IN-HOUSE DISCUSSION
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Non Proliferation and Strategic Stability in South Asia: A Russian Perspective

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STRATEGIC VISION
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On 16 May, 2016, the Strategic Vision institute (SVI) held an in-house discussion on the subject of "Non Proliferation and Strategic Stability in South Asia: a Russian Perspective." The guest speaker was Dr. Petr Topychkanov, an associate at the Non-Proliferation Program, Carnegie Moscow Centre. Amidst the ever-changing international milieu with its serious implications in the South Asian region, this discussion was specifically organized to get enlightened about the Russian perspective on the subject, since the recent Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference took place last year. SVI is thankful to Dr. Topychkanov for his availability during his visit to Pakistan.

Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema, President SVI, welcomed and thanked the worthy guest, speakers and participants for affording valuable time out of their busy schedule and gracing the occasion with their presence. He chaired the session, and initiated the discussion with a view that there exists a state of continuous concern in South Asia for the maintenance of strategic stability, especially in view of the recent developments that have been taking place between India and Pakistan — the two antagonistic nuclear powers of South Asia. Stability of South Asian region also banks on India-Pakistan's better relations with the world's leading powers like the US, Russia and China. At present, some re-alignments have taken place between India and the US which can substantially influence the strategic scenario of South Asia. Historically their relation was redefined in their strategic partnership evolved since 2002-3 and Nuclear Deal that took place in 2005. Since then, a number of strategic agreements between the two have created compulsions for Pakistan to review its relations with both India and the US. Relationship between Pakistan and the US — loaded with mistrust — was yet again proved deceptive as the US' Congress recently withheld the delivery of F-16s to Pakistan, thus created further gap in their so-called strategic partnership.

Dr. Cheema also highlighted the rapidly accelerating growth of conventional military and nuclear arms between India and Pakistan which can drastically impact the strategic stability of South Asia. The current stress is about the huge conventional and nuclear asymmetry between India and Pakistan. Indian armed forces are much larger and heavily equipped than Pakistan and pace of nuclear weapon development is much faster. India today is desperate to gain the second-strike capability, along with the development of nuclear submarines and ballistic missiles. In Pakistan, these developments are perceived as nuclearization of Indian Ocean, which compels Pakistan to find some sort of response. In the long run, India's pace of nuclear proliferation can lead to dire consequences for Pakistan and possibly for China as well. On the positive side, Russia and Pakistan are improving their relations and both should enter in a new era of relationship to build common grounds of stability in the region.

Dr. Topychkanov thanked the SVI for allowing him to share the "Russian perspective on the strategic stability of South Asia and non-proliferation". Before expressing his opinions on the given topic, he maintained that the views are his own and not reflect the official stance of the Russian government, Ministry of Foreign Relations or any other related institution.

He initiated the discussion with a statement that South Asia cannot be over looked due to its geographical proximity with Russia. He also

underlined a number of key areas of cooperation between Russia and India that may have possible impact on the strategic stability between Pakistan and India, such as:

- BrahMos
- Arihant
- Chakra
- Sharing of Military technology

He stated that the main aim of this cooperation is to keep India as an important strategic partner in the region, at the same time Russia is also keen on developing ties with Pakistan. Dr. Topychkanov also opined that with upgraded air-defense technologies, India may be able to control the airspace of Pakistan, if these are deployed along the borders of Pakistan and this is an important factor with reference to the strategic balance in the region.

India and Russia are cooperating to create new versions of BrahMos which presumably has the ability to be launched from submarine through torpedoes bays and also from airplanes. Nevertheless, Russia will not provide India the technology to build nuclear warheads for this missile as a principal part of the deal, said Dr. Topychkanov. In addition, if India gets expertise in BrahMos missile technology it may try replicating the same on other missiles like Nirbhay etc. India had planned to build six submarines; these are in the developing and testing phase but are not operational yet. Russia's technological assistance in the development of nuclear sea based capability of India cannot be denied. It has been helping India to get expertise in operating nuclear submarines, but India is now expecting far more advanced submarines from Russia, which may cause friction between both sides, thus Moscow and Delhi should resolve this issue beforehand.

Moreover, he highlighted many other Russian projects with India, for instance S-400 air defense system, which according to him, cannot be taken as a complete strategic system, and is quite disputable on intercepting medium and long-range ballistic missiles. Dr. Topychkanov also reminded that initially Russia agreed to sell S-400 to China, and only then Moscow and India initiated talks on selling S-400 to India too. On the other side, there are some speculations in mass media on the provision of Russian military missile technology to India. As of now, it is hard to predict and confirm these kinds of assumptions except for BrahMos.

