

Institute for Policy Reforms

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Major IPR Study Recommends Improving Pak-US Relations

“Despite mistrust, Pakistan and USA need each other. This is a relationship that cannot end” says a comprehensive Report on US- Pakistan relations issued today by the Institute for Policy Reforms. The Report is based on a major study conducted by IPR and supported by renowned Washington think tank, the United States Institute of Peace. IPR interviewed sixty leading experts and current and former senior policy makers, representing key constituencies in the security and foreign policy space.

With the relationship under strain and diplomatic and other contacts limited, there is need for both sides to understand each other’s perceptions and interests. The study attempts to fill this gap, relying entirely on views expressed by the sixty participants. IPR did not filter or change their views. The Report is written by IPR CEO Humayun Akhtar Khan and Ashraf Hayat.

Most discussants said that present US-Pakistan relations are at their lowest since 9/11. Relations had been mismanaged with no strategy to guide them. Both countries missed the post 9/11 opportunity to develop a broad-based partnership. Initially, cooperation focused on crushing Al Qaeda. This progressed successfully. Differences began when US expected Pakistan’s help to similarly defeat the Taliban. Pakistan says that for USA this has been a transactional relationship. Yet Pakistan too did little to build a strategic partnership.

Both countries want peace in Afghanistan, but they differ on methods because they do not have the same goals. Concerned about Indian influence, Pakistan wants a ‘friendly’ government in Kabul, while US favoured a military solution over reconciliation among groups.

Whatever the differences, Pakistan must stay engaged with USA and regain its trust. That does not mean yielding to all its demands. Pakistan must clearly state what is possible and what is not and not wait for US pressure to respond. It must offer USA sincere cooperation but make it equally contingent on US accommodation of Pakistan’s security concerns. US must also use its influence to stop cross-border activities from Afghanistan.

While Pakistan cannot be held responsible for all Taliban acts, it should pledge to restrain their activities from our borders. Pakistan must also nudge the Taliban to reconcile with other power groups in Afghanistan. The Taliban must realize that force is not a viable option. Moreover, a Taliban government in Kabul is unacceptable to most Afghans as well as to US, China, and Russia.

Within its moderate expectations from USA, Pakistan should rebuild security and economic cooperation. By offering US businesses incentives at par with those given to China, it should try to broaden its support in USA. Pakistan must reassure USA that its partnership with China does not preclude other alliances.

Pakistan has conflicting foreign policy goals. Its stated vision is to become a trade and transit hub for the region. Yet its India fixation conflicts with this vision. Many participants said that improved relations with India would allow Pakistan to modify policies. Two things come in the way of improving relations with India. Lack of trust between the two countries and India’s new-found confidence that makes it a demanding interlocutor. Consequently, third country mediation is a practical way forward. India resists mediation on

Kashmir though may not be averse to quiet mediation for bettering overall relations. This could later lead to an understanding on Kashmir.

Pakistan's policy making structure needs to change. The country has no agreed national security strategy. Elected leadership has not played its role in this regard. In addition, economic weakness compromises national security. Pakistan must reduce economic dependence on other countries.

With respect to Afghanistan, Pakistan must help in its negotiations with the Taliban, while extracting Afghan assurance for Pakistan's security through effective border control, degrading of TTP, and an end to cross border attacks from Afghanistan. The recent killing of Mullah Fazlullah is viewed positively in Pakistan.

There was unanimity of view that Pakistan must prioritize regional relations. In addition to its strong ties with China, and growing links with Russia, Pakistan must improve relations with India. Continued hostilities between two nuclear powered neighbours holds huge risks for the region. Countries in the region should do everything possible to realize its potential for economic dynamism and prevent it from becoming a battleground for local and great power rivalry.