



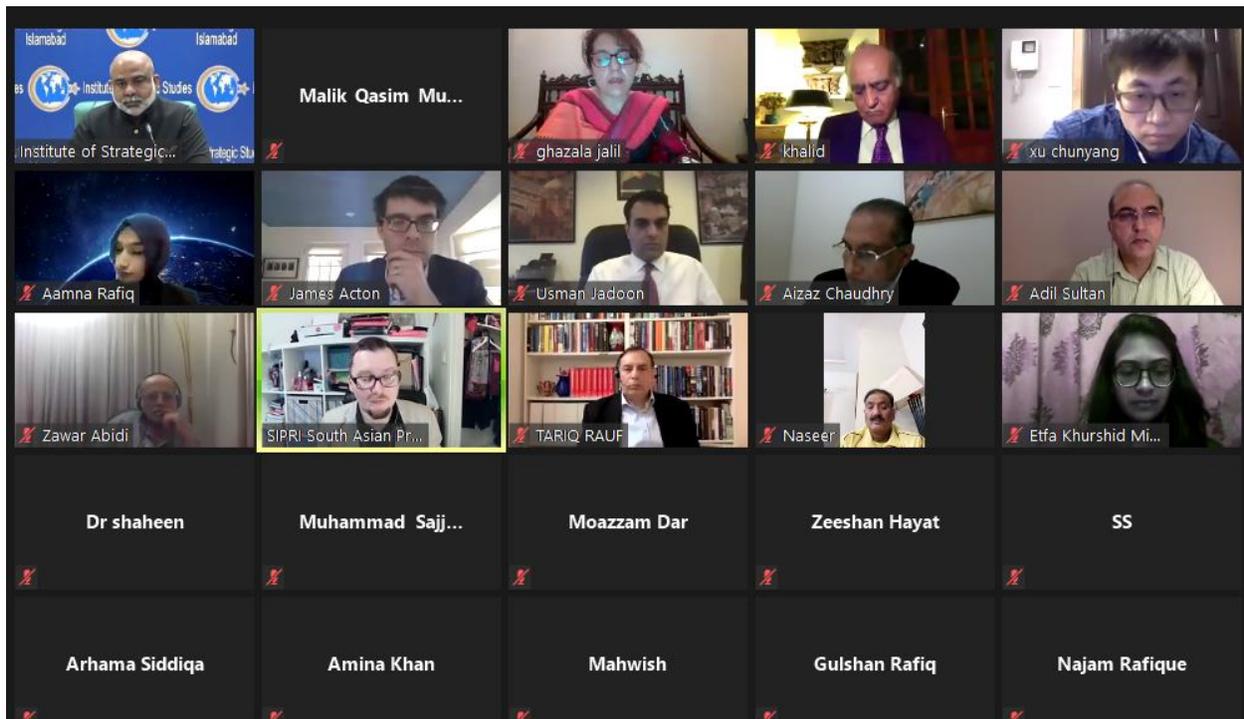
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Report – Panel Discussion

**“US Nuclear Policy under Biden:
Prospects and Challenges”**

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The Arms Control and Disarmament Centre (ACDC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organised a panel discussion on the “US Nuclear Policy under Biden: Prospects and Challenges” on Thursday, February 25, 2021, on Zoom. The panel of experts included: Mr. James M. Acton, Co-director of Nuclear Policy Programme, Carnegie Endowments for International Peace; Dr. Petr Topychkanov, Senior Researcher, Stockholm International Peace Institute (SIPRI); Mr. Xu Chunyang, Senior Researcher, China Arms Control and Disarmament Association (CACDA); Mr. Usman Iqbal Jadoon, Director General, UN Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and Dr. Adil Sultan, Dean/Head of Department, Faculty of Aerospace and Strategic Studies (FASSS), Air University Islamabad.

Introductory Remarks by Malik Qasim Mustafa, Director ACDC-ISSI

He warmly welcomed the participants and guests to the panel discussion. He said that the US nuclear and arms control policy went under a major shift during the Trump administration. Trump not only withdrew from major arms control and disarmament treaties but also proposed to develop low-yield nuclear weapons capabilities and tried to erode the norms against the use of nuclear weapons. The Trump administration was also interested in resuming nuclear testing. However, the new Biden administration is ready to revisit Trump’s major policy decisions and is willing to re-engage on bilateral and multilateral issues. Biden believes in using diplomacy and restraints in nuclear and arms control matters. He has already extended the New START treaty and offered to restart nuclear talks with Iran which are welcoming developments. He said that to explore the “US Nuclear Policy under Biden: Prospects and Challenges” the ACDC at the ISSI has organised this panel discussion.

