

9th ISSI-IPIS BILATERAL DIALOGUE, DECEMBER 21-22, 2010

The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) organized a bilateral dialogue with the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), Tehran at its premises on December 21-22, 2010 in what was the 9th in a series of such regular meetings between the two institutes.

At the inaugural session, Director General of the ISSI Dr. Tanvir Ahmed Khan, in his welcome remarks highlighted the shared heritage between Iran and Pakistan, and pointed out the importance of frequent interaction for the cause of mutual security and multidimensional bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Dr. Mostafa Dolatyar, Director General of the IPIS then addressed the participants and thanking the ISSI for extending the invitation for the dialogue, anticipated a constructive meeting which is essential for better understanding of each others' concerns.

The first session titled 'Iran and Pakistan's Worldview' was chaired by Dr. Rifaat Hussain, Chairman, DSS Department of the Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, who began by explaining why understanding worldviews is important since they provide the contexts that shape policies.

Dr. Tanvir Ahmed Khan, in his presentation on the Pakistani worldview, elaborated on the changing global dynamics of new challenges to a specific form of globalization and western hegemony that had come up in the shape of, for instance, non-state actors and the rise of China. Emphasizing the importance of economics, he highlighted that a preoccupation with consumption in the United States as other economies now manufacture, and the recent financial crisis has forced introspection in the western economies. He noted that while the U.S. remains the world's biggest military power, its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been costly, it has failed in its endeavor to rebalance the world, and it now sees itself at a serious competitive disadvantage with China. Dr. Khan then went on to examine in greater details the dimensions of these changing global dynamics for Afghanistan, Africa, the Middle East, highlighting issues of specific interest to Pakistan and its neighbours within these changing contexts.

Presenting his paper on the Iranian worldview, Dr. Mostafa Dolatyar also stressed that the developments of this century with their universal effects have led to the fall of a U.S. hegemony as we see other rising global and regional powers. There has been, he contended, a rise of Asia again as the continent's population and production challenges existing global governance patterns that are exhibited through frameworks set up by the western powers. However, this system has been unable to cope with a non-polar world, which now requires multi-partnerships. Dr. Dolatyar highlighted the situations in South and Central Asia and the Middle East, where extra-regional powers have played destructive roles; he noted that Iran's role in developing regional frameworks has been active and such frameworks have to be the way forward.

The second session at the meeting, chaired by Dr. Tanvir Ahmed Khan titled "Pakistan-Iran: Regional Issues" began with a presentation on 'Regional Issues: An Iranian Perspective' by Ambassador Jalal Kalantari. He gave a general view of the situation in Afghanistan and the role of external and internal actors, pointing out that problems of terrorism and drug trafficking are affecting many countries of the region, including Iran and Pakistan. He pointed out weaknesses and concerns in the current U.S. and NATO strategy, and emphasized on the need for a mechanism where individual economic and security problems are tied to regional contexts since the current approach as followed by western powers is destabilizing for Afghanistan as well as the region.

The second speaker for the session, Director Research at ISSI Ms. Simbal Khan, presented her views on the "Current Security Situation in Afghanistan and its Impact on the Region". She pointed out recent developments in the war in Afghanistan through the December 2010 Afghanistan and Pakistan Review of the Obama administration, which reflects an open ended U.S. commitment as its forces will likely remain in Afghanistan beyond 2014, in what is an 'Americanization' of the war. Presenting a detailed analysis of the current security situation in Afghanistan and the broad elements of U.S. strategy, Ms. Khan asserted that all the success stories projected by U.S. forces have been strongly contested by independent observers. While highlighting fallouts of the war for the region, she concluded that it is critically

important for Afghanistan's neighbouring states to develop a regional consensus and initiate meaningful coordination to seek a political solution to the crisis.

The final session on "Pakistan-Iran: Bilateral Relations" chaired by Dr. Mostafa Dolatyar, had as its first speaker Mr. Alireza Golipour who presented his views on 'Pakistan-Iran: Political, Economic and Cultural Relations'. Examining the unique bilateral ties due to security relations, shared border of significance for the South Asian and Middle Eastern region, ethnic and cultural ties, religion, economic and political cooperation and both countries' relationships with the U.S., he noted that certain deficiencies remain that prevent the true potential from being realized. He detailed how this was because of several factors, including the Afghanistan crisis, some problems on the Pakistan-Iran border, terrorist groups and the presence of supra-regional actors. Mr. Golipour concluded by highlighting these as the primary issues that need to be dealt with if the desired and plausible potential of economic, social, security and political cooperation between Pakistan and Iran are to be realized.

Ms. Sannia Abdullah and Mr. Kashif Mumtaz, Research Fellows at the Institute of Strategic Studies, then briefly discussed the current state of bilateral ties by looking at trade relations and cooperation in the fields of energy and communication, while also highlighting the issue of Iran's nuclear program as a factor of interest. Emphasizing the need for a strategic partnership between Iran and Pakistan in bilateral ties as well as on multilateral platforms, they concluded that despite improvements on the economic front, true potential had not been achieved and this is necessary for sustained stability in the region.

Concluding the event, His Excellency Mr. Mashaallah Shakeri, Ambassador, Islamic Republic of Iran, expressed his desire for fruitful ties between Iran and Pakistan. He narrated recent incidents that show a brotherhood between the neighbours and stressed the need for more cooperation to regain physical connectivity.

Scholars of the ISSI and IPIS also held an informal session to discuss various issues of interest to Iran and Pakistan including regional security issues,

approaches to solving the crises in Afghanistan, factors for strengthening bilateral ties and the role of extra-regional powers, in an attempt to understand the Pakistani and Iranian positions on various concerns. With the conclusion of a fruitful and promising dialogue between both institutes, there was a commitment made for more frequent contact and further meetings in the near future since such events are essential for the development of a consensus on specific issues that are of common importance.