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*Report – In-House Meeting
with
Mr. Wajid Khan*

**“Member of the European Union
Parliament from United Kingdom”**

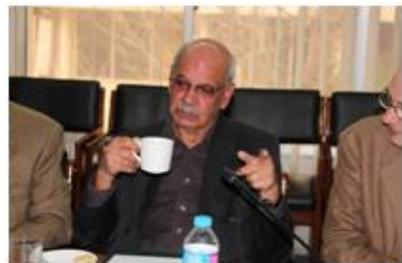
December 18, 2017



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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized an In-House Meeting with Mr. Wajid Khan, Member of the European Union (EU) Parliament from United Kingdom (UK) on December 18, 2017. Mr. Wajid Khan is a Member of the EU Parliament for the North West England European constituency since June 29, 2017 and a member of South Asia Committee.

In addition to the research faculty of ISSI, the group of intellectuals who attended the meeting included: Gen. (Retd.) Talat Masood; Ambassador Fauzia Nasreen, Head, Centre for Policy Studies, COMSATS; Gen. (Retd.) Asad Durrani; Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi; and Ambassador Ali Sarwar Naqvi, Executive Director, CISS.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI welcomed Mr. Wajid Khan and also expressed his gratitude to Mr. Wajid Khan for visiting the institute. He said that this meeting would be an interactive session to discuss the regional dynamics of South Asia and EU including the state of affairs in Afghanistan, Pakistan-India bilateral relations, Kashmir dispute, counter-terrorism initiatives by Pakistan, renewal of Pakistan's GSP Plus status, Brexit, and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Mr. Wajid Khan articulated his sentiments of honor and appreciation for Pakistan. He briefly informed the audience about his experience of traveling all over the world as an academician in the field of cultural anthropology before joining the EU Parliament. Describing his experience of dialogue with parliamentarians, leaders and diplomats, he said that the current situation of global politics is very bizarre and unpredictable. Advocating his passion for peace, he said that he supports the Kashmir cause not because he represents Pakistani and Kashmiri Diasporas of Manchester and Liverpool, but because it's the right thing to do.

Ms. Amina Khan, Senior Research Fellow ISSI briefed Mr. Wajid Khan on the current dynamics of Afghanistan. She said that the overall situation has consistently deteriorated. There is a marked increase in violence, insecurity and ineffective governance. Furthermore, she said that drug trade continued to escalate because of the Taliban insurgency. There were hopes that with the formation of the Government of National Unity (NUG) and subsequent takeover by the Afghan National Security Forces, the state of affairs will improve. However, the Taliban themselves have taken over more territory than the any other time during the last 16 years. The

question of uncertainty continues to revolve around the future of Afghanistan. In the last decade, various institutions were created for sustainability of the Afghan government.

Another major concern for the region, as well as for Pakistan is the growing presence of ISIS in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, along with the critical situation in Afghanistan, Pak-Afghan relations have also been following a downward trajectory, particularly since 2014 and onwards. This is primarily due to unfulfilled expectations on both sides, mistrust, constant blame game, counter-terrorism differences, failure of the peace process, repatriation of Afghan refugees and border dispute which resulted in casualties on both sides. Although a peace initiative was taken earlier this month between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the overall peace process is at a standstill. There is a great contradiction when it comes to the stance of the Afghan government. President Ghani at one time wanted to renew relations, but at the same time they reverse back to the blame game and hold Pakistan responsible for all the ills in Afghanistan.

Regarding the peace process, the position of the Afghan government is very vague. They want Pakistan to deliver the Taliban, and when Pakistan does like in the Murree Peace Process, they say that Pakistan is supporting the Taliban. President Ghani should focus on the contradiction among many elements within Afghanistan. In addition, many factions within the NUG are extremely against negotiations with the Afghan Taliban, let alone sharing the power at the center. In her opinion, the only way to peace in Afghanistan is through negotiations with the Afghan Taliban because they are the legitimate stakeholder. Nonetheless, the Afghan government will sooner or later recognize them just like the US. The Afghan government lacks national integration and reconciliation plan, and it will have to build a national narrative to accommodate the Afghan Taliban.

On Indian presence in Afghanistan, she stated that Trump's new policy which favors increased Indian role in Afghanistan is worrisome because India is not keen on bringing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table and when it comes to economic development, India is the largest donor. So, as long as India has a positive role in Afghanistan that is not detrimental to national interests of other neighbors including Pakistan, India is always welcome. However, there are proofs that Indian activities in Afghanistan are detrimental to the national security of Pakistan like support to Tehreek-e- Taliban Pakistan (TTP) based in Nooristan and Nangarhar provinces

in Afghanistan. Similarly, India is supporting the Baloch nationalist groups and arrest of Kulbhushan Yadav is a big example of this support.

