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Report – Public Talk

“China’s Foreign Policy After the 19th National Congress of CPC and its International Relations in the 21st Century”

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Pictures of the Event





The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a public talk titled “China’s Foreign Policy After the 19th National Congress of CPC and its International Relations in the 21st Century,” on June 26, 2018. The guest speaker at the event was Mr. Jin Canrong, Professor and Associate Dean at School of International Studies, Renmin University, Beijing. Other distinguished guests at the talk included Mr. You Yi, the Cultural Counsellor at the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China and Mr. Lijian Zhao, Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI, in his opening remarks welcomed and introduced the newly appointed Director General of ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry. He went on to welcome the distinguished speaker, Professor Jin Canrong and esteemed guests. Ambassador Mahmood said that Professor Canrong’s area of research deals mainly with China’s foreign policy and the US foreign relations. Referring to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held from October 18-24, 2017, Ambassador Mahmood said that the CPC congress reports and discussions offer an assessment of China’s external environment, national development agenda and set broad priorities for its foreign and defence policies for the next five years.

Ambassador Mahmood said that the 19th CPC Congress commenced with a report by the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, who also heads the CPC. President Xi called for a great “national rejuvenation” and stressed that “China’s international standing has mounted as never before,” during the past five years. The 19th CPC National Congress offered some very significant proclamations that not only reiterated continuity in many elements of China’s foreign policy under the reforms but also pointed to some new leitmotifs.

Some new themes were also explored by President Xi and the 19th CPC National Congress, which centre on great-power diplomacy with the Chinese characteristics and new types of great power relations. Firstly, it refers to the acknowledgment of China by the international community as a major power, ready to assume the corresponding responsibilities. It also reflects the reality that China has ascended as a great power. Secondly, President Xi has called for a new model for great power relations. The Chinese diplomacy wishes such relationship to be founded

on respect, equality and mutual benefit, instead of pursuing hegemony and competition; and on promoting cooperative security structures instead of military alliances. These type of relations between great powers implies that each recognise the core national interests of the others. China is dedicated towards achieving socio-economic development in a peaceful international environment instead of pursuing hegemony.

Ambassador Mahmood said that while pursuing economic development at home, China is also offering development opportunities to other regional countries. At the moment, China is a primary export market for 32 countries. Meanwhile, Beijing is leading concrete enterprises such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). With these projects, China is keenly contributing to the economic development of its neighbouring countries and actively addressing one of Asia's greatest challenges: the lack of infrastructure. The expectations from this new development institution are higher as more than fifty countries joined as founding members despite the strong US opposition. Among them are some of Washington's traditional allies, such as the United Kingdom, Australia and South Korea.

Meanwhile, persisting its traditional policy, China will continue to open itself to the outside world, as indicated in the 19th CPC National Congress, Ambassador Mahmood said. Instead of becoming more aggressive internationally, China will seek to strike a balance in domestic and foreign policies. The Chinese diplomacy will feature more strategic and systematic attitude. Instead of directing national energies on individual disputes, China will place hotspot concerns in a larger framework of development. This design of interaction between China and the rest of the world has been established already. The Chinese diplomacy, thus, will now focus on the establishment of a community of shared destiny for humanity.

It can be anticipated that the Chinese foreign policy will focus on expanding China's role in the global governance as a balancing force in the era of Trump-led disruptions. China, under President Xi, is capable and willing to play a greater role within the international community. This confidence stems from growth in relative national power of China as it has augmented its economic, military and soft power during past five years. Consequently, what happens today in China has an enormous impact on other regional countries and the international system.

Ambassador Mahmood said that Pakistan looks forward to China's continued positive contributions to international peace and development.

Professor Jin Canrong

Professor Canrong spoke on China's foreign policy and strategy. Professor Canrong, in his speech said, "China of today is much diversified just like the US. The most important thing for any country is to modernise itself and command its own destiny."

New China came into being in 1949, but some things never change. Protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity, modernisation and political stability are the permanent features of the Chinese national interest. China also accepts the co-existence of various cultures in its territory and independence and non- intervention of external powers. China tends to believe that they know their own facts and no outsider can judge you or put your house in order. China also believes in real international justice, which is not defined by West.

Most important fact of today is China's journey towards modernisation. The secret of the rise of West is their domination over manufacturing industry. This is also the secret of the rise of Japan and China as they have developed a strong grip on manufacturing industry. China has the largest machine/manufacturing industry in human history. It equals US, Japan and German industries combined. China is a modern state, class division is very shallow and the social status of women is very high as compared to other countries. China is a grass root based society and has minimal hierarchical structures. China's great revolution made a modern and progressive society. China has very large percentage of industrialisation. Also, half of the Chinese students are studying medicine and engineering.

The change in the Chinese society occurred when their ideology was reformed. During the Mao Zedong era different alliances were established. There was a struggle for the survival of new China (Peoples Republic of China). After Nixon's visit to China to seek cooperation against Soviet Union, Mao felt very secure and this facilitated China to move towards modernisation. China shifted from the first stage to second stage of development and became a strong regional power. The Deng Xiaoping era was focused on pursuing economic development. China isolated itself during the Cultural Revolution and became positive towards globalisation during this era.

President Xi's era came forward with a new demand, which was major power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. The new identity of China changed from a regional power to a world power. The approach of China changed from reactive diplomacy to diplomatic pro-activism. China became a country which also took initiatives on international platforms. It became a country with a shared future that wanted win-win relations with its neighbouring countries and had an open door in world economy and it also sought global partnership. Under President Xi, a new type of power relation was also established. A better and more open neighbouring diplomacy was developed and the new concept of an Asian security was defined. The US-China relations were also reformed and power-relations were established more on the basis of equality. President Xi also suggested to President Obama to join hands for new type of power relations between status quo and emerging power.

