“The US and South Asia after 2014”:
Roundtable with Mr. Alexander Evans

(18 December, 2012)
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The compilation is based on minutes recorded by RA Mr. M. Shabbir, RA Ms Beenish Sultan and Interns Ms Shumaila, Ms Adeela Bahar and Ms Quratulain under sponsorship of Global Studies-ISSRA.
“The US and South Asia after 2014”:
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18 Dec, 2012 (Tue): 1030-1340 hrs

INTRODUCTION

A three-hour long roundtable on the US interface with South Asia following the
drawdowns from Afghanistan was held at ISSRA-NDU on 18 Dec 2012. The exercise
pegged around a presentation by visiting diplomat cum scholar Mr. Alexander Evans in
the backdrop of recent Asia Society report on the theme. The roundtable was chaired by
President NDU Lieutenant General Nasser Khan Janjua and participated by policy-
relevant experts and scholars from within the NDU and various think-tanks in
Islamabad.

Mr. Alexander Evans is well known for his twin track achievements of high
distinction as a diplomat and second, a scholar with focus on geo-politics and history. In
recent years, he served on secondment from the British Foreign and Commonwealth
Office to late Mr. Holbrooke’s office on Afghanistan in the U.S. State Department. With
this background, he had been invited to be the Project Director for the Asia Society
study on the US interface with South Asia after 2014. Over and above this, he has held
an intimate relationship with Islamabad in his track record as diplomat.

The work plan of the roundtable comprised of a presentation by Mr. Alexander
Evans (about 40 mins), followed by remarks by two discussants namely: Amb
Najmmuddin Sheikh and Dr. Maria Sultan (10 min each). Another one hour or so was
dedicated to an interactive discussion amongst participants.
Alexander Evans initiated the deliberations by introducing the Asia Society Report titled: the US and South Asia After 2014. The discussion brought in focus the drawdowns in Afghanistan and approaching challenges the Obama Administration would be facing. The US policy in South Asia has been mired in alliance and estrangement, during 1947-1949, South Asia was not on high policy agenda of the U.S. During 1989-1993, Middle East dominated U.S policy. South Asia gained importance in U.S policy at different times; 1965, 1971, 1980-1988, and 1999 onwards. However, the growing importance of South Asia since 1990’s has created two major strategic disconnects:

- There is a major disconnection between those working on South Asia and East Asia which needs to be overcome.
- Policy agenda on counter terrorism, Afghanistan and India has been conducted in parallel rather than in concrete. Policy communities and agenda need to be better connected which could be only possible by reconnecting different parts of regional policy and expanding them into Asia-wide and global network.

A fresh four principles approach may be opted towards South Asia, which expounds that hyphens such as Af-Pak, Indo-Pak and others’ need to be avoided. As to India, it encourages the perception that U.S. policy is unbalanced and not autonomous of judgment. A singular hyphenation such as Afghanistan-Pakistan, India-Pakistan, and China-India has to be incorporated. Second principle laid out was the tackling of regional issues including issues like counterterrorism, deterrence stability, political and security challenges and potential crisis management among India, Pakistan and China. Third principle which needs to be incorporated into U.S. policy is to integrate South Asia into an Asia strategy, U.S. policy makers need to stretch their vision beyond boundaries of geographic bureaus at the State Department. Most of the functional challenges are cross South and Central Asia/East Asia. Lastly, policy agendas in South Asia need to be connected.
Important lessons which have been drawn out in previous U.S policy towards South Asia were also conferred during the talks which are as follows:-

- Recalibrated policy on South Asia after Cold War was lost, the policy should not be lost again, as Afghanistan and counterterrorism no longer dominates available policy bandwidth in Washington.
- A longer range bipartisan policy has been successful as seen in case of India-U.S. policy. The bipartisan policy sustained over a series of administrations and delivered tangible benefits for both countries.
- Afghanistan does not have to be the focal point in U.S policy for South Asia, U.S policy makers need to clearly identify U.S priorities in the region and a stable Pakistan is one of their priorities.
- It was stated in U.S foreign policy declassified documents that personal relationships with the South Asian leaders are of pivotal importance.
- National Security Council needs to be staffed with officials who have the authority over implementation of policies and vice versa in priority countries. Reliance on mid-level staff has not been seen as effective.

