

# Pakistan Tells US to Eliminate Terror Safe Havens in Afghanistan

Pakistan, in its formal comprehensive response to U.S. President Donald Trump's South Asia strategy, rejected allegations it is harboring Taliban insurgents who are staging deadly attacks against American forces in Afghanistan.

The rebuttal was issued Thursday after a meeting the National Security Committee of top civilian and military leaders chaired by Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi in Islamabad.

"The Afghan war cannot be fought in Pakistan... To scapegoat Pakistan will not help in stabilizing Afghanistan," Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif said while reading the statement to the Senate, the upper house of parliament.

## Trump's speech

President Trump in his policy speech Monday said that Pakistan is taking billions of dollars from the United States but housing the very terrorists attacking U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

Pakistani security forces have taken "indiscriminate actions" against all terrorist networks and sacrificed tens of thousands of troops and civilians in this fight, Minister Asif said. In turn, he asked the United States to move against fugitive anti-state militants hiding in Afghanistan.

"We would like to see effective and immediate U.S. military efforts to eliminate sanctuaries harboring terrorists and miscreants on the Afghan soil including those responsible for fomenting terror in Pakistan," said the foreign minister.

Instead of any financial or material assistance, there should

be understanding and recognition of Pakistan's efforts, contributions and sacrifice of thousands of its citizens and over 120 billion U.S. dollars of economic losses, Asif said.

"The claims of billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan are also misleading to the extent that the reimbursements to Pakistan since 2001 only account for part of the cost of ground facilities and air corridors used by the United States for its operations in Afghanistan, rather than any financial aid or assistance," the minister explained.

He said that Islamabad has consistently worked with both Washington and Kabul to promote a negotiated settlement of the Afghan conflict to bring an end to years of bloodshed in the neighboring country.

### **India's role**

Foreign Minister Asif also took aim at the Trump administration's attempt to give India, archrival of Pakistan, a role in regional security efforts.

"India cannot be a net security provider in the South Asia region when it has conflictual relationships with all its neighbors and is pursuing a policy of destabilizing Pakistan from the east and the west," he said.

Pakistani leaders have consistently maintained that the Indian intelligence agency is using its growing influence with Afghan counterparts to sponsor terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Kabul and New Delhi deny the charges.

Meanwhile, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan said Thursday the new war strategy Trump announced earlier this week will result in an increase in train, advise and assist efforts as well as stepped up air power to Afghan security forces battling the Taliban.

General John Nicholson told reporters in Kabul U.S. and NATO

are determined to enable Afghan forces defeat Taliban, and terrorists linked to Islamic State and remnants of al-Qaida. He also asked the Taliban to quit violence and enter into peace talks with the Afghan government.

“I say you have a simple choice: Stop fighting against your countrymen. Stop killing innocent civilians. Stop bringing hardship and misery to the Afghan people. Lay down your arms and join Afghan society. Help build a better future for this country and your own children,” Nicholson said.

But a Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, swiftly rejected the general’s call, saying the insurgent group is determined to continue fighting until the last soldier of the “foreign occupation” forces left Afghanistan.

*Courtesy: Voice of America*