Mr. James M. Acton, in response to the question of whether President Biden is expected to revive arms control initiatives and exercise restraint in his nuclear weapons policy, said that the Biden administration’s first step was to extend the New START which was a quick and welcome step. However, he said that a greater challenge will be the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). If Iran will come back to the deal, the US will come back to the deal. With the JCPOA there will have to be negotiations of the sequencing to getting back to the deal. When will sanctions be lifted and when will the US come back. The US has indicated that it will reduce restrictions on Iran, while Iran shows compliance with the IAEA. There will be opposition within

and outside the US and Iran. However, he said that a simultaneous process is possible and he is optimistic about the JCOPA revival.

On the future approach to arms control, he said that as opposed to Trump's trilateral approach Biden has indicated that the US will engage with Russia on one tract and China on a separate tract. He said the greatest challenge for the US is North Korea's nuclear capability. He noted that the US approach towards the issue will require painful reassessment – perhaps capping the threat may be more realistic rather than rollback.

Mr. Acton said that there is no nuclear arms race but a non-nuclear arms race between the US and Russia that is vigorous and needs to be discussed. The US has estimated that China will double its nuclear arsenal in the next decade. Nuclear competition can trickle into conventional balance. There is a real competition happening and it is dangerous. The traditional arms race is not apparent. There is some strategic competition between the US and Russia what would be the spill-over effect on South Asia?

Dr. Petr Topychkanov, responding to the question on how the extension of the New START is important for arms control and non-proliferation, stressed that the New START extension is important because it is the beginning of something bigger. However, the extension is not the beginning or end but a continuation of arms control arrangements between the US and Russia. The biggest value of the New START extension is that in the next five year to continue this conversation must be broader – to include more items in this conversation and more countries. He said that it is important to make existing channels more effective between the two. The New START demonstrated that two countries can take on challenges despite COVID-19.

Some issues he highlighted that the two countries needed to work on to how to deal with medium-to short-range missiles and their deployments, tactical nuclear weapons or low yield nuclear capabilities, a broader conversation on ballistic missile defence and early warning systems in space. He also emphasised the need to extend the discussions to new technologies and cyberthreat and their impact on strategic stability. He also said that doctrinal dialogue is essential between the US and Russia. China and other countries should be engaged in multilateral arrangements. He suggested, if possible, it is important for the US and Russia to delink political

issues from the arms control agenda. He said that now it is a competition of technologies between the US and Russia which is more dangerous than a traditional arms competition.

Mr. Xu Chunyang, while responding to the question on whether a new arms race between the US, Russia and perhaps China, continue unabated or would be scaled back, said that the arms race that was started during the Trump administration will shrink during Biden administration. On how is the extension of New START important for arms control and non-proliferation he said that the US and other powers must seek new arms control arrangements to maintain strategic stability and prevent an arms race. He said that on the North Korean nuclear issue, the US has deployed missile defence systems around the Korean Peninsula. This has made China and Russia uncomfortable and insecure. Biden administration needs to adjust its policy.

He also emphasised that addressing new technologies like cyberattacks and artificial intelligence (AI) would be important for Biden's policy. Biden has started work on next-generation arms control initiatives to maintain the US leadership in global non-proliferation. How should the new technologies should or should not be coupled with nuclear weapons? Biden has stressed on a policy that nuclear weapons should be decoupled from cyberthreat. However, that policy is not officially in place.

Mr. Usman Iqbal Jadoon highlighted that there is a dire need to bring new technologies like AI, hypersonic missiles, cyber threats and space-based military capabilities arrangements under arms control arrangements. He talked about the current trends in the arms control arena and the expectations of the revival of arms control from the Biden administration. Based on statements from senior US official, there are four trends. The first is on bilateral arms control with Russia. Second is competitors or threats like Iran and North Korea. The third is a multilateral arms control arena like the NPT. As far as the NPT is concerned, he had a bleak view of whether it could deliver or make any contribution towards arms control and disarmament. Also, as far as disarmament mechanisms in the US are concerned, he said that there is no dialogue on emerging technologies. The fourth area of focus is the informal arms control arrangements like codes of conduct regarding responsible behaviour in areas like cyberspace and outer space. Here as well there seems to be no progress.

There is no bold new initiative to deal with new emerging technologies. He also had a bleak view of efforts to regulate these technologies because no great power wants to give up its strategic advantage. Efforts at arms control or regulation start only once there is a proliferation of technologies and competition between countries intensifies.

