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Report- In-House Meeting

With

Dr. Jean-Luc Racine

Senior Fellow, Centre for South Asian Studies
(School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences - EHESS- Paris)

February 4, 2016



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Pictures of the Event





Report of the Meeting

The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) held an In-House Meeting on February 4, 2016, with Dr. Jean-Luc Racine, Senior Fellow at the Centre for South Asian Studies (School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences - EHESS- Paris), and Senior Fellow at Asia Centre, a Paris based think tank. Dr. Racine was accompanied by Ms. Nathalie Dupont, Political Counselor, and Ms. Nosheen Sajid, Deputy Press Attaché at the French Embassy in Islamabad. The focus of Dr. Racine's talk was on Pakistan's relations with India and Afghanistan.

Invitees at the meeting included: Lt General (Retd.) Talat Masood, Defense Analyst; Dr Zafar Iqbal Cheema, President & Executive Director Strategic Vision Institute (SVI); Puruesh Chaudhry, Founder and President of Aghai; Ambassador (Retd) Sarwar Naqvi, Executive Director, Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS); Dr Akab Malik, Assistant Professor, Department of Strategic Studies (SS), NDU; Dr Muhammad Khan, Head of Department of International Relations, NDU; Dr Aminah Hoti, Executive Director, Makaz-e-Ilm Centre for Dialogue and Action; Ms Aymen Ijaz, Assistant Research Officer, Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI); Dr Mansur Umar Khan, Assistant Professor, Department of Peace & Conflict Studies (PCS), NDU.

Welcoming Dr. Racine, Director General, ISSI, Ambassador Masood Khan said that he is recognised both in South Asia and Europe, for his expertise on issues related to India and Pakistan, and has contributed substantially as he has many books on Pakistan to his credit. Speaking about the good ties between France and Pakistan, Ambassador Masood Khan expressed his condolences with the people of France over the deadly terrorist attacks that took place in November 2015.

Dr. Racine began by talking briefly about the attack that took place in Paris in November 2015. He said that this was not the first attack that the French people had to face, and made a brief reference to the attack that took place on Charlie Hebdo in January 2015, which he said had targeted a specific audience. He was of the view that the November attack was against the common public at large, and which was a shock not only for the people of France, but for Europe as a whole. However, the attack did raise a very pertinent question of selective empathy. Dozens of people are killed on a daily basis throughout the world and do not receive the coverage or news, whereas an attack in Europe, or for that matter Paris, receives global coverage and condemnation. He said it was unfortunate that for the media, all deaths do not carry the same value or price. He said the most striking feature of these attacks has been the resilience of the French people. Notions in the international press such as "Paris is living in fear", or the reports by the American TV Channel, Fox News, that there are "No go" areas in France were not only misleading, but also certainly not grounded in reality. He said there are areas within France, and more so in Paris, which have social issues, but declaring them as "No go" areas is clearly an exaggeration. Hence, the media has a responsible role to play which should be based on reality and not propaganda. Dr. Racine said that as a result of the attack while there was a reduction in the number of tourists and hotel bookings, which are secondary, the fact that the French government decided to keep the schedule

and host the Climate Change conference in the same month clearly discards the notions that “France lives in fear”.

Dr. Racine then went on to talk about two key issues: Pakistan’s relations with India, and Afghanistan. He said it was important to talk about issues of common interest at a time when a number of fluxes are defining the convoluted Pakistan-India-Afghanistan relationships, as well as the relationship between Kabul-Islamabad-New Delhi and to a certain extent, Beijing, not because of the CPEC, but because of China’s role in the Quadrilateral coordination group which is trying to find ways to push the Afghan Taliban to dialogue with the Afghan government.

After giving a brief overview of the main issues that have been taking place and defining Pakistan’s relationship with Afghanistan and India, he highlighted that the common theme in these relationships was the ‘up and down paradigm’. To highlight his point, he referred to events that had taken place between Pakistan and India since December 2, 2015 to January 2, 2016. He reiterated that the common element in their bilateral relationship since the Mumbai attacks was that of ‘high and lows’. He talked about the interaction between Pakistan’s High Commissioner in New Delhi’s meeting with Kashmiri separatist leaders as a ‘low’, and referred to the meeting that took place between the two national security advisors in Bangkok in December 2015, where both decided to resume the composite dialogue as a ‘high’. He said the pattern repeated itself, but this time in the positive direction, when Prime Minister Modi made an unexpected visit to meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif as a ‘high or up’, and another ‘low or down’ in the form of the Pathankot incident. However, even after the attack, developments have been steady and have not reverted back to the blame game.

Hence, Dr. Racine said, Pakistan-India ties have been encapsulated in a matter of a few weeks. He raised an important question: whether 2016 would be built upon the ambiguous legacy of 2015? And, if so, could we link the history of ‘ups and downs’ scenario between Islamabad and Delhi with Islamabad and Kabul. He said there was an unfortunate symmetry, and gave the example of the ‘on and off’ blame game between India and Pakistan over the Line of Control and over the issue of cross border militancy, as well as the blame game between Kabul and Islamabad over the Durand Line and hosting of militant groups, be it the TTP on Afghan soil or Afghan Taliban safe havens in Pakistan.

