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*Report – Roundtable
with*
Dr. Werner Fassalabend

March 26, 2019

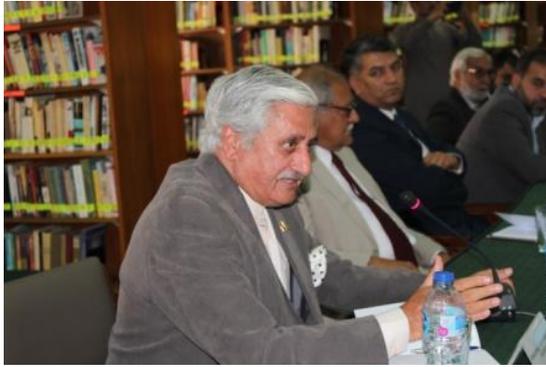


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PICTURES OF THE EVENT





The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a round-table on March 26, 2019, with a 3-member Austrian delegation of scholars led by Dr. Werner Fassalabend, former Austrian Defense Minister and currently President of Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES). He was accompanied by Brig. Gen. Dr. Walter Feichtinger, Director, Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management (IPSCM) and Mr. Peter Haider, President, Universal Peace Foundation (UPF), Austrian Chapter, Vienna. The agenda for the roundtable was based on how the peaceful settlement of the Kashmir Dispute is an international obligation.

Participants at the roundtable included: Honourable Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan, Honourable Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan; Ambassador (Retd) Arif Kamal; Dr. Rukhsana Qamber, President, Institute of Regional Studies (IRS); Mr. Shahras Asim, Director Kashmir, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Senator Lt. Gen. Abdul Qayyum (Retd.), Mr. Hamza Iftikhar, Mr. Malik Asif Tanveer, Ms. Tahira Abdullah, Mr. Raja Najabat Hussain, Dr. Afsar Rathor, Mr. Ershad Mahmud, Mr. Ghulam Muhammad Safi, Ms. Farzana Yaqoob, Ms. Mariam Nazir.

Welcoming the delegation, Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry highlighted how the world is changing, and all those principles formulated after the Second World War are under stress. A new cold war is germinating this time between China and US, a new arms race and narrow nationalism is on the rise and mutually exclusive agendas are being pursued in different parts of the world. The United States has started a new Asian Pivot strategy which is largely perceived as its policy to counter China. India has been emboldened by this move and as a result, is taking a heavy handed approach with all its neighbors particularly Pakistan. While Prime Minister Modi has unleashed enormous use of force in Kashmir, at the same time, he has underestimated the resolve of the Kashmiri people to resist this pressure. Modi's grand scale policy of Hindutva has deeply concerned all minorities in India that form 30 per cent of the Indian population.

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry stressed that a deliberate attempt is being made to change the demography of India by allowing Indian nationals to buy property in Indian Occupied Kashmir. The Modi government has also tried to abrogate certain provisions in the Indian constitution which gave certain rights to the people of Kashmir like the Article 370 and Article 35-A. Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry highlighted that Modi is playing a dangerous game

by stoking the flames of hatred against Muslims, Kashmiris and Pakistan just to win the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. This issue is of grave concern to the people of South Asia and the world as a whole. He stressed that Pakistan does not believe in a zero sum game and believes that it should have good relations with all countries. In that light, Pakistan believes that a political solution to Kashmir would require India and Pakistan, as well as the people of Kashmir to engage in dialogue.

While addressing the gathering, Dr. Werner Fassalabend stressed that the Kashmir conflict cannot be resolved militarily. Hence, both the sides should focus on resolving this dispute through political means as use of force would lead to lose-lose situation. Dr. Fassalabend went on to say that the opening of the Kartarpur corridor was a good move and Pakistan should try and normalize relationship with India even though at the moment the political tensions are very high. He appreciated the Pakistan government for reacting in an excellent and skillful way in the face of recent Indian aggression. He pointed out that the huge number of Muslims living in India can form a basis for co-operation between the two countries. He was of the opinion that any positive development in relations with India will take time and can be a very slow process. Therefore, in the meanwhile Pakistan needs to improve its relations with the countries located on the Western side of Pakistan such as Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iran while not compromising relations with Saudi Arabia. It's in the interest of Pakistan to keep a balance between China and US.

While quoting an American Professor, Dr. Fassalabend stated that a new political order will be based on ethnicity and this map will serve as the basis of various groups to pursue their political interests. He was of the viewpoint that in the years to come, Balochi nationalism and demand for independence would rise as Gwader's importance as a military port rises. He stated that the more Gwader becomes a military hotspot the more it will give rise to counter insurgencies and India and Israel will back such movements. Hence, Balochistan is a high stake challenge for Pakistan.

Dr. Fassalabend stated that China-Pakistan Economic (CPEC) is a massive opportunity for Pakistan to use its geo-strategic location for the benefit of the country. He was of the opinion that CPEC should also be extended from east to west instead of depending on just one corridor.

