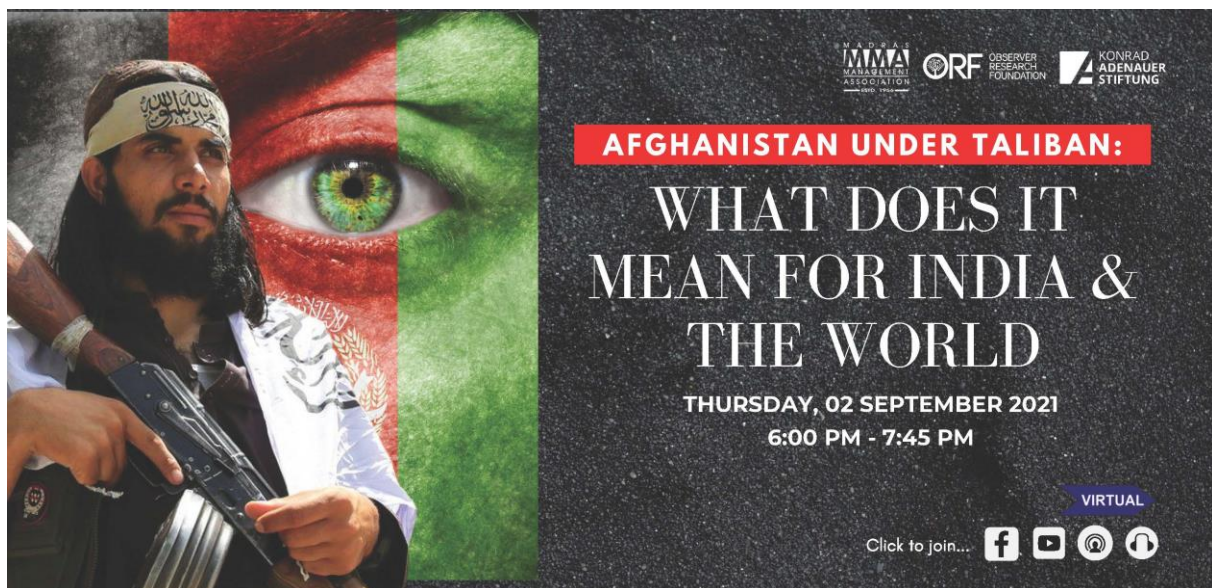


Discussion on  
**Afghanistan under Taliban:  
What does it mean for India & the World?**

*Thursday, 2 September 2021*



**Event on Zoom**

**MMA Facebook**

**[https://www.mmachennai.org/pages/livestream/  
YouTube](https://www.mmachennai.org/pages/livestream/)**

Discussion on  
Afghanistan under Taliban:  
What does it mean for India & the world?

**Speakers**

**Mr Peter Rimmele**

**Ms Indrani Bagchi**

**Amb Rakesh Sood, IFS (Retd)**

**Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd), PVSM, UYSM,  
AVSM, SM, VSM & BAR**

**Captain Alok Bansal**

**Held on Thursday, 2 September 2021**

**6.00 pm – 7.45 pm**

Discussion on  
Afghanistan under Taliban:  
What does it mean for India & the world?

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## THE CONTEXT

The shocking Taliban takeover of all Afghanistan, including capital Kabul, that too without much of resistance from government forces, should speak volumes for the nation's morale through the 20 years of American military presence, to be followed by a double-quick exit.

Strategically-placed between South and Central Asia, the current developments in Afghanistan have wider ramifications for the region and the world and that too for a long time to come.

Prima facie, it mocks at the so-called and self-touted all-American supremacy, decades after the end of the Cold War and the 9/11 attacks which emanated from Afghanistan.

For the same reason, allies, old and new which now clearly include India, would look askance at America's ability to keep its promise of defending them, in multiple contexts, especially against the emerging Chinese aggression and economic mercantilism combined with its increasing cooperation with a re-energised Russia.

The other issue relates to the re-emergence of the 'Clash of Civilisations' that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union but was contained with the end of Osama-bin-Laden.

In particular, for India, this means much more than 'divergences in views with the US on Afghanistan', to quote the Indian External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, as Kabul fell to the Taliban.

The questions are thus about what does a 'Taliban-ruled' Afghanistan mean for Afghanistan, first, India and the rest of South Asia next, and also the world at large?

What if, for instance, a 'modern-looking' Taliban with modern weapons but medieval mind-set, decides to rule Afghanistan, with rights-curtailment for its people, starting with women, but function as a 'responsible State', taking particular (read: pro-China and Pakistan) position in neighbourhood and international affairs?

## PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

**Madras Management Association** (MMA) in partnership with the India Office of the **Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung** (KAS) and **Observer Research Foundation** (ORF) organised a virtual discussion on the theme **Afghanistan Under Taliban: What does it mean for India & the world?"** on Thursday, 2 September 2021 for the benefit of MMA members, management professionals and national policy makers.

**Mr C V Subba Rao**, Senior Vice President, MMA and MD, Sanmar Shipping Ltd delivered the welcome address. **Group Captain R Vijayakumar** (Retd) VSM, Executive Director, MMA introduced all the speakers.

**Mr Peter Rimmele**, Resident Representative to India, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung delivered the Introductory Remarks. **Ms Indrani Bagchi**, Diplomatic Editor, Times of India moderated the panel discussions and a Q&A session with the panellists. The distinguished panellists who participated were:

- **Ambassador Rakesh Sood, IFS (Retd)**, Distinguished Fellow, ORF
- **Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd) PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM & BAR**, Former General Officer Commanding 15 Corps (Srinagar), 21 Corps & Military Secretary
- **Captain Alok Bansal**, Executive Director, South Asian Institute for Strategic Affairs (SAISA).

