

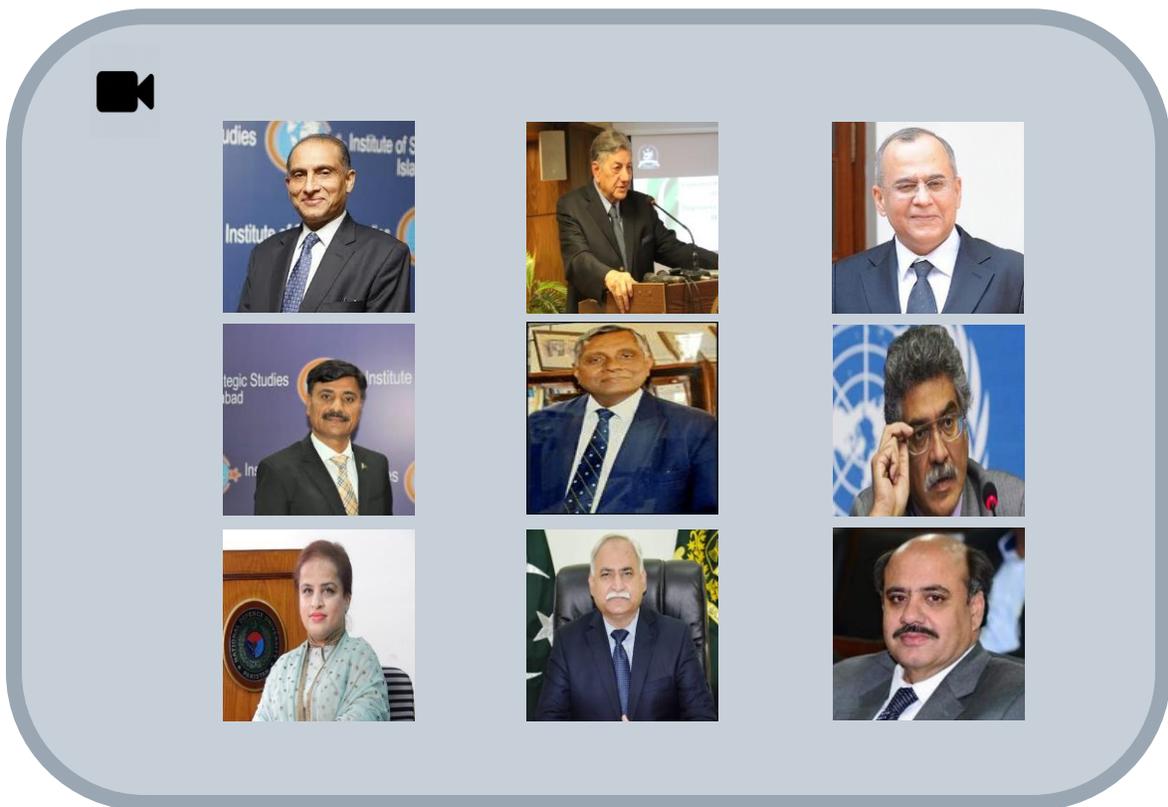


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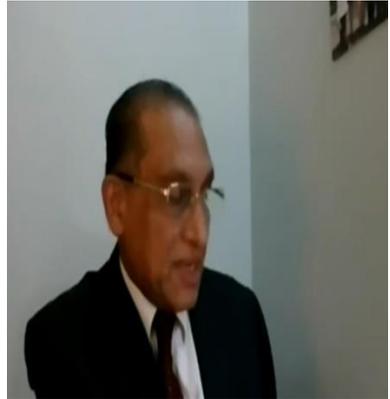
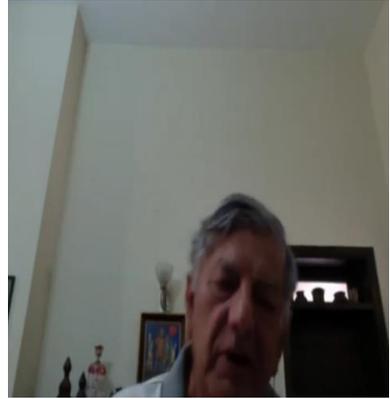
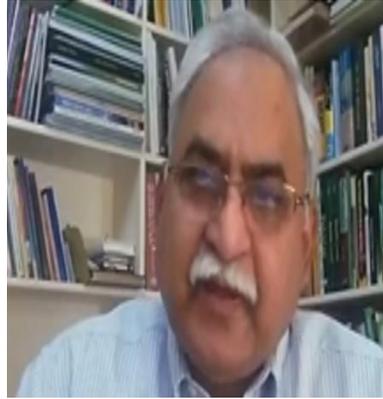
*Report – Webinar*  
**“India's Aggressions Towards its  
Neighbours: A Threat to Regional Stability”**

