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Report – Public Talk

“British Media Delegation”

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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a four-member Media Delegation from UK on February 6, 2018. The delegation included: Mr. Patrick Wintour, foreign Editor, *Guardian*, Mr. Mathew Symond, Defense & Diplomatic Editor, *The Economist*, Mr. Freddy Gray, Deputy Editor, *The Spectator* and Mr. Roland Oliphant, Moscow Correspondent, *Daily Telegraph*.

The meeting was chaired by Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI. The interactive discussion mainly focused on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), growing US-India strategic relationship to balance China's influence and its implications for Pakistan, and Pakistan's nuclear program. Peace in Afghanistan and the mounting presence and threat of Daesh in Afghanistan were also extensively covered.

Ambassador Mahmood briefed the visiting delegates on the emerging geo-political and geo-strategic situation in the region following the changing dynamics due to paradigm shift and new alignments. These, he said, have particular implications for Pakistan. The enhanced Indian role and the thrust of US strategies emphasized on China and India, which has emboldened Modi's Hindutva policies while making security issues even more detrimental in Indo-Pak relations. The resurgence of violence in Indian Occupied Kashmir is an evident consequence. He referred to the Indo-US nuclear deal and the latter's support to India for its entrance in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) as unjustifiable. On the other hand, US has picked up Japan for its Pacific policy which is deliberate, however, certainly not well-advised. This, Ambassador Mahmood said, generates coercion and not cooperation.

Dr. Ahmad Rashid Malik, Director China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at ISSI gave a brief account on CPEC. He told the delegates that a number of energy and infrastructure projects under the emblem of Early Harvest Program (EHP) have been completed in a short period of 33 months. Pakistan is now producing 1,224 MWs surplus electricity and has added another 8, 000 MWs to the national grid. CPEC is mainly an economic project and \$35 billion were earmarked for energy production while ensuring the international standards through green projects. He told the delegation that over 2,200 km long motorway has been constructed, making Pakistan the 5th largest country after China, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand to have completed motorways in Asia. It has also ensured that the environment would also be well-protected. Pakistan is already

experiencing 30% increase in its GDP due to the projects completed under the EHP phase. Long-term infrastructure projects have also now been started.

The transparency, sustainability, and more pertinently, the convergence of CPEC into a military project were other areas of concern for the delegation. The delegates were informed that Pakistan would be largely benefitting from the concessional loans and this would not be a burden on its finances. The Sri Lankan port of Hambantota, built by China, is not comparable with CPEC.

Though CPEC does not contain any military project, however, there is already a military cooperation between Pakistan and China. The transfer of technology between the two is uninterrupted. Earlier, Pakistan did try to diversify its resources through strategic partnership, but the response was neither forthcoming nor competitive from other countries.

The regional countries such as Russia and Iran have also shown their interest in the project. However, the pace has been gradual with Russia. Historically, Russia has always been close to India, and therefore has been cautious. With the shift in alignments, Russia is certainly slowly getting closer to Pakistan, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is expected to provide a better forum for their proximity.

Ambassador Mahmood told the delegation that it was deplorable that the age old acrimonious issues between India and Pakistan, generated ever since the partition of the Sub-continent in 1947, have deepened within the folds of asymmetrical relations. They have unfortunately aggravated due to the encouragement received by India to position itself against China in the US war of interests in the region. US growing strategic partnership with India is not only deplorable for Pakistan, but is adding to the instability of the region. Pakistan views the continuation of Obama's Af-Pak policy in Trump's Indo-Pacific policy as well, however, under a different rubric. Trump's policy is more militaristic and primed out of frustration of US failure in Afghanistan.

Briefing the delegation on the situation in Afghanistan, Ms. Amina Khan, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute, commented that US Afghan policy has been an exercise in futility, and the its military approach is not likely to bear fruit. In fact, according to some reports, more than 70% of Afghanistan is now under the control of Taliban. Similarly, the US needs to understand

that Daesh and Taliban hold different perspectives. Taliban are more centralized in Afghanistan and have shown moderation in their approach. They have expressed more political and social compatibility by allowing flexibility. They are basically against foreign occupation. She suggested that peace in Afghanistan is possible only with the participation of Taliban in the political process on which the Ashraf Ghani's government is divided. So far, a number of peace processes have been initiated, yet results could not be achieved due to non-participation of the Taliban in the dialogue process. Pakistan also hosted the Murree Peace Process in summer 2016, which was participated by the Taliban. While the process was a success initially, it was unfortunately scuttled by the announcement of the death of Mullah Mansoor who had been in favor of the reconciliation process.

Endorsing Amina's point of view, Ambassador Mahmood recommended that both the military resolution and the greater role given by US to India in Afghanistan is further complicating the situation.

To a question on Pakistan's nuclear program and its security as an irritant in the Pakistan-US relations, Ambassador Mahmood clarified that the nuclear program is under the surveillance of IAEA which has ensured its confidence in Pakistan's nuclear program time and again.

Qasim Mustafa, Senior Research Fellow at ISSI informed the delegates that Pakistan holds regular sessions with IAEA. It has around 28,000 security personnel guaranteeing the safety and security of its program. The US itself has also expressed its satisfaction on this issue. Questioning the security and survivability of the program is more to question the concept. It is used more as a media technique to exert pressure on Pakistan.

One of the delegates observed that Pakistan's decision to emphasize more on the tactical weapons is perhaps the reason for change in the US perspective.

This was contested by Mr. Mustafa who insisted that Pakistan's decision is basically meant to maintain minimum credible deterrence vis-a-vis India, and this is why Pakistan has developed its tactical nuclear weapons. Also, the change in Pakistan's nuclear policy has occurred in response to India's Cold Start nuclear doctrine and Pakistan will continue to make mandatory

technological changes in its nuclear weapons program as India is abandoning its already vague No-First Use (NFU) nuclear policy.

The delegation thanked Ambassador Mahmood for an illuminating discussion.