

Institute for Policy Reforms

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Pakistan has a key role in regional stability

Pakistan's location makes it "a natural melting point for major global players" said Moeed Yusuf of the United States Institute of Peace. He said this at a roundtable discussion held today by the Institute for Policy Reforms at Lahore. Pakistan has always boasted a geo-strategic location but it has always proved to be a liability for it. Now, with a focus on regional connectivity, spurred by CPEC, Pakistan could utilize the opportunity to transform the competitive and tense relations between South Asian states into cooperation. But he said that Pakistan needed to fundamentally reconsider its foreign policy paradigm to extract greater benefits from a globalized economy. He saw the need to unlock South Asia's economic potential by exploring ways of greater cooperation within the region. Only then can Pakistan truly turn its location into a strategic dividend. Specifically, he advocated for a positive U.S.-Pakistan relationship and Pakistan's supportive role in Afghanistan and improvement in India-Pakistan relations was necessary for this.

Earlier, in his opening comments Mr. Humayun Akhtar Khan, Chairman Institute for Policy Reforms said that his Institute organized the event because it was critical to know foreign policy preferences of the new administration. He said that the present US leadership was elected on the promise of a foreign policy that departed from the tradition. Candidate Trump had opposed USA's international engagement. He had stressed that USA had not sufficiently looked after its own interests. Allies had had a free ride. He emphasized the critical importance of the relationship for Pakistan.

Moeed Yusuf said that perceptions of Pakistan in Washington remain negative and the bilateral relationship continues to be focused on Afghanistan, terrorism, and nuclear weapons, each of which the two sides have serious differences on. The present view on Pakistan is being formed through a review of U.S. Afghan policy for which the U.S. National Security Adviser General McMaster visited Islamabad recently. Dr. Yusuf predicted that Pakistan will emerge negatively in this review given the issue of Taliban and Haqqani network sanctuaries in Pakistan that dominates the conversation about Pakistan's role in Afghanistan. General McMaster also raised this issue with the Pakistani leadership during his visit.

Dr. Yusuf did however assert that the future direction of U.S. policy in South Asia is still unclear, and would only be known after the review is complete. Dr. Yusuf argued that the U.S. relationship remained important for Pakistan and recommended a proactive approach from both sides to reach out to each other and agree on a way forward for the relationship. With respect to global politics, he rejected the notion that the world was moving to a multipolar global setting, arguing that the differential between the U.S. and its competitors in terms of military power and power projection capabilities was so large that there was no possibility of the U.S. being eclipsed. More accurately,

Russia, China, and others may begin to assert more control over their immediate neighborhoods if the U.S. withdraws and leaves a vacuum but he described this as a “semi-unipolar” setting rather than a multipolar one. He also cautioned against considering China as a substitute to the U.S. for Pakistan and urged strong relations with both simultaneously.

A spirited discussion followed his presentation in which senior former foreign and other Cabinet ministers, members of the National Assembly, counter terrorism experts from the police and Pakistan Army, former ambassadors, and prominent journalists took part actively.