

SVI In-House Seminar October 12, 2017: Report

Growing Indo-US Nexus and Threat to Regional Security in South Asia



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Strategic Vision Institute (SVI) organized an In-house seminar on “Growing Indo-US Nexus and Threat to Regional Security in South Asia” on October 12, 2017 at the SVI seminar room. In the Inaugural session, the President/Executive Director SVI, Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema, presented his



welcome remarks. He thanked the honorable Chair Amb. (R) Ali Sarwar Naqvi; Executive Director CISS, and distinguished speakers: Amb. (R) Zamir Akram; Former Permanent Representative to CD/United Nations Geneva, Dr. Zafar Khan; Assistant Professor SS Dept. NDU Islamabad, Dr. Rizwana Abbasi; Senior Research Fellow SVI, for affording valuable time out of their busy schedule and gracing the occasion with their presence. The seminar was well attended by the members of academia, diplomats, policy-making civil and military establishments and students from the field of strategic and nuclear studies, and international politics from prominent universities in Islamabad.



After delivering welcoming remarks, Dr. Cheema handed over the session to Amb. Naqvi. He shared his views about the US policies towards South Asia. Amb. Naqvi said that the Indio-US nexus dates back to 1991 during the Clinton administration. President Clinton shifted Washington’s orientation

in the region away from his old ally i.e. Pakistan (during the Cold War). Later during George W. Bush’ administration, the US alliance with India became stronger, thus resulting in the Indo-US nuclear deal and NSG wavier. It allowed India to access international nuclear market. It simultaneously let India embark upon massive militarization, and helped India develop a sea based nuclear capability. Amb Naqvi said all these development are result of India-US nexus that impose a serious threat to regional security. To counter these threats there should be nuclear arms

control measures. Having said that Amb. Naqvi invited the first speaker Amb. Zamir Akram to talk about “Trump’s Policy towards South Asia & Emerging Threats to Regional Security”. He shed light on Trump’s policy towards South Asia and the consequent threats to regional security. He



opined that we are on a threshold of a new Cold War due to the consequence of the efforts of a declining power i.e. United States to contain a rising power i.e. China. In his views, the US and its allies are in a state of growing confrontation with Russia and China because of a continuous competition among them. Indo-US partnership is further evolving with the major aim to counter China. President Obama’s pivot to Asia created a space for new strategic policies with India and other states including Japan, Australia and Singapore. These Indo-centric policies are quite relevant to China because of potential threats they pose to the critical sea lines through which more than 80% of Chinese trade happens with rest of the world. The need is to look at the Chinese responses; one of which is to create alternative routes with rest of the world for its outward push. In this regard One Belt One Road (OBOR) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are important part of China’s outward policies. The other Chinese response has been to evolve a stronger partnership with Russia against the US. Elaborating on the current US policy under Trump’s administration, he stated that it is the extension and continuation of the same US strategic objective to prevent China from emerging as a competitor and to build alliance with other regional states in Asia that could be helpful in this pursuit. Amb. Akram pointed out three important red lines for Pakistan in Trump’s speech on US Policy in Afghanistan and in South Asia. First, it is reflective of a virtual invitation for India to play an even greater role in South Asia. US explicitly recognizes India’s hegemony over South Asia and wants it to play a role of regional policemen. Second, it aspires to see India playing a more active

role with Afghan government to find supporting elements that could create instability in Pakistan. Those elements are TTP, Bloch separatists, and terrorists etc. These actions collectively undermine Pakistan's regional security interest because it enables India to work with Afghan government to facilitate the encirclement of Pakistan. Third, he talked about safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Amb. Akram stated that these red lines are totally unacceptable for Pakistan. He further explained that the US has decided to adopt a prolonged engagement in Afghanistan. After fighting a war for about 17 years, the US has still been unable to defeat the Taliban. Trump emphasizes upon the continuation of military operations and further increasing the number of troops. US believe that by fighting Taliban it will pressurize them to accept the eventual settlement. This tactic has already been used in the past and had been a failure. He opined that the Taliban will not go for talks while simultaneously being engaged in the fight. At this point he raised a question as to what are the real US objectives in Afghanistan. Whether it wants to go for the withdrawal of its forces or will it find a political solution to the problem? Answering to his own question, he said that the US most probably will not withdraw from Afghanistan not only because it provides it a space for its military basis with air fleets and high sophisticated technology, it would also prefer to stay because the cost it is paying is not very high. Afghanistan provides the US with a base from which it can interfere in Pakistan, China, Iran, Russia and Central Asia.