Mr. Wajid Khan also supported and reiterated the fact that the only way to peace in Afghanistan is through negotiations. He also held that in his various diplomatic interaction, he highlighted the efforts and sacrifices of Pakistan in war against terrorism. Pakistan not only paid a huge financial cost, but also lost many human lives in suicide blasts. The number of suicide attacks has visibly decreased after military operations by Pakistan. However, he also expressed concerns on Trump`s allegation of “double game” and demand of “do more” from Pakistan.

Responding to this concern Ms. Amina Khan said that many officials of the Trump administration accepted the fact that Pakistan has successfully curbed the menace of terrorism, particularly in tribal areas. This fact is also acknowledged by the Afghan government that since the military operations majority of terrorists were pushed back into Afghanistan. In her opinion, Americans should also do more.

Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi said that as a nation and state, Pakistan want peace and cooperation with the US. The demand of “do more” is frustrating for Pakistan since all the efforts in Afghanistan brings us to nothing. Restating the importance of negotiations, he believed that military force can never bring peace to any place. All the structured efforts like Murree and Qatar talks were deliberately sabotaged by leaking the information about the death of Mullah Umar. Similarly, Mullah Mansoor was bombed exactly four days after the recommencement of quadrilateral talks that included Pakistan, China, Afghanistan and the US. He was of the view that the US is not genuinely interested in bringing peace in Afghanistan and keeping military bases in Afghanistan is the core objective of the US strategy. These bases are highly significant for keeping an eye on Pakistan, Iran, Russia and China. Another problem in Afghanistan which he highlighted was the absence of constituency based representation of President Ashraf Ghani. In his view, the survival of President Ghani`s regime depends on the pact with the US.

Gen. (Retd.) Talat Masood highlighted genuine ground realities of Afghanistan besides the US strategy. He believed that a crucial factor of geography has instigated a feeling of insecurity among the Afghans. Today, Afghanistan and its government is deeply divided and more than 50% of territory is administered by the Afghan Taliban. Afghans as a nation are independent

people and have resisted foreign occupation for centuries and are not willing to receive the US dictation. Moreover, India is taking full advantage of Afghanistan to create problems for Pakistan because this is the best way of paying the price back to Pakistan for the policies it pursued in Afghanistan against India. India enjoys full support of the Afghan government, and its intelligence agency, the NDS is especially greatly inclined towards India. Although Pakistan has strong support of other countries like China, but it is being pitched against India and the US in Afghanistan. So, it is in the vital interest of Pakistan to have stability and good relations with Afghanistan.

Ambassador Fauzia Nasreen again stressed on achieving stability in Afghanistan. She said that Pakistan has paid a huge social and economic cost for its fight against terrorism. She warned about the factor of growing war economy in Afghanistan. She said that it is also imperative to isolate the spoilers like warlords and drug traffickers who are benefiting from instability in Afghanistan and chaos along the border. She emphasized that without peace in Afghanistan the project of regional connectivity will not materialize.

Reflecting on the historical perspective of Pakistan-Afghan relations, Ambassador Ali Sarwar Naqvi said that the Kabul elite in Afghanistan has traditionally being hostile to Pakistan. This can be traced back to the establishment of Congress party in the Subcontinent and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's support to that party. Ambassador Naqvi believed that the US position on Afghanistan is based on Indian perceptions, with the core objective to root out terrorism and go after the Haqqani network. Pakistan is a significant regional player and he stressed that it should be seen as such. Nevertheless, Chinese and Russians realize this fact and Pakistan has been made a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) along with India.

Expressing his view on Pakistan-India relations, Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi said that the problem with India is much longer, deep-rooted and nowhere closer to resolution. In the light of present attitudes, there is no possibility of durable relations in future. As a result, both countries are paying the cost of this situation, but unfortunately the cost is always proportionally greater for a smaller country. India is a big country with small heart. Resolution is only possible if there will be dramatic leadership change or paradigm shift in India. But since Modi, the extremist ideology is taking roots in India. It is important for Pakistan that its relations with Afghanistan

remain stable. Problem with Afghanistan is not as deep-rooted as in case of India, but both started together at the time of independence. Afghanistan was the only country which voted against Pakistan's admission to the UN and it started the ball rolling. Pakistan must review its policies towards Afghanistan.

The US interests in Afghanistan are very unpredictable, destabilizing, and broader. The US military presence is considered very useful with respect to containing China. The US realized the fact that for rest of the 21st century the only major threat is China. China is already a global power and it needs lines of communication to enter the global market. Chinese economy will be the world's largest economy in the next 20 years, and so, One Belt and One Road (OBOR) and CPEC are substantial for China. An important fact to notice is that the US do not need resources of Central Asia and Afghanistan, what they need is an ability to deny to China. Similarly, US is denying through Israel in the Middle East.

