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Report – Webinar

“ISSI-SIIS Virtual Dialogue”

August 12, 2020



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The China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) in collaboration with Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) hosted a Virtual Dialogue on regional security and Pakistan-China cooperation to advance peace and stability on August 12, 2020. Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, DG-ISSI and Prof. Chen Dongxiao, President SIIS chaired the proceedings. The speakers included Ambassador Masood Khalid, Prof. Wu Chunsi, Dr. Rifaat Hussain, Prof. Zhang Jiadong, Lt. Gen (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi, Prof. Wang Shida, Dr. Saranjam Baig and Prof. Wang Xu.

Director CPSC Dr. Talat Shabbir welcomed the speakers and participants to first virtual dialogue between ISSI and SIIS. He stated that at this occasion it is imperative to note that, during past 69 years, relationship between China and Pakistan withstood changes in international system, and as strategic partners both sides continue to support each other's core interests. Friendship with China is the cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy and there is an across-the-board political and public consensus on maintaining strong bilateral ties with China. The Belt Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor have brought important opportunities of development to Pakistan and countries along the route.

He was of the view that in recent months, several developments such as growing China-U.S. competition has impacted international situation. Meanwhile, regional environment continues to be influenced by on-going China-India border tensions, Afghan peace process, and India-Pakistan tensions in Kashmir. Most importantly, Indian belligerent and hegemonic policies have made regional environment more precarious.

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General (ISSI) in his welcome remarks stated that it is privilege for ISSI to hold virtual dialogue with SIIS, a prominent think tank of our friendly country. Ambassador Chaudhry stated that in his personal view the world has come to a long way from the world order that emerged after the Second World War and today other major powers of the world such as China and Russia are regarded as rivals/competitors as stated in its national security documents as well. He stated that US has also chosen India as its strategic partner in the Asia Pacific region to counterbalance China's influence in the region. We see that multilateralism is being ignored. Globalism is being put on retreat and that effects the shelve, role that UN and other institutions can play. He said that we also see a very alarming trend in the

world but also in our region which is preemption and our own neighbor India has carried out twice preemptive strikes on Pakistan. He was of the view that our region South Asia has been affected by the global changes. PM Modi wants to establish Hindu state which means no place for minorities. He told that we do get good news from Afghanistan and we are happy that US has given up military solution in Afghanistan and engaged in political negotiations to find a solution in Afghanistan and that's the right direction to move in. He said that Pakistan and China are not only close friends and good neighbors but also the importance of their bilateral relationship has increased due to regional and global connectivity projects like CPEC and at a wider scale Belt and Road Initiative initiated by President Xi of China.

Dr. Chen Dongxiao, President of SIIS in his inaugural address said that it is my honor to participate in the dialogue. He said that this dialogue between ISSI and SIIS would be a fresh start enhancing our institutional dialogue in near future. He stated that pandemic has put down the global economy and forced it to shut down and disrupted global chain. He said that economic recession has already happened and world is at greater risk of long term economic depression. Covid-19 pandemic has further strained US-China relations. He said that regional security situation has confronted more uncertainties in our neighborhood including India's provocative behavior to its neighboring states. He was of the view that pandemic has intensify the fragility and instability in human system as we have seen those transitional globalised emergency and risk related to the pandemic, climate change and some others, will have its long impact on our society and we are passing through difficult time. Covid-19 pandemic wakes us up to defeat that we are living in high risks, turbulent and more fragile system. In the end he suggested that our think tank people may frequently exchanges views and China-Pakistan are strategic partner in addition to control pandemic at home and resume our economic activity as soon as we can. We also have the responsibility to make stable our region and also to keep progress, peace and stability.

Ambassador Masood Khalid in his presentation said that there is no doubt that we are living in very uncertain times and complicated world. Global order is in state of flux—it is not at all a rosy picture. He argued that we are witnessing a growing turbulence effecting the security and development of all states while fruits of globalization, connectivity, development of science and technology, e finance and many other achievements in human realms cannot be denied, yet we see erosion of international institutions like the UN which have been marginilised and UN has

been increasingly becoming ineffective in enforcing its decision. In our region Kashmir is an example and in Middle East Kashmir is glaring example. He was of the view that we should be prepared with the looming challenges of climate change, food security, water security, cyber crimes, terrorism, mass migrations and xenophobic tendencies. He said that COVID-19 pandemic which should have united the world has led to more disarray and sharp divisions in international polity. There is growing divide between rich and poor of the world.

