

Documentation

Afghanistan - Ending Violence!

Diplomatic Academy of Vienna
19 October 2016



© Morteza Mohammadi

Edited by Ali Ahmad and Ines Greinstetter

Publisher:

Wiener Institut für Internationalen Dialog und Zusammenarbeit - Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC), Möllwaldplatz 5/3, A-1040 Vienna,
www.vidc.org

Editor: Ali Ahmad and Ines Greinstetter

Transcription: Ali Ahmad

Copyright pictures: Morteza Mohammadi

Published in accordance with §25 of the Media Law.

Copyright: Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC), Möllwaldplatz 5/3, A-1040 Vienna. Basic issues: discussion papers on development policies, international cooperation and cultural exchange south-north as well as anti-racist campaigning.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and not necessarily those of the editors/VIDC.

Content

Michael Fanizadeh4

Helena Malikyar7

Haseeb Humayoon12

Panel Discussion.....14

Audience: Q&A.....19

Michael Fanizadeh



Ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Michael Fanizadeh and I am a coordinator at VIDC responsible for Migration & Development and with a regional focus on the Middle East. I would like to welcome you to today's discussion "Afghanistan - Raus aus der Gewalt!"

We are very pleased to see so many people here and I am very happy to welcome our speakers from Kabul Helena Malikyar and Haseeb Humayoon. Welcome to Vienna.

Unfortunately I have to inform you that our planned moderator Antonia Rados could not attend our discussion today. As you might be aware, she is a reporter of RTL-Television and currently involved in the reporting from the battle of Mosul in Iraq. But I'm very glad that Sibylle Hamann, an independent journalist from Austria, accepted on very short notice to chair today's panel discussion. Ms. Hamann will later also briefly introduce our speakers.

I organized today's event with our Afghanistan consultant at VIDC, Dr. Ali Ahmad, whom I would like to thank for his collaboration. I would also like to thank the Afghanistan cultural associations AKIS, KATIB, and Afghan Wulas, as well as the group "Afghanische Jugendliche-NEUER START in Österreich," which helped with distributing information about today's event. The four associations are very active and supportive for newly arriving Afghans and refugees getting started in Austria. Also thank you for this important work.

A special thanks to the Austrian Development Cooperation, the Austrian Development Agency, which financed today's event, and my colleagues at VIDC, who actively supported me with organizing, as well as the Diplomatic Academy and the Festival Salam Orient for the excellent cooperation, as usual. Today's talk and discussion will be held in English and translated simultaneously into German. I would like to thank Ms. Gallo and Mr. Schmolz, our interpreters today, for their challenging work.

Today's event is part of our focus on the situation in the Middle East and the background for today's event is clear:

Afghanistan's population is one of the youngest and most rapidly growing in the world. Due to the bad safety conditions, lack of economic and political perspective, poor governmental leadership, and the strengthening of the Taliban and other violent groups, more and more Afghans are leaving their country. According to the UNHCR, over 2.7 million Afghans had fled the country, which equals 9% of the population – and these are only the official figures.

This makes Afghans the second largest group of refugees in the world after Syrians; in Austria they have been the largest refugee community since 2015, even larger than Syrians. Since January 2015, more than 34.000 people from Afghanistan have applied for asylum in Austria.

Most of you know that the EU has signed an agreement with the Afghan government allowing its member states to deport an unlimited number of the country's asylum seekers, and obliging the Afghan government to receive them. The deal has been in the pipeline for months, leading up to a large EU-hosted donor conference in Brussels early October this year. According to a previously leaked memo, the EU suggested stripping Afghanistan of aid, if its government did not cooperate.

We do not know in detail the outcome of the agreement, but there is a growing fear in the Afghan Community about deportation from Europe, from Austria. A very high number of 80.000 Afghans who should be deported from Europe to Afghanistan is very often mentioned.

But today we want to focus not on our fears and concerns in Europe, but on the situation in Afghanistan – if you want: on the root causes for the refugee movement.

We want to talk about how the cycle of violence and counter-violence can be broken.

Are there ways out of radicalization?

What are the alternatives to radical extremism in Afghanistan? Can the influence of the Madrassas be reduced?

What possibilities exist for the international community especially for Europe?

What roles do the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan play?

