

There is a future for Pakistan beyond the Haqqani Network

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ISLAMABAD: “There is a future for Pakistan beyond the Haqqani Network,” said Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Talat Masood, Former Secretary Defence, during a roundtable organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) Islamabad, here on Wednesday. Gen. Masood was of the opinion that even though it was not advisable for Pakistan to take action against the militants at the behest of the U.S., it was important for it to evolve a long-term strategic narrative for itself to address its own problems—including terrorism. Gen. Masood emphasized that it was imperative for Pakistan to reduce its over-obsession with India, and improve law and order situation and governance problems not on the insistence of any foreign power but for its own sake.

Gen. Masood advised the U.S. policymakers to refrain from publicly blaming Pakistan for whatever problems they were facing in Afghanistan. He underlined the great sacrifices made by Pakistan in the war on terror. “Our sacrifices are going waste because our narrative is not getting along. The world thinks that we are not suffering because of others but because of ourselves,” said Gen. Masood. He also warned the Pakistani decision-makers that Pakistani people will suffer if the relations between the two countries deteriorated.

Mr. Jonathan Pratt, the Political Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad enumerated the U.S. foreign policy priorities for Pakistan as counter-terrorism, regional stability and security, democracy, economic development and integration, and energy security among others. He added that both the U.S. and Pakistan had convergence on these policy priorities, but that the divergence was on the timeline of implementation and relative priority of any of these issues and how to go about addressing them.

Mr. Ashraf Azim, President Institute of Regional Studies, said that most of the recent statements emanating from Washington DC and Islamabad were playing to the media, a trend that needed to be avoided. Independent Defense Analyst, Dr. Ayesha Siddiq, argued that Pakistan’s policy toward religious radicalism was based on denial. She added that Pakistan did not have a roadmap for eradication of terrorism in the country or its spillover into other countries. Amb. Asif Ezdi termed the problem of terrorism in Pakistan an outcome of the struggle between the *haves* and *haves-not* and said that Pakistan needed to take care of corruption and bad governance to reverse the tide of Talibanization.

Dr. Tahir Amin, Professor Department of International Relations Quaid-i-Azam University, criticized Pakistan’s foreign policy approach toward the U.S. as based on short-term tactical objectives. He called for a renegotiation of the terms of engagement between Pakistan and the U.S. on the basis of give-and-take on Pakistan’s long-term strategic objectives such as resolution of the Kashmir dispute, normalization of relations with India on the basis of sovereign equality, and assistance with Pakistan’s water problems. Dr. Amin added that Pakistan was not out of cards in redefining its terms of engagement with the U.S. rather that it was not using them properly. Dr. Shaheen Akhtar, Research Fellow at the Institute of Regional Studies, urged the decision-makers of Pakistan as well as other

Report: “Roundtable on State of Pak-U.S. Relations: An Overview” with Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Talat Masood, Defense Analyst, on October 05, 2011

regional countries to capitalize on the vast economic potential of the region by constructively engaging with each other to promote reconciliation, especially between India and Pakistan and within Afghanistan.