

Report

Consultative Meeting of Think Tanks in Islamabad

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**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,
ISLAMABAD**

The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) held a Consultative Meeting to discuss the possible research agenda for a "*National Security, Strategy and Foreign Policy of Pakistan in 2014 and Beyond*", on August 23, 2013. The initiative was taken by the new Director General (DG) of the Institute, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais. Heads of 11 leading Think Tanks from Rawalpindi and Islamabad were invited from both government and non-government sectors to discuss and streamline the futuristic vision that may be helpful both for the government and the research institutes.

Seven of the invitee attended who included the following: Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Ambassador (Retd.) Sohail Amin President, Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), Professor Dr. Tahir Amin, Chairman, National Institute of Pakistan Studies (NIPS), Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani, Chairman, Gallup Pakistan, Khalid Banuri Director General, Arms Control and Disarmament (SPD), Ambassador (Retd.) Ali Sarwar Naqvi, Chairman, Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and Mr. Tariq Zamir, Director General Personnel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Chairman ISSI, Ambassador (Retd.) Gul Hanif chaired the meeting.

DG ISSI, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais laid down the objectives so that replication and silos in the works of various research institutes can be avoided. He emphasized that an objective and more scientific research is the prime requisite in these hours of fragility and era of modernism and which can only be achieved with consensus. He proposed that:

- a. Research Agenda for the upcoming five to ten years be shared among all the institutes for cooperation and collaboration in order to inculcate and promote the culture of team work. In this process common analyses and reproduction can be avoided.
- b. Although every researcher should have his/her own agenda and autonomy, they should be encouraged in the selection of the subject matter. However, the selection of the subject should be in balance with the overall mission, vision, and objectives of the institutes. He

opined that it is important to gel the two in order to avoid losses of intellectual thinking.

- c. There needs to be a shift in the prevalent role of the researchers from purely academic to policy research in order to make them more fruitful, and which will contribute to simple comprehension of the issues by governments as well. Dr Rais therefore suggested reorientation of the researchers through training sessions and workshops on Research Methodology so that they could be equipped with the difference in policy research and academic research.
- d. Accentuation on the need to conduct research in view of future challenges for Pakistan encapsulating the themes of Foreign Policy, National Security and Strategies. However this could be possible if there is clarity in understanding which could be achieved through empirical, well-based and scientific research.

Following his proposals, the Director General ISSI invited contributions and comments from the participants for future course of action by the Think Tanks. He also called for sharing of topics chosen by the researchers at the various institutes.

The introduction provoked a profound, an elaborate and comprehensive discussion amongst the participants around the table which highlighted three areas of sweet and sour realities of research:

- i. Reclaim the moorings of research by eliminating the anomalies and aberrations existent in the world of research, which have hollowed the field.
- ii. Understanding through collective wisdom the current economic and political shift from west to east and its relevance to Pakistan's security, foreign policy and defense; threat perception and opportunities.

- iii. Way forward through proactive, interactive and sustainable futuristic collaboration by pooling the wisdom.

It was almost unanimously agreed that with the mushrooming of institutes, the epic scale of research has dropped down with such institutes occupying spaces in replica to "neatly set modern cities in Christian societies"...."We have created places, over the last forty years, where people are only spiritless" and the work is as spiritless, commented Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani. He further elaborated that many institutions of this kind therefore practically die, leaving behind the list of seminars, reproduce, cut and paste research, and some of the widely read headlines.

Dr. Tahir Amin was of the opinion that the paradigms built by the institutions, whether military, bureaucracy, or academic, are addressing the issues in silos, which "has made the inter-paradigmatic debate difficult and complex." The world of consumerism has plagued research institutes as much, since the governments have their own policies in the backdrop of their economic priorities and national interests. The lack of linkage between policies and scholarship is therefore faulted frequently as is seen in the most developed world as well. Dr. Gilani suggested that under the circumstances, policy papers by researchers would be thorny. Transfer of knowledge generally builds into creation of knowledge. "To translate knowledge into policy and action is even harder which should not be looked into simplistically. Between the policy and the knowledge, there is a very little relationship that exists even in the countries like the US. To expect this to happen in Pakistan immediately is even more difficult."

