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Report - Book Launch

Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments: US Crisis Management in South Asia

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Pictures of the Event





The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) hosted launch of the book titled "*Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments: US Crisis Management in South Asia*," authored by Dr. Moeed Yusuf on September 5, 2018. Dr. Yusuf is Associate Vice President, Asia Center, US Institute of Peace (USIP), Washington DC. Distinguished commentators at the book launch included: Gen. (Retd) Ehsan ul Haq; Former Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff Committee; Ambassador (Retd) Riaz Khokhar, former Foreign Secretary; and Dr. Riffat Hussain, Professor, Development Studies, S3H, National University of Science and Technology (NUST).

Welcome Remarks by DG ISSI

Welcoming the author, commentators and the guests, Director General ISSI, Ambassador (Retd) Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry posed three key questions - Why has peace eluded South Asia? Why has brokering not worked? What does the future look like? While answering the first question, he said that looked at from a global context, South Asia has been caught up in global big power contestation. From the peak of the Cold War, or the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to the global war on terrorism in the 2000s, India and Pakistan were on the opposite ends of the big powers contest. Thus, there was little that the big powers could do to secure peace in South Asia. At the regional level, he highlighted that India seeks peace but on its own terms, and it thinks that given its size and power it can dictate its terms. He further elaborated that India refuses to engage in talks with Pakistan until action is taken against anti-India militants. He noted that ironically, this serves the objectives of the very militants that India claims to be fighting. He stressed that the real need is for India and Pakistan to cooperate in fighting terrorism. He said that unfortunately, Pakistan has not been successful in persuading India to see the logic of a cooperative approach to secure peace. At the bilateral level, he said that negotiations only succeed if both sides are prepared to give some space in favor of common ground. However, political will to that magnitude has been lacking.

Looking at the question of why brokering has not worked in South Asia, he said that he was looking forward to hear Moeed Yusuf's view on what role the US can play in mediating South Asian conflicts. He also offered his own views on this issue. He said that Pakistan did expect the US to play some role in conflicts between Pakistan and India since it is friendly to both. In the past, the US did play a role in defusing crises, but any attempts to resolve issues were either light

hearted or resisted by Indians, who claim that all matters between the two countries needed to be resolved bilaterally. He noted that this led to a circuitous argument whereby India wants issues to be resolved bilaterally, but at the same time has shut all doors to bilateral engagement. He further said that most other third parties were reluctant to get involved in a dispute that has dragged on for decades, despite clear UN position on Kashmir. Thus a kind of fatigue had set in. He said that the US had recently deepened its partnership with India in order to prepare it as a counterweight to China. This, however, had seemed to embolden Indian leadership to play hardball and shun any efforts for peace except on its own terms.

On the question of what does the future look like, he said that he is not very optimistic. At the same time, he noted that it was important to bear in mind that the nuclear environment has made the costs of any conflict unbearable. The only possible way forward was to realize that while India and Pakistan had been embroiled in conflict, that world has moved on.

Remarks by Dr. Moeed Yusuf

Introducing his book, Dr. Yusuf said that it essentially looked at US crisis management in South Asia post the nuclear tests of 1998. The larger question that he has tried to answer in his book was how crises were managed and play out in an environment with two nuclear states which are not super powers, what were the risks and how they could be mitigated? The entire literature on nuclear behaviors and deterrence came from the Cold War where competition was between two nuclear armed super powers. The context of crises was essentially bilateral. Looking at the environment like South Asia and other such contexts, he realized that the Cold War model would not hold. One key reason was that these regional nuclear powers would always have stronger third parties who would influence the dynamics of the crises. Thus, he started investigating what it meant for crises behavior, nuclear deterrence and risks. He came to the conclusion that third parties like the US had a key role to play in crises. Other third parties could be China or Russia, but the primary argument would still hold. He, therefore, argued that henceforth nuclear crises behavior should be studied as three actor model instead of two actor model.

Regarding what he hoped the book would achieve, he said that he wanted people to look at nuclear crises and draw lessons as to what went right and what went wrong, and how the lessons

can be used to mitigate risks in future crises. Secondly, he hoped that original scholarship on the subject would come from non-Western scholars, especially from India and Pakistan.

Dr. Yusuf said that he has looked at three case studies of India-Pakistan crises since the nuclear tests of 1998, and specifically focused on the US role during the Kargil war, the ten-month long 2001-02 military standoff, and the Mumbai crisis following the 2008 terrorist attacks in that city. His key finding was that since acquiring nuclear weapons, India and Pakistan had become more, not less, dependent on powerful external actors like the US to diffuse crisis situations. He has argued in the book that it was a structural reality that would remain. The US would show up to diffuse crises not because India or Pakistan want to ask it to, but because the risks involved are too great to do otherwise. He argued that the nuclear element was central to third parties wanting to intervene to de-escalate the situation. It was partly because of lessons of the Cold War where the US learnt that nuclear war would not happen because people wanted it to happen, but it might happen despite that. He said that de-escalation was that single most important motive driving third party behavior. The reason why things never moved towards dispute resolution was because the sole purpose of third party intervention was tactical, in order to avoid nuclear use.

