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Report – Public Talk

“70 Years of Pakistan-Iran Relations and Future Prospects”

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Pictures of the Event



On the occasion of the 70 years of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Iran, the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad hosted a Public Talk on March 12, 2018 by the Foreign Minister Islamic Republic of Iran, H.E. Mr. Mohammad Javad Zarif. Other dignitaries at the talk included: H.E. Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Deputy Chairman, Planning commission; H.E. Mr. Mehdi Honardoost, Ambassador, Islamic Republic of Iran and Mr. Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director General (Afghanistan, Iran & Turkey), Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Chairman ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood opened the proceedings by warmly welcoming the Iranian Foreign Minister, Ambassador Mehdi Honardoost and the entire Iranian entourage. In his welcome remarks, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said, "The brotherly ties between Pakistan and Iran is an enduring reality. Pakistan shares with Iran geographical border and ties of common faith, culture and history. The centuries old fraternal bonds between the peoples of Pakistan and Iran predate the creation of Pakistan. In the pre-partition days, the Muslim League had mobilized relief assistance for the earthquake victims in the Iranian Sistan-Baluchistan. And the Muslim League under the Quaid-e-Azam had passed a resolution demanding of the Soviet Union to withdraw from the Iranian territories it had occupied.

These ties of mutual love and friendship further deepened after Pakistan gained independence. Iran was the first country to recognize independent Pakistan and, likewise, Pakistan was the first country that recognized the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979. Iran's ready support to Pakistan in its difficult times, particularly during the 1965 and 1971 wars and after natural disasters, is etched in the memory of the Pakistani nation. The two countries together with Turkey established RCD and its successor ECO and have been coordinating their policies in the framework of OIC, NAM, D-8 and the UN system, IAEA and UN Human Rights Council in particular.

Of course, occasionally there have been difficult phases causing strains in mutual relations, but generally it has been a bond of brotherhood informed by mutual trust, compassion and confidence. In my long diplomatic career, particularly during my Ambassadorial tenure in Tehran from 1994 to 1997, I personally witnessed the ebb and flow in this important relationship between Pakistan and Iran.

My tenure in Iran from 1994 to 1997 unfortunately coincided with a rough patch in our bilateral relations. For one, this period saw the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan which in spite of our two countries' common goal of promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan, pitted Pakistan and Iran on the opposing sides. Then there had been intermittent bloody sectarian incidents in Pakistan in which precious lives were lost. The border across Baluchistan has also been disturbed. And our bonhomie with Saudi Arabia and the United States starkly contrasted with Iran's antagonistic relations with those countries. This state of affairs naturally put severe strains on Pakistan-Iran relationship. It is a shining testimony to the resilience of the unbreakable bond between our two countries that their bilateral ties survived this violent buffeting.

How does the present situation differ from that obtaining in mid 1990s? The ouster of Taliban in Afghanistan has removed the main divisive issue. Henceforth, Pakistan and Iran, the two countries directly affected by the developments in Afghanistan, are jointly, and in harmony, working for peace, stability and prosperity of Afghanistan. It is in their interest, more than any other country, to help facilitate a peaceful and orderly transition in Afghanistan. The sectarian scourge has been largely contained. It is, in fact, more a part of terrorism, to counter which, both Pakistan and Iran have been making individual and collective efforts, and quite successfully so.

The occasionally disturbed Baluchistan border is owed to the activities of criminal elements of various kinds operating along the border. The existing border management mechanisms are being effectively utilized to meet this challenge with good results. Of course, we have to be alert to and guard against the nefarious activities by foreign inimical forces who aim to vitiate and undermine our friendly relationship. Pakistan's policy of not becoming party in any conflict between Muslim states and rather working to promote harmony among them is gaining understanding and recognition.

For well-known reasons, Pakistan and Iran's relations with the United States have followed different trajectories. However, Pakistan has never become party to any US designs against Iran. It cannot think of ever doing so. The position adopted by Pakistan in the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency(IAEA) on Iran's nuclear programme stands in contrast to the pro-US stance, say of India. Recognizing Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear technology in consonance with its NPT obligations, Pakistan welcomed the Joint

Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Recent global and regional developments, US aggressive stance towards Iran and Pakistan, and growing Indo-Israeli nexus, are impelling Pakistan and Iran to get closer still.

