



REPORT OF ROUND TABLE SESSION ON PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN BORDER: SECURITY CHALLENGES, TRADE & COMMERCE, AND REGIONAL SECURITY



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**Round Table Session
On
Pakistan-Afghanistan Border: Security
Challenges, Trade and Commerce, and
Regional Economy**

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PREFACE

The recent developments along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border have once again exposed how fragile relations between the two countries remain. Heightened security concerns, frequent border closures, and stricter rules have created uncertainty that affects far more than just the frontier areas. Decisions that appear as routine government measures for security or administration actually cause immediate hardship on the ground: trade convoys are halted for days at crossing points, perishable goods spoil, transporters face heavy losses, and border communities—who have always relied on cross-border ties for family, social, and economic life—suffer the most. Families are divided by the boundary, daily workers depend on movement for their income, and small traders with slim margins struggle with instability they did not create. At the same time, genuine security challenges, cross-border militancy, weak border management, and mutual distrust, continue to shape tough policy choices. This ongoing tension between real security needs and deep economic interdependence makes every decision carry wide and complex consequences for people’s lives, bilateral relations, and regional peace.

It was against this sensitive and rapidly changing backdrop that the Round Table Session on “Pakistan–Afghanistan Border: Security Challenges, Trade and Commerce, and Regional Security” took place. The purpose was to create a calm, serious, and thoughtful platform for discussion rather than quick reactions or blame. Scholars, policy experts, practitioners, and professionals gathered with the shared understanding that lasting solutions must address deeper structural issues instead of reacting only to daily news. The conversations went beyond surface-level problems to explore the realities of border governance, the serious economic damage caused by repeated trade stoppages, and the wider regional impact of continued instability.

A major focus of the session was the role of trade and commerce. While trade is often the first casualty of border tensions, it can also become a powerful means of building trust and cooperation if supported by clear rules, better coordination, and practical mechanisms that shield regular commercial activity from sudden disruptions whenever possible. Participants stressed the need for stronger institutional communication between the two sides, greater transparency in how policies are applied, and concrete steps such as improved coordination among border authorities, easier trade facilitation processes, and deliberate confidence-building initiatives.

The dialogue was conducted with openness, mutual respect, and a genuine willingness to listen to different perspectives. Instead of assigning blame, the discussion centered on identifying realistic and practical ways forward. The central conclusion that emerged was that security and economic stability are not opposing goals—they must be pursued together. A balanced approach, grounded in sustained cooperation and ongoing engagement, was seen as essential for progress.

This report records the main insights and recommendations from the session and reflects the collective commitment of everyone involved to encourage informed and constructive conversation on these vital issues. We sincerely thank the

speakers for their insightful and thought-provoking contributions, which deepened the discussion significantly, and we thank all the participants for their active engagement, thoughtful questions, and valuable reflections, which made the session truly meaningful. It is through such respectful and careful exchanges that stronger foundations for stability, cooperation, and shared progress can gradually be built for both countries and the wider region.

CONCEPT NOTE

The Pakistan–Afghanistan border has remained closed for extended periods over the past year, with closures reportedly increasing significantly in 2025 compared to previous years. The two major crossing points, Torkham in Khyber and Chaman in Baluchistan, have faced repeated shutdowns. These closures have created serious concerns for both countries. Pakistan has justified the restrictions primarily on security grounds, citing the need to prevent cross-border militancy and protect its citizens. On the other side, Afghan authorities have also imposed complete closures at times, further escalating tensions. In October, the situation became particularly severe, with both countries coming close to a military confrontation, highlighting the sensitive nature of their bilateral relationship.

The broader security environment in the region has deteriorated over the past two years. Independent security reports indicate that militant attacks in Pakistan increased significantly in 2025 compared to 2024, with some estimates suggesting a rise of over 34%. The provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan have been the most affected. Despite continuous counter-terrorism operations by Pakistan’s law enforcement agencies and security forces, incidents of violence have continued. Cross-border movement of militants has remained a central concern for Pakistani authorities, making border management a key national security priority.

However, prolonged border closure has had serious economic and humanitarian consequences. For instance, trade worth million dollars being disrupted, trucks carrying goods remained stranded, and these factors causing an estimated monthly 177 million USD damage to Pakistan. Moreover, small businesses, local economies in border regions as well as broader regional trade, including transit trade to Central Asia, has also faced disruption due to broken contracts, supply chain interruptions, and rising transportation costs. Beyond economics, repeated closures have weakened these people-to-people ties and created uncertainty and frustration among ordinary citizens.

The prime objectives include: balancing national security needs with economic stability and humanitarian considerations. Therefore, the need of the hour is not simply opening or closing the border, but developing a secure and well-managed system that addresses security risks while allowing regulated trade and movement. The seminar hopes to contribute to dialogue-based solutions and a more stable future for the region.

Importance of the Session:

1. **Economic Impact:** Highlights the significant economic losses due to the border closure, affecting trade and transit between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

2. Regional Connectivity: Emphasizes the need to maintain regional connectivity and trade agreements.
3. Diplomatic Efforts: Encourages diplomatic channels to address security concerns without disrupting trade.
4. Stakeholder Engagement: Brings together stakeholders, policymakers, and experts to discuss solutions.
5. Sustainable Solutions: Explores ways to ensure smooth run of trade and transit.

Objectives of the Session:

1. Assess Economic Impact: Evaluate the effects of the border closure on trade and economies.
2. Identify Solutions: Explore ways to ensure uninterrupted trade and transit.
3. Foster Dialogue: Encourage discussion among stakeholders and policymakers.
4. Promote Regional Cooperation: Enhance regional connectivity and trade agreements.
5. Balance Security and Trade: Find a balance between security concerns and economic interests.