To bolster the process, a new longer-term strategic South Policy for U.S Administration is needed. The following recommendations were outlined by Mr. Alexander Evans:-

- Improved capacity for U.S strategy towards South Asia is needed which incorporates South and East Asia and smaller states.
- South and East Asia need to be connected through cross-postings. This includes career incentives to encourage diplomats to serve in China and South Asian states.
- In the short-term, Washington needs to continue to work with Islamabad on counterterrorism and drawdown in Afghanistan. In medium to longer-term, U.S. needs to establish an approach to Pakistan that would deliver U.S vital interests, whether the administration opts for a cooperative or confrontational approach to Islamabad.
• U.S counterterrorism policy needs to integrate regional policy perspectives. A better integrated foreign and security policy can be achieved in a manner in which agencies handling countering terrorism can have regional expertise.

• Lastly, the establishment of a South Asian cadre of foreign officers could resolve language barriers. Moreover, establishing a formal South Asian cadre in the foreign services in which officers can formally declare their career of interest in the region resultantly would provide South Asia policy leads in the State Department with a defined community of officers.

Six months earlier a debate was generated on declaring Pakistan a “state sponsoring terrorism”. However, the scenario has now changed but Pakistan still has very few friends in Congress and the State Department. The speaker concluded that years 2013-2014 will be pivotal for both United States and Pakistan and therefore they need to carry their policies with imagination and prudence.

REMARKS BY THE TWO DISCUSSANTS

• Amb Najmmuddin Sheikh

Ambassador Najmmuddin Sheikh extended the discussion by recommending that South Asia has been low on U.S. policy and the suggestions put forward by Mr. Alexander Evans cannot be implemented until certain incentives are provided. Furthermore, in order to bring a change, the people of Pakistan should be involved actively in the process.

Commonality of interests needs to be explored between United States and Pakistan followed by a heed into how United States interests can be best served and how it affects Pakistan’s integrity. For example, stability of the energy-rich Gulf region remains on high pedestal in the US policy. The objective is indeed shared by Pakistan as well. The US can be supportive of Pakistani urge to develop its market in the Gulf and thus strengthen its economic resilience. This becomes all the more important as post-
withdrawal Afghanistan will face 40-50% economic slump that will have fallout for the neighborhood as well.

**Dr. Maria Sultan**

Dr. Maria Sultan opined that the report fails to address three different realities of South Asia:

- South Asia itself is a geostrategic reality and therefore would be factored in any policy formulation process.
- United States Foreign Policy tenure will always remain eight years. It is cyclic and based on two successive administrations. It always depends upon how decisions are made in the first administration and transformed into action in the successive administration.
- South Asia and East Asia needs to be bridged together however, unfortunately it will promote an Indian centric perspective, in terms of how South Asia is important to the Global Affairs.

The post withdrawal Afghan reality will be no less complex than where it stands today. Firstly the reduction in the number of personnel operating in the field will only change the nature of operations. Secondly, the Afghan national army if called upon to pick up the pace in counter-terrorism will have to redefine its national purpose and prepare for that role.

The discussion of the US interface with Pakistan ought to be right focused in the context of historical experience that always flagged limitations in terms of expectations from both side and ability to address them. Lastly, the report fails to understand, that the policies made in Washington have their limitations in terms of implementation on ground as the scenarios remain impregnated with unpredictable factors. We need to keep in view that Pakistan’s rejuvenation will give new meaning to the South Asian reality.
INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

In the ensuing discussion, various issues regarding the situation in South Asia after 2014 in the context of US withdrawal were discussed. The discussion mainly focused on the potency of the South Asian role inspite of the US disengagement and the overriding geo strategic considerations that make Pakistan a pivot in building cross-regional economic and trade linkages and constructing structures of peace and progress.

The military strategy of US in Afghanistan to establish a position of strength vis-à-vis the Taliban and other armed opposition groups to allow the US to negotiate an acceptable withdrawal has indeed failed. Although US has not yet announced a comprehensive strategy for Post 2014 Afghanistan, some initiatives such as ‘New Silk Road Initiative’, Bonn Conference 2011 and talks with Taliban suggest a four-point strategy: firstly, to increase efforts in engaging Taliban at local level such as talks mediated by Qatar; secondly, to end the surge and hasten the rate of withdrawal; thirdly, to maintain a sizeable US military presence in Afghanistan by having advisory/training role and fourthly, Indian prominence in the region.