He opined that current upheaval between US and China is therefore a matter of great concern. We see a one sided tirade against China taken a point of frenzy. US policy is destabilizing international system. It has also divided its European partners who do not wish to take sides between China and US for their own reasons. Although sane voices in US have questioned this approach and level of hostility which has been unleashed and unlike to reverse after US elections, this has now become a strategic imperative or now it is enshrined US global strategy. He said that the world politics will be therefore influence by this growing rivalry between a rising China and erratic America. He opined that it will be naïve on US part to damage or contain China whose global footprint is now establish fact and US cannot wish away China neither cannot fix it. China will play a constructive and peaceful role in the world and developing countries will look at China for rehabilitation of their economies from the pandemic. China's BRI should continue to play important role in promoting such economic linkages.

Prof. Wu Chansi in her presentation criticized United States turning to be negative and even destructive. According to her negative role of the United States is from three aspects:

The first is that the U.S. society seems to be in a kind of dysfunction. Without a good institution to distribute the benefits from economic globalization, the U.S. confronted more serious polarization, which resulted in the rise of populism. Secondly, the United States is in anxiety when looking at the fast development of China. She was of the view that China is the latest target of the United States and the outstanding performance of China in the actions against Covid-19 makes the U.S. further nervous and intensified its provocative actions in South China Sea and even on the Taiwan issue, which increase the risks of the conflicts between China and the United States. Thirdly, she opined that this year is the election year of the United States and because of the economy and Covid-19, China has become the front topic in the election. The two sides of

the election compete to show their toughness on China. The Trump Administration, as the anti-establishment element, might go even farther to the extreme end. In order to win the election, whether will he choose to be a war president? This up to now is an open question.

She said that the trends of multipolarization are still there and are developing, while the United States is trying to use the force of the international system to crack down on China, most third-party countries choose not to be involved in. For most major powers and third-party countries, the best choice is to maintain the current international system. Therefore, for most third-party countries, it is better to keep the multiple options. Of course, the pressure from the U.S. side is increasing, but the European Union, European countries, Russia and many other countries are not that weak to have no any resistant capability. What we see is that the European Union is competing with the United States on the digital economy market and reviving the thought of pursuing independent defense. Russia is very active in international affairs. It is almost impossible for Russia to give up its major power position in world affairs.

She said that China believes that peace and development remain the theme of the age. China believes that most countries of the world do not want to be involved into a war, especially a war with major powers. Even in the United States, there are many rational voices. China wants to give every chance to peace and it kept restraint when confronting provocations recently in some cases.

In her concluding section she was of the view that if China has not had enough resources to influence global affairs, it can invest more in neighboring peace, stability and prosperity. In the world influenced by Covid-19, the global production chain, supply chain and value chain is re-setting. China, as the second largest economy of the world, surely will seize the opportunity to take a more favorable position in world and regional market.

Dr. Riffat Hussian in his presentation titled, “Sino-US relations: Implications for Pakistan”, said that its obvious fact that Pakistan is geographical neighbor of China and maintains close and friendly relations with Beijing. Both sides call it all weather friendship which has been stood test of time. Pakistan takes pride in China’s peaceful rise marked by its average economic growth rate of 8 percent over last three decades. He argued that at the same time Pakistan has been ally of the US during the time of cold war and maintains strategic ties with Washington. Pakistan

takes pride acting as a diplomatic bridge between Washington and Beijing in the late 60's, which led to the communist China and paved the way to rapprochement. In 1972 President Nixon visited Sino-US ties. Among other principles that were enshrined in this foundational document there was one principle which explicitly mentioned that China firmly supports the Jammu & Kashmir self-determination and it was written in the Shanghai communiqué.

