Amb (Retd) James A. Larocco, Dir NESA, and his team visited NDU on 24 February 2012 form 1030-1230 hrs to participate in a Roundtable Talk, on “Cyber Security” and “Iran Nuclear Issue”, arranged by Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad.

The session started with the recitation of the Holy Quran. DG ISSRA, Major General Ziauddin Najam chaired the session. The DG ISSRA warmly welcomed Amb Larocco and his team. He highlighted the importance of both the topics especially in the perspective of the current debate on Iranian nuclear program. In addition to ISSRA faculty, the event was also attended by the Dean and the Head of Departments from the Faculty of Contemporary Studies (FCS).

Prior to the start of Round Table Talks, Amb Larocco called on the President NDU, and briefly discussed the current impasse in Pak-US relations. The Amb explained that before coming to NDU, he visited Lahore and Karachi and has held interactive sessions with Pakistani scholars, business community and member of civil society at large. He candidly opined that he was confronted by Pakistani people against the US behavior especially in the context of recent development about Balochistan. He tried to cover up the story by narrating the US official stance in which the administration has distanced itself from Balochistan Resolution passed by the Congress. He was shy of discussing Balochistan and focused on other issues like emerging scenarios in Iran-US relations and likely possibility of the US attack against Iranian nuclear sites and possible response by them. With a view to reduce trust deficits between Pakistan and the US, he suggested that both sides must explore business opportunities and maintain institutional linkages like army to army contacts etc.

In response to Amb Larocco’s comments, President NDU was very categorical in his approach and said that the US administration is involved in a big way in Balochistan affairs and continues to patronize the decedent groups. He said that the leaders of decedent groups were being airlifted from Kabul to London and later on from London to Washington D.C. Thus, the US has become hub of Indian sponsored anti-Pakistan propaganda campaign especially in the context of Balochistan affairs. From his point of view, this situation shows
that the US administration has decided to frame “Nixon Doctrine” by undermining Pakistan while projecting India as a co-opted strategic partner. He said that Pak-US strained relations helps Islamic groups to gain lot of strength. But it is also good that the US attitude and displayed behavior has helped Pakistani nation to unite. He opined that Pakistan should stay away from the US to pursue its interest with full vigor and look inward and concentrate on its internal affairs so as to put its house in order. Therefore, distancing from USA will allow us space and time to re-evaluate our options. Pakistan shall focus on its strategic neighborhood and avoid becoming “taken for granted” nation - by USA.

Salient of the Proceedings

First Presentation-Cyber Security

The first presentation was initiated by the Mr. Zach Meyer from NESA, on the topic “Cyber Security-Fifth Domain”. The salient of the presentation are as under:-

- Cyber warfare is the fifth domain and the battle ground of 21st century. It is a man-made domain but intersects with naturally occurring domains (air, land, sea and space) with global stakeholders. It transcends physical, organizational and geopolitical boundaries and the more threatening aspect is anonymity of belligerents.

- The magnitude of cyber-attack on infrastructure has the same objective/impact as an airstrike or naval bombardment. The most distinguish aspect is speed and cost, but it’s quite vulnerable as an individual (or a smaller state) has more access to cyber technology than aerial or naval technology.

- It has decisive outcomes from a painless and bloodless form of conflict; hence, it has changed the traditional concept of power. Resultantly, the small relatively insignificant actors can gain power. The boundaries are blurred between the military and the civilian, even power can be exerted by state and non-state actors alike.

- There are two myths about cyber warfare: it is non-Kinetic and non-attributable. However, experiment Aurora proved that it is Kinetic and it is also attributable. The threat is more intense as globalization has tied down country’s national security with the economic security which is linked through Internet.
Cyber-attacks are real and emerging threat. The world is facing a dangerous mixture of vulnerabilities and adversaries. The targets are information and the information infrastructure. The adversary goals are exploitation, disruption, or destruction.

There are a few examples which help to categorize cyber warfare which includes, State vis-a-vis State, Non State vis-a-vis State- and Non State vis-a-vis Non State.

There are numerous strategic challenges which emanates from the fifth domain. Cyber security will never be fool proof but the world must work collectively and collaboratively to ensure global and economic security.

**Interactive Session**

Amb Larocco made a brief comment on legal aspect of cyber warfare. There is no international convention on cyber warfare as it is very difficult to develop unified codes. The best way to deal with cyber warfare is to start working on municipal law. States should include statutes regarding cyber-crime in their municipal laws.

In response to the assertions made by NESA experts, the following queries/comments were raised by the participants:

- On the security of US nuclear programs with reference to hacking and computer viruses, it was told that there is a Cyber Command department, firewalls, infrastructure, backups, etc. but one should remember that technology has no barriers. The threat is very real and international cooperation and agreement is need of an hour.

- Regarding the leakage of WikiLeaks, it was hoped that they were not planned leaks and the agents may have copied the files from the system.

- Emphasized was made on bilateral approach for setting up grounds for multilateral international agreement on cyber-crime. China was also accused of being number one in cyber-crime.

