

**'India should not fall for U.S. designs'**

Afghan former President Hamid Karzai. The Hindu Sandeep Saxena

Afghanistan's Former President Hamid Karzai said India should not be pulled into the U.S.'s approach to Afghanistan but should maintain an independent approach based on the shared interests of India and Afghanistan.

Mr. Karzai said he had expressed his own reservations to India about the new alliance between India and the U.S. in the region. "India is a friend and an ally and a traditional civilisational friend of our country but I want India to continue its traditional wise man's approach to the region. It is too deep a civilisation to be taken away by an American design... too big a nation to be in any temporary arrangement with this or that country," he said during a meeting with a small group of journalists in London on Wednesday. India has ruled out deploying troops but has said that it will expand development and medical assistance in the country to which it has extended around \$3 billion in aid to date.

Mr. Karzai reiterated his concerns about the new U.S. policy towards Afghanistan, warning that it would not bring peace but just further suffering to the Afghan people. "Every day Afghans told the U.S. of the sanctuaries outside our borders. The U.S. knew they were there but couldn't do much because Pakistan was an ally," he said.

**U.S.'s strategic game**

It was for this reason he remained sceptical, he said of the new U.S. approach which he said was not "aimed at ending extremism" but at playing a "bigger strategic game in the region in which Pakistan does not seem to fit in U.S. designs or Pakistan has taken a different path to what they were doing in the past... Pakistan has an economic integration plan, more closely aligned with China. It is more a power game than a fight against extremism that has re-aligned U.S. politics in the region." While praising India for being a "tremendous friend" of Afghanistan, he was critical of the influential role that U.S. approach had on India's own policy. He cited Afghanistan's request to the Manmohan Singh administration for help in its own military build-up. India's decision not to respond positively at that stage, he believes, was influenced by the U.S. being against it.

He said the best strategy towards the Taliban was to reach peace with them. "It is too late to talk of defeat... defeat means causing war in Afghanistan on a higher, larger scale... military solutions are no more an option for us. The Taliban are Afghans and we must sit down with them and have peace with them."

**END**

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