

By Shamim Mahmood

19-May-16

411

Pakistan committed to Afghan-led peace process, says minister



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions Lieutenant General (r) Abdul Qadir Baloch has said that Pakistan is seriously facilitating Afghan-led peace process for lasting harmony in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's role in Heart of Asia and Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) has been vibrant in actively pursuing peace process. Speaking at a conference on 'Evolving Situation in Afghanistan – role of major powers and regional countries', Abdul Qadir Baloch said that Pakistan has been facing multidimensional challenges due to instability in Afghanistan and in the country as well.

Highlighting the endeavours made by Pakistan in this regard, the minister said, "Pakistani forces have done what 48 countries could not done as yet." However, in doing so, he said, Pakistan has suffered a total loss of \$107 billion and sacrificed more than 30,000 precious lives, besides hosting the millions of Afghan refugees owing to the porous border between the two countries, who are not willing to go back because of peace and economic turmoil there. He said that after 15 years of counter-terrorism operation, Afghanistan still remains vulnerable to terrorism. Moreover, repatriation of Afghan refugees in yet to be done, he added.

“Although the al Qaeda-led jihad has been considerably weakened in Afghanistan as they have shifted their focus towards Middle East, splinter groups have started emerging within Taliban, but still operation in Afghanistan is essential to eliminate extremist elements from there,” he maintained.

“Pakistan believes in stability in Afghanistan and stability in the country as well. Pakistan’s operation Zarb-e-Azb to root out terrorists and their sanctuaries in FATA is a success. However, it is imperative for the two nations to make coordinated efforts to fight terrorism.”

Furthermore, he said that stability in Afghanistan is necessary for economic development of both countries. The success of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) also depends, inter alia, on a stable security situation in Afghanistan as “a peaceful Afghanistan can ensure regional stability and economic integration”.

Ambassador (r) Aziz Ahmad Khan, senior journalist Rahimullah Yousafzai, Centre for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) Kabul Director Dr Adul Baqi Amin, national and internationally renowned speakers also presented their views in the opening ceremony at the international conference.



Pakistan facilitating efforts for peace talks in Afghanistan: Gen (R) Baloch

May 18, 2016
25

[Share on Facebook](#)

[Tweet on Twitter](#)

ISLAMABAD May 18 (APP): Federal Minister for State and Frontier Regions (SAFRON), Lt General (R) Abdul Qadir Baloch on Wednesday said that Pakistan

is doing serious facilitating efforts for peace talks in Afghanistan. He was addressing inaugural session of seminar titled "Evolving Situation in Afghanistan: Role of Major Powers". The minister said that role of Pakistan in Heart of the Asia and QCG remained vibrant and it has been actively pursuing regional stability. Referring to Pakistan's effort in eliminating and fighting terrorism the minister said, "Pakistan at its part has done what world's 48 countries couldn't do in Afghanistan". However, the minister while reiterating Pakistan's consistent stance said, "We want Afghan owned and Afghan led solution to prevailing afghan situation". Highlighting the major crisis that Pakistan has faced because of Afghan unrest, the minister reminded the participants that Pakistan had been hosting five million refugees and facing border incursion and social issues. Gen Qadir further said that there has been frequent travelling of Afghan refugees between Afghanistan and Pakistan which is increasing social and strategic threats. He noted that if Afghan refugees return to their homes then Pakistan will be responsible for controlling border crossing. Earlier, Ambassador (R) Sohail Amin President organizing institution Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) in his welcoming remarks highlighted the need for catalyzing the efforts for a concrete and sustainable output. Director Hans Siedal Foundation Kristof Duwaerts on the occasion said Afghanistan situation has invited the major powers to jointly render for peace. "But role of Pakistan is distinct in terms of geographic and cultural links between Afghanistan and Pakistan" he said.

In the two days seminar, a number of strategists, scholars, think tanks including former diplomats and academia would share their views on afghan peace process in various sessions. The seminar is expected to extend recommendations and suggestions for the stakeholders as way forward for ongoing peace process in Afghanistan.

