

Pakistan’s foreign policy should be a reflection of its domestic realities

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Participants of a roundtable discussion organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Wednesday called for a foreign policy reflective of Pakistan’s domestic realities. Amb. B.A. Malik, foreign policy analyst who was the main speaker of the event, argued that foreign policy stands on the domestic situation of any country. He added that the domestic situation of Pakistan demanded greater regional integration for the prosperity of its people. Amb. Malik appreciated President Zardari’s statement on having trade relations with all countries of the world, and said, “There is no room for exceptions in foreign policy.” Defense Analyst, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Asad Durrani argued, however, that good friendly relations with all countries of the world could be a foreign policy goal but not the policy itself, because a comprehensive foreign policy needs to cope both with threats and opportunities.

According to Amb. Malik, it was mentioned in late Benazir Bhutto’s foreign policy vision that lack of progress on one issue on the agenda should not impede progress on the others. He maintained that regional trade and commerce is the way forward for Pakistan. “It is not an age of independence, it is an age of interdependence,” said Amb. Malik. He called on Pakistan’s political leadership to evolve consensus on a foreign policy that would break what he called the status quo.

Amb. Khalid Mahmood urged Pakistan to follow the Chinese model in domestic and foreign policy which was not characterized by domestic economic development alone but also by an uncompromising principled stance on core foreign policy issues. He added that Pakistan will have to combine the security and economic development aspects of foreign policy.

Lt. Gen. Asad Durrani, maintained that the general popular mindset in Pakistan now is more anti-America than anti-India. Mr. Stephan Roken, Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, argued that the threat perception analysis of the Pakistani population should also factor in their threat perceptions against problems like poverty, illiteracy, and hunger etc. besides threats from external state actors.

Dr. Mavara Inayat of the Department of International Relations at Quaid-i-Azam University called for learning from the example of the European Union (EU) for regional integration. Agreeing with Dr. Inayat, Mr. Pierre Mayaudon, Deputy Head of the EU delegation to Pakistan, argued that there was a greater need for Pakistan’s foreign policy paradigm to reflect Pakistan’s economic needs including international trading relationships. Ms. Shabana Fayyaz of the Department of Defense and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University called for reducing the gap between the foreign policy pronouncements of the political leaders and their actual implementation.

Deputy Political Counselor of the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Ms. Constancy Arvis, said that even though the problem of terrorism had implications beyond Pakistan’s borders and, therefore, countries like the U.S. had serious interest in it, war on terror was also in the interest of Pakistan to secure a peaceful future for itself.

Report: Roundtable on “Foreign Policy Challenges and Responses” with Amb. B.A. Malik, foreign policy analyst, on December 28, 2011

Other participants of the roundtable discussion included: Mr. Ashraf Azim, President of IRS; Brig. (Retd.) Bashir Ahmed, Senior Fellow at IRS; Ms. Farhat Parveen, Senior Research Analyst IRS, Mr. Aarish U. Khan, Research Analyst at IRS; and Mr. Basharat Hussain, Research Analyst at IRS.