Furthermore, the Indo-US deal and NSG wavier given to India has raised Pakistan's concerns. These special favors given to India by the US show its clear intentions for countering China. India's growing nuclear and conventional technology, Ballistic Missile Defence System (BMD), long range missiles, submarines, space technology etc, are part of India's Cold Start

Doctrine (CSD) that can any time be used against Pakistan. Amb. Akram further elaborated on the internal security threats of Pakistan which emerge due to Indian support for the TTP based in Afghanistan are causing cross boarder terrorist activities inside Pakistan. He maintained that the intentions of the US are now clear that it wants to disrupt the CPEC. Mentioning a statement by the US Secretary of Defence James Mattis about CPEC in which he mentioned that the CPEC is passing through a disputed territory, Amb. Akram stated that this resistance against the CPEC shouldn't make one lose hope. It is rather a positive sign that the US Secretary of Defence recognized Kashmir as a disputed territory, which is exactly what Pakistan claims too. In the end Amb. Akram proposed a pragmatic line of action for Pakistan and how it should respond to the international pressure. He suggested that Pakistan needs to improve its deterrence capabilities to full spectrum deterrence. Pakistan should also improve strategic cooperation with China and outreach with Russia in a meaningful and focused way. He urged on the rectification of the difference and suggested there should be convergence between Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan for mutual cause of peace in Afghanistan. Iran is critical to Pakistan and there is a need to improve the relations and solve the tensions. Pakistan should seriously take the violation of territory. There is a need to close down terrorist routes as they are the key problem. There should be simultaneous efforts to prevent the US presence in Afghanistan while unilaterally improving the security of our own borders. This can be done through installing electric and biometric surveillance in areas like Chaman. Landmines could also be laid down to secure the borders. Along with all this the attention should also be given to the refugees camps inside Pakistan as they are one of the reasons for insurgency in Pakistan.



The second speaker of the day, Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema, talked about “India’s Growing Influence in Afghanistan and Challenges to Pakistan”.

While discussing the pros and cons of India’s growing influence in Afghanistan and challenges to Pakistan, he raised some questions as to how Pakistan needs to respond. Should it behave as it is being expected to behave? Should it behave like it did in the immediate aftermath of 9/11? Or should it continue its present line of action? Addressing these questions, he said that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Gen. Pervez Musharraf acquiesced to the American threat and eventually gave concessions to the US. He said that Pakistan is suffering due to those concessions, e.g. the availability of the supply lines to the US. If Pakistan demands the US not to use its supply line, will America stop from doing so? And can Pakistan stop the US? Unfortunately Pakistan is unable to do that and ultimately Pakistan will suffer the consequences. Taking the discussion further Dr. Cheema shared two different statements made by Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Khuwaja Muhammad Asif and Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Qamar Javed Bajwa in response to the US demand for Pakistan to “Do More” to eliminate terrorism. Regarding the statement made by the Foreign Minister of Pakistan Khuwaja Muhammad Asif in his visit to the US, Dr. Cheema said that it is a flawed statement. He opined that it doesn’t suit a high official to give such kind of double line statements. On one hand he accepted that Pakistan is sponsoring terrorism and on the other hand simultaneously asking the US for a joint military action against the Haqqani network on the Pakistani soil. Dr. Cheema criticized the foreign minister for alleging Pakistan as a state that is sponsoring terrorism. Dr. Cheema said that Pakistan has been the worst victim of the War on Terror (WOT). In all its dimensions Pakistan has paid a very heavy cost for that. After playing a recognized central role in efforts against uprooting terrorism, there wasn’t any reason for such a flawed

statement and alleging Pakistan wrongly. Dr. Cheema argued if the situation warrants such statement and if there is a need to ask for the US cooperation under these circumstances? Surely there wasn't any need to deliver such statements and Pakistan should not go for joint military operation with the US.

