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Report – In-house Meeting

“US-India Strategic Tech Alliance: Options for Pakistan”

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The Arms Control & Disarmament Centre (ACDC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) held an in-house discussion meeting on “**US-India Strategic Tech Alliance: Options for Pakistan**” on Tuesday, January 12, 2021. Ms. Aamna Rafiq, Research Associate ACDC-ISSI, presented the topic followed by an interactive discussion. The in-house discussion meeting was attended by the members of the ISSI research faculty and the ACDC advisory board.

Malik Qasim Mustafa, Director ACDC, in his welcome remarks said that the core objective of this US initiative “US-India Strategic Tech-Alliance (UISTA)” would be to centre its Indo-Pacific Strategy vis-à-vis emerging technologies for defence and security purposes around its relations with India.

Ms. Aamna Rafiq said that the United States’ National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence (NSCAI) in its recent report proposed the creation of the UISTA. She said that the UISTA will be composed of regular working groups and high-level dialogues between the two states in seven key areas: promotion of technological innovation; expert human resource exchanges; strengthen joint research and development (R&D); accelerate security and defence cooperation; improve data sharing ecosystem; counteroffensive information operations; technological standardisation and norm building for AI; and any other technical aspect of a broader strategic landscape. This tech alliance would be one of the key components of a broader US agenda to keep India “as a key focal point” for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

India and the US have signed multiple agreements. The three US-India bilateral agreements namely “the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA),” “Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)” and “Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)” hints towards a bigger tech alliance in the form of the UISTA between two major Quad members in the coming years. The US is also encouraging such cooperation between India and Japan and Australia.

She highlighted that following the same model of “mini-lateral relationships,” the US has established a new trilateral partnership around emerging technologies with India and Israel, known as “T3” which is outside of Quad and would centre on will ensure the reliability, openness and interoperability of 5G technology.

The US and India are also members of a new tech alliance named “D10” conceived by the United Kingdom which aspires to bring together ten democracies of the world – US, UK, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Australia, India, Canada and South Korea for the global technology supply chain management

She said that these initiatives are setting the ground for greater technological cooperation with India on one hand, and the US, Australia and Japan on the other hand. All these arrangements are like beads on one string. The underlining themes running throughout these initiatives are India, data sharing and technological interoperability. All three themes point towards the US goal to achieve strategic advantage over China and Russia in the realm of dual-use emerging technologies.

With the re-emergence of great power competition, the US is aspiring to unite all partners for the international standardisation of key emerging technologies to ensure the uniform and rapid inclusion of these technologies into national security capabilities. Formation of this global technological alliance as the most viable option to offset China’s Digital Silk Road and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for the next decade.

Talking about what does this means for the strategic stability in South Asia, she said that majority of these emerging technologies are dual-use in nature, these bilateral and multilateral agreements would enhance the Indian capabilities both in civilian and military domains. Along with LEMOA, COMCASA and BECA, the UISTA will enhance data collection and analysis, access to advance satellite imagery, target acquisition capability, hypersonic missile capabilities and advanced encryption of classified communication for the Indian armed forces. It will also boost the Indian intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities vis-à-vis China and Pakistan in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. The UISTA will provide a huge boost to stationary as well as robotic applications of military AI.

Thus, she highlighted that India is building its military capabilities in the realm of emerging technologies with the help of the US and its allies on the pretext of the Chinese threat. This advancement of the Indian emerging military technologies could not only be easily shifted towards Pakistan but also increase the military asymmetry between India and Pakistan

It will push Pakistan towards a dangerous new arms race in South Asia. Keeping in view the long-standing Pakistan-China friendship, this emerging dynamic would directly as well as indirectly affect the digital initiatives under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Pakistan.

Talking about the options for Pakistan she said that it must build a cooperative framework with friendly countries across the globe and focus on the indigenisation of emerging technologies. Perhaps a Pakistan-China technological collaboration. Other options are public-private partnership and indigenisation. Pakistan may have less than a decade to catch up with technological advancements India is heading for. Pakistan has no other option except to catch up with these developments before it is too late.

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General ISSI, said that Pakistan has not focused on technological advancements and indigenisation. If we do not catch up with technological advancements, we will be left dependent on importing them.

Discussion:

Question: US-India tech alliance is empowering India against China. Also, the US-led global technological order is being shaped. China is also developing tremendously in technologies, such as 5G and AI. Where will the two sides meet? Will there be a clash between these two sides? How will it be reconciled?

Answer: The US is trying to establish a global technological order led by it. However, it is increasingly facing resistance from China and now Russia as well.

If we analyse the ongoing debates especially in the United Nations concerning cyberspace and AI at the platform of Certain Weapons Convention (CWC) where they are discussing some kind of system for the emerging technologies. There are two clear blocks - one is led by the US and includes its allies, the other is led by China and Russia.

The main issue is that the US argues that with new technologies like 5G and the internet existing framework of international law is applicable while China and Russia are of the view that this system is outdated and they want to have a new set of international norms that will benefit their

point of view. Regarding AI as well the US wants an open-ended system for regulating them while China and Russia want a more centralised regulating system, which state sovereignty intact and supreme. Due to these ideological differences, negotiations at the UN are completely deadlocked since 2014.

Comment: There is a certain similarity in the stance of the US-led bloc and the Chinese block regarding a technological global order. While the US wants an order that is led by it, China wants the principle of sovereignty as supreme i.e. they want to be in control of their technologies. Thus, at the moment no one wants a global order that controls and constrains their news technologies.

Comment: Concerning options for Pakistan, it should certainly indigenise. There need to be internal reforms in Pakistan and good governance. Cooperation with China is a good option but Pakistan needs to be cautious at the same time and protect its interests.

Answer: I do agree. We have to draft an overall national security policy. We also need to give chance to our local talent, empower and motivate our youth to put the country on the path to indigenisation.

Question: What impact would the Indo-US technological alliance have on Indo-Russia relations?

Answer: There will be a clash. India is one of the biggest clients for Russian military equipment. Thus, the first problem India will face is the maintenance of the existing military infrastructure. At the same time, India wants to acquire the latest military equipment as well as technology from the US. India will, thus, find it increasingly difficult to balance its relations with the US and Russia.

PICTURES OF THE EVENT

