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Report- In-House Meeting
CISS-ISSI Bilateral Dialogue

September 11, 2017



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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a bilateral dialogue with a 5-member Chinese delegation from China Institute of International Strategic Studies (CIISS) on September 11, 2017. The dialogue is part of annual interaction between the two institutes.

The members of the Chinese delegation included Major General (Retd) Zhao Ning, Vice Chairman of CIISS and former Defense Attache to Australia and the US; Major General (Retd) Li Mengyan, Senior Advisor of CISS and former Defense Attache to Pakistan; Sr. Col (Retd) Jing Chunlu, Senior Research Fellow CIISS; Mr. Li Zuyang, Assistant Research Fellow CIISS; and Mr. Dou Erli, Assistant Research Fellow CIISS.

Major General Chen Wenrong, Military Air and Naval Attaché of China to Pakistan, Sr. Col. Jiang Qingshi, Deputy Military, Naval and Air Force Attache, and Col. Zhang Wencheng also attended the dialogue.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI, welcomed the delegation and stated that both Pakistan and China have strong strategic and political ties, but these had been lacking in the economic field. He said that now, with the initiation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), economic ties have been given a boost as well. Ambassador Mahmood emphasized that Pakistan values its relationship with China, and jointly, both countries can cope up with challenges like terrorism and negative influence of some external threats.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood briefed the delegation on the situation in Afghanistan. He pointed out that according to a report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the state of development in Afghanistan is even worse than it was in 2001. Growing insurgencies by the terrorist forces get stronger with each passing day, as now more than 40% territory has been occupied by them. The Afghan government remains divided on the matter of holding dialogue with the Taliban. Being an immediate neighbour, the instability across the border in Afghanistan is a matter of grave concern for Pakistan. It has not only created security threats for Pakistan, but has also impacted our bilateral ties. The mutual distrust and blame-game being played out has further exacerbated the situation. Border skirmishes, repatriation of the Afghan refugees and conflicting approaches towards the execution of the peace process are issues that worsen the relations between both countries. The underlying problem here is the unreal and exaggerated expectations that the stakeholders in Afghanistan pin on the Pakistani government and its security forces. This brings to light the recent announcement of President

Trump's new Afghan policy in which Pakistan's role in Afghanistan has been grossly overlooked. However, the reprimanding manner of Trump's statements is not the only troubling factor of this new US strategy. The US government has stressed, with much solemnity, the need for India's engagement in Afghanistan. This enthused level of encouragement for Indian interference by the United States has implications for regional countries, especially for Pakistan and China.

Ms. Mahrukh Khan, Research Fellow ISSI gave a presentation on US President Trump's policy towards South Asia. She said that rather than being altruistic, Trump's political, economic and strategic interests in South Asia reflect a transactional approach. She brought forward the main points of his new US Afghan strategy. In this strategy, she said, President Trump has called for an increase in troops, but he has failed to mention about the kind of troops that will be deployed. This increase in troops will draw a negative shadow on the Afghan peace process, and the Taliban will react more negatively to it. The new strategy will also be dictated on the ground, and not arbitrary time tables. However, she said that it will hardly be capable of changing facts on the ground in Afghanistan, because we have seen an immense number of NATO and American forces fighting the Taliban, and which have not been able to bring any significant change. Furthermore, the Afghanistan strategy is now officially known inside the National Security Council as South Asia strategy. It points to a more regional approach that Trump wants to take in Afghanistan. In this regard, she pointed out, we see a growing US tilt towards India and its larger stake in Afghanistan which will come at the expense of Pakistan. The US desires to increase its role through economic funding. India, she said, is not a direct stakeholder in the Afghan peace process since it has on borders with it. On the other hand, Pakistan is a direct stakeholder in this process, and the US should consider that as an important factor.

She also said that Pakistan has been portrayed as a complicated counter-terrorism partner and post Trump, relations between Pakistan and the US have not been quite ideal. Apart from this, she pointed out that the recent Afghan policy puts forward a larger US agenda in the region and its future attitude in South Asia, and more importantly, with Pakistan, India, and China. Moreover, Washington has now placed Pakistan "on notice" for supporting the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network. She said that regardless of all the negative statements being made against Pakistan and threats to put it under sanctions, there is still some confusion, not exactly fear, but apprehension in the US regarding the road Pakistan will take if the US completely gets off its back. Pakistan, on the other hand, has showed its displeasure quite openly and called the

US allegations as false narratives. Pakistan's foreign minister also cancelled his visit to the US. Now, there is a constant debate in the US policy circles that isolating Pakistan could unsettle the US relationship with Islamabad and push it closer to Russia, and Iran, thus further complicating Washington's presence in the region.