Coming to the statement made by the COAS Qamar Javed Bajwa, Dr. Cheema appreciated that it is the first time that any leadership in Pakistan has categorically asked the US to do more. This statement shows his determination to safeguard Pakistan's national and security interests. This is the stance which should have been adopted by the foreign minister too. In response to the statement made by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Dr. Cheema said that he garnered a response similar to that of the COAS there is similarity in the views between the army and the prime minister remarks. Proceeding further with the discussion, Dr. Cheema talked about the role of Indian presence in Afghanistan. He said India is playing a role of military advisor to Afghanistan. Credible deterrence is the only way that can ensure Pakistan's security. He also stated that Pakistan should reach out to Russia. Referring to Trump's new policy he said that India would not deploy troops in Afghanistan for it did that once in Sri Lanka which proved to be a failure and the troops had to be withdrawn. In his concluding remarks, he said that there is a possibility of military threat from Afghanistan. At present Pakistan is not logistically and industrially capable of tackling a two-front war. However, regarding the US he commented that the last 40 years of partnership with the US is incompatible with the current situation for obvious reasons i.e. a nation goes by its interests not by the choice of friends.



The third speaker of the In-House, Dr. Zafar Khan, deliberated upon

“Indo-US Defence Partnership and Threats to Regional Stability”. He noted that the growing US-India strategic partnership provides India with an opportunity to acquire advanced technology that in turn will support its conventional and nuclear forces. It would create a major strategic worry in its immediate neighborhood, thereby potentially escalating the ladder to a possible conflict in the region. The Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) would transform the bilateral defence relationship between India and the US thus strengthening India’s defence industry. This initiative will help India’s defence industry move away from being the traditional “buyer-seller” dynamic to a more collaborative approach, exploring new areas of technological collaboration, boosting India’s naval capabilities, high tech-military equipment and enhancing quantitative and qualitative defence. India’s economic rise and strategic partnership with the US acts as an offshore balancer in the Asian maritime and continental affairs thus countering China, and plays a significant role in Afghanistan and consequently makes it an important stakeholder in the region. The logic behind this is to sustain the US hegemony and power projection without being severely challenged by the rise of its peer-competitor. Dr. Khan further argued that India, by virtue of its strategic partnership with the US vis-à-vis the strategic rise of China may eventually turn out to be a Frankenstein for the US itself in future because the strategic dynamics in the international politics remain unpredictable. India may not follow exactly what the US may suggest. The recent statement by Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman about India’s military role in Afghanistan is a clear reflection of India’s own aspiration for the ultimate decision-maker. India would rather like to modernize its conventional and nuclear forces and expand its geo-political and economic interest in the broader Asia-Pacific region. However, India’s aspirations for power and security maximization will potentially threaten the regional security. India has taken drastic measures to transform its strategic force posture in weapons

acquisitions and Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM). India plans to develop more nuclear submarines. It could have broader implications for rivalry between India and Pakistan including the core issue of Kashmir. He further elaborated that the growing US-India strategic partnership could reinforce India's CSD, making India more assertive, putting strategic pressure on Islamabad and enabling India to wage a limited war for achieving its political and military objectives. But CSD, if and when deployed, would be under the shadow of both strategic and tactical nuclear weapons on the other side of the border. This will turn the strategic environment more complex in South Asia and the same complexity could make India to take a pause before committing surgical strike for waging a limited war.