I will stop here with the questions, because we have distinguished guests to answer these questions and will hand over to our moderator Sibylle Hamann.

As said before, Sibylle Hamann is an independent journalist, she has a weekly column in the Austrian newspaper „Die Presse“, and she is a permanent writer for „Falter“ and „Emma“. Amongst others, she is chief editor of „Liga. Zeitschrift für Menschenrechte“, and lecturer for journalism at the “Fachhochschule Wien”. From 1995 - 2006 she worked in the foreign office of the weekly magazine „Profil“ and during this period she also visited Afghanistan. So she has a picture of what we are talking about.

Sibylle Hamann



Thank you very much indeed and a warm welcome from my side also. Jumping directly, news from Afghanistan has not been very good these times. We hear a lot about violence, we hear about terrorist attacks, we hear about persecution of minorities. Is there a way to stop violence in this country? This is a question that we are going to discuss today. I have two guests here with first-hand information. They have flown directly from Kabul and I am very proud to introduce them.

Helena Malikyar; she is a political analyst and a historian. She studied at NYU (New York University) and she lives in Arizona, she moved to Afghanistan to work for UNDP and she is also a columnist for Al Jazeera and an online magazine called “Al-Mujala”, as well as for Radio Free Europe. Moreover, she is the co-founder of Women’s Charters for Women’s Rights in Afghanistan.

Haseeb Homayoon, he also lives in Kabul, he is a businessman and also the co-founder of a youth organization, which is called “Afghanistan 1400”. And for those of you like me, who are not familiar with the Afghan calendar, 1400 is the year that is still ahead of us. Five years from now is 1400 in the Afghan calendar. “Afghanistan 1400” is a movement that wants to

encourage young people to participate in politics, in the economy, and also considers diversity in Afghanistan as an asset for the country.

But I would like to start with Ms. Malikyar. I would like to ask you, what is the security situation in Afghanistan at the moment and why has it been so bad recently?

Helena Malikyar



Thank you very much for the introduction. I would like to thank the VIDC for holding this particular event and for inviting me, but also for a series of events on Afghanistan. I have always thought that although Western countries, European countries and the United States, which have been so deeply involved in Afghanistan in the past 15 years, the general public does not get to learn about what is going on in Afghanistan. I am so pleased to see such a high turnout tonight and it is very nice to see members of the Afghan communities in Austria are also interested in attending these events.

To get to the main topic and to answer your question Sibylle; I think by now everybody knows that the situation in Afghanistan has gone from bad to worse especially in the past two years. The worsening of the political, security and economic situation in Afghanistan has become visible in the past two years, but in fact I would argue that the descend actually started in 2010 when the Obama administration announced that they were going to pull out the US troops from Afghanistan and along that NATO was going to have troops' withdrawal. That very announcement started to give hope to the Taliban and to their sponsors, Pakistan particularly - Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) unit, the military intelligence in Pakistan that has been really directing the insurgency in Afghanistan. They suddenly saw light at the end of the tunnel, thinking that the Afghan Security Forces were not ready to take on the enemy after the international troops' withdrawal, so they could smell victory again. They prepared to increase their attacks and to become more aggressive.

As the attacks increased, people started to panic, but it is also very important to know that the year , in which the Americans and NATO decided to leave Afghanistan coincided with the year, where Afghanistan was going to have its presidential election. This was an important presidential election, because for the first time since 2001, president Karzai was going to step down and a new face would have a chance to become president of Afghanistan. Thus a political transfer of power was going to happen. The security transition worked even though the Afghan Security Forces were not ready in many areas. Another transition that Afghanistan was supposed to go through at the same time was the economic transition, because from the time of the international intervention until 2014 most of the economic activities in Afghanistan were developed around the US and NATO military presence in Afghanistan; military contracts and military bases were the main stimulators of economy until the end. Unfortunately not much was done about the men and women those contracts ended, in consequence tens of thousands of employees have lost their jobs. Nobody thought about a proper transition into an indigenous economy. Therefore, what happened from 2014 onwards was a crisis on three fronts: security, and the political and economic situation. Politically, of course not only the elections were very problematic from the start, but we also ended up having a crisis between the two final candidates and then Mr. John Kerry, the US Secretary of States, arrived and he came up with a formula of putting together the two candidates and forming a sort of a coalition, which was both extra-constitutional and also was bound to create problems in the everyday functioning of the government. And we have actually witnessed these issues since the new government has come to office. So all of these issues led to a multi-pronged crisis in Afghanistan and the results of which may be here in Austria.

