

Amrullah Saleh's speech

Speech by Mr. Amrullah Saleh former head of Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (NDS) presented at the fourth Afghanistan-Pakistan Dialogue, January 23, 2016

Salam Alikum, afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

Afghanistan – Pakistan relations, myths, perceptions and realities.

I barrow a quote from the wise , treasured universal son of my country, who said, “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it”. Rumi.

Let me in the outset welcome our guests from outside Afghanistan, from Pakistan and India. I echo the Pashtu idiom,(har kela rashay,) you are welcome anytime and all the time. But just want to put some humor hint to my welcome to our Pakistani guests, – you are always welcome if you come for business, cultural programs, , commerce, sightseeing , research, bilateral ties and tourism. But never again for Jihad.



I also sincerely thank the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies under the wise leadership of Dr. Moradian for this initiative. Moradian in Farsee means a person of aims. I am sure he is that.

I also extend my thanks and gratitude to Pakistan Regional Peace Institute under wise leadership of Raof Hassan.

Honorable delegates , at times or more often Pakistan media , commentators or interlocutors that we have had the pleasure and chance to meet in conferences , multilateral forums or bilateral exchanges, would unfairly and unfoundedly accuse me or other representatives from Afghanistan of being Pakistan bashing analysts, blinded by the past and oblivious to the present realities.

Today, I neither carry the badge nor the hat of northern alliance in this conference as that entity no longer exists. The new reality in Afghanistan is a pan Afghan sentiment, a strong sense of nationhood, a strong sense of attachment and loyalty to the State system which I entirely share and adhere to. I am here as a citizen of Afghanistan with a pan Afghan heart , pride and feeling. I feel safe and credible to say what I say here is the dominant, prevalent feeling and sentiment in Afghanistan.

I sincerely believe it is time we listen to each other attentively without putting ourselves in defensive mood instantly. Anti each other should not be our default status. There may be flaws in perceptions but a sincere dialogue can shape the new pleasant realities. I seek forgiveness in advance if any of my comments cause inconvenience. The recipe and the menu of Afghan hospitality don't have the items of frankness and openness in it. But I want to break that tradition in order to make maximum use of this opportunity for the good of both nations and our peoples.

It is unfortunate that Pakistan is at war with Afghanistan . You may right away say that is not true and it is false. You may be right but need to prove us wrong. We need to prove that Pakistan is not at war with Afghanistan and the Afghan belief is false. Let's prove it. Some may think it is a myth, some may call it a misconception and a perception, but for majority it is a reality. I am part of that majority.

Today that theme is the belief of every single Afghan including the Taliban detainees and their splinter groups . There are of course the niceties of cultural exchanges, people to people relations and diplomatic engagements but none have created an alternative reality or a super perception to undermine the negative. This war is unfortunate. It is avoidable . It is un-necessary and it is un-needed. We are the weak party. We have not started it . We are the victims . We are burning every day. There is a wise Afghan proverb "if you can untie a knot with your hand don't use your teeth". Let's suppose Pakistan needs to untie a knot in its relationship with Afghanistan , it can be done through State to State dialogue. That in our view will be the most dignified way. That will take both nations to glory, unity and friendship. Involving the non-state actors and exerting pressure through proxies makes it difficult and complicated. It will be like undoing a knot of several tight folds with the teeth without using the hands. Impossible.

Over the years I have had so many pleasant and unpleasant conversations with high officials from Pakistan, former diplomats, former military officers and some journalists and writers. There are so much and so many commonalities and shared values between the two nations of Afghanistan and Pakistan but there is an axe, a very sharp axe constantly cutting us apart. That axe is the military, intelligence and security mind set and establishment in Pakistan. They are setting the agenda.

For Afghans the jihad ended in 1992. Unfortunately for Pakistan the anti Afghan and anti Kabul jihad still continues. Twenty four years on – the mainstream literature of Pakistan's policy on Afghanistan is jihad, militancy, inclusion of anti Afghan state groups into the system through extra-constitutional ways.

Last summer, under the very watchful eyes of Pakistan's security establishment State style fateha was convened for Mullah Omar in every single Pakistani city and town. Madrasas and seminaries collecting donations for what they call Afghan jihad is a common scene in Pakistan from FATA to Clifton in Karachi.

Why there was and still is so much attachment to Mullah Omar. Will Pakistani political parties do the same thing if Karzai, Ashraf Ghani , Dr. Abdullah or I die "mysteriously" tomorrow and our death is revealed two years later.