Dr. Khan said that India's growing strategic partnership and its force modernization plan challenge India's policy of minimum deterrence. It is not clear what India means by minimum deterrence when it needs to calculate its deterrent capability towards both China and Pakistan. Therefore, "what is credible towards China will likely not be the minimum towards Pakistan; and what is the minimum towards Pakistan cannot be credible towards China." India creates a strategic scenario in which one finds more ambiguity and vagueness, therefore putting pressure on Indian nuclear leadership to correct this strategic Dilemma. Last but not the least, he said that



the strategic partnership creates a competitive strategic triangle between the US, China and India as each one desires to show power projection and compete against the other.

The fourth and the last speaker of the event Dr. Rizwana Abbasi, talked about "Pakistan's Policy Response and Countermeasures to Safeguard Regional Peace". In her talk she added that Indo-US ties have undergone a significant paradigm

shift both in strategic as well as economic terms in the recent times. Talking about as to why is the Indo-US preeminent strategic partnership is mounted so deep in the contemporary environment; she explained that the global economic trends have shifted from Atlantic to Asia mainly due to Chinese increased growth rate. Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) connects 64-68 countries in four continents, with a total population of 406 billion (62 percent of world's total). China is indeed a rising power that experiences tremendous growth and can be expected to increase its geopolitical influence in the entire region to achieve its desired goals. India and China have shared interests in the China Sea, Western Pacific, Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf that drives India and China into serious geopolitical competition. At the same time, India is engaged in a heavy hedge against China to navigate Chinese growing wealth and power and to maintain Asian balance in the US favor by building deep collaboration with the latter. Against this background, India and the US have intensified their defence and security cooperation to promote shared military education and training programs, increase US defence sales to India, promote DTTI, initiate co-development and co-production and sharing of platforms on maritime security, sensitive technologies, over flights, navigation and surveillance systems etc. Dr. Abbasi explained that the US has invested extensively in Afghanistan in terms of manpower and material. Behind this there are three main reasons: one, to root out terrorism; second, to make Afghanistan a favorable ground to project power permanently in this region and beyond. However, the resultant outcomes of this long-held war in Afghanistan have made peace difficult to achieve. At the same time, because of multiple stakeholders' increased involvement in Afghanistan (including China and Russia), the US reliance on Indian role in Afghanistan has significantly increased. Third reason is that China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project of BRI that helps promote Chinese defined regional order. Both the US and India

believe that the CPEC aims at harming their legitimate interests in managing Asian balance of power, thus their ensuing collaboration on Asian affairs appears to be more prominent. Now the question arises how does Indo-US growing nexus lead to undermine Pakistan's security? There could be a number of answers to this. One, considering enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan, various statements of Indian high profile elites on confirming their designs to disintegrate Pakistan and empirical evidences such as Kulbhushan Yadav's arrest make Pakistan deeply uncomfortable towards Indian increased role in Afghanistan. Pakistan believes that India would continue to use Afghanistan as a proxy ground to subvert and stimulate violence inside Pakistan. Two, Indian increased influence certainly creates mistrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan and Pakistan and the US that in return halts the peace process in Afghanistan. It goes without saying that India is vigorously involved in sabotaging the CPEC by means of promoting violence that makes Pakistan further sensitive towards Indo-US partnership. Four, the NSG waiver to India in the backdrop of the Indo-US civil nuclear deal in order to offer India a status of the NPT state to reach out to the global commerce and continue its military modernization, has complicated the regional settings. These arrangements have created strategic imbalance in the region that in turn has strengthened the security dilemma between India and Pakistan by pulling Pakistan in an unending cycle of arms race in absence of an arms control mechanism. Finally, India continues to promote regional war hysteria by introducing counter-force doctrinal strategies and demonstrating provocative behavior thereby threatening to initiate surgical strike against Pakistan to test latter's deterrent credibility. These trends continue to drive this region towards an alarming crisis situation. How should Pakistan respond to these trends? On Afghanistan, Pakistan's role remains significant in achieving desirable peace. Presence of other stakeholders such as Russia, China, and Iran cannot be marginalized. However, peace is no