In the context of this large game, Pakistan has realized that its future lies with China and all it needs is good relations with Afghanistan so that it would not provide a nest for US strategy in the region. Irrespective of the blame game, Pakistan has a power to decide what it don't need for itself and restore the peace initiative. Pakistan is a bigger country with a lot to offer. Pakistan's policy for Afghanistan should be similar to the Chinese policy towards Pakistan. If China can't provide what Pakistan needs, take it from US but remain friendly and don't allow the US to use Pakistan against China. Similarly, if Pakistan can't provide what Afghanistan needs, take it from India, but don't allow India to use the Afghan soil against Pakistan. With respect to India-Afghanistan transit trade, he believed that Pakistan should not stop it because India possess the capability to bypass Pakistan. Pakistan must revise the long-term Afghan policy in the context of the bigger picture that includes China, Russia, OBOR, CPEC and especially BRI which is specifically based on the concept of connectivity and non-hierarchical peace markets. On the contrary, the US model is based on the hierarchical model. In the new world order, the US wants China to be its partner, but a lesser partner. China and Russia are coming together not because of their growing friendship, but because of growing differences with the US. Pakistan needs to open its doors to China and Russia to counter the natural alliance of India and US.

Mr. Wajid Khan briefed the research faculty and guests on dynamics of Europe in general and UK in particular. Deliberating on Brexit, he said that its ideology was totally possessed by the Conservative Party. The main driver was the rise of UK under the government of David Cameron. The issues of domestic politics like increasing poverty, unequal distribution of financial resources and globalization among different communities in UK generated a massive frustration against the government. The Conservatives won the referendum with very narrow margin of 50:48. Brexit is the biggest challenge faced by UK since World War II and such high level fundamental constitutional change should not be done by simple majority. In this referendum, there were four geographical regions: Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland; and England. As a democratic country, UK has to recognize the referendum and trigger Article 50 which provide two year legal transition period to leave all the future trade relations. The whole transit process is slow because of the complex and multinational structure of EU and the history of problem between Ireland and Northern Ireland since the 18th century. This slowdown leads to the conclusion that the entire leave the EU campaign was based on propaganda and lies. The public was misinformed by the media and the campaign leaders. Currently, public polls are changing and 61% want to remain in the EU. There should be a referendum on the basis of true facts and figures.

UK is already not happy with its history because its decisions in 20th century caused many territorial disputes as a result of partition in the Subcontinent which are largely unresolved till date and Brexit will follow the same fate of bad decision in the coming future. Credibility and reputation of Britain is deteriorating day by day globally. As a Prime Minister of a divided country and political party, Ms. Theresa May is in an impossible situation. Brexit threatened the very survival of UK. If Ireland and Northern Ireland split, Scotland will go and only Wales will be there with England.

It is important for UK to complete negotiations till March 29, 2019. Recognizing UK as the driving force behind the establishment of EU and NATO, many European countries don't want UK to leave and are currently negotiating with enormous goodwill. In the domestic political landscape, the Labor Party changed its stance, but the Tory Party have no inclination to do so. Here, the Pakistani, Kashmiri, Indian and Bangladeshi Diaspora also showed an implicit racism by voting in favor of exit.

UK and Pakistan have an incredibly strong history and cultural connection. As a member of Commonwealth, Pakistan enjoys a distinctive position within British diplomatic and political circles. Britain want to see a strong and progressing Pakistan. Keeping in view the huge Pakistani and Kashmiri Diaspora, the Labor Party recently incorporated the Kashmiri`s right of self-determination in its 2017 Election Manifesto. The lobby of British MPs on Kashmir is getting larger and stronger. As a result of Brexit, Pakistan will lose the voices of 73 British MEPS in the EU Parliament on foreign policy issues like Kashmir dispute and trade agreement with EU.

With respect to the renewal of GSP Plus status for Pakistan in January 2018, he said that this GSP Plus status helped Pakistan to increase its exports by 28% and EU exports to Pakistan increased by 20%. EU puts great weight on human rights situation in its trade partnerships with other countries. India is unable to reach a trade agreement because of violation of minority rights and restricted access to Indian Occupied Kashmir. A strong Indian lobby in EU is trying to terminate the GSP Plus status of Pakistan on the basis of human rights violation. However, human rights condition in Pakistan improved a lot in recent times, but it`s not there where it should be as a country. EU holds a view that Pakistan`s political institutions needs to be strengthen and governance should be improved. Pakistan must address the sectarian differences and human rights issue in Baluchistan. Slow economic growth with political insecurity is a perfect recipe for disaster and downward spiral. Injustice and poverty is a dangerous combination which breeds extremism. In short, the fragile democracy, deteriorating law and order situation in addition to unsteady political state of affairs will contribute negatively to GSP Plus status.