

Response to General Asim Munir of Pakistan

M.H. Atmar –January 25th, 2024

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS) of Pakistan, Gen Syed Asim Munir, has made highly unwise remarks regarding Afghanistan and the relations between the two countries, which will have far-reaching consequences. Given his pivotal role not only in the national security of Pakistan but also in shaping its domestic and foreign policies, his statements must raise serious concerns for Afghanistan, its neighbours, and the international community.

During a session with university students from across the country on Wednesday (<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2454331/coas-sets-out-foreign-policy-redlines>), General Munir's remarks were characterized by sarcasm, misinformation, and a mix of veiled and direct threats. He openly engaged in a reckless game of inciting anti-Afghanistan sentiments among the Pakistani people.

It was highly irresponsible to suggest that "the life of a single Pakistani is more important than the entire Afghanistan," particularly since the people of Afghanistan have never inflicted any harm upon Pakistan, nor harboured intentions to do so. Afghans have been extremely appreciative of the Pakistani people and their support during decades of being refugees.

General Munir's claim that "insurgency in Balochistan has long been supported by Afghanistan" is baseless and unsubstantiated. He clearly attempted to indoctrinate and provoke young Pakistanis by stating that "Afghanistan was the only country to oppose Pakistan's admission to the United Nations after independence". Blaming Pakistanis for not reading history and alleging that "the western neighbor (Afghanistan) has never shown friendship towards Pakistan" are perilous fallacies.

Furthermore, his warning that "when it comes to the safety and security of every single Pakistani, the whole of Afghanistan can be damned" is alarming and misplaced.

In response to his remarks, I would like to highlight the following points. First, such reckless remarks by Pakistan's highest military authority are deeply irresponsible. Insulting the proud nation of Afghanistan will not foster friendship or cooperation with the Pakistani military or government in addressing common existential threats. Threatening an entire nation that has endured the consequences of Pakistani military policies for over four and half decades is unwise. The Afghan nation no longer needs to demonstrate its resilience,

strength and determination to rise repeatedly from the ashes of imposed wars to anyone. Afghanistan will rise again and will not yield, even under or to the rule of the Taliban.

Second, it is time for Pakistani military leaders and strategists to be honest with themselves and their people. The policy of terror against neighbours has miserably failed, creating a formidable threat to Pakistan itself. Over the past two decades, Afghanistan and more than 40 countries involved in efforts for common security within Afghanistan cautioned Pakistan about the consequences of its policies. However, these warnings were recklessly ignored in pursuit of a Pyrrhic victory.

The unfounded accusation that Baloch insurgents or the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were supported by Afghanistan lacks corroboration from any other country, including those with extensive diplomatic, military, and intelligence resources deployed in Afghanistan. TTP was not Afghanistan's creation, but was nurtured in Pakistan to shelter, protect and support the Afghan Taliban in FATA.

Furthermore, in response to a question about whether "the neighbours of Afghanistan, India, and Iran" are happy, General Munir answered with a "No." This response is also misleading and hides facts from the Pakistani people.

Has any neighbour of Pakistan been content with Pakistani military policies supporting non-state actors actively involved in regional terror and instability? Not only Afghanistan, India, and Iran but even China expressed dissatisfaction due to ETIM (East Turkistan Islamic Movement) sanctuaries and close cooperation with the Taliban in Pakistan, and in Afghanistan recently. Therefore, the discontent of both Pakistani citizens and neighbouring countries should serve as compelling reasons for the Pakistani army to responsibly reconsider its failed policies.

Finally, Pakistani military leaders must address the crucial question of how to end bloodshed and instability in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the wider region. The answer lies in peace – peace in Pakistan, peace in and with Afghanistan, and peace within the neighbourhood.

Unfortunately, we did not hear such sentiments from him. It is understandable that the military may not be the most adept at bringing peace. However, it should also be evident to the Pakistani military that they lack substantial leverage, options, or resources to enforce their way in Afghanistan or the surrounding region. In the case of Afghanistan, strategies such as expelling hundreds of thousands of refugees, disrupting trade and transit, engaging in military action, or potentially supporting a new round of covert destabilising policies would prove ineffective and fail to bring security and stability to Pakistan.