longer achievable through military means in the world. Solution therefore, is based on mutually agreeable, political and diplomatic means that will yield favorable dividends for all the parties involved in Afghanistan. Unilaterally, Pakistan should make efforts to strengthen cultural diplomacy, people to people contacts, joint education and training programs in Afghanistan. Pakistan should make economic investment in Afghanistan by way of connecting CPEC to Afghanistan in order to achieve socio-economic growth in that country. Pakistan should make regional and extra regional stakeholders partner to the CPEC related growth in order to make it resilient and successful. Internally, Pakistan should focus on building Industrial base and economic growth engaging China on co-development and co-production with focus on “Made in Pakistan”. Pakistan should build deep connectivity with all the BRI countries by promoting economic, technological and educational linkages. This time Pakistan’s major focus should be on socio-economic development by learning from Chinese best practices to revisit states’ system, policies and rebuild institutions. Regarding the US, fundamental revisions in Pakistan’s policy are required. Pakistan has to get out of its colonial mind-set in order to reformulate national vision and strategic direction. Renewed diplomacy on mobilizing our alliance system is required. Grand bargain is needed to improve ties with the US. Pakistan has to become an active partner in this emerging competitive environment while pursuing a strategy of geopolitical accommodation to avoid conflicts. There are reports on possibility of Indo-US shared plans to seize or destroy Pakistan’s nuclear weapons in a crisis situation. The question is, will the US directly take risk of initiating any move against Pakistan’s nuclear installations? The answer is No. Is there any possibility of Indian surgical strikes against Pakistan with possible US’ tacit approval? Possibly Yes. Should Pakistan declare US its adversary and shift its existing policy and force posture to deter the US. No! War-like scenario is not affordable and the world would

not be able to grapple with dire consequences. War is not an inexpensive option for the major geopolitical competitors in this region – US and China. Regarding India’s bullying behavior; Pakistan can initiate joint military exercises with Russia and China or possibly unilateral exercises to send out message to the adversary that any immature and aggressive war-like move would have befitting response. Pakistan should continue to maintain its restraint policy and recessed deterrence policy of non-deployment of short range missiles and low-yield weapons. Mating of delivery systems with warheads would sharply increase probability of prompt use of nuclear weapons. This would not raise nuclear threshold but will make the situation further fraught. This does not mean that Pakistan should abandon the continuing potential to increase war fighting capabilities by order of magnitude. Pakistan must continue to grapple with an information age, transformation of modern defence capabilities, and new way of thinking about how the military forces have to accomplish their mission in the 21st century. Robust deterrent aims at avoiding not fighting wars. Unthinkable is not a choice and should not be aspired. Revised policy to reinitiate a dialogue with India by offering it some incentives may be required. Major instrument through which Pakistan can increase its profile and alliance system would be an effective diplomatic outreach and improved economy to entice global investment.



After the presentations by all the worthy speakers, Amb. Ali Sarwar Naqvi opened the session for Questions and Answers. Ms. Saima Aman, Senior Research Fellow at Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS) asked Amb. Zamir Akram how he interprets the statement given by the foreign minister about Pakistan sponsoring terrorism? Amb. Akram answered that only the foreign minister can best explain his own views but said he personally

thinks that Pakistan will not allow the US to conduct a joint operation inside Pakistan and if the operation will ever have to be conducted, it would be by Pakistan only. Amb. Naqvi shared his



views by saying that Pakistan's leadership should be more careful while giving such statements.

Mr. Abdullah Khan, Managing Director Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) asked the speakers how do they see the US' effort for the revival of peace talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan and if there could be a possible Russian role for any future peace talks? Amb. Akram answered that the US doesn't have any intentions for a political solution in Afghanistan. If the US opts for a dialogue, it will have to implement ceasefire first. Amb. Naqvi said Pakistan has to deal with the policies of the US in more efficient manner in order to achieve stability and uniformity.

