



# South Asian Weekly Watch

## NEWSLETTER

January 14, 2015

### Afghanistan

#### **January 14: Our flawed narrative on Afghanistan by Aqil Sajjad**

About two decades after the Taliban's initial emergence, our mainstream narrative on Afghanistan still revolves around viewing them as the force that brought peace to that country when it was mired in a bloody civil war, and as the group that is resisting a foreign occupation today. Unfortunately, this narrative is badly flawed on several counts, and has been an important contributing factor in the confusion about our policy on Afghanistan and the problem of terrorism in Pakistan itself. The purpose of this piece is to offer some context in this regard.

Since Taliban-controlled areas in Afghanistan would inevitably serve as natural safe havens for TTP militants at a scale much larger than their current sanctuaries in that country.

Given this backdrop, it is about time we dumped the apologist narrative that the Afghan Taliban are the 'good guys who brought peace to Afghanistan' in the dustbin of history and start wholeheartedly supporting the constitutional set-up in Afghanistan. The Afghan people should not have to suffer another round of anarchy and state failure or a return to the savage rule of the Taliban they had to endure back in the 1990s.

[Express Tribune](#)

#### **January 12: UN chief urges India to take lead role on Afghan security**

UN chief Ban Ki-moon urged India on Monday to help shore up stability in war-torn Afghanistan after the departure of US troops, saying the world was relying on South Asia's powerhouse to play a lead role. Speaking on a visit to the capital New Delhi, Ban said India had a "huge role" to play on the security front in a region that has been beset by unrest.

“The world is looking at India to help advance peace and prosperity in South Asia,” the UN secretary general said at a public lecture. “Continuing instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan is not only the responsibility of these two nations. These challenges should be addressed through greater bilateral parleys.”

“The security challenges in Afghanistan cannot be solved by military process. It needs regional support from India,” he added. India has poured \$2 billion in reconstruction aid into Afghanistan and has been asked for further support, including military assistance in Kabul’s battle to contain a Taliban insurgency after a Nato combat mission wound up at the turn of the year.

[Express Tribune](#)

### **January 12: Afghanistan names 'unity' cabinet after months of delay**

Afghanistan’s new cabinet was unveiled on Monday after three months of wrangling following the election of President Ashraf Ghani and the formation of a “national unity government” in the wake of last year’s fraud-mired election.

Ghani was inaugurated in late September after signing a power-sharing deal with his poll rival Abdullah Abdullah, but negotiations over ministerial posts brought politics to a stalemate and threatened to fuel the Taliban insurgency.

The “unity government” deal was seen as saving Afghanistan from the risk of imminent civil war when both candidates claimed to have won the election in a stand-off that fanned long-standing ethnic tensions.

[Express Tribune](#)

### **January 11: ISI chief, Afghan president agree to boost anti-terror cooperation**

Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Lt Gen Rizwan Akhtar on Sunday met Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani in Kabul and discussed ways to boost anti-terror cooperation, according to the Afghan Presidential Palace said.

It was Akhtar’s third visit to Afghanistan since he assumed office in November 2014. He first travelled to Kabul just after taking charge as ISI chief, while in December he accompanied the army chief in the aftermath of the Peshawar school attack.

“The President of Afghanistan Mohammad Ashraf Ghani received Pakistan intelligence ISI chief Lt General Rizwan Akhtar in his office on Sunday,” the Presidential Palace said. “In the meeting both sides discussed ways to further strengthen joint efforts against terrorism and extremism,” the statement added.

They also talked about peace and security in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region, among other matters.

[Express Tribune](#)

## India

### January 14: Pakistan urges US to persuade India on talks

Amidst seething tensions with India punctuated by sporadic border skirmishes, a top Pakistani official on Tuesday called upon the United States to prevail upon New Delhi to work with Islamabad towards regional peace and economic prosperity.

As an ‘influential member’ of the international community, the US could prevail upon India to work with Pakistan towards regional peace and economic prosperity, Prime Minister’s Adviser on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz said at a joint news conference with US Secretary of State John Kerry, who was on a two-day visit to Pakistan for a second edition of the Pak-US Strategic Dialogue.

Aziz said Pakistan wanted a constructive, sustained and result-oriented dialogue with India on all issues of mutual concern. However, he made it clear that a dialogue with New Delhi sidestepping the Kashmir dispute was out of the question.

[Express Tribune](#)

### January 13: Ruling Kashmir

The uncertainties of electoral politics have shown their face once again in Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir, where governor’s rule has been declared, essentially placing the region under New Delhi’s direct control. The development comes after elections held in December ended in a stalemate, with no party stepping forward to attempt to form government. In the polls, the regional People’s Democratic Party, led by ‘soft-line’ separatist Mufti Muhammad Sayeed, won most seats, but not enough to form government. The party claimed 28 seats, only three more than Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s BJP.