**Mr Sathiya Moorthy**, Director, ORF Chennai gave the concluding remarks.

**Group Captain R Vijayakumar** (Retd) proposed a vote of thanks. The session started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.45 pm. 5321 participants watched the programme in various social media platforms.

### Mr Peter Rimmele

Mr Peter Rimmele is currently the Resident Representative to India of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

He has a First Law Degree from Freiburg University, as well as a Second Law Degree from the Ministry of Justice Baden-Württemberg, Germany and a M.A. in Geography.



After working as, a jurist, judge and lecturer, he took public office as Ministerialrat, Head of Division at the State Ministry of the Interior in Saxony, Germany, from November 1991 on until 2000. There he first served in the Police and Security and later in the Local Government Department. On behalf of the German Foreign Ministry he served in East Timor as Registrar General, Head of Civil Registry and Notary Services (UNTAET), and became later the principal Advisor for Governance Reform for GIZ (German International Cooperation) to the Ministry of Administrative Reform and the Anti-Corruption-Commission of the Republic of Indonesia, where he served for 7 years. He then moved to Rwanda, also as Principal Advisor Good Governance/Justice Program. Earlier he was Resident Representative Lebanon, Director of Rule of Law Program Middle East North Africa, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

## **Ms Indrani Bagchi**

Indrani Bagchi is a diplomatic editor with the Times of India where she has been reporting and analysing foreign policy issues for the newspaper since 2004. She covers daily news on foreign affairs as well as interpreting and analysing global trends with an Indian perspective. She writes news stories, opinion articles, news features, and a blog, 'Globe spotting'. Prior to this, Bagchi worked as an associate editor for India Today. She started her



journalism career at The Statesman before moving to the Economic Times. Bagchi was a Reuters Fellow at Oxford University. She was also awarded the Chang Lin-Tien fellowship by the Asia Foundation to study US-China relations at Brookings Institution, Washington DC. She is a Fellow of the India Leadership Initiative of Aspen Institute India and a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network.



## **Amb Rakesh Sood, IFS (Retd)**

Ambassador Rakesh Sood is a Distinguished Fellow at ORF. He has over 38 years of experience in the field of foreign affairs, economic diplomacy and international security issues. He is a post graduate in physics, economics and defence studies.



Before joining the Indian Foreign Service in 1976, he worked for a couple of years in the private sector. He initially served in the Indian missions in Brussels, Dakar, Geneva and Islamabad in different capacities and as Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington, later in his career. He set up the Disarmament and International Security Affairs Division in the Foreign Ministry, which he led for eight years till the end of 2000.

During this period, Ambassador Sood was in charge of multilateral disarmament negotiations, bilateral dialogues with Pakistan, strategic dialogues with other countries, including the US, UK, France and Israel (especially after the nuclear tests in 1998), and dealt with India's role in the ASEAN Regional Forum, as part of the 'Look East' policy.

He then served as India's first Ambassador — Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament at the United Nations in Geneva. He also chaired a number of international working groups, including those relating to negotiations on landmines and cluster munitions and was a member of UN Secretary General's Disarmament Advisory Board from 2002 to 2003.

Since his retirement, he has been writing and commenting regularly in both print and audio visual media on India's foreign policy, its economic dimensions and regional and international security issues. He is a frequent speaker and contributor at various policy planning groups and reputed think tanks in India and overseas.



## **Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd), PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM & BAR**

Through most of his 40-year illustrious career General Hasnain has served in turbulent environment and hot spots. From Sri Lanka to Siachen Glacier, from the North East to Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), and in UN operations from Mozambique to Rwanda, he has seen it all in crucial appointments. He served seven terms in J&K, decorated in most of them and knows the J&K conflict comprehensively. He commanded the Indian Army's Srinagar based 15 Corps and is today one of the foremost writers and analysts on J&K, Pakistan,



Middle East and transnational extremist violence. He is a much sought after speaker and writes for major Indian newspapers – The Times of India, The Indian Express, The Hindu, Deccan Chronicle and The Asian Age, besides being a regular participant in television debates on mainstream television. With a strong academic background from Sherwood College Nainital, St Stephen's College Delhi, the Royal College of Defence Studies, Kings College London and the Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies, Hawaii, he has been at the forefront of encouraging the adoption of the US initiated Scholar Warrior concept in the Indian Army. He has spoken at the Lee Kwan Yu School for Public Policy, the Rajaratnam School for International Studies and the Indian Institute for South Asian Studies, all at Singapore. He has also spoken at the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), London. He is associated with the Vivekanand International Foundation and Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, as Distinguished Fellow and is on the Governing Council of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) and Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies (IPCS). He speaks on National Security at various military, civil services and corporate institutions with a view to enhance India's strategic culture. He has recently visited Iran and was at the forefront of neutralizing Pakistani influence operations in that country.

On 13 Jul 2018, The President of India appointed Lt Gen Hasnain as Chancellor of the Central University of Kashmir.

Gen Hasnain has six decorations awarded by the President for India and two by the Army Chief. He superannuated from the Indian Army in Jul 2013 after 40 years of active service.

## **Captain Alok Bansal**

Alok Bansal is the Executive Director of the South Asian Institute for Strategic Affairs (SAISA). He has been the Executive Director of the National Maritime Foundation (NMF) and has worked with the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) and Center for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) earlier. He has authored a book titled “Balochistan in Turmoil: Pakistan at Crossroads” in 2009 and has co-edited several other books.



