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Report – In-House Meeting

“5-Member Chinese Media Delegation”

July 30, 2018



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Pictures of the Event





The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) held an In-House Meeting with a 5-member Media Delegation from China on July 30, 2018. The members of the delegation included: Mr. Yu Lintao, *Beijing Review*; Mr. Wang Cong, *The Global Times*; Ms. Peijuan Ji, *People's Daily*; Ms. Li Huiru, *China Org*; and Ms. Wang Ping, *World Tourism Pictorial*.

Welcoming the delegation, the Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry gave an overview of Pakistan's foreign and security policies, regional security environment and great power competition. Commenting on Pakistan's relations with India, Ambassador Aizaz stated that difficulties with India go back to the time of partition in 1947 which brought up issues like division of assets, water, and financial dues leading to hostility between the two countries. It was also the time when the Kashmir issue commenced, with part of territory liberated from Indian occupying forces, while the rest is still under occupation of India. Thus, Pakistan's priority became survival with focus on ensuring security. Wars have been fought between the two countries and peace processes have also taken place, but mistrust has not been bridged. Pakistan has informed India time and again that it seeks peace but it cannot compromise on sovereignty, territorial integrity and dignity.

Ambassador Aizaz informed the delegation that presently, India has suspended the dialogue process arguing that militants from Pakistan go and attack India. Pakistan's sacrifices in the war on terror and its efforts to overcome terrorism are overlooked. Islamabad holds that when India suspends the dialogue, it plays into the hands of militants who oppose the peace process. Meanwhile, political changes have occurred in India, and the present Indian government is a right-wing party under Narendra Modi. It has adopted a hardline stance towards minorities including Muslims, and Kashmir. Additionally, deepening India-US relationship has emboldened the Modi regime to deal with its neighbors with an iron hand. The present environment, thus, is not conducive for peace in the Subcontinent.

On relations with Afghanistan, Ambassador Aizaz stated that the present situation is turbulent. Turmoil in that country has been going on for the last 4 decades. He informed the delegation that there are over 20 terrorist outfits operating from Afghanistan, including IMU, ETIM, Taliban and Daesh/ISIS Afghanistan. Daesh has spread to 9 provinces in Afghanistan close to Pakistan's borders. Pakistan is concerned that while it has pushed terrorists out of its territory, they have

found safe havens in Afghanistan. Ambassador Aizaz stated that peace must come to Afghanistan, but peace cannot be achieved through military means. Pakistan has nudged the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network to engage in peace talks. Pakistan believes they are Afghans and should join Afghan politics and participate in peace talks. President Ghani's announcement of a peace talks strategy and offer to recognize Taliban as a political group showed his willingness to address core concerns including future status of foreign forces. Pakistan believes that when US leaves Afghanistan, it should do so in a responsible manner so that chaos does not return to Afghanistan.

On China, Ambassador Aizaz stated that Pakistan takes immense pride in its relations with China. Every generation of Chinese and Pakistani leaderships and public have strengthened this close relationship. China does not interfere in other countries affairs and seeks to promote cooperative relations. China wishes goodwill towards Pakistan, and the latter has supported China's stances on many issues. Pakistan has consistently supported One-China Policy at the United Nations. Now, economic cooperation is taking place under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project which connects Western China with Pakistan. CPEC is a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative. There are huge stakes in the success of CPEC if both countries can manage it well in the face of negative propaganda against this project, especially by India.

Speaking on Pakistan's ties with Iran, Ambassador Aizaz stated that it is a cordial relationship. Historically, Pakistan has had a cultural imprint from Iran. Unfortunately, Saudi-Iran relations are not well, which affects Pakistan. Saudi Arabia is a close friend for Pakistan, and it is home to 2 million Pakistanis and Islam's sacred sites. On the other hand, it has good relations with Iran. In times of tension, Pakistan seeks to unify Muslims in the Middle East. Ambassador Aizaz also touched on international sanctions on Iran. He stated that the talks with Iran on Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCOPA) had succeeded, but now US has backed out of the agreement and is again threatening sanctions and undermining the nuclear agreement. Pakistan believes that sanctions on Iran have undermined strengthening of economic ties between Pakistan and Iran.

On Pakistan's relations with US, Ambassador Aizaz stated that it is a roller-coaster ride, with ups

and down. There is difference in expectations from both sides. While Pakistan believes in friendship, US believes in an interest based approach. US is a big power and Pakistan seeks a steady relationship. In recent months, things are improving between the two countries. He said that Pakistan and US can cooperate on peace in Afghanistan, and US can take advantage of economic opportunities in Pakistan due to CPEC. Ambassador Aizaz was of the opinion that US should participate in Pakistan's economic revival.

Finally, on the global picture, Ambassador Aizaz stated that major power competition is resurfacing. Today, US believes China is a competitor and it has accorded high priority to major power competition. He said that while positive competition is good, but conflict should be avoided. Quoting President Xi, Ambassador Aizaz said that China is looking for a "community of shared destiny", which is a positive signal. China has emerged as a voice for globalization and its Belt and Road Initiative shows that China is contributing to regional infrastructure development. Ambassador Aizaz concluded his briefing on the note that major powers should respect principles of the UN Charter in conduct of international affairs.

The briefing was followed by an interactive question and answer session. A delegate inquired about the policy of new in-coming government of Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf on CPEC.

Ambassador Aizaz noted that PTI Chief, Imran Khan, has met the Chinese ambassador and reaffirmed his support for CPEC, and that the project will be taken forward. Three CPEC routes pass through the provinces, and energy and infrastructure projects under CPEC are helping local people. Ambassador Aizaz said that in implementation of the projects, both countries should follow relevant rules and procedures, and ensure transparency.

Mr. Ali Haider Saleem, Research Associate at ISSI's China-Pakistan Study Center (CPSC), pointed out that when PTI was in power in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, it had engaged positively with Chinese authorities on CPEC and other projects in the province.

Ms. Neelum Nigar, Research Fellow CPSC, also noted that PTI's manifesto and Imran Khan's victory speech specifically referred to CPEC. She said that PTI has keenly followed China's development model for reducing poverty and aim's to learn from it.

On another question about prospective role of overseas Pakistanis in the PTI government,

Ambassador Aizaz stated that overseas Pakistanis are an important part of Pakistan, and they are always eager to participate in national affairs.

Responding to another question about debt, Ambassador Aizaz noted that Pakistan's debt crisis is not new, and discussions are going on to reduce pressures. If Pakistan takes loans, it will be a temporary solution, but increasing trade will make the real difference. He said that bilateral trade between China and Pakistan needs to be balanced, a Free Trade Agreement was signed in 2006, but the bulk of trade is currently in favor of China. This needs to be rebalanced.

The DG then invited Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman ISSI Board of Governors to make concluding remarks.

Ambassador Khalid stated that Pakistan and China relationship is unique as we don't share culture or religion, but we have close relations. This relationship is an example for other neighboring countries. It is a time-tested relationship, and even amid global and regional changes, Pakistan-China ties have remained constant. China enjoys broad support among the Pakistani society and the new government will take this relationship further. He said that CPEC projects will generate economic activity and Pakistan will be able to pay back loans and meet its commitments. He noted that Pakistan seeks to have good relations with all major powers even though US has put Pakistan on the other side of America's interest. Pakistan, he said, has a very bright future, and the country will not be deterred by adverse stance of other countries. We are quite confident that our economic conditions will improve and overcome the crisis we are facing nowadays.