The United States of America (USA) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces would be withdrawing from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. Strategic and diplomacy experts see a new wave of change after withdrawal which is likely to have multidimensional impacts on the entire world, especially South and Central Asia; and, China.

Militants, scattered in the region, may get resurrected as they did after withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan during 1998-99. This time, however, their outreach and influence patterns may vary given information and communication technology (ICT) now being used as a major weapon for spreading extremist agendas. Cyber terrorism has, thus, become a major area of concern of late.

Simultaneously, militant organisations and networks are trying to establish themselves in other regions such as Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) that have emerged as new breeding grounds for extremist activities over the last decade. Moreover, some MENA countries have become financial hubs for extremist organisations which are likely to make the region more vulnerable. While many countries find even a hint of long-term U.S. presence in Afghanistan unacceptable, Central Asian countries have been voicing concerns that military (and strategic) withdrawal could lead to instability in the latter.

China, as an emerging global power, also has vital interests in Afghanistan, albeit of a more economic nature. The Republic has invested heavily in oil, gas and other natural resources in South Asia, MENA and Central Asia. Disengagement of USA and NATO could have multiple ‘spillover effects’ including tilting the balance of power towards China, at least as far as Central Asia is concerned. This panel will explore some of these issues and try to answer the following questions:

- What would be the economic, social and peace related opportunities and challenges for Afghanistan and regional stability?
- What would be the potential role of different state and non-state actors such as business community, Taliban, drug mafia, warlords, government, media and development/aid agencies?
- What should be South Asia’s role (e.g. the role of SAARC) in ensuring a peaceful transition and stable Afghanistan?

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