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ROUND TABLE SESSION

The Round Table Session on “Pakistan–Afghanistan Border: Security Challenges, Trade and Commerce, and Regional Security” commenced at Governor House, Peshawar, in the gracious presence of the esteemed Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, whose participation lent significant weight and encouragement to the proceedings. The session was proudly hosted by Muhammad Yamaan Khan, a 6th-semester student of the Department of International Relations, and expertly moderated by Shizal Misbah, an 8th-semester student from the same department. Their initiative and dedication in organizing and guiding this important dialogue provided a meaningful platform for thoughtful exchange among scholars, practitioners, policy analysts, and professionals.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

DR. SYED SAMI RAZA, CHAIRMAN, DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Dr. Syed Sami Raza, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of International Relations at the University of Peshawar, delivered an insightful opening address at the Round Table Session. He began by expressing deep gratitude to the sponsors and the esteemed Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, for their generous support and presence, which made this important roundtable session possible. Their involvement underscored the significance of convening such discussions at a high level and provided the necessary encouragement for meaningful academic and policy engagement on critical bilateral issues.

Dr. Raza then shed light on the core purpose of the seminar. He explained that the session aimed to gather valuable feedback and input from various quarters of the local economy—including traders, transporters, border community representatives, business leaders, and other stakeholders. By bringing these diverse voices together, the seminar sought to collectively analyze the current situation along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border, assess the multifaceted impacts of security measures on trade and livelihoods, and generate practical recommendations. He emphasized that the ultimate goal was to call upon all stakeholders, especially the government, to take decisive action and implement active policy changes. These adjustments are essential to adapt to the rapidly changing dynamics of the time, ensuring that economic interdependence is not sacrificed in the name of security while addressing legitimate concerns effectively.

He highlighted the challenging context of bilateral relations, noting that the government across the border (in Afghanistan) remains weak and continues to grapple with issues of international recognition and internal stability. Particularly

since last year (2025), the two states have experienced very tense relations, marked by repeated border incidents, airstrikes, retaliatory actions, trade disruptions, and fragile ceasefires that have heightened mutual distrust and instability in the region.

As a teacher and scholar of International Relations, Dr. Raza drew on history to offer a hopeful perspective. He pointed out that the history of international relations is replete with examples where nation-states once locked in bitter conflicts and wars eventually found paths to peace through the deliberate building of trade and commerce relations. These economic ties raised the costs of war, fostered mutual dependencies, and paved the way for reconciliation and shared development. He cited the classic case of the European Coal and Steel Community (established in 1951 following the Schuman Declaration of 1950), where pooling coal and steel production between historic rivals France and Germany made future war between them "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible," laying the foundation for today's European Union. Similar patterns, he noted, can be observed in other cases, such as the post-war reconciliation between the United States and Japan, as well as between Brazil and Argentina (and Brazil and Indonesia in broader regional economic cooperation contexts), where trade integration helped transform adversarial relationships into cooperative ones focused on prosperity.

DR. NOREEN NASEER

Dr. Noreen Naseer, Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Peshawar, is a distinguished scholar and advocate specializing in political economy, governance, gender, and conflict dynamics in the Pakistan–Afghanistan borderlands. Her pioneering work, including the chapter “FATA ‘A Permanent War Zone’: Breaking Silence” in the Sage publication *Women and Politics of Peace: South Asia Narratives on Militarization, Power and Justice* (2016), has brought international attention to the plight of women and children in the Pak-Afghan border regions.

In her address at the Round Table Session, Dr. Noreen Naseer provided a sobering analysis of the economic fallout from ongoing border tensions and insecurity. Drawing on recent data, she highlighted that bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan has declined sharply over the past five years, from approximately US\$2.4 billion to around US\$754 million, resulting in a staggering loss of nearly US\$1.5 billion in Pakistani exports. This drastic reduction, she explained, stems primarily from deep-seated mistrust, frequent border closures, securitized policies, and persistent instability that have disrupted established trade routes and eroded confidence among traders and communities.

Dr. Naseer further pointed out the devastating role of opium production and the narcotics trade in the border regions. These illicit activities have not only damaged legitimate agricultural production, undermining livelihoods for farmers and smallholders, but have also fueled militancy, perpetuated cycles of violence, and created additional barriers to normalized trade relations. The interplay between narcotics economies and insecurity, she argued, has made cross-border commerce

increasingly precarious, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups such as women traders, daily wage earners, and small-scale entrepreneurs who depend on fluid movement for survival.

To reverse this decline and foster economic stability, Dr. Naseer advocated a fundamental shift away from blanket securitization of the border toward smarter, more nuanced approaches. She stressed the urgent need to implement risk-based controls that differentiate between legitimate trade and illicit flows, rather than imposing uniform restrictions that punish honest traders. Practical measures she proposed include devising phased transitions to ease small traders back into operations, integrating modern trade facilitation tools (such as digital tracking and simplified customs procedures), introducing greater digital transparency to build trust and reduce corruption opportunities, and initiating structured dialogue on bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Equally important, she emphasized community engagement, directly involving affected traders, border residents, women's groups, and local stakeholders in policy design, to ensure that solutions are grounded in on-the-ground realities and address the human costs of disruption.

Concluding her remarks, Dr. Naseer called for a holistic strategy that balances legitimate security concerns with the economic imperatives of interdependence. By prioritizing inclusive, evidence-based reforms and sustained engagement, she asserted, both countries can revive trade as a driver of peace, reduce the appeal of illicit economies, empower marginalized communities (especially women), and pave the way for shared prosperity in the borderlands. Her address underscored the session's broader theme: that thoughtful, cooperative policy adjustments informed by local expertise are essential to breaking the current impasse and building a more stable future.

DR. HUSSAIN SHAHEED SOHARWARDI

Prof. Dr. Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi is Professor and Chairman of the Department of Regional Studies at the University of Peshawar, and former Chairman of the Department of International Relations. He holds MS and PhD degrees from the University of Edinburgh and has received several international fellowships. With over 50 research papers and multiple books, his expertise covers International Relations, conflict resolution, countering violent extremism, regional connectivity, and Pakistan's foreign policy. He frequently serves as a policy consultant, visiting professor, and media commentator on South Asian and Central Asian geopolitical issues.