The ruling National Conference won 15 seats, while the Congress party, which had fared poorly across the rest of India, was able to pick up 12 seats – a surprise for many. The divided verdict, however, means that no party has collected the 44 seats needed to form government in the 87-member state assembly.

The decision on governor’s rule came after caretaker chief minister Omar Abdullah of the National Conference announced that he would be stepping down as the state required a full-time administrator and not one who was in no position to take decisions.

This is the sixth time since 1977 that Kashmir finds itself under governor’s rule. Abdullah, whose party has traditionally allied itself with the Congress, has also said that the situation on the borders of Kashmir

had displaced thousands of people and that some sense of stability was needed in the region. How this will be brought about is as yet unclear. There had been talk of the PDP attempting to forge a coalition with the NC but almost everyone agrees such a set-up would be a weak one. The possibility of new elections is very real but for now the people of Kashmir watch and wait to see what happens next.

[The News](#)

### **January 13: No question of talks with India without Kashmir on agenda: Aziz**

National Security adviser Sartaj Aziz said on Tuesday there was no question of talks with India without Kashmir on the agenda.

“The dialogue process with India would be meaningless without the core issue of Kashmir on agenda,” the prime minister’s senior aide said during a joint press conference with US Secretary of State John [Kerry who is on a two-day visit to Pakistan](#).

“Pakistan wanted a constructive, sustained and result-oriented dialogue with India on all issues of mutual concern,” Aziz emphasised. His statements come after Kerry earlier in the day urged India and Pakistan to return to peace talks. “It is profoundly in the interests of Pakistan and India to move their relationship forward,” he told reporters in Islamabad.

[Express Tribune](#)

### **January 12: BJP’S onslaught on Kashmir by K.Iqbal**

Indian held Jammu and Kashmir (IHK) has been placed under the Governor’s rule. Now the Bharatia Janata Party (BJP) shall have more freedom to maneuver for installing a Hindu Chief Minister in IHK. The imposition of direct rule means local representatives will have no say in the running of IHK, at least for the time being. This development came after the two top running parties, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Hindu nationalist BJP, failed to work out a power sharing arrangement or cut a deal with other smaller parties, The PDP won 28 seats in the Muslim dominated areas while the BJP won 25, mainly in the Hindu Jammu region.

The verdict of Kashmir elections has been fractured. What Kashmir needs is a representative Government, which respects the existing Constitutional provisions, especially Article 370. The National Conference and Congress now must choose which direction to go for Government formation. BJP gaining electoral ground in Kashmir is a sign of aggressive policies to abolish article 370 and to bring in the agenda of a Hindu Nation.

Dr Ghulam Nabi Fai has rightly argued in his recent article that: “In case the BJP is in the driver’s seat or in the driving car, the plight of Kashmir will worsen...The desire to possess Kashmir is nothing but a fantasy, an extremely poor business decision, and an outrageous ego trip. If historic experience is a guide, over more than 67 years, no bilateral talks between India and Pakistan have yielded agreements without the active role of an external element.

[Nation](#)

### **January 12: India helping terrorists in Pakistan: Khawaja Asif**

Building on recent accusatory statements by government representatives, Federal Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Monday claimed that India was helping terrorist groups in Pakistan to carry out "heinous acts".

In an interview on DawnNews’s programme News Eye, the minister alleged that India "has designs on Pakistan".

“The Taliban have links with India. Also, India’s involvement in the insurgency in Balochistan cannot be ignored,” he said. When asked to provide evidence for his claim, the minister dodged the question and proceeded to claim that a low intensity war was underway. He stated that his allegations were based as much on conviction as on experience.

[DAWN](#)

### **January 9: Modi sarkar by M. Saeed Khalid**

Narendra Modi’s juggernaut reached Delhi six months ago amid excitement and anxiety. In some ways, Modi sarkar has performed as was expected of it – business friendly, imperious and self-righteous.

The catch phrase, ‘Modi means business’ has been relayed from the top, down to state functionaries and even to India’s foreign partners. That too was expected of someone who nursed the ambition of ruling India one day in a more energetic manner than is the norm.

Modi spent decades preparing for that day. It is doubtful he ever thought of having a personal life unless that too was a means to the end. He got rid of the encumbrance of married life by dispatching his wife to the village she came from, and has no children. What remains to be seen is whether ruling India was an end in itself or whether applying Hindutva to a diverse society would be carried through, and at what cost?

Alternatively, the BJP leader may have begun to comprehend that nations or societies do not gallop. If he

is aiming at an attitudinal change in a millenary culture, patience will be his greatest virtue. The same applies to relations with other countries, whether it is to attract investment or forge political partnerships.

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