## Mr N Sathiya Moorthy

Sathiya Moorthy is Distinguished Fellow and Head of ORF's Chennai Initiative.

Sathiya Moorthy has worked with several newspapers in India, both in English and local languages. He was *editorial advisor* at a trilingual TV group in Sri Lanka and was based in Colombo, from October 2005 to March 2006.



He toured the US as an 'IVP Scholar' of the US State Department in October-November 2005 where he obtained first-hand knowledge of the US electoral system and operation.

## KEY STATEMENTS



- Women are now barely visible in Afghanistan's streets and markets; all signs indicate that the Taliban reign of terror has made yet another comeback. - **Mr Peter Rimmele**



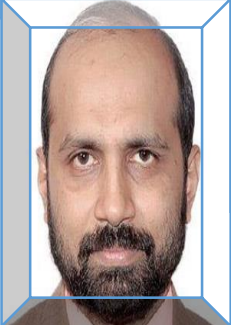
- The heightened threat perception from the Afghan crisis is because of the fear that what happened there will not just be confined to that country. - **Ms Indrani Bagchi**



- The US did not spend 2 T\$ on Afghanistan. The fact is, only about 40 B\$ was spent by the US on governance, economy and development of Afghanistan. Out of the rest, 1,250 B\$ was spent on the US military in Afghanistan - **Ambassador Rakesh Sood**



- The perception that the Taliban managed to fight a mighty army successfully may give an ideological boost to other Islamic radicals. - **Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd)**



- In the earlier days, Kabul was ruled from Delhi. In its modern existence, Afghanistan has never been free from foreign influence. - **Captain Alok Bansal**

## KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

### Mr Peter Rimmel's Introductory Remarks:



- The first day of the second term of the Taliban rule in Kabul, with scenes played out at the city's international airport, reminded us of the end of the Vietnam War.
- The desperation to escape a country where democratic institutions have been lost in favour of the Sharia law was gargantuan.
- The withdrawal of the US military was a political decision that many critics have judged to be a hasty abandonment of a country to which the Americans had once promised an unwavering commitment.
- America's longest war ended in a worst-case scenario with the declared enemy as the victor. The clock has been turned back by 20 years.
- Women are now barely visible in Afghanistan's streets and markets; all signs indicate that the Taliban reign of terror has made yet another comeback.
- The Taliban's seizure of power is painful for those within Afghanistan, like the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (KAS) who believed and worked relentlessly for democracy and freedom, in all these years. The KAS now had to close its bureau in Kabul and evacuate its personnel to safety.
- We have been surprised by the speed with which the Taliban have taken over the country but not by the fact that it happened.

#### **The Mistakes during 20 Years**

- The US and allies had a completely military approach. The development aspect came too short.

- Institutions that were created in Afghanistan became deeply corrupt.
- Humanitarian aid funds often never reached the rural areas, but were bagged by corrupt officials. This explains the support of the rural population for the Taliban, who exploited and filled the void for their own benefit.
- The Western allies have simply overlooked these problems for years and now face the consequences.

#### **Taliban Not Dependable**

- During the last Taliban rule, Afghanistan provided safe havens for anti-India terrorist groups operating in Kashmir such as the Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba.
- Now, backed by a Taliban government, such terrorist organisations would regroup and spread chaos and havoc in neighbouring countries and far beyond.
- We cannot trust the statements of the Taliban that Kashmir is not on their agenda.

#### **Infighting Expected**

- The vacuum of power created by the departure of foreigners from Afghanistan cannot be filled by the Taliban for a considerable period of time.
- The Taliban do not control Afghanistan at the moment. They don't control their own fighters.
- We can expect that many fractions will be fighting to share power. Within the Taliban, the moderates will be fighting with the radical ones. The attack on the airport was a sign of that.
- The ISIS, al-Qaida and other terrorist groups want to show their presence and would claim some power too. This will lead to instability.
- Terrorism will be back and will remain a problem, specifically for India now and the world, in the future.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE PANEL DISCUSSIONS

### Ms Indrani Bagchi's Opening Remarks:



- The heightened threat perception from the Afghan crisis is because of the fear that what happened there will not just be confined to that country.
- People who have studied Afghanistan feel that this development should have been expected, knowing the Taliban.
- There will be two lines of India's engagement with Afghanistan- one, the investments that India has made in Afghanistan and their people for the last 20 years; two, India's own security, viewed in the context of the Taliban and its relationship with terror sponsors.
- The questions that need to be asked are:
  - How will the developments affect India?
  - How of much of control will be exercised by the Taliban?
  - What kind of a government will evolve in Kabul?
  - What will be the political and military actions that will happen?
  - Will the resistance that we see in Panjshir valley and some other pockets be sustained?
  - The regional developments will be of much interest: What will be the role of Pakistan who have backed the Taliban for 20 years? Is China a big winner from this and will it replace the US as the primary partner of Afghanistan? How will India deal with the Taliban, given its past history?



- Will the ISI backed terror groups be emboldened? How will this shape the future of radical Islamic terrorism?
- How will the other regional powers like Iran, Russia, China, Turkey and Qatar act? Will they pick up the security slack vacated by the Americans?
- Will the US remain engaged with Afghanistan and if so, in what way?

## Ambassador Rakesh Sood, IFS (Retd)'s Speech:



- Much has been written about the Afghan developments and many myths abound in the narratives that need to be dispelled.
- **Myth 1: It was America's longest war.**

**The Fact:** The US just fought a one-year war, twenty times over. Each time, they had a new general and rediscovered the wheel. At the end of each general's tenure, they came to the same conclusion that nobody can win a war against insurgency, unless the safe havens and sanctuaries of insurgents are destroyed. Every single general acknowledged this fact.

