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Rethinking Afghanistan-Gulf Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape

Summary and Key Outcomes

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Summary and Key Outcomes

On June 3, 2025, the Gulf Research Center (GRC) and the Afghanistan Policy Lab at Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs co-hosted a closed-door webinar titled **"Rethinking Afghanistan-Gulf Relations in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape."** The session brought together experts and policymakers to examine the evolving dynamics of GCC-Afghanistan relations, with discussions spanning political, economic, and humanitarian dimensions.

The speakers of the webinar were **Dr. Abdulaziz Sager**, Chairman of the GRC; **Dean Amaney Jamal**, Dean of the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs; **Ambassador Adela Raz**, Director of the Afghanistan Policy Lab at Princeton School of Public and International Affairs; **Ms. Fatima Gailani**, Afghan Women's Rights Activist, Former President of the Afghan Red Crescent, and Member of the Afghanistan Peace Negotiating Team; **H.E. Dr. Majed Al Ansari**, Advisor to the Prime Minister, Spokesperson to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Director of the Center for International Policy Research (CIPR); **Dr. Yousuf Al Bulushi**, Chairman of the Muscat Policy Council; and **H.E. Dr. Sultan Mohammed Al-Nuaimi**, Director General of the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research. **Dr. Christian Koch**, Director of Research at the GRC, moderated the webinar.

The webinar covered five themes:

1. Current Gulf countries' policies and strategies for Afghanistan
2. Opportunities for humanitarian, economic, and political cooperation
3. Perspectives on how Afghanistan fits into the Gulf's regional and global foreign policy outlook
4. Practical recommendations for enhancing Afghanistan-Gulf relations in a way that promotes stability, development, and prosperity
5. Gulf countries' expectations and demands from the Afghan government

The dialogue focused on Afghanistan's current situation and the potential avenues for strategic engagement by the Gulf states. Participants explored pressing challenges, including extremism, drug trafficking, and regional instability, while emphasizing the importance of inclusive dialogue and collaborative efforts to foster long-term peace. It was noted that Gulf support for Afghanistan hinges on concrete actions by the Afghan authorities, particularly in the areas of counterterrorism and governance.

Speakers underscored the urgent need for a political settlement in Afghanistan, stressing the critical role of the GCC in stabilizing the country. The importance of involving all Afghans in the peace process was emphasized, as was the need to redirect regional attention to Afghanistan's internal issues in the current geopolitical context.

Qatar's distinct role as a mediator between the Taliban and the United States was discussed, with recognition of its efforts in facilitating dialogue and promoting greater inclusivity within the Afghan government. Despite existing challenges, participants agreed that constructive strategic engagement with the Taliban remains essential for advancing peace and addressing humanitarian needs and women's rights.



The session also underscored the importance of empowering Afghan institutions through capacity-building initiatives, such as training bureaucrats on human rights and governance. The emergence of a new generation in Afghanistan was seen as a potential driver for meaningful change under the current regime.

Regional engagement was another key theme, with emphasis placed on connecting with Afghanistan's youth and addressing their socio-economic concerns. Panelists noted the cautious yet strategic diplomatic overtures by Gulf states and stressed the need to balance engagement with regional dynamics.

The UAE's diplomatic outreach was cited as an example of the Gulf's role which could be directed toward promoting stability and economic development. Speakers also addressed the critical issue of supporting Afghan women, emphasizing the importance of their participation across sectors, even amid the challenges of working with Taliban leadership. Historical ties between the Gulf and Afghanistan were acknowledged as a foundation for future cooperation.

Finally, participants called for a more proactive Gulf role in Afghanistan's economic recovery, particularly in sectors such as agriculture and labor. They advocated for enhanced humanitarian assistance, greater support for UN-led peace initiatives, and sustained regional dialogue to counter extremism and disinformation, focusing on peace and stability in Afghanistan.

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