

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Islamabad, September 11, 2019:** “Regional stability: what it means for our future” organized by Youth Economic Forum was an interactive session designed to enlighten the youth on the role of Pakistan in maintaining stability in the region, US exit from Afghanistan and the effect of US-Afghan war on economy of Pakistan. 40 young leaders from different backgrounds and universities participated in the event to present a more holistic youth prospective on this issue. The focus target audience for the session was young minds on security and peace matters. Mr. Adnan, Public Relations Associate at Youth Economic Forum, moderated the session. Dr. Shahid Afridi International Relations Scholar and Pak-Afghan US relations expert and Ms Sidrah Khan (Director Internal Affairs GHQ) were the guest speakers for the event.

Mr. Adnan welcomed the guest speakers and gave a brief introduction on the topic. Dr Shahid Afridi continued the discussion by quoting Winston Churchill “Those who do not learn from the history are doomed to fail”. He put forward questions such as why did America fail in Afghanistan? And why is it failing on the negotiation desk. He then argued that modern state of Afghanistan came into existence 30 years after US was discovered. He then moved onto the state of Affairs of both countries terming the difference due to Afghanistan being land of conquerors who either used it at a transit route for trade or establishing the empires in the region. Coming to the post 9/11 era he argued that three american Presidents have tried to end the Taliban empire in the region but they have been unsuccessful because they undermined the power of Talibans and each time they came back stronger each time. He argued that the America afghan war has had huge costs in both human and financial loss for the region . Despite all the war Taliban still hold 61 percent of the area as of today in Afghanistan.

Dr Shahid argued that US has been continually unsuccessful due to their strategic shortcomings and differences between the approach of civil and military leadership in tackling this war. He further mentioned war crimes as the reason for insurgency of Taliban where women and children were brutally killed etc. He blamed ego of american leaders as a reason for not being able to negotiate with Taliban for peace talks. US never wanted to negotiate with Taliban rather their aim was to divide them. He pointed out that various negotiations have been carried out over time but they have not yielded anything substantial for both the parties. He was of the view that distribution of resources is the only solution to afghan war.

Ms Sidrah Khan presented her viewpoint on the recent developments. She was of the view that the peace talks between US and Afghanistan have been not sabotaged rather they have been suspended due to 9/11 anniversary. She termed the September 28 2019 as of particular importance as it can be a turning point as if Afghan presidential elections are unable to take on that day ,it might make the situation more worse. She presented three narratives keeping in mind the two dates. Details of the peace talks have not been public and are known only to few. Secondly portion of Taliban assume themselves to be strong enough to win the war on their own. Third Taliban faction is overly hopeful about these peace talks so much that they forget the realities.

She concluded the session by pointing out that if US leaves Afghanistan is it going to restore peace in the region or are there going to be civil war. She pointed out that Americans will not want to isolate themselves

from the region and therefore if peace does indeed occur in the region it will be under very controlled environment which is acceptable to all stakeholders inside and outside Afghanistan.

The panelists were of the view that Pakistan cannot take leverage from US on Kashmir issue because although trump offered to mediate on the issue but it is very different from actually resolving this issue. Talking on relationship with Afghanistan they stressed on increasing the bilateral trade between both countries. They emphasized that Pakistan needs to be more potent and alert to the negative sentiments being spread by various lobbies to undermine the peace of the region.

Mr. Adnan concluded the event by giving the summary of all the guest speakers and gave an insight of a way forward. Then at the end of the event, Question-Answer session proceeded for about 30 minutes. Students and youth activists enthusiastically participated and asked questions from the guest speakers.

Youth economic forum is the Pakistan's first youth-run policy think tank which strives to bridge the gap between the youth and the policy makers. Its mission is to make policies that are more youth inclusive. This session was in alignment with its vision and presented the youth of the country to connect with the policy makers on a much deeper level.