

Session

On

"South Asia after 9/11"

5:30 pm- 7:00 pm, September 9, 2011

WWF Auditorium, 172-B, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of 9/11, Aspen Institute India organized a session on "South Asia after 9/11" with Ambassador Ronen Sen, Former Indian Ambassador to USA, Mr. Praveen Swami, Associate Editor of The Hindu and Mr. C. Raja Mohan, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research and Consulting Editor, Indian Express.



Starting with the opening remarks, Ambassador Sen gave his personal perspective and insights on how the events unfolded that day when he was in a meeting in Brussels with ambassadors of EU countries. The discussions that day were covering host of issues which were important to bring it to the UN and in this long list he pointed out that two words were missing i.e. 'international terrorism'. But the response throughout was disapproving. The Indian delegation was told that terrorism was a regional issue. But just after 9/11, for the first time, terrorism became a global issue and an act of terrorism was equated with an act of war.

Mr. Praveen Swami pointed out that the terrorism in India and also 9/11 has its genesis in the specific social conditions. Mr. Swami said "these young Muslims came from a class which had economic opportunities but did not have a political voice and no real political representation." Mr. Swami also pointed out that there have been two key failures since 9/11 in India. Firstly, the failure to build an effective policing and intelligence structure. Police in India is still unskilled and they are treated as unskilled labourers. Secondly, the inability to have an honest national conversation/debate about communalism, its costs and consequences. Mr. Swami said "just stopping riots will not help. We need to introspect on our culture and social fabric."

Mr. Raja Mohan focussed on the big political strategic picture outside India. He said “ever since Mr. Obama came to power, the term ‘war on terror’ has simply disappeared”. The term now used by President Obama is ‘challenge of violent extremism’. Mr. Raja Mohan pointed out that there is now a structural change and a relative decline of United States. A decade later after 9/11, we are arguing about American weakness and not strength. And this weakness has not just come from this ‘war on terror’ but also from the financial crisis that came in 2007. US’s economic structure will drive how US is going to end its war. The idea of leaving Afghanistan in 2014 does not show a clear picture of what will be left in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has natural resources but how will it translate that into internally sustainable economic growth remains to be seen. On Pakistan, Mr. Raja Mohan said that “geography demanded Pakistan”. From being an untouchable the Pakistan Army suddenly became most wanted ally. Mr. Raja Mohan said “we might think that Pakistan is in a bad shape but Pakistan Army sees it as a historical change to regain strategic depth in Afghanistan”. Mr. Raja Mohan concluded by saying that “when US leaves Afghanistan and Pakistan’s influence increases, India is going to face a completely different decade”.

This video can be watched here:

http://www.youtube.com/user/aspeninstituteindia?feature=mhee#p/u/34/HmcEs8kPi_w