You see them in the form of a flow of Afghan refugees along with Syrians and others. Many of these refugees left the country, because of the economic stagnation that we have been experiencing; we have of course to keep in mind that the economic stagnation is also a result of heightened insecurity in the country and that attacks by the Taliban and other terrorist groups have increased. People have lost hope and when people lose hope in the future and when there is an unknown future ahead of them, I think it is human nature throughout history that they try to leave their country and find a new home, where they can build a future for themselves and I think this is what is happening.

To conclude my initial remarks about today's situation in Afghanistan, I think there are two larger elements that have contributed mainly to the international involvement and almost failure in Afghanistan. Pakistan is by far the most important one. I think by now it is not a secret that the terrorist activities in Afghanistan are supported by Pakistan, Pakistani ISI, but the issue is that the Americans from the very beginning until very recently, they had decided to overlook this issue and not to pressure Pakistan too much over their support of the Afghan terrorists; even though more than 3000 Americans have lost their lives in Afghanistan since 2001. These are the military personal and the contractors, who were killed in Afghanistan. It is very obvious that if Pakistan is supporting the terrorists, Pakistan is responsible for the death of these Americans, but there has always been a theory in Washington that if we pressure the civilian government in Pakistan too much, they may collapse and then the nuclear bombs will get into the hands of unsavoury characters there, namely radical Muslims. That was the reasoning behind not really putting a lot of pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting the Taliban, the Haqqani Network and other terrorist groups. But recently, since the beginning of this year, we see a change in Washington and in the attitudes of the American Congress and somewhat in the attitude of the Obama administration. They are beginning to tighten up the rope on Pakistan and they are talking about possible sanctions and political isolation. Had they done this a few years ago, we may not have been in this situation, but let's hope that the new administration will follow up on this and they will continue this trend, but at the same time it would be very helpful if the Europeans would also stand for this kind of trend and pressure Pakistan for their support of terrorist groups.

The other issue that has contributed greatly in the worsening of the situation in Afghanistan is the involvement of the US. Again I do not want to continuously put the blame on the Americans, but the truth is since 9/11 and since the US intervention in Afghanistan, they have been dictating which direction Afghanistan should take.

The Americans from the very beginning took an approach that put stability in Afghanistan ahead of everything else. I would say stability at the cost of the rule of law and this in my opinion was a factor that has created political crisis in Afghanistan as well as it has created a lot of disgruntled people, which has made it easier for the Taliban to recruit. Afghanistan

traditionally and over centuries has had the concept of justice as the most important element in the legitimacy of state. In modern concept justice translates into rule of law. We did have a wonderful constitution in 2004 and 2005. It was more advanced than in most of the countries in our region, but implementation of that constitution has faced problems at every step of the way and that is because a number of people, who came back to power and became America's trusted allies in the war against terror, were exactly the people who have been operating outside of the law and have been immune from the legal system. Furthermore, throughout Mr. Karzai's administration, he keeps a sort of resemblance of political stability and political consensus; he also allowed them to be outside of the law. As a result of course this has trickled down and rule of law has become a joke in Afghanistan. And that in my opinion has had a great effect on the multiple crises that we are going through right now.

In fact, it seriously influenced people's perception of the state and legitimacy of the state and has lead to people not having confidence in the system. These are the two larger issues in addition to other issues I have talked about before. We always only discuss especially the outside, but also at some degrees the inside of Afghanistan. Whatever security issue rises, we only talk in terms of Taliban or the Haqqani network, but in fact because of this rule of law issue that I have mentioned before, there are internal elements also in the security problems in Afghanistan. The fall of Kunduz city last year and it happened this year again, had a lot to do with this. Yes the element of the Taliban was there, yes the Taliban wanted to capture a major city, but what made it possible more than anything else was not the Taliban strength but rather the internal issues that were going on in Kunduz. The same internal issues are going on in other parts of the country as well.