Explaining the current US-China tensions Prof. Riffat Hussain said that under the Trump Administration China is the new enemy and according to China threat theory, China is strategic threat to US hegemony. He was of the view that Washington under the Trump has pushed national agenda on the basis of US first approach and tried to extract concessions from its foes and friends alike. He said that after imposing trade sanctions on Chinese goods in the wake of outbreak of Covid-19, Trump has become visibly hostile to China. This can be seen in protests against China in Hong Kong, interference in Taiwan and public support to PM Modi to subvert the CPEC and the BRI. US has also strengthen its naval presence in South China Sea to challenge the Chinese interest. He was of the view July 23rd speech of Mike Pompeo, US secretary of state describe China as a threat to the world and said, "If the free world does not change communist China, it will surely change us". The free world must triumph over this new tyranny. India has volunteered along with South Korea, Australia and Japan to be the linchpin of this strategy containing China. In his concluding remarks he said that there are many voices in US who do not buy this China threat theory and believe that President Trump is doing it to win its next elections, after the elections the Sino-US relations will return to its early position. The conflict between US and China will force Islamabad to take side and there is no doubt that Pakistan will choose China.

Prof. Zhang Jiadong shared his views on China-U.S. Tensions and explained them through the concept of realism, idealism and constructivism. After the rise of China, the national strength of China and the United States are close, and the United States' strategic vigilance against China is on the rise. This is a major factor in the deterioration of Sino US relations. The existing international system has been difficult to deal with the current contradictions among major powers. This also needs to be adjusted. The differences in political concepts between China and the United States have been intensified by the rise of strategic contradictions. Political differences in turn worsen the strategic perceptions of the two countries. These three constitute a

vicious circle. The first factor of realism is difficult to compromise. However, the second and third types of factors are likely to be changed and adjusted. He opined that competition and cooperation will remain the mainstream of Sino US relations. He was of the view at present, Sino US relations are in an abnormal and irrational state, which is unlikely to continue. After November, no matter who comes to power, Sino US relations will be more rational.

He said that the economic interdependence between China and the United States still exists, although the international system and norms have been challenged, they are still the foundation of today's world and still constrain all countries. All countries depend on this system to survive better. China and the United States are inseparable from this system. The deterrent function of nuclear weapons is still effective. This restricts and reduces the possibility of war.

In his presentation titled "Perspectives on regional security", Lt. Gen (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi said that we do understand that Chinese side is cooperative and do compete positively whereas the other side is trying to confront and bring it to closer. He opined that I would tell my Chinese friends you may not interested in war but the war may be interested in you so remain alert. Speaking about the South Asia region he said that it all depends whatever happens in this region and it depends upon the China-US relations. Secondly the relations between India and China also matter in this region because India is the largest country of the region and also controls large portion of Indian Ocean. He said that India is trying to play US design in the region and it will leave its consequences in the region. Indian's attitude with its neighboring countries is hostile including her role in Afghanistan which further vitiates. He opined that Russian role cannot be excluded because they have interest in Afghanistan, Central Asian countries and South Asia although they are not asserting but her alliance with China gives boost and together they can do a lot.

He said that I personally believe that US will not be interested in peaceful Afghanistan after her withdrawal. They'd like to keep influence in Afghanistan to keep check on Iran, CPEC and Central Asian States.

He spoke about the Israel recent threat to Iran cannot carry on with the nuclear program and it shows that turmoil will continue in Iran especially after Chinese business interest in Ira. US will remain in confrontation with Iran. Speaking about the Kashmir issue he said that now there are

three stakeholders including China. China is the signatory of peaceful solution of Kashmir. After the abrogation of article 370, India is settling non Kashmiri's in the region which will make situation hostile. He opined that initially US was quite on CPEC but now they are very much against the BRI and CPEC project. CPEC will remain bone of contention in this region. In his concluding remarks he said that this region will remain in turmoil because three nuclear counties and above mentioned issues, Pakistan must try to engage everyone and avoid confrontation mode but sometimes your interests force you to make a tilt and it is with China.