Admiral Mike Mullen who was the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff told the US Congress a decade ago that the Haqqani network is the veritable arm of the ISI. About seven or eight years ago, the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, while on an official visit to Islamabad, in a joint press conference with her counterpart, had warned Pakistan about the dangers of keeping snakes in its backyard.

The US war had ended on 31st Dec 2014 when President Obama announced the completion of Operation Enduring Freedom and launched Operation Resolute Support. After the surge of US military personnel which he had authorised, Obama had also begun the drawdown of the forces. Since then, they were in Afghan, only in train and assist mode and not in combat operation. The lead was taken by the Afghan forces.

- **Myth 2: Afghan Forces cannot fight**

**Fact:** The Afghan forces have been fighting the Taliban all these years, losing over 50,000 men while the US lost 67 soldiers since 1 Jan 2015.

- **Myth 3: The US spent 2 T\$ on Afghanistan**

**Fact:** Only about 40 B\$ was spent by the US on governance, economy and development of Afghanistan. Out of the rest, 1,250 B\$ was spent on the US military in Afghanistan and 500 B\$ on servicing the interest payments for the loans / bonds issued; 88 B\$ was spent on Afghan national forces, 9 B\$ for counter-narcotics operations and 4 B\$ for humanitarian relief.

- **Myth 4: The US suddenly withdrew their forces**

**Fact:** The process of legitimisation of the Taliban began much early, orchestrated by nations including the Europe. In 2013, they opened an office in Doha and in 2018, US began direct talks with them. On 29 Feb 2020, the US signed an agreement for withdrawal from Afghanistan, in return for safe passage of its personnel. When it was signed, the rest of the world turned a blind eye.

- **Myth 5: Taliban 2.0 is different from Taliban 1.0**

**Fact:** The Taliban have not changed. Many reports of the UN Sanctions Monitoring Committee, with intelligence inputs from its member nations, have stated that the Taliban have not severed its links with al-Qaida.

- **Myth 6: The Afghan-led and Afghan owned peace process had collapsed.**

**Fact:** The experiment of a democratic government in Afghanistan was attempted by US and other nations. When these nations legitimised Taliban, the democratic government propped by them collapsed.

- **Myth 7: Many nations including Iran and Russia wanted the US to withdraw, so that Afghan will be back to normal.**

**Fact:** It is possible that the US withdrawal from Afghanistan might come back to hurt all the nations that wished for an American exit from the Afghan soil.

**Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd), PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM & BAR's  
Speech:**



**ORIGIN OF ISLAMIC RADICALISM**

- We need to understand the origin of Islamic radicalism and the role of the Taliban in the last 40 years.
- Islamic radicalism started with Gen Zia-Ul-Huq coming to power in Pakistan in the year 1977. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan happened in 79. In 1981, US, Saudi and Pak got together and groomed radical Mujahedeen's and fedayeen's to fight the Russians in Afghanistan. Zia wanted to seek revenge against India for Pakistan's loss against India in the 1971 war.
- US weapons, Saudi money, Pakistani military intelligence and leadership and the radical Mujahedeen formed a powerful combination to take on the Russians in an eight to nine-year war. It was at this time, 3 million refugees moved from Afghan into Pakistan border areas and in these refugee camps, the Taliban was born.
- Kashmir was the ultimate target of those promoting Islamic radicalism and Afghanistan was only an interim point.
- Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 1996 and vacated it in 2001. Now after 20 years, they are coming back to power. We need to understand the purpose for which the Taliban was created by the deep state of Pakistan and examine if that strategy is still relevant today.
- If the Taliban would listen to their original masters (Pakistan) or Taliban 2.0 would like to be seen as independent remains to be seen.

### **LACK OF AUDIT ON ANDSF**

- The Afghan National Defence Security Forces (ANDSF) had been losing 8000 soldiers every year in spite of having air support from the US forces. No audit was done on ANDSF as to why they suffered such huge casualty and what was their real capability. There were huge gaps in logistics; the fighting forces did not even get their food. The money that was intended for the forces had gone elsewhere.
- Why were 600,000 modern assault rifles required for the ANDSF? In the last three months, 7 attack helicopters and a range of other weapons were provided to them. Much of it has fallen into the hands of the Taliban.
- Some of the assault rifles may go to Pakistan. Since 2017, India has been doing extremely well in Jammu & Kashmir. NIA has been going after the terror networks and managed to neutralise a large part of it. Therefore, to think that the Afghan developments will have immediate ripple effects on J&K may be a bit far-fetched. But India has to be very careful though.

### **LOOK BEYOND KASHMIR**

- What was thought of as the end of Islamic radicalism may not hold good and there is enough inspiration for revival of it. The perception that the Taliban managed to fight a mighty army successfully may give an ideological boost to other radicals.
- India should not only be concerned about Kashmir. It has to be prepared to pre-empt the after-effects in the rest of India too, apart from Kashmir. We need to look at the rest of the region like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Maldives for possible terror attacks.
- Al Qaida and ISIS had long been warning of targeting India and in particular, Kashmir but they have not been able to get the better of Indian security forces.
- India should now work closely with Saudi and UAE, Kazakhstan and Iran apart from the US, who is our strategic partner.

