

Report: Roundtable on “India’s Foreign Policy toward Pakistan” with Tridivesh Singh Maini, Research Fellow at the Jindal School of International Affairs Haryana, on July 03, 2014.

India’s Pakistan policy would not shift with the change in government

Aarish U. Khan

ISLAMABAD: “The basics of India’s foreign policy toward Pakistan would remain the same after coming to power of the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party]” said Mr. Tridivesh Singh Maini, Research Fellow at the Jindal School of International Affairs Haryana. He was speaking at a roundtable organized here on Thursday by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS). He added that statements given during election campaigns should not be viewed as policy statements.

Mr. Maini was of the opinion that lack of progress on core issues should not hold progress on other issues hostage. “Core issues also change over time; to me, the core issue is lack of understanding between the two sides,” he said. Calling 2008 a setback to the peace process, Mr. Maini argued that it had become very tough for Indian governments to move forward on the dialogue with Pakistan without substantial progress on the follow-up of Mumbai by Pakistan. “The mantra that Pakistan is also target of terrorism no longer cuts ice in India; Pakistan would need to do the doables.” said Mr. Maini. He maintained that some sort of progress on Mumbai from the Pakistani side is important for the dialogue process to move forward.

Mr. Maini was of the view that granting of the most favored nation (MFN) status to India would not be a favor to it; rather Pakistan would stand to gain considerably from freeing of trade with India. He termed India the best hope of trade for Pakistan, and called for economic diplomacy between the sub-regions on the border of India and Pakistan, such as Punjab and Sindh in Pakistan, and Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat in India. He argued that confidence building measures (CBMs) between India and Pakistan were not very effective because of procedural inefficiency. Mentioning visa liberalization as a case in point, Mr. Maini said that even researchers with good track record of traveling to Pakistan and writing about Pakistan were still getting police reporting visa. He also mentioned the important role of soft power, especially Pakistani Dramas which are popular in India, and Bollywood movies which are a rage in Pakistan.