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Report- In-House Meeting
Indonesian Media Delegation

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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a 6-member Indonesian Media Delegation on November 6, 2017. The members of the Indonesian delegation included Mr. Imanuddin Razak, Editor, Jakarta Post; Mr. Arif Zulkifli, Editor-in-Chief, Tempo Magazine; Ms. Devi Monica Lumannauw, TV anchor and Reporter, TVRI; Mrs. Agustina Elok Dyah Messwati, Senior Journalist, Kompas; Mrs. Andini Weningtyas Effendi, Anchor and Reporter, Metro TV; and Mr. Irvan Januari, Cameraman, Metro TV.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI, welcomed the delegation and stated that both Pakistan and Indonesia have solid bilateral relations. Indonesia always extended its full support to Pakistan even in the difficult times like the 1965 war with India. Over the years, this relationship has sustained and resulted into mutual cooperation. Both countries are members of the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Highlighting the main contours of Pakistan's "Look East Policy", he said that Pakistan emphasizes on developing close ties with the Southeast Asian countries, particularly Indonesia. He expressed his sincere gratitude towards the Republic of Indonesia for supporting Pakistan's sectoral partnership with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its membership of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Deliberating on the current status of Pakistan-Indonesia bilateral ties, he stated that relationship between the two countries is improving, particularly in the trade sector. Indonesia has become Pakistan's 8th largest trading partner. Much more can be done to enhance these ties by developing several mechanisms and joint commissions. Both countries can initiate a joint anti-terrorism effort at the international level. Pakistan is looking forward to ever increasing and strengthening ties with Indonesia.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood also briefed the delegation about the existing dynamics of South Asian region. He said that the region is greatly affected by the negative changes at international level, but there are also troubles within the region like Pakistan-India conflict, Pakistan-Iran and Pakistan-Afghan relations. On the positive side, a mega project of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an assurance of development, integration and connectivity not only between China and Pakistan, but also for the entire region. Reflecting on the foreign policy of Pakistan,

he outlined the two interconnected guiding principles which govern Pakistan`s policies: namely economic development and peaceful neighborhood.

Mr. Imanuddin Razak thanked the Institute for hosting the delegation and introduced his colleagues. He said that this delegation is open to learning about international relations, China, Unites States (US) and India from Pakistan.

Ms. Amina Khan, Senior Research Fellow, ISSI briefed the delegation on the dynamics of Afghanistan. She said that the overall situation in Afghanistan has consistently deteriorated. There is a considerable increase in number of causalities besides the growing Taliban insurgency. Unfortunately, along with the bad situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan-Afghan relations have also been following a downward trajectory, particularly since 2014 and onwards whereby both countries have been engulfed in a continuous blame game. This is primarily due to unfulfilled expectations on both sides, counter-terrorism differences, failure of the Afghan peace process, and the incidences at the border which have resulted in causalities on both sides. Recently, Pakistan has been trying to reach out to Afghanistan to ensure its support for a stable Afghanistan, and also to the peace process. But unfortunately, there is a lot of mistrust, and the government of national unity had not been very welcoming in this regard. Recently, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) of Pakistan, General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited Kabul in an effort to restore ties and developments over this visit were positive, but unfortunately, the Afghan President has reverted back to the blame game.

Pakistan, she told the delegation, has supported the Afghan-led peace process. Pakistan repeatedly advised that the government of Afghanistan should also include the Afghan Taliban in the peace efforts. In all the previous processes, the Afghan Taliban were not included except the Murree Peace Process which had been initiated by Pakistan. If all other stakeholders are not willing to include the most important component of the peace process, there can be no way forward. Still, Kabul blames Pakistan for the fate of the peace process. The Afghan government is itself divided on the issue as many sections within the fragile government of National Unity openly opposed talks with the Taliban. Moreover, several heads of the National Directorate of Security are also not willing to share power with them and resigned on this particular issue.

Expressing her views on the role of regional countries, she said that for the first time in history, every country is favoring a comprehensive regional approach and are also putting emphasis on including the Afghan Taliban in the peace process. Before this, countries like Pakistan, Iran and Russia always had opposing views on the issue. Pakistan also adopted a regional approach, and it has especially been trying to collaborate with Iran. Similarly, Russia and China are very proactive in Afghanistan. Trump's new South Asian Policy and common threat of ISIS in the region are the motivating factors behind this new consensus.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI endorsed Ms. Amina's views by saying that the situation in Afghanistan is going downhill, and the Afghan government is still reluctant to deal with the Taliban on an equal footing. Pakistan and other regional countries believe that only national reconciliation which includes the Afghan Taliban will be successful. Yet, there is no progress in resuming the peace talks so far. Another factor which is stagnating Pakistan-Afghan relations is the growing Indian influence in Afghanistan because the present Afghan government is cozying up to India. He said that Indian activities in Afghanistan are risky especially for Baluchistan. Pakistan has stressed that it have no issue with India-Afghanistan trade relations, but when it comes to military cooperation between India and Afghanistan, it is jeopardizing the national security of Pakistan. Afghanistan should be mindful of Pakistan's security apprehensions. It also applies to the US since it also talks about one side of the picture and does not take into account the security concerns of Pakistan. So long as Pakistan's security concerns and Taliban's opposition in the national setup lies, there is no hope for peace and security coming to Afghanistan any time soon.

