

IPR seminar reflects on Pak's terrorism challenge

Lahore

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The Institute for Policy Reforms (IPR) held a seminar on Pakistan's terrorism challenge.

Welcoming the participants, IPR Board Chairman Humayun Akhtar Khan said that the institute organised the event because of its critical importance for the country. Even while an operation was taking place, it was important to discuss counter-terrorism strategy including how to address the issues that would arise from it, he said, adding that the two considerations were particularly important.

"First, sleeper cells in urban centres are potentially a threat for large populations. Second, the political leadership had made no effort to prepare government departments and coordinate among them to respond to the likely fallout from any military action. Past record in this respect showed weak capacity."

US Institute of Peace Washington South Asia Program Director Dr Moeed Yusuf was the main speaker on the occasion while participants comprised largely retired senior civil and military officers, intellectuals, and known media personalities.

Dr Yusuf discussed the North Waziristan operation and stressed that there was a long road ahead and that the next phase against terrorism will be fought to clear out the cities of terrorist cells. He argued that it would be the performance of the police and the legal system that would ultimately determine how quickly the state was able to win this upcoming phase. He worried about their track record.

Dr Yusuf referred to his research on insurgencies and counterinsurgencies in other South Asian countries and highlighted lessons applicable to Pakistan. He said that many states fighting terrorism use force and negotiate with the terrorists as part of their strategy.

"However, talks very seldom work in South Asian countries unless the state approaches these from a clear position of strength. The TTP certainly could not have been characterized as a clear loser in Pakistan's case when the negotiations began and so he never felt there was any hope of success in these talks," he said.

Dr Yusuf argued that states that win insurgencies create a narrative against the enemy supported by the most influential segments of society for a long period of time.

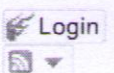
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"This is crucial to create clarity in the minds of state organs responsible for executing all aspects of counterinsurgency. No South Asian state seems to have won an insurgency without winning the narrative war unequivocally," he contended.

He painted a fairly bleak picture in terms of where Pakistan stood in this regard. His number one finding is the great confusion among the population and, even parts of the state apparatus on "who the enemy is." He said that the confusion about internal and external hands in the unrest in Pakistan, the status of terrorism in Afghanistan versus Pakistan in the religious context, and the pervasive anti-Americanism in the minds of average Pakistanis is replicated within the state apparatus.

"Experiences in and outside South Asia suggest that this is detrimental for the state and could undermine its ability to ensure sustainable peace," he said.

Yusuf worried that the growing intolerance of religious, sectarian, and ethnic diversity in Pakistan and the obvious lack of ability of the state apparatus to provide day-to-day security as well as its failure to deliver basic needs to the people had discredited government departments and limited acceptance of their action.



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