President Xi's foreign strategy consisted of the BRI. He also stressed on the concept of new security for the Asian people. The Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP) is a major effort by Xi to promote economic integration and globalisation. Someday, China might have a FTAAP with the US. This will inject vitality in world economy and rekindle enthusiasm for free trade. Under President Xi's foreign strategy, China will seek a larger voice in current international regime and will also develop new institutions. This is China's dual approach.

China's foreign policy framework is based on neighbourhood diplomacy, big power diplomacy, developing world diplomacy and diplomacy in international organisations. But since President Xi came into power, three other forms were added, which include public diplomacy, global governance and protecting the overseas interests and also the national interests. China sees all developing countries as partners and wants to develop organisations and mechanisms to support developing nations. China wants to develop strong political ties with other countries. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) reflects as a strong alliance of Asia and it has expanded in areas of health, education, science and technology, security, tourism and many others. China has become more active globally and is trying to establish a mechanism for cooperation by increasing spending on aid development, poverty relief and climate change. China has played a great part in the reduction of poverty. Without China, results of poverty relief would have been very less.

China's way of global governance is very different from the US. China's way of global governance is always UN centred. However, the American proposals for global governance are based on alliances system. Secondly, the American global governance proposals focus on security, while China focuses on development. China believes in having partnership on equal terms, and status in the UN should be same and there should be non-intervention of external forces.

Despite China's fast growing economy and emergence as a strong regional power, it is facing some foreign challenges like every nation does. The first challenge is the Taiwan issue; this is a big challenge for China. Pro-separation party in Taiwan is creating a lot of difficulties. Second, one of the most pressing of these challenges is the US-China relation. It can be foreseen that this relation will enter a very difficult period. The main reason is that the US feels the pressure of the rise of China and they cannot accept it. They cannot accept the new reality, but they cannot ignore the rise of China. The third challenge is the disputes within its neighbourhood. China still has conflicts with India, Vietnam and Japan, and it still has to deal with these disputes. Apart from these challenges, like many other countries, China is also dealing with non-traditional security challenges such as disease, terrorists and cyber-crimes.

Question/Answers/Discussions

Q: In the process of becoming a global power, there will be enormous responsibilities on China because one does not want the old equation of status-quo power and emerging global power to come in conflict. In this context, there is apparent conflict of interest between the US and China. If it comes to conflict, how will China deal with it? Will it deal with it militarily or through the UN?

A: The question that whether China is a developing or developed country is still debatable. President Xi has stressed that China is still a developing country. China is still facing Taiwan issue and some other conflicts. China is still a status quo power. China is still between globalisation with no revolutionary change. It is not a revolutionary country, it just wants reforms. We need change in favour of the development of the country. Disputes between China and the US will occur sooner or later whether China is a global power or not. But China would likely resolve these issues through talks.

Q: There are debates and new ideas about establishing new organisations like AIIB and China Development Bank. China is contributing roughly 35 per cent to the global growth. But it is not given its due share of representation in international organisations. Does, as a part of the Asian economic security, China needs another institution that deals purely with financial management, and which is at par with International Monetary Fund (IMF) to supplement the effort of IMF by establishing an Asian Monetary Fund? What is your view about it?

A: The reason why China raised the idea to have the AIIB is that the Asian Development Bank (ADB) did a lot to develop countries, especially in Asia. But according to the Chinese perspective, they do not pay attention to infrastructure. From China's own experience, better infrastructure is the first step to have better connection. That's why China raised the idea of infrastructure. So China said that the AIIB is a complementary partner not a competitor. From an economic perspective, it has its own space and value. China is able to support its huge population. According to one of China's NGO, it can afford half of the world. So China can support itself and other countries as well.

Q: What is the Asian security? If there are threats, who are they from? What is China's concept about security within Asia? Why China is not playing any proactive role to counter these threats?

A: Asia is the largest continent in the world. Most old civilisations came from here. Many parts of Asia was colonised by the West, and the Asian nations are facing a lot of conflicts. President Xi raised the idea of an Asian security. The basic concept of Asian security is that any one Asian nation should not seek absolute security. Our security council is based on co-existence and equality. In my understanding, countries want to resolves issues through compromise, arbitration and just let it go and contain the problem. China has dispute with India, Japan and a few others, and it knows that it cannot resolve it so it has to just let it go. This is China's approach and it does not exert it on the other Asian countries, it just suggests it to others. It's time to find an Asian philosophy to resolve the Asian issues.

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

Concluding the talk, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General ISSI gave a token of thanks to Ambassador Khalid Mahmood for the warm welcome. Ambassador Chaudhry said that the post-World War II order was based on the UN chartered principles and the Chinese leadership still believes in them and, hence, affirms everyone's belief in them. The world has developed since the demise of the Cold War towards globalisation and open economy. However, protectionist trends still exist. Active diplomacy is one the most significant policy of China which emerges from Xi Jinping's dual approach. The Americans have called it major power competition in their national security and national-defence strategic documents. However, President Trump has gone a step further and called it major power rivalry. Conversely, the Chinese policy makers want to promote major power diplomacy, which is quite opposite to President Trump's idea. If the US and China end up in a conflict - given the technological development - the results will be horrendous. It makes perfect sense that an emerging global power informs the former global power that the path they took after the World War II was the right path.

When you move from one stage to another that is a development stage and when you move to the third stage - which the West calls dignity - is essentially interpreted as assertiveness and aggression by Western writers and media. That aggression can lead to a conflict. But a much wiser approach is to put your own house in order first, consolidate power and then talk tough. Talking tough without modernisation and industrialisation will only ring empty and that is what the Chinese do not want to do. There is a lot of merit in the Chinese approach and other developing countries should also opt for this approach.