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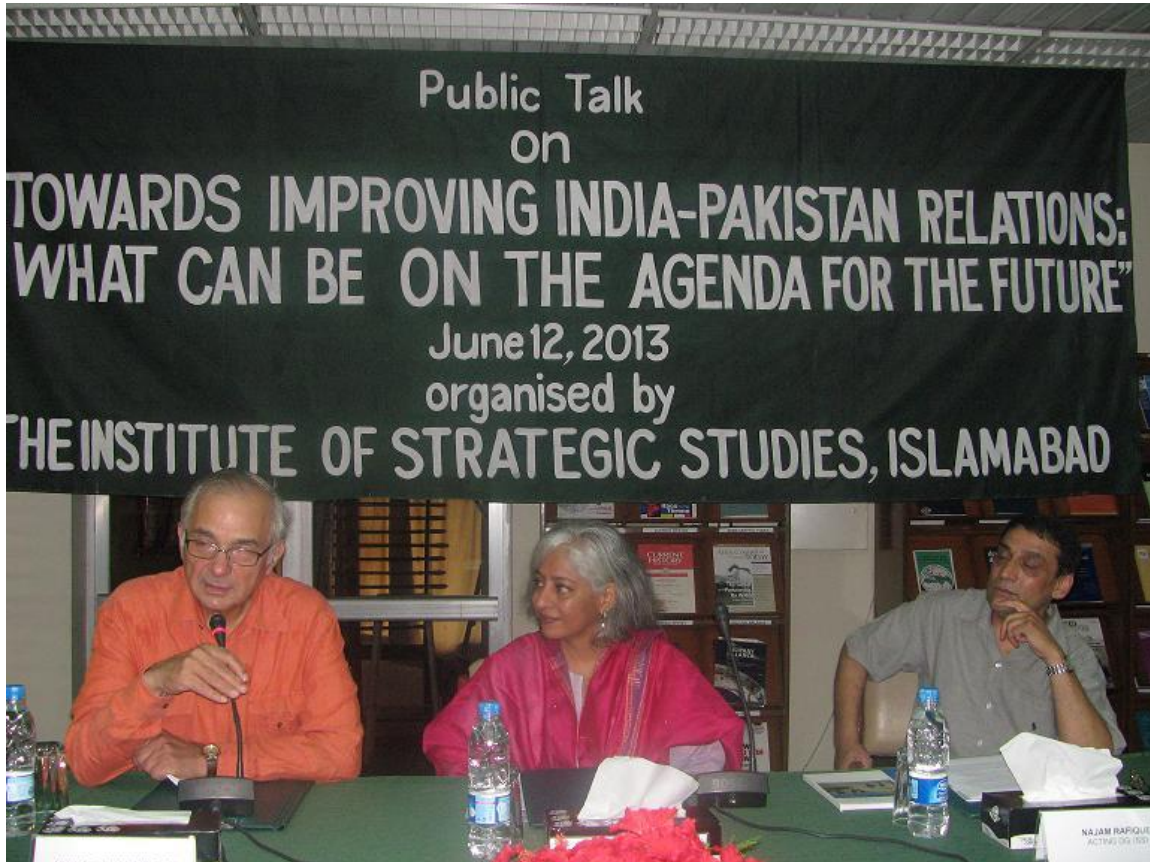
“Towards Improving India-Pakistan Relations: What can be on the Agenda for the Future”

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**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,
ISLAMABAD**

“Towards Improving India-Pakistan Relations: What can be on the Agenda for the Future”



A public talk was organised by Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) on June 12, 2013 under its “Distinguished Lecture Series” on “Towards Improving India-Pakistan Relations: What can be on the Agenda for the Future”. The speaker on the occasion was Dr. Radha Kumar, Director General, Delhi Policy Group, India. Former Director General, ISSI, Ambassador (Retd.) Ashraf Jehangir Qazi chaired the Talk.

In his opening remarks Ambassador (Retd.) Ashraf Jehangir Qazi highlighted the importance of the subject of the talk. He said that India-Pakistan relations are key to Pakistan’s success in many other fields like internal economic growth and improving security situation in Afghanistan. There is a new government in Pakistan which faces many challenges. In order to deal with these challenges, Pakistan needs efficient policies

and efficient policies don't flow from confrontation. This will not be easy as there is a historical baggage. But the new enlighten generation will help the two countries to move forward as good friends.

Welcoming the guests, Mr. Najam Rafique, Acting Director General, ISSI said that in international relations, it is said that there are no permanent enemies or permanent friends – only permanent interest. This, he said, is not true at least in the case of India and Pakistan who have been locked in perpetual enmity. He said that even as Dr Radha prepared to speak, there were jingoistic voices emanating from New Delhi calling for a punitive war and massive retaliation against Pakistan in case there was another act of terror. He said that Dr Radha, who was a former member of the Group of interlocutors for Jammu and Kashmir appointed by the central government in New Delhi, would be in the best of positions to provide us with her insights on the most critical issue that has and continues to affect relations between Pakistan and India, and the security situation in South Asia