Major General (R) Saad Khattak, Director General, PICSS made a generic comment where he said that the biggest damage of War on Terror for Muslims, especially for Muslims of Pakistan is that it reduced them to being apologetic, doubtful and live with these emotions. He questioned why Pakistan is always in the eye of storm? Will Pakistanis be ever allowed to live with their real beliefs and values? He opined that there is a disconnect between the government, the policy makers and the common people. 90% of us are not connected with 90% of those walking on the streets. Are the people sitting in this room planning to make some convictions? Some resolve? He suggested that we should give some weightage to the intangibles through which we are facing challenges. We are usually very calculative but it's important to give weightage to the intangibles too. In response to Gen. Khattak's comment Dr. Cheema politely disagreed with his



observation and claimed that the discourse development during these discussion sessions is equally heard outside of these walls and reaches out to the common people too and so do their concerns, which are deliberated upon considerably in these talks.

Mr. Jamil Bandey, Retired Banker questioned about the performance and readiness of Pakistan forces. While referring to the 1971 debacle, he asked if Pakistan forces are ready to defend Pakistan in the face of Indo-US nexus or the history will repeat itself? Amb. Naqvi said that during 1971 the situation was different as compared to the contemporary Indo-US nexus. During 1971 people of West Pakistan were willful to get separate from East Pakistan, but now the whole nation is united. He gave the example of Kashmir issue that Pakistan is determined about its stance on Kashmir and India cannot suppress the people of Kashmir. Now there will be time Insha'Allah that there will be a solution in the favor of the people of Kashmir.



Mr. Afrasiyab, Student at National Defence University, asked that how can Pakistan work to address the internal issues as they make the environment conducive for the external threats. Dr. Cheema replied that the poor governance is one of the major problems in Pakistan at the moment. It is important that our house should be put in order first. Pakistan will not be able to sustain for too long if it has to face a two-pronged war from within and without. He agreed that the internal weaknesses invoke external interventions but he opined that it doesn't mean that Pakistan's security will be compromised. In the presence of credible deterrence capability and Pakistan's arms forces being one of the best in the world and due to nuclear weapons, there is less possibility of conflict.

Mr. Lokhaze Ali, an Environmentalist asked what is Pakistan planning in terms of its policy towards Afghanistan, are we expecting the military retaliation? Dr. Zafar Khan replied that Pakistan needs to learn from its past mistakes. It should try to understand its value in the strategic



scenario and should work towards maintaining its credible minimum deterrence. Amb. Zamir Akram said that it is essential to avoid war in two front circumstances. Pakistan's efforts should have been to show to the leadership in Afghanistan not to be hostile towards Pakistan.



Mr. Wahid Ali Research Intern at Senate of Pakistan, asked Dr. Rizwana Abbasi is there any possibility that Pakistan's protest against India's role in Afghanistan will be heard by the international community and how could Pakistan engage in the process to maintain the status quo? Dr. Abbasi answered that Pakistan should make efforts to strengthen cultural diplomacy, people to people contacts, joint education and training programs in Afghanistan. Pakistan should make economic investment in Afghanistan by way of connecting CPEC to Afghanistan in order to achieve socio-economic growth in that country. Pakistan should make regional and extra regional stakeholders partner to the CPEC related growth in order to make it resilient and successful.

In the end, the Chair closed the Question-Answer session and Dr. Cheema profoundly thanked the august audience for their presence that made the seminar a successful endeavor. He offered special thanks to the Speakers and the Chair and expressed his appreciation for all the guests for actively participating and making the discussion interactive. He also appreciated the research and secretarial staff of the SVI for their hard work.

Media Converge:

In-house seminar on “Growing Indo-US Nexus and Threat to Regional Security in South Asia” was covered by following media house:

The Royal News Network

<http://rnnpk.com/2017/10/13/pakistan-to-improve-deterrence-for-full-spectrum-credible-deterrence-in-his-view-can-ensure-pakistans-security-dr-zafar-iqbal-cheema-presidentexecutive-director-strategic-vision-institute/>