Post Event Report of RUSI Delegation’s Visit at NDU

Theme: “The Post 2014 Afghanistan and South Asian Regional Security”

February 28, 2012
Institute for Strategic Studies; Research and Analysis (ISSRA)
National Defense University, Islamabad
www.ndu.edu.pk
RUSI DELEGATION VISIT TO NDU – 28\textsuperscript{th} FEBRUARY 2012

General

1. Mr. Alexander Neil, Senior Research Fellow and Mark Phillips, Research Fellow Military and Intelligence Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), UK visited NDU from 0925-1400 hrs on 28 Feb 12. A very thought provoking and insightful interaction took place, chaired by DG ISSRA and attended by expert foreign policy analysts, allied think-tanks and NDU faculty (Annex A). The theme of the discussion was “The Post 2014 Afghanistan and South Asian Regional Security”.

2. In this interaction, a candid and open discussion was carried out on a broad range of issues. Many issues of mutual interest and common concern were raised. The potentials for cooperation with Pakistan were explored and recognized consequently. In the end, the importance of Pakistan with respect to future political construct in Afghanistan was recognized and an active role of Pakistan in the transition of power in Afghanistan was recommended. It was agreed that the Afghan imbroglio could be resolved only if the ethnographic and historical dynamics of the conflict were appreciated and kept in view. List of participants and program of the day are attached as Annex A and B respectively.

Call on the President NDU at his Office

3. President NDU welcomed the Guests in his office and after pleasantries following issues came under discussion:–

   a. While talking about water and climate security, President stressed that the glaciers are shrinking and if water issues between the countries are not resolved in time, these may lead to conflict within various regions.

   b. As regards Afghanistan, he pointed out that there is a lot of uncertainty. Each nation is pursuing its own vested policy which is not contributing to the overall perspective and therefore making any strategic calculation difficult. He added that though the international community has shown resolve in Afghanistan but presence of foreign forces has never been seen by Afghan public with optimism. One event like desecration of Holy Quran nullifies all the good efforts. He stressed that the future road map should be very clear to remove ambiguity in minds. The delegation agreed that it is certainly not clear where we are heading.
Opening Remarks by DG ISSRA

4. The DG raised regional security concerns in his opening remarks. He apprehended that if the NATO leaves Afghanistan in haste, further instability will prevail in the country. It will have a spillover effect in the region. The Talibans will be emboldened in the neighboring countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan. They will consider NATO’s withdrawal their victory. Therefore, a comprehensive and prudent strategy is needed for post 2014 evolution in Afghanistan to create an enabling security environment in the region. He admired the historical relevance of RUSI in UK’s foreign policy formulation and then asked Ambassador Tanvir Ahmad Khan to initiate the debate.

Initiative by Ambassador Tanvir Ahmed Khan

5. He initiated with a formal statement that the peace and stability in Afghanistan was a visceral concern of Pakistan in its broader regional approach. He cleared the dust on Pak-Afghan relations with appreciating Pakistan’s Foreign minister’s statement that the relationship is very cordial and without any issue of friction and hostility. He further assured that Pakistan would continue to play in the reconstruction of Afghanistan for its own very interests.

6. He retrospectively spoke that the Afghan Crisis which started with Soviet intervention has not settled down yet. It is posing a continuous threat to the regional security. He categorically analyzed the NATO’s withdrawal dynamics with criticism. He was of the view that the NATO lacks a clear cut war termination strategy. There is a clear ambiguity when to disengage and how to disengage. And there are obvious differences on these issues within NATO. It lacks any strategy to cope with the void created by its withdrawal.

7. He apprehended that the vacuum was susceptible to be filled by the Talibans, and concluded that the whole region would be facing a situation of instability. And it would be wrong of NATO to misread the ideological linkage of Taliban with Al-Qaeda. Any comprehensive strategy must be cognizant of this ground reality.

Presentation by Syed Muhammad Ali

8. He gave the factual analysis of the situation in Afghanistan. He discussed the topic with a wider approach including Afghan political system, economic structure, ethnicity, culture, minerals and energy politics of regional players versus international players. He tried to develop a relationship of foreign interventions with rich mine presence and drug trafficking in the host countries.
9. On his stated presumptions, he estimated these to be the US future goals in Afghanistan: reducing the role of most major regional players, restricting the influence of a resurgent Russia, denial of Energy resources to rising China, enhancing Strategic and energy leverage against Beijing as a hedge against its growing economic dependence, encouraging a larger role of an emerging strategic partner (India), encirclement, monitoring and isolating Iran, blaming and therefore limiting the regional role of Pakistan and also influencing the dynamics of its internal political structure and processes, and securing alternative and future energy resources and denying them to other emerging powers.