## Captain Alok Bansal's Speech:



- Most myths on Afghanistan were created by the British. "Afghanistan is the graveyard of empires and it has never been conquered," is one such narrative and Americans bought into this myth.
- For most of its existence, Kabul was ruled from Delhi- from Babar to Aurangzeb and beyond. In its modern existence, Afghanistan had never been free from foreign influence.
- Afghan army is capable of fighting. But Afghans have an uncanny skill of sensing the impending doom. That is why their soldiers fled, in search of survival.
- The 300,000 strong Afghan army was overwhelmingly dependent on US contractors for its logistics support. One month ago, 80% of this logistics support was withdrawn, giving a clear message that the Ashraf Ghani government would go.
- In the context of Afghanistan, deals and agreements mean nothing. The assurances that the Taliban are now giving, whether they come from Kabul or Doha, cannot be taken seriously.
- The US under former US President Donald Trump not only legitimised but also enhanced the reputation of the Taliban. The US kept Ashraf Ghani and his team out of these talks and marginalised his regime.
- In 1996, Taliban advanced from the south and east, consequently allowing the government to withdraw northwards. This time, the Taliban captured the Northern provinces first. They also captured the border posts and starved the

government of its supply chains. This was a major shift in their military strategy and perhaps inspired by the ISI.

- On the morning of 15 August 2021, the Doha office of the Taliban announced that Taliban would not enter Kabul. But on the same day, the troops went and captured the Afghan Presidential Palace and Parliament. ISI had dictated Taliban to take control on 15 August which is India's 75th Independence Day.
- The idea of an inclusive Afghan government is illusory. Even if Hamid Karzai, the former Afghan President, who is now under house arrest, joins the Government, he will be merely a figurehead and the Taliban will call all the shots. The scenario is very similar to Czechoslovakia after The WWII which seemed like a multi-party government but Communists were dictating the terms.
- The Taliban is basically a Pashtun entity but this time, a large number of Uzbeks and Tajiks have joined their ranks.
- The Taliban are an ideologically committed organisation and they are committed to the establishment of an Islamic emirate. Their linkages with global jihadist movement are very strong.
- Righteous leadership and capture of territory are ingredients of Islamic theology. With the passage of time, this ideology will spread beyond Afghanistan.
- Resurgence of jihadi support and sympathy for the Taliban within India are areas of concerns for India.
- India will eventually have to fight the Taliban. The only question is – will it be in Afghanistan, Srinagar or at the Wagah border?



## EXTRACT OF THE DISCUSSIONS

**Mr Peter Rimmele**, Resident Representative to India of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)



“On the first day of the second instance of Taliban rule in Kabul, the scenes played out at the city’s international airport reminded many of us of the end of Vietnam War,” said Mr Peter Rimmele in his introductory remarks.

“Women are now barely visible in Afghanistan’s streets and markets; posters of women have been hastily painted over throughout the cities and the sharia law has returned, all signs indicating that the Taliban reign of terror has made yet another comeback,” he said and remarked that the clock has been turned back by 20 years.

He regretted that Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (**KAS**) which had been active in Kabul since 2002 supporting several educational projects and other peace initiatives had to close its office now and evacuate its personnel to safety, like many other organisations. He termed the withdrawal of the US military as a hasty political decision and one that was poorly executed.

Mr Peter Rimmele felt that the US focused more on military aspects than on development, during these 20 years. “Because of corrupt officials, the humanitarian aid did not reach the people,” he pointed out and cautioned that

the western allies which turned a blind eye to these developments now have to face the consequences.

He was categorical that the Taliban assurances of not meddling in Kashmir cannot be trusted. “The earlier regime of Taliban was a safe haven for terrorists.”

He opined that the vacuum created in Afghanistan cannot be filled by Taliban and that their control would be limited. There will be infighting and power battle in Afghanistan and as an offshoot, terrorism will be a problem for India and the world, he predicted.

**Ms Indrani Bagchi**, Diplomatic Editor, Times of India



Initiating the panel discussions, **Ms Indrani Bagchi** stated that the increased sense of threat perception from the Afghan developments is because of the fear that what happened in Afghanistan may not just be restricted to Afghanistan. According to her, people who have studied Afghanistan feel that this development should have been expected, knowing the Taliban.

She reckoned that there will be two lines of India's engagement with Afghanistan: One, the investments that India has made in Afghanistan and their people for the last 20 years, and two, India's own security, viewed in the context of the Taliban and its relationship with terror sponsors.

She urged the panel to deliberate, among other things, on the degree of control that can be exercised by Taliban, the political and military actions that will follow, the fate of resistance that they face in the Panjshir valley, the role that will be played by regional partners - Pakistan and China and the other regional players like Iran, Russia, Qatar and Turkey, the fate of ISI sponsored and radical Islamic terror and if the US will remain engaged with the new Afghan dispensation, and if so, how.

On a concluding note, Indrani Bagchi recalled a scene from the past – 22 December 2001- when Hamid Karzai took over the Presidency of Afghanistan, which was attended by India’s then Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh with a small team including herself.

“We boarded a helicopter at Bagram to fly to Kabul with Jaswant Singh. It was a Northern Alliance helicopter that was taking us. There was only one seat in the helicopter. Jaswant Singh occupied that seat and we were all standing. The door opened and one gentleman walked in from another flight. It was Ashraf Ghani who was going to become Hamid Karzai's Finance Minister. Jaswant Singh with his impeccable manners and being a gentleman to the end, stood up and gave his seat to Ashraf Ghani, a much younger man,” she narrated and added on a poignant note, “Twenty years later, on the 15th of August 2021, Ashraf Ghani had to leave Afghanistan in a helicopter. That scene of 2001 has stayed with me for ever.”