Dr. Soherwordi delivered a visionary and strategically oriented address that reframed the Pakistan–Afghanistan border challenges within a larger framework of regional connectivity and South–South cooperation. He opened by positioning Afghanistan not merely as a source of security concerns, but as the essential geographical and economic bridge linking Pakistan directly to Russia and, by extension, to broader Eurasian markets. He emphasized that in relations with

neighboring countries, economic policy effectively serves as the most authentic form of foreign policy, arguing that genuine and sustained economic engagement is the surest path to mutual prosperity and, ultimately, to durable peace in a historically volatile region.

Dr. Soherwordi highlighted the multifaceted benefits of trilateral connectivity among Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Russia, including expanded trade opportunities, development of efficient transport corridors, deepened energy cooperation, accelerated boundary and cross-border trade, and the collective pursuit of mitigating shared security threats such as terrorism. He explained that this triangular relationship would extend far beyond the three nations involved, forging vital linkages between three major geopolitical and economic regions: South Asia, the Middle East, and Eurasia. This broader connectivity, he argued, represents a transformative imperative for inclusive regional development.

To structure his vision, Dr. Soherwordi elaborated on three core points. First, he stressed the need to strengthen Pakistan–Russia economic ties through dedicated connectivity corridors, with active cooperation in key sectors such as agriculture, transportation infrastructure, and energy. He placed particular emphasis on the strategic importance of refurbishing and revitalizing Pakistan Steel Mills in Karachi as a flagship initiative that could anchor industrial revival and support broader trade flows. He noted that by establishing reliable routes through Pakistan–Afghanistan–Tajikistan–Uzbekistan pathways, South Asia would gain direct access to Eurasian markets, dramatically lowering transportation costs, increasing trade volumes, and enhancing overall economic integration.

Second, he underscored Afghanistan's pivotal and indispensable central role in realizing this connectivity vision. Afghanistan, he argued, functions as the natural hub for north–south and east–west linkages. He specifically highlighted the proposed railway track connecting Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan, describing it as a potential major energy corridor once materialized. He also drew attention to the strategic significance of the TAPI (Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India) gas pipeline project, which could evolve into a comprehensive cargo and energy conduit, further solidifying Afghanistan's position as the linchpin between Eurasia and South Asia and enabling seamless multimodal transport across vast distances.

Third, Dr. Soherwordi contrasted these emerging multi-regional corridors with the existing China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which he described as an energy and infrastructure corridor primarily limited to bilateral ties between Pakistan and China. In contrast, the Pakistan–Afghanistan–Russia-linked corridors he advocated would connect three enormous regions, offering exponentially greater scope for economic transformation. He strongly advocated redirecting attention from traditional North–North trade patterns (dominated by Western and developed economies) toward vibrant South–South trade and cooperation, which he viewed as more equitable, self-reliant, and aligned with the interests of the Global South.

Addressing the formidable obstacles to this ambitious agenda, Dr. Soherwordi candidly identified the primary challenges: the precarious security environment in Afghanistan, terrorism originating from ungoverned spaces, and the consequent erosion of investor confidence and mutual trust. He bluntly stated that terrorism and economic prosperity are inversely proportional—where terrorism flourishes unchecked, prosperity inevitably suffers, and vice versa. To overcome this, he called for the urgent formulation and implementation of a joint, comprehensive regional strategy involving Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, and other concerned countries to decisively counter terrorism, including groups such as ISKP (Islamic State Khorasan Province), TTP (Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan), and other transnational terrorist organizations. Such collaboration, he argued, is essential to create the secure environment needed for investment and sustained economic growth.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Soherwordi framed the proposed triangular connectivity between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Russia as the embodiment of true Global South cooperation and authentic South–South solidarity. This approach, he asserted, empowers the region to pursue prosperity independently, free from over-reliance on conventional Western-centric economic policies and frameworks. He expressed optimism that once trade routes and connectivity infrastructure are made safe, predictable, and investor-friendly, confidence will return, capital will flow, and lasting peace will take root across Eurasia, South Asia, and the Middle East. His address provided a compelling, optimistic roadmap that complemented the session's overarching theme: transforming economic interdependence into a powerful instrument for overcoming security dilemmas and fostering shared regional progress.

MR. IBRAHIM SHINWARI

Ibrahim Shinwari, a senior journalist with nearly three decades of professional experience covering the Pakistan-Afghanistan border regions, delivered a grounded and critical address drawn from his extensive on-the-ground reporting. He has served as a correspondent for Dawn newspaper, where he continues to report on border issues, security, trade disruptions, and local impacts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former FATA areas. His career also includes contributions to prominent outlets such as The News International, The Muslim, BBC, and VOA Deewa Pashto service. In recognition of his dedication to the field, he served as President of the Tribal Union of Journalists in 2010. Academically, he holds a master's degree in Political Science, which has informed his insightful coverage of political, economic, and humanitarian dynamics along the Durand Line.

Mr. Shinwari opened his remarks by reflecting on his more than three decades of direct engagement with both Pakistan and Afghanistan, spanning reporting from conflict zones, border crossings like Torkham, and interactions with traders, communities, and officials on both sides. He asserted that, particularly over the last decade, Pakistan's border and trade policies have increasingly become anti-trade in

nature, characterized by frequent closures, stringent restrictions, and a heavy emphasis on security over economic facilitation. He pointed out that these measures have severely hampered bilateral commerce, which was once more fluid and mutually beneficial, leading to significant losses for traders, transporters, and border-dependent economies.

A key point in his address was the conspicuous absence of effective involvement by parliamentarians and the civilian government in shaping and overseeing border policies. He argued that decisions have largely been driven by security establishments, with limited input from elected representatives or civilian authorities, resulting in policies that prioritize short-term security measures over long-term economic stability and people-to-people ties. This disconnects, he suggested, has contributed to the persistent cycle of mistrust and disruption.

