



**INSTITUTE OF
STRATEGIC STUDIES**

web: www.issi.org.pk
phone: +92-51-9204423, 24
fax: +92-51-9204658

Report – Strategic Virtual Dialogue

“Challenges to Peace and Security of South Asia”

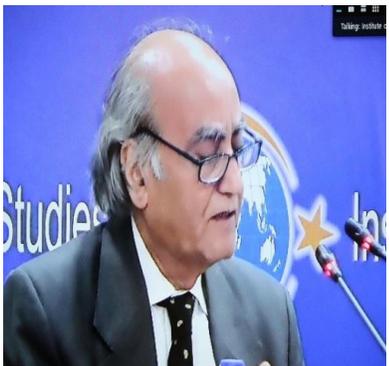
October 14, 2020



Rapporteur: Misbah Mukhtar

Edited by: Dr. Saif Malik

PICTURES OF THE EVENT



The India Study Centre (ISC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a strategic virtual dialogue titled “Challenges to Peace and Security in South Asia” between the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS) and ISSI on 14th October 2020. The webinar aimed at analyzing the current geo-political and geostrategic environment of South Asia and to exploring how Pakistan and Myanmar could play their roles to promote peace in the region. The dialogue further looked into the current standoff between India and China and how it has impacted the strategic calculus of South Asia.

While moderating the event, **Dr. Saif Malik**, Director ISC, welcomed the panellists and explained regional strategic dynamics. Highlighting the conflicts between India and its neighbours, Dr. Saif stated that the complexity of these threats pose great risk to both regional and international peace. He further mentioned that India’s aggressiveness towards its neighbours has adversely affected the security balance of the region. In this milieu, the economic potential of South Asia has made it even more significant at global level.

Welcome Address: Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, DG ISSI:

Addressing the occasion, Ambassador Chaudhry expressed his pleasure to speak to the distinguished panellists from both the countries and for conducting the first ever virtual dialogue between ISSI and MISIS. He laid down two themes for discussion during the dialogue:

- Indo-Pacific strategy: with special reference to the perspectives from Pakistan and Myanmar
- Understanding the perspective of both the countries on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) focussing China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)

The Ambassador further stated that there is an emerging competition between US and China. US has identified Indo-Pacific region to be the main arena where this competition will unfold. This US- China competition has caused tension in South Asia as US has chosen India as its strategic partner. The Ambassador further mentioned that the ongoing tussle between unilateralism and

multilateralism presents huge challenges for peace and security of the world in general and this region in particular.

Opening Remarks: Ambassador U Nyunt Maung Shein, Chairman MISIS

Addressing the audience, Ambassador Shein extended warm welcome to the friends from Pakistan. The Ambassador shed light on the Pakistan-Myanmar relations in general and the relation between the two institutes i.e. ISSI and MISIS in particular during the webinar. He said that the Pakistan-Myanmar relations date back to the independence era from British colonial rule and numerous political and diplomatic exchanges have happened between the two countries.

Speaking about the relation of two institutes, the Ambassador stated that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the two institutes has long expired, however, he expressed his pleasure on the revival of contact between the two institutes. Moreover, the Ambassador also expressed his willingness to sign a new MoU with ISSI.

Remarks Dr. Farhan Hanif Siddiqi, Quaid i Azam University, Islamabad:

In his remarks, Dr. Siddiqi discussed the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report (2019) released by the US Department of Defense. He explained that a new world order is in formation in the wake of US-China rivalry. Conceptualizing “Indo-Pacific Strategy”, he explained this strategy sees China as a revisionist power and aspire for a rule based order led by the US in the world. According to him, ethnocentrism is embedded in this strategy. Dr. Siddiqi further dilated that ethnocentrism presents a choice between a free world order and a suppressed one.

Against this backdrop while raising the question about the future policy options for Pakistan, Dr. Siddiqi said that the answer to this question is multifarious. The optimal strategy for Pakistan is not to choose any side or to see one political power as essential. He further mentioned that adopting economic pragmatism and pursuing an autonomous foreign policy which cherishes regional peace and security is one way forward for Pakistan.

Remarks Dr. Daw Khin Ma MaMyo, Yangoon University:

Speaking on Myanmar’s perspective on Indo Pacific, Dr Myo said that Asia is one of the world's most economically and politically dynamic region. In 2017, the concept of the Indo-Pacific was

unofficially framed by the US. She mentioned that the objectives of “Indo-Pacific Strategy” are the expansion and revision of the "Asia-Pacific Rebalancing Strategy" and to contain China's rise. Dr Myo further observed that Indo-Pacific concept is actually seen as divisive by various Asian countries where Japan, India, Singapore and Indonesia are the advocates of this concept while others are sceptical about it.