Addressing the gathering, Dr, Radha Kumar said that peace making is the most important issue not only for both the countries but also for the region, particularly Afghanistan. Dr. Kumar was of the view that it is believed that only political will is required to improve relations between India and Pakistan. This is not true as there are structural obstacles and historical baggage to overcome. The role of media is also very critical. Government in India, civil society and think tanks believes that at times, the role of media is so negative that it makes peace making very difficult not only with Pakistan but with other countries as well as within India also. Since partition, efforts have been made to make peace between the two countries. Some very bold steps were taken during the time of high tension. She said that Pakistan's newly elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif tried to make peace with India in the past and intends to do same this time. This has been welcomed in India. The issues that Prime Minister Nawaz sharif has highlighted so far are trade and economic improvement. Both India and Pakistan are in a state of economic recession. Economic issues have expanded hugely as they include environmental issues, long term infrastructure development and energy. These issues were not part of dialogue earlier but have become priority now. Political leadership in

both the countries have no choice but to address these social welfare issues. This situation presents both the countries with an opportunity to move forward in a positive manner. Both the countries should look for ways to cooperate and to share resources like water. Perhaps options should be looked into the SAARC framework. She lamented the fact that SAARC has not been able to forge cooperative development among the regional countries and hoped that in future, SAARC would be able to restimulate itself.

Dr. Kumar also spoke about the Composite Dialogue between India and Pakistan. She said that there were three outstanding issues in the dialogue i.e. Sir Creek, Siachen and Kashmir. Many other problems actually flow from these issues like the plight of fishermen who stray into these undemarcated waters. However, a lot of progress has been made in Track II diplomacy particularly on the issues of Sir Creek and Siachen and it is believed that an agreement can be reached on these issues particularly Sir Creek.

Dr. Kumar, being part of the three member group of interlocutors appointed by government of India in 2010 following massive outburst of anger by the Kashmiri youth also talked at length about the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. She said that three member team went to every nook and corner of Kashmir and interacted with people from different walks of life. The anger among the Kashmiris was so strong that she and her colleagues had to act as “sponge” to absorb all that frustration. Without going into the details of the report that was presented to the Government of India in 2011 and which is available on the internet, Dr. Kumar highlighted some of the points that were demanded by all sections of the Kashmiri society. Among these points were better governance and human rights.

Dr. Kumar also talked about the back channel discussions between India and Pakistan during former President Musharaf era on the issue of Kashmir. Dr. Kumar emphasised that perhaps both India and Pakistan should study in detail the framework that was charted out during these back channel discussions as the suggestions in the framework did not reflect the ideas of any single individual. In fact, the ideas in that framework were given by Kashmiri civil society.

On the issue of Afghanistan, while acknowledging the difficulties both the countries face with regard to their security concerns, Dr. Kumar stressed that both India

and Pakistan will have to find a way to help Afghanistan in the larger interest of regional peace. She once again deplored the negative role being played by a section of Indian media and said that the issue is being raised with the media as this attitude is actually weakening the democratic structures and political decision making.

The presentation was followed by a vibrant Question/Answer session. A guest from the audience said that the nuclear CBMs that Pakistan has been putting forth from time to time failed to receive positive response from India. He also said that India and Pakistan are engaged in rivalry in Afghanistan and it is the need of hour that both countries talk about it and find a way out. Another guest raised the issue of mistrust between the two countries and wondered how this issue can be dealt. Another guest commented that Pakistan has been under dictatorship for many decades and it would not be easy for Pakistanis to forget it and own back channel negotiations on Kashmir.

Dr. Kumar said that it is absolutely important for India and Pakistan to move forward towards nuclear restraint. There were some efforts in Track II diplomacy to include China as India has concerns regarding growing Chinese might in the region. Situation in Afghanistan has made even more important for India and Pakistan to make peace. The Strategic Partnership between India and Afghanistan clearly mentions that this partnership will not be directed against any other country. At the moment, Afghanistan needs all its friends. She agreed that Pakistan has been under military rule for decades but once again emphasised the fact that most of the ideas in back channel negotiations were actually given by Kashmiri civil society and not by any single individual.

Taking advantage of the occasion, a Chinese guest suggested that putting aside political differences, India, China and Pakistan should try to create special economic zone/ duty free zone between Indian and Pakistani border. Another guest referred to Pakistan's proposal of mutual reduction of forces and level of armaments which again has failed to get positive response from India. Another question was raised regarding structural obstacles in conflict resolution between India and Pakistan.

Dr. Kumar commended the suggestions given by Chinese guest. On the issue of force reduction, Dr. Kumar said that such issues have been discussed in track II talks and

with all the technology available these days it is much more doable. Reduction of forces on the border would be a huge CBM for Kashmir as well. On structural obstacles, Dr. Kumar was of the view that both the countries have institutional obstacles, poor governance and radicals on both sides do hate each other. Both the countries need to address these issues.

A question was raised regarding Dr. Kumar’s experience while dealing with Kashmiris that apart from poor governance and human rights, whether the issue of freedom struggle and plebiscite were also raised or not. Dr. Kumar said that their mandate did not cover the part of Kashmir that is under Pakistani control. For a permanent solution of Kashmir, all parties i.e. India, Pakistan and Kashmiris have to be on board. There are lots of opinions on the issue of “Azadi”. For example Laddakh and some parts of Jammu wants to become union territory of India- a view which is not shared by the valley.

Concluding the event, the Chair, Ambassador (Retd) Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, thanked Dr. Radha Kumar for presenting her views on a subject that is of great importance not only for India and Pakistan but also for the future of entire region particularly Afghanistan. He also thanked the audience for their active participation and making the event a success.

- *Prepared by*

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