

“SOUTH ASIA SECURITY SITUATION”

Remarks by H.E Masood Khalid,
Ambassador of Pakistan to China

Venue: National Defense University, China

Date: 08 December 2016

(Salutations)

Allow me to express my deepest thank to the National Defense University of China for inviting me to present my thoughts on this very important topic, “South-Asia Security Situation”.

South Asia is indeed important in so many ways- in size, shape, history and geography. It forms the most important strategic area bordering the Indian Ocean.

South Asia is home to a quarter of world’s population. It is a cradle of world’s oldest Asian civilizations, the Mehrgarh (6500 BC to 2500 BC), the Indus Valley Civilization (2500 BC - 1500 BC), and the Gandhara Buddhist Civilization (500 BC to 10 AD) the ruins of which can be found in Pakistan. The region is endowed with rich natural resources. It is ethnically diverse and pluralistic in its composition.

Despite its enormous potential, South Asia is beset with poverty, socio-economic vulnerabilities and income inequalities. It faces problems such as extremism, terrorism and organized crime, as well as climatic and environmental challenges.

In recent decades, the region has become the focus of major powers. The situation in Afghanistan remains a security dilemma. Afghanistan continues to face a multitude of challenges including security, law and order and social upheaval.

The unresolved dispute of Jammu and Kashmir remains the root cause of tensions even after 70 years. Water, a critical source of life, is also a source of conflict posing serious challenge to peace and the regional harmony.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Economic development is intertwined with the concept of sustainable security. Security means not just the absence or threat of war. It also means an absence of hegemonic designs of bigger powers towards their smaller neighbors. It means advancing avenues of win-win cooperation and shared prosperity. It is akin to the security of our societies, infrastructure and energy supplies, development of natural resources and adoption of a comprehensive approach to mitigate common challenges facing us today.

A typical 'security community' is bound by shared, values, interactions and reciprocal long-term interests. This kind of integration normally leads to the impossibility of a military confrontation between member states, while retaining their sovereignty and economic advantage. In these regional security structures, the essential threat perceptions by states are interlinked and mutual. Theoretically, these arrangements are subject to alteration in the face of changes in regional balance of power, in domestic political systems, or in historical amity and enmity patterns.

South Asian nations tried to create a mechanism in the form of SAARC. At its inception SAARC was envisioned as a platform to foster mutual understanding, good neighborly relations and meaningful cooperation among its Member States. However, SAARC has only partially succeeded in achieving its objectives.

Almost three decades since the creation of SAARC, and despite all goodwill and efforts, the organization's underlying objectives remain unrealized. While other parts of the world have capitalized on the gains of regional cooperation and economic integration, SAARC has not lived up to its full potential. Unlike the EU and ASEAN, South Asia remains

the least integrated region in the world, and its institutional set up remains elusive of collective development, cooperation and peace and stability. Intra-regional trade amongst SAARC countries is only about 5% of the global trade.

SAARC can best aim at modeling itself on ASEAN's vision of shared economic prosperity. It should also harness its potential to combat poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy and chart a bright future of socio-economic development of the peoples of South Asia.

People of South Asia need peace to prosper. The dream of peace and prosperity in our region cannot be realized without settlement of outstanding disputes between SAARC member states. SAARC Members countries should develop joint strategies to combat terrorism and extremism and institute confidence building measures to reduce the prospect of war.

Given the enormous challenges we face as a region, we should be strengthening regional cooperation and dialogue instead of weakening it. India's decision to impede the SAARC process by boycotting the 19th SAARC Summit at Islamabad on 9-10 November 2016 has struck at the heart of the spirit of the SAARC. Unfortunately this was not the first time India refused to attend the SAARC Summit held in Pakistan. On previous occasions, it has used flimsy excuses to disrupt the SAARC dialogue process and subvert regional cooperation.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Pakistan shares the perspective that connectivity and development are critical to progress, prosperity and security in the region. We support regional connectivity projects that entail win-win prosperity and development for all. These would include regional energy and infrastructure integration, oil and gas pipelines, and other measures enabling the region's access to international markets.

We realize that Pakistan's unique geo-strategic location at the confluence of South, West and Central Asia makes it a critical player for

peace and stability in the region. Pakistan's foreign policy envisages a peaceful and developed neighborhood as key to regional peace and security.

Pakistan has strived for steady relationship with India. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's decision to attend Prime Minister Modi's inauguration ceremony was a reflection of this commitment. He gave a 4-point proposal to establish sustained peace and stability in South Asia. Pakistan has put forward several initiatives, including the Strategic Restraint Regime in South Asia to promote nuclear stability and conventional balance in the region.