## Ambassador Rakesh Sood, IFS (Retd), Distinguished Fellow, ORF



**Ambassador Rakesh Sood** opined that while much has been written about the Afghan developments, there are many myths in the narratives and which need to be dispelled.

Was it America's longest war? No, he said. They just fought a one-year war, twenty times over. He attributed US army's inability to weaken the Taliban to the frequent changes of army generals and the failure of the US to go after the safe havens of the insurgents.

“The US war had ended on 31st Dec 2014 when President Obama announced the completion of Operation Enduring Freedom and launched Operation Resolute Support. After the surge of US military personnel which Obama had authorised, he had also begun the drawdown of the forces. Since then, US forces were in Afghan, only to train and assist mode Afghan National Defence Security Forces and not in combat operation. The lead was since taken by the Afghan forces,” said Ambassador Rakesh Sood.

While people say that Afghan forces cannot fight, the fact is that they have been fighting the Taliban all these years, losing over 50,000 men while the US lost 67 soldiers since 2015. He also demystified the statement that US spent 2 T\$ on Afghanistan. Of this, close to 1750 B\$ was spent on the US military, including spend on US war veterans and the interest payments. Only about 40

B\$ was spent by the US on governance, economy and development of Afghanistan.

He also disagreed with claims that US withdrawal was sudden. The process of legitimisation of the Taliban began much early, orchestrated by nations including the Europe. In 2013, Taliban opened an office in Doha and in 2018, US began direct talks with them, he said.

He was firm in his conviction that Taliban 2.0 will be very much the same as Taliban 1.0, drawing inference from multiple reports of UN Sanctions Monitoring Committee which were prepared with intelligent inputs from many UN member nations.

**Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd), PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM & BAR,**  
Former General Officer Commanding 15 Corps (Srinagar) 21 Corps & Military  
Secretary



**Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd)** focussed on the origin of Islamic radicalism and traced it to Gen Zia Ul Huq's taking over the power in Pakistan in 1977 to form an Islamic state. It was the combination of US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia that created and funded the Mujahedeen's since 1981 and this led to many major developments including the rise of Osama Bin Laden and 9/11, he pointed out.

He regretted that despite the Afghan National Defence Security Forces (ANDSF) losing 8000 soldiers every year in spite of having air support from the US forces, no audit was done on ANDSF as to why they suffered such huge number of casualties and what was their real capability. There were huge gaps in logistics; the fighting forces did not get even their food. The money that was intended for the forces had gone elsewhere, he regretted and ascribed these factors to their giving in to the Taliban's final onslaught without offering much resistance.

"Kashmir was the main target of Islamic radicalism and Afghanistan was only an interim point in their journey," according to Lt Gen Hasnain. He said that India has been doing a great work in Kashmir since 2017, busting the terror networks and therefore, saying that there will be immediate ripple effects of Afghan crisis in Kashmir may be far-fetched.



However, he hastened to add, that in the present situation, one should not merely focus on Kashmir but look beyond, not just at other places of India but also in the neighbouring nations like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, Nepal and Maldives, for the effects of terrorism.

He suggested that India should work closely with Saudi and UAE and Kazakhstan and Iran, apart from the US, to handle the fallout of the Afghan developments.

## **Captain Alok Bansal**, Director, India Foundation



**Captain Alok Bansal** said that one should have a thorough understanding of Islamic theology to unravel the Afghan developments and how it will develop. The Taliban are an ideologically committed organisation and they are committed to the establishment of an Islamic emirate. Their linkages with global jihadist movement are very strong. Righteous leadership and capture of territory are ingredients of Islamic theology. With the passage of time, this ideology will spread beyond Afghanistan.

Recalling history, he pointed out that in its modern existence, Afghanistan had never been free from foreign influence. Afghan army was capable of fighting. But Afghans have an uncanny skill of sensing the impending doom. That is why their soldiers fled, in search of survival, he said.

He also attributed Taliban's quick march into Kabul this time as compared to 1996, to a dramatic change in their strategy, by taking over the country's Northern provinces and all the border posts and starving the supply chains for the ANDSF (Afghan National Defence Security Forces). "This strategy was perhaps drawn up by ISI. Also, the 300,000 strong Afghan army was overwhelmingly dependent on US contractors for its logistics support. One month ago, 80% of this logistics support was withdrawn, giving a clear message that the Ashraf Ghani government would go," he said.

He remarked that the US under former US President Donald Trump not only legitimised but also enhanced the reputation of the Taliban. The US kept Ashraf Ghani and his team out of these talks and thus marginalised his regime.

Captain Alok Bansal dismissed claims that the Taliban government will be inclusive and said that their assurances mean nothing.

He concluded that India will eventually have to fight the Taliban. The only question is – will it be in Afghanistan, Sri Nagar or at the Wagah border?

## Q&A

**Q: There are geo-political shifts in the region. We are looking at new alliances / informal groupings between Pakistan, Russia, China, Qatar and Turkey while India works with the West and the US. How do you see the region shaping up?**

**Amb Rakesh Sood:** In 2001, the US action in Afghanistan was supported by Russia and China. Twenty years later, the US-China and US-Russia relationships are under strain. US now looks at Russia and China as strategic rivals. There are sanctions imposed on both Russia and China by the US. Russia feels that they have been let down with NATO expansion. China feels that US does not want them to rise further. The net result is that both Russia and China look at the US now very differently, compared to how they viewed it in 2001.

