



**INSTITUTE OF
STRATEGIC STUDIES**

web: www.issi.org.pk
phone: +92-920-4423, 24
fax: +92-920-4658

Report – In-House Meeting
“US National Security Strategy 2017”
December 28, 2017



Written by: Mahrukh Khan

Edited by: Najam Rafique

Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), hosted an In-House Meeting on December 28, 2017 with a distinguished panel of analyst to discuss the new National Security Strategy (NSS) announced by the US President Donald Trump. The guest speaker at the meeting was Brig. (R) Feroz Hassan Khan, Lecturer at the Naval Post Graduate College, Monterey, US.

The participants of the discussion included Shuja Alam Additional Secretary MOFA, Ambassador Riaz Khokar, Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Dr. Rifaat Hussain, NUST, Air Cdr. Khalid Banuri, Gen. (Retd.) Asad Durrani, Maj. Gen Khalid Amir Jaffery, Ambassador Inam-ul- Haq and Ambassador Asif Ezdi.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI welcomed the guests and shed light on the main features of the NSS document and highlighted its four important pillars:

- i. Protection of American people and homeland,
- ii. Promote American prosperity,
- iii. Peace through strength, and
- iv. Promoting American influence.

Ambassador Mahmood said that a lot of stress has been paid to China and Russia, while Iran and North Korea are termed as rogue states. He said that the document stresses on bigger military build-up, and deeper partnership with India. Pakistan on the other hand faces the same music of harsh criticism.

Brig. (R) Feroz Hassan Khan gave a brief overview of the National Security document and the changes that have happened in the US since 2016. He touched upon the sources of influence from where the Trump policy originates and the element of Islamophobia. The other two impacts that he spoke about were the intense lobbying of India, and conversely, the lack of such efforts by Pakistan. While highlighting some key features of the document, Brig. Feroz said that the document clearly brings out the element of competition back to the table, which builds up the core of the American security strategy. America today has begun to realise that the US competitors have taken advantage of its follies in the past 25 years. It is seeing a lot of tensions around the globe, whether its Europe, Middle East or the Far East. The document also echoes America's relative decline and the rise of China.

The Trump administration sees the resurgence of China in the Asia Pacific region, and have realised that the policy of Asia Pacific initiated by the Obama administration is not delivering. Hence, the current administration has envisioned a different route to achieve that by moving away from the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), while taking a more militaristic approach. This schemata is also visible in the pillars that are discussed in the NSS document.

While giving the analysis of the third pillar of the NSS, Brig. Feroz said that given the nature of the modernisation of China over the past three decades and the modernisation of Russia, the US felt compelled to tap on other spheres of security modernization such as cyber space. The aspect of cyber space security became more prominent during the elections and even post elections. The US realized how this one aspect of security can be used in hybrid warfare by the Russians, Chinese, or even by North Koreans.

Brig. Feroz also touched upon the apparent US shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific. He drew attention to the fact that the Indo-Pacific term which is defined the region from the western coast of India to the Pacific coast of Japan, was the brain child of Raja Mohan. The very idea has been bought by the Trump administration, as it wants to bring India into the larger security paradigm which is not just limited to South Asia, and thus making India the next security provider.

The four pillars in the NSS document, Brig. Feroz said, are interlinked with each other, they provide a corresponding view of the other. Protecting homeland talks about the issue of border management, immigration policies, second is the idea that the US wants to destroy the source of threat, and thirdly, to rebuild the element of influence which the US believes is varying in the international arena.

He also brought to light the repeated focus of the Trump administration on the complacency of the previous administrations, indicating that for the past two decades the US has been complacent. This is the era of competition which does not mean that the US is going for war, but is actually preparing for it while keeping focus on the character of the competition. The document also proposes the idea of 'full spectrum of conflict' across multiple domains at once. Another important factor highlighted is to 'maintain military's overmatch' - and the US military will always fight with an overmatch which will make it kinetic and aggressive. It also talks about increasing its ability and size, as well as innovation; promising tremendous amount of defense

expenditures both in public and private military industry complex. The military build-up will also improve India's market, and not just military market but also the economic market. Another component of the NSS is to retain the military's overmatch, and it lays out that the US will not be involved in a fair fight and will always fight with an overmatch. The US is talking about modernizing, acquisition, and capacity increasing and developing a joint force, which means developing a public sector force and a private sector force also known as Claus domain capacity in the US. He also highlighted that the US continue to pursue and increase its ability and capacity to fight in irregular warfare, like terrorism and proxies. The NSS document in particular tasks the Department of Defense to develop concepts and capabilities.

Touching upon the subject of nuclear issues, Brig. Feroz stressed on the mention of non-nuclear strategic attack in the NSS document. This aspect, he said, points towards the strategic importance of cyber space and space - both technological elements - an attack on which the nuclear deterrence cannot prevent. The US is recognizing that their command and control system is old and vulnerable to Russian and Chinese attacks. Space and cyber space are the new domains that are, at the moment, most important element.