10. He further reasoned why the US approach towards the Post-2014 Afghanistan was unlikely to Succeed. He enumerated those reasons as:-

   a. The US-led War has increased Anti-US Sentiment throughout the developing world in general and Muslim world in particular and hurts its interests and reduces its influence in various regions including Middle East, West Asia, and Central Asia etc.

   b. The US prolonged focus on Af-Pak Strategy, distracted its strategic focus, orientation, capabilities, energies and resources away from Al-Qaeda, which has used this time and opportunity to organize and consolidate itself in other states and regions such as North Africa, Yemen etc.

   c. Post-2014 Afghan Government cannot afford to maintain 300,000-400,000 troops from its own resources, which could create far more chaos than order within the society once the US dollars dry up.

   d. US has not learnt from history and unilateralism, cutting-edge technology, and military might cannot solve social, cultural, ideological, developmental, governance or corruption related issues, which will deny it the victory as was denied to the Soviets earlier.

   e. Large Force structure is not an alternative for large-scale development. Therefore, the resources which are being allocated for a disproportionately large ANA force structure should be allocated towards socio-economic and infra-structural development and capacity building.

   f. Limited time and Political Capital of the US Administration.
11. He concluded that Terrorism was equal to the cost of denying Justice. The best way to defeat terrorists is to create a just international society where socio-economic opportunities and resources are shared equitably. It is the lack of socio-economic justice, discrimination and lack of conflict resolution which not only weakens the ability of the US to build sustainable alliances in the developing world but also creates the Anti-Western sentiments. He gave a Pakistani perspective with Sun Tzu’s quote, “We cannot enter into alliances until we are acquainted with the designs of our neighbors”. Further, let Afghan people decide for themselves what they want for themselves. Therefore, any solution to the Afghan issue ought to be “Afghan-owned and Afghan-led” and neighboring partners should be provided due opportunity to play a constructive role in the future of a stable Afghanistan.

**Presentation by Alexander Neil**

12. In his presentation, Mr. Neil raised many issues of concern. He said that in shaping the Afghanistan security environment, we must be very clear what might constitute success, what the country (Afghanistan) should look like, when and how the transition would complete in 2015, and what effect on the regional neighbours would be due to this transition.

13. Concerning Afghanistan’s State Capacity: Governance, Authority and Legitimacy, he raised issues like how could the international community best support the legitimate political aspirations of the Afghan people, how to improve support for the development of a legitimate government, sustainable institutions, political parties, transparency, accountability, media and civil society and what needed to be done to implement constitution, reform electoral processes and link central and local government actors. He further observed that other regional powers are being drawn in and Iran, Russia and India have convergent interests in Afghanistan opposed by Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, regional states and non-state actors will seek influence in a post-NATO Afghanistan. Therefore, there is a need to discuss the regional dynamics affecting a political settlement required for longer-term stability.

14. He also recognized the deterioration of Pak-US relations as a defining factor in the post 2014 settlement. Other issues like 2014 presidential elections in Afghanistan and Tajik-Pashtun friction, and the rise of neo-Talibans might be the perfect storm for the descent into civil war.

15. He further discussed the post 2014 possibilities under following points:-
   a. Complete withdrawal of all US troops according to a fixed timetable.
b. Exclusion of al-Qaeda and other international terrorist groups from areas controlled by the Taliban.

c. A government in Kabul headed—at least nominally—by men the Taliban would see as good Muslims and Afghan patriots.

d. Negotiations on a new Afghan constitution involving the Taliban and leading to the transfer of most powers from the center to the regions.

e. De-facto—though not formal—Taliban control of the region of Greater Kandahar, and by the Haqqanis of Greater Paktika.

f. A return to the Taliban offer of 1999–2001 of a complete ban on opium poppy cultivation and heroin production in the areas under their control, in return for international aid.

16. He also feared the increasing influence of India in Afghanistan. He said that ISAF commanders and individual Western nations had often responded to India's growing presence in Afghanistan with certain ambivalence. He suggested that more and more pashtun representation in Afghanistan might balance the Indian influence. He also stressed on ending drone attacks because they were costing a heavy collateral damage.

17. In the end, he outlined UK's overarching image of an Afghan state that stays standing after 2014, has sufficient capacity to contain insurgent threats, gains upward developmental trajectory, and contributes in making the efforts to build links with Pakistan. He ended on two clear and important notes. One, full-scale civil war after 2014 remains unlikely; two, the UK Government has made a clear commitment to withdraw from the combat role in Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

Presentation by Mark Phillips

18. In his rather futuristic presentation “Scenarios for the future stability of Afghanistan and the region & opportunities to influence”, he postulated following possible developments in Afghanistan. One, national unity government; two, status quo: weak Kabul government; three, return to civil war. And the underlined factors influencing these hypothetical developments might be.

a. Strength of the insurgency in Afghanistan.

b. Capability and cohesion of the Afghan National Security forces.

c. Level of international military assistance post-2014.

d. Role of other countries in the region.
e. Nationalism and the withdrawal of international forces.

f. Al Qaeda's influence and presence.