**June 12, 2020**



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India Study Centre at Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), organised a webinar titled "***India's Aggressions Towards its Neighbours: A Threat to Regional Stability***" on June 12, 2020. The occasion was graced by distinguished and seasoned diplomats including Ambassador Riaz Khokhar, Ambassador Zamir Akram, Ambassador Salman Bashir and Maj. Gen (Retd) Dr Shahid Hashmat, who apart from his military career also served as High Commissioner to Sri Lanka. Eminent Academics like Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Professor, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-e-Azam University, Dr. Moonis Ahmer, former Meritorious Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi and Dr. Asma Khawaja, Associate Professor, Department of Strategic Studies, National Defence University were also present to share their views on this event of great significance.

In his introductory remarks, Dr. Saif Malik, Director India Study Centre highlighted the importance of the topic in view of the changing paradigms in South Asia. He said that since its independence from the colonial rule, India has been continuously extending and devising disputes with all its neighbours. Starting from the illegal annexation of Kashmir to the border disputes with Nepal, from border issues with Bangladesh to the heinous motives of moving troops in Sri Lanka in the guise of Peace Keeping Force, to the designs of impinging Bhutan's defence and foreign Policy, and last but not the least, the folly of indulging in the recent misadventure in Ladakh, all this reflect trajectories of Indian aggressive designs towards its neighbours. This relentless pursuit to establish its dominance on its neighbours is also a manifestation of the Hindutva ideology that the Indian leadership has adopted lately.

Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhary while welcoming the guests highlighted the rationale of organising this particular webinar at this particular time frame along with the importance the subject under discussion. He said when the tensions started mounting in May 2020 on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), on the surface it appeared as if this was a Chinese aggression but in reality, it was other way round. In order to understand the real motives of India, it is noteworthy to see what India is doing to its other neighbours and what kind of security dilemma it poses to South Asia!

Ambassador Riaz Khokhar while expressing his views on "***Recent Challenges in Pakistan – India Relations***" shed light on India's strategic objectives in the region. While completely

dismissing the notion of ‘*Akhand Bharat*,’ Ambassador Khokhar listed hegemony in South Asia, domination of eastern and western Indian Ocean and keeping all South Asian countries under its control as India’s strategic objectives. In pursuit of her objectives, Pakistan is the main impediment and also China in certain ways. Referring to recent Sino-India standoff, Ambassador Khokhar said that Indians are scared of China. For Pakistan, India is the only real threat and since August 2019, situation has worsened as India continues to unleash reign of terror on Kashmiris. India thinks that this is the final solution which is a gross miscalculation. Indian approach at the moment is to keep pressure on Line of Control (LoC), therefore, Pakistan needs to give a stern message that if India crosses the LoC, it will get a befitting response. On diplomatic front, India contemptuously rejected Prime Minister Imran Khan’s offer of help on COVID-19. He also highlighted that India is an ally of the US and undermining CPEC; being a joint motive of both the countries. India is propagating that CPEC is a threat not only for India but also for the West.

Ambassador Salman Bashir expressed his views on “*India - China Standoff – What is at Stake?*” He said that the only claim to fame of Modi’s regime is that it has been feeding the Indian public about the myths of Hindu superiority in an effort to instil a sense of self-worth in the society. On the situation on LAC, China has run out of patience. Chinese were forced to take certain actions in view of grave Indian provocation. These provocations range across wide spectrum including Jurisdiction - the step they took in August 2019 to alter the legal status of Jammu and Kashmir and incorporating Ladakh as a union territory which was objected to by the Chinese. Second is political which encompasses number of things including claims for Siachen, continued hostility towards CPEC and statements by the Indians of their nefarious designs on Gilgit Baltistan. On military side, Indians have tried to change the status quo along the LAC by not only reinforcing their military positions in the area but also by building infrastructure. Another component is strategic and the global powers play. India, at the behest of the US has been campaigning against China. Lip service to the Wuhan spirit will continue but the Chinese will read actions not words. On implications of Indo-China stand off for Pakistan, Ambassador Salman Bashir said that it is evident that there are four parties to the Kashmir issue. It has also brought forth the Indian designs on Gilgit – Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. He suggested that there is a need for deeper consultation between Pakistan and China. Pakistan need to take Indian threats seriously and take appropriate measures on the ground to prevent Indian aggression against Gilgit-

Blatistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Security of CPEC routes is critical and China and Pakistan should jointly take care of it.

