

Afghan violence has risen: Jaishankar

Minister says the country's territory must not be used by terrorist groups to attack any other country

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Talks between the Afghanistan government and the Taliban have not resulted in any reduction in violence, said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, pointing out that reports from the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) showed a major increase in violence despite the talks and a U.S.-Taliban agreement last year. However, he said India is 'supportive' of the Intra-Afghan negotiations, and called for the United Nations to play a "leading role" in the reconciliation process.

"Violence has only increased, especially after May 1," Mr. Jaishankar told the UN Security Council at a special meeting on Tuesday, as he referred to the May deadline that had originally been agreed to as a date for the U.S. troops pull-out from Afghanistan. "The country has



India's stand: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar taking part in the meet via video conferencing from New Delhi. ■PTI

been witnessing targeted attacks on religious and ethnic minorities, girl students, Afghan security forces, Ulemas [clerics], women occupying positions of responsibility, journalists, civil rights activists and youth," he said, calling for a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire".

According to the UNAMA report that was detailed by U.N. Secretary General's Special Representative Deborah Lyons, civilian casualties

have increased by 29% in the first quarter of 2021, compared to last year, and women casualties increased by 37% and child casualties by 23%. Ms. Lyons said not only has the Taliban captured more territory in the last few weeks but also seems poised to take over key cities once the foreign troops pull out.

American envoy to the U.N. Linda Thomas Greenfield defended the U.S. move to pull out troops as a care-

fully considered decision, but warned the Taliban that taking the "military path" would not bring the group legitimacy.

Without making any direct references to Pakistan or any particular terror group, Mr. Jaishankar called for an end to "terrorist safe havens" and "terrorist supply chains" as well as cross-border terror, and said the international community must ensure that transit trade from Afghanistan to the "high seas" is allowed.

"It is equally important to ensure that the territory of Afghanistan is not used by terrorist groups to threaten or attack any other country."

Afghanistan Foreign Minister Hanif Atmar, who attended the UNSC meeting, was more candid accusing the Taliban of keeping its links with the al-Qaeda and Pakistan-based terror groups including the Lashkar-e-Toi-

ba and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.

He said as the withdrawal of the U.S.-NATO troops is completed, the international community would see that the Taliban has not kept any of its promises, including the promise to cut ties with international terrorism, to reduce violence and work towards a ceasefire and to reach a political settlement with the government of Afghanistan.

At another web meet, Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani said the Taliban was putting its "relationship with its network and sponsors" ahead of the Afghan people, and called upon the militant group to "make a choice" between the LeT, the Jaish-e-Mohammad, the al-Qaeda and other groups or make a "common bond of patriotism" with the people.

(With inputs from Sriram Lakshman in Washington)