This trend comes at a time when a wave of economic integration is sweeping the region. I am referring to China's visionary Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in particular its flagship mega project CPEC, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. CPEC has opened up vast opportunities not only for accelerated development of Pakistan, but also for the entire region, including Iran, and even beyond. No wonder Iran has publicly indicated its interest in becoming part of this venture. ISSI recently organized an international conference highlighting prospects of trilateral cooperation among Pakistan, Iran and China.

Surely, the synergy between the economies of Pakistan and Iran generated by CPEC will help in overcoming the regrettable persistent deficit in their commercial ties and economic cooperation. As CPEC gathers steam and following the signing of the Banking and Payment Arrangement between the central banks of the two countries, there is no reason why we cannot achieve the \$5 billion target of bilateral trade. There is also no reason why the unduly long delayed Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project and enhanced import of electricity from Iran should not soon materialize.

Sometimes, unwarranted concerns are heard about Chabahar being a rival port to Gwadar. As you know, they have been declared as sister ports. But the mere declaration is not enough. Possible concrete areas of complementarity and inter-operability have to be identified. ISSI plans to hold a roundtable of experts on this subject. Meanwhile, Pakistan and Iran along with Turkey and other member states should strive to make the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) more relevant, effective and visible.

It is no wonder that, as evidenced by a poll, 76% of Pakistanis have favorable view of Iran, making Pakistan the most pro-Iran nation in the world. Indeed, the scintillating Pakistan-Iran friendship is a very precious relationship. Let us value it, guard it and further build upon it. This is the requirement of the day. This is the demand of our tested friendship. Moreover, it reflects the aspiration of the peoples of the two countries.”

H.E. Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission in his speech said, "It is indeed a matter of great honour and pleasure for me to attend this ceremony to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Iran. It is very kind and gracious of Dr. Javad Zarif to come personally to inaugurate this occasion because this is a year-long celebration that will include many activities to highlight and strengthen various elements in our relationship. As you all know very well, that relations between Iran and Pakistan are rooted in centuries of contact and not just post 1947 which are marked by common history, culture, religion, language and people-people exchanges. Actually this bond can truly be called civilizational because it was forged at a time when the bond between Persia and the Muslims of the subcontinent was very strong. The people of Pakistan attach great importance to the fact that when we gained independence, Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan and in May 1948, we established diplomatic relations. Soon after that, the two countries exchanged ambassadors. In the 1950s, the two brotherly countries signed a treaty of friendship to promote mutual harmony, progress and prosperity. High level exchanges became a regular feature of our bilateral relations and over the past seven decades, our two countries and people have stood by each other through thick and thin.

I want to emphasize that the people who have tried to create problems in this relationship are a very small minority. An overwhelming majority of people on both sides of the border have very warm feelings for each other and really believe in the destiny of this relationship. This is actually the strength of this relationship. The second dimension that we must keep in mind is that the Muslim world as a whole has been in turmoil. Today, if you look at the troubled parts in the world, most of them are in the Muslim world whether its Iraq, Syria or Yemen. It is a very tragic situation that Muslims are killing Muslims in these countries. The common objective of Iran and Pakistan, unity of the Muslim *Ummah*, bringing peace and prosperity to the Muslim *Ummah* are very important common objectives that they both must pursue through mutual cooperation and consultation. During my tenure at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I have had the closest working relationship with Mr. Javad and we have tried very hard to steer through different crises as we went along and to keep the relationship on a strong footing.

I think the glory of our civilizational links is a very good foundation on which to build this mutual relationship. Most of you are aware; the heart of diplomacy is the geo-economics and

therefore the strength of our relationship. It is very unfortunate that Iran was subjected to sanctions which also affected our economic links and now those sanctions are being lifted, I think this is an opportunity for us to deepen those links both by expanding trade, investment and connectivity through energy and other areas. This is why we are very happy that Mr. Zarif is accompanied by a very strong business delegation. Meetings will be held with them here and in Karachi and these are the important steps that we are taking so that this relationship is converted. We have the target of expanding our trade to \$5 billion and I hope that we get closer to it as we go along. Again, the people-people contacts remain strong and we need to improve our communication and transportation links of both road and sea. So, by strengthening economic links and people-to-people contacts, in the coming years we will have a very strong and fruitful relationship for the benefit of the people of the two sides. This visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister will go a long way in strengthening Pak-Iran ties.”

Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif after greeting old friends and expressing his pleasure to be a part of the august occasion, said, “For us in Iran our relations with Pakistan are not only political, we have probably the longest diplomatic relations between two countries spanning 70 years, but our relations between the two peoples are much deeper, which go back centuries, even millennia, and are rooted in our common history, culture, values and a kinship between two peoples of Iran and Pakistan that's unbreakable. Difficulties, ups and downs and political issues will never break the ties that exist between the peoples of Pakistan and Iran. Let me assure you that Iran will never do anything to harm Pakistan, and we are confident in Iran that Pakistan will never do anything to harm Iran and that is a lot of comfort for two neighbors to have so much confidence in each other, and in the attitudes towards one another.

Iran and Pakistan have been able to establish strong ties politically, we never forget that Pakistan has always been on our side during the times of difficulty and we know that our Pakistani brothers and sisters don't forget that Iran was at their side when they needed a friend, a neighbor and brother on their side. We move to establish even stronger economic, political and cultural ties and the ties between our people.

The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline which hopefully can come to fruition through common efforts of the two countries, the banking relations between Iran and Pakistan which hopefully will remove

hurdles, the preferential trade agreement (PTA) which will hopefully move to a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between two countries and making the two big projects of Iran and Pakistan, the Chabahar port and the Gwadar to be complimentary and not to be even perceived by anybody as competing projects, are important prospects for furthering our bilateral relations in the interests of the two countries, in the interest of peace and security in the region and in the interest of fighting extremism and terrorism which finds fertile grounds in poverty and underdevelopment.

So the relations between the two countries can only move ahead, strengthen and further expand and we are confident that on the 70th anniversary of our official relations, that this is the path that we will both journey together in peace and prosperity.

But Iran and Pakistan have a bigger task. I believe the task between Iran and Pakistan as two major Muslim countries living in a very difficult neighborhood is much greater. And we owe it not only to our two peoples, but also to the *Ummah* at large, to work together in order to change the paradigm of relations that exists today, unfortunately, in the Muslim world. We have suffered, unfortunately, in the region and the Muslim world in general from a paradigm of exclusion, of rivalry and, unfortunately, of dependence on the outside sources.

There has been an illusion that security can be purchased, there has been an illusion that security can be attained at the expense of insecurity of others. We live in a different world. Our world is not a world of coalitions anymore. We built coalitions only to find that our allies turn against us. Some of you still remember Saddam Hussein. When he invaded Iran, Pakistan didn't help him but many did, with billions upon billions of dollars, with a lot weapons and with a lot of political support. The world turned a blind eye when he used chemical weapons against us; they even gave him those chemical weapons. But what happened? When he could not achieve his goals with Iran he turned and started using those guns against the people who gave him those guns. That's the nature and logic of trying to export, of trying to buy security at the expense of others, of trying to rely on others for your security.

Pakistan and Iran can be a model for change and let me just point out to the parameters how Pakistan and Iran can work together in order to have a better region not against anybody but for everybody, and that should be the name of the game. We're not building coalitions against each

other. We're moving to a different paradigm of relations that would benefit everybody that I call a new emerging paradigm, some may call it idealistic, but it's not because every other experiment in human history has failed.

The experiment of exclusion, the experiment that is governed by will to power has failed to produce security for anybody, even those who promote it. Is the United States secure today? Did any of you visit New York after 9/11? I did, one week after September 11, I have lived in New York for a long time and I visited New York after a week of 9/11. I saw among New Yorkers a horror in their face. They looked at a foreigner and they saw a bomb. That is the greatest super power on the face of the earth who can't even achieve the minimum that is required of a state; security for its citizens. That's the outcome of the paradigm of exclusion and rivalry and trying to build coalitions against each other. We need to move away from that path.

We need a paradigm built on the understanding of the most basic concept and that is that we all live on the same boat. We will either move together to the coast or we will sink. There's no way that we can gain security by deterring others or by making our neighbors insecure. We need to start by building a new paradigm in this neighborhood. Maybe we can call it a neighborhood paradigm, maybe we can call it a neighborhood policy or maybe we want to call it a paradigm of networking. We say diplomats always make the right choice, but after having tried all the wrong choices. Now we have tried all wrong choices, I don't know whether any choice is left for us. Look at what's happening in Syria and Yemen, these are the miseries that our own wrong choices have brought not only to us, but to innocent women, children and the elderly. This is the outcome of the paradigm of wrong choices we made and then we continue to blame each other. Blaming may be a nice scapegoat but it's not a nice solution. We need to look at our problems differently.

