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Report – In-House Meeting
“German Media Delegation”

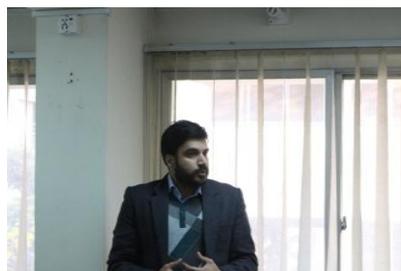
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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a five-member media delegation from the Federal Republic of Germany, on December 6, 2017. The delegation included Sven Hansen, Tax/Die Tageszeitung, Philip Breu, Freelance, Florian Neuhof, Freelance, Philipp Katzer, Freelance and Simon Schneller of Bayerischer Rundfunk.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman Board of Governors, welcomed the delegation. He acknowledged the German's popularity with the people of Pakistan mainly due to its resilient economic success and impressive development after World War II, whereby it is now the fourth largest economy of the world. Ambassador Mahmood said that though the relations between the two countries have been cordial since 1961, yet there has been limited people to people contact and media interaction.

The trade between Germany and Pakistan has also seen a persistent growth, particularly after the GSP+ status to whose requirements Pakistan has complied religiously. Pakistan has instituted a mechanism to conform to the 27 Conventions under the GSP+. Pakistan's cooperation in countering terrorism has been the most outstanding. It has faced a loss of more than 80,000 lives and borne immense financial loss.

Dr. Ahmad Rashid Malik, Director China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) of the ISSI, while giving a brief on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), called it a buzz word for the entire world, which however, holds differing perspectives on the project. He emphasized that it is a national project and does not hold any precedence in the 70 years history of Pakistan. The purpose is mainly to link Pakistan with the land-locked Western China. The Chinese President Mr. Xi Ji Ping, during his visit to Pakistan in 2015, made an initial offer of \$46 billion which has further increased to \$63 billion with the addition of more projects mainly in the sectors of energy, infrastructure, education and social development. CPEC is purely an economic project and has no political or military strings attached to it.

On the other hand, Pakistan also needed to develop its Gwadar Port as a third port to off load its burden on the other two ports. It is a natural deep sea harbor and offers for its development were made by various countries including the US. In 2007, the Singapore Management Authority was given its management rights which were withdrawn due to mismanagement and were handed over to China's Overseas Port Holding Company in 2013.

China has developed the port within a short period of five years and has impacted Pakistan's economy positively. For example, in the last 31 months, the GDP of Pakistan has increased from \$270 billion to over \$300 billion. Similarly, foreign investment has also increased. The deficiency in the energy sector has also been overcome to a large extent. This growth is largely attributed to some of the energy projects that have been completed since the signing of CPEC.

Ms. Amina Khan, Senior Research Fellow at ISSI while giving a brief on Afghanistan lamented that the instability in Afghanistan has increased multi-fold despite the responsibilities taken over by the Afghan National Security Forces. She insisted that peace in Afghanistan is possible only with the participation of Taliban on which Ashraf Ghani's government is divided. So far, a number of peace processes have been initiated, such as the Heart of Asia Conference, the Kabul Peace Process and others, yet results could not be achieved due to the non-participation of the Taliban in the dialogue process, and who still hold immense influence in the country.

Pakistan also hosted the Murree Peace Process in summer 2016, which was participated by the Taliban. While the process was a success initially, however, regrettably it was scuttled by the announcement of the death of Mullah Mansoor who had been in favour of the reconciliation process.

President Trump has shown no interest in any of the dialogue processes and believes more in the resolution of the issue through military means. This approach is less likely to bear fruit.

Amina's point of view was also endorsed by the Chairman ISSI. He said that both the military resolution and the greater role given by the US to India in Afghanistan is further complicating the situation. It is not only worrisome for Pakistan, but also for the region. India is considered a destabilizing factor particularly by Pakistan with which it holds age old differences.

Amina Khan also suggested that the difference between the ideology of Daesh and Taliban must be understood in its correct perspective. The Taliban are more centralized in Afghanistan and have shown moderation in their approach. They have expressed more political and social compatibility by allowing flexibility for example, in the role of women, in education and public affairs. They have even spoken of making friends with the US.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, while once again giving support to Amina's stance said that the Taliban do not adhere to Daesh's ideology and rather want to come into power through a political process. He said that they are basically against foreign occupation.

In his response to a question that whether Pakistan fears the spill over effects of the US military operations in Afghanistan, Ambassador Mahmood referred to the statements given by the US officials as threatening.

Amina also briefed the delegation on the recent border regulations being introduced by Pakistan and the support given to the 2.7 million refugees now living in Pakistan for their repatriation and safe exit to Afghanistan. These security measures are mainly meant to avoid any further infiltration of the terrorists into Pakistan who have taken refuge in Afghanistan. Pakistan has been successful in flushing them out through military operations like *Zarb-e-Azb* and *Rud-ul-Fassad*.

Sven Hansen also admitted to the complexity of the Afghan issue which receives no unified opinion in Europe, particularly in Germany. He said that Europe certainly wants to get out of it since the mess is too deep. The Afghan refugees are also adding to the already difficult refugee and immigration problem in Europe. European Union, particularly Germany itself is experiencing political and economic instability. Brexit, the rise of nationalism and far-right are not familiar phenomenon with the history of Europe. Poland and Hungary are also drifting away from the core values of Europe. Unfortunately, the anti-European movement has taken grip of the continent which the mainstream political parties are finding difficult to handle. In fact, the political parties are in a flux. However, he was optimistic that since EU is a strong democratic structure, it would emerge victorious out of these turbulent times.

In a response to a query on increasing fundamentalism in the Pakistani society in the context of the *dharna* at Faizabad and Pakistan's war on terror, Mr. Najam Rafique, Director Americas/Research informed the delegation that the recent *dharna* at Faizabad was in the background of a proposed change in the oath undertaken by the parliamentarians and other executive members of the government regarding the finality of the prophet. It was more political in character and did not, in any way, reflect an increase in religiosity or fundamentalism in the society as such.

Regarding terrorism, he said that Pakistan has been successful in countering terrorism by adopting a two-pronged strategy: one based on a kinetic approach, and the second based on implementation of the National Action Plan. Pakistan has achieved tremendous successes in its kinetic strategy based on various military operations in overcoming terrorism in Pakistan, and which have been successful in destroying safe havens and capturing of terrorists. He informed the delegation that the Government of Pakistan has introduced a 20-point National Action Plan (NAP) which included, among others, *Madrassahs* reforms, cutting off the funding sources of various isolated terrorist groups, as well as reforms in Baluchistan and FATA. But unlike the kinetic strategy, this process will be long drawn and the government would need time for its success.

Mr. Ahmed Saffee, Research Fellow at ISSI suggested that media, particularly western media, needs to avoid prejudiced reports while giving ground realities about Pakistan. Pakistan's society has appreciably exhibited tolerance. The number of foreign visitors has increased and both violent extremism and terrorism has significantly shown a downward trajectory in the recent past.