Even Iran provided intelligence to the US in their war against the Taliban. But they were later disappointed when they were labelled as the axis of evil by the Bush administration. China has developed closer ties with Pakistan and they have also invested heavily in the China-Pakistan economic corridor. Russia has increased its influence in the Central Asian countries. At the moment, we see a coming together of Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran in dealing with the Taliban.

**Q: Do you believe that India will end up fighting the Taliban and if so, what is our preferred theatre?**

**Lt Gen Ata Hasnain:** According to me, it is not the Taliban that will be fighting with India. Instead, the whole of Islamic radical ideology, propelled by Pakistan, will take on India. Pakistan has been projecting to be the flag bearer of Islam but it has not succeeded in doing so. They may start imagining that they are closer to that dream today.

It will not be a conventional war but a hybrid war where we will see a battle of the mind and battle of the ideology. India must learn to fight this hybrid war. We have

not done badly in Kashmir but our focus so far has been on the physical neutralisation of terror networks. With correct international linkages, we must counter Pakistan in all its intents. We have to sensitise the world against discrimination of and atrocities happening to Muslims, both in China and Pakistan.

**Q: How should India deal with the ideology and forces unleashed on it?**

**Captain Alok Bansal:** India has to create a counter-narrative and for this, one needs to understand theology. Unfortunately, a majority of the Indian policy makers do not understand any theology, let alone Islamic theology. The counter narrative must be steeped in theology. Media and curriculum are the powerful tools that we should make use of.

**Q: How should India respond to the Afghan crisis?**

**Amb Rakesh Sood:** We need to have options, evaluate them and decide on a course. At the moment, I am afraid, our options are limited, except to withdraw all Indian personnel from Afghanistan and bring them home. Because, we relied much on the government in Kabul and believed in the Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process. We have to wait and see how the situation evolves. These are early days yet and the situation is very fluid. We have to engage in, as the British described, masterly inactivity.

**Q: Why did the US fight the Taliban and now why are they legitimising them?**

**Amb Rakesh Sood:** When the Taliban came to power in 1996, the US did not have any enmity with them, in spite of the Taliban coming out with draconian Sharia rules and blowing up Bamiyan Buddha statues. In 1996, Osama Bin Laden was brought to Sudan with US knowledge when Saudi refused to accept him. Even after 9/11, the US gave an ultimatum to Mullah Omar to turn in Osama Bin Laden and said they did not want to fight with them.

The Taliban came up with many conditions and sought more evidence of Bin Laden's involvement in 9/11 and this angered the US. So, on 7 Oct 2001, they attacked and

ousted the Taliban. The US mission was focussed on counter-insurgency but they were never really equipped for that. That is why, for the last one decade, they were looking for ways to get out of Afghanistan. In the last few years, the US saw less of a threat perception from the Taliban.

**Q: Should India accept the Taliban offer of being a trading partner?**

**Amb Rakesh Sood:** We cannot respond to every statement of the Taliban. We have to see the shape of the government that is coming up there and see who will call the shots.

**Q: Why do many people believe that the Taliban now have no linkages with terror groups?**

**Lt Gen Ata Hasnain:** This has been projected primarily to the United States whose main focus is their homeland security. US has stipulated that the Afghan territory should not be used in any way to target the American homeland. If something sort of 9/11 happens, it will draw the ire of the US government, military and the people and we will never know the intensity with which they will respond. So, the Taliban is playing cool and they are not showing their true colours at the moment.

**Q: Was there a lack of nation building in Afghanistan? How does it affect nation building exercise elsewhere?**

**Captain Alok Bansal:** Afghans have a fair amount of feeling of nationhood. What lacked was State building. The State institutions did not work out as envisaged. Right from the early days of its history, Afghanistan had been a decentralised feudal entity. There was an attempt at providing too much of centralisation. Governors were changed at the whims and fancies of the President. 80% of the officials were expatriates with dual citizenships, like Ashraf Ghani himself, who had two passports. Also, corruption had become endemic.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS



In his concluding remarks, **Mr Sathiya Moorthy**, Director, ORF Chennai thanked the panellists for sharing their views.

He was of the opinion that the Afghan developments are just over two weeks and it is too early to come to conclusions, with the situation being hazy. However, he suggested that India must engage with the Taliban, while closely monitoring the situation.



## VOTE OF THANKS

**Group Captain R Vijayakumar VSM (Retd)**, Executive Director, MMA



**Group Captain R Vijayakumar** proposed the vote of thanks. He thanked **Mr Peter Rimmele**, Resident Representative to India of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung for delivering the introductory remarks and for being a pillar of support to MMA.

He thanked **Ms Indrani Bagchi** for leading the conversation. He thanked panellists – **Ambassador Rakesh Sood (Retd)**, **Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd)** and **Captain Alok Bansal** for their insightful and compelling speeches and views exchanged.

He thanked **Mr Pankaj Madan** of KAS, India office for his close coordination with MMA in organising the webinar. He thanked **Mr N Sathiya Moorthy** of ORF for his concluding remarks. He thanked the members of MMA, ORF and all the participants who had attended the programme online.

As a token of appreciation and on behalf of the panellists, MMA has arranged for distributing face masks and mini sanitisers to the local community.