Expressing his views on Trump's policy, Maj. Gen. Zhao Ning, Vice Chairman, CISS was of the opinion that whereas President Obama had tried to exit from Afghanistan, Trump's new strategy indicates that he wants to restart the war. President Trump's strategy means that from now on the Afghan war is going to be Trump's war. He substantiated this assessment by quoting Trump: "We are not nation-building again. We are killing terrorists." Therefore, Maj. Gen. Ning elaborated, Trump's strategy suggests that they only want to crush various terror groups. They only have military objectives, and there is no political aspect to it. He said that the US is trying to redefine its alliances to a larger extent in Afghanistan by blaming Pakistan, which according to Maj. Gen. Ning, is an important player in ending turmoil and chaos in Afghanistan. Trump's strategy of blaming Pakistan and reduced partnership with it is only to increase the US partnership with India. This is a part of a larger strategy of the United States in Afghanistan, as they want India to play a bigger role in their so-called 'Indo-Pacific strategy'. Currently, he said that the US has an Asia-Pacific strategy in which Japan and Australia are northern and southern anchors respectively. They want India and Australia to be anchors in their 'Indo-Pacific strategy'. Trump and the American government do not know the essence of this war. The real enemy is not the Taliban or ISIS or any other terrorist group, but in fact the Afghans themselves who despise foreign occupation. American troops are considered to be an occupation army by the local Afghan population. This is the reason that the former Soviet Union failed here, and this is also precisely why the US troops have failed for the past 16 years. This is the American dilemma in Afghanistan. He was of the opinion that even with more than 100,000 troops, the US was not able to eradicate the terrorist groups in the past, then how can they be expected to do so with an even smaller number of troops? He pointed out that Trump has given more authority to his frontline commanders and generals in Afghanistan and in South China Sea as well, and who will now be at the fore front in carrying out larger combat operations in Afghanistan? Maj. Gen. Ning was of the opinion that the Trump administration is not happy with the present government in Afghanistan as well. Trump's exact words about this were, he quoted: "Our support is not a blank cheque ... Our patience is not unlimited. We will keep our eyes wide open."

Mr. Najam Rafique, Director Americas and Research was of the opinion that President Trump's philosophy thrives on the perpetuation of war. He reinforced General Zhao's comments about the new American policy in Afghanistan as extending the conflict instead of making any sincere effort to resolve it. Specifically referring to Trump's emphasis on granting India a bigger role in the on-going fight Afghanistan, Mr. Najam stressed that such a policy initiative pits neighbour against neighbour, and Afghanistan would be a testing ground for using India as a strategic partner in the long run, not just in that country, but elsewhere in the larger Indo-Pacific region as pointed out by Maj. Gen. Ning. This is indeed a dangerous game being played by President Trump and his administration. However, he pointed out that unlike Trump's military approach to deal with the conflict in Afghanistan, the regional countries have adopted a more balanced strategy in terms of working towards finding a collaborative regional approach for peace in Afghanistan. He praised China's peaceful dialogue with India to resolve the Sino-Indian impasse at Dokhlam.

Ms. Mahwish Hafeez, Research Fellow ISSI gave an assessment about India's strategic intentions. Giving a brief introduction of India as a country, she then spoke about its regional and global ambitions. She said that being a multi-religious society, India was never at peace and incidents of communal violence took place quite often. But the level of violence since Modi came to power is unprecedented. Hindu hardliners have attacked Muslims, as well as Christians. Even the Sikh community and Dalits have also not been spared. She said that within the region, India has problems with almost all its neighbours. All countries see it as a regional 'hegemon' or trying to act as a big brother. Pakistan has always challenged the hegemony of India and both the countries share complicated relations. Of all the issues, the issue of Kashmir is a major bone of contention between India and Pakistan, and it is referred to as the nuclear flashpoint in South Asia. Last year, Jammu and Kashmir witnessed an outburst of protests following the killing of a freedom fighter Burhan Wani. The protesters were brutally countered with pellet guns and thousands lost their lives during this mayhem.

Since Modi's reign, India has openly expressed its intention to isolate Pakistan in the international community. Modi has also threatened to block the waters of the rivers flowing into Pakistan and has been talking about revoking the Indus Water Treaty. She said that SAARC is also a victim of Indo-Pak rivalry. India has global ambitions outside the region, and is buying all sorts of arms from all available resources, with eyes on countering both China and Pakistan.

