



**INSTITUTE OF
STRATEGIC STUDIES**

web: www.issi.org.pk
phone: +92-920-4423, 24
fax: +92-920-4658

Report- In-House Discussion

with

“United Kingdom Media Delegation”

February 27, 2017



Compiled by: Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan

Edited by: Najam Rafique

Pictures of the Event



In-House Discussion

“Discussion between United Kingdom Media Delegation and Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) Experts”

The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a discussion at its premises for the UK media delegation visiting Pakistan from February 26 till March 05, 2017. The meeting took place on February 27, 2017 at 1000 hours and lasted for one a half hour.

The UK media delegation consisted of Mr. Owen Bennett Jones (BBC), Mr. Peter Osborne (The Spectator) and Mr. Colin Freeman (The Telegraph). 6 members of ISSI's research staff also participated in the discussion. All the researchers were experts in their particular fields. ISSI team was headed by Director Research Mr. Najam Rafique (expert on America, Peace and Conflict and Security and Strategy), Mr. Malik Qasim Mustafa (expert on Nuclear Issues, and Arms Control & Disarmament), Ms. Amina Khan (expert on Afghanistan and FATA), Mr. Asadullah Khan (expert on Radicalisation, Anti-Terrorism and Extremism), Mr. Faisal (expert on CPEC), Dr. Talat Farooq (Editor and expert on South Asia and Indo-Pak relations) and Mr. Taimur Khan (Media Co-ordinator and works on Russia, SCO and CIS).

The meeting started with Mr. Najam giving an overall analysis of regional situation surrounding Pakistan. He elaborate on the relations with different regional states including China, Iran Afghanistan and India., as well as relations with the US.

Below are the points presented by ISSI experts in response to questions put forward by the UK media delegation regarding topics outlined above:

Dr. Talat:

1. US-Pakistan has always had a securitized relationship. I don't think the nature of relations is going to change any time soon...the Trump administration will remain interested in Pakistan in view of its nuclear weapons, CPEC and counter-terrorism. I don't see them focusing on the civil society or democracy.
2. The Kashmir dispute is a British legacy. India-Pakistan hostility is at the heart of all security issues in our part of the world. The Kashmir dispute must be resolved. The international community needs to do the needful and Britain should take the lead in this regard.
3. Zarb-i-Azb could be all the more successful if NAP was implemented in letter and spirit and if Kabul and the US cooperated with the Pakistan military in disrupting and destroying sanctuaries of militants who have fled North Waziristan after the operation was launched in 2014.
4. It is time for Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US to resolve the issue of cross-border terrorism.

Mr. Mohammad Faisal:

1. In recent years military's influence in decision-making has grown. At the same time PM Nawaz Sharif has been successful in retiring two army-chiefs on completion of their terms. An indication that civilian side has made a little progress in terms of gaining more space in the decision-making.
2. Military's role in on-going campaign against counter-terrorism has expanded largely due to the reluctance of PM Sharif to provide direction to the national campaign as a war-time Prime Minister.
3. PM Sharif was reluctant to authorize a Para-military operation in Punjab previously. With the change of military leadership PML-N have agreed on a comprehensive paramilitary operation in Punjab.
4. Though speculation was intense that General (R) Sharif would assume command of a 34-nation Muslim armies, but the probability of it actually happening is very low. Defense minister and other government officials, though, confirmed that talks had taken place about such a possibility.
5. Debate on FATA reforms has boiled down to following two options: merger with KP province or making FATA a separate province. There are arguments in favor of both propositions. Also, talks are underway for financing these reforms. Federal government has proposed allocating 3 percent from the NFC award for development and reforms. Concurrence from other provinces is required before making public these reforms.

Mr. Asadullah Khan:

1. Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad has been launched across the entire country. It is aimed at indiscriminately eliminating residual threat of terrorism and consolidating gains of operations made thus far and further ensuring the security of borders. All security and law enforcement agencies will continue to actively participate to eliminate the menace of terrorism from Pakistan.
2. The efforts entail conduct of Broad Spectrum Security/Counter Terrorism operations by Rangers in Punjab. Focus is more effective border security management. Country-wide de-weaponisation and explosive control are additional cardinals of the effort, including pursuance of National Action Plan (NAP).
3. NAP is an on-going process. It is being implemented by the government slowly and gradually. Perceptions that it is being ignored by the government are wrong. Many parts are majorly implemented, e.g. Ban on hate speech, glorification of terrorist organizations etc.
4. A considerable number of points are ignored which have negatively affected government's efforts to fight terrorism.

5. Regarding the success of Operation Zarb-i-Azb, it has been 90% successful and that's why since 2012 till 2016 the fatalities in terror incidents have fallen by 50%. (For exact figures, an issue brief was also handed to the delegation).
6. However, things are moving in the positive direction and more political will is needed to deal with core issues.

Ms. Amina Khan:

1. Afghanistan has always had a negative attitude towards Pakistan. Relationship between the two has been a roller-coaster ride since the time of Pakistan's independence. Afghanistan voted against Pakistan's entry into the UN and every successive government of Afghanistan has refused to accept the Durand Line as the official border between the two countries.
2. The current Afghan government has subjected to blame-game against Pakistan.
3. Despite of Pakistan's efforts to establish good, cordial relations with Afghanistan, the latter has always tried to disrupt progress and let its land be used by terrorist against Pakistan.
4. Pakistan has done its part in eradicating terrorism from the country but due to the non-serious attitude of the Afghan government and the hidden agenda of its military and intelligence establishment, the menace of terrorism is still prevailing in the region and regional countries are suffering because of it.
5. Pakistan is also playing its part to bring political stability in Afghanistan by convincing the Afghan Taliban to return to the negotiating table with the Afghan government.
6. Pakistan has also been very accommodating and understanding with regards to the expatriation of the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and has extended the deadline for the 4th time till December 2017.
7. As far as fencing the Pak-Afghan border is concerned, that is being done to counter and contain terrorism and not to choke Afghanistan. Pakistan wants peace and stability in Afghanistan as it will be beneficial for the entire region. Pakistan has also extended Afghanistan the offer to be a part of CPEC.