

## **Pakistan says ready for mediation between Afghan govt and Taliban**

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### **Afghan President Ashraf Ghani poses for a group photo during a peace and security cooperation conference in Kabul, Afghanistan.**

**Islamabad:** Pakistan on Thursday said it was ready for mediation between the Afghan government and the Taliban as it extended support to Afghan president Ashraf Ghani's political process in the war-torn country.

Speaking at the second Kabul Process conference, Ghani said that his government was ready to recognise the Taliban as a political group and offered unconditional talks with the militant group to "save the country".

The Afghan Taliban are a political entity and Pakistan supports the dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban, foreign minister Khawaja Asif told journalists here.

"The talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government are actually discussions between two political forces, and Pakistan will support it Pakistan is also ready for one-on-one mediation with the Afghan Taliban," he said.

He said Pakistan wants peace and stability in the neighbouring country, while stressing that there was no military solution to the Afghan conflict.

The foreign minister also asked Washington to strike a balance in its policy towards South Asia if it was interested in having a dialogue between Pakistan and India.

"The US can have an interest in Pak-India discussions, but before that it should create some balance in its South Asia policy," he said.

He also talked about the so-called "institutional interests" in Pakistan and said that practice of portraying interests of institutions as the greater national interest "will also be changed soon".

Asserting that Pakistan will frame its foreign policy keeping in view the national interests, Asif said, "We will not sacrifice our own interests for the protection of the interests of the United States."

"The effects of the 80s and the Musharraf era still exist, Pakistan will not make the same mistakes now to keep American interests above its own interests," he said.

He was referring to the military governments of General Zia-ul Haq and General Pervez Musharraf that allied with the US respectively in 1980s and after 9/11 to support it against erstwhile USSR and terrorism.

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