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## *Report – In-house Meeting*

### **“Visit By Ms. Victoria Schofield”**

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## Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad hosted an In-House Meeting on March 1, 2018 with Ms. Victoria Schofield, a British author, biographer and military historian. Besides the researchers at ISSI, the event was also attended by a number of former diplomats, heads of think tanks and defense analysts including Ambassador (R) Ali Sarwar Naqvi, Executive Director, Centre for International Strategic Studies, former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ambassador (R) Inam Ul Haq, former Foreign Secretary Ambassador (R) Riaz Muhammad Khan, Ambassador (R) Asif Ezdi, Lt. Gen. (R) Asad Durrani, Lt. Gen. (R) Talat Masood and Maj. Gen. (R) Khalid Jaffery; and Ambassador (R) Aziz Ahmad Khan.

Welcoming and introducing Ms. Schofield, the Chairman ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood requested her to appraise the gathering on her extensive study of the Kashmir issue and the prospects for a way forward.

Quoting from one of her writings the "Tragedy of Kashmir", Ms. Schofield described how Kashmiri youth came out into the streets with stones in their hands to protest the killing of a teenage boy at the hands of Indian security forces in 2009, and how, despite promises made by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, human rights abuses took place on a daily basis in Kashmir. She highlighted the lack of vision on the part of Indian leaders who always think that these protests will die down. She also lamented the fact that the international community is preoccupied in Afghanistan and commercial interests with India, and has completely forgotten about Kashmir. Today, following the extra judicial killing of Burhan Wani, the Valley has again erupted in protests and this repetitive nature of the conflict is depressing. Unfortunately, there is no political will and without political will, it is difficult to find resolution of this issue. However, she insisted that one should not lose hope and remain optimistic.

Ms. Schofield presented five reasons which makes the resolution of Kashmir issue imperative in 2018. These included:

1. Kashmir's geographical location. It is strategically located between India and Pakistan. Today, both India and Pakistan are nuclear powers and Kashmir is a nuclear flash point. This has made things even more difficult. In fact, this situation is a major concern in both United Kingdom and United States.

2. The human rights situation. Kashmir is heavily militarized which obviously leads to human rights abuses. Ms. Schofield deplored the plight of thousands of women who have been raped and the mental trauma they go through for the rest of their lives. Similarly, lives of orphans and half widows is another sorry tale of Kashmir. In fact, human rights abuses alone can be listed as a reason that makes resolution of Kashmir issue imperative.
3. The cost of this conflict for both India and Pakistan is far more than what the two countries should be spending. Both India and Pakistan are sitting on a demographic time bomb. They are running short of water. Both India and Pakistan need to channel more funds towards poverty reduction, health and education. Ms. Schofield insisted that civil society in both countries should come forward and play its role in this regard.
4. Narratives in both countries are also dangerous. Both countries think the other as hostile. Consequently, another generation is growing up in both India and Pakistan with deep hostility towards each other.
5. Both countries are competing in Afghanistan. US, China and Russia are all active in this region. With a growing Daesh imprint in Afghanistan, it is important that both India and Pakistan cooperate with each other instead of indulging in rivalry. This, of course, is not possible without resolution of the Kashmir issue. Hence, resolution of this issue is important before it gets hijacked by the geo-strategic interests of other powers.

On a way forward regarding this issue, Ms. Schofield was of the view that with Modi as Prime Minister of India, relationship between India and Pakistan would remain difficult. Already, there is heavy firing across the LoC on a daily basis, and opportunities to resolve the issue are being lost. She advised that perhaps Pakistan should take some initiatives which should be reciprocated by India. Pakistan should focus on some kind of roundtable discussion where Kashmiris are also participants. She said that it has to be kept in mind that the scenario of the whole state of Jammu and Kashmir either going to India or Pakistan is unlikely. Any solution will have to take into account the will of people of Ladakh and Jammu. She expressed her disappointment that instead

of winning the hearts and minds of Kashmiris, India resorted to the use of pellet guns which was inhuman and has absolutely alienated the Kashmiri people. She also acknowledged that there is a ploy to change the demography of Kashmir to make it difficult to hold a referendum. She insisted that negotiations is the only way forward and there has to be some kind of compromise.

A question was raised regarding hindrance in implementing the UN resolutions. Ms. Schofield said that both Quaid-e-Azam and Nehru had agreed on November 1, 1947 that plebiscite should be held. The Governor General Mountbatten on the other hand had suggested a temporary accession to India. UN was called in to facilitate this plebiscite and for that purpose, troops had to be withdrawn so that the local population did not feel coerced. India skilfully said that by virtue of agreement of accession, Indian troops had a right to stay and it is Pakistani troops that had to withdraw. This situation gave rise to various concerns in Pakistan and hence, India found an excuse to step back from its commitments saying that the preconditions for plebiscite have not been met. Later, assembly elections were held in the Valley and Nehru started propagating it as an expression of Kashmiri people's decision in favor of India.

To a question regarding current thinking in India, Ms. Schofield replied that there is a clear shift in Indian attitude. Earlier, India did not claim areas that are under Pakistani control. But now, India claims that the whole state of Jammu and Kashmir belongs to India. The mood in India today is very bullish and nastier and the extensive use of pellet guns is one example.

Another guest commented that nuclearization of South Asia has actually removed the military solution of the problem. Regarding historical reference of troops withdrawal from Kashmir, the guest said that there was UN Resolution No. 98 (1953) which allowed 3,000-6,000 troops from Pakistan side and 12,000- 18,000 thousand troops from Indian side and therefore, Indian claims are baseless. The question is what are the solutions? There is no military solution. There is hardly any chance of plebiscite now. The only way is to have a political or diplomatic solution, but unfortunately, under Modi even that seems unlikely. Status quo might also not be a solution because that would be at the price of Kashmiri blood. Ms. Victoria replied that opportunities are there and both India and Pakistan need to be vigilant to cease those opportunities.