghan Taliban returned to power in August 2021. The stakeholders/participants were identified after an extensive mapping exercise through community contacts and opinions by experts from the region on the tribal regions' influencers, the nature of social and political issues, and the state of infrastructure.

The conference agenda focused on the potential role of tribal stakeholders in addressing Pak-Afghan bilateral challenges concerning economic connectivity, peace, and security, and advocating for the rights of girls and women in Afghanistan, particularly those of education and work.

### **Critical Analysis**

The dialogue resonated with conflicting, though largely conservative views on the aforementioned issues. One of the recurring arguments regarding education centered on tribal tradition; most of the participants from both sides argued that impediments to girls' education and inclusion are not entirely due to religious factors but are also due to cultural and tribal factors too. Considerable support for the status quo also came through such as the restoration of former FATA regions (Pakistan) to enable ease of movement and trade for the tribes on both sides of the border. The

abolition of FATA (in May 2018) took away substantial authority from the tribal elders which - they INSIST – could have helped them intervene with Afghan Taliban on issues such as female education and employment.



### Sense of Meeting

These tribal elders, nevertheless, remain as of now the most relevant actors for engagement with the Kabul regime as far as discussions on female issues as well as regional peace, security, and trade and transit trade are concerned. If engaged effectively, their influence can be utilized since most of them do not align with the militants or extremist ideologies, rather they ask for governments’ support to eradicate the radical mindset from the region. They generally supported normalizing girls’ education as far as it is within cultural and religious norms. Some tribal stakeholders deemed the issue of refugee influx more of a Taliban issue than Pakistan’s since they believe that the current government is unable to provide socio-economic support to its people. Among the Afghan participants, however, some believe that the ill-treatment at the border and other issues faced by refugees inside Pakistan must be addressed. Tribal leaders demanded revamping of border markets and allowing free movement of the people per the constitution.

### Recommendations

Based on the thorough discussion and insights on the aforementioned issues, the participants from both sides tabled the following recommendations:

#### 1. Women’s Inclusion and Girls’ Education

- The Emirate must ensure that the girls have access to schools, universities, and workplaces provided there is segregation, and they observe purdah

- Women must be allowed to work but in “decent” professions as officers, doctors, teachers, etc.
- Both countries should deploy women police officers at border areas to ease the process of immigration

## **2. Economy, Trade, and Transit**

- Pakistan and Afghanistan must have a consistent trade policy
- Pakistan should extend its banking and commercial expertise to Afghanistan to optimize the country’s banking and transaction system-
- The government should resume issuing trade cards so the volume of trade can increase
- Custom points should be removed, and a tax-free corridor should be created
- Border markets should be established on modern footings like those of Turkey and Iran
- Border crossings should be facilitated by instating more qualified personnel and state-of-the-art equipment

## **3. Regional Cooperation, Peace, and Security**

- A joint committee of Pak-Afghan tribal leaders to be constituted to meet occasionally and discuss matters of mutual interest. This will maximize the prospects of implementation of respective recommendations whilst putting forth to the relevant government authorities
- Governments should mainstream tribal stakeholders’ decision-making and inclusion in core matters

## **4. Refugees and Border Inhabitant Rights**

- Visa restrictions and delays should be addressed as a priority
- Permanent residence and or long-term business visas along with residence should be offered to Afghans who want to live in Pakistan permanently
- Easement Rights Act should be placed in practice for the inhabitants of border areas

## **VI) 2nd Pak-Afghan Tribal Stakeholders Dialogue – Quetta**

### **Context**

The Pak-Afghan relationship remains tense and sessile given the recurring volatility and chaos at the borders, especially the Chaman crossing points have seen unprecedented turmoil in the past few months. In the same vein, the attendees at the 2nd Pak-Afghan Tribal Stakeholders Conference elicited the need for sustained bilateral cooperation for socioeconomic development and lasting peace across the border regions. The forum - led by the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) and the Organization for Economic Studies and Peace (OESP) - comprised tribal leaders, chieftains, and community influencers from the Chaman- Spin Boldak borders region.

## Agenda

The conference's agenda was centered on how tribal stakeholders may help address bilateral issues with peace and security, cross-border clashes at Chaman, economic connectivity, trade and transit, and most eminently women's and girls' rights in Afghanistan – noting the indefinite school ban by the Taliban for older girls in grade 6 and above.

## Critical Analysis

Cross-border clashes emerged as dominant concerns as the repercussions become more personal - inflicting pain and adding misery to the lives of people living near the surrounding areas of the border. These clashes have led to rancor and ill-perception among the populace. Such transnational and civil conflicts are also creating a vacuum for the insurgencies such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as it builds and capitalizes on the sentiments of isolation and obtuseness of the youth in the region. Chaman border natives are pro-peace and have generally been non-supportive of any terrorist groups, but they fear that border clashes – if overlooked further – can provide a conducive environment to TTP and others.