APP/

Hamza/soh

VNS Islamabad

Post 9/11 policies have been failed in Afghanistan: Gen. Baloch

Wednesday, 18 May, 2016 17:22 PST



Nasir A.mughal

Islamabad-No country has suffered more than Pakistan due to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, having lost nearly 5000 soldiers, hosting more than 1.5 million registered refugees, and economic losses of 100 billion, shared Lt. General (ret.) Abdul Qadir Baloch, Federal Minister for State and Frontier Regions.

He was delivering inaugural address at the two-day international conference on 'Evolving Situation in Afghanistan: Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries' .

The event is being organized by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) and the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF).

Federal Minister said that the 'war of the Kalashnikov' has continued to fester and create mistrust and suspicions on both sides because of a porous border that leads to weapons proliferation as well as drug exports.

The post 9/11 policies of major powers for state building have not only failed within Afghanistan, but have also affected Pakistan since they provided our adversaries to use Afghan territory to destabilize us, he said.

'There can be no peace in Pakistan, if there is no peace in Afghanistan,' he emphasized.

Mr. Kristof Duwaerts, Resident Representative of Hanns Seidel Foundation, also stressed that Pakistan is Afghanistan's Siamese twin, linguistically, culturally, historically and geographically, so it is a relationship that must be improved.

In his welcome address, Ambassador (retd.) Sohail Amin, President IPRI, hoped that by bringing together views from major powers and regional countries on one platform, the Conference will help cement regional ties and bring important stakeholders on the same page in handling the evolving Afghan security and stability situation.

'Pakistan has been engaged in sincere and consistent efforts to facilitate an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process. Our collective war should be against the ideology of hatred, extremism and militarism', he said.

Chairing the session on 'An Overview of Afghanistan's Situation', Ambassador (retd.) Aziz Ahmad Khan, former High Commissioner of Pakistan to India and Afghanistan, noted that the timing of bringing such diverse regional and global views about Afghanistan was opportune since the 5th round of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) for the proposed peace dialogue between the Afghan government and Taliban insurgents is also simultaneously taking place in Islamabad.

He pointed out that while the situation in Afghanistan was dire, there is hope for the region since slowly but surely institutions are being rebuilt; despite threats of violence and brutality, voter turnout during their General Elections was almost 60%, with more than 2.4 million *Afghan* women voting, accounting for approximately 38% of total *turnout*. 'There exist strong undercurrents of change and efforts to establish peace which must be garnered.

' He was of the view that 'While one must be firm towards insurgents, they also need to be mainstreamed into the political process.'

Veteran Peshawar-based journalist Rahimullah Yousafzai, speaking on a framework for political reconciliation in Afghanistan cautioned that there is no magic concept to make peace in Afghanistan as the conflict is old and complicated due to involvement of foreign powers and non-state actors.

Discussing the fluid positions of Pakistan, U.S.A, China and the regime in Kabul, he observed that the Afghan scenario is 'primarily a waiting game', with each actor waiting for the other to either weaken, give up, give in, with no clear idea if the Taliban would eventually agree to negotiate with the Afghan government or not.

'Their annual spring offensive named Omari on April 12, including the suicide bombing in Kabul on April 19 that killed about 70 people; and the counter attacks by the government in 15 provinces explains the challenges facing the QCG,' he remarked.

However, the QCG mechanism with its four-member countries hold the key to making peace in Afghanistan, he said, and all sides needed to be realistic and adopt a sincere approach to talks since there had been too much hatred and blood-feud already.

Speaking on the current security situation in Afghanistan, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and emerging challenges, Dr. Abdul Baqi Amin, Director, Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS), Kabul, shared that the war in Afghanistan is a war not just of armies and intelligence, but also a war of the international drug mafia who are still profiting from increasing global drug exports.

