

Report: Roundtable on “Pakistan’s Evolving Role in the Resolution of Regional Issues concerning Afghanistan, India, and the Middle-east” with a visiting delegation from the Royal Danish Defence College” on January 24, 2012

## **Pakistan wants a stable Afghanistan**

**Aarish U. Khan**

ISLAMABAD: Participants of a roundtable discussion organized by the Institute of Regional Studies here on Tuesday called for addressing Pakistan’s genuine concerns with regard to the impending withdrawal of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan.

Mr. Ole Kvaerno, Director of the Institute for Strategy at the Faculty of Strategy and Military Operations of the Royal Danish Defence College, expressed his concern over the situation in Afghanistan. He warned though that a premature withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan could lead to even further destabilization in the region.

Prof. Nazir Hussain of the School of Political and International Studies at the Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) maintained that Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan had been grossly misunderstood by the west. He added that Pakistan wants a stable and prosperous Afghanistan. He cautioned against a policy that would not take into account the internal dynamic of Afghan state and society. Prof. Hussain argued that Afghanistan and Pakistan are closely interlinked and even interdependent, which should not be compromised for a greater Indian role there. He criticized the overemphasis on the military strategy at the cost of political reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Prof. Salma Malik of the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies (DSS) at the QAU said that instead of emphasizing the strengthening of the Karzai regime in Afghanistan, the NATO countries need to focus on evolving a broad-based and inclusive political reconciliation program for Afghanistan. Prof. Shabana Fayyaz of DSS QAU said that since the Danish government’s image was badly tarnished by the blasphemous cartoons issue, the Danish government needed to come up with strategies to improve its image in Pakistan. She suggested a student exchange program for image-building of Denmark in Pakistan. She added that the cartoon issue was not an issue being exploited by the clergy in Pakistan, rather that it was an issue close to the heart of a great majority of Muslim Pakistanis.

Brig. Bashir Ahmed, Senior Fellow at the IRS was of the opinion that the relations between India and Pakistan were stabilizing. He said that the domestic socio-economic compulsions of both the countries were compelling them to evolve a negotiated solution to their disputes. He added that the Pakistanis respected the Chinese and the Scandinavian countries for their commitment towards development and social welfare.

Mr. Kvaerno shared that the Danish government chose to maintain its diplomatic mission in Pakistan and work on expanding its cooperation with the latter after the terrorist attack on the Danish Embassy in Islamabad in 2008. He added that his delegation was in Pakistan to explore avenues of future cooperation between the two countries and their people.