

Changing strategic stability concerns

Aarish U. Khan

ISLAMABAD: Participants of a roundtable discussion organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Tuesday expressed concern over the situation in Afghanistan. On the other hand, however, they expressed optimism over the improvement in relations between Pakistan and India.

George Perkovich, Vice President for Studies and Director of the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC, maintained that India is eyeing a global role for itself, which has made it more inclined to talk peace with Pakistan. In this, he saw an opportunity for Pakistan to build a peaceful future for the region. He advised the Pakistani decision-makers to resolve Pakistan’s internal problems which, according to him, were a bigger threat to the country than any external threats.

Brig. Bashir Ahmed, Senior Fellow at IRS, enumerated the destabilizing influences in the region as volatile Pak-U.S. relations, the equally volatile situation in Afghanistan, the U.S. relations with Iran, and the presence of armed non-state actors in the region. Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Senior Research Analyst at IRS, was of the opinion that for long-term stability in Afghanistan, the NATO forces would have to plan their withdrawal in a very responsible fashion. Aarish U. Khan, Research Analyst at IRS, was of the view that the understanding of stability and the parameters for success and failure there were rather exaggerated, and that NATO needed to align its aspirations with respect to Afghanistan with the on-ground realities there. Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Asad Durrani said that Indian could never substitute Pakistan in Afghanistan. He maintained that the inter-dependence of Afghanistan and Pakistan was too deep to be replaced by any other country.

Commenting on the Indo-Pak relations, Defense Analyst, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Saleem Haider, said that civil nuclear deal between India and the U.S. had been a destabilizing influence in the region. Foreign Policy Analyst, Amb. Qurban, added that by signing a similar agreement with Pakistan, the U.S. could offset some of the destabilizing influence of the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal. He added that India and Pakistan no longer needed any foreign involvement for the resolution of their disputes. Gen. Asad Durrani argued that from the past combat experiences of India and Pakistan, in which they carefully avoided attacks on one another’s civilian targets, India and Pakistan had proven themselves to be careful adversaries. This, he asserted, was reason enough not to get too concerned about the prospects of a nuclear conflict in the region. Gen. Durrani also appreciated the progress made by India and Pakistan in the Composite Dialogue and their return to it after crises. He also questioned U.S. sincerity in promoting stability in the region.

Mr. Ashraf Azim, President of IRS, appreciated the visit of the Carnegie Endowment delegation and hailed it as a positive step in the direction of creating greater understanding in the U.S. decision-making circles about Pakistan. Other participants of the discussion included: Mr. Toby Dalton, Deputy Director of the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment; Dr. Li Bin, Li Bin is a Senior Associate working jointly in the Nuclear Policy Program and Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment; Brig. (Retd.) Feroz

Report: Roundtable on “Strategic Stability in South Asia” with a delegation from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on January 10, 2012

Khan, lecturer at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterrey, CA; and Mr. Bob Schwartz of the Department of Energy, U.S. government.