Mr. Shinwari specifically highlighted the critical role of logistics and border management at key crossing points like Torkham in controlling and often choking trade activity. He described how bureaucratic hurdles, arbitrary delays, documentation requirements, and intermittent closures create bottlenecks that strand goods, inflate costs, and discourage consistent trade flows. These logistical challenges, combined with broader policy rigidity, have turned what could be thriving economic gateways into sources of frustration and financial hardship for thousands of families reliant on cross-border movement.

He also addressed the issue of visa restrictions imposed by Pakistan, noting that these have created significant barriers for Afghan nationals, traders, and even local border tribes seeking legitimate movement. While acknowledging visa-related challenges on both sides, such as reciprocal restrictions and documentation issues, he emphasized that Pakistan's tightened visa regime (including requirements for passports and visas for entry, especially since mid-2010s escalations) has disproportionately affected everyday cross-border interactions, including family visits, small-scale trade, and labor mobility. This has exacerbated tensions, reduced informal trade that sustains many communities, and contributed to a sense of alienation among border populations.

In summary, Mr. Shinwari's address provided a journalist's firsthand perspective on how policy choices over the past decade have shifted toward restriction rather than facilitation, sidelining civilian oversight and logistical efficiency in favor of securitized approaches. He underscored the human and economic costs, lost livelihoods, stranded goods, and eroded trust, and implicitly called for more inclusive, pragmatic policies that restore balanced trade while addressing legitimate security concerns. His insights, rooted in years of reporting from the ground, enriched the session's focus on the need for cooperative solutions to revive economic ties along the Pakistan–Afghanistan frontier.

MR. SHAMIM SHAHID

M. Shamim Shahid, a veteran journalist from Buner district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, brings over four decades of professional experience to his analysis of Pakistan–Afghanistan relations. He holds a Master’s degree in Journalism and Mass Communication (JLM) from Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, and has been active in journalism since 1984. Throughout his career, he has contributed to leading national newspapers, including *The Muslim*, *The Frontier Post*, *The Nation*, *Pakistan Today*, *The Express Tribune*, and *The Frontier News*.

Internationally, he has served as a correspondent for *Khaleej Times* (Dubai), *Asahi* (Japan), and *Voice of America* (VOA). His reporting has consistently focused on Afghanistan, tribal areas, security issues, terrorism, and religious extremism, making him one of the most seasoned voices on the Durand Line dynamics.

In his address at the Round Table Session, Mr. Shamim Shahid began by contextualizing the current tensions, stating that the Pakistan–Afghanistan conflict is far from a new phenomenon. He reminded participants that friction along the border, disputes over the Durand Line, cross-border movements, and mutual suspicions have persisted for decades, often intensified by external interventions, regime changes, and internal instabilities in both countries. However, he stressed that the present moment requires a fresh and pragmatic approach rather than reliance on outdated strategies.

He strongly advocated that the Pakistani government must make concerted efforts to maintain cordial and constructive relations with Afghanistan. To achieve this, he proposed sending high-level delegations composed of influential local political leaders, particularly respected figures from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with deep ties to Pashtun communities, as well as prominent religious scholars (ulema) who command credibility on both sides of the border. Such delegations, he argued, would be better positioned to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Taliban leadership than purely bureaucratic or military-led channels. He emphasized that these interlocutors could help build trust, address grievances, and find common ground on issues such as border management, trade facilitation, and counter-terrorism cooperation.

Mr. Shahid cautioned that the Taliban can no longer be approached in the same way as they were during their insurgency phase or earlier periods of exile. Since assuming governance in August 2021, they have become the de facto administrators of Afghanistan, responsible for state functions, public services, and international representation. This shift in status demands a corresponding change in Pakistan’s policy mindset. He urged the government to recognize these evolving dynamics, adopt proactive and forward-looking policies, and be willing to revise or abandon previous approaches that may no longer be effective or appropriate in dealing with a governing authority rather than a non-state militant group.

He acknowledged that challenges exist on both sides of the border, including security threats, militant activities, and governance issues, but firmly stated that

Pakistan must also introspect and acknowledge its own shortcomings. He was particularly critical of the frequent and prolonged border closures, describing them as counterproductive. While such measures may be intended as short-term security responses, they often backfire by inflicting economic hardship on border communities, disrupting livelihoods, and breeding resentment. He warned that repeated closures could transform passive discontent into active hostility: where previously there might have been only one Taliban sympathizer in a household, prolonged economic strangulation and restricted movement could multiply such sentiments across families and villages, deepening alienation and potentially fueling recruitment into extremist groups.

In essence, Mr. Shamim Shahid's address called for a balanced, people-centric, and dialogue-driven approach to Pakistan–Afghanistan relations. He urged moving beyond securitized responses toward inclusive engagement that leverages local political and religious leadership, recognizes the Taliban's changed status as a governing entity, avoids punitive measures like blanket border closures, and addresses mutual shortcomings through honest self-reflection. His recommendations, rooted in decades of frontline reporting and deep understanding of tribal and cross-border realities, reinforced the session's broader theme: that sustainable stability requires not only security cooperation but also economic openness, trust-building dialogue, and sensitivity to the human costs of prolonged confrontation.

MR. MEHRAN WAZIR

Mehran Wazir is a researcher and development practitioner with over 15 years of experience working on the Pakistan–Afghanistan borderlands, particularly in the northwestern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. His work focuses on understanding the political, social, and historical dynamics of these cross-border regions, while promoting dialogue, connectivity, and collaboration among civil society actors across the frontier. He currently serves as Chief Executive of the Centre for Regional Policy & Dialogue (CRPD), where he leads initiatives that bring together researchers, youth, and civil society organizations to strengthen cross-border engagement, regional dialogue, and peace-building efforts. His work combines research and practice, with a strong emphasis on building networks between communities and civil society across the borderlands to support democratization, stability, and inclusive civic participation.

