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Report – In-House Meeting

Delegation from the Republic of Tajikistan

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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted an In-House Meeting, on April 6, 2018, with a delegation from the Republic of Tajikistan. The delegation included: Mr. Mirsaidov Abror, Deputy Director of the Institute of Economics and Demography of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan; Mr. Hakim Abdullohi Rahnamo, Head of the Department on Analysis and Foreign Policy Perspectives (Vision) of the Center for Strategic Researches under the President of Tajikistan; Mr. Kurbonov Abdurahmon Sherovich, Head of the Department on Social Sciences Problem Studies of the Center for Strategic Researches under the President of Tajikistan; Mr. Abdurahmonov Marufjon, Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan; Mr. Akbarov Akramhoja, Journalist/political reporter (National Information Agency of Tajikistan “Khovar” under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan); and H.E. Mr. Sherali Jononov, Ambassador, Republic of Tajikistan.

Welcoming the delegation, Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood shed light on various dimensions of Pakistan-Tajikistan relations: historical, religious, political and cultural. Dushanbe and Islamabad, he stated, have always cooperated very closely with each other on international forums. Of all the Central Asian states He said that Tajikistan is geographically closest to Pakistan. The bilateral relations had been established in 1992 when Tajikistan gained independence and these have been improving since then. Although the bilateral cooperation is growing, yet we haven't been able to achieve what we wanted with regards to the regional development and the Afghan issue. However, CASA-1000 and Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement (QTTA) will further strengthen the bilateral ties. Referring to Afghanistan's intransigence, he said that Kabul would realize soon that it is a gainer in the project. Given the renewed economic cooperation between the two countries, he was optimistic about the future trajectory of Pakistan-Tajikistan relations.

Mr. Mir Sherbaz Khetran, Research Fellow at ISSI, presented an overview of Pakistan-Tajikistan relations. He said that Islamabad has been successful in maintaining excellent political relations with Dushanbe. Through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the bilateral relations will be further strengthened in terms of sustained socio-economic integration, greater trade and commercial ties. The CASA-1000 Transmission Project envisages the transportation of surplus electric power available in summer months (May

to September) from Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The project will comprise the development, financing, construction, ownership and operation of the facilities, and which would be capable of delivering 1300 MW (1000 MW is Pakistan's share and 300 MW is Afghanistan's share). The participating countries are committed for completion of this project by 2018.

Islamabad is also working to restart direct flights to Tajikistan that would help increase bilateral trade. However, he was of the view that both countries need to explore new avenues of cooperation in oil and gas sector, agricultural research, food processing, textile, machinery and equipment, construction and infrastructure projects. Tajikistan's major imports from Pakistan are sugar, fruit and vegetables and minerals making up US\$ 18.3 million between January-September 2017. Tajikistan's major exports to Pakistan are cotton fiber, fruit and vegetable and unprocessed hides, and which amounted to US\$ 7.6 million in January-September 2017. However, full bilateral trade and economic potential has not yet reached to a significant level.

There is a noticeable revival in regional cooperation between the two countries, which is evident from the active participation in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Summit held in Islamabad in March 2017. The Islamabad Declaration brightened the prospects of regional cooperation. According to the declaration, ECO connectivity will be enhanced in terms of transport and transit, telecommunications, cyber, energy and people-to-people exchanges. However, Mr. Khetran emphasized on the non-availability of direct land and air route to Central Asian states which weakens the linkages between the people.

He concluded his presentation on a positive note maintaining that Pakistan's permanent membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will bring the two countries more closer. Pakistan and Tajikistan are culturally linked and we can transform this through greater people-to-people and business to business contacts, and there is a need for establishing direct linkages. In this regard, he mentioned the seminar and celebration of 25 years of diplomatic relations with Central Asian States at ISSI in 2017, where all ambassadors from the Central Asian States had been invited to speak. He also admired the role of Mr. Sherali Jononov, Ambassador, Republic of Tajikistan, in bridging the gap of trade and communication between Pakistan and Tajikistan.

Head of the Department on Analysis and Foreign Policy Perspectives (Vision) of the Center for Strategic Researches under the President of Tajikistan, Mr. Hakim Abdullohi Rahnamo outlined the major goals of Pakistan-Tajikistan relations. He said that Pakistan enjoys a special place in Tajikistan's foreign policy. Lately, a new concept of the country's foreign policy has been developed in which Pakistan's role in Tajikistan's foreign policy is discussed at great length. He enlisted three major areas of cooperation between the two countries:

- Energy
- Transport
- Security

As Tajikistan has huge potential for energy, Pakistan can become its potential partner for energy cooperation. Tajikistan has officially shown its interest in CPEC. He said that the two countries collaborate on the regional security problems and Tajikistan acknowledges Pakistan's key role in the regional security issues. He said that stability in Tajikistan and Pakistan is contingent upon peace and stability in Afghanistan. The success of all the regional projects depends on peace in Afghanistan, which is in the two country's interests. The politics of the regional players should be free of ideology, political or ethnic groups; it should be centered on backing a national Afghan government. Pakistan-Tajikistan relations depend on peace in Afghanistan.

In Almaty, Dushanbe and Bishkek, meetings are arranged regularly on Afghanistan. He suggested that ISSI and Centre for Strategic Studies Researches should arrange joint research ventures such as roundtables, conferences and seminars. This comprehensive approach will help us understand the Afghan problem in a better way. He also put forward a proposal for signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ISSI and the Center for Strategic Researches.

Chairman ISSI welcomed Mr. Hakim Abdullohi Rahnamo suggestions, especially the MOU, and fully concurred with his views on promoting peace in Afghanistan. He said that Tajikistan and Pakistan shouldn't hold themselves hostage to Afghan crisis, rather they should explore all the avenues of cooperation. Furthering discussion on Afghanistan, he stated that it is imperative for Pakistan to find a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Afghanistan because whatever happens there directly impacts Pakistan. Yet the key to long-lasting peace in Afghanistan lies in political

reconciliation. This idea is gaining tract as it is also evident from the recent Kabul Process. In Afghanistan, Donald Trump opted for a military approach which is not the right approach. Whether it is accepted or not, the Taliban are a political force in Afghanistan, and by encouraging the process of political reconciliation, the Afghan problem can be resolved to a great extent.

It is in everyone's knowledge that most of the terrorist activities originate from Tahreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) based in Afghanistan and Pakistan shouldn't be held hostage to the blame game. Pakistan has zero tolerance for any terrorist activity on its land. Many a military operation have been going on, for instance Operation Radd-ul-Fasad. Pakistan has also offered all the cooperation to Afghanistan and, at political level, it has been trying to reaching mutual understating.

While discussing Pakistan-India relations, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood highlighted the need for creating a friendly environment with all the neighboring countries and, for this to be achieved, New Delhi and Islamabad should settle the bilateral disputes first. Contrary to this, Modi adopted a more hawkish approach and spurned all our offers of peaceful negotiation. We should be ready to have friendly ties with India, but not at the cost of our national interests. Kashmir is a major bilateral dispute which can be resolved through implementing the UN resolutions. Pakistan believes that it is the people of Kashmir who have the right to determine their fate, but India is doing the opposite. It is blinding people, using them as a human shield and using every instrument of brutality at its disposal to suppress the people's right to self-determination.

Mr. Sherali Jononov, Ambassador Republic of Tajikistan, expressed his confidence in Pakistan-Tajikistan think-tank cooperation. He was optimistic that the MoU would be signed soon and increased exchange between research community can help gain more dividends.