- A suggestion was given to the US in taking a lead to draft a resolution in the United Nations on cyber-crime.
Amb Larocco talked on “Iran’s Nuclear Issue”. The salient of his talk include:

- The current strategy on Iran’s nuclear program is of sanctions and talks. It has resulted in increased sanctions on Iranian Central Bank, European Union embargo on Iranian oil (effective from July 1), shutdown of SWIFT access.

- The multilateral efforts can make the difference but customers such as China and India are not applying sanctions. The increased saber-rattling in public has been matched by quieter efforts to restart talks. It depicts that sanctions do have an impact.

- According to the experts, weaponization process in Iran could begin by mid-summer 2012. This would require a “rush” likely visible to IAEA or intelligence agencies. Moreover, the Fordow uranium enrichment facility near Qom is built under a mountain which is beyond the reach of bunker-busting munitions. It means that the option of successful strike is narrowing down.

- There are three approaches to deal with the situation:
  
  - One, a strike is not a viable option to deal with Iranian nuclear program, as it would strengthen Iran’s position to retaliate directly in the Gulf, and through proxies in Iraq and elsewhere. The possible spike in oil prices would jeopardize worldwide economic recovery. It would also galvanize popular support, strengthening the regime and its commitment to nuclear weapons. There are less possibility of successful operation as many sites hidden or fortified. The most contested view is that it would only delay, not end, nuclear program. It would also divide the international community, making future strikes or containment more difficult.
  
  - Two, a well executed air strike could permanently disrupt Iranian nuclear program which is important for long term security and stability of the Gulf region. It would encourage Iran’s rival states like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, not to seek nuclear technology for their protection.
• Three, the third option is reaching on an agreement. Iran could still decide its best interests by engaging with the international community. The agreement could include, a bilateral (US-Iran) or multilateral (GCC-Iran) non-aggression pact, removal of sanctions and economic package (Pipelines, trade, technical assistance), and other confidence-building measures.

➢ Under any scenario, either an agreement or a strike on Iran would be game-changing. An agreement is the best option. There are strong reasons both for and against a strike; however, no one can anticipate as to what exactly the leaders would decide.

Interactive Session

It was indeed an interesting presentation. During the course of discussion, following important points were made by the participants:-

➢ The questions were raised on the legality of attack on Iran. Amb Larocco explained that it would not be an occupation but a strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities. However, the US is trying to seek a diplomatic solution of the conflict.

➢ One of the participants expressed his views and said that the events are folding in a way that it seems like the US is searching for casus belli to attack on Iran. The threat based on future potential of a country is an exponential one not existential, so the attack would not be a pre-emptive but preventive one.

➢ Another participant made the point that to deal with Iran; there is also a need to study reasons which provoked Iran to go nuclear. It will help international community to reach on successful negotiation. In the grab of WMD, US attacked Iraq and found nothing and in case of Iran, the story may not be repeated. Therefore, an attack without full justification would further destabilize the region and strengthen Iranian position.

Brief Analysis

The interaction with Amb Larocco and his team remained fruitful. During the course of discussion, it was deduced that ‘cyber security’ is a challenge to national security and there
is a dire need of a legal instrument binding on all states related to cyber-crime. The real threats relates to the nuclear programs of the countries. The point to note is that the US side is not confident whether or not its nuclear program is fully protected against cyber attack. The NESA expert was unsure whether the US-Cyber Command department was confident enough to counter the challenges related to cyber attack.

In case of Pakistan, cyber threats to its nuclear program are more eminent because of well advanced computer technology available with India and Israel. A collaborative effort by India and Israel against Pakistan’s nuclear program can’t be ruled out. However, such planned actions by the states are unlikely to take place especially in peacetime because of grave consequences which can lead to nuclear war accidentally. Pakistan should be mindful of this capability with India and Israel, which can be unfolded especially during heightened tension. However, Pakistan should always be prepared against the intents of non-state actors who have the capability to launch cyber attack against any country’s nuclear program.

On Iran nuclear issue, the general consensus of participants was against the strike. The emphasis was given on reaching a diplomatic solution through talks by engaging the IAEA and other international regimes.

**Closing Remarks by the Chair**

Cyber threat is very real, more chaotic and dangerous one, available to state and non-state actors. Pakistan has a ‘Cyber Crime Unit’ and is working on increasing cyber security. However, the global commons and humanity in large should work to deal with issue. On question of rationality, the Chair said that every state is a rational actor but due to their national interests, they behave in irrational manner. The purpose of establishing United Nations as a neutral body was to bring rationality in international politics. The Chair emphasized that it is important to study those factors which compel a state to such an irrational decision. It was concluded that if the US made a strike on Iranian nuclear facilities, no body can guarantee whether the attack would succeed because Iran might have fortified the nuclear sites.

At the end, the Chair thanked Amb Larocco and his team for visiting NDU and sharing their vision about recent changes. He also thanked NDU participants for their extremely enlightened and thought provoking discourse with the distinguished guests.