

CENJOWS Interaction with United States Advanced Operational Air Studies Fellowship (AOASF) - 29 FEB 12

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On 29 Feb 12, CENJOWS had an intellectual exchange of nearly one hour duration with an eighteen member United States Advanced Operational Air Studies Fellowship (AOASF) delegation comprising officers of the rank of Col and equivalent from the services US Army and other friendly countries who were on their study tour of India. The visiting team specifically wanted to discuss the issues which are now most commonly discussed in the strategic circles i.e. India's role in Afghanistan post ISAF withdrawal in 2014 and an emerging challenge of China in the Indian Ocean Region. Lt Gen (Retd) AS Kalkat, SYSM, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, Director Emeritus initiated the discussions after giving a brief overview of CENJOWS and its mandate. The gist of the discussion is recorded below.

Afghanistan Post 2014

General Kalkat briefly highlighted the current and the possible future scenario in Afghanistan after ISAF withdrawal by Jul 2014. He pointed out that future situation in 2014 after ISAF withdrawal depended on four aspects. First, the historical background of the region in which warlords and clans have always played a dominant role in governance hence, their role in any future governing dispensation cannot be ignored. Second, the recent Middle East experience evidently makes clear that the western concept of governance does not always find favour with the masses. Third, the future of Afghanistan will largely depend in the state in whole ISAF leaves and finally Pakistan's continuous indulgence in the Afghan internal affairs. With the imperative of withdrawal becoming almost certain, first United States and now Karzai government have now accepted the inevitability of Taliban's sharing role in future governance of Afghanistan. Prior to 2001, during Taliban's rule, both Afghanistan and Pakistan had been the training ground for the terrorists of various hues. As can be seen that the security situation in Afghanistan is fast deteriorating and the situation will only worsen after ISAF withdrawal unless stable and fairly effective governance is put in place of the present dispensation. Pakistan's is working to bring

Taliban back into power to achieve strategic depth against India. But, how could Afghanistan extend the strategic depth is beyond any rationale. Prognosis of the future situation though is not easy but, it is possible that Taliban elements could take a dominant role in future Karzai regime or he may be forced to leave power, that would bring Taliban to power in most of the provinces. This means that the situation would be similar to what was in existence prior to US operations i.e. Taliban ruling the most of the southern provinces and smaller part with those who are opposed to Taliban's. India has given considerable assistance for its reconstruction and development to Afghanistan but, we are constrained by lack of connectivity. The connectivity to Afghanistan through Pakistan seems out of question but, even an approach through Iran is threatened with the development of uncertain security situation in gulf region caused by western suspicion of nuclear proliferation by Iran and consequent invoking of economic and trade sanctions on Iran. United States need to review the Iran situation. Its Iran policy is also having an impact in the Afghanistan where India can play a constructive role if it gets an access to Afghanistan. A conciliatory approach with Iran in long run could strategically benefit both.

China in Indian Ocean Region

Besides piracy, China is particularly concerned in securing the energy route to the West Asia. However, it does appear that China's new Naval Strategy is to project its power in key oceanic areas, including and most significantly in the Indian Ocean. China has been keenly developing interests along the crucial choke-points in the Indian Ocean which not only serves its economic interests but also to enhance its strategic presence in the region. We believe that China like any seafaring nation has right to operate in the Indian Ocean region. In fact, India is collaborating with China and Japan to fight the menace of the Piracy in the Gulf of Aden. At the same time, we are watchful of the Chinese expansion in the IOR and are fully capable to safe guard our interests. On a question about china using a proxy to threaten India, It was explained that all threats are considered in our defence plans. Differences in perception may appear every now and then but, actual confrontation is unlikely in view of improvements of ties with China and Pakistan. In fact, Sino Indo ties are improving since nineties. Our trade has increased manifold and slated to reach USD 100 billion. We are regularly meeting and negotiating on outstanding border issues with 15th round of boarder talks has been just concluded. We expect a healthy competitiveness from China and believe that animosity in relations could only harm both therefore, do not expect any armed conflict on any issue including on Indian Ocean. In the concluding part of discussion the rationale of our nuclear policy of No First Use was explained. The policy adequately deters nuclear adventurism by any country including China. The discussion concluded at 1100h.

(Proceedings recorded by Gp Capt (Retd) G D Sharma, VSM, Senior Fellow,CENJOWS)