The creation of militia forces was another "brilliant idea" of the Americans, because they could not leave Afghanistan's security to national security forces, which had not completed the training by 2014. They came up with this idea that it would be cheaper and easier to create local militia forces with local commanders and a lot of these commanders were back from the days of Afghanistan's fight against the Soviet Union. They gave them money and they allowed them to have militia forces. Some of them already had unofficial forces, but now they have become official and they were also paid for it, regardless of their local

rivalries, territorial wars that sometimes go back to 1980s; among these militia forces were local commanders and some of these forces are also involved in narcotic business. There are so many layers, the issue is so complicated and it needs to be addressed for what it is and not over-simplify it, if we really want to address the issue of Afghanistan and turn it into success.

Before I stop here, I just like to add that it is still not too late for Afghanistan. I returned to Afghanistan in 2002 after a long exile in the US. I have continued living there and I have decided to raise my child there, who is now eleven. So that should tell you that I have not lost hope in Afghanistan and Afghan people. What gives me a lot of hope is the large mass of young Afghans. Today almost 70% of the entire population is under the age of 30. A lot of these young people took advantage of the opportunities that were presented to them in the past 15 years. Many managed to study, went through training programs, even the young illiterate Afghans I met in the rural areas want to have a modern life. They want to have opportunities. They want to improve their lives. They see that kind of improvement, that kind of future in an Afghanistan that is secure and begins to prosper. And that force I think is enough to invest on and to have hope for the future, but Afghanistan needs its international friends still. We are hoping that Austrians and Europeans in general would step up their involvement in Afghanistan in a more positive way than what we have seen in the last 15 years. I will stop here and leave the rest for the later session.

Sibylle Hamann

Thank you very much indeed. You just said many people lost hope, lost confidence in the system. Mr. Humayoon, would you agree with this analysis? Why in your opinion has the situation gone so bad? And what role does the young generation play?

Haseeb Humayoon



It is great to be here in Vienna. It is my first time and I am only here for 24 hours but I have already been struck very strongly by two sentiments that I must express here. I learned in Vienna that the highest numbers of refugees that have moved here over the past two years are Afghans.

The generosity that families in Vienna and in Austria in general but also what the government and the public has shown towards them, that has been very heartening coming from Kabul, knowing that our people when they choose to leave and go through rather terrible harsh terrain and to find second home for themselves in Europe. There are people, who extend their hands and they have been given the assistance. This is very heartening and as a responsible citizen of Afghanistan, I will not get an opportunity as this one again, I am here to thank you. I am here to show gratitude for the fact that these are difficult times, absolutely difficult ones for the 30 million that we call our citizens in Afghanistan but also for many others around the world - Syrians, Libyans, Iraqis. What Europe in general and Austria must pride of that you got something right that people turn this way in contrast to some neighbouring countries.

But why things are going down in Afghanistan and why we have a deterioration cycle in the country.

It is a combination of factors. It is a multitude of factors, historical and very recent. We have been at least close to forty years in search for a country with security and stability. It is not that things went bad only in the past two years, because within those forty years we had massive refugee populations around the world including our neighbouring countries Iran and Pakistan. The search for stability requires a formula both amongst our people but also for Afghanistan as a country, in the region and in the world. And we have struggled with finding that footing. There was some optimism that by signing a Bilateral Defence and Security Agreement with the United States in 2014 we will get that sense of stability and a sense of a longer term of projection of the country's direction. When the signing happened, we have had international commitment in particular with the US, European commitment all renewed

to Afghanistan, but at the same time we ourselves missed up something. For a country, you need to know the rules of the game; you need a constitution. 2014 was a terrible election year, where political disputes exacerbated. We lost the constitution direction of the country and ended up with a government that is extra-constitutional and in some ways its inadequacies or inefficiencies has caused a downward spiral in the situation of the country, but that is just one factor. The other factor is that we are dealing with terrorism and extremism that is mostly enabled and fostered outside our borders and part of a sort of a grand strategy by one of our neighbours or some perception of their interests that frankly put, we really do not understand.

