

Report: Roundtable on “Kashmir: A Way Forward” with Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Senior Research Analyst, Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) Islamabad, on December 14, 2011

## **A people-centric approach is the way forward for Kashmir**

**Aarish U. Khan**

ISLAMABAD: India and Pakistan will have to move from state-centric approaches for resolution of the Kashmir dispute to people-centric approaches, said Dr. Shaheen Akhtar during a roundtable discussion at the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Wednesday.

Dr. Akhtar, a Senior Research Analyst at IRS, was of the opinion that with the change in the regional and global realities a military solution to Kashmir had become obsolete. She highlighted that the economic and energy needs of India and Pakistan as well as the global redefinition of the concept of security in favor of human security had compelled the two countries to talk peace. She added that the pressures of increasing population and the need for economic and energy security have gradually pushed Pakistan towards normalization of relations for India. According to Dr. Akhtar, the Kashmiri leadership had also expressed its willingness towards accepting an alternative solution acceptable to India, Pakistan, and the Kashmiris, which, she said, was beyond their long-held position in favor self-determination.

Dr. Akhtar said that India and Pakistan had come a long way from their stated positions on Kashmir like the “Jugular Vein” and “Integral Part” to “human security and development”. She hailed Pakistani leadership for showing the courage towards redefining Pakistani narrative on Kashmir after the resumption of the Composite Dialogue in 2004. Dr. Akhtar regretted the fact that Pakistan’s bold initiatives on Kashmir during Musharraf era were not reciprocated in the same spirit by India.

Foreign policy analyst, Amb. B.A. Malik, said that Pakistan’s Kashmir policy was out of sync with its domestic realities, and that the decision-makers needed to have a serious rethink of its policy towards India in general and on Kashmir in particular. He suggested that Pakistan could compromise on slow progress on the resolution of Kashmir dispute for the dividends that would accrue out of peace with India. He said that peace instead of Kashmir was the core issue for Pakistan. Agreeing with Amb. Malik, defense analyst, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Saleem Haider, said that India is an emerging economy of the world and that the way forward for Pakistan would be to benefit from the growth of India.

Mr. John Hill, Deputy Political Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, said that the U.S. would welcome any proposals from Pakistan for a role it could play for the peaceful resolution of Kashmir. He cautioned, however, that in the past their role had also proved counter-productive on occasions. Mr. Pierre Mayaudon, Deputy Head of the European Union delegation in Islamabad, appreciated the progress towards normalization of relations between India and Pakistan.

Other participants of the roundtable included: Mr. Ashraf Azim, President of IRS; Brig. (Retd.) Bashir Ahmed, Senior Research Fellow at IRS; Mr. Ahmer Bilal Soofi, expert on international law and advocate at the Supreme Court of Pakistan; Mr. Sikander Shah, Advocate and Professor; Ms. Arshi Saleem Hashmi, Assistant Professor at the National Defence University; Dr. Z.A. Qureshi, Head of the International Relations Department at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML); Prof. Salma Malik of the Department of Defense and Strategic Studies at the Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU); Dr. Mavara Inayat of the Department of International Relations at the QAU; Ms. Farhat Parveen, Research Analyst at IRS; and Mr. Aarish U. Khan, Research Analyst at IRS.