

Institute for Policy Reforms

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Risk of India-Pakistan crises remains high

The Institute for Policy Reforms held a memorable seminar about the risks of friction between nuclear armed countries in South Asia. The discussion was based on themes presented by Moeed Yusuf in his book “Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments: U.S. Crisis Management in South Asia”, published by the prestigious Stanford University Press. Moeed Yusuf is Associate Vice President USIP Washington DC. In addition to the author, a dazzling group of respected experts gave their views, including former Foreign Secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan, General Waheed Arshad, Ambassador Shahid Malik, and analyst and anchor Ejaz Haider.

Welcoming the participants, Chairman and CEO IPR Humayun Akhtar Khan said that conventional wisdom informed us that possession of nuclear weapons ruled out the possibility of direct conflict between rival nuclear states. History of Pakistan India relations since 1998, however, is the opposite. He said that continuous occurrence of incidents for seventy years confirms that Pakistan and India are unable to resolve disputes bilaterally. Involvement of non-state actors, tactical nuclear weapons, and missile technology added further layers of risk to an already complex situation.

Moeed Yusuf said that his book examines India-Pakistan crises since the nuclear tests of 1998 and focuses on U.S. role in Kargil, the 2001-02 military standoff, and the Mumbai crisis. The book is original scholarship by a Pakistani about nuclear deterrence and crises between nuclear states.

Yusuf said that India and Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons to gain strategic independence. His research however finds that since the nuclear tests, both sides have become even more dependent on mediation. USA has actively mediated in South Asia as its concern for nuclear war overwhelms its leaning towards India. Breakdown of U.S.-Pakistan relations, if it happened, could make it difficult for America to influence Pakistan. In such situations, US will resist the temptation of siding with India as Pakistan may seek to bank more on China in future.

Yusuf predicted that the risk of India-Pakistan crises remains high. USA and others will continue to influence regional crisis situations. It is in Pakistan’s interest to maintain good relations with USA.

When asked what was the value-added of his work, Yusuf said he hoped his book encourages young Pakistani scholars to make original contribution to western literature for an informed debate about Pakistan.

Former Foreign Secretary Riaz Khan described Moeed’s book as an “outstanding analytical study” and a “must-read” for policy circles in Pakistan, India, and elsewhere. He agreed with the thesis about critical third-party role in defusing a crisis. He emphasized the need for mid-crisis re-evaluation which in the case of Kargil made clear the untenability of the operation. In his view, Kargil and later, Mumbai, damaged Pakistan and the Kashmir cause and helped India gain

internationally. In the nuclear environment, militancy and drivers of sub-conventional conflict must be controlled and countered. Once a crisis begins, diplomacy must interject at every point. Also, Pakistan and India should revisit dangerous doctrines such as Cold Start and development of battlefield nuclear weapons. As responsible nuclear neighbours, they must institute top military contacts and hold regular summits regardless of the state of relations.

General Waheed Arshad said that while non-state actors affected both countries, there was no mechanism in place for sustained dialogue. That is why the concept of 'brokered bargaining' or "role of US as third party" is defining. Yet, US tilt towards India and her adversarial relationship with Pakistan raises concerns about its role as an honest broker. "For a sustained peaceful future" he counseled that India and Pakistan eschew recourse to third party and begin meaningful and candid bilateral dialogue to resolve differences.

Ejaz Haider said that the book's brilliant logic and the deterrence model it presents is applicable beyond the Pakistan India dyad. He said that while US is a natural third party because of its influence, there will be situations where other world powers, especially China and Russia, would act as third party.

Former High Commissioner to New Delhi, Shahid Malik said that some instances covered in the book were directly relevant to his experience. He enthralled the meeting with a detail account of his experiences in India.