He stressed the need for an Afghan mediatory group composed of Afghan nationals and academic personalities acceptable to all engaged parties, who can bring together their views. Furthermore, establishing a foreign pivot for the Afghan peace process working within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) and United Nations is important.

Dr Amin also strongly urged the need of coordinated national pressure groups for bringing peace. 'Strategic think tanks can lay the groundwork for the peace through academic programmes and research publications and even impact public opinion to influence regional and international policies', he said.

Mr Haroun Mir, founder of Afghanistan's Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) in Kabul, drew a painful picture of day-to-day life of ordinary Afghans.

He stressed that the Afghan people, having endured decades of hardship, understand that improvements in the security and economic sector will require time under the national unity government, but what they will not tolerate is failure in fixing a dysfunctional government which has been unsuccessful in addressing endemic corruption and a culture of impunity.

This is also a concern of donor countries as it could weaken their financial commitments. 'Any reduction in funding for the Afghan government could negatively impact the Afghan security forces, giving the Taliban room to increase their offensive,' he warned.

The international community can play an important role in help in supporting and reintegrating the Afghan economy within the region because without a flourishing economy, there can be no progress and development.

The new generation in Afghanistan is evolving, we recognize that Pakistan has legitimate demands but the reconciliation process in Afghanistan needs to be given a fair chance and more time, more patience from our Pakistani brethren.

With time, the phenomenon that is 'Taliban' might soon become obsolete, he hoped. In an answer to a question, he shared that no matter how the outside world views the current democratic government in Kabul and how it was formed, it is a government which is not based on a copy pasted formula of democracy.

It is a government which accommodates all ethnicities and groups within the country and hence, fits the Afghan culture perfectly.

In the session on South Asia's Security Concerns in Afghanistan, Former Chief Secretary KPK, Khalid Aziz, gave an overview of Afghanistan and the deterministic nature of its geography. Discussing the story of the region from December 2001 to date, he emphasised how Afghanistan is the gateway to riches of Indo-Ganges Plains.

'We are children of our geography. This geography is pushing us into strategic policy making,' he said. Stability in Afghanistan would bring security in FATA and Southern Punjab. The aim of the U.S. to launch a war in Afghanistan was to dismantle the Taliban. What was the objective now that Mullah Umar was dead, he questioned? 'We are looking at chaos in the future. If chaos takes place in Afghanistan, it will naturally spill over to Pakistan,' he predicted.

Ms Farhana Asif, Director (Afghanistan) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, discussed the Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process which was established in 2011 at the initiative of Afghanistan and Turkey to foster regional cooperation and connectivity.

Giving an overview of the multi-tiered approach of the process, she briefly outlined the Ministerial meetings held in Turkey (2011), Kabul (2012), Almaty (2013), Beijing (2014), and Islamabad (2015).

The fact that the process is Afghan-centered is one of its biggest strengths, she said.

Its intrinsic link between peace and economic progress and its complementing existing mechanisms are also fundamental. However, the complexity of Afghanistan's situation; insufficient organisational support and funding; and the transition from a conceptual framework to tangible results are impending challenges.

'It is important that the process should retain its distinctive character with deepening cooperation through CBMs and projects of connectivity,' she proposed.

Dr. Muhamad Mujeeb Afzal, Assistant Professor, School of Politics and IR, Quaid-e-Azam University, while discussing the role of India in Afghanistan said that India had been using soft power by investing in infrastructure projects in the country.

India is the country's fifth largest donor, he informed. 'Indian role in Afghanistan is a partial success story, it is trying to become a benign regional power,' he argued.

The session was chaired by Major General Noel Israel Khokhar, Director General, Institute for Strategic Studies Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University (NDU).

Conference delegates unanimously agreed that Afghanistan was at critical junction in its turbulent history, a junction where a political settlement of the conflict is not only the desire of regional countries, but is also the desire of the Afghan people.

The conference was well attended by academia, media, students as well as government officials and policy experts.