On a question related to the Afghan Taliban's safe havens in Pakistan, Ms. Amina said that initially when President Ghani came into power, Pakistan decided to take a back seat position because of its previous recognition of Afghan Taliban and only supported the peace process. Later, on the insistence of the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Pakistan used its influence with Taliban and brought them on the negotiating table, but this failed. So as to address the issue of safe havens, the political government and armed forces of Pakistan jointly took several initiatives for the first time in the history to regulate the Pakistan-Afghan border. At the initial level, Pakistan fenced 48 km of the Durand Line and made the use of passport/legal documents mandatory. Pakistan achieved huge success in this respect and terrorists on the Pakistan's side of

border reduced considerably. The Afghan government also accepted that most of the terrorists have now shifted back to Afghanistan. In addition, there is an ambiguity in the stance of the Afghan government. It blames Pakistan for supporting terrorists, but when Pakistan took border initiatives to prevent the movement of the militants along both sides of the border, the Afghan government opposed them because approximately 90% of the flow is coming from their side. Despite Pakistan's maximum efforts, the Afghan government has not taken a single initiative for border management.

Responding on the question by Mrs. Andini Weningtyas Effendi on other sources of terrorism besides the Afghan Taliban and ISIS in Pakistan, Ms. Amina said that at first Pakistan did have a home grown insurgency which was Tehreek-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Jamat-ul-Ahrar, but in the last 3 years, Pakistan has conducted successful military operations in Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA). The Afghan Taliban are now operating from Afghanistan mainly Nooristan, Kunar and certain areas of Nangarhar province. The government of Pakistan has given credible evidences to the Afghan government to take immediate actions against these groups. As a result of terrorist attacks by TTP and Jamat-ul-Ahrar earlier this year, Pakistan military carried out surgical strike against them across the border which was acknowledged by the Afghan government. Presently, ISIS itself is not operating from Pakistan, but there are certain smaller groups which have declared alliance with ISIS.

Answering a question on Pakistan's viewpoint about the role of China in the region, especially in regard to Afghanistan, she informed the delegation that China played an instrumental role in the entire peace process. China not only brought certain representatives of the Afghan Taliban on the negotiation table, but has also been contributing in quadrilateral and trilateral peace processes. Likewise, the Afghan government is also optimistic about China's role because of its neutrality.

Ms. Mahrukh Khan, Research Fellow ISSI briefed the delegation on the current situation of Pakistan-US relations under the Trump's administration, especially after the killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. She said that the operation against Osama bin Laden was an unfortunate event, but it has less to do with the current strategy of the Trump's administration towards Pakistan. Recent US strategy towards Pakistan is now under the umbrella of broader South Asian Strategy in general, and the Afghan strategy in particular. It is currently transactional or

condition based. The Trump Administration is accusing Iran and Russia of supporting the Afghan Taliban. It is also giving a role to India in Afghanistan and continuously accusing Pakistan of providing safe havens to terrorists. Pakistan has rejected these allegations and despite its limited military resources, Pakistan has been more successful in fighting terrorism in its own country than the US has been in Afghanistan for more than a decade. During the recent exchange of visits between the US and Pakistan, Pakistan abundantly made it clear to the US that its narrative of “Do More” for its war in Afghanistan is wrong. US expectation from Pakistan should be limited because Pakistan is not going to ignore its own national interests in the region.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI endorsed Ms. Mahrukh`s views by saying that instead of supporting peaceful reconciliation and negotiations, the Trump`s administration opted for the military approach which had already failed.

Mr. Najam Rafique, Director Americas/ Research ISSI, clarified that the Taliban are not a monolithic entity and the Afghan Taliban must be distinguished from other Taliban groups like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan . The Afghan Taliban are not terrorists and in fact they are in a war of "liberation" for their country from occupying foreign forces. They are seeking a political role in Afghanistan and have an entirely different agenda than that of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). TTP was at one point based in Pakistan and the agenda of this particular group is to undo the state of Pakistan. They has been funded by the detractors of Pakistan, particularly India, which has now found a niche on the western borders of Afghanistan to open up a second front against Pakistan. India is now pursuing covert operations from the western border, along with putting military pressure on the eastern border with Pakistan. There are enough evidences to the fact that they are funding TTP operating from Afghanistan, as well as from the tribal regions inside Pakistan. Responding to the question on the geopolitical role of China, he said that China is playing a very positive role in terms of establishing peace and reconciliation within Afghanistan. It had hosted talks between the Afghan Taliban and the government, and was a part of the QCG process as well.