Speaking from the perspective of civil society, Mr. Wazir opened his address by highlighting the severe and often overlooked human and economic impact of deceitful and inconsistent border closures between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He described these repeated, unpredictable disruptions, frequently justified on security grounds but lacking transparency or clear rationale, as profoundly damaging to borderland communities. Such closures, he argued, do not merely interrupt commerce; they erode livelihoods, shatter trust, destroy established supply chains,

and create widespread uncertainty that affects families, small traders, transporters, and entire local economies dependent on cross-border movement.

Mr. Wazir emphasized that this pattern of inconsistency reveals a fundamental lack of priority and strategic clarity in Pakistan's approach to the border. He questioned: there is no clear, consistent path forward—who exactly are we trying to connect with, and how are we meaningfully interacting with Afghan counterparts? Without a defined vision or sustained engagement, policies remain reactive, ad hoc, and counterproductive, failing to build the mutual confidence needed for stable relations.

He stressed the indispensable role of strong, functional institutions in ensuring the long-term sustainability of border trade. Effective institutions, such as dedicated trade facilitation bodies, joint border management mechanisms, transparent customs processes, and inclusive stakeholder forums, are essential for predictability, accountability, and resilience. Unfortunately, he observed, those currently leading negotiations or interactions with the Afghan government often appear disconnected from the realities of trade. Many negotiators, he pointed out, have little to no affiliation with or understanding of trade unions, business associations, or the day-to-day concerns of traders and transporters. This institutional disconnect results in policies that overlook the economic stakes and prioritize short-term security optics over long-term stability.

Finally, Mr. Wazir drew attention to a broader structural consequence: the shift, or deliberate neglect, of the economy along the border inevitably leads to a corresponding shift (or deterioration) in infrastructure. When trade is consistently disrupted, investment in roads, warehouses, customs facilities, digital tracking systems, and supporting services dries up. Border points like Torkham and Chaman, which could serve as thriving economic hubs linking South Asia to Central Asia, instead suffer from neglect, decay, and underutilization. This vicious cycle further entrenches poverty, reduces state presence, and undermines regional connectivity potential.

In summary, Mr. Wazir's address, grounded in civil society's on-the-ground perspective, served as a poignant reminder that border policies must move beyond securitization toward institutional strengthening, consistent engagement, and recognition of trade as a lifeline for peace and prosperity. His call for clarity, institutional accountability, and inclusive processes aligned closely with the session's emphasis on balancing security with economic interdependence to foster sustainable cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

MR. WAJID ALI SHINWARI

Mr. Wajid Ali Shinwari, Senior Vice President at the Khyber Chamber of Commerce & Industry, is a prominent figure in cross-border trade facilitation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. As a Senior Leader of the Custom Clearing Agent Association and an Export Analyst specializing in Pak-Afghan trade, he

brings extensive practical expertise to issues of commerce, logistics, and economic interdependence along the Durand Line. His roles involve advocating for smoother trade processes, analyzing export trends, and representing the interests of traders and businesses affected by border policies, making him a key voice in discussions on regional economic stability.

In his address at the Round Table Session, Mr. Wajid Ali Shinwari began by underscoring the critical strategic and economic importance of the Pakistan–Afghanistan border, describing it as a lifeline for bilateral and regional trade rather than merely a security frontier. He directed his views specifically to the federal government of Pakistan and the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), urging them to recognize the Torkham Border's pivotal role in facilitating trade flows. He highlighted Torkham as one of the busiest and most vital crossing points, handling a significant volume of goods, including perishables, machinery, and raw materials, and argued that its efficient operation is essential for sustaining economic activity in Pakistan's border provinces and beyond.

Mr. Shinwari stressed the immense value of Afghanistan and the Central Asian markets for Pakistan's economy. He pointed out that Afghanistan serves as a gateway to landlocked Central Asian republics such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, offering Pakistan opportunities to expand exports in sectors like textiles, pharmaceuticals, food products, and construction materials. He emphasized that nurturing these markets could diversify Pakistan's trade portfolio, reduce dependence on traditional partners, and foster regional integration through enhanced connectivity.

To illustrate the tangible costs of disruptions, Mr. Shinwari cited stark economic losses: to date, the Pakistani government has incurred a staggering loss of 168 billion rupees due to repeated border closures, while the KPK province alone has suffered an estimated 5 billion rupees in revenue shortfalls. These figures, he explained, encompass direct impacts such as halted exports, spoiled goods, unemployed transporters, and reduced customs duties, as well as indirect effects like supply chain disruptions and lost business opportunities. He argued that such closures not only inflict immediate financial pain but also erode long-term investor confidence and trade relationships.

He further contended that the provinces of KPK and Balochistan are almost entirely dependent on Pak-Afghan trade for their economic vitality. In KPK, cross-border commerce supports thousands of jobs in logistics, agriculture, and small-scale manufacturing, while in Balochistan, points like Chaman serve similar roles in sustaining local economies. Any prolonged restrictions, he warned, threaten to exacerbate poverty, unemployment, and social instability in these already vulnerable regions.

Mr. Shinwari also addressed the broader regional context, noting that Central Asian states, being mostly landlocked, face significant challenges in accessing global markets due to restrictions on alternative routes such as Iran's Chabahar Port (influenced by international sanctions and geopolitical tensions). This situation, he

argued, creates a mutual incentive for Pakistan and Afghanistan to collaborate, as opening borders could position Pakistan as a key transit hub for Central Asia's exports (e.g., energy resources and minerals) while providing those states with reliable access to South Asian ports like Karachi and Gwadar.

Calling for action, Mr. Shinwari urged governments on both sides to collectively prioritize the reopening and normalization of borders through coordinated policies, joint mechanisms for dispute resolution, and investments in infrastructure. He emphasized that unilateral or reactive measures only perpetuate losses, and instead, proactive bilateral engagement is needed to balance security with trade imperatives.

