



PRESS RELEASE

**Two-Day International Conference
Conflict and Cooperation in South Asia:
Role of Major Powers**

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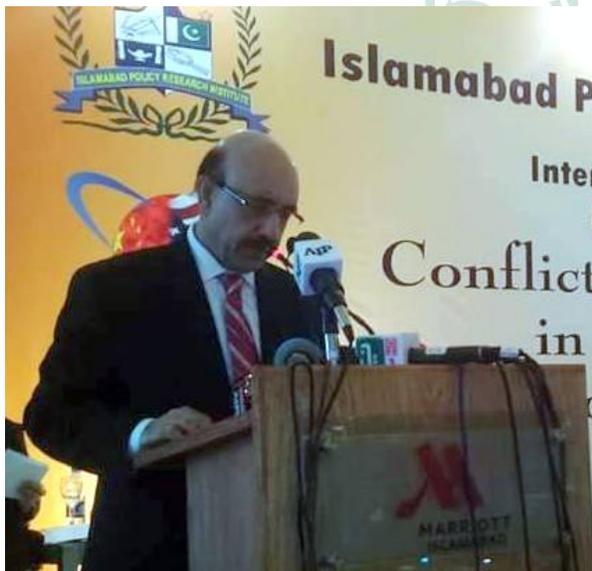


- Apart from the traditional security threats, the South Asian countries face multiple common challenges in the realm of non-traditional security. It is imperative that regional cooperation be sought to address such collective concerns like rising poverty, food insecurity, water shortages, illicit trafficking, poor human development indices etc., in the domain of social sector and human resource development.
- Pakistan should, therefore, focus on strengthening its economy through structural reforms and robust trade regimes. Bilateral transit trade agreements and SAARC's agenda should be promoted so that regional trade volume could be enhanced.
- Emphasis should be placed on diplomatic means, political dialogues and negotiations at both bilateral and multilateral levels to amicably settle inter-state disputes. Pakistan's recent peace overtures towards both Afghanistan and India are unfortunately not being reciprocated. The existing political and security paradigm demands that countries must resume dialogue and open communication channels regarding issues of critical nature. Global powers should play a proactive role in

bridging the divide between disputants by facilitating political engagements between South Asian countries.

- **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) offers a vision of common economic development for the entire South Asian region, which may eventually lead to common security architecture. Rather than attempting to sink this economic initiative in controversy, it should be seen as a means for mutual economic prosperity and development.**
- **Pakistan and the US must rationalise their expectations from each other in terms of their objectives in the region and common concerns. The US and Pakistan must move from transactional to principle based relationship.**

These were some of the policy recommendations put forward by speakers from Pakistan, China, Russia and the US speaking on the final day of the international conference 'Conflict and Cooperation in South Asia: Role of Major Powers' organised by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute, here in Islamabad today.



In his keynote speech, Chief Guest *H.E. Mr Sardar Masood Khan, President Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K)* urged Pakistan not to change, abandon nor alter its stance on Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK), and called on the government to develop a holistic and clear national security paradigm and national security strategy which is shared with all stakeholders. Sharing the situation in IOK, he said that India had abandoned all principles of proportionality and precaution; and the distinction between combatants and non-combatants was being flagrantly violated. He cautioned that till the

general elections in India, no peace overtures are likely to be considered. President Khan also emphasised that CPEC has helped bring the Kashmir dispute back on the world stage given India's hostility to the project. However, CPEC should be treated as a catalyst and not as a substitute or panacea for Pakistan's internal economic development. 'Start thinking of CPEC in terms of CPEC-Plus wherein social sector development, especially Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) about provision of quality education is prioritised', he commended. He also emphasised leveraging the strength of Pakistan's diaspora in the Middle East, Europe and US which now has considerable political traction, in order to reap huge dividends for the country on critical political and economic issues.



