**Peace for Afghanistan and Pakistan**

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It is a historic opportunity for Afghans to end the conflict, which has for long led to the destruction of infrastructure and loss of humans and humanity.

Pakistan and regional countries have, and will continue, to support the Taliban and Afghan government in hammering out a solution and rebuilding the country. Peace in Afghanistan is an existential question for Pakistan and is pivotal to regional connectivity and shared economic prosperity. Pakistan and Afghanistan have worked together through thick and thin. Peace has special significance for the brotherly countries.

Playing a constructive role dictates that we provide a platform through which further conversations can be held, create peace strategies that might aid the country and direct our resources towards improving the standard of living for the masses. Through a closer partnership, we will be able to put up a stronger stand against regional clashes. Thus, this is something that we must work towards. Independently, we have been directing our efforts in facilitating peace in Afghanistan. Now, Pakistan must nurture its relationship with regional powers so that the resolution process is as successful as it can be.

With its large urban population and sizable middle class, Pakistan can survive the bane of extremist violence. Sustained development is vital for meeting the needs of its growing population. Fast-paced development in step with the other developing regions of the world would require well-considered policies steered by leadership, both military and civilian, with a grasp of issues, clarity of vision, and the ability to make tough decisions. Alternatively, Pakistan will move forward slowly; drifting along the powerful global currents for development and progress as long as it does not start breaking up ethnic and parochial fault lines.

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Another factor in Pakistan’s favour, paradoxically, is the country‘s large army, which is strong enough to hold together a country of its size. This is not to make a case for Pakistan to remain a security-oriented state instead of diverting more resources towards welfare and socioeconomic development. Nor is it a justification for the army to resume its erstwhile role in politics. As already shown during the Swat and South Waziristan operations, the army has an indispensable function as the instrument of last resort against insurgencies and as a strong institution with a stake in the integrity of the country.

Reference must be made to the increasingly mobilized civil society and the powerful media. Although their tendency to overreach contributes to an environment of instability, these informal institutions of democracy will reach equilibrium if the democratic transition stabilises. The year 2010 was a harbinger of a few good tidings, with an all-party consensus on the Eighteenth Amendment: something not witnessed since the all-party agreement on the 1973 constitution. The parties were able to bridge differences over several prickly issues, such as provincial autonomy and procedures for key appointments of the chief election commissioner and the supreme judiciary. These milestones came in the wake of the 2009 National Financial Award agreement on revenue sharing among the four provinces and the proposal for a Baluchistan package to redress the long-standing grievances of that province. Though these developments have an uncertain quality, seen in the context of the tumultuous years since the 2008 elections they augur well for the country’s political and democratic process. Again, much depends on improved governance to sustain political stability, revive the faltering economy, and address the formidable challenges of socio-economic development.

A final advantage is the society’s openness, which imparts to it both the capacity to absorb shocks and the possibility of correcting its direction as shown in the public reaction to Taliban Excesses in Swat. The media has asserted itself as a strong and, on balance, a positive new force that can serve as a check on political leadership. The media has expanded the openness, although in the present circumstances they also contribute to anxiety, agitation, and confusion in the public mind.

Pakistan has survived many experiences of deep national trauma and tragedy, sanctions and pressures, which have strengthened its inherent resilience. Nonetheless, it cannot afford to remain mired in weak governance, ambivalence, and confusion in grasping and overcoming the challenges it faces. The pace of Pakistan’s progress will depend on clear thinking in public discourse about the demands of modernity and on the collective vision of its political and intellectual leaders.

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