Popular demand is that governments should empower the tribal figures to strengthen their role and efficacy in bridging the gap of misunderstandings on both sides and paving way for sustainable peace and security in the region. The natives also complain of ill-treatment while border-crossing,



especially when it comes to women, and highlighted the need for women police at border crossing points to check female travelers' documents as they have traditional values and deem it inappropriate that male officials check their documents and do the scrutiny.

Besides, the Taliban's increased taxation policy is hampering the economic connectivity between the two countries and has also caused inflation as border closures impede the supply of goods – raising demand, hence the price hike.

Girls' education issue is more complex on the ground level. Whereas the Pakistani tribal leaders seem open to the idea of normalizing girls' education across the region, the Afghans have different concerns. They opine that the standard of education is not at par even for the boys, so the normalization of education is out of the question for their daughters.

### **Sense of Meeting**

Cross-border firing events and extended closures have not only disturbed the peace on both sides but have also hampered trade and transit and public mobility, and as a result, they continue to be the main cause of enmity between the two sides. Nothing that, the tribal leaders in the region are significant and relevant actors in the engagement with the Afghan Taliban concerning the matters of security, economic connectivity and trade, and women's education. They possess certain clout and are familiar with the socio-psycho landscape of the Afghan Taliban as well as people living in the nearby areas of the Chaman and Spin Boldak borders. Moreover, they have influence and respect among the Taliban regime and the people in Chaman, Qandahar, and nearby areas. If these tribal leaders are engaged effectively, they will prove an antecedent in improved bilateral relations and regional stability. These stakeholders – if engaged via sustained iterations – can play an integral role in ensuring regional peace and stability, robust trade and economic connectivity, and amplifying voices in favor of girls' education for a prosperous Afghan society and overall tribal regions.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the thorough discussion and insights on the aforementioned issues, the participants from both sides tabled the following recommendations:

#### **1. Peace and Security, and Cross-border Cooperation**

- Separate queues should be installed for men and men at the border crossing points since women from Afghanistan experience stampedes and uncivil treatment during border closures.
- The tribal stakeholders – elders, chieftains, and community influencers – should be included in decision-making and dialogue on border issues by the governments of both countries. A committee should be formed in this regard under the supervision of CRSS.



- Messages of cross-border cooperation and peace efforts should be disseminated by the muftis and religious scholars on both sides via social media. CRSS should lead this strategic initiative.
- Both countries should deploy women police officers at border areas to ease the process of immigration.
- Afghan government should devise a comprehensive counter-terrorism policy with the collaboration of relevant track 1.5/II actors on both sides to tackle ISKP, TTP, and other potential threats to regional security.

## **2. Trade and Economic Connectivity**

- Customs duties should be constant and the same for both sides.
- Chaman border opens for less than 12 hours a day. The border authorities should keep it open 24/7 as the Torkham border is accessible all the time.
- The Afghan government should decrease taxes to improve trade.
- Bilateral trade between both countries should be done in local currency, rather than the US dollar.
- Border markets/bazaars should be installed from both sides at the middle spots/zones.
- Border crossings should be facilitated by instating more qualified personnel and state-of-art-equipment. Custom departments can play an integral role in this regard.

## **3. Refugees and Border Inhabitant Rights:**

- People coming from Afghanistan faced hurdles due to the policies of UNHCR and NLC. A uniform policy should be devised in this regard.
- Refugee card issuance process should be made smoother and expedient so the current and incoming displaced Afghans can lead respectable lives during their stay in Pakistan.
- Refugee rights require stronger and more potent advocacy. Platforms such as CRSS should collaborate with international donors to work on socioeconomic and academic facilities for the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, as the host country's current capacity cannot serve much to provide a sound living for the displaced population.

## **4. Girl's education, and social and economic welfare:**

- Girls should be given allowed to attend schools and have higher education facilities similar to their male counterparts as per the Sharia and Quranic principles.

- Capacity-building workshops should be held for female doctors, midwives, and lady health workers in the border and rural regions of Afghanistan. Pakistani female doctors can lead these pieces of training.
- Educational facilities and socioeconomic development initiatives should be introduced in the border regions as per the cultural and tribal needs and sensitivities.

## **VII) Pak-Afghan Stakeholders Dialogue on Regional Stability and Economic Connectivity**

### **Context**

Comprising eminent religious and tribal leaders, academicians, and trade and media personnel from Pakistan and Afghanistan, the forum was convened to discuss and recommend solutions to the impediments to Afghan girls' education and women's right to work, regional and bilateral peace and security, and economic connectivity.

### **Critical Analysis**

Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, women have lost livelihood opportunities which further exacerbated the country's economic crisis. Girls' school closure, in the longer run, would obviate progress in socioeconomic, political, governance, and health sectors. In the light of prevailing circumstances that are, with each passing day, pushing the Afghan society toward regression, stakeholders on both sides of the border agree that the demand for reopening girls' schools in Afghanistan is undisputed as only an educated lot of women and men can lead and build the future of Afghanistan.

