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Report – Roundtable

“Kashmir Crisis: A Way Forward”

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Executive Summary

The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) in collaboration with Jammu Kashmir Self Determination Movement International (Islamabad Chapter), organized a Roundtable on “*Kashmir Crisis: A Way Forward*” on October 9, 2019. Sardar Masood Khan, President Azad Jammu and Kashmir, was the Chief Guest at the occasion. Lt. Gen. (Retd) Agha Mohammad Umer Farooq, Former President of National Defense University and Lt. Gen. (Retd) Naeem Khalid Lodhi, Former Minister of Defense, Pakistan also delivered remarks at the occasion.

The assessment and recommendations during the deliberations are given below in this executive summary.

Assessment of the Situation

- Kashmir issue is multidimensional; the real issue is not the Articles 370 and 35A, but the right of self-determination which is embedded in the UN resolutions.
- India has violated international law by attempting to change the nature of a disputed territory.
- Response to Indian lockdown from the international community has been disappointing.
- World will continue to acquiesce in what India is doing because of their own commercial and economic interests.
- India is looking to exploit Pakistan’s vulnerabilities.
- Delhi is aggressively carrying out demographic engineering in Indian occupied Kashmir.
- Prime Minister Modi will come up with harsher measures.
- There could be false flag operations by India.
- India and Pakistan are headed towards war.
- There will be consequences for the rest of the world.

Recommendations

- Extensive lobbying at UNSC and other international forums.
- Prioritize stabilization of domestic economy.
- Take the Pakistani public on board and prepare for the possibility of war.
- Counter all efforts by India in creating a wedge between Kashmiris and Pakistanis.
- Make continuous efforts to raise awareness and expose Hindutva ideology.
- Enhance counter intelligence capacity.
- Create understanding of the legal aspects of the conflict taking into account the implications of unconstitutional measures taken by India.

- Make appeals to the international community on humanitarian grounds.
- Invite international agencies to monitor on ground situation.
- Create an interface with Indian civil society because there are many Indian authors and writers who are writing vociferously on the humanitarian situation in Kashmir.
- Mobilize the Pakistani and Kashmiri Diaspora, who in turn could also engage Indian Diaspora.
- Pakistan needs to invest in human intelligence, both domestically and internationally.
- Form intellectual study groups and centers in the universities and think tanks to focus on Kashmir dispute. MOFA's Kashmir Cell and South Asia Division may interact with these study groups regularly, either directly or through ISSI.

Report of the Proceedings

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry, Director General ISSI, extended a warm welcome to all the distinguished guests. He indicated that the brutal Indian lockdown of Indian Occupied Kashmir is over 2 months old(As of October 17). He stressed that Indian government has violated international laws and all norms of civilized behavior. Consequently, international humanitarian organizations and international media are now openly condemning the Indian atrocities towards the Kashmiris.

Highlighting the diplomatic efforts made by Pakistan for the Kashmir cause, Ambassador Aizaz said that they have been vital for stirring global conversations on this topic. “Slowly, but surely, pressure is building up on Indians to reverse its brutal occupation of Indian Occupied Kashmir (IoK). Pakistan has shown that they stand firmly with their Kashmiri brothers. It is important that the international community also rises to stop a humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in IoK,” he added.

Sharing his thoughts on the developments in Kashmir, **Lt. Gen. (Retd) Agha Mohammad Umer Farooq** opined that Modi’s Kashmir offensive constitutes demographic engineering and Kashmiri genocide while steering Pakistan into a reactive mode. According to him, India feels it might be able to subdue and integrate Indian-held Kashmir. In the context that they succeed, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) will become the next contesting ground. He shared a number of potential scenarios and appropriate responses.

He suggested that while United Nations resolutions exist, there has to be an initiative taken beyond these. This could be the right time for Pakistan to come on front foot and plead for a plebiscite. At the same time, Pakistan should maintain internal socio-economic stability, pre-empt any detractors and put safeguards into place against them.

Lt. Gen. (Retd) Naeem Khalid Lodhi stated that Pakistan has made untiring efforts in the field of diplomacy. However, if anyone thinks that the Kashmir issue can be resolved through diplomacy alone is wrong. There are other areas such as psychological warfare where Pakistan needs to work upon. Engaging militarily does not mean weapons and combat alone, it includes other aspects as well. Pakistan has done nothing in the psychological warfare realm. India has slowly, but surely almost completed what was the first phase of its operation, which was to suppress the Kashmiri youth leadership either by dislocating them or killing them.

The second phase which they want to embark upon is to bring in lots of investment, the aim of which will be to entice Kashmiris on the Pakistani side as well.

The third phase would then involve coming towards AJK.

Further apprising about the situation, he said that India will not hold back since its end objective involved obliterating Pakistan. Pakistan has the right to respond to Indian atrocities. In his view, Pakistan missed a golden opportunity of taking action when the curfew was imposed. Pakistan's stance for years has been to wait for a Kashmiri uprising from within and then aid that. He asserted that Pakistan should be more attentive on the strategic front and should not give India any space or time to implement its strategies.

