



ASHRAF GHANI TRUSTS INDIA AS A RELIABLE PARTNER



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01 November 2017

Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani's half day visit to India on Oct 24th once again demonstrated Kabul's trust in New Delhi as a reliable partner. India has been indeed consistent in its approach with Kabul and has been engaged actively in development and humanitarian assistance. Ghani, in his address delivered to Vivekananda International Foundation (New Delhi) during his visit, talked about the challenges Afghanistan is facing and is likely to face and voiced that Afghanistan is looking at India as a reliable partner to counter these challenges.*

Ghani talked about the **four critical transitions** Afghanistan went through at the end of 2014, "under conditions of global and regional uncertainty".

The first was *political transition* where, for the first time, Afghanistan saw a "democratic transition of authority, not power". It was the first time the Afghans chose their leader and Afghanistan adopted an approach of constituting a Government of National Unity, which is "well and functioning".

The second transition was *security*, where the Afghan security forces took charge of the security from the leading militaries of about 43 nations. There were apprehensions about the sustainability of the Afghan army and how long it will last, but the Afghan President believes the Afghan Army is 'well and good'.

The third transition Ghani talked about was *economic*. Afghanistan economy was totally dominated by foreign forces and for each member of the international force there were about 4 to 6 contractors. With the withdrawal, the middle class and the upper middle class demands went down

resulting in a great recession. The Afghan leadership believes the economy is showing signs of recovery and the International Monetary Fund is projecting a growth rate of 3.5%.

The fourth transition Ghani talked about was in the “*culture of the state*”. He bluntly emphasised that “the state was being perceived as an estate, as a series of claims of property rights for various networks and where corruption has become the norm.” He said that Afghans own their problems and will tackle their problems themselves.

Ghani talked about multiple critical issues in his address including; global economy, Asia’s rise in the global economy, Afghanistan’s redefined relationship with Central Asia, Trump’s Afghan policy, India’s role, Pakistan’s behaviour etc. However, the critical points that could be drawn from his remarks are as follows:

1. *Security* is undoubtedly the prime concern for Afghanistan at present. The security situation remains volatile in Afghanistan and the rising numbers, as well as the intensity, of terrorist attacks does signal an alarming future for Kabul. According to a report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, there were 11,418 conflict-related civilian casualties reported in 2016 and 5,243 for the first half of 2017. Although Ghani claimed that the ‘state is not at the risk of collapse’ but he admitted that the ‘worst attacks in human history have been launched against the urban population and against civilians’ in Afghanistan. On the other hand, situation in the rural areas seems to be under control. The surge in violence does indicate probably a worse conflict in 2019.
2. Ghani outlined that Kabul’s “*approach to internal peace is to own through Afghan-government-led process*”. Thus, an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process is intended. Afghan leadership cherishes its success of swinging a successful peace deal with the leader of Hizb-i-Islami, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Kabul clearly would not welcome other regional players telling them what to do.
3. *Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan* caters to its deep strategic interests which contradict with the stability in Afghanistan. Former President Karzai and Ghani have both openly condemned Pakistan’s support to Afghan Taliban which has not allowed peace in Kabul. Ghani very clearly said that Afghanistan “would like a push factor from Pakistan vis-a`-vis Taliban, not a Pakistan-managed peace process with the Taliban”.
4. *Trump’s Afghan policy* is seen as a *game changer* by the Afghan leadership. Kabul seems to be relieved with the announcement of: an extended US military presence, condition-based

withdrawal, multi-dimensional (military, diplomatic and economic) instruments for peace and stability, and an expanded role for New Delhi in Afghanistan.

5. Afghanistan undoubtedly trusts *India as a reliable partner* in countering the central challenges of 'poverty, inequality and insecurity not at the sub-national level but at the regional level'. As Afghanistan proceeded towards transition, India's position has been of a supporting actor focused on development and capacity-building in Afghanistan.

India's interests in Afghanistan have multiple dimensions- expansion of its regional influence; building its soft power; trade and commerce; countering growth of Islamist extremism from Afghanistan and deterring Pakistan from using Afghanistan as a territory for sponsoring terrorism against India. New Delhi had been primarily focused on developmental and humanitarian assistance until a couple of years back, when it took the decision to expand its cooperation and extended security assistance in the form of supplying helicopters and extending training to the Afghan security forces. India has created its credibility in Afghanistan over the last few decades and should continue its efforts as it serves mutual strategic interests. Afghanistan has clearly recognized that India's engagement is crucial for stability in Pakistan. However, New Delhi's efforts have been continuously thwarted by Pakistan which feels threatened with Indian presence in Afghanistan. Kabul's blatant recognition of Pakistan being a bad player would assist India in furthering its actions and objectives in Afghanistan.

*Text of President Ghani's address at Vivekananda International Foundation available at- Office of the President, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," <https://president.gov.af/en/speech/president-mohammad-ashraf-ghanis-remarks-at-vivekananda-international-foundation-vif/>, October 25, 2017. Accessed on October 26, 2017.

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Keywords: India-Afghanistan relations, Ashraf Ghani, Pakistan