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## *Report- In-house meeting*

**Mr. Matt Decker,  
Principal of DDP Global,  
Washington DC, USA**

**September 1, 2016**



## Pictures of the Event



### **“Mr. Matt Decker, Principal of DDP Global, Washington DC, USA”**

The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted an In-House Meeting with Mr. Matt Decker, Principal of DDP Global, Washington DC on September 1, 2016. The Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood welcomed the speaker and opened the floor for his remarks.

Mr. Matt Decker began by saying that the US is experiencing a fairly unique election this time. The amount of coverage the US elections are getting is extraordinary, both within the US, and around the world mostly due to Donald Trump’s unique personality. He was of the view that Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are the least two popular presidential candidates in the US history – and so the choice will be between the lesser of the two evils. Mr. Decker said that for the last sixty years, the US has been doing a national survey of American voters, in which the Americans are asked a simple question: Do you think that your children will be better off than you are? And for the first time in sixty years, Americans have answered negatively in a majority, which is a significant change of attitude. This election is a mirror to the growing negativity and pessimism in the American society.

He highlighted that in the US, hate does drive as much votes as admiration. The two Obama elections were historically high in terms of voter turnout, which was closer to sixty per cent. However, in this election, because of the unpopularity of both the candidates, the US will experience a significant low voter turnout, probably below fifty per cent. Another important thing to keep in mind is the mood of the Americans and the populism that is going on right now in the US. However, nobody expected Bernie Sander to become the power that he is; certainly not the Democratic Party, its leaders or the public.

Mr. Decker said that it is interesting to know that the American public tends to get tired. In 2008, when Bush was at his least popularity, somewhere around 32 or 35 per cent and at the height of economic crisis, sixty three per cent of Americans were of the view that the US is on the wrong track. That poll in return confirmed that Barack Obama will win. What is confusing this time is that seventy per cent of the Americans think that the US is in a terrible shape.

Mr. Decker further explained that in the US, we like to elect Governors and Vice Presidents to the presidency. Senator Obama was the first sitting member of the Congress to be elected as the President since John F. Kennedy. The last three presidents that the US elected were under the age of sixty. However, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are seventy years old and will be the oldest presidents to be ever elected. This is interesting, because since 1992, Americans have really changed their mind to elect someone younger.

Explaining about the election 2016 candidates, Mr. Decker said that there were originally 17 Republican candidates, incredibly well-experienced and aged. Donald Trump was the loudest

most voice on the trail, and he ended up winning the nomination. What Republicans thought of a fabulous field of candidates turned out to be a failure, and Donald Trump ended up winning.

Mr. Decker also highlighted that in comparison to other democracies, the US has a two-party system, and it's not by law, it's just the way it has been, and it is not going to change anytime soon. Secondly, the political parties in the US are weak and do not have the power to nominate a person, it is done through votes.

While talking about the candidates, Mr. Decker said that all the presidential candidates are different from each other. Donald Trump likes to brag about the money he has made over the years, whereas, Bernie Sanders is an absolute socialist. They are not the same people in their ideology. As far as Hillary Clinton is concerned, there won't be any noteworthy change. And with Hillary in office, the whole Asia pivot policy will be on a back track. She has a much more natural affinity with the European allies and NATO. There will be a significant shift back to working with the NATO and European allies.

He was also of the view that Americans do not care about foreign policy especially during election time. They care about national security and national issues. Whatever foreign policy issues the candidates want to talk would be framed in the language of national security. Similarly, most of the Americans vote for the candidates keeping in mind what they will do for the economy of the country. The choice will not be made on foreign policy issues. The elections in 2004 were unique because they were completely a national security driven elections, as they were the first elections after 9/11 and the US had invaded Afghanistan and Iraq by then. But this time, it's going to be about the economy.

Concluding his remarks, Mr. Decker highlighted that there will be three main policy issues which will come up and will be fairly significant; Firstly China. China is always a foreign policy issue in the election, not because of the foreign policy reasons but because of the economy. Second is Russia. Russia really put itself in the elections when it hacked into the democratic national security emails which will make it an important campaign issue. Third is ISIS, which will be the most significant issue.

Mr. Decker's comments were followed by a series of remarks and questions by the participants. Responding to questions Mr. Decker said that the US elections are driven by money. If a candidate doesn't have enough money, it means that he cannot get media attention; and in this regard, Bernie Sanders was very good. He inspired a dedicated group of young people, and he was very good at getting donations. The strategy he adopted was completely different from that of Hillary Clinton. Despite getting hundreds and thousands of dollars in donations through fund raisers, Bernie Sanders turned towards the internet and other modes of communications and

interaction for funds and donations. And as a result, he outraised Hillary Clinton beginning in February till the end of their primary campaign.

While responding to another question regarding Donald Trump as a running candidate for the presidential elections, Mr. Decker said that there hasn't been any other outside candidate with the kind of recognition and fame than Trump. Hence, it will be unfair to compare Donald Trump with any other outside candidate who has no affiliation with politics in the US or any background in politics of the US.

Answering another question, Mr. Decker said that unlike President Obama, Hillary Clinton does not have affinity with the Asia Pacific. In fact, she has a lot more dislike towards China. On the contrary, she has greater affinity for the US historical allies. Hillary Clinton's policy towards the South China Sea is going to be more aggressive whilst supporting the Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan while pursuing a war or words with China. He also said that Hillary's commitment to Pakistan will be more strategic in nature and more dependent on security calculus. And there are chances that US relationship with Pakistan will be more stable under Hillary as compared to President Obama. On the other hand, Donald Trump has no trust in allies. He will choose allies according to the need of time and circumstances; he does not trust historical allies. Donald Trump has no appetite for supporting allies when he does not see an interest.

Responding to another question, Mr. Decker remarked that there has not been a single coherent US foreign policy since the end of the Cold War which was a unique time in the US history. Part of this is due to the design of our system. Today, the US has way too many interests to be specific about its policies. There is no board room where everybody agrees on a single coherent foreign policy. Also, another important thing to keep in mind is that it's not only the Democrats or the Republicans against each other, it's also the several branches of the government. So, it's the President fighting with the Congress, at the same time there is huge difference of opinion within the Obama Administration.

At the end, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI thanked the speaker for his valuable time and informative remarks and the participants for their participation.