

The Prime Minister of Pakistan's speech on the Abbottabad operation and death of Osama bin Laden

Transcript

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Complete text of Pakistani Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani address to the Pakistan Parliament in which he targeted the US and western nations over slain al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden and terror groups.

SPEECH OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF PAKISTAN IN THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ON THE ABBOTTABAD INCIDENT 09 MAY, 2011

Honourable Speaker,

Honourable Members of the House,

From the Floor of this August House, I wish to take the nation into confidence on the situation arising from the Abbottabad operation and the death of Osama bin Laden.

However, before I do so, I would like to inform you about my visit to France which I undertook on 3rd May. This visit had been pre-scheduled.

I was invited to visit France last year, but had to postpone my visit twice due to volcanic ash clouds and floods in 2010.

France is currently the Chairman of G-8, an influential global power and enjoys prominent position within the European Union.

Pakistan-France relations are close, friendly and cooperative. During this visit, two important Declarations covering economy and security were signed. The visit also provided me an important opportunity to discuss with President Sarkozy and the French leadership the situation arising from the operation leading to death of Osama bin Laden.

President Sarkozy demonstrated complete solidarity with Pakistan and expressed appreciation for the great sacrifices of our people in the war against terror.

Before leaving for France, I had extensive consultations with President Zardari, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, the Chief of Army Staff, Director General ISI and other important stakeholders on issues relating to Pakistan's national security.

The government's position on the Abbottabad operation and death of Osama bin Laden as

enunciated in the official statements was based on extensive inter-agency and inter-departmental consultation process.

Honourable Speaker and Members of the House,

In today's age of information explosion, it is important to sift facts from fiction.

Very often it is the virtual or the media reality that obscures the actual. Yet, truth cannot for long be submerged in falsehood.

Fascination for high drama sometimes makes us forget the sequence and context of fast moving events that are splashed on television screens.

However, every development has a context. Its correct appreciation requires a dispassionate view of history. It is well-known that those who forget history are condemned to relive it.

Some of the recent public discourse; narratives and counter narratives, in talk shows and public comments have missed some essential points.

Reaffirmation is necessary.

We are a proud nation. Our people value their honour and dignity. Our nation is resilient. Our real strength is our people and our State institutions.

We all are united and fully committed to sparing no sacrifice to uphold our national dignity and honour; to safeguard our supreme national interests by all means and all resources at our command.

No other nation has successfully met so many challenges. No other people have been put to so many tests by history and by circumstances of geography and geo politics.

No other nation has borne the collective burden of the international community.

Our nation has met all these challenges with supreme confidence, which is borne out of our firm belief in the noble injunctions of our glorious religion Islam, our societal values, our culture and traditions.

Ever since our independence, Pakistan stood up for our values which are also universal: freedom, dignity, equality, tolerance, humanity, harmony and brotherhood.

Pakistan's foreign policy has always reflected our national ethos which, undoubtedly, transcends considerations of narrow interests or politics of expediency.

Pakistan is not only a state but an idea and an ideal that our courageous and talented people strive, in their daily lives, to translate into reality.

Our democratic and pluralistic polity as epitomized by this august House, State institutions, free press, open and intense public discourse are, indeed, our great strengths.

Our friends can from this discourse fathom the depth of our sentiments, the aspirations of our people, the authentic spirit that guides and inspires them to seek equity, justice, security, peace, progress and prosperity.

For over thirty years, Pakistan was impacted by the conflict and strife in Afghanistan. In that struggle we, together with the rest of world, decided to uphold the principle of self-determination for the great Afghan nation.

We opened our homes and our hearts to those who fled the conflict in Afghanistan and also supported the great Jihad.

I talk of a bygone era. However, it is perhaps necessary to remind everyone about that era which has been so well documented including in the CNN series on the Cold War showing video footage of high ranking US officials exhorting the Afghans and Mujahideen to wage Jihad, to go back to their homes, to go back to their mosques, in the name of Islam and as a national duty. For us, all of this was real. We have continued to suffer from its effects.

Is it necessary for us to remind the international community of the decade of the nineties which saw the Arab volunteers, who had joined the Jihad mutate into Al-Qaeda? Who was responsible for the birth of Al-Qaeda? Who was responsible for making the myth of Osama bin Laden?

To find answers to today's question, it is necessary to revisit the not so distant past. Collectively, we must acknowledge facts and see our faces in the mirror of history.

Pakistan alone cannot be held to account for flawed policies and blunders of others.

Pakistan is not the birth place of Al-Qaeda. We did not invite Osama bin Laden to Pakistan or even to Afghanistan. It is fair to ask who was Osama bin Laden and what did he personify?

Osama bin Laden was the most wanted terrorist and enemy number one of the civilized world. Elimination of Osama bin Laden, who launched waves after waves of terrorists attacks against innocent Pakistanis, is indeed justice done.

However, we are not so naïve to declare victory; mission accomplished, and turns around.