Finally, he advocated for a multi-stakeholder approach, encouraging border chambers of commerce, small traders, the Custom Agent Association, and influential tribal leaders to step forward and actively contribute to resolving border issues. These groups, with their on-the-ground knowledge and community ties, could facilitate grassroots dialogues, propose practical solutions, and pressure authorities for reforms that protect livelihoods while addressing security concerns.

In summary, Mr. Wajid Ali Shinwari's address provided a business-oriented perspective on the urgent need to revive Pak-Afghan trade, backed by economic data and regional insights. His recommendations for government action, stakeholder involvement, and recognition of interdependencies reinforced the session's core message: that open borders and collaborative efforts are indispensable for economic recovery, regional stability, and shared prosperity in the face of ongoing security challenges.

DR. WAQAS HUSSAIN SHAH

Dr. Waqas Hussain Shah is an interdisciplinary scholar specializing in International Relations and Regional Studies, currently pursuing his doctoral research at the University of Peshawar. He holds a PhD in International Relations, complemented by multiple postgraduate degrees, and earned a Gold Medal for securing first position in his MA in Political Science. His academic work centers on Pakistan–Central Asia economic linkages, the evolving regional order in post-U.S. Afghanistan, trade corridors, and the political economy of security. With extensive fieldwork conducted across Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asian countries, Dr. Shah effectively bridges rigorous academic inquiry with practical, policy-relevant analysis on issues of regional connectivity, trade governance, and cross-border economic dynamics.

In his address at the Round Table Session, Dr. Waqas Hussain Shah introduced himself by noting that, although he holds a PhD in International Relations—with his doctoral thesis specifically focused on the economy of Afghanistan and Central Asia—his recent Diploma in International Trade from the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) in Karachi has equipped him with valuable, hands-on insights into the practical challenges confronting Pakistan–Afghanistan trade.

Through direct engagement with systems such as the Pakistan Single Window (PSW) and Pakistan Customs operations, he has observed concrete efforts to modernize trade procedures, streamline processes, and enhance transparency in areas like border management and customs clearance. These initiatives represent important steps toward reducing bureaucratic hurdles and improving efficiency at crossing points.

Dr. Shah then emphasized the substantial untapped potential inherent in trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He described this bilateral commerce as holding great promise for mutual economic growth, given geographic proximity, historical ties, complementary needs (such as Pakistan's manufactured goods and agricultural exports meeting Afghanistan's demand for consumer and industrial products), and the opportunity to serve as a gateway for broader regional flows. However, he candidly acknowledged the persistent and multifaceted obstacles that continue to undermine this potential, including deep-seated security concerns (such as militancy and instability that deter consistent operations), inadequate infrastructure (ranging from poor road networks and limited warehousing to outdated facilities at border points), and significant issues of mutual trust that erode confidence among traders, investors, and officials on both sides. These factors collectively result in frequent disruptions, higher transaction costs, and missed opportunities for sustained economic cooperation.

Shifting to a broader strategic perspective, Dr. Shah highlighted Central Asia's critical geopolitical and economic significance, referring to it as Mackinder's heartland—a central, resource-rich continental pivot area long recognized for its strategic importance in global trade and energy dynamics. He pointed out that Central Asia offers substantial opportunities in trade (including minerals, hydrocarbons, and agricultural commodities) and energy (such as natural gas and electricity exports), which could benefit Pakistan through diversified partnerships and transit revenues.

To capitalize on these opportunities, Dr. Shah drew on Alfred Thayer Mahan's classic emphasis on sea power and maritime connectivity, positioning Pakistan's Gwadar Port as a transformative maritime gateway. He explained that Gwadar can effectively link Mackinder's heartland (Central Asia) to global markets by providing landlocked Central Asian states with reliable, cost-effective access to the Arabian Sea and international shipping lanes. When integrated with Afghanistan as a transit corridor, this creates a powerful strategic corridor that connects Central Asian economies directly to South Asian ports and beyond, enabling efficient movement of goods, energy resources, and investment flows while generating shared economic gains for Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asian partners.

Dr. Shah concluded by stressing that realizing this strategic corridor and unlocking shared prosperity requires deliberate and coordinated action on several fronts. Improved border systems are essential to facilitate faster, more reliable, and less costly movement of goods and people, including through digitized processes, better facilities, and reduced delays. Enhanced security cooperation between the relevant states is crucial to mitigate instability, build mutual confidence, and create

a predictable environment for trade and investment. Finally, strengthened regional connectivity infrastructure—such as upgraded roads, railways, energy pipelines, and integrated logistics networks—is vital to support sustained and expanding trade flows across the corridor.

His remarks, blending advanced academic expertise with recent practical trade knowledge, reinforced the session’s central theme: that addressing security and infrastructural barriers through collaborative, transparent mechanisms can convert regional challenges into opportunities for economic integration, stability, and mutual prosperity involving Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.

MR. SHAHID KHAN SHINWARI

Mr. Shahid Khan Shinwari is a prominent businessman with over 25 years of experience in cross-border trade and transport operations spanning Afghanistan and Central Asia. He expanded his family's truck tyre business, originally founded by his father in the 1970s, into a leading regional transport company where he serves as CEO. His business model emphasizes credit-based partnerships to foster growth and promote financial inclusion among partners and stakeholders. In addition to transport, he has invested in the pharmaceutical and tyre industries, including ventures based in Karachi. From 2018 to 2022, he served as a Member of the Board of Investment, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where he contributed significantly to trade promotion initiatives and the development of the Rashakai Special Economic Zone. During his tenure, he facilitated collaborations for establishing tyre manufacturing industries in partnership with Chinese and American entities and presented industrial development proposals directly to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. He also proposed the innovative concept of 24/7 Pakistan–Afghanistan–Central Asia trade connectivity to former Prime Minister Imran Khan. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Shinwari played an active role in sustaining trade and transport operations by suggesting practical solutions to the government, such as driver exchanges at borders, ensuring continuity even during global disruptions. His career exemplifies strong leadership in regional transport logistics, industrial investment, trade connectivity, and sustainable economic development.