2014 when we had a massive reduction in international presence, Pakistan also launched its two biggest military operations against militants including Afghan militants but also militants from Central Asia, from Zhang Zhang of China and elsewhere. The effect was not a reduction of terrorism in Pakistan, but a pushing of militants into Afghanistan. So what we are dealing today is the re-strengthening of Taliban that have been pushed in Afghanistan again together with their militant allies, who were not necessarily from Afghanistan. This push happened at a time when our national security forces and our government were prepared. We were just adjusting to the fact that the international troops have left and that we have had a change of leadership in the politics of the country.

Besides that there are some figures that we should put it into perspective; in the past nine months we have lost over 2.500 civilians to terror incidents in the country. In many ways when you are in Kabul or when you are in Afghanistan, you overlook these figures and these are UN figures. I suspect the figures are higher because UN access is now very limited due to security and mobility issues. So what we have observed over the past two years is that terrorist militants seem to have found access to more sophisticated weaponry. Within the first couple of years after 2001, the targets of militants were very clear: foreign military establishment and their convoys' movements and later Afghan military, the police or even the government personnel or entities. Over the past two years the attacks has become very deliberately, very locally and very specifically indiscriminate. Thus we have had attacks on universities with casualties in high numbers. We have had attacks in the public sphere,

against youth organized public rallies, where we lost more than 80 of our citizens, who were in some ways the best and the brightest.

Regarding the question of youth and what they are doing; what we always miss when we look at the bloodshed in a country like Afghanistan is that majority of the fighters are very young. Taliban recruits the younger population of the country and exploits their vulnerabilities in a systematic way. The youth are at the forefront of the trouble. There are youth movements that have been formed in the past, trying to do work around the country increasingly even though their space is very constricted since mobility and access to most parts of the country is very limited. Maybe you are familiar with a very powerful movement that has emerged recently in the country called “Enlightenment Movement”. It sparked out of protest over an electricity grid and its direction is to discuss how the country should go on. We have that kind of discourse despite the violence. But the movement has now turned into a source of energy in the public sphere. Most of them are young people. But the future for them remains uncertain, because they are impacted by trends that are bigger, namely political, and regional and militancy dynamics.

Panel Discussion

Hamann: Thank you Haseeb. You mentioned the Taliban, but there are also the others. DAESH is holding foot in the country as well. I would like to know more about the background that feeds these groups ideologically, socially, and economically?



Malikyar: A lot has been written about their ideological motivation and without any doubt the ideological element is present, but I think a series of issues are important. Many of the supporters of the extremist groups grew up in refugee camps in Pakistan, deprived of a normal life, getting confused while growing up or confused with their identity and eventually not even remembering or knowing their own past. These people in the Madrassas in Pakistan, they

are presented with completely distorted reality that the Americans and the other “infidels” would have come to invade our country, that they want to take away religion and that they want to turn our families into infidels and things like that.

Hamann: Has the US intervention helped those groups in a paradox way?

Malikyar: Yes, unfortunately it has.

Hamann: Haseeb, would you agree?

Humayoon: No, not at all. I think the trend of militancy and terrorism in our region preceded the 2001 US intervention. When the Taliban came into being, there was actually zero US presence in Afghanistan. We were begging the world to be present in our country, but they isolated us in the 1990s. Yet the Taliban still came into being, flourished and moved around the country. The same goes for the other part of the region. They always had their networks and obviously with their interests, they go and exploit a convenient narrative and one of these narratives is presented around the idea of international military presence in a place like Afghanistan. Taliban is a familiar brand for many groups, but what they all are known for is targeting rural Afghanistan. They have marched around the country with that rural, non-urban brand that they have. Increasingly we also have extremists’ - rather softer extremism - creeping into the society in urban centres. That is a trend that is both worrying and concerning, because it gives terrorism a soft cover. So justifications are bred ...

Quickly on the idea of DAESH or ISIS in Afghanistan; there are news’ headlines about it, there is recognition that they do exist in a couple of districts. Out of 394 districts they are present in 3, 4 or 5 districts, but if you look deep into it, they are pretty much the same old militants with the same ties.

Hamann: It is always the same people?

Humayoon: They raised a new flag. What is important especially in the journalistic context is that they thrive on attention and recognition and sometimes we fall for that. Somebody raises a black flag and calls themselves DAESH and we give them extreme recognition. But if we are interested in addressing problems or threats such as DAESH, then the line of thinking is that we should not de-territorializing them. We must not think that they are franchised or

a brand that can exist everywhere. They cannot and they should not. The way to fight them is where they were born and bred.