Talking about the regional approach in the NSS, Brig. Feroz said that the document clearly asks India to take over the regions leadership role - a point which hits at the roots of Pakistan's independence and sovereignty. The new administration feels that it is very easy to deal with one capital in New Delhi and expects all the other capitals in the region to comply. While the only capital to resist will be Islamabad, or to some extent, Colombo. Also, Chinese influence is another worrisome issue. In addition, Washington also fears asymmetric threats emanating from Pakistan and fear of a conventional war escalating into a nuclear war and the blame will automatically be generated towards Pakistan.

Concluding his presentation, Brig Feroz stressed that these are very difficult times and Pakistan and US relations are at a downward spiral. The nature of the NSS is an indication of the nature of the regime. It's pivotal to not let the relationship rupture, as it will not be good for either country. Pakistan should do everything to prevent that from happening and have to be very careful with the US.

Questions and observations were made during the discussion.

Ambassador Riaz Khokar inquired about a possible military operation by the US in Pakistan to which Brig Feroz stated that the strategy that was made public by the Trump Administration in August 2017 will clearly not going to make any headways. The sense that prevails in Pakistan regarding the US looking for a scapegoat is a correct one. He further added that if the US finds an asset such as Al Zawahiri or any of the Haqqanis, they will go for them. The US will pursue a cross border raid regardless of where the asset is located. Across the board, the thinking about Pakistan and its role in regional security is almost unanimous. The US is not asking Pakistan to do more, rather they are asking it to stop doing what they are doing - to stop it and not do more.

Replying to Ambassador Qazi's remarked about Pakistan's policy being India centric and the consequences of Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan, Brig. Feroz said that the US is aware that most of the operational part of the terrorists are in Afghanistan, but their master minds and planners are in Pakistan and the facilitators are here as well. At the same time, it is embarrassing that the US is not acknowledging Pakistan's sacrifices. Nonetheless, the engagement that has happened in the last couple of months between Washington and Islamabad has been, to some extent, successful. That is one reason the US has not bracketed Pakistan as a serious concern compared to North Korea or Iran. Pakistan is still considered an ally. Regarding the difference of policy, Brig Feroz said that the US recognizes Pakistan strategy as a hedging strategy with regards to Afghanistan as compared to India.

When the US saw the Pakistani reaction to its Afghan strategy, there was an immediate realization in Washington that they had went overboard on India's case in Afghanistan. Moreover, India, in response, backed off a little as a result the US comprehended that they have alienated Pakistan as they understood that India is not going to pick up their fight in Afghanistan.

Replying to questions posed by Gen. (Retd.) Asad Durrani, Brig. Feroz stated that Pakistan and US relations are fractured on four issues:

- i. Pakistan's policy towards India,
- ii. Pakistan's counterterrorism policy and Afghanistan policy,
- iii. Pakistan's deep relations with China and

iv. The trajectory of Pakistan's nuclear program.

These are the core areas of Pakistan's national security, if there is friction in any of these areas, it will eliminate the possibility of strategic congruity between Pakistan and the US. Conversely, if the same is applied to the US policy towards India, one will see complete congruity in their thinking. The US security policy from the start has been in the form long term investments which also includes Pakistan.

It is up to Islamabad to decide how they want to take this relationship forward. Pakistan's strategy should be simple; not to be made the scapegoat of the US failures. One thing the US fails to answer is that the fracture remains in the Afghanistan establishment and political stability in Afghanistan cannot be sustained without the US. Secondly, the Afghan forces are incapable to lead as their capacity and leadership is limited.

Ambassador Asif Ezdi highlighted the concept of the Indo-Pacific security where Pakistan is lagging behind only because of its policy limitations which have restricted it to Afghanistan and South Asia. Indo-Pacific is the term which has made India able to look beyond the South Asian region compared to earlier used term Asia-Pacific. Pakistan should take interest in Asia-Pacific affairs, and the Indian Ocean affairs. He was of the view that the NSS document, without a doubt, provides India with a leadership role in the Indian ocean, a concern to which Pakistan has failed to respond. For Pakistan to remain silent on India's larger role in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific amounts to a tacit approval by our government. He also added that the long-term stay of the US in Afghanistan is due to Pakistan's nuclear weapons. This gives them the ability to take action against our nuclear weapons in case such a scenario where either Pakistan has to use its nuclear arsenal against India, or if they fall into the hands of an extremist organisation.

Ambassador Inam-ul-Haq, presented a brief overview of the NSS document. He was of the view that the policy document carry a lot of negative nuance. It talks about anti immigrant and anti global policies, walls around the borders - a fortress mentality; and moving towards policies of the extreme right. Another important factor he stressed on was the idea of principled realism used in the document. The US has clearly appointed Japan, India and Australia as its preferred partners in the Indo-Pacific arena, with the primary objective of curtailing China. There is a bipartisan consensus on US and India relations and Pakistan figures as a pro-China country.

