

“Pakistan Media: Impact on Society and Foreign and Security Policy”

One-day Seminar organized by The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad

The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) arranged a One – day seminar to highlight the emerging contours of the Pakistani media landscape and its impact on the society, and foreign and security policy.

The Chief Guest of the seminar was former Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting and currently Central Information Secretary, Pakistan Peoples Party Mr. Qamar Zaman Kaira who said that that before independence media in this part of the world has been a ‘movement media’ which was the need of the time. However, he lamented, it has been unable to assume the role of nation-building, and has continued to act as a ‘movement’ institution. Lack of objectivity, according to him, was lacking in the most of the content produced by the media. He also referred to the divisions within the media of of pro-democracy, anti-democracy, pro-military and jihadi segments.

Earlier, Tanvir Ahmed Khan, Director General / Chairman, Institute of Strategic Studies in his opening remarks said that the media offers a new dimension that cannot be ignored while studying security, social and political affairs. He said that it is no longer possible or even profitable to stifle the media. He further highlighted the role of new technologies in media that transform and establish the ‘shape, color and scent’ of our time. According to him the Face book generation, using technological devices and tools for mass communication through what is now called ‘social media’ have necessitated a rethinking of traditional media roles.

The first speaker of the first session was Ms. Amna Yusuf Khokhar, Research Fellow at the ISSI who identified several questions regarding religion, society, public opinion, liberalism and westernization that the media should be addressing. Ms. Ammara Durrani, Strategic Communications Specialist of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting raised the question that whether media had assumed the role of a game changer in the making of foreign policy in Pakistan.

Syed Talat Hussain of Dawn News made a presentation titled ‘Media in Pakistani Society: Agent for Positive Transformation or Regression?’ arguing that media can only present a viewpoint and highlight it but it is absolutely in no position to form an opinion in a country. He explained that to understand this sensitive and complex subject it is also equally important to first understand what exactly power is? What is public? And is the media absolute? Media is a much wider field than it is thought to be, he said.

Senior Journalist, Zahid Hussain spoke on '**Pakistani media and its impact on foreign and security policy.**' He was of the view that Pakistani media is much more candid, opaque and vocal regarding foreign and security policy. One of the major problems of print media, he said, is its division in English and Urdu. English newspapers cover issues related to foreign and security policy while there are hardly any such issues available in Urdu newspapers. This dichotomy is an underlying reason of our conflicts over various issues and inability to reach consensus.

Executive Editor Express Tribune, **Muhammad Zia Ud Din** spoke on 'Media and Ethics.' He said Pakistani media has been operating under strict regimes and laws with no media ethics. The media struggle in early days was not for ethics but for media freedom. Media ethics had been violated by the governments for their own propaganda and suppression of opposition. Pakistani media despite its weaknesses makes us proud and is a responsible institution. Pakistani media is impacted by two trends. One is media's participation in freedom movement before partition. And the other is import of free media idealism from colonial power. Many people are disappointed with media performance but I am happy about the fact that we have free media, independent judiciary and strong parliament. Free media, independent judiciary and strong parliament are the social contours which improve governance and keep corruption at a low level.

In the Second session Dr. Hiba Tohid, a Karachi based social researcher presented a paper on 'Evolution of Social media in Pakistan: Rise of the Technivist' in which she said that when everyone is connected, anything is possible but the Face book itself wasn't a revolution, and it was just a means of global village. Mr. Ghani Jafar from ISSI, noted that professional standards had been eroded in both print and electronic media in Pakistan.

The discussant of the final session was Dr. Sania Nishtar, Executive Director Heart File, who highlighted the importance of social media, noting that organizing a seminar on social media by the ISSI which usually dealt with foreign and security policy issues was a commendable development underling the growing realization that a state's security meant more that dealing with territorial threats only.