Malikyar: If I may add something here. The Islamic militancy did not start with the Taliban. It actually started during the war against the Soviet Union among the Afghan Mujahidin of the time in 1980s particularly with groups like Mr. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's group (Hizb-e Islami), which at that time was the group that kills the most numbers of Soviets. Therefore, we have to give them the bulk of money and arms because they can kill more Soviets. That is where it really started. Afterwards the arriving of the Arabs with Osama bin Laden and people like him to Pakistan to help the Afghan Jihad and for the Americans and for others, who were helping the Afghan Mujahidin, they did not see what this will eventually lead to. Or they chose not to see it, because at that time the only objective was to win the cold war. So that is where it actually started. Since then it has been morphing into new forms and new names. It came in the form of the Taliban with the Afghans; Al-Qaeda became a kind of an entity as such. The latest is the ISIS or DAESH as we call it. Now in Afghanistan we have a series of proxy wars that Afghanistan has been a victim of. Lately we hear that Iran has its own Taliban in Afghanistan that they are supporting. Russia has its own Taliban that they are supporting, each for their own reasons. So the term Taliban is beginning to become synonymous to "gun for hire" and I am sure we will see other names and other forms of it as time goes by.

Hamann: Has the pull out of foreign soldiers provided new space for these groups?

Malikyar: What happened simultaneously was almost around the same time of the death of Mullah Omar. The original Taliban leader was announced to have died two years earlier but they had kept it secret. When the death was announced, some Taliban members did not agree with Mullah Mansour as the new head and then after Mullah Mansour was killed by an US drone in Pakistan the latest Mullah Hebatullah came to power. In the past two years we have seen a lot of branching out within the Taliban. But this is not necessarily because of the US and NATO pull out. There are also other sorts of dynamics that have worked.

Hamann: Are the Madrassas a key factor in this whole thing?

Humayoon: They are ideological or brain-washing centres for the kind of militancy that are targeting a place like Afghanistan. But increasingly the range of recruits has changed, because there is much greater space to operate. They and Taliban in particular have managed to give the public the sense, especially in rural Afghanistan, that 15 years of very robust international efforts could not defeat them. In comparison the efforts of the government of Afghanistan seems to be very limited and cannot prevent them from their march.

Hamann: How can we get out of this, any recommendations?

Malikyar: I do not think that we can directly take the route of diplomacy and negotiations. Right now the Taliban feels very confident and very strong and they think that time is on their side or at least the Pakistanis think that. So this has been taken on a stage, where at least negotiations equal on both sides can take place and reasonable compromises can be made. I strongly believe that we need to first contain the Taliban to some degree militarily in order for them to sit at the negotiation table. I am a woman and the gains of Afghan women in the past 15 years are something that is extremely important and very precious. And all other gains that benefit the majority of Afghan men and women's freedoms, liberties and rights, we do not want to give them up just to end this war and to have the Taliban join the power structure again.

Hamann: Actually I wanted to get exactly to this point. Because I could imagine the fear you just mentioned and the insecurity that people feel must greatly affect economy as well and social structure in this country and hinders development in every way. Can we identify some key players in this or some forces or some groups that might help to overcome this fear? Do you see that within the youth movements for example or among women?

Humayoon: How do we create a solution that is political, because deep down, when you observe, there is a lot of pressure in human's lives being lost. We lose a lot of them on an average of over 30 soldiers per day around the country. That is absolutely unsustainable and we cannot keep going on as such. It impacts the moral, the confidence of people and families. Again, to put it in perspective, we are a country, where people marry really young. So when a soldier is lost on the battle field they are just 22 or 23 and most of them are a HE.

