

## **BIPSS President's Lecture at BIPSS Lecture Event - 'Engaging South Asia: Obama's South Asia Policy'**

Ambassador Moriarty, distinguished guests, Ladies and gentleman Good morning. I have the distinct pleasure of welcoming you to this very important lecture on "Engaging South Asia: Obama's South Asia Policy". I would also like to thank Ambassador, Moriarty to take the time off from his busy schedule to speak on the subject today.

On going shifts in geo-political, geo- strategic and geo-economic power from the West to the East make the Asia –Pacific region more important to the US today than ever before. In this, the South Asian sub-system occupies an important and often a vital place. South Asia is the home of one fifth of the global humanity. It is also houses two of the latest members of the nuclear club. It has also made significant economic strides over the past decades. The rapid economic growth in India throws more weight to its potential. The over-all politico-military, socio-economic growth trajectory in South- Asia shows the signs of South Asia as engine of global economy and as a major player in the global economic and political system. But surprisingly on a comparative analysis of the policy focus in terms of areas, Washington has not been comprehensively and consistently focused on the region in the past, that happily is changing in the new era of hope under the new Obama administration. It is expected that Washington will play a more pro-active role in the region, recognize the new geo-strategic realities and position itself to deal more effectively with the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in the region. As former Deputy Secretary of state Richard Armitage which speaking about China policy once said " To get China right, we have to get Asia right " I will say , to get Asia right. One has to get South Asia right.

These are also times of fundamental changes and shifts in South Asia. The region is going through a turbulent time. A quick survey of the strategic and security landscape of the region will only indicate the enormity of the problem. The war in Afghanistan is far from over, there is also a coalition troops surge in the area. There are questions about effective national control by the Afghan Government. The effects and spill over of the Afghan situation has further complicated and worsened the situation in the FATA area. in Pakistan. Pakistan is fighting a determined and courageous battle against Taliban strong holds in that area and deserves the support and appreciations of the international community. Although Sri Lanka has successfully militarily ended a 30 years civil war by defeating the LTTE, the post conflict situation remains grave with concerns over political sustainability of the solution and humanitarian situation. The recent political tension in Nepal and the civil- Military stand off has again brought the question of post

Republic political and peace consolidation in that country. Happily in Bangladesh we have returned to democratic governance. But we are seeing some early signs of dysfunctional parliament and intolerant politics. India also faces a number of internal security challenges including the rise and growth of Hindu fundamentalism and maoist insurgency. The stalled Indo-Pakistan peace process and rising tension over terrorism issues between the two nuclear neighbors cast a dark shadow over the region. The region's non-traditional security challenges specially from climate change related issues and water sharing problem is in many cases existential.

But I must also mention a positive trend in the region. For the first time in many years all countries in South Asia have now got democratically elected Governments. As it was said in a recent US congressional hearing about US policy goal in the region, "The US has a consistent policy basis through out the region, promoting democratic stability as the base from which to counter extremism and terrorism." So, an ideal base now exists in the region for the Obama administration to deepen the engagement in South Asia. And as Secretary Gates said in the Shangri-la Dialog last year, US views itself not as an out side power but as a resident Asian power. South Asia is also diverse and complex region and it needs a holistic understanding and approach to engage the region effectively. As Secretary Clinton very rightly said talking about South Asia said, "We can not talk a myopic, country-by-country, issue-by-issue approach to our foreign policy or our national security interest here. We have to look at the region as a whole and understand it's complexities if we are to head of threats and devise sustainable solutions." With this back drop, we hope see the policy formulation and economic, political and military engagement of US in South Asia. I will now request the Ambassador to deliver his talk.