The myth and legacy of Osama bin Laden remains to be demolished. The anger and frustration of ordinary people over injustice, oppression and tyranny that he sought to harness to fuel the fire of terrorism in the world, needs to be addressed. Otherwise, this rage will find new ways of expression.

Pakistan believes in democracy and pluralism. A society that strives for equality and dignity. An open and transparent society is undoubtedly essential for addressing the rage and anger arising from political or economic injustices.

When we say that in this war against terrorism, Pakistan has lost some 30,000 men, women and children and more than 5,000 armed forces personnel, billions of dollars lost as economic costs; we do not intend to put a price or seek acknowledgement or recognition from any one.

The war against terrorism is our own national priority. Our nation is united in its resolve to eliminate terrorism from our sacred land. Pakistan will not relent in this national cause and is determined not to allow its soil to be used by any one for terrorism.

This national consensus was built by our democracy, this Parliament, and the entire political

leadership of this country. Our patriotic citizens and State institutions are all united in their resolve to prosecute this campaign against terror to its logical end. We will utilize all means and resources and Insha Allah succeed.

Honourable Members of the House,

Now, let me briefly retrace the first decade of new millennium. International forces marched into Afghanistan to dismantle the Taliban regime after 9/11. In fact, Taliban had already left Kabul and taken along Al-Qaeda to their hideouts in Afghanistan. The Tora Bora bombings resulted in the dispersal of Al-Qaeda.

Even at that time we had cautioned the international forces on the consequences of a flawed military campaign could lead to the dispersal of Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda leaders and foot soldiers sought hideouts everywhere, in the mountains, and deep inside cities, including Pakistan.

We did not invite Al-Qaeda to Pakistan. In fact, for the first time, our armed forces were deployed in the Tirah Valley to form a security cordon to interdict Al-Qaeda during the Tora Bora bombings. .

In that operation 248 Al-Qaeda members were captured by our armed forces. Subsequently, Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence prosecuted the anti-terror strategy with a high degree of professionalism and superb determination.

In fact, some 40 of the key Al-Qaeda operatives including Chief Operation Officer Faraj Al Libbi and Khalid Shaikh Mohammad, the master planner of 9/11 were captured by the ISI. Pakistan's armed forces also carried out successful operations in Swat, Malakand, South Waziristan, Mohmand and Bajour Agencies against terrorists and militants.

No other country in the world and no other security agency has done so much to interdict Al-Qaeda than the ISI and our armed forces.

This was done with the full support of the nation and in accordance with the political will articulated by the Parliament of Pakistan.

It is disingenuous for anyone to blame Pakistan or State institutions of Pakistan including the ISI and the armed forces for being in cahoots with the Al-Qaeda. It was Al-Qaeda and its affiliates that carried out hundreds of suicide bombings in nearly every town and city of Pakistan and also targeted political leaders, State institutions, the ISI and the General Headquarters.

The obvious question that has vexed everyone is how could Osama bin Laden hide in plain sight in the scenic surroundings of Abbottabad. Lets not rush to judgment.

Allegations of complicity or incompetence are absurd. We emphatically reject such accusations. Speculative narratives in the public domain are meant to create despondency. We will not allow our detractors to succeed in offloading their own shortcomings and errors of omission and commission in a blame game that stigmatizes Pakistan.

This issue of the hideout needs a rational answer. Recrimination and misplaced rhetoric is self defeating.

Yes, there has been an intelligence failure. It is not only ours but of all the intelligence agencies of the world.

The Al-Qaeda chief along with other Al-Qaeda operators had managed to elude global intelligence agencies for a long time. He was constantly being tracked not only by the ISI but also by other intelligence agencies.

It was the ISI that passed key leads to CIA that enabled the US intelligence to use superior technological assets and focus on the area in which Osama bin Laden was eventually found. All this has been explained in the statements issued by the Foreign Ministry and the ISPR as well as in the detailed briefing by the Foreign Ministry.

Asymmetrical warfare happens to be the tool in vogue against superior conventional forces. Terrorism falls in that category. Osama Bin Laden used terror for whatever cause that he espoused. Hiding in plain sight, as is evident in this case, is perhaps another technique that could be attributed to Osama Bin Laden in the realm of asymmetrical intelligence.

Nonetheless, we are determined to get to the bottom of how, when and why about OBL's presence in Abbottabad. An investigation has been ordered.

Our people are rightly incensed on the issue of violation of sovereignty as typified by the covert US air and ground assault on the Osama hideout in Abbottabad.

This has raised questions about Pakistan's defence capability and the security of our strategic assets.

As the Abbottabad episode illustrates our Military responded to the US Forces covert incursion. The Air Force was ordered to scramble. Ground units arrived at the scene quickly.

Our response demonstrates that our armed forces reacted, as was expected of them.

Abbottabad hosts a routine Military training institution, which does not require any elaborate special defence arrangement. There is no denying the US technological ability to evade our radars. We regret that this unilateral action was undertaken without our concurrence.