We do have female officers in our defence forces and police, but when a soldier gets killed, they leave behind one or two orphans in Afghanistan. They leave behind a wife, a mother and a father, who no longer has somebody, who can provide for them. In many ways the humanitarian, the human cost of this has become extremely overwhelming for a society such as Afghanistan. At the same time, the 15 years of international support, the birth of a generation that is a lot more vocal and a lot more active and more organized cannot be overlooked. As a matter of fact we do have women leaders in parliament, in the public square, public space in the country, in government, and more. In fact, the majority of our public university students are women. We have had that sort of fabric change in our society; trends that cannot be washed away easily even by Taliban inter-politics. There will be a back and forth, there will be a negotiation on these where we must stand, namely basic principles of freedoms and liberties that we have institutionalized over the past 15 years including the freedom of speech and the need for a constitution and the need for women to be able to do what they choose to do in workplace, education and at home. But most of the rights for most of our citizens today are just on paper. The reality is that a great part of our country is living under conditions, where they do not have access to these rights because of insecurity.

Hamann: This is incredible waste of resources. For example, if women do not dare to go out in to the public sphere, right?

Malikyar: Yes, this year alone 4.000 schools closed because of lack of security. Yes, there is a huge loss there, loss of rights or not being able to practice one's rights, and not to mention loss of human's life. I mean around 65.000 civilians are dead since the UN started taking counting from 2009 until the beginning of this year. That is a huge number of civilians, you know casualties of war. That definitely is of course not sustainable, but on the other hand to do what the Taliban want and what the Pakistan want, which is in the end of having control over the Afghan state, is something that will throw the Afghan society back into darker days that they thought they have left behind. So it is something very delicate, but there are ways I mean, one of the important ways is talking and trying to find a non-military solution. The key is Pakistan and if the world decides to put real pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting the terrorist groups that would make a huge difference.

Audience: Q&A



Hamann: In our next round, I would like to give the audience a chance to ask questions or to give a statement.

Question: Thanks a lot to both of you for very interesting talks and insights. I want to get back to something Ms. Malikyar have said on the rule of law and this total lack of trust of the population with regards to the government. You already hinted on corrupted elites and compromise in the name of stability, but I would like to ask you what needs to be done to change this kind of situation and bring trust back to the state? And what role do you see for the international community?

Question: I have a question in regard to the Afghan refugees in Austria. Should we keep them or should we send them back? How would that affect Afghanistan?

Question: My question is related to the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in October this year. I was just wondering what the speakers thought towards the outcomes of this conference, and the second question is related to corruption and how it relates to problems that Afghanistan is currently facing?

Question: My name is Hussain and I arrived 9 months ago from Afghanistan to Austria. I just wanted to stress that there is already a war in Afghanistan and this war is ongoing since 40 years. We lost hope in Afghanistan and there is no future for us and our children. Do you have an idea or advice for us refugees here in Austria.

Question: Hello everyone. I also recently came to Vienna and I am as well a refugee. I have two questions. One question is to Ms. Malikyar.

Ms. Malikyar, you talked about refugees. You said, all of the Afghan refugees in Europe are here due to economic reasons, but I believe that is not right. I was 18 years in Iran. When I grew up in a second country I saw Afghanistan is every day getting worse. Then I took a

decision to come to a third country. I think I am not here because of economic reasons. I need a safe place and the entire world knows that Afghanistan is not safe. One year ago when my brother returned to Afghanistan for his studies, the Taliban took him off the bus. We do not know whether he is now a hostage or whether the Taliban killed him.

The second question is to Mr. Humayoon. What do you think about the American government and the rumor that they supported the Taliban? And also we hear about Iran and Pakistan supporting the Taliban.

Question: I am president of the Peace and Welfare Youth Association in Afghanistan, but now I am a refugee in Austria. I am so happy to associate with friendly Austria, but my questions are concerning the US, the EU, Canada, Great Britain and many other countries, which know that Afghanistan is not safe, but nevertheless all of them are pushing the Afghan government to ask the Afghan refugees to come back. How can we convince them that Afghanistan wants their youth back only to fight against each others? Taliban and DAESH are hiring people who have returned to fight against their own brothers and sisters?

Question: I'm from the Afghan organization Neuer Start in Austria and I have a comment in regard to the security situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is not a secure country at all, but especially not for the Hazara community. Therefore it is not fair, if the EU want to send back refugees in such a violent environment as Afghanistan.

Hamann: I think we have to talk about refugees. I like to ask you from the Afghan perspective. Would it be better for the cause of democracy, if we would send these people back or should we keep them here? What shall we do?