Dr. Moonis Ahmer extensively spoke on “***Indian Citizenship Amendment Act – Implications for Bangladesh – India Relations***”. He said that when Sheikh Hasina last visited India in November 2019, she ruled out any negative impact of National Registration of Citizens (NRC) on Indo-Bangladesh relations. But situation changed in December when Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was promulgated. This somewhat changed the situation between two countries and Bangladesh had to cancel the visit by its home and foreign ministers to India. Following month witnessed number of demonstrations in Bangladesh against NRC and CAA. Modi was scheduled to visit Bangladesh in March 2020 to commemorate birth anniversary of founder of Bangladesh. However, the demonstrators announced that they would not allow Indian Prime Minister to land in Dhaka and ultimately, the visit was cancelled on the pretext of ongoing corona situation. Dr. Moonis Ahmer said that there is lot of resentment at the popular level but at the government and elite level, the relations between the two countries have not been much affected. The people in Bangladesh believe that there are half a million Indians in Bangladesh who send around \$5 billion remittances back to India, and therefore, India cannot take Bangladesh for granted. People feel that Bangladesh must protect its sovereignty and cannot allow India to interfere in Bangladesh’s internal matters.

Ambassador Zamir Akram while speaking on “***India - Nepal Tensions***” said that the tensions between India and Nepal reflect India’s aggressive behaviour towards its neighbours to the extent that now a country as small as Nepal has also risen up to Indian hegemony. While explaining the background of the current conflict between the two countries, Ambassador Zamir Akram said that the Kalapani area which is around 400 sqkm lies west of Nepal and it is at the trijunction of India-Nepal and China. There is another territorial dispute to the South of Nepal in area called Susta which is about 140 km. The history of the dispute goes back to the Sugauli treaty that was signed between kingdom of Nepal and the British Indian government in 1816 according to which areas west to the Kali river were considered to be part of Nepal. But in 1962, during the Indo-China war, the Indians occupied this territory. The recent flare up between the two countries is because of the road that the Indians are building up to the Lepulekh pass across the disputed land. In fact, the problems between India and Nepal are much deeper as there is a

very strong resentment in Nepal against Indian bullying of its smaller neighbours. There is a popular opinion in Nepal that India is a big country with a small heart. India has also blockaded Nepal several times most recently in 2015, which resulted in shortage of basic commodities for the people of Nepal. Fortunately, in 2000s, China became more active in Nepal providing a “fall back” option for Nepalese government. Chinese have built almost 800 km long highway that connects Lhasa to Kathmandu. Nepal is strategically important to not only China and India but also to the US as the Tibetan immigrants to Nepal were encouraged to create problems for China. Ambassador Zamir Akram suggested that perhaps China can provide an opportunity for Pakistan to connect with Nepal for trade and other purpose via Xinjiang. Additionally, India’s behaviour with all its neighbours also calls for greater cooperation between Pakistan-China and Nepal.

Dr. Asma Shakir Khawaja focused on “Hindutva and Modi’s Regional Policy”. She opined that Hindutva constructs exclusive society through religious, social and political polarization and that is why it symbolizes Indian colonialism. Hindutva is a destabilising factor for the regional states as they are under threat to exercise their sovereignty. Hindutva manifests Hindu superiority which is also known as ‘*Akhand Bharat*’ and that is why India is unable to respect sovereignty and integrity of regional states. While manifesting this ideology, Modi, during his visit to Bangladesh applauded the role of Hindu youth and Indian government in creating the state of Bangladesh. The arms race in the region is also triggered by the illusion of ideology of Hindu supremacy. As a result, most of the economic resources are being consumed by non-developmental projects. Hindutva encourages policy of power centralization and therefore, India has ensured that SAARC remains ineffective and dysfunctional so that India remains a hegemon in the region. She lamented the fact that throughout the world, regions are collectively fighting against Covid-19 but this is not the case in South Asia ,where India has used it as an opportunity to polarize the region on the basis of religion and ethnicity. She also expressed her fear over the safety of command and control of Indian nuclear arms especially when Hindu radicals are in power with access to nuclear push button.