While Pakistan is blamed and vilified by US and international media for various reasons, its good actions are not noticed. In the process of combating terrorism, Pakistan has suffered the loss of over $70 billion, more than 35 thousand civilians and around five thousand security persons. Yet these sacrifices are not recognized by the US, instead Pakistan is suspected of aiding terrorism in the region, its concerns about Indian activities are ignored and it is targeted through drones in the name of ‘pressure policy’ of the US which has not been quantified.

For Pakistan’s security and economic progress, peaceful, stable and economically prosperous Afghanistan is very important. US has made little progress towards political reconciliation in Afghanistan and isolated groups like the Taliban are dominating major parts of the country. After eleven years of war in Afghanistan, US policy is shifting towards Central Asian and East Asian countries to counter Iran and
‘contain’ China. However, leaving Afghanistan without reconciliation and a stable government will be another mistake which would lead to bigger disasters than 9/11.

The current policy of US in South Asia is tilted towards prominence of India in South Asia which is evident from a number of factors: Indo-US nuclear deal, Indian lobby in the US, India’s projected role in Afghanistan and non-resolution of Kashmir dispute. The US has to give equal strategic value to India and Pakistan without favoritism towards India while formulating policies towards South Asia. Because, Pakistan’s position in making the region an economic block is vital, as it is the only route to connect with Central Asian states, Russia and China.

WRAP-UP REMARKS

The chair while summing-up the discussion, opined that the Asia Society report looks at the arena on a much bigger canvas, underestimating the South Asian reality and skipping major parts of the Pakistani role at the cross roads of regions. It is therefore important to revisit the product following detailed deliberations right-focusing its findings.

Given the above framework, the chair raised queries with a three-fold focus:-

- First, are the suggestions only US centric and focuses only on its good? Is it to keep the US in the dominant leadership position or suggest delivering leadership equal to all unequal’s? The recommendations of the report suggest a good premise in this regard, but at times they tend to get selective. The fact should be understood that being selective for the US would again transit the world into unilateralism.

- Second, do the recommendations suggest measures to enhance world peace in the drawdown scenario from Afghanistan? Keeping in view this concern in the backdrop of the sentiment of unilateralism, perhaps more candid recommendations may be added in the report. This is so because; the world
community at large has an obligation to identify the deficiencies of the US. Hence, suggestions should be made whereby that provides leadership to the world in making a better and peaceful world.

- Third, where does Pakistan fits in the overall drawdown scenario? With regards to Pakistan, the report should highlight that the country is indeed going through difficult times. However, despite the gravity of the situation, the country has managed to endure and survive in the comity of nations. Pakistan has indeed shown the world its resilience and capability in the past eleven years of problems which were supposed to be handled collectively. Hence, a midterm relationship with Pakistan in the drawdown scenario would mean that the US is overlooking Pakistan’s potential and capability.

Perceptibly, there is a major disconnect in the US policy at the military and political level. Hence, reports of such nature have a critical importance in letting the US understand the ramifications of such disconnects.

The Chair opined that the US as a superpower remains neighbor to us all, with or without Afghanistan-specific situation. It is therefore important that we look for convergences of interests rather than divergences, and focus more on common cause for eradicating global extremism, peace in the larger setting and promoting trans-regional economic cooperation. The US has the capacity to lead the international community in common search for a better world and reduce the widening gulf between ‘haves and haves not’.

While looking at the future of the region, Pakistan’s sacrifices and capabilities should not be forgotten. For the last eleven years, Pakistan has extended beyond its capabilities and shown the world its resilience. The US needs to rise beyond perceptions and look towards Pakistan as a gateway to every important region in its neighborhood including China and CAR’s. Hence, if the US knows a lot of Pakistan, it needs to be told more.
WORK PLAN:
“THE US AND SOUTH ASIA AFTER 2014”
(FCH: 18 DEC 2012)