Humayoon: Is that the question you want to start with? Let us absolutely start with that question, because it is a very current debate in most European countries, but also increasingly inside Afghanistan. There are certain facts that we must get absolutely right. One of the key facts is that there is a war going on in my country. There is a war going on, a perpetual one and the situation has gone really bad in the past two years. Within that context, some of our people have decided to leave. They have chosen to sell their properties, pretty much everything they had back in the country to find the means and the resources to pay for smugglers or for human traffickers to take them to really harsh terrain

and help them to come to Europe. Within this context, I think there are better ways of addressing the issue and better ways of trying to find solutions than sending people back.

Hamann: Would you like to add to the issue of refugees?

Malikyar: Sure. Let me begin by addressing the concern of the young man. When I talked you misunderstood me, because I did not say that all of the Afghan refugees here are economic refugees. I said many are, but I also qualified that by saying that the economic situation is driven by bad security situations. So everything goes back to security.

I agree with Haseeb. I think to send back refugees, who have sold whatever they had to pay a human smuggler to bring them to the West is totally inhumane. If you think that this is not an issue that should be discussed in terms of morality, I disagree, because Western democracy was built on certain moral values. How many Afghans do you have here in total now? Between 30.000 – 40.000? Can Austria not absorb 40.000 refugees? I think the moral question is very important here, but if you want practical reasons for it, Haseeb mentioned it too. If you return these people to Afghanistan, you will be contributing to an expansion of radicalism and to an expansion and increase in international terrorism.

Hamann: There are two other questions that I would like to pick up. One of them was about the rule of law and the other about corruption which are two elements that definitely have an impact to the feeling of insecurity in the country. Maybe you would like to add something here.

Malikyar: The rule of law question is a wonderful one; the short answer would be that the international partners of Afghanistan, the donor countries should seriously start prioritizing rule of law over other issues in Afghanistan. Let us start with making the Afghan government as well as the international community to really believe in the implementation of the rule of law and making them accountable to that. That would be a good beginning. And to demonstrate that and to become accountable it is not very difficult to start dealing with taking away the immunity of the political elites of Afghanistan right now and then you can get to more everyday issues of courts I think the first step should be a political one.

Hamann: Would you like to add something on corruption?

Malikyar: Corruption is eating Afghanistan in such a way. I mean a lot of the international aid, if we have not seen the impact fully is because of corruption. One thing that I should make clear here that corruption has not only happened within the Afghan government or Afghan institutions. The donors are also accused of practicing corrupt ways; most projects at one point. A study came out that as much as 70% of the budget that was given to Afghanistan in the name of helping Afghanistan was going to overhead cost of international organizations, because when they came to Afghanistan, they had to have a life of luxury, they had to have bullet proof cars, body guards etc.

The current Afghan president talks a lot about being serious and fighting corruption. They are in the process of changing a lot basic procedures within the government to make corruption less easy, to make the government institutions more accountable. The same goes for the international side, but all of this will take time. Corruption has taken such deep roots in the last 15 years in Afghanistan.

Let me just add to the ethnic issue. Since we do have a lot of Afghans here in this audience and the question of the Hazara came up several times. I just like to say that especially people from Afghanistan, who have found their ways in European countries already, in the US or Canada have had now the chance to live normal lives. I think the biggest thing you can bring back to or send back to Afghanistan is a different view on Afghans. Not as different ethnic groups or linguistic groups or sectarian groups, but as Afghans as a whole and that is what the country needs to heal. That is what the country needs to move forward. We have to change the whole discourse and you are in a better position to do it from outside than people, who are in a difficult situation in Afghanistan. The discourse has to change from an discourse about ethnic differences to a discourse about differences between the parts of society that are forward looking, that are modern and those who benefit from war, benefit from creating rifts within the Afghan society and trying to play the ethnic card or sectarian card for their benefit, for their sustainability, for their own power and sources of money. If we do that, if we change that discourse in Afghanistan, you will see that the majority of the Afghans from all ethnic groups, Shi'a and Sunni, Persian speaking, Uzbek speaking or Pashtu speaking, the majority will be on the side of the forward looking part. And you will see that those, who are creating conflicts, using the ethnic issue, will be a minority and will be

isolated and then the majority will have a voice to contribute to their own future and the future of the country. Please consider this.
