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Report - In-House Meeting

“Turkish Media Delegation”

October 29, 2018



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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted an In-House Meeting with a 6-member media delegation from Turkey on October 29, 2018. The delegation included: Mr. Birol Tekince, Coordinator, Turkish Defense Review; Mr. Mustafa Kaya, MD, Ulusal Kanal (TV); Ms. Nur Ozkan Erbay, Ankara Bureau Chief, Daily Sabah; Mr. Emre Kizilkaya, Managing Editor, Hurriyet Daily News; Mr. Aslan Balci, Member Management Board, Think Tank South Asia Strategic Research Center (GASAM); and Mr. Mustafa Kinkcioglu, Politics Editor, Daily Sabah. The meeting was attended by Mr. Najam Rafique, Director Research; Fatima Raza, Research Associate and Taimur Khan, Research Associate and Media Officer.

Welcoming the guests, Mr. Najam Rafique said that the global political atmosphere is changing rapidly and various regions around the world are in a flux as a consequence. The old world order is breaking down as uni-polarity is gradually fading and multilateralism is gaining prominence. We see China rapidly becoming an economic and military giant, India is moving into a new strategic partnership with the US, Russia is resurgent, regions in East, South and West Asia including the Middle East are rife with perpetual conflict where the conflict in Syria and Yemen has turned into a humanitarian disaster, Europe is in the throes of issues concerning the Union, rising nationalism and the problems of immigrants, while the whole world is trying to understand the nature and direction of the Trump phenomenon in the US.

He said that under the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has successfully completed its first phase of the early harvest energy and infrastructure projects, and is now gearing up to move into its second phase concerning establishment of special economic zones.

Talking about security in South Asia, he said that interstate rivalry between Pakistan and India has prevented the region from achieving its full potential, while the turbulence in Afghanistan seems to have no end. US President Donald Trump's South Asia strategy has also impacted the political situation in South Asia. Pakistan's relations with Iran are on the upward trajectory with both sides looking to expand economic ties and taking bilateral trade beyond \$5 billion. However, the re-imposition of sanctions against Iran by the United States might hinder progress in this regard. Relations with India are quite strained at the moment with the composite dialogue

at a stand-still. Moreover, India has designs to isolate Pakistan by rendering the self-determination struggle of Kashmiri people as terrorism sponsored by Pakistan.

Referring to the state of Pakistan-US relations, Mr. Rafique said that ties between the two countries are not what they used to be. Historically, the ties have always been conditional vis-à-vis Pakistan's role in the larger context of US interests in the region. Another factor that has soured relations in recent times is the increasing affinity between India and the United States. India has been encouraged by the US to become more and more involved in Afghanistan and is deemed as an important pillar in the US Indo-Pacific strategy. The already flourishing relationship has been further cemented by the US-India strategic partnership agreement which strengthens their bilateral defense and economic ties while increasing India's role in the region. He reiterated that the growing US-India alliance is part of a greater tussle between China and the United States.

Briefing the delegation on Pakistan-Turkey relations, Fatima Raza explained how the two countries have maintained deep cultural, historical and cultural linkages since decades. The two countries enjoy a deep and abiding bond based on mutual understanding on various global issues, particularly those of the Muslim world. Both countries have enhanced reciprocity regarding boosting trade, commerce, defense collaboration, cultural linkages and people-people contacts. Visits of heads of states have been quite frequent between the two countries. President Erdogan's visit to Pakistan in March 2017 for the ECO Summit marked a new phase in relationship that is based on regional connectivity and economic integration. Ms. Raza elaborated how with the arrival of a new government in Pakistan, the relations are on an upward trajectory as Prime Minister Mr. Imran Khan has voiced his full support to Turkey in times of its strained ties with United States.

It was emphasized by Ms. Raza how Turkey has always supported Pakistan's stance on the Kashmir issue, both bilaterally and at multilateral fora. Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Mevlut Cavusoglu also attended the OIC Kashmir Contact Group meeting upon invitation from Pakistani Foreign Minister held at the sidelines of the UNGA summit in September 2018. Pakistan has also consistently lent diplomatic support to Turkish Cyprus at every international forum. Both countries share similar concerns over UN reforms, especially UN Security Council expansion.

Turkey has also supported Pakistan's bid for Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership and has opposed US motion to 'grey list' Pakistan at the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meeting.

Talking about strategic and economic cooperation, Ms. Raza explained that the Pakistan-Turkey High Level Strategic Partnership Cooperation Council (HLSCC) is a comprehensive bilateral agreement between the two countries. It covers almost all areas of mutual cooperation between Pakistan and Turkey such as cooperation on political and international issues; collaboration in the defense sector; energy and agriculture sectors; education and science; trade and finance; and cultural exchanges and tourism.