In the context of getting a waiver from Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) following Indian-US nuclear agreement, Dr. Topychkanov reiterated that India had committed to separate its civilian and military nuclear facilities in a phased manner. It had plans to place civil nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, sign and adhere to IAEA's additional protocol, continue its unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing. Some of such undertakings have yet to materialize.

Furthermore, Mr. Topychkanov made it clear that Russia is interested in keeping India a long-term strategic partner to achieve its futuristic goals of development. On the other hand, to maintain the strategic stability in the region, Russia intends to maintain better relations with Pakistan as well. “Russia has tried to help Pakistan in the recent times to prevent the strategic imbalance in South Asia”, said Mr. Topychkanov. He added, one-way out to create strategic balance between India and Pakistan is through diplomatic means and for that purpose, Russia supports both nations to be included in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In addition, Russia has also tried to look for different avenues for both India and Pakistan to sit together. Another way to manage negative impact of strategic imbalance is to develop military cooperation with Pakistan. The Russian helicopter’s deal with Pakistan is just a testing ground between both states and if successful, other deals will continue to strengthen the Pak-Russian relationship. The more pertinent project for both Pakistan and Russia is to continue re-export of engines for JF-17 Thunder trough China. Russian involvement in this matter can help Pakistan, as there are some similarities with Mi-35M helicopters (Russian).

Talking about non-proliferation efforts, Mr. Topychkanov revealed, that after the USSR’s collapse, Russia it could not combat non-proliferation in the same way because of its own weaknesses at the international level. Financially, for about 10 years, Russia was dependent on the US in the field of non-proliferation along with the improvement of its own safety of nuclear installations. He also clarified as to why Russia’s stance about Abdul Qadeer Khan’s network was similar to that of the US. During Putin’s leadership, Russia had realized that there are differences in the US and Russia’s approach towards non-proliferation. This realization came strongly during Iraq war when Russia tried to convince the US that “as Sadam Hussain cannot build anything closer to a nuclear device but the US misused its intelligence and tore the region apart,” expressed Mr. Topychkanov.

In the question-answer session, Dr. Cheema wanted to confirm the truth behind the news of Russia being allegedly in contact with the Taliban. Mr. Topychkanov replied, “Russia strictly condemns extremism of any kind with any brand, the only possibility of staying in contact with the Taliban would be for the purpose of discouraging the formation of Islamic State anywhere in the region and especially in Syria. From this point of view, Russia will be in an alliance whatsoever with any force, which is against the creation of Islamic State.”

Mr. Yasir Masood, a Senior Research Associate and Editor at SVI mentioned that Afghanistan has remained a breeding ground for extremist ideologies, especially after the USSR's defeat, and these extremists repeatedly altered and clothed their ideologies with new brands of terrorist thought, and the associated groups emerged to sporadically threaten a-new Pak-Afghan security, as well as that of the rest of the region. He asked how Russia perceives these developments and what is the possible way in view of Russia to keep the regional harmony intact? In response to this question, Mr. Topychkanov commented that Afghanistan issue can have two possible way outs; one is that Russia should sell small arms to Afghanistan, train pilots and help in

building infrastructure by supporting political leadership. The second view is to let the Afghans decide their own fate, because only they should know the real solution to their problems. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Russia should isolate Afghanistan, as this approach would not help the region at all. As long as NATO forces stay there, it is helpful for the maturation of political process but it will hardly bring any national consensus and reconciliation among different forces.

Mr. Imran Iqbal— a Research Associate from the SVI — asked, if the US can be termed as a common enemy (of Russia and Pakistan) when it comes to geopolitics of Middle East or South Asia. Similarly, China becomes a common friend for both Russia and Pakistan, so what is holding Russia back from supporting Pakistan whole-heartedly when it comes to the level of strategic partnership, economic assistance and military cooperation. Dr. Topychkanov stated that, as far as Indo-US relations are concerned, despite India's good relations with the US, there are a lot of misunderstandings. Although, the Indo-US nuclear deal has been signed but so far no nuclear power plants have been established by the US' companies in India. Therefore, Russia still believes in providing civil nuclear energy and transfer of military technology to India. In addition, Pakistan maintains efficient relations with China but Russian-China relations are still not very profound. "Russia should learn from the best practices adopted by both Pakistan and China," he added. Therefore, in the long-term, possibility of a triangular strategic partnership between Russia, India and the US still seems a far cry.

Another probing question came from Ms. Adeela Azam from Strategic Planning Division (SPD), she inquired that Islamabad perceives that Russian-Pakistan relations are hindered by your close friendship with India. How far India is proving to be a stumbling block between our nearness? Dr. Topychkanov maintained that it would be a mistake if Russia lets its relations with Pakistan be dictated by the Indian factor. He suggested that Moscow should maintain transparency in its relation with both India and Pakistan and avoid throwing surprises at Pakistan.

