

## **Time to reconsider policy assumptions about Afghanistan**

**Aarish U. Khan**

ISLAMABAD: Mr. Ejaz Haider, Senior Advisor Policy Outreach and Peace and Conflict Program at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), questioned some of the generally held basic perceptions in Pakistan about Afghanistan. He was the main speaker at a roundtable organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Wednesday.

Haider argued that the U.S. was, most probably, not losing in Afghanistan or that an exit was the only option for it, as is generally believed in Pakistan. He also questioned the hypothesis that the insurgents in Afghanistan would wait for their time to strike or that the government in Afghanistan would crumble and the Afghan national police (ANA) and the Afghan national army (ANP) would unravel after the NATO would quit Afghanistan leading to a situation like the 1990s for regional actors like Pakistan to have a more dominant role.

Haider maintained that the U.S., as well as the ANA and ANP, had not done as bad in combat in Afghanistan as assumed in Pakistan. He added that the NATO had installed institutional structures in Afghanistan—no matter how imperfect—capable of operating and sustaining themselves for the future.

While expressing his consciousness about Pakistan’s desire to have a friendly government in Afghanistan not under Indian influence, Haider called for a synchronization of Pakistan’s India-policy on both the eastern and western borders. If Pakistan was opening up to India for trade and people-to-people contacts on the eastern border, it needed to evolve some understanding with India over its role in Afghanistan as well, according to Haider.

Amb. Ali Sarwar Naqvi, Executive Director of the Center for International Strategic Studies, called the Chicago summit a humiliation for Pakistan, wherein the head of the state of the host country did not extend the courtesy of a meeting to the Pakistani president. He was of the opinion that in the West Pakistan is perceived as a state that tolerates, or perhaps supports, terrorism. Amb. Naqvi called for a review of Pakistan’s Afghan policy in a way that, according to him, would put Pakistan ahead of other priorities.

Defense analyst and former Director General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (DG ISI), Lt. Gen. Retd. Asad Durrani, questioned the perception that the U.S. would want a stable, peaceful, and democratic Afghanistan. He was of the view that he had not seen much of an effort on the part of the U.S. to that end. Defense Analyst, Lt. Gen. Talat Masood, also called for a review of Pakistan’s Afghan policy calling it stuck in the past and oblivious of its negative consequences for Pakistan. Foreign policy analyst, Amb. B.A. Malik, and Mr. Najam Rafique, Director Americas at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), also questioned the assumption that the Americans were leaving Afghanistan and called for a foreign policy formulation in Pakistan, which would take that factor into account. Mr. Stephan Roken, the Deputy Head of Mission of the German Embassy, urged for a greater understanding of the Pakistan narrative in the west, and called on Pakistan government to use every opportunity for helping with the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

Other participants of the roundtable discussion were: Mr. Ashraf Azim, President of IRS; Brig. (Retd.) Bashir Ahmed, Senior Fellow at IRS; Amb. Khalid Mehmood; Prof. Nazir Hussain of the Department of International Relations at the Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU); Dr. Shabana Fayyaz, Assistant Professor at the Department of Defense and Strategic Studies (DDSS) QAU; Dr. Salma Malik of the DDSS QAU; Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Senior Research Analyst at IRS; and Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Saleem Haider.