

## **“STRATEGIC VISION OF PAKISTAN FOREIGN POLICY”**

### **Statement by Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, at European Institute of Asian Studies on 4 October 2016**

**Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I wish to express my thanks to European Institute of Asian Studies for hosting me today.

It is indeed a privilege to address this prestigious institute. I hope that my statement followed by our interactive discussion will provide fresh insights into the subject.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Pakistan's foreign policy choices, as like any other country, are determined by international and regional geo-political trends as well as by its domestic environment. Foreign policy formulation in Pakistan has also taken imprints of global situation that is rapidly transforming, regional situation that remains complex and domestic environment, which offers multitude of both challenges and opportunities. I would like to describe them in a little detail.

**On global stage**, profound transformations have taken place with implications on international stability and security.

Presently, we see the emergence of a multipolar system, as evidenced by inability of any single country or a single bloc of countries to address global challenges of security and development.

In the emerging multipolar order, sadly, self-serving national interests tend to override the collective approach required for maintenance of international peace and security; hence the limitations faced by the United Nations Security Council in Syria and other theaters of conflict.

Concurrently, the world has shied away from the chronic hotbeds of conflict such as Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir and thus failed to limit the social and ideological disillusionment arising from unresolved disputes. This enhances the potential for further conflagration in the event of extra regional forces promoting regional hegemons.

Unresolved conflicts tend to affect neighboring countries and beyond by creating spillover effects. The world today is witnessing a grave refugee crisis driven primarily by unresolved conflicts, war and persecution. Pakistan too has faced such a

protracted refugee situation for the last three decades. Over three million Afghans still live in Pakistan, either as registered refugees or illegal entrants. We have shouldered this responsibility even in the face of negligible international assistance for many years now.

Pakistan's **regional geo-strategic landscape** remains complicated. On one hand, the phenomenal rise of China and its close relations with Pakistan, combined with our improved ties with Russia has have opened the prospects that finally Pakistan geo-strategic location can be converted from a liability into an asset for economic development of the country.

This positive trend is counter-balanced by India's continuing policy to pressure Pakistan, by sponsoring terrorist campaigns inside Pakistan to foment separatism or by ceasefire violations on the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir to constrain Pakistan Army's ability to deploy more resources on the western borders with Afghanistan. India also maintains direct military pressure on Pakistan through deployment of advance weapons systems, offensive troops positioning and exercises along the border to refine the capacity of a surprise attack, as envisaged in its Cold Start Doctrine. Regrettably, India is also openly opposing China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for no apparent reason than to obstruct the economic development of Pakistan. India's proclivity to use of force against innocent civilians in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and its refusal to discuss the long- standing Jammu and Kashmir with Pakistan locks the relationship of our two countries in a perpetual crisis.

Further complicating our regional situation is uncertainty in Afghanistan over challenges faced by the country in the context of peace and reconciliation and rebuilding state institutions.

Pakistan's **domestic situation** has a very strong relationship with its foreign policy. Our decision in the 1980s to get deeply involved in the Western strategy to counter the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led to many serious long term consequences, such as consequences of militarization of our tribal areas and spillover effect of allied military operations into Pakistan where terrorists crossed over into our areas and coalesced to carry out spates of terrorist attacks which killed or injured over 60,000 people in the past 14 years caused economic losses of over \$ 100.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Faced with these global, regional and domestic challenges, the Government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif have conceived and implemented a strategic vision for our foreign policy with clear objectives of fostering national economic development and promoting peace in the region and beyond. This strategic vision has three major pillars:

- i. The first pillar is priority to Pakistan's own security. This implies a policy of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs

and refrain from fighting other's wars or supporting causes of conflict that do not concern us directly.

ii. Secondly, making economic revival and sustainable development, the centerpiece of our foreign policy. This entails embarking on domestic reforms and striving for a peaceful neighbourhood.

iii. Finally, we are making concrete efforts to turn Pakistan's geostrategic location from a liability into an asset through trade, transport and energy connectivity with China, Central Asia and West Asia. This in turn could also help to re-balance our geo-strategic and geo-economic priorities.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The first two pillars of the strategic vision i.e. focusing on our own security and creating a peaceful neighborhood are mutually interlinked. These goals are constrained by our difficult relationships with Afghanistan and India:

*i.* **Firstly**, on Afghanistan, peace and stability in Afghanistan remains critical for security of Pakistan. Formation of a national unity government in Afghanistan in September 2014 had brought about a significant improvement in Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan. However, intensification of hostilities in different parts of Afghanistan, following the withdrawal of ISAF forces and the stalled Peace Process strained our relationship. Internal political divisions within National Unity Government and failure to articulate clear modalities of reconciliation complicate the peace process. Despite these constraints, the Quadrilateral process, comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan, the US and China, is a manifestation of our commitment to undertake joint efforts for realizing the goal of reducing violence and achieving long term peace and stability in Afghanistan. A broader intra-Afghan understanding and consensus within the Afghan Government will be critical for the success of the Peace Process.

