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Report – Roundtable

Delegation from Iraq

July 25, 2019



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PICTURES OF THE EVENT



A five-member delegation from Iraq headed by Shaikh Dr. Hamam Hamoudi, Head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, a political party and part of the ruling bloc made a brief visit to Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) on July 25, 2019 to discuss the contrasting human rights situation in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) and Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and garnering support for Pakistan's stance on the dispute of Jammu and Kashmir. Other members of the delegation included: Dr. Sana Al-Musawi, MP from Najaf and Member of the Services Committee of the Parliament; Mr. Amer Al-Fa'ez, MP from Basra and Member of Foreign Relations Committee of the Parliament; Mr. Sami Araj, Chairman, Investment Commission of Iraq; and Mr. Ahmad Al-Hassani, Director, Foreign and International Relations in the Office of Sh. Dr. Hamam Hamoudi.

Welcoming the guests, Chairman Board of Governors, ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that Iraq is a proud Muslim country. It is rich in resources and is a land of number of holy shrines. Iraq has gone through a very difficult time, but now it is on the road to recovery and prosperity. Pakistan wishes Iraq well in its endeavor to recover. He said that Pakistan too has been focusing on economic recovery lately. In this connection, Pakistan realizes that stability at home and a peaceful neighborhood are important. Hence, Pakistan's relations with India are of utmost importance. Referring to the Kashmir dispute, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that there are three ways to settle the Kashmir dispute. First is going to war which is not viable as both the countries are nuclear powers. Second is the bilateral dialogue which has been tried for the last 70 years. More than 45 summit level meeting have been held, but without any result. The third way to resolve Kashmir issue is through third party mediation which can be done by a friendly country or international organizations like UN.

Elaborating on the issue, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood pointed out three aspects of the Kashmir dispute. First, that the political aspect of the Kashmir dispute goes back to the time of partition when Kashmir according to the partition plan should have become part of Pakistan. Second, that there is a legal aspect of the dispute. India took this matter to the United Nations where a number of resolutions were passed which called for ascertaining the will of the Kashmiri people. Initially, India agreed to these resolutions, but later it backtracked. The third aspect of the Kashmir issue is the human rights abuses in IOK at the hands of Indian security forces. Unfortunately, the international community overlooked the issue of human rights in Kashmir, but

now, things are slowly being changed. Recently, there have been number of reports released that detail horrific stories of violence and abuses. The most recent report has been released in February 2019 by Association of the Parents of the Disappeared Persons and Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society. This report compiles 432 case studies of torture victims. Following this report, *New York Times* and *Washington Post* also ran reports on human rights abuses in Kashmir. Ambassador Khalid Mahmood also spoke about recent statement by President Trump where he expressed his desire to help in resolving the Kashmir dispute.

Shaikh Dr. Hamam Hamoudi extended invitation to ISSI to visit and work in collaboration with think tanks in Iraq to create more awareness on this issue. He also said that an MoU between ISSI and Iraqi think tank would be a positive step. Shaikh Dr. Hamam Hamoudi inquired how Pakistan would like Iraq to help in resolving the Kashmir issue.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood responded that Kashmiris are fighting for the sake of their right to self-determination which is recognized under international law, as well as United Nations Charter and resolutions. Right to self-determination is also recognized as human rights issue. It is need of the hour that India recognizes this and come to the negotiating table for a meaningful dialogue on this issue.

Mr. Sami Araji said that Pakistan has a very special place in Iraq. But at the same time, Iraq also enjoys very cordial relations with India. Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that the human rights situation in Kashmir should be a matter of great concern for the international community. The community should highlight the importance of resolution of this conflict to avoid confrontation. He emphasized that it is also in India's interest to resolve this issue as it wants to emerge as a global power. India needs to be at peace with itself. The resolution of this problem is also important to uplift the living standards of the people of the two countries.

The guests from Iraq expressed their resolve to gain access to Indian Occupied Kashmir to assess the situation on ground. They also said that academics in India can be convinced to interact with the concerned people and seek resolution of this problem.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood thanked the delegation for their visit to the Institute of Strategic Studies and for taking keen interest in the issue of Kashmir.