

Report

“In-house meeting at ISS with the Chinese Delegation from China Center for Contemporary World Studies”

October 10, 2013



**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,
ISLAMABAD**

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The Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI), Islamabad, organised an in-house meeting with a 4-member delegation from China Center for Contemporary World Studies (CCCWS) on October 10, 2013. The delegation was led by Deputy Director General of CCCWS, Dr. Hu Hao, along with Dr. Sun Binghui, Research Fellow, Dr. Lin Yongliang, Associate Research Fellow, and Mr. Gao Lianjia, Research Fellow. The Director General, Institute of Strategic Studies, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais expressed his deep gratitude to the distinguished members of the Chinese delegation and gave them a warm welcome at the Institute of Strategic Studies.

Dr. Hu Hao said that this visit was in continuation of the MOU which was signed between the CCCWS and Tariq Fatimi, advisor to the Prime Minister, during the visit of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to China in July 2013, and the visit of think tanks in Islamabad led by ISS to CCCWS in August 2013. He expressed the hope that this visit to the ISS will help expand the exchange of ideas between the two think tanks. The agenda of the meeting revolved around post withdrawal scenario in Afghanistan and menace of terrorism in Pakistan. Dr. Hu Hao was very interested in learning the ISS perspective on the impact of terrorism on Pakistan and the neighbouring countries including Afghanistan.

Amina Khan, Research Fellow on Afghanistan gave a brief on the current Afghan situation saying that the situation has become very complex and that the Afghan National Army is not capable of handling the situation after the 2014 withdrawal since 95 percent of the country's area is out of control of the Karzai government. She informed the delegation that in recent years, insurgency has increased manifold and there was no writ of the government. She said that the Afghan government is very weak and confused about whom to talk with. She lamented that the Tehrik-e- Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is using both sides of the border and carrying out terrorist activities inside Pakistan. The Afghan National Army is also regularly violating the border by cross-border raids and through artillery fire on Pakistan villages.

Furthermore, she said that Afghanistan was divided on the bases of ethnicity where Pushtuns have been pushed to the wall despite the fact that they are a majority in Afghanistan. Former Northern Alliance has been awarded a major share in the Afghan National Army, and they lose no chance of carrying out propaganda against Pakistan's effort in 'War against Terror'. Such activities have reshaped the mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan on the issue of negotiating with the Taliban. She added that if Taliban insurgency continues, it will pose serious threats to Pakistan's economy which is already under tremendous stress.

DG ISS, Dr Rasul Bakhsh Rais said there are three possible future scenarios for Afghanistan. The first one relates to a 'functional state' that would be in the larger interest of Afghanistan and its neighbours. The only condition for the survival for this state is that there is a process of dual reconciliation i.e negotiations between Taliban and Kabul government, and negotiations between Taliban and the Northern Alliance. If international community fails in Afghanistan, the chances of functional state would be bleak. The second scenario for Afghanistan is the emergence of a 'nominal state', whereby the central authority would be limited to Kabul. History could repeat itself where the Taliban could reemerge and the other ethnic groups have their own territorial domains. The third possible scenario is that civil war breaks out because Pushtuns have been denied their fair share in Afghan National Army and main stream politics.

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Furthermore, he said that as the ‘Heart of Asia’, if there would be no peace in Afghanistan then it will have dire security consequences for the regional states and larger Asia. He said that in the context of ‘new silk routes’ a peaceful Afghanistan could be a commercial transit state for China, Central Asia, Iran, Russia and South Asia. It is imperative that the international community should play a vital role for creating peace and stability in Afghanistan for economic and commercial benefits.

Dr Hu Hao said that TTP terrorist activities inside Pakistan were creating severe security challenges for Pakistan. Furthermore, he said that since the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, the security situation has become very fragile. In the current scenario, if the security situation in Afghanistan becomes worst, it will have direct effects on both China and Pakistan. It is China’s sincere hope that peace is established in Afghanistan, and towards this end it signed a strategic agreement with Afghanistan in 2012. Afghanistan, he said, needs assistance rather than intervention.

Referring to the question on the role of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Anjum Saeed, Research Associate on China said that SCO can play a vital role for establishing peace in Afghanistan because all the neighboring countries of Afghanistan are permanent members and observers of the SCO. Russia and China are the power houses of SCO and both the states have economic interests in the region. He said that Pakistan, currently an observer, would like to be accepted as a permanent member of SCO.