*ii.* **Secondly**, Pakistan-India relations continue to challenge our dream for a peaceful neighbourhood. Improving Pakistan-India relations was part of the election manifesto of Pakistan Muslim League. The sincerity of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to this objective was evident in his participation in the inauguration ceremony of Prime Minister Modi. For the last two years, our offers to resume dialogue have been met with India's disdain and preconditions. The root of contention between the two countries is Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Unfortunately, India is responding to the indigenous Kashmiri movement for the right to self-determination by denial and delusion. India denies a legitimate and popular freedom struggle in Kashmir by brandishing the region as its "integral

part". India is also under delusion that Kashmiri uprising is terrorism. Riding on this denial and delusions, it holds Pakistan responsible for the crisis in Indian-Occupied Kashmir and continues to perpetrate grave human rights violations. For peace in Kashmir, India must dismount the untenable position it has taken thus far. In our negotiations with India whenever they take place, we will continue seeking normalization of relationship and promoting steps that would pave the way for settlement of all outstanding disputes, particularly Jammu and Kashmir.

Another important dimension of Pakistan India relations is maintaining Strategic Stability in South Asia. In this context, the International community, I believe, has a two-fold role to play:

- i. **One**, encourage both sides to have a sustained and result-oriented dialogue on all issues, including Nuclear and Conventional Confidence building Measures (CBMs).
- ii. **Two**, the international community should desist from policies and actions that undermine strategic stability in the region such as the supply of weapon systems that widens the existing conventional asymmetry. Any preferential and discriminatory approach favouring India in the nuclear field can affect strategic stability in South Asia. It is in the context that we urge our application of NSG to be evaluated on criteria at non-discriminatory approach.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The third pillar of strategic vision is to turn Pakistan's strategic location into an asset. In the context, regional connectivity and regional cooperation is our important foreign policy priority. Our government is earnestly implementing trans-national and regional connectivity projects to optimize our economic and trade potential. As a flagship project of China's *One Belt, One Road* initiative, CPEC envisages formidable economic and trade partnership through connectivity. By linking China with Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, CPEC will optimize trade potential and enhance energy security of China, Pakistan and our wider region. CPEC is also a catalyst for regional economic integration. It will foster regional harmony and forge closer relations among China, Pakistan and our neighbours. Pakistan is also actively pursuing various regional connectivity projects like TAPI, CASA 1000, IP, and Torkham-Jalalabad-Kabul motorway to take further advantage of Pakistan's geostrategic and geo-economic disposition at the crossroads of three regions. In terms of regional cooperation, Pakistan attaches great importance to its membership of the SCO as it allows us to reiterate our interest in regional peace, stability and development and our support for regional cooperation against terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

In terms of implementing the strategic vision, let me point out that we are strengthening our relation beyond our neighbourhood, focusing on the Muslim World, East Asia and the West, USA and Europe. We seek to deepen cooperation in areas of security, counterterrorism, promoting economic and trade relations and seeking investment, which is essential for our economic growth.

We view our relations with the European Union as an important component of our foreign policy. The European Union is a traditional ally and a major trading and investment partner. The trajectory of relations is positive, both at economic and strategic level. We are ready to further expand and deepen our partnership with the European Union. At the Third Pakistan-EU Strategic Dialogue meeting yesterday, I discussed with the High Representative the modalities of a new framework of cooperation, which would be launched in 2017. We hope the new framework would help establish a long-term strategic partnership between Pakistan and the European Union.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Pakistan's ground realities are rapidly changing for the better, with decisive and comprehensive action to combat violence, terrorism and extremism. The heroic efforts and sacrifices of our armed forces in Zarb-e-Azb supplemented by intelligence based operations around all major urban centres, Madrassah reforms and conviction of terrorists through military courts, have released Pakistan from the shackles of terrorists and extremists.

Improvement in the security situation has led to visible signs of economic revival and higher investment. Government has accordingly set out to pursuing vigorously the priorities of expanding investment and trade and actively resolving the energy crisis.

In Pakistan of today, the democratic process and institution have become stronger, supported by an independent judiciary, free media and a vibrant civil society.

Before I finish, let me point out that in terms of future priorities, we seek to improve Pakistan's economy, vigorously build CPEC and focus on relations with our immediate neighbors in the spirit of peaceful co-existence. At the same time, we are putting our house in order by focusing on better governance, improving law and order situation, attracting FDI and embark on sustained economic growth.

We look forward to the support of international community in our endeavor to build a prosperous Pakistan and a peaceful neighbourhood contributing to our common objectives of mutually beneficial economic development and maintenance of international peace and security.

**Thank You**