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Report – Webinar

“Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS): A Move towards Fascism in South Asia”

January 13, 2021



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PICTURES OF THE EVENT



India Study Centre (ISC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a webinar titled, “Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: A Move towards Fascism in South Asia” on January 13, 2021. The webinar was aimed at analyzing the Indian democracy from secularism to RSS and was pondering over the threat emanating to the region by the RSS ideology.

While moderating the event, Dr Saif ur Rehman Malik, Director ISC, welcomed the panellists and maintained that the world is witnessing an unprecedented surge of far-right extremism. Movements like White supremacist, anti-immigration and Islamophobia are prevalent from Europe to Asia. In 2014, with the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of Modi, India too fell to populism. Since then, the South Asian region witnesses growing Indian belligerence towards its own people as well as the regional states. Director ISC further reiterated that BJP is a political wing of RSS which is an Indian right-wing, Hindu nationalist organization that was founded to unite Hindus and promote Hindu superiority. The RSS is a staunch follower of the Hindutva ideology that embraces only those religious communities whose origins could be traced to the Indian soil. Hence, it is no surprise that the Muslims and Christians have been suffering at the hands of Hindu extremists particularly, since 2014.

Dr. Malik argued that on the regional front, RSS impacted foreign policy outlook since the smaller states of South Asia too are increasingly becoming uncomfortable. India’s hegemonic designs are now affecting the sovereignty of the neighbouring states. India’s latest stunt of issuing new map and showing Nepal’s land as its own is only one such example. India’s long-time ally Bangladesh too is increasingly concerned particularly after the NRC exercise which left some 1.9 people homeless most of whom are Bengali Muslims. Needless to say, with Pakistan, India’s belligerence has increased many folds and it is in this scenario, that the today’s event has been organized by ISC so that a better understanding can be developed regarding threats emanating from the BJP - RSS nexus.

While welcoming the guest speakers, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General ISSI in his remarks accentuated two areas in which India Study Centre ISC, ISSI would be focusing a lot. The first area in which ISC will work extensively would be Indian terrorism in Pakistan. On 14 November 2020 Foreign Minister of Pakistan and DG ISPR presented a dossier to the media and the big dossier was sent to the United Nations and also shared with other

countries. The dossier clearly indicates that how India is promoting terrorism in Pakistan. India has been using terrorism as an instrument in its foreign policy.

DG ISSI further said that the second area in which ISC will focus more is the disinformation campaign of India against Pakistan. India has been involved in heinous activities for years perhaps for decades as was manifested by Indian Chronicles that were not Pakistan's publication rather it was EU Disinfo Lab which brought to light after considerable efforts that how for 15 years in so many countries Indian agents were spreading disinformation about Pakistan. These are the two areas in which we need to expose the real face of India to the world as well as to our own people so that we can hope that India can desist from such activities in the future.

Ms Mahwish Hafeez, Research Fellow at ISC, ISSI highlighted RSS activities in India. She presented an overview of the organization, its functions and modus operandi and said that during the early 1900s, the Indian subcontinent under the British rule witnessed several movements by different communities to protect their religious and cultural identities from getting polluted by other religions or by western cultural influences. The emergence of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925 at Nagpur by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was also in this backdrop as RSS's proclaimed aim was to free 'Hindustan' and save Hindu culture. Additionally, it also sought cultural and spiritual renaissance of the Hindu as a nation. RSS seeks to bring Hindus under nationalistic lines. For this purpose, the RSS relies upon the Hindutva ideology that was first floated by V. D. Savarkar (Vinayak Damodar Savarkar,) who believed that to be an "Indian" one had to believe that India was both his holy land and fatherland. By this definition, followers of religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were Indian. However, Muslims and Christians were outsiders as these religions had their birthplace and holy lands somewhere else.

She further maintained that it is a well-known fact that India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a trained "Pracharak" (worker) of RSS and an ardent supporter of the Hindutva ideology. It, therefore, is no surprise that since 2014, with the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party BJP under the leadership Modi, India has fast drifted towards Nazi-inspired Hindu nationalism or Hindutva ideology. In fact, this ideology of Hindutva has totally captured the Indian society. Mob lynchings have become a norm whereas, National Register of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act, revocation of Article 370 and 35 A are all manifestations of Hindutva ideology

as they are meant to isolate the Muslims. The RSS agenda has very serious consequences for the region as well as is evident by the fact that India is increasingly antagonizing its neighbours and SAARC has been left almost defunct due to Indian bigotry.

Dr Zafar Iqbal Cheema, President Strategic Vision Institute SVI Islamabad was of the view that RSS has occupied India and the threat of RSS emanates from India to South Asia is extremely dangerous. The threat of RSS needs to be taken seriously. RSS is now almost a hundred years old. The nature of the threat of RSS is very significant because India is the largest country of South Asia in demographic term, military term and economic term. Cheema highlighted three main points such as RSS and its ideology, RSS tactics and methods and what is the nature of RSS being in power in India today. RSS believes in primordial ideology and primordial nationalism.