### **Sense of Meeting**

As much as the Taliban consider economic and political stability their foremost responsibility, they cannot overlook the graver and more virulent landscape occurring as a result of the school closure. The consensus on this was elicited by all the participatory actors – religious and tribal leaders, journalists, academicians, and businesspersons. The forum also opined that continuous engagement with the religious and tribal leaders is imperative to keep the voices alive and better advocate for the normalization of Afghan girls' education. The participants also believe that the Taliban have not denied/ are not against girls' right to education. However, they must create an enabling environment for girls and women so they can attain education and participate in the economic workforce and nation rebuilding. The forum strongly recommended reaching out to and consulting the Qandahar faction of the Taliban (a key factor in the decision-making) to regulate discourse and come up with prudent solutions to the issue. In this regard, a high-level Pakistani delegation must visit Kabul at the earliest to engage with the prominent stakeholders to discuss these recommendations with them. The Afghan side also opined that Pakistani stakeholder (academicians, religious scholars, educationists, policy experts, etc.) should offer their assistance to the de facto authorities vis-à-vis curriculum reviewing and revamping (if required) per the

Islamic guidelines and modern scientific education so the country can compete with the rest of the world.

The interlocutors also urged for resolving rampant conflict at the borders as it leads to closures and hinders economic connectivity. Non-renewal of APTTA and the absence of uniform trade policy have caused, in the longer run, disruption in bilateral trade and transit, and hence the agreement must be revised and mainstreamed to boost economic and trade potential between the two countries. Furthermore, a unanimous resolution that resonated was to advocate both governments to introspect their bilateral trade policy and introduce a barter trade mechanism under the current political climate in Afghanistan.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **1) Human Rights and Girls' Education, and Socioeconomic Welfare**

- Religious and tribal leaders, academicians, educationists, and policy experts from Pakistan and Afghanistan should meet the key Taliban officials to discuss the major impediments to girls' education, and recommend solutions to address them, including those on curriculum, if needed. The key Taliban officials must include those from the Qandahar group as it is considered the most integral decision-maker and influencer. In this regard, a high-level delegation under the leadership of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) must visit Kabul soon.
- International community and entities such as UNICEF should continue their assistance vis-à-vis paying the salaries of the Afghan teachers.
- Religious education networks such as Wafaq ul Madaris should extend their support, if needed, to the educational departments under IEA and collaborate on curricular policies per the Islamic guidelines and needs of the contemporary era.
- The IEA should provide an enabling environment for female members of society so they can attain education. This includes allocating separate classrooms/institutions for them and ensuring their safety and security.

#### **2) Regional Economies, and Bilateral Trade and Transit**

- Governments of both countries should prioritize eliminating bureaucratic hurdles and malpractices on part of certain border personnel that impedes trade and transit and cause bad blood between both countries.
- Both sides should devise relaxed taxation policies.
- Consultations should be held with the World Trade Organization (WTO) to revamp, update, and mainstream Afghanistan – Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) so both sides can have a uniform trade policy and robust economic connectivity.
- Discussions on agreements and implementation of mega projects such as the Turkmenistan – Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (TAPI) pipeline must resume, keeping aside the political differences.

### 3) Governance, Rule of Law, and Peace and Security

- The forum must continue advocacy to promote regional peace and prosperity, as well as urge the de facto authorities to implement the Doha Agreement in letter and spirit to address the current wave of terrorism and insecurity in Afghanistan and the region
- Since peace is dependent upon education and collective approaches against extremism and radical ideologies., the IEA must normalize education for all individuals and groups to avert future waves of belligerence and radicalism.
- Pakistan and the international community should extend their assistance to the de facto authorities in improving and expediting its counter-terrorism efforts
- Border personnel on both sides should be sensitized via capacity-building training to tackle mass influx, and custom requests and ensure cross-border harmony with a people-centric approach.
- The IEA should formulate a transparent and explicit, zero-tolerance policy against terrorism.

### 4) Miscellaneous

- International community should increase its involvement and assistance to Pakistan vis-à-vis refugee influx to deal with their housing, education, and other social needs as the host country lacks the capacity - given the ongoing, grave economic crisis and population bulk.

## **6. Way Forward**

The engagements with tribal and religious stakeholders throughout the Beyond Boundaries initiative have highlighted their continued relevance and significance in advocating for crucial bilateral and regional matters within the current political scenario in Afghanistan under the de facto Taliban rule. Recognizing this reality, it is imperative to forge ahead by sustaining engagement with these influential actors. This approach will ensure inclusive dialogue and enable the formulation of comprehensive policy recommendations that address the concerns of all stakeholders and decision-makers involved.

It is essential to acknowledge that the Taliban now hold power in Afghanistan and cannot be overlooked or isolated. Discontinuing communication with them would not be a viable solution. Instead, the focus should be on maintaining an ongoing dialogue and advocacy through those who wield considerable influence, namely religious and tribal leaders. By leveraging their role and connections, it becomes possible to advocate for causes that impede regional stability and prosperity. Moving forward, the key lies in building upon the existing engagement framework and further strengthening ties with religious and tribal stakeholders. This entails continued dialogue, consultations, and collaborative efforts to address the challenges faced by Afghanistan and the region.





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