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 hrs</td>
<td><strong>Arrival</strong></td>
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<td>10:05-10:25 hrs</td>
<td><strong>Call on the President NDU at his Office</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Chair</strong></td>
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<td>- President NDU</td>
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<td>10:30-10:45 hrs</td>
<td><strong>Opening</strong></td>
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<td>- Recitation from Holy Quran</td>
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<td>- Welcome and Introduction of the guest speaker / discussant</td>
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<td>10:45-11:25 hrs</td>
<td><strong>Presentation by Mr. Alexander Evans on ‘The US and South Asia after 2014’</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>11:25-11:45 hrs</td>
<td><strong>Discussants: (10 min x 2)</strong></td>
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<td>- Amb Najmmuddin Shaikh</td>
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<td>- Dr. Maria Sultan</td>
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<td>11:45-12:25 hrs</td>
<td><strong>Interactive discussion</strong></td>
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<td>12:25-12:30 hrs</td>
<td><strong>Wrap up/Presentation of Souvenirs</strong></td>
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<td>12:30-13:30 hrs</td>
<td><strong>Lunch (by invitation)</strong></td>
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<td>13:35 hrs</td>
<td><strong>Signing of Visitor’s book</strong></td>
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<td>13:40 hrs</td>
<td><strong>Departure</strong></td>
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Alexander Evans OBE is a counsellor in the British diplomatic service and a senior fellow at Yale's Jackson Institute for Global Affairs, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses. In August 2012 he was selected as the Bernard Schwartz Fellow at the Asia Society in New York, where he is leading a study on U.S. policy toward South Asia.

He was the 2011/12 Henry A. Kissinger Chair in Foreign Policy and International Relations at the Library of Congress, and previously worked at the Department of State as a senior advisor, first to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and then to Ambassador Marc Grossman, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Before working for the U.S. Alexander served as a British diplomat in Islamabad and New Delhi and as a member of the Policy Planning Staff, London. He worked on former Prime Minister Tony Blair's 2007 policy review, Britain in the World, and was seconded to the Consular Crisis Team coordinating the Lebanon evacuation in the summer of 2006. Alexander has been visiting, researching and writing on South Asia since the early 1990s.

Prior to joining the diplomatic service Alexander was research director at Policy Exchange and an associate fellow at Chatham House. He was also a regular commentator for BBC World TV, CNN and Reuters. Alexander has worked for the U.N. in Afghanistan, been an adjunct fellow at the Stimson Center, Washington DC, and worked in Macedonia as a political advisor and for the OSCE. He spent two years as director of studies of a financial think-tank, the Centre for the Study of Financial Innovation, worked in the private office of the President of the General Medical Council, and began his career as an international policy advisor at the Adam Smith Institute.

Alexander was appointed an officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2010 Queen's Birthday Honours List. In September 2010 he was appointed a visiting Senior Research Fellow at King's College London, and he has previously held fellowships at Yale University (2009 World Fellow) and Nuffield College Oxford (Gwilym Gibbon Fellow, 2006-2010). He is a current member of the Yale World Fellows Advisory Board and a former Governor of Portsmouth College. He has served as an elected Council Member of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs from 2004-2007; as a member of The Round Table from 2002-2007; as a member of the Public Value of Security steering group, Demos, 2007; and of the Asia Programme Steering Group, Chatham House, 2007. In 2002 he was an international ambassador for Merlin, the U.K. based humanitarian NGO. He lives in New Haven, Connecticut.
CV OF DISCUSSANT 1:
AMBASSADOR NAJMUDDIN SHAIKH

Ambassador Najmuddin Shaikh is a former Pakistani diplomat who served as Foreign Secretary of Pakistan from 1994 to 1997. He currently writes a weekly column for Daily Times. Amb Shaikh, from Sindh province, joined the Foreign Service of Pakistan in 1961. He is a graduate of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (1962). During his 38 years of service, he served as Pakistan's ambassador to Canada (1987-1989), ambassador to West Germany (1989-1990), ambassador to the United States (1990-1991) and ambassador to Iran (1992-1994).

CV OF DISCUSSANT 2:
DR. MARIA SULTAN

Director General of the South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI), Dr. Maria Sultan specializes in South Asian nuclear arms control issues, disarmament and weapon systems development, she has published widely in academic journals and the national and international Newspapers.

Formerly the deputy dir of South Asian Strategic Stability Unit at the Bradford Disarmament Research Centre, Dr. Sultan is on the list of visiting faculty member/speaker as Pakistan’s National Defence University. Pakistan Foreign Service Academy, Pakistan Air War College. Pakistan Naval War College and is a guest lecturer at Quaid-e-Azam University and the University of Peshawar and Command and Staff College Quetta.