

**Text of talk delivered by H.E. Janan Mosazai, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic
of Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
at the
Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad
on
Afghanistan-Pakistan Relationship**

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میچرلا نمحرلا لا مسب.
میرکلا هلوسر یلع یلصن و هدمحن.

Honourable Ambassador Masood Khan, Director General, ISSI,
Honourable Ambassador Mahmood, Chairman, Board of Governors,
ISSI, Fellow ambassadors,
Diplomats,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As-salam-o-alaikom and good morning to you all.

I want to thank both Ambassador Masood Khan and Ambassador Mahmood for suggesting this talk and for inviting me and inviting all of you. It is a privilege to be here with you today in the company of such an august audience to share some thoughts on the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship.

The first thing that must be said about the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship is that it goes far beyond a relationship between two governments or even two states. This is a relationship rooted in age-old ties of shared history, culture, religion, traditions, geography, language and blood. I say this everywhere, and it bears repeating again, that millions of Pakistanis trace their ancestry to Afghanistan. We feel this is something that we should all be proud about and something that should bring us closer as two states and two nations. We also face a common set of challenges as well as opportunities.

Speaking of the close people-to-people ties, one of the best gifts that my family and I will be taking with us now that my tenure as ambassador is coming to an end, will be the numerous friendships we have established over the past two years with wonderful people throughout this country. We will cherish these personal friendships for years to come. We have enjoyed the warm hospitality of the people of Pakistan, and enjoyed travelling throughout the length and breadth of this beautiful country. We will be coming back again as visitors for sure inshallah.

The people and government of Afghanistan are grateful to the people and government of Pakistan for hosting millions of Afghan refugees for more than three decades with

generosity and kindness. Afghan refugees by and large have been treated with hospitality, kindness and generosity in Pakistan, especially by ordinary people in their daily interactions. For that we're thankful.

I am, however, also concerned at the trend over the past couple of years, especially since the barbaric APS attack in December 2014, of government officials, both at the federal and provincial levels, pointing the finger of blame towards Afghan refugees whenever a terrorism-related incident takes place in Pakistan. And this is despite absolutely no evidence in a single incident in the past 36 years of the presence of Afghan refugees where an Afghan citizen has been involved or implicated in a terrorist incident or other major crime incident anywhere in Pakistan.

So, it is my earnest hope, and appeal, that the leaders of this country, including those charged with domestic security responsibilities including police officials, will demonstrate more care and restraint in their words and statements in the future. Afghan refugees want to go back to their country in dignity and the government of Afghanistan is firmly committed to working with Pakistan and the UNHCR, as we have been doing much more intensively over the past two years, to facilitate their return through a voluntary, dignified and gradual process in as expeditious a timeframe as possible because we see the return of our refugees as integral to our peace efforts. But until that time, the presence of Afghan refugees should be looked at and treated as a purely humanitarian issue, which is what it is, and for it not to be politicized for short-term purposes, which would certainly not be in the long-term interest of the state-to-state and people-to-people relationship between our two countries. Pakistan enjoys tremendous goodwill among the Afghan refugee population and I think it's important for this country also to preserve that goodwill, which has been earned over decades.

Beyond the centrality of the close people-to-people ties between our two countries, from an Afghan perspective, Afghanistan and Pakistan as two independent, sovereign states are vital to each other's peace, security and prosperity. As such, the destinies of our two countries are inseparably linked to each another. When we conceive of and think about peace, security and prosperity in Afghanistan, we do not do so in isolation from Pakistan but rather very much keeping Pakistan at the top of our mind. That is the framework of thinking and vision in Afghanistan. Indeed, as His Excellency President Ghani has underlined repeatedly and consistently, we consider Pakistan as a vital partner in security, economic development, political cooperation and people-to-people relations.

From the Afghan perspective, there is nothing in this relationship — no challenge, no problem — for which we cannot find solutions through dialogue and cooperation. So the question then becomes one of dedicating the time, energy, courage and focus to seek out those solutions and mark a new, different trajectory for the relationship.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the realm of economic cooperation, as again President Ghani pointed out during his November 2014 visit, his first as President, Afghanistan and Pakistan can easily become the lynchpin of an Asian continental economy, linking Central Asia with South

Asia and China with West Asia and beyond, thus realising the noble goal of meaningful, deep economic integration that would help us lift millions of our citizens out of poverty and underdevelopment. The realization of this vision will also restore Afghanistan's rightful place and natural role in this region as a land bridge and connector between and among the aforementioned key sub-regions of Asia.

During that same visit, President Ghani endorsed, together with His Excellency Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, an ambitious 48-point agreement on economic cooperation. At the time, the President said that we managed to do more work in terms of getting agreements and decisions on key elements of economic cooperation between us in three days than in the previous ten years, including the goal of increasing our bilateral trade from the existing roughly \$2 billion per year to \$5 billion per year by the end of 2017.

However, if I am to be completely candid, when it comes to practical follow up and implementation, we have neither matched the shared strategic vision of our leaders nor have we delivered satisfactorily on the scope of the decisions we have made. In my view, the work that we have done in the past fourteen months since that first historic visit of President Ghani to Islamabad, we could have probably done in just a couple of months.