He said that the US approach towards South Asia is not even-handed. The US is providing India with technical cooperation and military hardware, while such cooperation is being denied to Pakistan. He stressed that in the field of emerging technologies India is getting ahead. If these technologies degrade Pakistan's nuclear capabilities it would be a major concern for Pakistan. Thus, there is an urgent need for regulating new technologies.

On lethal autonomous weapons, he said that he had been part of the negotiations at the UN for years but the debate was not on how to regulate these weapons but whether such regulations were needed at all. Thus, as far as the multilateral arms control arena is concerned, he said that there is very little chance of any breakthrough on emerging technologies, cyber threats and other areas

Dr. Adil Sultan on the implication of US nuclear policy towards South Asia said that the US arms control approach has been consistent and we can expect a continuation of previous US policy. There is bipartisan agreement in the US that Indian defence capability must be enhanced to build it up against China. This is directly affecting South Asian security. The US has tried to bring India into the nuclear mainstream. There have been efforts to make India a permanent member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and creating waivers for it. He opined that Indo Pacific policy has primacy and the US will continue its policy of giving primacy to India. However, the US- India partnership should not be at the expense of Pakistan's security. He said that this trend in South Asia will adversely affect the region. As the US China rivalry intensifies, Pakistan might have to bear the brunt of it.

He expressed concern that there are no questions asked for any capabilities India is developing. However, Indian capabilities cannot be used against China because it is powerful but there is concern that it will be used against Pakistan.

Question and Answer Session

Question: What are Biden admin's views on Open Skies treaty and creating the environment for nuclear disarmament (CEND) initiative? What are your views on the former Defence Secretary, Perry's call to eliminate ICBMs?

Answer: Biden has not announced policy on the CEND and open skies treaty. The CEND is a no brainer. On the Open Skies treaty, there is a debate in the US whether the withdrawal was legal. Biden might have taken the argument to reenter the Open Skies treaty. However, it might go either way. On ICBMs, I would encourage you to read a Carnegie report to extend the life of existing ICBMs like Minuteman. While trying to negotiate the reduction of ICBMs. This would avoid the costs of building new ICBMs.

Question: In its high-level segment at the CD this week, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary made an expansive statement on several aspects of NACD; will Pakistan propose any ideas or initiatives on the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) and the fissile material treaty (FMT)?

Answer: On PAROS, Pakistan is on the receiving end. Pakistan does not have large space capabilities. The debate has already moved from militarisation to weaponisation. Pakistan is trying to prevent the weaponisation of space. What shapes Pakistan's views is India's ASAT test and capability and the possibility of integrating BMD systems with space assets. In the future Rods from Gods kinds of weapons that India might develop are of concern to Pakistan. Pakistan has always been a supporter of PAROS. Bilaterally Pakistan has proposed several initiatives on non-militarisation and non-weaponisation of outer space to India but there has been no positive response.

The time for FMCT has passed. It was not about constraining P-5 but those like Pakistan and India. That logic is no longer valid. India has been given preferential treatment and waivers. Pakistan also built fissile material. So, today the treaty is irrelevant. Talking about it is like flogging a dead horse.

Question: How do you see President Biden approach towards the emerging technologies, especially concerning hypersonic weapons, as we had seen during President Trump tenure that

the US was actively engaged in the development of hypersonic glide vehicles (HGV) and a couple of tests were conducted?

Answer: In the US the hypersonic weapons are linked with the Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS) programme. That is no longer the focus of US weapons which now have shorter range weapons now and conventional. It has a rationale and it about China. It will not change under the Biden administration. Individual programmes might be modified. Russia and China both have hypersonic missiles. Russia already deployed hypersonic Avangard. It counts towards the New START treaty limit. It remains to be seen if there is any arms control pursued hypersonic weapons.

Question: What is the biggest challenge for the US administration?

Answer: North Korean nuclear programme is probably the biggest challenge for the new US administration. Tricky in many ways. Kim regime wants to develop ICBM and wants to hold the US at risk. This is not bargaining. The capability is to deter the US. A realistic policy will require a painful reassessment of US-North Korea policy. Unlike the approach, the Trump administration pursued complete denuclearisation of North Korea, capping the threat may be more realistic rather than rollback.

Concluding Remarks by Amb. Khalid Mahmood, Chairman, BOG ISSI

Amb. Khalid Mahmood said that President Biden has indicated that his approach to arms control will be different than that of Trump. He has demonstrated it by extending the New START after taking office. He said that bilateral, trilateral and multilateral avenues to arms control and disarmament must be pursued. However, he emphasised that it is important to apply arms control arrangements indiscriminately otherwise their efficacy is lost. There are different standards for India and Pakistan in the arms control and export control regime which erode their efficacy.

PICTURES OF EVENT