Earlier in the day, discussing geopolitics of South Asia and interests of the US, **Mr Harrison Akins, Research Fellow, University of Tennessee's Howard H. Baker Jr., Center for Public Policy, US**, while earlier, Pakistan-US' pragmatic relationship rose and fell according to the



saliency of American security interests in the region, now voices within policy debates are the politically appointed Trump loyalists without the input from foreign policy professionals, diminishing the effect of the foreign service bureaucracy to serve as a check on the actions of the presidency. 'Without the input of foreign policy professionals, it appears that the Trump administration has difficulty in fully understanding the foreign policy implications of his actions, such as connecting his bullying rhetoric and policies toward Pakistan with his increase of troop presence in Afghanistan, with the strong relationship with Pakistan a key part of any Afghan strategy of the United

States.' Mr Akins also explained that foreign policy under the Trump administration is not shielded from the vicissitudes and demands of domestic politics. 'Foreign policy has become another battleground for Trump's electoral politics with his actions reflecting what's best for his administration rather than achieving the strategic interests of the US', he concluded.



Dr Liu Zongyi, Research Fellow from the Institute for World Economic Studies and Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIR), China was of the view that even though the BRI has stimulated South Asian regional connectivity, India has adopted opposing, delaying and hedging measures towards different parts of the BRI. 'India opposes CPEC and delays BCIM and puts forward BBIN and BIMSTEC, has raised Project Mausam, Cotton Route, Spice Route, or Sagar Mala projects, and upgraded the "Look East policy" to "Act East"

policy, to hedge the 21st Century MSR,' he said. According to Dr Zongyi, India has been giving precedence of geopolitics over geoeconomic cooperation. 'Indian hedging strategy toward the BRI has very strong military and strategic implications. They want to use so-called values, norms, international law, rules and standards to contain BRI. Indian and Western mass media has waged a war on BRI', he stressed.



Discussing geopolitics of South Asia and interests of Russia, **Mr Leonid Savin, Founder and Chief Editor of Journal of Eurasian Affairs, Russia**, argued that since Pakistan has taken a position of sovereignty and denied its critics in Washington, it has aroused considerable interest from Russia as an emergent power. 'This window of opportunity can be favourably used by two parties. In light of the irresponsible behaviour of the US (and their satellites) on the world stage, the implementation of joint Russian-Pakistani projects, including military cooperation, will help strengthen security in Eurasia in the interests of all participants,' he opined. Mr Savin pointed out that there is great interest on the part of Moscow in intellectual cooperation. Russia needs semantic filling of this concept that is not possible without the active participation of the outside scientific and expert community of South Asian countries.

Dr Maria Sultan, Director General, South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI), Pakistan opined that all trends indicate that the Indian Ocean will not only become the centre of economic development, but also a region of great power rivalry along with other extra regional actors' desire to dominate the region's maritime sea routes as economic interests will dominate the security projections for this region, making IOR 'the most securitized ocean in the world.' Dr Sultan highlighted that the Gwadar Port, with 400 mnt current capacity and potential to reach 800 mnt, will make Pakistan one of the world's most critical interconnecting maritime routes in the world opening up a whole new world of



opportunities and progress for the country and region.

In the session 'From Geopolitics to Geoeconomics' chaired by Ambassador (R) Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, Director General, Institute for Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), Pakistan, **Dr Huma Baqai, Associate Dean, Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, Institute of Business Administration, Pakistan** discussed that the winds of emerging global trends are in flux, swaying more eastwards than before. 'Relative

wealth and economic power continues to shift favourably from the West towards the East’, she said. However, she was of the opinion that ‘geopolitics will continue to remain in South Asia and other parts of the world with its core ingredients - space, territory, territoriality, and power. ‘Commercialisation can do wonders if connected with geopolitics of the region as a whole, factoring in China’s mutual respect and win-win cooperation paradigm’, she recommended.



Outlining his views about moving from conflict management to conflict resolution for India and Pakistan, **Dr Naeem Ahmed, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi, Pakistan** urged that conflict resolution is vital because continued brinkmanship may lead to full-fledged war between India and Pakistan due to the changing nature of the Kashmiri movement after the death of Burhan Wani; and the growing menace of terrorism.

In her paper on Sino-US geo-political competition and implications for Pakistan, **Dr Sarwat Rauf, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Pakistan** urged that internally, Pakistan should focus on its economic development, especially industrial development. ‘Externally, Pakistan should continue to strengthen its relations with China, and find solutions of the existing irritants in relations with Iran and Afghanistan since mistrust is hindering the region’s progress.



Concluding the two day conference, **Brig (R) Mohammad Mehboob Qadir, Acting President, IPRI** thanked the President AJK H.E. Sardar Masood Khan, speakers from various countries, participants and the media for an interactive and productive event.