We live in this neighborhood, we are forced by geography to live together. Of course, it is not a bad choice and we are not enemies. We call each other brother and sisters. We pray to the same God, we accept the same Prophet (P.B.U.H), same book; there are small theological differences, but that's not what should divide us. One of our leaders, our first Imam and our Sunni brothers' fourth caliph, when he sent a ruler to Egypt he said "Treat people well because they belong to

one of the two groups; either they are your brothers in religion or in humanity.” So in this region, the difficulties that join us are far greater than the differences that divide us.

We all suffer from poverty, we all suffer from extremism. The scourge of ISIS doesn’t recognize between Shia and Sunni, doesn’t recognize between Muslim and Christian, brothers and sisters. The most victims of Daesh have been Sunnis, not Shias, not Christians, not Jews, but Sunnis. So, the menaces that affect us in this region are common menaces which require common solutions. We need to recognize that if we create an enemy for our enemy, it will become our enemy. We need to abandon this outdated paradigm of trying to create enemies, of trying to create blocs to fight enemies, of trying to blame every problem on somebody from the outside. We need to seek solutions from inside and we have the capability of doing that.

So we need to move away from bloc-formation, we need to move away from attempting to achieve hegemony, to something different. You know attempting to achieve hegemony didn’t even work for the United States. After the end of Cold War, the Americans believed that there was a new world order, you remember President George W. Bush Senior in the General Assembly, I was sitting there. Some of you may also have been sitting there. He said something about starting a new world order. What was that new world order? It was an attempt to change the temporary US predominance to a long-term US hegemony. How much did it cost the United States? You’ll find out if you listen to President Trump , not the President, but the campaigner, trillions upon trillions of dollars by the United States and did it achieve hegemony? Did it even achieve security? Hegemonic tendencies are expensive illusions. We need to accept that in our region. We need to accept that we cannot have any ‘hegemon’ in our region. No one, not from within and nor from the outside. That is just an illusion to think that somebody can govern this region alone. So what should we replace this with? Instead of trying to be the strongest in the region, we all need to work together to create a strong region. Move away from excluding others, try to include everybody.

Ours can be a very strong neighborhood. Ours can be a very strong region. The Islamic world can be a very strong *Ummah* provided that none of us try to be a dominant force in the *Ummah*, provided that none of us tries to exclude anybody from this region by blaming them for whatever reason. That is number one. We need a strong region rather than a strong nation in the region.

That doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to seek excellence. But, we can only achieve it with each other not against each other. Iran and Pakistan having advanced in many areas of science and technology can, in fact, complement one another. The Muslim world can complement each other. The continent Asia can become the basin of knowledge, technology and development. We don't need to have competition at the expense of one another.

Second and related to this, instead of forming blocs, we should form networks. These are two very different propositions. You form blocs in order to exclude somebody and you form networks in order to include everybody. When you make blocs, you need enemies and if you don't have one, you will create one. Those of you who remember the early 1990s, you remember the books being written in the United States at that time? Clash of Civilizations, the Green menace replacing the red menace? Why did they even need the green menace? Why did they need the new enemy? Because that's a tool for global governance; the requirement of an enemy and that is the foundation of bloc-formation. What we need is to create networks. It could be a collection of all powers, an attempt to bring everybody together. In order to not exclude anybody, we need principles acceptable to everybody such as the principles enshrining the UN Charter. That is not too difficult. Just imagine, if all of us adhere to the same principles and reject a threat, are we committed to those principles? People trying to blockade other countries, people trying to put pressure, are not under international principles. Accepting the inviolability of international borders, accepting non-interference in the internal affairs of each other, accepting the right to self-determination of people, are simple principles that allow everybody to join.

They don't exclude anybody because they are Arab or non-Arab, Shia or Sunni or belonging to this coalition or that coalition, accepting a minimum standard of behavior in order to join rather than to be excluded. The name of the game should be to include, find an excuse to include people, not an excuse to put them out. We have tried pushing people out and we have failed. Look at what is happening in Yemen. Is it too difficult to resolve? As we proposed few days after beginning of the bombing in Yemen, which they thought would be over in 2-3 weeks. You know when they invaded Iran, they thought the same. That is why the Security Council Resolution 479 was not issued for a week after Iraq invaded Iran. Miscalculations lasted 8 years. When the bombings in Yemen started, they thought they will last only three weeks. I tried with some western countries for a ceasefire, but they said it will end in 2-3 weeks. It is now entering

its fourth year with a million people suffering from Cholera and this is shameful in the 21st century. It is shameful, but it has happened. It is because of the illusion that you can gain security at the expense of others. It is because of the illusion that you can achieve hegemony. Same happened in Syria. When developments started in Syria, people said and I quote, “By the end of *Ramdan* somebody will be out of Damascus.” Now we have spent seven *Ramadans* in Syria. Therefore, we need to change our paradigm and our approach.