Speaking about Pakistan-Afghan relations, Dr. Racine said that during his recent visit to Kabul, the two main issues being discussed in Kabul were the recent attempts made at initiating dialogue with the Afghan Taliban, particularly after the first attempt through the Murree Dialogue, which Dr. Racine described as a ‘high or an up’. This was immediately followed by a ‘low or a down’ when the talks collapsed shortly afterwards following the discourse over Mullah Omar’s demise. He said that what will happen between Kabul and the Taliban is deeply linked to Pakistan’s role in facilitating or not facilitating the process.

According to Dr. Racine, several pressing questions needed to be addressed in case the Afghan government decides to initiate a dialogue including: Who will the Afghan

government talk to? Will it be the Quetta Shurah or Mullah Mansoor's faction which includes Sirajuddin Haqqani, and is considered to be close to Pakistan? Do you talk to representatives of the Taliban office in Doha Qatar? Do you ignore those who are opposed to talks such as Mullah Rasool, or those who support the Islamic State?

Hence, the critical question is who are the real representatives of the Afghan Taliban? Unless and until this is not established, talks will remain elusive. Also, once the real representatives of the Taliban are identified, what will be the agenda of talks and how will the process be sustained? Will redlines be discussed? The Afghan government, he said, has already set pre-conditions for the talks such as the laying down of arms by the Taliban, putting an end to their violence, and accepting the Afghan constitution. However, considering the success of the Taliban's offensive and their rigid stance regarding the constitution, one wonders whether the Taliban will lay down their arms and accept the current constitution without any changes. Similarly, with such a rigid stance from the Taliban, it is highly unlikely that Kabul will agree to hold talks without these preconditions being met.

Dr. Racine also made a brief reference to the recently held Pugwash meeting between representatives of the Taliban and people close to the Afghan government in Doha, Qatar in January 2016. He said that the government in Kabul was not pleased with the meeting as the Pugwash initiative is not a part of the official peace process, and it feels that the meeting was providing the Taliban with an undue and parallel platform.

Briefly speaking about Pakistan-Afghan relations, Dr. Racine said that despite a year of 'ups and downs', relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have witnessed a marked improvement. He said that this was partly due to President Ashraf Ghani's efforts to reach out to Pakistan despite immense domestic pressure on him. He concluded by saying that the most important question was how to manage different relationships between Pakistan and India, and Afghanistan and Pakistan. He queried whether Pakistan should de-link its ties with India from its ties with Afghanistan? And, whether is it even possible to do so?

Other participants at the meeting also made some brief remarks.

Lt. General (Retd.) Talat Masood was of the view that in the present circumstances it was difficult to delink Afghanistan from Pakistan's ties with India, because Afghanistan feels very insecure about Pakistan and believes it can get a wedge from India. So because of that, it feels it should have a strong relationship with India which is unfortunate for Pakistan. He said Pakistan has made some very strong moves under General Raheel Sharif to improve ties with Afghanistan. However, the Afghan requirement is that Pakistan should clear the sanctuaries, and once they are cleared, Pakistan should not allow the Afghan Taliban or the Haqqani network to operate from its soil. Only then will it be possible for the Afghans to have confidence in Pakistan. However, he raised a question that if Pakistan does what the Afghan government is asking, how will it then be able to convince the Taliban to opt for talks with Kabul? Subsequently, Pakistan cannot afford to fight on two fronts at one time, it is already at war with the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and if it takes on the Afghan Taliban, this will further increase problems for Pakistan as they may

give sanctuary to the TTP. Hence, this is a great dilemma for Pakistan. Speaking about Pak-Indo ties, Lt. General (Retd.) Talat Masood said that if Pakistan sincerely wants to establish ties with India, it will have to completely abandon its support for militant organizations. However, he said, this will not be easy or possible for Pakistan to do so for obvious reasons unless India also makes a very solid move towards a serious political dialogue.

Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema said that there was unease in Pakistan about the blind provision of Uranium to India, the latest of which is the agreement by France to provide nuclear reactors and technology to India, despite the fact that India had violated its obligations with Canada and the US, as well as the Nuclear Proliferation Regime when it carried out its first nuclear test in 1974. He was of the view that India's actions appeared to have been forgotten by the West, and although Pakistan has no qualms about the West providing economic or military assistance, but assistance in the field of nuclear technology is a clear violation in the spirit of the Nuclear Proliferation Regime. Hence, why this self-contradictory behavior by the international community?

Dr. Muhammad Khan was of the view that misperceptions existed in the international community about Pakistan's relationship with India and Afghanistan. Speaking about Pak- Afghan ties, he said that Pakistan had a clear policy towards Afghanistan which was governed by non-interference and supporting the peace process for peace and stability in Afghanistan. He also said that he was unsure about the number of Afghan Taliban safe havens/ Taliban shurah's in Pakistan, which he felt were over-exaggerated.

The Director General, ISSI, Ambassador Masood Khan while concluding the meeting thanked Dr. Racine for his insightful and thoughtful suggestions.