So what we need to do going forward in this crucial area is to ensure that we progressively narrow the big gap that exists between agreements and decisions on the one hand and implementation and concrete outcomes on the other hand.

This gulf between Afghanistan and Pakistan is unfortunately demonstrated quite starkly by the fact that we have achieved significant progress since the establishment of the National Unity Government in terms of advancing connectivity and integration with Central Asia, Iran and China over the past few years but as President Ghani said in Islamabad last month, "By contrast, our ambitious projects of cooperation for transit and for linkages through Pakistan have still remained at the level of conception and aspiration." I hope we can change this picture in a measurable way in the months to come because that is how we will win and sustain the confidence of our people in this relationship.

To mention another concrete example here, we have a major challenge in the form of the non-implementation of the existing Afghanistan -Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement provisions with regards to Afghan transit trade with India and the rest of South Asia through the territory of Pakistan.

The legal basis for this is Section IX, Article 33a, page 17 of the APTTA where it is clearly stated that Pakistan will provide national treatment to Afghan exports. This is what Article 33a says, and I quote, "rules and procedures affecting transit traffic treatment applied to transporters from the other Contracting Party shall be no less favourable than applied to their own like services and service providers," end quote. The existing situation is that Pakistani trucks are allowed to unload cargo at the Integrated

Check Post (ICP) in Attari on the Indian side and return with Indian goods that are allowed to be imported through Wahga to Pakistan.

So what we would like to see happen soon is for the government of Pakistan to apply this existing APTTA national treatment clause to Afghan trucks and allow them to unload Afghan export cargo at ICP Attari and be able to bring back Indian goods on their return trip, starting with those goods and products that are imported into Pakistan. In other words, Afghanistan is not asking for any exceptional treatment in doing trade with India through Pakistan; we would like to see the existing transit trade agreement between us implemented in full — both in letter and spirit. I hope Pakistan can take this important decision because it can start to transform the character of regional trade in the SAARC and Central Asia regions.

There is, however, good news on two other game-changing regional projects related to energy which will significantly advance the goal of deeper economic integration specifically between Central Asia and South Asia, namely the TAPI pipeline work on which was commenced in Turkmenistan last month and the CASA-1000 transmission line which will be inaugurated in May this year in Tajikistan. The completion date for the TAPI pipeline at this point is sometime in 2018 and for CASA-1000 sometime in late 2017.

We are also moving ahead on plans for a new Peshawar-Kabul motorway and work on the construction of a hydropower project on the Kunar River, which would generate more than 3000 MW of clean electricity for both countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On security, the first point that must be made is that the people of both countries have suffered grievously. The Afghan people have suffered from aggression and terrorist violence for nearly three decades, but the people of Pakistan too have suffered from the scourge of terrorism and violent extremism over the years, especially the past decade, and this suffering must be brought to a conclusive end rapidly.

Peace and a normal, cooperative relationship with Pakistan has been a key driving goal of Afghan leadership and government over the past fifteen years. In his thirteen years as President, H.E. Hamid Karzai undertook more than 20 visits to Pakistan towards that end.

And since the election of the National Unity Government in September 2014, our earnest hope again was and is that our two countries would be able to work closely together to advance an agenda of peace, including peace and reconciliation talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, a process in which Pakistan has an essential role to play, in for no other reason than the nature of the conflict and where the leadership, ideological and funding support sources of the Taliban, among other things, are located. This is precisely why, very early in his tenure, President Ghani undertook a bold outreach effort towards all segments of state and society in Pakistan when he

visited Islamabad in November 2014. It was agreed at the time that both countries will work together through specific and time-bound actions to prevent a Taliban spring offensive in 2015 and create a conducive environment for the commencement of direct talks between the Afghan government and authorized representatives of the Taliban.

Of course the first objective was not attained because instead of a spring offensive getting prevented, the violence unleashed on Afghanistan last year was worse than during any of the preceding thirteen years, with innocent Afghan civilians — women, children, men — being the primary victims. The aim of this unprecedented violence was to create two parallel political geographies in Afghanistan where the legitimate Afghan government controlled the vast majority of the country but where the Taliban would also be able to claim control of significant territory. Despite suffering significant casualties, Afghan national security and defence forces proved their capability and resilience and defeated this sinister design, and with the exception of the fall of Kunduz city for a few days in September, which was taken back by Afghan forces quickly, the Taliban did not make any strategic gain last year.

On the talks front, in early July we did manage to hold a first direct formal meeting with representatives of the Taliban in Murree facilitated by the Pakistan, a meeting which was also observed and participated by the U.S. and China. However, that process collapsed quickly in late July before the second meeting, after it was revealed that the Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, had died more than two years earlier, information that had not been shared with us in advance. As we saw, the Taliban subsequently broke off talks and intensified violence, including a series of horrific attacks in Kabul in early August that killed and maimed hundreds of innocent civilians, most of them in their sleep.

