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Report - In-House Meeting

“Italian Media Delegation”

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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI), hosted a 3-member media delegation from Italy. The delegation included: Mr. Alberto Negri, Senior Journalist, Daily II Sole 24 Ore (Business newspaper), Mr. Gianluca Di Feo, and Deputy Editor in Chief, Daily La Repubblica and Ms. Emma Jacqueline Charlotte Rossi, a freelance journalist. The meeting was attended by the Chairman Board of Governors ISSI, Ambassador (Retd) Khalid Mahmood, Director General ISSI, Ambassador (Retd) Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhary, Najam Rafique, Director Research, Shamsa Nawaz, Research Fellow, Shahroo Malik, Research Associate, and Taimur Khan, Research Associate and Media Officer.

Welcoming the delegation, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry emphasized upon the changing nature of global politics and the transitioning from the bipolar to a multi-polar world with the emergence of China, resurgence of Russia and the rise of India. He said that the pivot of US foreign policy is already directed towards the larger Indo-Pacific region, and whatever US does or does not, affects the entire world.

Ever since the Obama administration, and now with the coming of the Trump administration, several non-conventional issues of vital concern have emerged which include the trade and tariff wars, particularly between US and China. Issues such as climate change do not hold as important a position, particularly with the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Climate Summit in 2018. Hence, the changing paradigms require a new diplomacy since war is not an option.

Europe too, which has always played a very central role in defining and leading the international order by the introduction of the concept of nation-states and then presenting a Union model for the regional cooperation, is now distracted by the emergence of narratives like populism, extremism and nationalism.

At the regional level, Pakistan's relations with its eastern neighbor carry a historical baggage despite the efforts made to engage India in a dialogue process. There is a conflict on prerogatives. India places 'terrorism' as a priority in its list of issues to be resolved. On the contrary, for Pakistan, Kashmir and the right of self-determination for its people remains paramount under the UN resolutions.

Pakistan also wants recognition of its role and sacrifices in the fight against terrorism. The country has been successful in reversing the tide of terrorism in the region, and the terrorists are now on the run. However, Pakistan feels if Afghanistan is not stabilized, achieving peace would be a daunting task. There are 20 recognized terrorist outfits currently operating from Afghanistan, and according to the latest reports, 44 per cent of the territory in Afghanistan is under the control of Taliban. The emergence of the Islamic State or Daesh in Afghanistan is yet another worrisome factor for the security of Pakistan, since it shares a long border with Afghanistan. Pakistan, therefore, emphasizes on a political solution of the Afghanistan issue. The condition based strategy of the US would also be successful only if the US remains engaged in a dialogue with Taliban. Pakistan suggests that:

- The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan must be secured. Pakistan has already started fencing the border in order to manage the inflow of people from Afghanistan. They are being more closely monitored without disturbing the legitimate travellers.
- Pakistan has hosted more than 3 million refugees in Pakistan over the last 30 years. Pakistan urges their respectable return, and therefore seeks the world support in their return. Both the government of Afghanistan and the US must facilitate in their rehabilitation back home. Pakistan feels that these Afghan refugees are vulnerable to the terrorist activities and are being used by the terrorist outfits.
- Consensus amongst the regional states is the third most vital component of ensuring peace in the region. The soil of Afghanistan must not be used for the individual interests of the countries.

As far as relations with Iran are concerned, Pakistan has always had cordial relations despite the hostility between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Pakistan has been largely successful in maintaining a balance between the two.

Pakistan's relations with China are exemplary, and China's assistance under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will help Pakistan set the pace for its economic development.

In her brief presentation on Pak-Italy relations, Shamsa Nawaz told the visiting delegates that Italy is an active investor in Pakistan and their investment in both the development and the non-

development sector are well-recognized by Pakistan. The financial contribution of Italy in the development sector is €1 billion. The projects supported by Italy focus more on the livelihood, improving living standards and gender diversification. Pakistan also appreciates Italian support in its bid for free trade agreement between Pakistan and EU. In a meeting between military officials this year, Pakistan and Italy have also been discussing matters of mutual interest which include counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, defense production, and regional stability and security.

Ms. Nawaz also pointed out the increase in the institutional collaboration, promotion of SME development and collaboration in important sectors like livestock, energy, infrastructure, oil & gas, transport management and chemicals. Pakistan and Italy have also signed three letters of Intent (LoIs) in February 2018 for cooperation in textiles, footwear and stone sectors at the 3rd session of Pak-Italy Joint Economic Commission (JEC) held in Rome. The indirect contribution of the Italian government through UNESCO and the World Bank are also celebrated in Pakistan particularly for the projects related to female education and protection of cultural heritage. At bilateral level, Italy's support in reviving Pakistan's agro-based industry has been of tremendous help, particularly in Swat. However, both Italy and Pakistan realize the need of increasing the total trade flows by facilitating market access and diversifying the range of goods and services.

Mr. Alberto Negri wanted to know about Pakistan's perspective on the definition of the term "terrorism" which, he said, still requires consensus amongst the international community. He was of the view that terrorism is a political issue and therefore carries variability. The understanding of the term also largely depends upon the bilateral relations more than the multi-lateral understanding. He was also keen on comprehending the transition in Pakistan-China relations particularly with reference to the launching of CPEC, and the impact it could create in Pakistan's relations with US.

Ambassador Chaudhry submitted that Pakistan has enjoyed cordial relations with both China and US, although there have been some tensions in its relations with the former lately. He reminded the delegation that Pakistan had been a bridge between China and US during the time of President Nixon. But while both China and US have emerged as competitors, they can still cooperate.

He agreed with Mr. Negri that the world has not yet reached a consensus on the definition of terrorism. However, it still remains the responsibility of the state to maintain respect of the basic rights of the individuals in that state. Ambassador Chaudhry quoted the example of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir where the right of self-determination of its people is being brutally ignored. Similarly, Kurdistan, Palestine and Iraq are also considered as victims of terrorism by either the major powers or the ruling government. He said that in places of states ridden with terrorism, the focus is now being shifted to violent extremism.

In his answer to the initiation of the political resolution of the Afghan issue, Ambassador Chaudhry reiterated that even when US and NATO had a large force in Afghanistan in 2011, the issue could not be resolved, which proves the argument that there is no military solution for Afghanistan. The Afghan government needs to introduce more pull factors in order to convince the Taliban for a peaceful resolution of the issue. It is however encouraging to see the US engaging with the Taliban in the recent past. Pakistan has been pressing hard for a dialogue not as a Taliban supporter, but because Pakistan has more at stake. Drugs, he said, are of major concern. More than 30,000 square miles of Afghan territory is being utilized for cultivating drugs and all of it is being transported illegally to the world market through Pakistan, and the latter has, time and again, urged for greater regional collaboration in order to thwart the misuse of Afghan soil to pursue individual interests.

Responding to Mr. Gianluca Di Feo's question on Indo-Pakistan relations, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood emphasized on the causes of the acrimony that have unfolded since the time of the inception of Pakistan. Despite flexibility by Pakistan in its dialogue process with India by accepting comprehensive handling of all the issues instead of Kashmir only, the dialogue always remained scuttled due to India's unbending attitude. The dialogue process initiated via media could never bear fruit. Even the incumbent government in its recent invitation could not convince its Indian counterparts to submit to a dialogue after an initial positive response. Pakistan feels that the closeness in its relationship with the US over the recent past has emboldened India to take an aggressive stance towards Pakistan. India, he said, is being used by US in its counter-balancing strategy in the region to offset Chinese economic and political influence.