Similarly, the document chalks Pakistan as a nursery of extremist and harbour of chaos. In order to push Pakistan, the US can increase the intensity of drone strikes inside Pakistan. The US can opt for incursions inside Pakistani territory and withdraw Pakistan's non-NATO ally status. Out of all of the pressure points that the US can use, the most pivotal is economic. The US can manipulate and influence international financial organizations like the IMF to deny Pakistan financial assistance. Also, the US can also influence its European allies to limit their support to Pakistan. This will put Pakistan into a major economic mess which will be destabilizing enough for Pakistan. In addition, the US can encourage India to exert further pressure on Pakistan by engaging and attacking on the Line of Control.

For Pakistan, it is important to understand that what kind of cards do we hold? Such scenarios warrant a policy change. Pakistan has lost credibility in the US. The only cards that Pakistan hold are:

- i. Transit route of American equipment,
- ii. Pushing Afghan refugees back, and
- iii. Controlling our border with Afghanistan.

While talking about Afghanistan Ambassador Haq said that the Afghan elite does not want the US to leave Pakistan nor does the US want to leave. The document fails to mention the drug market in Afghanistan. Compared to its predecessors, drug trafficking is not an important issue for the Trump administration.

Dr. Rifaat Hussain identified levels at which the NSS is standing. First is the global perspective, in which the document has identified China, Russia as major rivals. Second is the regional level, in which the US talks about its allies like India, Japan, South Korea and the larger Indo-Pacific region and Pakistan-US bilateral ties. Another aspect that he highlighted was that whatever happens inside Pakistan has now become a major concern for the US, whether it is war against terrorism, or against militancy.

In this context, Dr. Hussain said that the American approach toward Jihadi militarist and religious extremism has a regional dimension in which India's role has become important. This is the point where sub-conventional war and Pakistan's struggle against terrorism gets spilled over

into the possibility of a conventional war between India and Pakistan. Explaining all these factors, Dr. Hussain drew a linkage between bilateral threats, threats of religious extremism and its linkage with the conventional warfare, and ultimately a nuclear war, and how Pakistan copes with these threats.

Air Cdr. (Retd.) Khalid Banuri commented on the nuclear aspect of the NSS document. He was of the view that the document reflects the US concern regarding Pakistan-India war, but it talks about this more in terms of a consequence. The issue probably that the US has, and is not mentioned in the document, is regarding the ranges of the nuclear missiles. Talking about the cyber domain, Air Cdr. (Retd.) Banuri said that it is important to lobby in the United Nations about the limitations of the international law of not having the definitions of what can be a cyber attack or not. Touching upon Pakistan's national security policy, he said that attempts have been made, there is a study that is carried out occasionally by the Joint Staff, another such exercise was carried out which had members from the Foreign Office, military, representative from the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad and other think tanks, which was presented to the President and the Prime Minister. The main obstacle is that these reports are not published, and hence, are not made public unlike the Americans do. This is where think tanks can provide their input to pull the threads of what is publically known about the policy and prepare a document which, in broader terms, reflects the policy.

Adding to the discussion Brig. Feroz said that the nuclear issue with regard to the Trump administration is very low key as compared to the Obama administration. The previous administrations were upfront with the nuclear issue by having nuclear summits. This administration is very low key. The main concerns in the US regarding Pakistan's nuclear trajectory is the range of its missiles. Anything beyond Shaheen 3 and below Nasr range is a problem for the US. Another important element is the absence of Pakistan's nuclear diplomacy in using international nuclear forum for the legitimacy of its nuclear program. The only focus is on the Nuclear Suppliers Group, other than that Pakistan is absent from the other three. This indifference by Pakistan has astounded many in the international community with respect to its absence in international nuclear regimes. This makes Pakistan's case weak in order to enter the NSG. In order to be the member of the NSG, Pakistan needs to be the member of the other

existing international nuclear regimes. India is member of two of the groups, and likely to become a member of the third.

Concluding the discussion, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI said that NSS document is an exercise which has been there since 2011. The current NSS document reflects Trump's administration strategy. The fundamental concern of the US remains the rise of China and every other policy revolves around it. From this one aspect radiates the US policy in the region, towards Pakistan, China, India, and Afghanistan. Whatever Pakistan does, it will not change the fundamental thrust of the Trump administration's policy. What Pakistan can do best in the given circumstances is to take certain measures to elevate or minimise the current pressure on Pakistan.

This will require rethinking of our policies on Afghanistan, India and the region as a whole. Similarly, it is important that Pakistan remains engaged in talks with countries that impact us and our policies, pursue and propose a continuous process of dialogue, and to focus on our domestic situation and bring more stability in the country.

Ambassador Mahmood thanked the panellists and the speaker for their candid views.