Expanding upon defense sector cooperation between Pakistan and Turkey, the delegation was told that Pakistan has most recently signed a \$1.5 billion deal to buy 30 T129 ATAK helicopters from Turkey. In addition to the purchase of attack helicopters, Pakistan also has plans to procure vessels from Turkey for Pakistan Navy. Turkey is also providing training to Pakistani air force officers in upgrading its F-16 fleet. Three ATAK helicopters were sent to Pakistan ahead of the deal for 23rd March for Pakistan Day as a sign of solidarity between the two brotherly nations. Troops from the two countries have also held joint drills.

Welcoming Turkey's vociferous support to Pakistan for its efforts on fighting the menace of terrorism, Ms. Raza noted how Turkey is among countries that have appreciated Pakistan's sacrifices. In 2017, in a bilateral dialogue between ISSI and SAM (Center for Strategic Research) in Ankara, the Turkish side acknowledged Pakistan's sacrifices and reiterated that Turkey could learn lessons from Pakistan in the field of counter-terrorism.

The brief introduction of issues was followed by an interactive Q & A session.

Responding to a question by Mr. Aslan Balci regarding Turkish students interested in studying in Pakistani universities and hindrances in visa facilitation for these students, Mr. Najam Rafique explained how the fragile security situation, particularly with regard to terrorism, has led to a regime of strict checks and balances on entry into Pakistan. He further maintained that while delays might occur due to these policies, but the Turkish students will be quite welcome here in Pakistan.

On a question about Fethullah Gülen groups and Pak-Turk schools operating in Pakistan, Mr. Rafique responded that Pakistan has cooperated with Turkey to address Turkish concerns quite effectively and many schools have already been shut down. More efforts would be made to find an amicable solution to the problem to the satisfaction of the Turkish government.

A question was raised by the delegation regarding Pakistan ties with US, China, Iran and Saudi Arabia and \$6 billion Saudi package received by Pakistan. Replying to this query, Mr. Rafique explained how Pakistan has always adopted a balanced approach, while on the other hand, US policy has always been more interest-based and transactional. He further elucidated how new power centres are emerging all over the world and in this context, Pakistan has maintained a balanced approach in its ties with both US and China. He reminded the delegation that it was Pakistan who facilitated contacts between US and China in 1971. Likewise, Pakistan has played a reconciliatory role to mend ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Regarding the \$6 billion package from Saudi Arabia, he said that the latter had come to the assistance of Pakistan at a very difficult time and agreed to assist Pakistan as it faced a budgetary shortfall. The Saudis have not only agreed to provide financial assistance, but also extended oil supplies on deferred payments to the government of Mr. Imran Khan.

Answering a question about the new China-Russia axis forming in the region in opposition to the US coalition, Mr. Najam Rafique reiterated Pakistan's balanced approach in regional and international relations. He highlighted the significance of Pakistan in bringing about peace in Afghanistan, and stated that it is not possible to reach a political resolution of the conflict without recognizing Pakistan's role. Replying to a question about the assassination of General Abdul Raziq in Afghanistan, Mr. Rafique replied that it was an unfortunate incident and that the assassination seemed part of sabotaging the peace talks with the Taliban. He went on to say that Pakistan has always played a constructive role in bringing both parties (Afghan Taliban and US) to the dialogue table, however, there have been always been such attempts from destabilizing agents who wish to sabotage the process.

A question was asked regarding China's long-term goals to use CPEC funds to increase influence within Pakistan and the region. Mr. Rafique responded that China has never been a colonizing power, and its projects for connectivity under its Belt and Road Initiative, and China-

Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), are aimed at development and sharing of the fruits of increased prosperity not just between Pakistan and China's western regions, but beyond to regions in Central and West Asia, Africa and Europe. He enunciated how the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) set up by China is different in its dealings from other international financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Its loans do not carry stringent conditions like those issued by the Western financial institutions. Project funding in CPEC is also through various channels including grants, loans and investments by Chinese companies and soft loans have been issued to Pakistan for completion of CPEC projects with minimum mark up rates. Misconceptions about CPEC must be clarified as these are propagated by elements who wish to stunt Chinese economic progress.

Responding to other question about Gwadar and Chahbahar Port Mr. Najam Rafique informed the delegation that these ports are not in competition. In fact, the Iranian and Pakistani governments have time and again reiterated that Gwadar and Chahbahar are 'sister ports'.

Concluding the meeting, Mr. Rafique thanked the delegation for their pertinent questions and welcomed again to Pakistan.