Dr. Shahid Hashmat exclusively pondered upon “*India - Sri Lanka Relations: The BRI Factor*”. He said that in the middle of Sri Lankan civil war, India actually invaded Sri Lanka on the pretext of sending a peace keeping force which was not authorized by the UN or any other regional body. Later, when Indian forces were being withdrawn, India forced Sri Lanka to

change its constitution. An amendment was made which is commonly known as 13th Amendment which unnecessarily created nine provinces in a small country like Sri Lanka. To date, India is interfering in the problems of Northern Province which is mostly inhabited by Tamils. India continued to pressurize the Sri Lankan government to join northern and eastern province, which is in line with its policy of dividing Sri Lanka into two countries. Nevertheless, the same objective India could not achieve militarily or through Tamil terrorist activities. India has also on number of occasions forced the Sri Lankan government to retract their statements demanding a peaceful resolution of Kashmir dispute. The people of Sri Lanka respect Pakistan from the core of their heart. However, Sri Lanka has its limitations and Pakistan need to not only understand but also respect that limitation while dealing with Sri Lanka.

Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, while expressing his views on “*False Flag Operations – India’s New Normal*” articulated that India always wanted to establish itself as a hegemon. This desire at times was called Indira Doctrine or Gujral Doctrine and now it is being called as the new normal. Earlier, though making such attempts, India did not enjoy international support. But today, this has changed. He further explained that this new normal is very much militaristic in nature. First it was called punitive action, then hot pursuit and finally surgical strike. But this new normal gained a different dimension after the incidents of February 27, 2019, where India lost its conventional superiority confidence. As a result, it jumped over to nuclear compellence strategy. However, it is widely believed that a nuclear compellence strategy against a nuclear power is a disaster. With India’s new normal, Pakistan has been forced to enhance its credibility of deterrence and so Pakistan came up with quid pro quo plus strategy. Dr. Jaspal was of the view that India’s new normal manifested through its false flag operation as a tactic against Pakistan that will very much escalate the crisis and instability further leading to strategic instability. In conclusion he said that India is not looking for hot pursuit but by indulging in offensive rhetoric, India wants to divert domestic pressure away and engage Pakistan in a nuclear arms race.

Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhary in his *keynote address* said that Modi has brought a paradigm shift to India internally and externally. Internally, he has introduced RSS agenda and declared his intentions of creating a Hindu Rashtra which is a xenophobic concept. On the economic front, corporate India was very excited when Modi came to power but that excitement has now deflated. Externally, Modi has bruised and harmed India’s

image as it is no longer being viewed as pluralistic, democratic, secular and tolerant state. US-India partnership has given a fillip to India but it comes with a baggage which is manifesting itself in India's quarrelsome relationships in South Asia as well as with China. India is trying its best to replay the bogey of terrorism to shift the blame on Pakistan but this strategy is not working anymore. Hence, the paradigm shift brought by Modi has proved to be a disaster for India. India's relations with all its neighbours are troublesome. India has always projected itself as a victim of Chinese aggression and Pakistan sponsored terrorism but today, the world knows the truth.

This was followed by a vibrant question and answer session. A question was raised as to what extent the Sino-India conflict can extend in both military and political terms and also what will be the impact of this conflict on the strategic culture of South Asia. Ambassador Salman Bashir said that standoff in Ladakh is important as far as the ground situation is concerned. Indians are in difficult situation both politically at home and militarily in that area. China has signalled very clearly that they will not tolerate any mischief. The conflict at the moment has been confined and there will be repeated references to Wuhan consensus. But that probably will be redefined. Another question was raised about how to halt Indian aggressive posture for peace in South Asia as India does not believe in dialogue as a key to resolve disputes. Ambassador Riaz Khokhar said that perhaps encouraged by the Indo-US partnership, India thought that it can take on China. But the US is very cautious as is evident by Trump's offer to mediate between China and India. Pakistan need to take a stronger position that China has a very legitimate case. India will remain a threat for Pakistan but Pakistan should be ready to handle it. Pakistan does not need to beg for dialogue. India must know that if it creates mischief for Pakistan, Pakistan is in a position to handle India appropriately.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman, Board of Governors said that with the advent of Modi as an advocate of RSS ideology aiming at establishing a Hindu Rashtra, situation in India and region has worsened. India is being small minded though it is a big country with huge resources, power and population. Therefore, it is the desire of India to aspire to be an influential country as it wishes to be permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. However, instead of getting the support of the regional countries, it has earned their suspicion and enmity. It is in India's own interest that it should mend its ways and policies

to instil confidence in its neighbours. India should think of acting as an elder brother instead of big brother.