# PHOTOS

## Photographs taken during the Discussion on “Afghanistan under Taliban: What does it mean for India & the world?”



## LINKS FOR THE RECORDING

### **Afghanistan under Taliban: What does it mean for India & the world?**

We are pleased to share that the recording of the event is available for viewing through the links indicated below:

**Website:**

**[www.liveibc.com/mma/](http://www.liveibc.com/mma/)**

**YouTube:**

**<https://youtu.be/T8e436BabUI>**

**Facebook:**

**<https://www.facebook.com/mmachennai/videos/1812613025613610/>**



**The response to the event was excellent and a larger number of viewers logged in live through Zoom, MMA Live webinar, YouTube and Facebook.**

**Total Number of Participants:**

**Zoom: 71**

**YouTube: 4275**

**Facebook: 75**

**MMA Webinar: 900**

**Total number of participants at the event – 5321**



## THE PARTNERS

### About Madras Management Association (MMA)

**Madras Management Association (MMA)** was established in 1956 with the prime objective of promoting management education, training and development activities in this part of the country. The vision of MMA is “To be the Fountainhead of World class Management Excellence in India”.

Over the past six decades, MMA has striven for development and nurturing management expertise, combining Indian ethos with International Management thoughts and practices. MMA has contributed immensely to the enhancement of management capability in this part of the country, and in particular Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. MMA has over 7000 corporate houses, industries, professionals, academics and executives on its rolls as members. MMA annually organizes about 725 executive development activities, including seminars for top management with a total participation of fifty-nine thousand executives and entrepreneurs.

MMA is the largest affiliate association of All India Management Association (AIMA) in the country and has been adjudged as the Best Management Association in India by AIMA for ten times in a row including the “National Excellence Award” for the year 2017-18.

The activities of MMA are planned to achieve managerial excellence in the functioning of industries and professional managers in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. In this direction, MMA chapters have been established at various towns in Tamil Nadu mainly to cater to the needs of SMEs. Nine such MMA Local Chapters at Ambur, Attur, Erode, Hosur, Namakkal, Salem, Sri City, Trichy and Puducherry are functioning effectively.

Apart from corporate leaders, MMA has, in its Managing Committee, the Vice Chancellors of Madras University & Anna University, the Directors of IIT Madras and IFMR and the Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu, as members.

### **OUR VISION**

To be the Fountainhead of World Class Management Excellence in India

### **OUR MISSION**

- Synthesise Indian Ethos with international management thought
- Be a reservoir of expertise in management
- Inspire individuals to actualise their potential
- Nurture creativity and originality

## About Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)

**The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)** is a political foundation. Established in 1955 as “Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education”, in 1964 the Foundation proudly took on the name of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom and justice through political education. We promote and preserve free democracy, social market economy, and the development and consolidation of the value consensus. We focus on consolidating democracy, the unification of Europe and the strengthening of transatlantic relations, as well as on development cooperation.

The leitmotif of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation "Germany. The next chapter" is supported by a thematic focus. With the three main topics Innovation, Security and Representation and Participation, it is quite clear which topics the Konrad Adenauer Foundation will focus on in the coming years.

We cooperate with governmental institutions, political parties and civil society organizations, building strong partnerships along the way. In particular, we seek to intensify political cooperation in the area of development cooperation on the foundations of our objectives and values. Together with our partners, we make a significant contribution to the creation of a global order that empowers every country to determine its own developmental priorities and destiny in an internationally responsible manner.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has organized its program priorities in India into five working areas:

1. Foreign and Security Policy
2. Economic, Climate and Energy Policy
3. Rule of Law
4. Political and Societal Dialogues focussed on multilateralism and Indo-German relations
5. Media and Youth

The India Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation takes great pride in its cooperation with Indian partner institutions who implement jointly curated projects and programmes.



## **About Observer Research Foundation (ORF)**

### **The Beginning**

ORF began its journey in 1990 at the juncture of ideation tempered by pragmatism. During the period of India's transition to a new engagement with the international economic order, several challenges emerged, evoking a need for an independent forum that could critically examine the problems facing the country and help develop coherent policy responses. ORF was thus formed, and brought together, for the first time, leading Indian economists and policymakers to present the agenda for India's economic reforms.

### **What We Are Today**

Propelled by the process of reforms initiated in the 1990s, ORF, over the past 30 years of its existence, has effectively narrated and participated in India's story as the country has acquired an unmistakable global footprint. From primarily looking inward and engaging with domestic reforms, to gradually forging global partnerships, ORF today plays a seminal role in building political and policy consensus that enables India to interact with the world.

As new powers re-emerge onto the global stage, existing systems face challenges of agreeing on a new set of rules to control and regulate the new frontiers of space, the oceans, the internet and the human mind. The world continues, also, to navigate persisting concerns related to security and strategy, economy and development, energy and resources. As India begins to play a larger role in the 21st century, ORF continues to push normative boundaries, bring new ideas into the policy discourse and provide a platform to a new generation of thinkers. It is supported in its mission by leading intellectuals, academicians, policymakers, business leaders, institutions and civil society actors.

ORF's aim is to encourage voices from all quarters, geographies and gender, both those that fall in and those that question dominant narratives. It is this plurality of thought and voice — in a country of over a billion individuals — that ORF seeks to carry abroad, while simultaneously bringing contemporary global debates to India.

### **The Mandate**

ORF seeks to lead and aid policy thinking towards building a strong and prosperous India in a fair and equitable world. It sees India as a country poised to play a leading role in the knowledge age — a role in which it shall be increasingly called upon to proactively ideate in order to shape global conversations, even as it sets course along its own trajectory of long-term sustainable growth.

ORF helps discover and inform India's choices. It carries Indian voices and ideas to forums shaping global debates. It provides non-partisan, independent, well-researched analyses and inputs to diverse decision-makers in governments, business communities, and academia and to civil society around the world.

Our mandate is to conduct in-depth research, provide inclusive platforms and invest in tomorrow's thought leaders today.