In his address at the Round Table Session, Mr. Shahid Khan Shinwari shared personal and historical insights into the enduring importance of Pak-Afghan trade. He stated that his family has been engaged in business since the 1970s, contributing to the local economy by establishing and strengthening trade links from Karachi through Khyber to Kabul and beyond. He highlighted how, even during the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic, trade in the region did not come to a complete halt. This continuity was possible because he and other stakeholders suggested effective measures to the government at the time, such as arranging exchanges of drivers at the borders to maintain essential transport flows without compromising health protocols.

Mr. Shinwari directly appealed to the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to leverage his good offices and influential position to bring the genuine plight and

concerns of local traders to the attention of powerful decision-making circles in Islamabad. He emphasized the need for high-level advocacy to address the hardships faced by border-based businesses due to repeated disruptions.

He proudly recalled that the concept of operating border trade on a 24/7 basis was originally proposed by him in 2018/19 to the then-Prime Minister Imran Khan. This initiative aimed to maximize efficiency, reduce delays, and boost overall trade volumes at key crossings like Torkham. Mr. Shinwari reinforced this idea by noting that, historically, even during times of conflict and tension, trade between nations has continued because economic stability remains essential and mutually beneficial for both sides, providing livelihoods, revenue, and a degree of interdependence that discourages escalation.

He strongly advocated for greater inclusivity in policymaking, insisting that whenever any trade agreement is signed between Islamabad and Kabul, representatives of local traders and border business communities must be present at the table. Their direct involvement would ensure that practical, on-the-ground realities, such as logistical challenges, daily operational needs, and the human impact of policies, are fully considered, leading to more realistic and effective agreements.

Mr. Shinwari called on Islamabad and Kabul to deliberately separate politics from trade. He argued that sustainable economic cooperation demands continuity, long-term stability, and the building of mutual trust that transcends short-term political differences or fluctuations in bilateral relations.

While acknowledging past mediation efforts by countries like Turkey and Qatar to bridge gaps between Pakistan and Afghanistan, he observed that these initiatives had not produced the desired long-term, sustainable outcomes. Expressing hope for future progress, he specifically suggested that Saudi Arabia could step forward to play a constructive bridging role—facilitating high-level dialogue, mediating trust-building measures, and helping to resume and regularize daily cross-border trade activities. Such involvement, he believed, would strengthen economic ties between the two neighboring nations and contribute to broader regional stability.

In summary, Mr. Shahid Khan Shinwari's address combined personal entrepreneurial experience, historical perspective, and practical recommendations to underscore the vital role of uninterrupted, inclusive, and depoliticized trade in fostering prosperity along the Pakistan–Afghanistan frontier. His call for stakeholder inclusion, advocacy at the highest levels, and potential third-party facilitation aligned closely with the session's emphasis on transforming economic interdependence into a foundation for peace and shared progress.

GOVERNOR KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA MR. FAISAL KARIM KUNDI

His Excellency Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi, Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, delivered the concluding address at the Round Table Session, speaking directly to the assembled academia, students, scholars, practitioners, journalists, business representatives, and participants. He expressed appreciation for the initiative taken by the young organizers and participants, hoping that the thoughtful recommendations emerging from the seminar would move beyond discussion to practical implementation. He emphasized his belief that such well-researched, inclusive dialogues could offer workable, realistic solutions capable of influencing policymaking at both the provincial and federal levels.

Governor Kundi reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering commitment to fostering strong bilateral relations and significantly enhanced trade with Afghanistan and other neighboring countries. He stated clearly that sustainable regional peace is an indispensable prerequisite for meaningful economic growth, business development, and prosperity across borders. He underscored that meaningful and timely dialogue plays a constructive and indispensable role in shaping effective policymaking, particularly on complex and intertwined issues such as border security, trade facilitation, and regional economic concerns. He advocated for a carefully balanced strategy that simultaneously safeguards legitimate security imperatives while actively promoting legal trade flows, cross-border commerce, and healthy people-to-people contacts that strengthen mutual understanding and interdependence.

Referring specifically to the security environment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Governor noted that the border belt adjoining Afghanistan has had a direct and profound impact on law and order within the province. He traced the roots of much of the present instability to historical developments, observing that the Soviet–Afghan War (1979–1989) and the events following the September 11, 2001 attacks drastically reshaped the regional landscape. These events, he explained, fueled the spread of extremism, militancy, and prolonged instability that have continued to affect peace and security in the province and the country at large. He paid tribute to the immense sacrifices made by Pakistan—particularly by the people and security forces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—in the long and arduous fight against terrorism, describing the province as a living testament to those heavy costs borne in the defense of national and regional stability.

His Excellency called for making the Pak–Afghan border fully functional and operationally efficient without unnecessary delays or disruptions. He stressed that an open, predictable, and well-managed border is essential to boost legitimate business activity, revive economic momentum in border communities, and facilitate smoother access for Pakistan to the vast markets and resources of Central Asian states. He reminded participants that merely identifying problems—however accurately—is insufficient; what is truly required are practical, realistic, and

implementable solutions that address root causes while balancing competing priorities.

The Governor expressed his strong hope that the seminar’s recommendations—drawn from the diverse and informed inputs of academics, journalists, representatives of chambers of commerce, traders, civil society, and students—would provide valuable guidance to relevant institutions and help shape informed, effective, and forward-looking policymaking. He reiterated Pakistan’s dedication to strong bilateral relations and enhanced trade with Afghanistan and neighboring countries, adding once again that sustainable peace across the region remains the key to unlocking genuine economic and business development.