India's growing relations with the US also play a part in its global aspirations. President Trump's policy was all praise for India to the extent of inviting India to play a greater role in Afghanistan. With this support from the US, India now feels emboldened in dealing with its neighbours, and Indian reaction in Doklam area is a testimony to it. Indian aggression in the South China Sea also speaks about the role and encouragement given to India by the US. India is also trying to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. In conclusion, she said that having ambitions of being a regional hegemon and a global power, India cannot and should not ignore its immediate neighbours. Without settling its disputes with its neighbours, the 'Indian Dream' of becoming the world leader will always remain elusive.

Mr. Asadullah Khan, Research Fellow ISSI briefed the delegation on the counter-terrorism situation in South Asia. He highlighted Pakistan's contribution to counter-terrorism. He informed the delegation that Pakistan is contributing to counter-terrorism in two ways: regional and the national level. On a regional level, Pakistan is an active and important member of Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building in Asia (CICA). The Heart of Asia-Istanbul process is another forum where Pakistan is contributing actively. In the Heart of Asia 6th Ministerial Meeting in Amritsar in December 2016, member states identified terrorism, extremism, sectarianism, radicalization, separatism and the linkages between them. He also said that in the Heart of Asia-Istanbul process, Afghanistan has been put as the central problem and the member states try to cooperate on the Afghanistan issue. China has appreciated how Pakistan has handled the Afghan refugees and how swiftly and smoothly they have been sent back to their native lands. The Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism (QCCM) is another important new forum. The second meeting of this forum was fruitful as Pakistan's Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and his Afghan counterpart agreed to form a joint working group on terrorism. On internal security dynamics and measures taken by Pakistan, he said that to cope with challenges, Pakistan is following a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy combined with the use of hard power followed by soft power. Following this strategy, Pakistan has been successful in achieving nearly 45% reduction in violence-related activities in 2016. In fact, since 2014, there has been an overall reduction of nearly 66% in such activities. This achievement is a result of three primary factors: the National Action Plan (NAP); and the two military operations *Zarb-e-Azb and Raddul-Fassad*.

In June 2015, Pakistan Army launched *Zarb-e-Azb* to strike against all extremists and finish of terrorist activities in the FATA area of Pakistan. This includes destroying or curtailing groups such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Al-Qaeda. He said that China has appreciated Pakistan's counter-terrorisms efforts, particularly *Zarb-e- Azb* as China itself faces serious threats from ETIM. According to reports made public in 2016, during *Zarb e Azb*, more than 150 ETIM militants have been killed in North Waziristan and more than 66 militants of this group have been handed over to China. He further said that the NAP is now developing the soft power side to curtail the menace of terrorism. The Plan was drafted after the Army Public School Peshawar attack on December 16, 2014. The successes of NAP include establishment of counter-terrorism financing units, reorganizing of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NAFTA), FATA action plan, cyber security bill and registration of religious seminaries.

He went on to say that *Raddul-Fassad* is another effort by Pakistani forces in counter terrorism. The two military operations aim at the elimination of the threat of terrorism, consolidating the gains of these operation made so far, and further ensuring the security of borders. The operations focus on more effective border security management. Operation *Raddul-Fassad* has been launched uniformly all across the country to aid law enforcement agencies to meet their objectives effectively. The recently concluded military operation *Khyber Four* is another success story of Pakistan. In conclusion, he said that in any region of the world, the lifeline of the nation is determined by hard power. The world has witnessed how the West has used a combination of hard and soft power. In case of Pakistan, this blend of both is yet to be determined and that will be the turning point when we will find out which blend of power will be effective for Pakistan.

Following the briefing by ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood invited the Chinese delegation to apprise the research faculty of the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Sr. Col. (Retd) Jing Chunlu, Senior Research Fellow from CISS said that the Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK) believes that enhancement of nuclear capabilities is its only safe option in the region, especially with Trump's fiery rhetoric of 'raining fire and fury upon North Korea'. He was of the opinion that the possibility of physical conflict breaking out in that region is quite thin. China believes that the United States should reduce hostility towards North Korea as it is only using the nuclear weapons' threat as a bargaining chip for starting negotiations with the United States on

the matter of sanctions. Col. Chunlu emphasized that the US itself is the key to solving this conflict. China believes that peace and stability in the region are in everyone's best interest.

When inquired about the prospects of a dialogue with North Korea, the Colonel said that China encourages peaceful negotiations, but the stalemate is likely to continue for now. However, he conveyed that China's goal is not to cripple North Korea's economy by imposing harsh sanctions, but to dissuade it from its programmes of missile and nuclear proliferation.