Perhaps not. Perhaps we are already branded enemies of Pakistan which we are not. Pakistan may right away say after 1992 it was division within the Afghan Mujahedeen that led to civil war and destruction of Kabul. They may say Pakistan tried its best to facilitate talks and bring about unity amongst the Afghans. We have heard all of that narrative. But the reality, supported by massive amount of research and evidence, is that Pakistan never stopped supporting Hekmatyar and later on Taliban for the sole purpose of dominating Kabul's foreign policy and security posture.

I will be more than glad to share with you index of the references, a lot of it from Pakistan, in support of my argument. There used to one writer, Ahmed Rashid revealing certain things on Pakistan's not so hidden hand in our internal affairs, however by now there too many mini Ahmed Rashid's whispering their frustrations with us. The small underground civil society in Pakistan shares our frustration and fed up with double dealings and double standards.

Well, there is an argument in Pakistan. They say we supported the Afghans to evict the Soviets from their soil, we sheltered the refugees, we made Pakistan second home of the Afghans and at the end Afghanistan is friendlier to India than to us. They may call it Afghan betrayal. I read twits from Pakistan constantly calling us back stabbers. Is that true ? Are we closer and friendlier to India than to Pakistan. Or is this the view of few in

this country, in my country ? Cynical analysts may call it the work of Indian intelligence in Afghanistan. We have been hearing that narrative for many years now. They have given it other titles too.

While I echo the analysis that we are friendlier and close to India but I want to highlight why . It is because as I said in the beginning of presentation , there is a Pashtun proverb which says “ by way friendship you can take us to hell. By use and way of force we refuse to go to heaven. Pushing us into doing things won’t work”. There are representatives from India here and they can speak on behalf of their country. The reason I am bringing it up is simple. We are victim of Pakistan’s India centric policy and strategy.

India in Afghanistan has engendered and formulated a simple policy. India works with the Afghan government, respects Afghan institutions, doesn’t support or promote factionalism, is a friend with the Afghan people, whoever they are, whatever they are .In return we are reciprocating the friendship with friendship.

As late as last month, former President of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf singled out a specific constituency in Afghanistan as being enemies of Pakistan. In an interview with the BBC Persian he accused a specific ethnic group , some political groups , this valley or that province, this Afghan or that Afghan for being anti Pakistan. How shall we as Afghans interpret that statement. Simple. It shows Pakistan is not respecting the territorial integrity of Afghanistan. It shows Pakistan’s policy visa – vis Afghanistan is geographically selective, politically selective, ethnically selective and culturally selective. Well, counter-argument implies and says General Musharraf is a former president and doesn’t represent the official policy of Islamabad any longer.

My reaction will be hummmmmmm.

Lets recall that the same was his argument even when he was holding the highest office in Pakistan. We have never paid attention , complained or even noticed posters of which Pakistan leader are in what size and put where. Pakistan has time and again objected why Shaheed Ahamd Shah Masoud’s posters are in Kabul. Laughable. Because he is the son of this soil. It is, Afghanistan , his country. We decide where to put his posters and portraits. Can you imagine Pakistan even trying to dictate who should be our heroes and who should not.

You may have a valid and legitimate counter – argument to mine. You may say Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country and if a specific group, we may all suspect which one, is unhappy then Pakistan has to come in and do something. Is there a non multi ethnic country in the entire world? Is there a single ethnic country in the world that we are unaware of ? By virtue of the same argument, don’t you think Pakistan gives us the

right to side with Pakistani ethnic groups, exploit grievances, and create divisions, hate, sectarian factions and violence. In countries with low economy it is not a rocket science to do any of these. We are all vulnerable to it. So the solution is let's show respect to each other's national flags and not recognize party and ethnic flags at the same time.

Let me look at the other angle of Pakistan's official policy. Although I have not come across the definition for un-official policy to this date. I know however what covert policy means. Last year Pakistan was kind and gracious to arrange talks between representative of the Afghan government and the Taliban leaders in Muree, Islamabad. The Taliban guys were representing the political and military wings of the group. Right. Three days ago the spokesperson of the same group took responsibility for massacre of the Tolo TV journalists . They claimed responsibility for massacre of 80 civilians in Shah Shaheed area of Kabul last year and they claimed responsibility for mass loot, mass killing and mass rape that took place Kunduz in September 2015 too. I led the fact finding mission for Kunduz disaster.

Don't we all think, especially delegates from Pakistan that it is so logical and also an act of friendship that Pakistan make a gesture , arrest them and hand them over to Kabul for the latest crime they have committed in which dozens have been killed and injured. This simple police action by Pakistan will create a completely new horizon for relations and harmony between the two countries.