Mr. Nasir Hafeez, from SVI, viewed the development of Indian SSBMs, entire triad of submarines along with the S-4 missile system which have delivery means etc. being developed with the Russian assistance, and if these are deployed along Pakistan's borders, may control the entire air space of Pakistan. He queried, since this strategic cooperation has created a serious dent in the strategic stability of South Asia, what Moscow should do to rebalance South Asia. Dr. Topychkanov in response, accepted that Russian cooperation with India has an influence on the strategic stability of the region but the way out is to exercise effective diplomacy. Russia should continue helping both Pakistan and India to become members of (SCO) and to make likelihood of war impossible between the two states. "Another option is that Russia must make it clear to India and Pakistan that it is not just an ally of any single state rather it is keen on keeping good relations with both of them. An open alliance with any single side may disrupt the regional stability", said Mr. Topychkanov. He further opined that it is for the same reason that now Russia is actively engaged with the military establishment of Pakistan. Lately, Russia has been holding few small-size military and naval exercises with Pakistan. "Russia is now looking to work with the public opinion of both India and Pakistan to reduce these misunderstandings and help in bringing transparency in their relations," said Mr. Topychkanov.

Mr. Raza, a student of IR department at NDU, inquired: "how Russia could justify its commitment towards ensuring strategic stability in South Asia, especially when it is providing technological support to India alone, which is a clear indication of creating a strategic imbalance in the region". Dr. Topychkanov contended that Russia is very much interested in the strategic stability of the region, rationally speaking; both Pakistan and India need to accomplish this task. Russia would not be able to shoulder such a responsibility on its own. Simultaneously, he was of the view that S-400 has a very limited capability to intercept ballistic missiles. It may only target aircrafts, cruise missiles, but may not be effective against medium and short-range ballistic missiles and hence may not be affecting the strategic balance of the region. He also anticipated that in case of crisis, even in the next ten years, despite the Indian commitment to pour in huge funds towards its BMD capability, it may not be able to intercept full specter of nuclear delivery systems from Pakistan. India despite maintaining close defense cooperation with Israel is still far from building efficient ballistic missile defense.

Ms. Maimuna Ashraf, a Research Associate from the SVI, questioned regarding the recent Indian nuclear sea based developments, which imply that the rivalry between the two South Asian nuclear states has entered into maritime domain. So, if Pakistan looks forward to neutralize these developments, what would be its implications on the region? Mr. Topychkanov replied that Moscow is against the nuclearization of Indian Ocean. It was in fact the US' initiative to nuclearize the Indian Ocean followed by China which is trying to create a space for its own fleet. This could trouble the Ocean's waters considerably and pose a potential source of future conflict. To avoid further nuclearization, examples from the US and Russia's disarmament treaties can indicate China, India and the rest to work towards de-nuclearization and disarmament.

Mr. Shams Us Zaman from the SPD also spurred an important question, one of the major factors effecting strategic stability in the region is India-Pakistan relations, both states have always tried to have a dialogue process but it mostly turned out to be a fiasco. Keeping in view the historical relationship of Russia and India, how Russia can play a role in bridging the gap between India and Pakistan? According to Mr. Topychkanov, Russia has played its role many a times as a negotiator between India and Pakistan, the fair example is of the famous *Tashkent* agreement. After the USSR's collapse, both India and Pakistan perceived this differently. However, the major point here is that, said Mr. Topychkanov, "Russia had better relations with the previous government of India, though the relations with the present Modi's government are also good. In the same way, Russian relations with Musharaf were friendlier than the present Sharif's government." He also held that today because of the rising tensions between India and Pakistan, Russia is less capable to ask both states to sort out their differences and sit for a composite dialogue.

Mr. Baqir Syed, Dawn News' Senior Correspondent, was curious in finding out that if India is a preferred partner for Moscow then what is Pakistan's status in Russia's foreign policy? Mr. Topychkanov responded on the term 'preferred partner' by arguing that for Russia, both countries have its own importance for different reasons. India is a long term strategic partner, but now Russia is also thinking to build better relations with Pakistan, especially after the Cold War. Pakistan may be an economic hub and Russia keeps an eye on different potential economic projects that can benefit both sides.

Ms. Sadia Kazmi, a Senior Research Associate at SVI asked, since Russia and Pakistan are warming up to each other, would there be a possibility of Russia's taking part in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), if not now, then may be in the future. Mr. Topychkanov expressed his views positively about CPEC's importance in the region, but simultaneously he regretted that Russia initiated some vital projects via Iran and India but till now it did not become fully operational, such as the International North–South Transport Corridor. To conclude the session, Dr. Cheema once again extended his gratitude to the speaker and the audience.