

SHAKEEL RAMAY

# Economy Is the Taliban's Top Priority

*Shakeel Ahmad Ramay is the Director of the China Center at the Pakistani Development Policy Institute, and a columnist for The Nation and The Express Tribune newspapers in Pakistan. The following is a summary of his presentation following that of Harley Schlanger to The LaRouche Organization's July 10, 2021 webinar, "Will Afghanistan, the Graveyard of Empires Become the Cradle of Peace Through Development?"*

Mr. Ramay titled his presentation, "Corridor for Community with Shared Future," referring at the same time both to the potential linkage of a reconstructed Afghan transport grid with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); and to the community of neighboring and nearby nations which is even now holding a series of "summit" meetings to discuss restoring security and bringing development to Afghanistan.

One idea central to his presentation was that the circumstances under which the Afghan Taliban once protected the al-Qaeda Islamic extremists, have dramatically changed with the actions of those and related terrorist groups in South Asia over 20 years. Ramay's judgment is that the Taliban now will have to be largely responsible for development and livelihoods of the Afghan people, and that now, consequently, "economy is their top priority." He noted and the leader of the Taliban had told the *South China Morning Post* that the group would welcome China as a friend in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

More, he said that the Taliban, having signed a peace treaty with the United States leading to the American troop withdrawal, now see themselves as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan. In that position they will not again allow al-Qaeda—or ISIS—to find refuge in the country simply because they have nowhere else to go.

Turning to the most urgent development needs of Afghanistan, Ramay said it immediately needs international investment in healthcare and hospitals, and in education; healthcare and education. "These two sectors need immediate support from the world," he said, because Afghanistan now has neither a developed

healthcare infrastructure, nor a well-developed education system. Ramay recommended that an Afghanistan Regional Economic Integration Fund be established with investment of major nations and international institutions.

The key purpose of the fund would be the establishment of the transport and development corridor which links Pakistan—with CPEC already the largest development project of China's Belt and Road Initiative—to Afghanistan's capital Kabul, transforming its transportation "connectivity." Ramay emphasized that Pakistan would also reap economic benefits from this development.



Courtesy of Shakeel Ramay

He assessed that "If we are able to take care of the economic issues, then that means we will be able to take care of most of the problems of Afghanistan." The objectives of the Corridor for Community with Shared Future, in his concept, are 1) sustainable peace, and 2) sustainable prosperity. And "that corridor can be created under the Belt and Road Initiative," of which it would be the seventh economic corridor.

Mr. Ramay's final point was that the potentials and needs of Afghanistan, which has a unique and fiercely independent history, cannot be viewed through the lens of any great power or combination of powers outside of it—it has always repelled their attempts to occupy or conquer it—but only through the eyes of the Afghans. Any development approach which they do not fully approve, will not succeed.

Shakeel Ramay's presentation can be viewed [here](#).