

CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR
On
BONN'01 TO BONN'11:
DEBATING AFGHANISTAN'S POLITICAL FUTURE

February 8-9, 2012

Venue: Jamia Millia Islamia University

As Bonn conference completes its 10th year, Afghanistan plunges into a new phase of uncertainty with continuities and changes from the previous phases. Uncertainty and conflict remain recurrent themes in Afghan history, and this is absolutely true of the current phase Afghanistan is transiting through. A growing insurgency visible in the lethal attacks on specified targets, weak governance leading to space for increasing Talibanisation, a disgruntled population confused and disillusioned with corruption and abuse of power, the drawdown of international forces and its related insecurities are some of the perceptible tendencies visible in contemporary Afghanistan. Although Afghanistan experimented with democracy as a panacea for its challenges, positive results still elude the country. Rather, manipulated elections, cabinet reshuffle, crisis in the parliament have emerged as new issues needing attention. Numerous conferences focus on Afghanistan's problems but immediate issues like security and stability are still a far cry. New uncertainties about the aftermath of possible US drawdown and increasing reluctance of other major powers to remain actively engaged have added to the anxieties of a number of domestic and regional actors. Initiatives like Istanbul and Bonn conferences of 2011 remain a big hope for most in the region and elsewhere.

Moreover, debates on the correct political course in Afghanistan have taken place in various international forums. Sometimes federalism has been suggested as the effective mechanism to deal with problems like ethnic diversity, regional divide and warlordism. The presidential system of government has also been under question and some have favoured a strong Parliamentary system over the current Presidential one. Many experts have argued that the only way to lead Afghanistan out of its present quagmire is to restore the country to its well-established and widely respected tradition of neutrality. The problem of fitting its traditional institutions into modern ones, a phenomenon that can be referred to as *Afghanisation*, has been highlighted as issues of great significance to the future of Afghan polity.

The purpose of the Seminar is to critically examine the functioning of the present political arrangement and gaze into the future to build alternative political scenarios factoring in the role of various stake holders such as the different ethnic groups, the insurgents, the warlords, the traditional political institutions in Afghan society. The role of regional and extra-regional powers in any possible political future must also be taken cognizance of in order to give a direction to Afghanistan out of the present spell of uncertainty.

The discussions would revolve around the following themes: Evaluating the current political arrangement.

1. Federalism and the problem of ethnic diversity
2. Parliament or Presidential forms of government
3. Neutrality of Afghanistan

4. Problem of traditional and modern political institutions
5. Role of resurgent groups /*Talibs*
6. Role of regional powers in Afghanistan's Political Future
7. Role of extra-regional powers/international community in shaping Afghanistan's political future.