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Report- Public Talk

“70 Years of Pakistan-Turkey Diplomatic Relations”

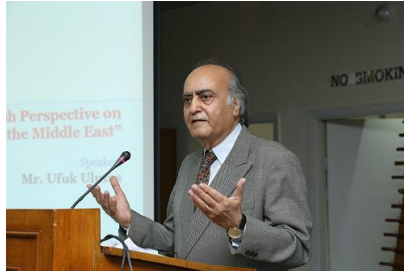
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Pictures of the Event



The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a Public Talk on November 27, 2017 to commemorate 70 years of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Turkey. The speakers on the occasion included Dr. Mesut Ozcan, Acting Chairman, Center for Strategic Research, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkey, Ankara, and Mr. Ufuk Ulutas, Researcher and Columnist, Turkey. The Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey in Islamabad, H.E. Sadik Babur Girgin was also present at the occasion.

Welcoming the guests, Chairman ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that the relationship between Pakistan and Turkey predates establishment of Pakistan. People in the Subcontinent always felt close affiliation with Turkey and the Ottoman empire. Even today, there are no two opinions in Pakistan that Turkey is a close brotherly country with which we have a deep relationship and special affinity. Turkey and Pakistan have been partners in the Baghdad Pact, Economic Cooperation Organization and many other similar organizations. The relationship between the two countries is also special because Turkey has always been a staunch supporter of the Kashmir cause. Likewise, Pakistan has always supported Turkey on its position on the issue of Cyprus. Ambassador Khalid Mahmood also pointed out that despite all these positive trends in the bilateral relations between the two countries, the relationship in the economic field lags behind. The trade volume between the two countries is merely 600 million. Some efforts are being made to address this issue and it is hoped that these efforts would give a new impetus to bilateral economic relations. He also expressed his optimism that under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), there would be new opportunities for Turkish investments in Pakistan.

Dr. Mesut Ozcan appraised the audience regarding "*Turkish Foreign Policy*". He also reiterated the fact that relations between Turkey and Pakistan predate creation of Pakistan, as people in Turkey have also felt a special affinity with the Muslims of the Subcontinent. During the Cold War era, Turkey, being a NATO ally, adopted policies accordingly. The post Cold War era brought many changes in the world. At that time, there were wars going on in Turkey's neighbourhood, particularly in Bosnia which directly affected Turkey. Besides, at that time Turkey was also facing a serious problem posed by Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Hence, when most of the countries around the world were focusing on economic driven foreign policy, Turkey had no option but to pursue a security driven foreign policy. This situation changed

during the decade of 2000, and following the year 2003, there was lot more activism on the part of Turkey at the global stage, particularly in areas like Latin America and Sub Sahara African region. Trade with other regions also increased during this time. Today, China is also coming closer to Turkey, and both the countries are involved in a number of joint projects. On the other hand, certain factors like the economic crisis in Europe, xenophobia and refugee crisis are negatively affecting Turkey's relations with the EU. Turkey's relations with the US also have their ups and downs, and both the countries are having serious differences over the Syrian crisis.

Mr. Ufuk Ulutas spoke extensively on "*Turkish Perspectives on Developments in the Middle East*". He stated four phenomena to describe the situation in the Middle East. The first phenomenon according to Mr. Ufuk, is the 'failed or weak states'. This phenomenon is a major source of instability in the region. Terror organizations like ISIS emerged and flourished in weak countries like Syria and Iraq. These countries are not able to control their borders, and their sovereignty also has a question mark. This particular phenomenon had a ripple effect in the entire region and that leads to the second phenomenon which is 'proxy wars'. Proxy wars were fought throughout the Cold War era. Post Cold War era saw a new wave of proxy wars where not only proxies are fighting alongside their partners, but also states are fighting with their proxies. Third phenomenon identified by Mr. Ufuk was terror groups like ISIS and PKK who are fighting across borders wreaking havoc in the region. This phenomenon also leads to the fourth phenomenon which is the refugee crisis. This refugee issue is not only an economic and cultural problem, but in fact it has become a security issue. Mr. Ufuk expressed his deep concerns at the unfolding situation in Syria. He informed the audience that Turkey feels that there could be no military solution to the Syrian crisis, and hence, Turkey supports a political solution. He also said that Turkey respects the territorial integrity of both Syria and Iraq and is against separatism or creating new weak states. He was also of the view that rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia would also have devastating effects for the entire region.

The presentations were followed by an active question and answer session. A question was posed to Mr. Ufuk regarding his views about the new crown prince in Saudi Arabia and his policies. Mr. Ufuk said that there are uncertainties regarding the agenda of the new crown prince. He may have to separate realpolitik from ideology. Focusing on ideologies without addressing the real issues will not be helpful.

Responding to a question regarding US intervention in the Gulf region, Mr. Ufuk said that there is no US Middle East policy. There are different ideas in different quarters in the US, but there is no coherent long-term policy for this region. Invasion of Iraq was like opening the Pandora box, and so was the case with Afghanistan. To the question as to why Muslims are killing Muslims, Mr. Ufuk pointed out short sightedness and bigotry as reasons for this sorry state of affairs.

A guest raised a question regarding Turkey's change in policy and turning towards Iran and Russia to find a solution to the Syrian crisis. Mr. Ufuk replied that Turkey is trying to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis and that is the reason why it is talking to Iran and Russia. Otherwise, there is no change in Turkey's policy towards Syria.

A question was also posed to Ambassador Girgin regarding the steps taken by the Turkish government to infuse sense of nationalism in Turkish people. Ambassador Girgin replied that education, not only in schools, but also at homes has been the key factor.

Chairman ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood while making the concluding remarks said that this has been a fascinating and very educative session. He expressed optimism that the friendship between Pakistan and Turkey will remain strong and concrete in the face of changing scenarios around the world. He also reminded the audience that Turkey was the only country that registered its protest with the Bangladeshi government for hanging Jamaat i Islami leader Motiur Rahman Nizami for alleged war crimes during the war in 1971 by calling back its Ambassador. He thanked the Turkish guests for presenting their views and the audience for their active participation.