Sardar Masood Khan, President of AJK started off by highlighting a report which was released by the National Federation of Indian Women which says that 13,000 boys have been detained by the occupation forces and the bulk of them have been transferred to the most notorious prison houses in India because the Indian Government wants to crush the freedom struggle in the IoK.

Let us be very clear that steps taken by India on August 5 were all illegal. All these steps are in violation of international law, humanitarian law and the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. Pakistan's reaction was very strong and for the first time, the entire nation took a unified stance on the issue. Diplomatic outreach was tremendous and impactful. There was also supportive reaction from international media, from government legislators such as those in the UK and the US, who have demanded the release of political prisoners and lifting of the curfew.

Major powers have issued very cautious statements. Only four countries supported Pakistan openly: China, Turkey, Iran and Malaysia. The response from the Security Council was disappointing. It had to wait for a communication from the Foreign Minister of Pakistan to hold an informal session, but even that was not followed by a presidential statement.

It is primarily the responsibility of the UNSC to intervene in Kashmir and to save the people from the scourge of genocide and to save the region from the scourge of war. If there is engagement between India and Pakistan, a limited war can quickly spiral into a nuclear war with catastrophic results.

He added that we are facing the rise of Hindutva, which believes in the elimination of Muslims in South Asia. Hindutva leaders state that Pakistan committed a cardinal sin by creating a separate state for Muslims in 1947.

He warned about the risks of the developments in Kashmir and added that the brutalization of Kashmiris would increase in the time to come. Because of their economic, political and strategic interests tied with India, international community's response will be insignificant to thwart India's strategy.

There could and would be a false flag operation and Pakistan has to brace for this kind of operation because for sure Pakistan would be blamed for this kind of terrorist attack. We cannot rule out by wishful thinking that India would not attack Pakistan or AJK. India is capable of that and we should prepare ourselves for that. In fact, Pakistan is already in a state of war and we have to respond to it by all means- kinetic and non-kinetic. There would be an intensification of proxy wars against Pakistan and finally, there is a distinct possibility of the construction of the Ram Temple on the site of the Babri Mosque which could be a smokescreen for India to carry out its other initiatives.

Talking about the way forward, the President said that Pakistan should lobby with the Security Council very aggressively, since it is ultimately the responsibility of the Security Council to take action in accordance with not just the existing UNSC resolutions, but because this is a new situation. We must brief members- permanent and non-permanent- about the deteriorating situation in the region.

He posited that we have to respond effectively and must deliberately try to maintain unity in our ranks because India is trying to drive a wedge in different segments of Pakistan. India wants Pakistan's support to the Kashmiris to weaken and the Kashmiris to be left alone so they can deal with them with utmost brutality. We have to repulse and frustrate this kind of move and maneuver by India.

Do not ever underestimate the power of diplomacy, if we count our failures and successes, we will have to refer to diplomacy. This track has to be pursued most persistently because your rival is pursuing that track and it is succeeding. India is very active diplomatically; hence do not slow down your diplomatic outreach. Diplomacy is as important as preparedness for war. He suggested engagement with the Indian civil society since Indian human rights organizations have spoken up for Kashmiris.

Discussing the economic aspect of the conflict, he said that Pakistan's economy is a strategic priority and efforts must be made to stabilize it further. He concluded by saying the issue of Jammu and Kashmir is alive for three reasons: First, the sacrifice of the people of Jammu and Kashmir; second, the very strong and powerful stance of Pakistan; and third, the existence of Azad Kashmir.

Interactive Discussion

Prominent figures from civil society participated in the discussion that followed. A representative of JKLF enquired about the possibility of taking legal actions on human rights grounds against Modi and the RSS?

The answer given was that even though Pakistan can take the issue to International Court of Justice (ICJ) on two aspects of the issue: the ongoing genocide there and the illegal steps that India took on August 5, but thorough research will be required prior to that.

Questions were also raised regarding the awareness of the situation, and how to prepare ourselves for possible escalation in tensions between the two countries.

In response, it was stated that AJK, Gilgit-Baltistan and Baluchistan should be treated as sensitive areas and investment in these areas is very important so that India cannot exploit the situation. In our respective legislative assemblies, a pro-Kashmiri action plan needs to be passed so that it can be showcased that the whole of Pakistan is on the same page. Pakistan also needs to set its house in order, get the people on board, so that it can effectively respond to India. Narrative lies at the heart of diplomacy. Hence, we should have a single narrative which we, as a nation, should collectively advocate. Indian media propaganda needs to be countered through informed discussion by Pakistani analysts which would aid our internal consumption as well. Instead of only portraying Kashmiri women as victims, we should not be overlooking the critical role that the youth and women can play in the whole future Kashmir policy of Pakistan, something which has not been addressed so far.

Summing up, Ambassador Aizaz stated that the situation in Kashmir is horrendous and Pakistan's reaction has been the strongest ever. The international community's response has been disappointing to say the least, though there are certain positive reactions as well. He thanked the speakers and participants for contributing in this crucial discussion.

PICTURES OF THE EVENT







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