Unilateralism runs the inherent risk of serious consequences. Suppose the operation had gone wrong. A US helicopter was abandoned and destroyed on the site. This is a small though important reminder of the risks in such operations.

Let no one draw any wrong conclusions. Any attack against Pakistan's strategic assets whether overt or covert will find a matching response. Pakistan reserves the right to retaliate with full force. No one should underestimate the resolve and capability of our nation and armed forces to defend our sacred homeland.

There are of course legal and moral issues that relate to the question of sovereignty. In a generic sense this is a question that continues to vex the international community as a whole. The Security Council while exhorting UN member states to join their efforts against terrorism has repeatedly emphasized that this be done in accordance with international law, human rights and humanitarian law.

The drones are given out as an instrument to fight terror. Yet, as we have repeatedly said these attacks constitute a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and are counter productive. On

this question which relates to operational matters, we have strong differences with the United States.

The media spin masters have tended to portray a false divide between the state institutions of Pakistan. I would like to most emphatically reject the notion of divide.

The political leadership is supportive of the strengthening of all of Pakistan's institutions. We follow a whole government approach.

On all key issues, all stakeholders are consulted through inter-agency processes. The Statements issued by the Foreign Ministry and the Military on the death of Osama bi Laden were authorized by the Government.

Let me also affirm the Government's full confidence in the high command of the Pakistan Armed Forces and the Inter Services Intelligence. Indeed the ISI, is a national asset and has the full support of the Government. We are proud of its considerable accomplishments in the anti-terror campaign.

Now let me put the present situation in its proper perspective. Our foremost priority is development. This requires security and stability at home and in the region. The pursuit of this objective is the guiding spirit of our engagement with the international community and in particular major powers as well as regional states.

I must say that this endeavour has found resonance and we are well on the road towards giving this vision tangible form. We realize that the world and in particular the Asian region is undergoing a fundamental and fast transformation.

We are delighted that our all weather friend, the Peoples Republic of China has made tremendous strides in economic and technological development that are a source of inspiration and strengthen for the people of Pakistan.

Apprehensions are being voiced about our relations with the United States. Let me dispel any anxiety in this regard. Pakistan attaches high importance to its relations with the US. We have a strategic partnership which we believe serves our mutual interests. It is based on mutual respect and mutual trust.

Pakistan and the US have strategic convergence. The dissonance that finds hype in the media is about operational and tactical matters. It is not unusual to have a different point of view on the methodology to achieve shared objectives.

We have, however, agreed that whenever we find ourselves on "conflictual" paths and disagree, we should make efforts to reach common understanding by deeper and more intense exchange of views.

Our communications at the official and diplomatic levels with the US, during this phase, have been good, productive and straight forward. We have agreed to a calendar of engagements. Most notably Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US have agreed to form a Core Group for promoting and facilitating efforts for reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan.

On 3rd May, Senior Officials of the Three Countries met in Islamabad and held useful and productive talks. Another Trilateral is envisaged in the near future. On the bilateral track we look forward to the visit of Secretary of State Clinton to Islamabad in the near future.

As you know, there has been a sea-change in our relations with Afghanistan. Destiny of Afghanistan and Pakistan is inter-linked. We must assume full ownership and responsibility for realizing our shared vision of stability and prosperity.

With India we are embarked on an important process of engagement that should yield dividends for our two peoples and for peoples of South Asia, as a whole. We will pursue our engagement with India in a positive and constructive manner.

I would like to conclude by underscoring the following:-

One: Pakistan is confident of its bright future.

Two: Our real strength is our people, who are determined to over-come all challenges.

Three: We have an ongoing multi-track process of engagement with all major powers including the United States.

Four: Our engagement with states within our region is being intensified in the interest of shared stability and prosperity.

Five: Counter-Terrorism is a national priority.

Six: Al-Qaeda had declared war on Pakistan. Osama Bin Laden's elimination from the scene attests to the success of the anti-terror campaign.

Seven: Intelligence cooperation is critical for the attainment of the goals of anti-terrorism.

Eight: Blame games serve no purpose.

Nine: An investigation in the matter has been ordered which shall be conducted by Adjutant General of the Pakistan Army Lt. Gen. Javed Iqbal.

Ten: Our security policies are constantly reviewed to enhance defence capabilities.

Eleven: There are no differences among the State institutions.

Twelve: Cooperation in counter-terrorism warrants a partnership approach which fully accommodates Pakistan's interests and respect for the clearly stipulated Red Lines.

Thirteen: Pakistan's relations with all States especially immediate neighbours and major powers are in good shape.

Fourteen: Safeguarding and promotion of our national interest is the sole objective of the Government's policies.

Fifteen: The Parliament is the right forum to discuss all important national issues. The will of the people shall prevail.

A joint session of the Parliament has been called on ... I have directed the concerned services authorities in the armed forces to impart an in-camera briefing to the joint session on the subject.

I look forward to a productive debate in the House.

Thank you.

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