Prof. Wang Shida highlighted the US policy in South Asia. He said that the biggest feature of the current regional security situation is that geopolitical games dominate regional security. First, the United States has adopted a more unbalanced South Asia policy under the Indo-Pacific strategic framework, deliberately raising India's geographic position, and adopting unfair attitudes toward Pakistan by signing different defence deals which led to imbalances in South Asia. and a more fragile regional security situation, which has stimulated the outbreak of conflicts between India and Pakistan, Nepal and other India's neighboring countries. He said that tensions have been brewing between India and Nepal after India issued fresh maps of its borders, which showed 62 sq km of Nepali territory, known as Kalapani, as its own.

He was of the view that Hindu nationalism has become the mainstream ideology in India, stimulating India to adopt a more speculative and adventurous foreign security policy, which is more offensive and aggressive, leading to the confrontation between China and India troops in the Galwan Valley on June 15 which resulted China-India relations fell to the bottom. After the conflict in Galwan River valley, BJP is unable to cope with domestic pressure without any action. At present, the leader of the Indian National Congress Party Rahul and others has referred to Modi as "surrendering Modi." The possibility that the BJP take further risks on the border issue under pressure cannot be ruled out.

He was of the view that new types of terrorist organizations are on the rise. Some of them are supported by certain countries and become agents of specific policy targets, further threatening the regional security environment, for instance Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), launched an attack on the Pakistan Stock Exchange building in Karachi, Sindh province, resulting in 10 fatalities.

In his concluding remarks said that the geopolitical game has become the biggest threat to regional security and stability, and the United States and India obviously bear the main responsibility for this. As responsible regional countries, China and Pakistan need to cooperate more closely to maintain overall peace and stability in the region.

Dr Siranjam Baig stated that CPEC has in true sense broadened and enhanced the scope of future cooperation between China and Pakistan. He pinpointed three areas for future cooperation namely renewable energy, tourism and research and development. He emphasized that there is huge potential in these areas and will help the two countries in meeting the socio-economic development targets under CPEC. Dr. Siranjam added that Pakistan should gain from Chinese expertise in order to achieve sustainable growth.

Prof Wang Xu geo strategic changes undergoing regionally and globally. There is increasing competition between US and China. BRI and Indo-Pacific strategy have also intensified disputes between the two countries. Recently, China and India have also seen escalation in tensions. He said that irrational domestic politics and rise of Hindutva have also contributed to rising instability in the region. Dr. Wang said that India's traditional foreign policy approach has changed and is shifting towards alliances.

In response to a question related to the upcoming elections in the US, Dr. Shao Yuqun said that we are following US elections very closely. She added that Trump's opponent, Joe Biden is trying to show his toughness towards China but when he enters the White House there will be a change in approach towards China. She stated he focuses on alliance and prefers multilateralism however, Trump's policies have lasting implication US-China relations and a different administration cannot change things dramatically. Dr. Shao added that there is a bipartisan consensus in Washington that China is a major challenge for US and must be tackled. Dr Rifat added that if Biden wins the election then there will be greater element of predictability in Pakistan-US relations. He also said that Mr. Biden has a strong understanding about Pakistan and the region.

On the future of India-China relations post Galwan, Prof. Wang Shida stated that historically China-India relations have seen ups and downs. He added that tensions are rising at the moment but in the long term both sides will find a way to stabilize the situation.

Sharing his conclusions, Prof. Chen said that he his colleagues enjoyed participating in this fruitful discussion. He said that we should continue to engage with each other through digital technologies. International order is facing uncertainty but pluralism and development will carry on despite disruptions. More security and economic challenges will be faced due to the pandemic. We should enhance collaboration to overcome our common issues.

Concluding the event, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that during the Cold War era policies were driven by security concerns and after that focus shifted towards social and economic well-being and interdependence. Unfortunately, the security paradigm is resurrecting nowadays. He said that unilateralism will not succeed eventually. He insisted that SCO members should avail the platform to settle the disputes in the region. He added that Pakistan-China relationship has stood the test of time and is being reinforced through new initiatives.