The DG ISS said that following the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, the situation will not be improved immediately; rather it would take quite a long time to get back to normal because the change of setup would have various implications on the political scenario of Afghanistan.

He said that the proposed Gwadar-Kashgar Economic Corridor will open new avenues for China and Pakistan, and the new Government of Pakistan is taking a keen interest for developing this milestone project between the two friendly nations. In order to take this project further, the Government of Pakistan has now established a separate office for the facilitation of economic activities between the two countries.

Dr Hu Hao referred to the visit of Chinese President, Xi Jing Ping, to the Central Asian states where he talked about the Silk Road Economic Zone, and that Pakistan could be a part of this project which could prove to be quite beneficial for its economic development.

Mr Ghani Jaffar, Editor at ISS called attention to the issue of drugs and human trafficking. He said that six immediate neighboring countries of Afghanistan should develop a mechanism to prevent safe passage of drugs, human smuggling, terrorism and to maintain common agenda for the peace and security of the regional states.

On the issue of terrorism, the DG ISS said that China has been confronted with terrorism in the Xinjiang province for many years. He informed the Chinese delegation that he has put together a team of researchers at ISS to work on this issue to suggest ways and means to tackle the menace. He asked the members of this team to brief the delegation on the work being done by them on this issue.

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Dr Ahmed Rashid, Senior Research Fellow at ISS told the delegation that various kinds of non-state actors are working in Pakistan who have been receiving support from foreign elements during the Afghan war. In 2001, a clear shift was seen in Pakistan's foreign policy and the government of that time decided to join the war against terrorism and Al-Qaeda. Pakistan has been facing numerous problems in confronting the issue of terrorism and for owning this war. However, with the US carrying out drone attacks inside Pakistan, many Pakistanis feel that this is not our war, and the government is taking long-term and short-term measures to overcome this problem. Moreover, it has now announced that it is willing to have dialogue with the Taliban groups in Pakistan.

Qasim Mustafa, Research Fellow at ISS said that there are 52 militant organisations operating inside Pakistan. They have been involved in terrorism, sectarianism and the killing of ethnic minorities inside the country. He said there are three broad categories of militant organisations in Pakistan which can be divided into Jihadis, Sectarian and ethnic/national separatist e.g in the province of Balochistan. He said that since 2002-2013, 18000 suicide attacks by these organisations on armed forces and civilian targets have been recorded.

Nadia Mushtaq, Research Fellow at ISS said that Pakistan has paid a huge economic price, approximately US\$ 100 billion, and also loss of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). More than 50000 army personnel and civilians in Pakistan have lost their lives in this on-going war on terror.

The DG ISS pointed out that before 9/11, the US and the western world did not brand Chechens as terrorists, they were considered as freedom fighters and put pressure on Russia to respect them. Before that, the Mujahideen in Afghanistan were also supported and the former US president Ronald Reagan invited them for a dinner in the White House. The Taliban today in Afghanistan portrays themselves as freedom fighters, but this time the US is not willing to accept them as such and they are branded as terrorists.

Dr Hu Hao said that we realise that Pakistan is facing lot of problems since it joined the war against terrorism. Some of Pakistani groups are showing resentment, and as a result they are carrying out suicide attacks and terrorist activities within the territory of Pakistan. The international community should recognise Pakistan's role in the war against terrorism and assist Pakistani government in fighting against terrorism. Pakistan and China have a same stance on war against terrorism because both the countries are victims of terrorism. China respects Pakistan's role on war against terrorism as well as extremism.

The DG ISS said that the whole Pakistani nation was in a deep mourning when they heard the news that Chinese mountaineers were among those shot dead in a recent deadly terrorist attack on Nanga Parbat in Pakistan. He said that we have common enemies and some foreign funded organisations have been involved in these attacks because they want to destabilise Pakistan-China relations. Both the countries need to expand cooperation on counter-terrorism and improve economic relations which at present do not present an ideal situation expected of our bilateral political relations. We will suggest to our government to cooperate more extensively with China for enhancing economic ties. China, on the other hand can invest in the field of energy infrastructure to overcome this major crisis in Pakistan.

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In conclusion, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais thanked the Chinese delegation on behalf of the Institute and said that such visits and exchanges will further strengthen political, economic and technological cooperation between two old friends.

- *Prepared by*

Anjum Saeed
Research Associate