Right now, we are back at a stage where we have agreed to resume all-out joint and common efforts to restart the talks process and make sure that we have an agreement on reduction of violence prior to next spring when otherwise another offensive could be unleashed.

It is my view that the intensive discussions and dialogue we have engaged in since the second visit of President Ghani to Pakistan early last month for the 10th Heart of Asia ministerial meeting followed by a visit of Chief of Army of Staff Gen. Raheel Sharif to Kabul late last month and the support and role of our partners, specifically China and the United States in this process, have created ripe conditions once again for a potential breakthrough ahead of this coming spring.

As you must have noted, we held the first meeting of the Afghanistan-Pakistan-United States-China quadrilateral coordination mechanism on Monday here in Islamabad where we agreed on parameters for the work of this quadrilateral group, underscored the need for immediate resumption of direct talks between the Afghan government and Taliban groups and agreed to pursue our efforts as part of an intensive schedule of meetings and discussions.

The active presence of China and the United States in this renewed effort gives the people and government of Afghanistan added confidence that the quadrilateral mechanism could achieve tangible results in the coming months. Success will, more than anything else, require sincerity, both in words and in actions, and a continued sense of urgency and focus, especially in terms of the actions and measures that each side has to undertake, to make sure our work remains specific, measurable and time-bound and that we don't lose this critical new window of opportunity.

As a note of caution, I must say that the Afghan people and government are particularly alarmed at the recent rise of attacks in Kabul and around the country since the visit of President Ghani to Islamabad last month. The continuation of this recent surge in violence will make sustaining the bilateral Afghanistan-Pakistan rapprochement increasingly difficult to the Afghan public unless we start to see tangible progress in the peace and reconciliation process including and especially a quick reduction in the current shocking levels of violence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allah forbid, but if we lose this important opportunity for reduction and ultimate elimination of violence in Afghanistan, the security challenges and levels of violence and bloodshed in this region, not just in Afghanistan, will exacerbate exponentially, and there will be even more room for new strains of violent extremism, particularly Daesh, to further spread its vicious tentacles more deeply into our societies and countries. The debate in Pakistan last year on the Daesh threat was fairly ambiguous but I think the events of the past few weeks and the violence perpetrated in the name of that group in Karachi last year and Parachinar this year should have convinced everyone that this new, horrible manifestation of violent extremism and terrorism poses a potentially devastating threat to this region, especially to the impressionable minds of the large number of vulnerable youth in this region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Ambassador, based on the instructions and vision of the leadership of my government, we have also tried to expand the scope of our bilateral ties. For example, we have never had a direct relationship with the province of Punjab, the largest in Pakistan. So we requested soon after I arrived in Islamabad, permission to establish a consulate general in Lahore. Unfortunately, that request has not yet been granted but I do hope that it will come through sometime soon as an Afghan consulate general in the largest Pakistan province would play an important role in establishing direct linkages of economic cooperation and people-to-people ties between Punjab and Afghanistan.

We were able last year to invite and host the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Kabul, which was the first visit of a Chief Minister of that province to Kabul. Among other things, we agreed to establish a bilateral Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-Afghanistan Joint Working Committee to enhance economic cooperation, people-to-people ties, academic exchanges and health tourism.

As ambassador, I have also tried to introduce the transformation that Afghanistan as a country, society and state has gone through since 2001 to the people of Pakistan, something that hasn't received much attention and is therefore not adequately appreciated. What I have tried to convey to our Pakistani friends, brothers and sisters is that the Afghanistan is today is not the Afghanistan of the jihad days when Pakistan hosted Afghan mujahideen and the Afghan people appreciated that, and that now we want Pakistan to help encourage and push the Taliban towards talks with their legitimate, elected government, that Afghanistan has made historic gains in institutional development, education, healthcare, the strengthening of democratic governance, the rights and freedoms of women and children and infrastructure development. What we have proposed, in a nutshell, is for Pakistan and Afghanistan to strengthen our state-to-state ties. Let me once again assure you that as we have shown in years past, Afghanistan sincerely desires a cooperative, special relationship with Pakistan, and will never be a threat to this country nor will allow any other country to pose a threat to Pakistan from Afghan soil. This is the emphatic policy of the Afghan state.

To conclude, I believe there is unbounded potential for deep, mutually-beneficial, win-win solutions and cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan in virtually all areas, and notwithstanding the unacceptably high toll that the ongoing violence exacts on us on an almost daily basis, we are probably in the midst of the best available opportunity to make a break with the legacy of the past forty years and mark a bold, new, more hopeful beginning.

To attain that noble goal, complete sincerity and, much more importantly, result-oriented bold action on the agreements and decisions that we make is absolutely crucial. This approach that we're proposing could entail risks, including blowback from non-state actors that have felt safe and secure so far, but without such farsighted courageous action which can change our peoples' perspectives about the present and future trajectory of this most important bilateral relationship and the prospects of peace, stability and prosperity in both countries, we will just continue muddling through, which as I have tried to argue here, may not be a viable option much longer.

Thank you very much.