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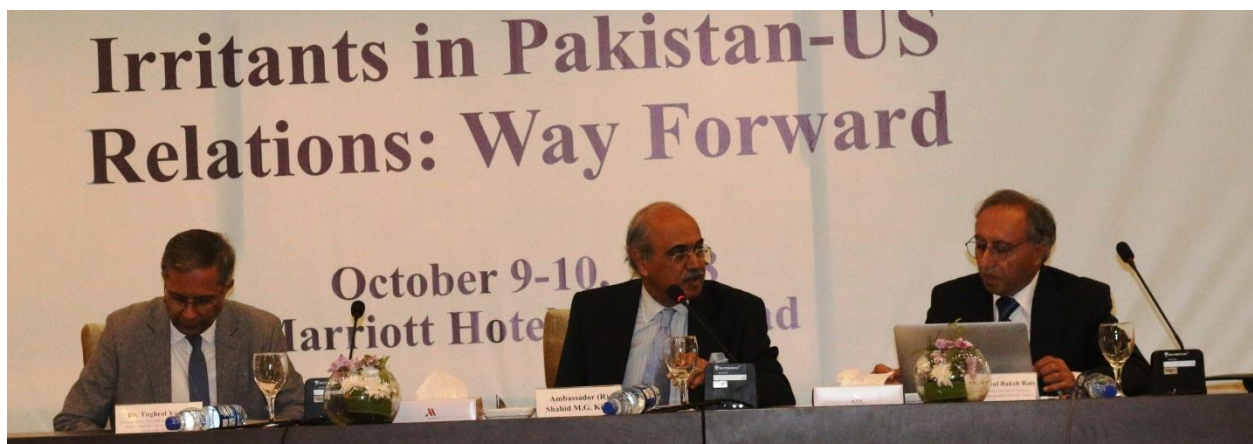
Two-Day National Conference

‘Irritants in Pakistan-US Relations: Way Forward’

9-10 October 2018

- Pakistan has to show patience, understanding and honesty of purpose to resolve issues with the United States (US) and Afghanistan without compromising on its core national interests.
- The US and Pakistan need to find a middle ground and find compromises to work together towards shared mutual interests, especially in Afghanistan because both sides have had physical, psychological, and social wounds due to the four-decade long war in the region.
- Stability and order in Afghanistan is a primary interest of both Pakistan and the US. However, bilateral relations between the three countries should also develop independent of each other.
- There should be consistency and no ambiguity in Pakistan’s foreign policy and stances.

These were some of the recommendations put forward at the final day of the Two-Day National Conference on ‘Irritants in Pakistan-US Relations: Way Forward’ organized by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute, here in Islamabad today.



In the session on ‘Approaches to Overcome Trust Deficit’ chaired by **Ambassador (R) Shahid M.G. Kiani**, **Dr Tughral Yamin** Associate Dean, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad delivered a presentation on ‘Afghanistan Crisis and Pakistan-US Disagreements on Operational Aspects of Countering Terrorism’. Dr Yamin shared that both countries realize the importance of the other, but each has its own priorities guiding the bilateral relationship based on the prevailing international and regional environment. ‘Depending on the circumstances each has its own expectations of the other; and these expectations usually don’t match leading to a trust deficit and souring of relations,’ he explained. Dr Yamin said that relations between the

US and Pakistan have deteriorated and been ‘downgraded’ since US President Donald Trump’s administration began taking a hard line on Afghanistan in 2017. He was of the view that this is because the US wants a face-saving exit from Afghanistan leaving a stable government in Kabul, and Pakistan also wants a stable and friendly government in Afghanistan, while the Afghan Government just wants to survive at all costs. He pointed out that while Pakistan’s new government is already trying to reset relations with the US, they also need to build trust with the Afghan government by offering credible cooperation in security matters; revive economic-related activity since the volume of bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan has dropped from USD 2.5 billion to a mere USD 500 million in a few years; increase people-to-people contact, while at the same time secure the Western borders.

In his presentation on ‘Pakistan-US Relations under Trump Administration: Continuity or Change’, **Professor Dr Rasul Baksh Rais** from the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Lahore discussed the Afghan endgame and Pakistan-US relations and contended that wars cannot be won decisively and it is, thus, important for transfer of security responsibility to the Afghans, focusing on building Afghan forces and continuing negotiations with the Taliban. Dr Baksh pointed out that on the Pakistan side, there is both a feeling of stalemate and desperation in its relations with the US due to the withdrawal of security assistance, President Trump’s tweet on Pakistan, denial of funds, Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and US pressure. He was, however, hopeful that now that the US was directly engaging with the Taliban, and had appointed a Special Envoy to help Taliban-Kabul negotiations, there may be positive changes, especially with the Taliban willing to talk as they are now unsure of their military victory. He concluded that for Pakistan-US relations, Afghanistan remains the point of convergence since peace in that region is in the interest of both countries. Dr Baksh cautioned, however, that Islamabad needs to carefully tread the emerging geopolitical pulls like China, Iran and Russia.



In the last session on ‘Pakistan-US Relations: Way Forward’ chaired by **Lt. General (R) Naeem Khalid Lodhi**, Former Minister for Defence, author and journalist **Ms Nasim Zehra** was of the view that the ‘bolstering and belligerence coming out of Washington is its new language and the new world disease’, and is not likely to change any time soon. According to her, ‘downturn in relations with Pakistan is largely due to the US’ self-serving narrative in Washington to justify its failures in Afghanistan and blaming them on Pakistan. ‘The paradox of Afghanistan haunts this relationship’, Ms Zehra remarked. She stressed that ‘fundamental

recalibration in the Pakistan-US relationship really lies in Pakistan’s hands not with the US. Pakistan needs to reduce its expectations from the US in a substantive and consistent way; and work to improve its relations with its neighborhood.’

Dr Farhan Hanif Siddiqi, Associate Professor at the Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad in his speech proffered that the Pakistan-US relationship is both fascinating and complex. But, while one can stress the

need for improvements in Pakistan's foreign policy, the foreign office has successfully navigated its relationship with the US and China simultaneously and this is an important success of the country's foreign policy. 'We need to continue this navigation instead of picking one side or the other.' Pakistan-US have only focused on interests rather than on an ideational framework like with China. 'To consolidate our relationship with the US, we've to move beyond a historically transactional relationship and adopt an ideational imperative and paradigm,' he recommended.



Concluding the two-day conference, Acting President IPRI, **Brig (R) SI(M) Sohail Tirmizi** thanked the distinguished chairpersons, speakers and participants for their enthusiastic participation. He said that the conference discussions were exhaustive and extremely productive in highlighting various challenges and the prospects for improving the Pakistan-US relationship. 'The discourse over the last two days has been cohesive, intellectually rewarding and practical, and will be shared with policymakers within the Government of Pakistan. The proceedings will also be published in the form of a book,' he announced.