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Report- In-House Meeting
with

Mr. Didier Chaudet

“Editing Director of CAPE (Center for the Analysis of Foreign Affairs)”

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Edited by: Najam Rafique

Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organised an In-House Meeting with Mr. Didier Chaudet, editing Director of CAPE (Center for the Analysis of Foreign Affairs)". In an interactive meeting, the guest and the research team at ISSI discussed the situation in Afghanistan and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Mr. Chaudet posed certain broad questions to the research faculty which set the tone of the discussion. He began with a question on how is Pakistan doing in the recent past years, especially in terms of evolving security situation?

Mr. Najam Rafique, Director Research said that in fighting terrorism, Pakistan has come up with a domestic policy framework in the form of a twenty-point National Action Plan (NAP) which has been complimented by kinetic military efforts in the shape of military operations *Zarb-e-Azb* and *Radd-ul-Fasad*. The NAP, it was explained, broadly addresses extremism in all forms and manifestation under a reformist agenda of mainstreaming madrassa system, building counter narrative on extremism in the society, reforms in the criminal justice system and many more. Moreover, reforms in Baluchistan and FATA also form part of NAP as these areas are worst affected by terrorism.

Mr. Assadullah Khan, Research Fellow believed that Pakistan has been partially successful in its fight against extremism. However, the success of military operations have built a foundation for government and civil institutions for implementing the soft components of the National Action Plan that cater to combating extremism in the society. With respect to NAP, Pakistan faces the problem of implementation and needs a comprehensive nationwide programme for de-radicalisation. Pakistan military has wiped out all terrorist sanctuaries on its soil and has also targeted some on the Afghan side, but which still remain active. He said that there is a need for an effort from other regional stakeholders to address extremism on their soil. Now, Pakistan's fight against extremism is transitioning from kinetic to non-kinetic efforts in combatting extremism, which requires the implementation of NAP in letter and spirit.

Moving on to the regional situation, Mr. Chaudet said that we now see Russia, China and Iran starting to have a similar vision for Afghanistan. Do you think that this could work with United States of America (USA), especially with their opposition to Russia?

Ms. Amina Khan, Research Fellow said that despite American opposition to Russia, they still haven't back out of the Afghan peace process, and the presence of Islamic State (IS) in Afghanistan brings new opening to US-Russia cooperation. Therefore, America will be more open to Russian efforts to counter IS. However, nothing substantial has come up from officials. Mr. Najam highlighted that the claim of Russians providing assistance to the peace process in Afghanistan is not new, and it will all depend on what interests they safeguard and pursue. With growing IS factor in Afghanistan where it is opposing the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, it would be wise on the part of Russia and US to join their forces for a systematic combat operation and a comprehensive peace process.

Moving on to recent bombing in Afghanistan, Mr. Chaudet asked that how is the use of 'mother of all bombs' in Afghanistan is being perceived in Pakistan? What do you think is the value of such expensive operation?

Mr. Najam responding to the previous question on Afghan peace process added that Afghanistan has not only failed to lead the peace talk, but arguably, they are not even capable of carrying out the peace process. For this process, the regional countries should come together, but without the consent of the US any such process cannot succeed. The mother of all bombs did not have a huge impact on Pakistan, but arguably was targeted on sending a message to Russia and its military operations, especially in context of Syria that the US was now ready to use 'spectacular force' against all opposition, and that America will not hesitate using its latest technology in conflict zones, be it in Afghanistan or Syria.

Moving on the recent election of Trump administration in America, Mr. Chaudet asked what do Pakistan expect from President Trump policy on South Asia?

Mr. Najam said that Pakistan expects an even handed approach from the US and continuation of Obama administration's policy of Strategic Dialogue with Pakistan. But so far, there has been no clear definition of Trump administration's policy towards Pakistan and South Asia. However, we see a clear leaning towards their new strategic partner in the region, India. Pakistan expects a balanced approach and policy where Pakistan's reservations, especially with respect to India should be taken seriously. Mr. Trump has been making statements to the effect that he will work to bring India and

Pakistan together to resume their stalled bilateral dialogue and resolve all outstanding issues. Whether he is able to do this is something to be tested with time.

Dr. Ahmad Rashid Malik responding to the security situation in Pakistan endorsed the views expressed and said that there has been a 90 percent reduction in terrorist incidents within the country. He highlighted that despite these efforts, Pakistan is challenged by its adverse relations with neighboring country on the eastern border, and who has been caught redhanded sponsoring terrorist activities in Pakistan. Therefore, for an enduring peace, a regional approach to terrorism must prevail with cooperation from all stakeholders.

