

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MANJEEV SINGH PURI, ACTING PERMANENT  
REPRESENTATIVE, DEBATE ON “SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN”, AT THE  
UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL ON MARCH 19, 2013

Mr. President, I join others in thanking you for scheduling today's debate on the situation in Afghanistan in the context of the renewal of UNAMA's mandate and would like to congratulate you for assuming the Presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to thank the UN Secretary General for his briefing and thank Ambassador Zahir Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan for his statement.

Mr. President,

Looking ahead at the timelines for ISAF withdrawal and elections in Afghanistan, it is important that the commitments flowing from the major international conferences in Bonn, Chicago and Tokyo and at the regional level in Istanbul and Kabul for peace, security and development in Afghanistan, are implemented in word and deed. These are also essential for creating an enabling environment towards Afghanistan's fiscal sustainability and self-reliance.

It is particularly worrying that the overall security situation remains volatile in the country amidst the ongoing simultaneous security, political and economic transitions. Even after over a decade of ISAF's presence and concerted efforts of the international community, Afghanistan continues to face an existential threat from terrorism. We are yet to isolate and root out the syndicate of terrorism, which includes elements of Al Qaeda, Taliban, LeT and other terrorist and extremist groups that operate with impunity from safe havens across Afghanistan's borders. Indeed, as NATO draws down from Afghanistan claiming 'Mission nearly Accomplished', judging by the latest acts of terrorism and violence, there is no sign a similar 'drawdown' on the part of terrorist outfits across the border.

Whatever happens in Afghanistan has and will continue to affect security in our region and the world. We have not forgotten the terrorist havens that wreaked havoc as Afghanistan descended into chaos in the 1990s. And obviously, we do not want that to happen again. The UNSG report rightly notes that Afghanistan will only be able to achieve the stability, growth and prosperity that its people aspire to, and deserve, if there is peace.

As Afghanistan looks forward to holding Presidential and Provincial elections in April, 2014, we need to bear in mind that short-sighted approaches and quick-fixes guided by political expediency could be a recipe for unmitigated disaster. It is, thus, imperative that any political settlement must be driven by Afghans so that it is acceptable to all sections of Afghan society and does not jeopardize the hard won gains of the last 10 years. A single-minded focus on the elections and constitutionalism would vindicate the 2004 Constitution, the most widely debated with the maximum consensus to date, consolidate democracy, institutionalize elections, and provide the legitimacy and political and moral strength to the Islamic Republic to negotiate with the

Taliban and advocates of an Islamic Emirate, and the international community, from a position of strength, and guarantee the post-2001 gains for new and older generations of Afghans.

It is for this reason also that the internationally-accepted red lines must be respected in whatever reconciliation models are being considered. So also, actions in support of the political transition should not undermine Afghan institutions of governance. We all need a credible government after 2014 as well.

But most of all, we are yet to see any evidence that supports the notion of a dividing line separating Al Qaeda from other terrorist and extremist groups, or indeed, that these groups and those who support them have either had an epiphany or made a strategic reassessment of their objectives. To us, it makes little sense to draw lines of distinction that most of these groups or their sponsors are themselves not prepared to do, either in word or deed.

Mr. President

India remains engaged with like-minded countries having the shared goal of peace, security and development in Afghanistan. In pursuit of this, India has held a dialogue with the US and Afghanistan in New Delhi and China and Russia in Moscow last month.

We firmly believe that Afghan ownership and leadership is critical for cementing the foundations of lasting peace and stability in the country. The Afghan people should be able to choose their destiny in an environment free from coercion and outside interference. Security is the key ingredient for accelerated socio-economic development, which could also be a catalyst in strengthening the voices of moderation and tolerance in the Afghan society. India has taken a number of initiatives in this regard.

The Delhi Investment Summit of June, 2012 last year was an important endeavour in focussing regional and international attention towards investments in Afghanistan and their potential in providing economic development and stability to Afghanistan during the transition period.

India has also taken initiatives to promote bilateral trade and investment in Afghanistan by measures like the elimination of base line customs duties on virtually all imports from Afghanistan and the investment in Hajigak iron ore reserves.

Enhanced regional cooperation and regional integration are imperative for bringing in much needed foreign investments in Afghanistan, ensuring its economic viability and spurring economic growth. Conscious of this imperative need, India has taken the lead in the commercial Confidence Building Measures under the Istanbul process. Within South Asia, SAARC remains an important vehicle for strengthening regional cooperation.

Afghanistan is strategically located as a land bridge linking South Asia with Central Asia and the Middle East and an important conduit in tapping into vast energy resources of Central Asia. Projects like TAPI gas pipeline would benefit all of us and have the potential to usher in rapid transformation in our region.

Mr. President,

Afghanistan and India are natural strategic partners by virtue of geography and a common vision of peace and cooperation in the region. India remains committed to support Afghanistan during the crucial period of transition till end 2014 and thereafter. The implementation of the Strategic Partnership Agreement of October, 2011 between our two countries has already been set in motion with the convening of the first meeting of the Partnership Council last year.

India is assisting as best as it can in Afghanistan's reconstruction and development. India has pledged up to \$ 2 billion in development and humanitarian assistance. The projects under consideration are in line with the projects suggested under the National Priority Programmes of the Government of Afghanistan. The pace and nature of the utilization of the present and future Indian assistance is being determined by the preference, comfort level and absorptive capacity of the Afghan government.

Afghanistan needs assistance and support to build its capacity to help it overcome the toll that three decades of externally-inflicted conflict have imposed on it. India has been assisting Afghanistan to rebuild the foundations of its society through scholarships for its young and training programmes that seek to help its democratic institutions brace for the multiplicity of challenges that it faces.

Mr. President,

India remains unwavering in its commitment to assisting the people of Afghanistan in their endeavour to build a peaceful, stable, democratic and prosperous nation.

As we approach critical timelines for transition in near future, the international community must continue to work with renewed vigour and unity of purpose towards strengthening efforts of the Afghan government in seeking solutions that are inclusive and led by the Afghan people themselves.

We believe that the UN has a central role to play in coordination of international assistance. There is no substitute for the coordinating role of the UN in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. We appreciate the leadership of SRSG Ján Kubiš and the good work done by UNAMA. It must continue to work in close consultation with the Afghan government.

Thank you.

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