He went on to say that RSS is a threat to Indian democracy; they are a threat to secularism, they are a threat to the way of life in India. Hindutva ideology is exclusionary in nature; they especially target Muslims and think that Muslims are outsiders and a threat to Hindutva ideology. RSS, no doubt, is inspired by nazism and fascism. RSS ideology is not only a threat to South Asia it is a threat to the region as well as a threat to the whole world. The tactic and methodology of RSS are fascist in nature. Their definition of India is very threatening to the region. RSS definition of India goes back to Ashoka the Great, an Indian emperor from c. 268 to 232 BC. They want India that of the Indian emperor Ashoka the Great. The current government of Modi is the manifestation of RSS ideology posing a threat to South Asia. The ideology of RSS is to exclude other people from the government, exclude other people from the region. They want to establish their own dictatorship, authoritarianism that by and large will pose a threat to South Asia.

Lt. General (Retd) Asif Yasin Malik HI (M), Former Secretary of Defence said that India is the only country in the world whose name as Hindustan is based on religion; obviously, there is no space for other religion in India. It is very important to understand why they have an issue with Muslims? They have an issue with Muslims because the Muslims ruled over India for seven hundred years. They openly say that they will avenge the period of seven hundred years by eliminating the Muslims. General Malik further argued that if he were a policymaker he would

not call India instead he would have called India as Hindustan. Before we talk of RSS we need to understand fascism ideology based on natural social hierarchy and rule of elites. Fascism is a form of government that is one type of government, fascists are against democracy and they aim to prepare a nation for war. It stands for a centralized government and fascist government tends to be materialist and racist.

If we relate fascism with RSS all components of fascism are visible in India. There is going to be a one-party system in India. General Malik cautions that RSS has already led the foundation to the disintegration of the Indian union. India, on the other hand, has been trying to behave as a global power in reality it does not have the credential of even the local force. The latest example is that of Sino-Indian standoff where Indian weaknesses have been exposed to the world. India has undergone in isolation all its neighbouring states have strained relations with it. Indian economy will further deteriorate and internal unrest will intensify. New Delhi is likely to exploit the new US Arab-Israel nexus and may conduct surgical strikes against Pakistan. Finally, Pakistan has to keep eyes on the Indian internal instability caused by the BJP and ought to exploit various faultiness in the Indian Union.

Ambassador Aziz Ahmad Khan, Former High Commissioner in New Delhi said that it true that RSS is now established in India. If we see the history of India the preparation of RSS ideology, was there consisting of different organized groups. Even the presence of RSS is now in village level. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by Hindu nationalism because Gandhi was talking about Muslims rights. RSS under Modi regime manifests complete fascist image. When Modi was Chief Minister of Gujarat state he was involved in the Muslims massacres. The fascist Modi is unwilling to apologize for the killing of Muslims in Gujarat. India, by all means, under current juncture is a fascist state, the Hindutva ideology is the supreme ideology of the country.

Congress party in India has become a minor party; it is an uphill task for congress to gain ground in the near future. It is certain BJP government and RSS ideology will remain in power for a long time. It is very dangerous that an overwhelmingly majority have support for RSS policies in India. Secular India has gone, the policies that are being pursued in India continued to be pursued as far as the suppression and discrimination of Muslims are concerned. India currently has fragile relations with its neighbouring countries. Though Pakistan wants to have good relations with

India, there is no positive response from the Modi government. India is now changing the demography of Kashmir through the domicile law; they are going to influx Hindus in Kashmir.

Ambassador Aziz Ahmad Khan predicted that there will be the likelihood of false flag operations and surgical strikes by India against Pakistan to divert the attention of the international community from Kashmir. Our armed forces need to be extremely vigilant for giving a befitting response to India. We have to continue to fight against terrorism launched by India inside Pakistan. We should need to communicate the world what India is doing in Pakistan. The recognition of Israel will embolden India in the region. We need to be cautious as far as our borders are concerned; we ought to be watchful as far as Indian sponsored terrorism is concerned. We should work extremely hard diplomatically to convince the world about Indian heinous activities in the Kashmir and Pakistan.

During question answer session, a question was raised by DG ISSI; is India really heading towards disintegration? Ambassador Aziz Ahmad Khan by responding to the question said that as far as the disintegration of India is concerned there might be unrest in India there might be discontentment however disintegration of India may take time. Another question was raised by Dost Muhammad Barrech Research Associate at ISC, ISSI about the impact of Hindutva ideology in Indian foreign policy. Ambassador Aziz Ahmad Khan responded to the question by saying that the global powers are involved in their own problems the US particularly is embroiled in the mess the Trump has created. They are unconcerned about Hindutva ideology.

Towards the end, Chairman Board of Governors, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood in his concluding remarks articulated that an exclusionary ideology based on race, culture and religion is not entirely a new phenomenon. The recent history shows that exclusionary ideology prevailed like Nazism in Germany and fascism in Italy. This phenomenon under the Modi government is again emerging in India. Hindutva ideology under current circumstances has permeated in all Indian institutions including parliament, media, defence and security establishments. It is now affecting national polices in every filed. RSS ideology is akin to Nazism is very dangerous development it has resulted in continued communal riots such as destruction of Babri Mosque, the murder of over two thousand people in Gujrat riots and more recently the Delhi riots.

Ambassador Khalid Mahmood further reiterated that the Citizenship Amendment Act, National Registration of Citizenship these are all the expression of the Hindutva ideology.