

Globalization and Trans-nationalism

On 10 August 2006, The National Advisory Council for South Asian Affairs (NACSAA) met at the Cosmos Club in Washington, DC, to answer several questions: Do markets know best? Does the market really know? Are the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer? Does globalization mean Westernization and/or Americanization? Are traditional societies being dissipated? As there were many speakers, I will present only brief summaries.

Shabir Ahmed stated that the West uses its foreign aid to get countries to follow its own standards and perspectives, while many members of the elites have abandoned the traditional lifestyle. On the positive side, globalization solves poverty through the market. Syed Akhtar asked whether globalization was the same as McDonaldization or Nikeification, or just about cultural domination and sweatshops. He sees globalization as a win-win situation, provided that a nation has the necessary “enabling conditions”: a highly educated workforce, the rule of law, and democratic institutions.

V. Balachandran reminded the audience that globalization also causes problems. In India, this takes the form of increasing farmer suicides, shanty towns, a lack of investment in the agricultural sector, a decrease in the qual-

ity of life, and questions of who owns the country's natural resources. James Clad defined globalization in negative terms: It is not necessarily an across-the-board integration of economies, a generator of an immediately improved security environment, a trend of deepening skill sets and the development of an industrial and an R&D culture, something new (it is a recurrent phenomenon enabled by technological advancement), or westernization, for all cultures borrow what is useful to them.

Abdul Mommen claimed that the South Asian diaspora can help root out terrorism. Currently, South Asia is facing higher levels of terrorism; in America and western Europe, these levels are actually declining or increasing only marginally. Bangladesh, despite being a liberal Muslim state, is seeing its level of terrorism, as well as the number of fatalities, grow even faster than has been the case in the Middle East since 9/11. Vijay Sazawal spoke on self-governance and trans-nationalism in Kashmir. He pointed out that while Pakistan calls for more self-rule in Indian Kashmir, it provides almost none to its own Kashmiri citizens. He concluded that "the line of control (LOC) is more or less a pretty clean division between various ethnic entities that make up the old princely state and that the current boundary can sustain regional stability even when its political future is questioned."

Ashraf Haidari, representing the ambassador of Afghanistan, spoke of how globalization transformed Afghanistan into the site of a proxy war (twice) and its abandonment to the drug lords, warlords, and al-Qaeda. On the bright side, the country is making some progress in economic, political, and legal reforms; is open for regional and international business and investment; and has joined SAARC and SAFTA. Shamsar Mobin Choudhury, the ambassador of Bangladesh, said that trans-nationalism has led to decolonization and the universalization of human rights; the globalization of capitalism with its destabilizing effects on less developed countries; a technological revolution in transportation and communication; and the expansion of social networks that facilitate the reproduction of trans-national migration, economic organization, and politics.

Maryam Qudrat, an Afghani-American, analyzed how the Taliban crushed independent thought by using memorization to defeat the people's analytical ability, how they twisted education and private judgment to serve their own interests, used the five daily prayers to indoctrinate the people, cited Ibn Taymiyyah to justify their attacks on other Muslims, and punished people in public to "teach." Jacob English said that Afghan nationalism is in a development phase. Although Karzai is encouraging the refugees to return, there is no stable infrastructure and a 30-55 percent unemployment rate. These and other negative factors explain, in part, the Taliban's resurgence.

Many people do not care who wins as long as the fighting stops. Government support of the drug lords and warlords might lower the people's respect for the government, but who else is there, he asked? The international community's priorities should be paying teachers, police, and members of civil society in a consistent manner; build and staff infrastructure and schools, protect human rights, and provide security in the south.

Steve Cohen, the father of South Asian studies in America and now at Brookings, maintained that the "border" for the clash of civilizations runs within Pakistan, that Washington's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are going "very badly," and that Afghanistan is "teetering on the edge of catastrophe." He expects radical Islam to follow the path of communism: a movement that wanted to build a just world but quickly lost its unity and ultimately collapsed due to its own internal inconsistencies. In closing, he said that America is giving Pakistan a free ride because of the war on terror and that the Bush administration clearly has no long-term vision.

Faizan Haq, general secretary of the Pakistan-American Conference, claimed that the media is promoting ultra-nationalism, a policy that engenders the victimhood that enflames tension. Unfortunately, the "war on terror" is an open-ended war to which the other side has not responded. Therefore, no alternatives are provided and everyone is using the same words. Yusuf Salahuddin said that Huntington's claim that future wars will be over religion, not economic or politics, has been partially correct: Bangladesh faces rising Islamic militancy; Afghanistan and Pakistan face ethnic and religious fragmentation; and India faces poverty, friction between traditional and modern values, and the rise of Hindu "fanaticism." Since Hinduism has failed to "reform" the caste system and stop high caste persecution of low castes, the disenfranchised lower castes are listening to different ideas.

The two lively and informative question and answer sessions dealt with many of the same issues, as well as how they were affecting Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the smaller South Asian countries.

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