I am sure that you have a counter-argument to this. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif while visiting Washington in 2015 said " we can't kill the Taliban and also try to bring them to the table at the same time" . He is absolutely right. Our question is when was the last time you ever killed a Taliban ? I mean the Afghan Taliban. Of course Pakistan loves to kill scores of the Pakistani Taliban, the TTP. We love to kill them too. However in Pakistan's view , for Taliban , the road to heaven goes through Kabul and the road to hell goes through Islamabad. That is what Mullana Fazel Rehman, Mulana Samiulahaq both members and affiliates of the deep state in Pakistan keep saying and preaching. It is double standard, naked and open. Recently I wasted my time and read Mulana Samiulahaq's book . It is Fatwa book for Afghan killing. Simple. Mulana's from Pakistan, most of the time with tacit endorsement of the deep state, talk as if they have come from a fresh visit to heaven , where Afghan Taliban continue to have feast and party and TTP burn in never ending fire of hell. This is in reality ridiculing of the concept of afterlife in Islam.

Now let's go to solutions .

It is said that countries don't choose their neighbors. It may be true elsewhere.

Remember, up until 1991 we had one neighbor in the north , the mighty Soviet Union.

Let me sing two lines from Soviet Union's National Anthem. Sorry for my broken Russian though, " Soyuz Nerushimy respulic Svobodnykh – Unbreakable union of free republics" Yediny, mogouchy , Sovetsky Soyuz – The United, the Mighty Soviet Union “.

It doesn't exist today. We have three neighbors in the north of us. We should not weaken ourselves to the point of break. It won't be beneficial to any party. It will be disaster and catastrophic. Let's not invest on divisions. Let's invest on unity and harmony.

Perhaps not well enough, but we do understand Pakistan's anxiety and concerns about regional issues. India has built a magnificent parliament building for Afghanistan. Our 34 provincial councils don't have good and permanent structures. Pakistan is most welcome to build 34 mini parliaments.

India trains our police and army officers. Pakistan has asked to do the same. So some cadets have been sent for training to Pakistan. All Afghans are very sensitive on the issue of security and military ties with Pakistan for one simple reason. They ask, please stop training Haqqani network, Lashkar Tayeba, Jaish Mohammed, Quetta Shura, bring to an end the recognition of the Taliban government in exile in Quetta then no door in Afghanistan will be blocked or closed for you and to you. The logic of Afghans is strong "you can't hold two water melons in one hand". Either be with Afghan National Army or with the Haqqani network.

For Pakistan to exert pressure on us, to gain passing control over certain sway of land in Afghanistan is easy. Others have also tried to gain our land and stop our hearts. It has not worked. However if Pakistan want to win hearts and minds of the Afghan people , please open up Karachi port for trade and transit. On September 3-4 , 2015, I was a speaker in a track 2 conference in Istanbul. Former high officials from Pakistan like Foreign Secretary Najmuddin Shaik, General Ehsanul Haq and General Durani were there. They said, Karachi will be half open, limited open for Afghanistan for as long as India Pakistan problems are not solved. Please de-couple your Afghan policy from that of India. Deal with us independent of your India centric concerns.

Afghanistan is not a breakable country. There is nothing to break here. Our nationhood is a matter of our gene. It is our blood. Our roots as a nation, our foundation as a state don't stand on sectarian, ideological bedrocks. We are not a concept. Afghanistan is not an idea. However poor, however destitute, however in pain, it is a nation. Will remain so. The best way to have us is to work with us. Not dictate us. Our infrastructure is already broken by bombs, suicide attacks and Taliban barbarism. Our will is unbreakable. No need for me to re-sing the national anthem of the Soviet Union.

There is the issue of Durand line too. It has become a hot issue these days again. Since 1948 Pakistan has played victim by portraying Afghanistan as a adventurist claimant of its territory. Before any meaningful negotiations, talks, track one or track 2 dialogue on that issue, Pakistan must stop weakening us in order to gain concession. A weak Afghan state, an unstable Afghan state will never ever be able to talk about it. Only a strong and stable Afghanistan can discuss the eventual fate of Durand. So some may say instead of letting a strong Afghanistan talk about Durand line, let's keep it weak forever. That is also pipedream and illusion . Syria had a strong army few years back. It had troops in Lebanon. It struggles to defend Damascus now that is not even possible without Russian and Iranian help. Counting on bombs, bullets, missiles and tanks is not a solid calculation. Europeans fought each other for centuries. The game of domination came to an end when cooperation, harmony and economic cooperation become the dominant theme and the dominant factor. We can learn from them. We have good and bad lessons before us. It is upto us. Let's make history.

Regards.

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