Ms. Mahwish Hafeez, Research Fellow ISSI briefed the delegation on the current situation of Pakistan-India relations under the Modi government. She stated that the bilateral relations have never been smooth. Both countries started a composite dialogue process in 2004 and identified 8

key areas of cooperation. However, since the multiple terrorist attacks in Mumbai this process is at halt. The current Modi administration adopted a muscular policy towards Pakistan. She said that till the issue of Kashmir is resolved according to the wishes of the Kashmiri people, the notion of peace in the region will remain elusive. She also highlighted the severe violation of human rights in Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IoJK) over the last seven decades by Indian forces. In 2016, in the protest of the Kashmiri people after the death of young Kashmir freedom fighter Burhan Wani, Indian forces used pellet guns to suppress the protesters which not only killed hundreds of Kashmiris, but also blinded thousands including women and children. India is violating the ceasefire along the LOC on a daily basis which has resulted in death of civilians and numerous security personals. Recently, the Modi government also threatened Pakistan of revoking the Indus Water Treaty. This irresponsible Indian behavior is devastating to the regional security. Pakistan has always demanded the resolution of outstanding issues through peaceful negotiations.

Sharing his views on the strong Indian lobby at the international level, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that international human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were denied access to IoK, but still they highlighted the Indian atrocities. The Chairman of the UN Human Rights Council also expressed his concern in this regard. Furthermore, Pakistan is doing its best to highlight these human rights violations at all international forums. Pakistan`s position is based on UN resolutions which provide the Kashmiri people their right of self-determination. It was India who took this issue to UN which prescribed a solution in the form of impartial plebiscite under UN auspices. Pakistan and India mutually accepted the solution, but later on India rejected it. Indian stance on Kashmir is confusing, on one hand it claimed Kashmir as its integral part, but on the other called it a disputed territory when it comes to CPEC.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood pointed out that Indonesia is not taking forthright position on Kashmir at international forums like OIC and UN as Pakistan expects it to do as a brotherly Islamic country. He said that whenever this issue was raised, Indonesia put some reservations on it. This is mainly due to the issue of Papua New Guinea. However, these two issue are poles apart from each other as Papua New Guinea is an issue of cessation and Kashmir is a disputed

territory. He impressed upon the delegation that in the spirit of Islamic solidarity and in support of the UN resolutions, Indonesia should openly support Pakistan's stance on Kashmir.

Responding to the question on the exchange and training of troops in the light of Moscow Peace Process, Ms. Amina clarified that this was just trilateral negotiations with the objective to resolve the Afghan crisis and it does not involve any military cooperation. Its recent round included all the Central Asian countries, Pakistan, Iran, India, Russia and China.

Answering the question on the ways in which China's One Belt One Road initiative will affect the South Asian region in general and Pakistan in particular, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood stated that China is a rising power and wants to emerge as a peaceful economic power. Unlike the US, its objective is to share the economic benefits with other countries and not to impose its decisions. CPEC is one of the six routes of China's One Belt One Road initiative which is all about cooperation, connectivity, integration, energy and infrastructure development, establishment of especial industrial zones, and most importantly, the development of the Gwadar Port. This project includes three types of projects; early harvest, medium term and long term. These project will contribute in the economic development of Pakistan, especially the rural areas. It will also help Pakistan in overcoming the electric power crunch. At the regional level, the Gwadar port will provide the shortest maritime trading route to China, Iran and Central Asian states.

Mr. Arif Zulkifli asked about the extent to which India is a contributing factor in the growing Pakistan-China relations. Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that initially, common enmity with India was the significant factor since China and Pakistan both were at war with India in 1962 and 1965 respectively. However, the relationship broadened over time and got its own momentum, content and philosophy. Pakistan- China relations are about interdependent economic cooperation, not about anti-India sentiments. India will always remain a factor, but not the most important factor. The growing US-India cooperation in South Asia and Indo-Pacific region also contributed to the growing relations of China with Russia, Iran and Pakistan. India is extending its naval reach to Pacific and closer interaction with Japan, Vietnam, Australia and New Zealand. China is clearly not liking this because it heavily relies on these maritime trading routes.

According to the Indonesian delegation, the views of Indonesia are opposite to those of Pakistan on the role of China in their respective regions and developments over the time will decide the course of China-Indonesia relations.

Responding to a query on Indonesian views on China-US competition in South East Asian region under Trump administration, Mrs. Andini Weningtyas Effendi said that US-China competition is not a new phenomenon and was there during the Obama Administration. The US needs Indonesia because of its geopolitical position and had business interests, but in terms of investment China is a bigger partner of Indonesia. China is culturally and socially more connected to Indonesia. In short, it's a win-win situation for Indonesia and getting benefits from both the US and China.