

# Report

## “Rethinking National Security of Pakistan: Challenges & Opportunities”

December 26, 2013



**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,  
ISLAMABAD**

*“Rethinking National Security of Pakistan: Challenges & Opportunities”*

To celebrate 40 years of its founding, the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) organised a seminar on *“Rethinking National Security of Pakistan: Challenges & Opportunities”* on December 26, 2013. Mr Sartaj Aziz, Advisor to the Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs was the Chief Guest at the occasion. Welcoming the guests, the Director General (ISSI) Dr Rasul Bakhsh Rais said that it was sometime in 1972 that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then President of Pakistan gave the idea of establishing Institute of Strategic Studies. He read out a document where years back this decision of establishing a think tank was taken. He also showed a pictorial slideshow of the past 40 years of this prestigious institute.

Talking about the 21<sup>st</sup> century problems for Pakistan, Dr. Maria Sultan, Director General, South Asian Strategic Stability Institute, Islamabad highlighted three emerging security challenges. She said that it will be important how Pakistan see the emergence of pre-emptive use of force in Pakistan’s case. Whether the attack will be coming from the eastern front or the western front? Secondly, internal security problems presented by various groups and their economic dimensions; and lastly, how Pakistan deals with the fault lines i.e. Shia–Sunni problem, narratives based on ethnic lines, economic divide and finally to ensure writ of the state. She also identified four different domains to respond to national security challenges which included the social domain, physical domain, cognitive domain and information/cultural domain.

Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Director and Associate Professor at the School of Politics & International Relations, Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad spoke on *“Strategy to Meet Future Military Challenges to Pakistan”*. He was of the view that strategies are never static and they always change, and that strategic environment plays an important role in shaping a suitable strategy. Pakistan, he said has been facing military threats since its creation. Unfortunately, these threats have multiplied with the passage of time. The new government under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif could improve the situation on Pakistan's eastern and western borders, but the worst case scenario cannot be ignored. For Pakistan he said, the biggest threat is India. Afghanistan presents Pakistan with another serious security challenge. Mr. Jaspal viewed threat emanating from transnational terror organisations as the third major security challenge for Pakistan. Citing the Salala incident and Abbottabad operation, Dr. Jaspal termed the military threat from non-regional powers as the fourth major threat for Pakistan. And finally, he was of them opinion that Pakistan's relations with Iran needed immediate attention.

Director General ISS, Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais while talking about *“Security Studies in Pakistan: Continuity and Change”* opined that the traditional paradigm of security studies that is premised on external military threats is not capable of fully explaining the national security problems of post-colonial third world states like Pakistan. According to Dr Rais, the discourse on security in Pakistan has to come out of the traditional mindset. Security studies cannot be confined to military threats only, and that internal security has to be brought under focus. Dr. Rais opined that the narrow view of security has come under attack following the fall of communism and disintegration of the Soviet Union. Collapse of Soviet security structure proved that military power is important but not sufficient to maintain a legitimate security system. Economic and political measures and a responsive state apparatus with roots in civil society and satisfaction of societal demands are equally important. He said that problems the Pakistan faces like sectarianism, ethnic militancy or the situation in Karachi requires urgent attention of researchers, scholars and policymakers.

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In his keynote address, H.E Mr. Sartaj Aziz said that changes around the world have taken place at a very fast pace. Concepts like nation state and national sovereignty have eroded. Economic gravity is shifting to Asia. He cited the rise of China as another very important development. Mr. Aziz said that Indian aspirations for global power and turmoil in the Arab world are the events that Pakistan cannot take its eyes off. In the region, Pakistan enjoys good relations with China but has serious problems with India and Afghanistan, and that the uncertain situation in Afghanistan is a source of concern for Pakistan. Pakistan also has a problem of improving its image globally. However, all these challenges can be converted into opportunities. There is a global consensus that there should be peace in this region. Pakistan’s geostrategic location is also an asset which can be used to boost trade and cooperation in energy sector throughout the region. Highlighting Pakistan's foreign policy objectives, Mr. Aziz emphasised that it is Pakistan’s desire to improve relations with India, and that only a better environment in South Asia will ensure SAARC realizing its full potential. Mr. Aziz said that Pakistan also needs to reset its relations with the US. He also elaborated on the working of Cabinet Committee on National Security. Mr. Aziz stressed the fact that in order to find solutions to all the problems, Pakistan will have to put its own house in order. If Pakistan can deal with its internal problems, then external challenges will not be so hard to handle.

The presentations were followed by a question and answer session. A guest from the audience raised a question regarding problems faced by Pakistan due to lack of proper arrangements on Pak-Afghan border. Mr. Sartaj Aziz admitted that a better management was very important and required regulated movement of people. He informed that a border commission was already working on this issue and would come up with its recommendations very soon. Another guest requested to know the current status of Pak-Iran gas pipeline. Mr. Aziz said that as energy starved country, Pakistan was very interested in this project. However, due to sanctions imposed on Iran by the US, Pakistan is finding it difficult to arrange finances. He hoped that the sanctions would be removed soon and both the countries would go ahead with this project.

Raising serious concerns regarding the emerging situation in Afghanistan, a guest inquired that if the US leaves Afghanistan and adopts “zero option”, most probably there would be a civil war in Afghanistan. In that case, does Pakistan have a clear policy to deal with the situation? Mr. Aziz said that Pakistan has a policy of “non-interference” in Afghanistan. Pakistan hopes that once Afghans are left to decide their own fate, they will come up with some kind of consensus. It is Pakistan’s desire that Afghanistan remains united and peaceful.

A question was raised that if Gilgit-Baltistan, which is a much smaller area as compared to FATA can be given provincial status, then why not FATA? Mr. Aziz said that in this regard different ideas have been surfacing but nothing actually has been worked out. At the moment, besides development in education sector, efforts are also being made to politically integrate the people of that area.

Regarding questions on Pakistan’s policy towards Bangladesh and Syria, Mr. Aziz said that whatever is going on in Bangladesh is their internal matter. Pakistan would always like to have close brotherly relations with Bangladesh. Similarly, Pakistan wishes to see peace in Syria. He expressed his concern regarding the sectarian dimension of the Syrian crisis.

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Responding to the question regarding misperceptions in the US about the safety and security of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons and suspicion in Pakistan regarding US intention of taking control of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons, Mr. Aziz said that Pakistan has already convinced the US that its nuclear weapons are safe and beyond the reach of non-state actors.

Concluding the event, Chairman ISSI, Ambassador (R) Khalid Mahmood thanked the participants and the guests for making the event a success. He thanked Pakistan’s Foreign Office for providing all possible support to the institute. He also said words of appreciation for all his predecessors and researchers who had worked at ISSI in past 40 years.

- *Prepared by*

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