19. About the role of neighboring countries he said that uncertainty about post-2014 situation has prevented greater co-operation to date. But shared interests are emerging. It will be the test of statesmanship that how a more coordinated regional approach is achieved.

**Interactive Session**

20. In the interactive session, a thorough discussion ensued on the whole scope of the theme. Initially, a serious concern was raised that the NATO's policies were incongruent with the ground realities e.g. Doha Talks which excluded Pakistan, Iran and even Afghanistan. Moreover, the process of disengagement was flawed because it was not the time to impose the unilateral solutions. This concern was responded in another dimension. It was said that the deterioration of global economy and Euro-zone crisis must also be taken into account. Moreover, there were steps which the western powers needed to take, and there were also other steps which the regional powers needed to take.

21. A very interesting point was raised that India might have some legitimate interests in Afghanistan and greater Persian Gulf region. Pakistan needed to calculate what those interests meant to her. It was further added that at the moment achievement of holistic peace in Afghanistan seams difficult. Gradual steps should be taken towards peace e.g. creation of the zones of limited ceasefire, zones of peace and zones of no fire should be declared to de-escalate the conflict.

22. It was further stated that for future peaceful Afghanistan, the issue of Hamid karzai’s future role was important. It was also pointed out that the role of afghan national army has been made the center of gravity. This approach is wrong and difficult to succeed. It was suggested that the narrative of stabilization and reconstruction should replace the narrative of counter terrorism.

23. In the end of the interactive session, China’s role in Afghanistan was discussed. It was alleged that china adopted an amoral attitude on war on terror. It had not done anything in security assistance to the region. That concern was responded very clearly. That china did not work in the frame work given by the west. It has its own vision of world politics and works within it. In that frame work, it lived in conformity to some moral scale. Moreover it was responded that the alignment of Russia, India, and Iran was changing. The example was Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), where Russia and China were the biggest rivals and had a close cooperation at the same time.
Concluding Remarks by DG ISSRA

24. The DG gave a thoughtful insight initially. He said that the military operation was launched in a haste. He further elaborated that in war the logistics and supply line had to be behind the line of operation but in the case of ISAF the operation was launched from the north, while the supply line ran in the opposite direction from the south. When The Taliban were pushed from the plans into the higher ground, Tora Bora mantairs, which is the natural refuge for mantainous Taliban. Again instead of mapping up the pockets of resistance us, shift the bulk of the fncco to drag allaving the Taliban to recoup.

25. He said that due to their long presence the NATO forces which were considered as the liberators, began to be viewed as occupiers. He further raised his concerns vis-à-vis India. He said that Indo-Pak hostility compelled Pakistan to maintain strategic balance on eastern and western borders. Therefore, Pakistan could not afford to overstretched at the cost of its eastern border.

26. He further regretted that no mid-course-correction was adopted by NATO in a war stretched over a decade. The US hasty decision to come in Afghanistan was wrong. It has pushed the Taliban to a hardened position. He retrospectively thought that there were times when Talibans were ready to negotiate with the US. But now the political direction has been lost because of the focus on military approach. He then concluded with two suggestions. One that NATO should not withdraw in haste rallied its withdrawal be linked to situation. Second that; keeping in view the ethnic divisions, the formation of loose federation in Afghanistan would be a better option. In the end he thanked the guests and the participants for their serious and active participation.
# Annex A

**RUSI Delegation’s Visit at NDU (February 28, 2012)**

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

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<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>RUSI Delegation</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Mr. Alexander Neil</td>
<td>Senior Research Fellow at RUSI</td>
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<td>Mr. Mark Philips</td>
<td>Research Fellow at RUSI</td>
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**Participants from Think Tanks**

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<tr>
<td>Air Cdre Khalid Iqbal</td>
<td>IPRI</td>
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<td>Ms. Humaira Iqbal</td>
<td>IRS</td>
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<td>Shakir Bacha</td>
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<td>Asra Hassan</td>
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<td>Air Cdre Muhammad Waseem</td>
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**Pakistani Representative – Invited by NDU**

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<td>Ambassador Tanvir Ahmad Khan</td>
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**FCS**

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<td>9.</td>
<td>Prof. Dr. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema</td>
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<td>Mr. Khurrum</td>
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**ISSRA Faculty, RAs and Interns**