Agreeing to Dr. Gilani's rationale, Khalid Banuri said that "Think Tanks should provide policy inputs to the governments on take it or leave it basis but it generally does not happen. Either that policy does not happen in the Think Tanks or if it does, the government should take it and adopt it per se." This gap in communication between the Think Tanks and the government leads to loss of grip on the issues. This ruthless reality needs to be realized with veracity in order to steer clear of historical legacies without blame game if effective results are desired.

It was argued by Dr. Gilani that to bring back the altruistic spirit inherent in factually correct research, mask around the truth has to be

drawn down with dedication, precision and vision just as it was done by Al-Baruni while writing Kitab-ul-Hind. Tariq Zamir seconded the underlying principle by giving example of Professor Vito Saliamo, an Italian researcher who dug into the archives of Mussolini's daily programs in order to know the exact date and time of his meeting with Allama Mohammad Iqbal, and completed an Italian translation of Allama Iqbal's Urdu works in 25 years of hard work through sheer dedication and commitment. This is the intellectual spirit and dedication that needs to be emulated by the researchers of today.

The participants also shared generously the information on the works being carried out and the mechanism followed at their institutes. They further highlighted the issues of immediate concern for the researchers to probe into. Mushahid Hussain suggested that since Pakistan is peculiar in its strategic location, its government needs extensive thinking in "countering terrorism" mainly emanating from its participation in ten years long 'War on Terror', which has vastly implicated the world in general and the region in particular. "Government knows what to do, but how to do it" is the area expected from the research institutes to explore, said Mushahid Hussain.

Dr. Tahir Amin also believed the WoT entails analyses in terms of costs and benefits. "US has secured it for themselves", he said. A serious thought is required for securitization through engagement of the major powers in the region. It is vital for the rebuilding of the region politically, diplomatically, economically and in inter-regional relations.

Amb. (Retd.) Sohail Amin asserted that the non-conventional threats, such as diplomacy, societal regression, inefficiency and slackness in governance are equally pivotal issues for any serious contemplation.

Amb. (Retd.) Ali Sarwar Naqvi was of the view that Pakistan has done well in its multilateral framework, but in its bilateral relations, China is the only success story in the region. The relationships with Bangladesh have also turned coarse recently. On the international paradigm, Pakistan is continuing with love-hate relationship with the US. It has to rethink about its relationships in the post 2014 and the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. Institutes also have to work together to correct the distorted version of the world for the good of Pakistan so that the world could also

understand Pakistan better. People-to-people contact, more interactive academic debates with the outside world are therefore worthwhile. Exchange of expertise in the human resource development is yet another neglected field. It could be more fruitful than economic diplomacy.

In his detailed but captivating address, Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani suggested the need to investigate into the model of China which took twenty years to withdraw from international engagement and excessive concern with military and politics-related security affairs. Pakistan has enormously overstretched itself and destroyed its ability to do anything. The next ten years must be dedicated to its withdrawal. He further elaborated that India is our number one issue, however, we need to see it not in the context of India-Pakistan relations, but for how India sees it. Their culture, their sentiments, their politics, all has to be looked into through the prism of India, if India has to be kept engaged. Similarly, to know Pakistan is as pertinent. He further stated that despite having favourable relations with China, Pakistan's engagement in China's economic relationship is less than one percent. Any research on the issue recommending the means and sources, coming from the various institutes could be a substantial contribution.

The question and answer session remained focused on the mechanism to be followed in due course in order to ensure collaboration amongst the institutes and strengthening the intellectual abilities of the existing researchers through maximum support, particularly in terms of access to quantitative data and sensitive information so that the efficacy and sustainability of research could be maintained.

Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais concluded the meeting by suggesting self-accountability and stocktaking of the works done in order to initiate restructuring and reshaping the institute and more frequent exchange of dialogue in this perspective.

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