In a particularly encouraging note directed toward the students and young organizers, His Excellency expressed admiration for their initiative in convening such a meaningful discussion on local and regional issues. He encouraged them to continue taking ownership of such efforts, assuring them that his office and personal support would always be available to assist and facilitate similar constructive initiatives in the future.

The Governor’s address provided an authoritative, hopeful, and action-oriented conclusion to the session, reinforcing the central theme that security and economic stability are not opposing goals but complementary imperatives. By calling for balanced strategies, inclusive dialogue, practical solutions, and sustained youth engagement, he set a forward-looking tone and underscored the potential for collaborative progress in Pakistan–Afghanistan relations and broader regional connectivity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Round Table Session on “Pakistan–Afghanistan Border: Security Challenges, Trade and Commerce, and Regional Security” brought together diverse voices—academics, journalists, traders, civil society representatives, business leaders, and students—to confront a shared reality: prolonged border disruptions, driven by security imperatives, have inflicted severe economic damage, eroded livelihoods in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, deepened mistrust, and foreclosed access to Central Asian markets.

Speakers consistently highlighted that trade is not a secondary concern but a powerful instrument for building trust, raising the cost of conflict, and fostering regional stability—echoing historical precedents where economic interdependence transformed adversaries into partners. From the sharp decline in bilateral trade and the human cost of inconsistent closures to the untapped potential of corridors linking South Asia, Central Asia, and beyond, the consensus was clear: securitization alone is unsustainable.

Participants called for balanced, pragmatic solutions—risk-based border management, institutional coordination, transparent policies, stakeholder inclusion (especially local traders and communities), depoliticization of trade, 24/7 operations where feasible, and proactive dialogue involving credible local and religious leaders. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi’s closing remarks reinforced this vision, affirming Pakistan’s commitment to cordial relations with Afghanistan, urging practical implementation of the session’s recommendations, and encouraging youth-led initiatives.

Ultimately, the session demonstrated that security and prosperity are not opposing goals but interdependent necessities. By prioritizing sustained cooperation, inclusive policymaking, and economic continuity over reactive restrictions, Pakistan and Afghanistan can convert a volatile frontier into a corridor of shared growth, peace, and regional connectivity.

The recommendations that emerged, rooted in expertise, lived experience, and shared sacrifice, provide a credible, actionable foundation for provincial and federal policymaking. Identifying problems is no longer sufficient; what is required now is political will, cross-border cooperation, and practical implementation. If these insights are translated into policy with the urgency they demand, the Pakistan–Afghanistan relationship can shift from a cycle of tension and loss to one of interdependence, stability, and mutual progress. The dialogue has shown what is possible; the time has come for decision-makers to act.

RECOMENDATIONS

The Round Table Session generated a set of practical, evidence-based recommendations that address the intertwined challenges of security, trade disruption, institutional gaps, and missed regional opportunities. These recommendations are designed for immediate consideration by provincial and federal authorities, as well as bilateral mechanisms with Afghanistan.

Shift to Transparent Border Management

Shift to risk-differentiated border management that separates legitimate trade from illicit flows. Activate 24/7 operations at Torkham and Chaman, integrate digital tools (Pakistan Single Window, upgraded customs), and provide phased support for small traders. This will stop multi-billion losses, prevent spoilage, restore predictability, and prove commerce builds trust faster than closures.

Mandate Stakeholder Inclusion in Negotiations

Require direct participation of border chambers, custom agents, small traders, tribal leaders, women entrepreneurs, and civil society in every bilateral trade and border agreement. Their inclusion ensures policies reflect ground realities, logistics, visa issues, community impacts, closing institutional gaps, preventing alienation, and delivering durable, realistic solutions.

Develop Multi-Regional Connectivity Corridors

Fast-track integrated corridors (Pakistan–Afghanistan–Uzbekistan rail, TAPI pipeline, Gwadar as gateway) with Afghanistan as the central hub linking South Asia to Central Asia and Eurasia. This South–South strategy will cut transport costs, unlock landlocked markets, generate transit revenue, and create economic stakes too large for conflict to continue.

Create Joint Mechanism for Counter-Terrorism and Confidence-Building

Form a multi-lateral group (Pakistan, Afghanistan, regional partners) for coordinated action against ISKP, TTP, and narcotics while running parallel confidence-building: protected people-to-people contacts, community engagement, and non-disruptive joint monitoring. This dual approach shrinks militant space, breaks the narcotics–extremism cycle, and enables secure, sustained investment.

Institutionalize Depoliticized Economic Dialogue

Create regular, depoliticized economic dialogues treating trade as a continuous public good, with mixed delegations (leaders, scholars, youth, business). Where needed, invite neutral facilitation (e.g., Saudi Arabia) to resume normalized daily trade. This adaptive strategy acknowledges shared sacrifices, separates politics from commerce, and delivers the peace essential for economic recovery and prosperity.

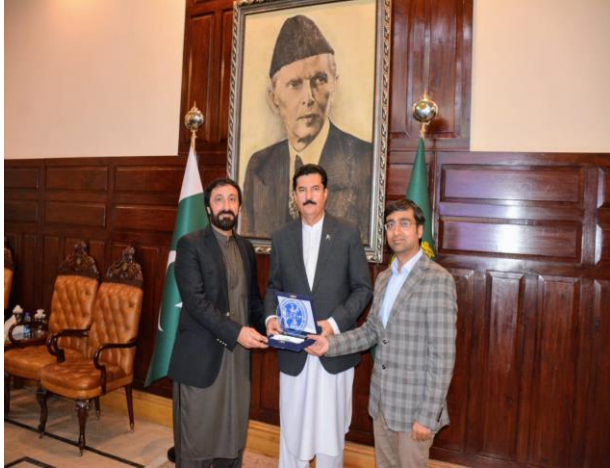
GLIMPSES OF THE EVENT



GROUP PHOTO



ROUND TABLE SESSION







Mmmmmm