Moving on to Indo-Pakistan relations, Mr. Chaudet asked how things could get better with India, especially with the rigid stance of right wing parties in Pakistan and the situation in Kashmir?

Highlighting the historical context of IndiPakistan relations, Mr. Najam said that India has never recognized the existence of Pakistan. India played a big role in the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971 and is also working now for creating instability in Pakistan. India-Pakistan relations are not going to get better anytime soon, but India should understand that it has to work and learn to live with its neighbours. To begin with, the resumption of the composite dialogue process should be a starting point for both countries.

Mr. Chaudet said that some may say that Baloch separatists are being backed by Afghan and Indian forces. How do you see progress in Balochistan and can these separatists be contained and is Pakistan going in the right direction?

Mr. Khetran and Najam asserted that Pakistan is certainly going in the right direction in Balochistan. There are certainly some seeds of dissent being planted by outsiders, but overall, we see the space shrinking for such voices of dissent. With China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other reform packages for the province, we see things settling down in Balochistan. However, insurgency is still a threat which Pakistan is systematically tackling through different means, and there is a need to counter the

covert moves India is playing in creating and supporting the disgruntled elements in Balochistan.

Mr. Chaudet said that some argue that CPEC is going to be a game changer, however some in Pakistani media have serious reservations on this mega project and are calling it the new East India Company. How will you respond to that?

Mr. Najam said that there will always be distracters who create ambiguity among society on key issues like CPEC. Such propaganda need not to be taken seriously, as CPEC will surely provide a win-win situation for Pakistan and other regional countries, and there is a need for all stakeholders to work together to make it a success. A major hurdle for us and CPEC has been India, as they are neither interested in joining CPEC, nor the other corridors under the One Belt One Road initiative such as the Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM) corridor. Dr. Ahmad Rashid Malik said that there are misunderstandings and misperceptions about the CPEC in general masses which need to be clarified and media has an important role to play. He also rejected the misperception of China having colonial ambitions, and stressed China's policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries.

Mr. Chaudet sharing his opinion on Iran-Pakistan bilateral relation said that he found many misunderstanding especially in Iran regarding Pakistan. Now after former Chief of Army Staff General Rahil Sharif taking the charge of Saudi-led military alliance, how do you see the relations with Iran in the coming times?

Mr. Najam said that in the light of Iranian relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran has every right to express their reservations on the newly formed Saudi-led military alliance. Pakistan desires to play a constructive role, rather than taking sides between two brotherly countries. What direction the Saudi-led alliance takes has to be seen? However, Pakistan has invited Iran to join the alliance, but Iran at present does not see any need for such an alliance, rather views it in the larger geo-political context of America's Middle East policy. The visit of Iranian President Rouhani to Pakistan was a positive development, whereby Pakistan and Iran have now agreed on taking their bilateral relations to a new level with a comprehensive all round engagement.

Moving on to the upcoming French elections, Ms. Shamsa asked how Macron views Brexit and what role the youth is going to play? Mr. Chaudet speaking generally on the youth in France said that there is one generation of them that is lost to the paradoxes of globalization. There is one type that aspires to globalization, seeks international roles, and the other which views international developments as a conspiracy and holds a very simplistic view where it is easy to distinguish between friends and foes. Ms. Le Pen aspires more to these conspiracy driven youth at home that holds Muslims as enemies. On the issue of Brexit, generally French like to complain but not to destroy things. French are more reformist and 70% of French do not want to opt out of Europe, but want to change a few things. Macron is far from perfect, but there are some good brains around him which would want to consolidate the centrist parties by entering into a political coalition, especially when left wing parties are completely broken and right wing parties are also suffering from problems. To be politically relevant, all political parties need to reinvent themselves.

Mr. Faisal asked about the role of Muslims in France? And how France seeks relation with China? Mr. Chaudet responding to the role of Muslims said that French constitution discourages segmentation of people on the lines of ethnicity and religion. Rather, the principle of citizenship is enshrined in the constitution where Muslims need to be viewed like any other citizen of France and their role as a responsible citizen. The Islamic culture in France is also much diversified and hold different vision on Islamic issues. The issue of veil among Muslim women is also twisted in the media where a local issue having more to do with the person was projected as a societal issue relating to religious freedom. France believes in fundamental rights and cannot discriminate.