Unfortunately, despite our repeated efforts the dialogue process could not get on track. Instead, tensions have been reignited. We are seeing in our neighborhood the rise of chauvinistic trends and ultra-rightist, militant ideology, which seeks to dominate the entire South Asia.

Analysts describe the emergence of security dilemmas amongst nuclear weapon states as a serious and perpetual challenge to strategic stability. In a conflict between two nuclear armed adversaries, even fought with conventional weapons, there is always a possibility of escalating it to a strategic level conflict. This escalation may not be pre-meditated, but there is always a danger of an inadvertent escalation, caused by misreading of the intentions of the adversary, accidental escalation or caused by a false warning of an imminent or actual first strike by the enemy.

The recent unprovoked firing by our eastern neighbor on the Working Boundary and the Line of Control is, therefore, a serious cause of concern. India has resorted to use of heavy weaponry after a span of 13 years. This is a violation of 2003 Ceasefire Understanding and of International Law and a blatant attempt to divert attention from the grave situation in IOK, where India is engaged in gruesome violation of human rights and illegal occupation of IOK. There are more than 700,000 plus Indian troops deployed there who have unleashed a reign of terror against Kashmiri civilians.

These actions are in complete violation and disregard of international law and the UN Security Council's resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir. Such escalation can lead to strategic miscalculation. It is critical, therefore, for the international community to dissuade India from such provocative measures and to play a more active role in promoting dialogue and peace in South Asia.

It is also important to strengthen UNMOGIP to monitor the LOC and WB on the Indian side which is the UN body present on ground to monitor and make independent investigation of ceasefire violations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Pakistan wishes to see a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan. Economic development and good governance are pre-requisites for the prosperity of Afghanistan. The reconciliation process in Afghanistan has to be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. There should be a regional consensus on non-interference in Afghanistan's regional affairs. Any effort by external actors to seek spheres of influence in Afghanistan should be actively dispelled. Negative elements that prevent construction of healthy relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan should avoid playing games to let the complete peace return to this country.

At the same time, it is important to underscore that terrorism poses a serious threat to peace and stability of our region. Terrorism is an unfortunate by-product of the political and geo-strategic developments in the region over the past 30 years and their negative fall-out on Pakistan. Pakistan has suffered the most due to terrorism. We remain firm in our resolve to root this menace out whether perpetrated from inside or outside. There is political consensus in Pakistan to root out terrorism in all its forms. After a successful counter-terrorist operation by our valiant forces, the backbone of Al-Qaeda, TTP and its affiliates has been broken.

Dear Friends,

Big powers have an important responsibility for peace and stability in South Asia. They should refrain from taking measures that affect the overall regional stability. Measures such as Indo-US nuclear deal or proposed selective inclusion of India into Nuclear Suppliers Group by the US and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement signed between India and the US on 29 August 2016 may affect strategic balance not only in South Asia but also far beyond it. It would only add to the complexities and disturb the strategic nuclear balance in the region.

Pakistan greatly appreciates China's proactive role in promoting peace and prosperity in our region. President Xi Jinping's One-Belt-One-Road Initiative (OBOR) provides a win-win blueprint for regional prosperity. This blueprint involves rapid employment generation, technology transfer, supply of energy requirements and capacity building. It will serve as a conduit for trade and energy corridors from China to South Asia, Central Asia, Middle East and Europe and will bring about a transformational change in the lives of our peoples.

As the flagship project of OBOR, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will serve as a game-changer for our region. This unique model of South-South cooperation will spur regional economic integration and prosperity for South Asia and beyond. Together with Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Silk Road Fund, this Initiative can complement SAARC initiatives such as South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services (SATIS) and contribute to long-term development of South Asia.

Pakistan welcomes China's growing engagement with South Asia, and engagement with SAARC. As an all-weather friend and strategic partner, Pakistan fully understands China's efforts to maintain peace and stability and propose a win-win solution of regional prosperity. China's history bears testimony that its engagement with the rest of the world is based on principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity,

national independence, non-use of force and noninterference in internal affairs of other states. These are also the guiding principles of the SAARC Charter.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

This is the Asian Century. We all know that future belongs to Asia. South Asia's demographic potential and its economic potential are promising. China's rise and economic pre-eminence is creating a new, economically prosperous and vibrant region.

We in South Asia are fortunate to be at the centre of these dynamic changes. South Asia must employ political will to forge regional connectivity, trade, cultural, economic and people-to-people linkages, to create sustainable development and prosperity. Only then can we make SAARC into a platform for joint cooperation and harmonious development that can contribute to the long-term peace, security, development and prosperity.

As Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has said, Pakistan looks forward to playing its part to build a brighter era of peace and prosperity in South Asia. We owe this to our people and to succeeding generations.

Thank you.