Identifying the choices available to Myanmar during the recent great power rivalry, she said that the non-alignment foreign policy serves Myanmar well as it calls for balancing internal factors while managing external relations independently. While specifically highlighting Myanmar's role in Indo Pacific, Dr Myo listed five important factors making Myanmar a unique country:

- Strategic Location
- Natural Resources
- Massive communication and transportation
- Maritime Strategic Post
- Participation in regional and sub-regional organizations

Remarks Dr. Shabana Fayyaz, Quaid i Azam University, Islamabad:

While focussing CPEC, she mentioned that the world is undergoing a great change. The crux of her discussion revolved around different options available to Pakistan to contribute to this fast paced world. Addressing the panel, she said that BRI is an over-arching project with the promise of a shared economic growth for the region. BRI is a flagship project in which Pakistan has completed its first phase. The second phase of the project is about Special Economic Zones and the same is still in progress.

Addressing the misconceptions about CPEC, she mentioned that CPEC is not about industrial prosperity alone. It brings a lot of agricultural progress as well. She further mentioned that CPEC is perceived as a “debt-trap project” by many. However, countries acquire loan to develop themselves and to optimize their resources. Towards the end while listing benefits of this flagship project, India can equally benefit by joining CPEC. Dr. Fayyaz identified that Pakistan

can provide India route to Afghanistan, Central Asia and GCC, ensuring economic growth and stability in the region.

Remarks U Kyee Myint Former Deputy Director General:

Speaking upon the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), Mr. Myint primarily focused on the security and strategy aspects of these projects. He said that the people of Myanmar consider CMEC as a precursor of economic development, peace and stability.

Expressing Myanmar's perspective on these projects, Mr. Myint mentioned that:

- CMEC is strategically significant as it provides China direct access to the Indian Ocean for the first time
- The government of Myanmar sincerely believes that participating in the BRI will bring domestic peace, economic development, and will strengthen people-to-people contacts with other countries along the BRI routes
- Myanmar is concerned about the debt trap followed by these projects.
- Reaching ceasefire agreements with the armed organizations in the conflict zones is imperative for enduring peace and China can play a key role in this regard.

Summing up - Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, DG ISSI: Summing up the proceedings of the webinar, Ambassador Chaudhry expressed his pleasure to revise the Memorandum of Understanding between ISSI and MISIS, and to renew it. He said that keeping in view the above discussion following points merit attention:

- US-China competition in the region needs to be handled carefully because economic prospects cannot be ignored by the countries.
- Myanmar's strategic location makes it a hub of connectivity between South Asia and East Asia.
- CPEC is the harbinger of prosperity for all by integrating regional economies.

- Myanmar's CMEC is an important economic corridor however, the concerns of Myanmar about debt trap and internal security are obstacle in the process.

Question Answer Session

While addressing a question about India-Myanmar relations and how India has deployed insurgent groups in Myanmar, Myanmar's expert on Indian affairs said that owing to India's aggressiveness, there has been tension between the two countries.

Answering another question about the ways through which cooperation between Pakistan and Myanmar could be enhanced, Dr Myo said that both Pakistan and Myanmar are agro based economies. Garments and fisheries are Myanmar's main exports and Pakistan can import them. Pakistan produces many pharmaceuticals and Myanmar can benefit from it.

Concluding Remarks -Ambassador Khalid Mehmood:

Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Khalid Mehmood expressed great pleasure at the revival of contact between ISSI and MISIS. The Ambassador further said that rise of unilateralism has presented a myriad of challenges for the world. The reviving US-China rivalry has also aggravated the situation. Furthermore, peace is affected in the region due to ideological breakup of the countries. Modi's Hindutva driven government's treatment of minorities in India is an example of it. Against this backdrop, China's BRI is a visionary initiative promising economic growth for the entire region.

He further said that efforts should be made to promote peace and enhance cooperation in the region. SAARC process needs to be revived for regional cooperation. The Ambassador further mentioned that it was imperative to explore all means for peaceful settlement of disputes as identified by the UN Charter. Concluding the event, the Ambassador said that the only recipe of economic development of the region, is the peaceful resolution of conflicts ,and the countries should focus on it.