I believe Iran and Pakistan are prudent enough and have solid foundations to lead this change for a stronger neighborhood based on the concept of inclusion and accepting the participation of everybody in this neighborhood. So let us share the bounty of the good relations that have existed between Iran and Pakistan. Share it with all other neighbors and move from something that has caused misery and underdevelopment for this region, to something that will take us towards what has been promised to us and that is to become a united *Ummah*, and then we could become examples for the entire world.”

An interesting and interactive Q & A session followed Dr. Javed Zarif’s speech.

Q: What are we to make of the bonhomie between Iran and India regarding the Chabahar port deal which according to Indian newspapers is aimed at nullifying the impact of Gwadar?

A: Let me categorically state that Iran will never allow anybody to hurt Pakistan from Iranian territory. As we know that Pakistan will never allow anybody to harm Iran through Pakistani territory. That’s an absolute commitment by Iran. Our relations with India, just like Pakistan’s relations with Saudi Arabia, are not against Pakistan. We understand that Pakistan’s relations with Saudi Arabia are not against Iran. We want to develop Chabahar Port as a complimentary port to Gwadar, not as a competing port. It is because we believe that this area of Eastern and South-eastern Iran and South-western Pakistan requires a lot of development.

The outcome of this development will be to eradicate poverty which has given rise to extremism and terrorism on both sides of the border. We offer Pakistan our participation in the CPEC project and we offered Pakistan and China to take part in Chabahar port.

This is not a project to encircle or strangulate Pakistan, but it is a project for the development of this region. We believe that Gwadar and Chabahar have to be linked together both through road and the sea.

Q: What specific measures are you taking to improve your relations with Saudi Arabia as it puts the entire Islamic world in a very difficult position when two major Muslim countries are at variance with each other?

A: Iran has responded positively to all offers of mediation from Pakistan, Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Russia and Kuwait. The problem is that Saudi Arabia believes that it is in its interest that the world perceives that it is facing some sort of threat from Iran. Sometimes they call Iran a ‘paper tiger’ and sometimes they call it a threat. I don’t know what they wish to achieve - a crisis in the region or an alliance with Israel. It is unimaginable.

We are ready to work with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on every bilateral and multilateral issue. We know that we cannot exclude Saudi Arabia from this region and it’s important for them to also understand this. We need to have a reciprocal understanding that excluding one another from the region is not an option. If KSA faces foreign aggression or terrorism, Iran will be the first to come to their assistance. We believe the security of our neighbors is our security. Stability within our neighborhood is our stability.

Q: What is your assessment of the future of JCPOA?

A: President Trump is not in favor of the deal, but he has not yet torn it up because it is a valid multilateral agreement that cannot be unilaterally abandoned. The real objective here is to prevent Iran from benefitting from the economic dividends of the JCPOA.

Q: Does Iran favor resumption of dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and what role can Iran and Pakistan play to bring about peace in Afghanistan, especially with regards to the newfound footprints of Daesh in the region?

A: The ideology of Daesh still persists, although its network was broken down in Iraq. We have seen evidence that Daesh soldiers were airlifted from battle zones by US helicopters, even from prisons. We see then the outcome, more and more violence in Pakistan and Afghanistan. So this becomes a threat against Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, Russia and China and the entire region. We need to work together to counter this threat. We favor dialogue between all Afghans, including the Taliban and the factions in the government. Iran and Pakistan can also work together to use their influence in Afghanistan to play a positive role. The presence of United States will not be a positive influence in this regard.

Q: **Is it possible for Iran as a strategic player in the region to implement the idea of ‘paradigm networking’ to a potential anti-terrorism alliance in Qatar which is underway?**

A: Iran will welcome any alliance that favors inclusion of all parties. Any bloc-forming strategy will not be welcomed. Engaging everybody through such new initiatives is what Iran will support.

Concluding the talk, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI emphasized that the relationship between Iran and Pakistan must be valued and cherished.