Another key finding was that during times of crises, the normal foreign policy goals of the US, India and Pakistan in this case were suspended in time. Another lesson was that great power rivalry took a back seat during times of a crisis. It was interesting how US, UK, China and Russia all fell in line with the de-escalation agenda rather than use the opportunity to undercut their rivals. He left the audience with a question whether this principle would hold or the US-China trade war would cloud their ability to cooperate in a nuclear environment to de-escalate tensions. There is an incentive built in the model for India and Pakistan to work with the US to diffuse crises. He emphasized that whether India and Pakistan trusted the US or not was not a factor, but leverage was. Both India and Pakistan perceived that it had the leverage to get what it wanted from the opponent. That was the reason that third party mediation worked in all three case studies. He also said that it was impossible for the US or any other third party to gang up with one party during a crisis. They had to balance things to ensure crisis de-escalation. He said that the reason why the third party intervention model worked was due to superior intelligence and information of the US and the fact that it became the conduit of information between India and Pakistan. The US and other third parties had the incentive to let India and Pakistan feel that

they could gain more concession from the opponent through third party channel. He further pointed out the limitation of this model - it was only meant to de-escalate not to resolve a crisis. However, he argued that the model was here to stay. For Pakistani policy makers, Dr. Moeed's last thought was the importance of studying and reflecting on past crises in order to understand and reduce risks during future crises.

Remarks by Gen. (Retd) Ehsan ul Haq

Gen. (Retd) Ehsan ul Haq complimented the book as a symbol of evolving strategic thought on the matters of nuclear deterrence and crises. He praised the innovative approach by Dr. Moeed of introducing the theory of third party intervention. He said that the author had provided a thorough analysis of third party intervention by examining three crises between India and Pakistan. Based upon his personal experience, he said that decision makers on Pakistani side were aware of risks of escalation. They, therefore, exercised prudence. He questioned, however, whether the growing Indo-US strategic partnership could redefine the mediating role of Washington between India and Pakistan. He stated that US enjoyed, and would continue to enjoy the supremacy in the field of surveillance and monitoring, which enabled it, even in the foreseeable future, to continue its role as a peace broker.

At the same time, he highlighted that one must not lose sight of the fact that a primary reason for averting wars between India and Pakistan was the credibility of its nuclear deterrent. In the last 20 years, Pakistan has come a long way in its quest for structuring a credible nuclear deterrence in the face of daunting challenges. The credibility of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence has been continuously challenged by India through doctrinal, as well as technical development. We are also at the receiving end of selective and discriminatory application of the provisions of the nuclear regime. The most blatant of these has been the Indo-US nuclear deal and the efforts to bring India into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). We have successfully continued our strategic programs and maintained the credibility of our deterrence. It must continue, no matter how adverse the environment, as there is a national consensus that this reflects our national resolve to guard our sovereignty and integrity.

He commented that an important point highlighted in the discourse on third party intervention is that it materializes when the chips are down and the crisis has seriously escalated, underlining

the absence of regional crisis prevention mechanism. This is an issue that needs to be continuously agitated at the international and regional forums. Lastly, he commended the author on producing a world class work on dynamics of a nuclear South Asia.

Remarks by Ambassador (Retd) Riaz Khokhar

Ambassador (Retd) Riaz Khokhar praised the author's intellectual input combined with the refreshing element of objectivity and neutrality. He pointed out Indian hypocrisy in past crises - at times India refused third party intervention, while at others like the 1962 India-China crisis it went seeking mediation. In the three case studies that are discussed in the book, India and Pakistan welcomed mediation. Based on his own experience as Ambassador, he said that in times of such crises, fear of escalation was predominant. He also pointed out the possible element of exaggeration by third parties and the danger inherent in it. During the Kargil crisis, the US manipulated that situation into letting India think that Pakistan had operationalized its nuclear weapons, while in reality it had not. He admitted that Kargil war was a mistake on the part of Pakistan. It perpetuated an image of an irresponsible nuclear weapons state. He said that the stigma caused to Pakistan as a result of the Kargil war still lingers. He also criticized that while US played a role in mitigating crises, but it had no role in conflict resolution.

He also pointed out that the "strategic bias" of the US is expected to gain more prominence in the context of Indo-US convergence of interests. He stated that unfortunately, as of present, the element of trust between Pakistan and India was lacking. India and Pakistan needed to work towards building an environment where candid talks could be held.

He placed great emphasis on the need to develop a crisis management mechanism at the international level, perhaps through the platform of the UN. India and Pakistan have a flimsy crisis management apparatus. This, he said, was extremely dangerous given the worsening relations between India and Pakistan, and the worsening situation in Kashmir. Lastly, he said that given US strategic bias towards India, it may not be prudent to give it a blank cheque in terms of third party mediation.

Remarks by Dr. Rifaat Hussain

Dr. Rifaat Hussain remarked that the concept of ‘Brokered Bargaining’ as put forth by Moeed is as much a theory of process as it is that of outcome and makes his work an outstanding original contribution towards enhancing our understanding of South Asian nuclear crises management. With the nuclear tests of 1998 by India and Pakistan, many in the West called South Asia one of the most dangerous environments. Pessimistic scholarship on the subject argued that nukes in the hands of non-Western states are dangerous since they would not be able to resist their use. He praised Dr. Moeed's alternate theory of 'brokered bargaining' and his three case studies were strong evidence of brokered bargaining, as well as great concern over escalation by the parties involved. He appreciated the author's model of brokered bargaining as a unique way to look at and manage nuclear crises. However, he criticized the centrality of Afghan factor in the trilateral model, which was missing in Moeed's work. Overall, he said that the book was a must read for policy makers, students and scholars of nuclear strategy.

Concluding Remarks by Chairman ISSI

Chairman Board of Governors ISSI, Ambassador (Retd) Khalid Mahmood concluded the event by saying that it is evident that while the US has met the pre-requisites of diffusing crises, recent events have showcased that the US cannot broker honestly and objectively. Instead, its present role is conversely de-stabilizing. However, that does not take away the importance of foreign brokering in times of crisis.

He also highlighted the importance of conflict resolution. He said that while defusing a crisis is good, it has to be followed up with efforts for conflict resolution. Peace building and conflict resolution are imperative in South Asia, otherwise unending crises would keep popping up in South Asia.