

Indo-Afghan Relations on the Crossroads

New Delhi, 6 April 2009: As the US and its allies make a volte face in their policy by extending an olive branch to the Taliban and concede that a military victory is likely to remain elusive, the challenges New Delhi's faces only grow sharper. "With a potential return of Taliban in Kabul, New Delhi's options will shrink, for it has made political investments by backing the Karzai government," says Raghav Sharma in a Special Report recently published by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi.

According to Sharma, striking the right balance is an immediate challenge for New Delhi. The near collapse of Pakistan's state machinery in its frontier region not only accentuates the crisis across the border in Afghanistan but also drives the extremist threat much closer home. "In the Afghan regional matrix, Pakistan remains a key challenge for India," he says adding further that for any policy to be effective India will have to ensure that "its past support to the Tajik dominated Northern alliance against the Pashtun dominated Taliban does not serve as a convenient propaganda tool against its interests."

Sharma analyses India's current engagement with Afghanistan and suggests that the best way forward for India is to expand its aid Programme and pursue an active role in strengthening state governance capacity and winning the trust and confidence of the Afghan citizens by sharing its experiences of grassroots governance like the Lok Adalats and Panchyati Raj system. He also recommends helping drought-stricken Afghanistan rebuild its devastated agricultural sector through the help of indigenous farming and irrigation techniques. To tackle the illegal poppy trade Sharma believes New Delhi should "support the initiative put forward by the Senlis Council on the poppy for medicines program" and share its own experience of licensing poppy cultivation. The trick, he believes, is in undercutting the influence of Pakistan and winning the heart of the local population by giving them a stake in the state.

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Raghav Sharma's complete report –**India and Afghanistan: Charting the Future** - is available on the IPCS website www.ipcs.org.

For more recent publications on Afghanistan also see **Mayank Bubna's** report titled **Afghanistan: Talking to Taliban** and **Sonali Huria's** report titled **Failed States & Foreign Military Intervention: The Afghanistan Imbroglio**, available on the IPCS website www.ipcs.org.

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