Senator Abdul Qayyum was of the view that it is the UN's responsibility to solve the long standing issue of Kashmir and unfortunately, UN seems to have become a useless organization

just as its predecessor the League of Nations. He said that when the interests of major powers demand certain UN action, the organization becomes active for example in South Sudan and East Timor.

All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) representative Mr. Ghulam Mohammad Safi said that the world community has turned a blind eye towards the Kashmir dispute which is very unfortunate. He said that Kashmiris are busy in their struggle as per the UN resolutions and unless these resolutions are not implemented, the region will be at risk. He argued that people of Kashmir deserves a peaceful solution.

Mr. Farooq Rehmani said that most of the political scientists agree that Kashmir has been a conflict forgotten by the international society for the last 71 years. He said that Kashmiris have all along offered great human sacrifices to create a global awareness for a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue. But everything fell on deaf ears and they yearn for a dose of sunshine. Mr. Rehmani argued that politically, Pakistan and India both are important but no two parties during the past long decades could succeed in finding a solution. Every bilateral agreement on Jammu and Kashmir failed to reach the place of destination.

Mr. Rehmani further elaborated that peace is an ultimate loving aim of humanity, but the world leaders have not addressed the root cause of hostility and tension after every cease-fire and truce. He opined that many conflicts continue for want of right and durable solution. Kashmir is a major international flash point; its people are in an open prison surrounded by over half a million army of India equipped with modern weapons. He said that different agreements over the years inked in Delhi, Srinagar or Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Lahore couldn't give internal or regional peace to the people, particularly the main suffering party, the Kashmiris. They only strengthened their chains of subjugation and Jammu Kashmir freedom turned to be only yet another form of wailing wall for them.

Commenting upon the new wave of uprising in Indian occupied Kashmir, Mr. Rehmani said that the youth of 21st century in Kashmir has refused to submit before the occupying forces and began kissing death instead of humiliation of mothers and sisters. Therefore, today the question is not who occupies and rules Jammu and Kashmir, but it is what attracts and governs hearts of these landlocked people whose history of civilization dates back to thousands of years.

He said that international community should show its iron political will to resolve the conflict peacefully between all the three parties. The world should have no objection to this reality that the dispute was born when Jammu and Kashmir (JK) was annexed forcibly by India. He added that second step would be to urge India to act as a responsible member in JK and behave like a true democracy and give Kashmiris treatment as human beings and equal citizens and lift all curbs in the form of black laws.

Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan, former Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir, in his deliberations thanked ISSI for organizing a roundtable on an important subject. He also welcomed Austrian delegation to Pakistan. Sardar Attique gave a historic overview of Kashmir conflict, described the current situation and way forward towards resolving Kashmir dispute.

He said that Kashmir conflict is very much related to the situation in Afghanistan with the involvement of mostly common regional and international actors. He said that Afghan dispute appears to be coming to end after excessive use of force against Taliban for 18 years, wasting trillions of dollars, energies and human resources which indicates that resolving Kashmir through use of force is a fantasy. He added that the world recently saw that the use of force has not borne any fruitful outcome be it in Syria, Iraq, Libya or Yemen, so why insist on failed strategies.

Sardar Attique said that Indian propaganda and diplomatic offensive to portray indigenous nature of Kashmir resistance movement with terrorism will not bear any fruitful results. He added that Indian allegations of cross border infiltration despite barbed electrified fence, digital surveillance and presence of heavy military troops raises serious question on professionalism, capacity and competence of Indian military. Indian forces have perpetrated unthinkable atrocities on innocent unarmed Kashmiris. Sardar Attique argued that Indian claims to confuse the legitimate struggle is false as the State of Jammu and Kashmir is internationally recognized as disputed territory rather than integral part of India.

Talking about the way forward, Sardar Attique was of the view that UN resolutions provide an agreed and workable roadmap to settle this dispute. It is feared that any departure from UN resolutions would mean departure from partition plan of British India in 1947 that may fuel secessionists movements across South Asia. He further added that cumbersome procedures

regarding travel and trade on LoC should be simplified and engagement of youth across the state is yet another important step that requires serious attention.

Civil society activist Ms. Tahira Abdullah slammed the inaction of UN to act upon its own resolution and urged the Austrian delegation to highlight the sentiments of Kashmiris they listened today when they go back home. She said that the human rights situation is at its worst in occupied Kashmir where protestors are being blinded by use of pellet guns and rape is being used as a weapon of war against the struggling Kashmiris. Ms. Tahira added that there are geopolitical reasons as to why international community is not acting on Kashmir and the situation now is near to hopeless.

Brig. Gen. Dr. Walter Feichtinger said that stability in South Asia will remain fragile as long as the Kashmir dispute is active. He added that UN is likely to remain dysfunctional with regards to Kashmir dispute and this is an unfortunate reality. He assured the participants that they will take these sentiments back to Europe.