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Conference Report

Insurgencies and Terrorism in South Asia: Lessons for Pakistan

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In its Distinguished Lecture Series of 2014, the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) organised a public talk on June 26, 2014 by Moeed Yusuf, director of the South Asia Program at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington DC. The topic under discussion was *Insurgencies and Terrorism in South Asia: Lessons for Pakistan*. ISSI Director General Dr Rasul Bakhsh Rais welcomed Yusuf for sharing his work on geo-politics and security of South Asia, with particular reference to his research on counter-insurgency in South Asia. He regarded his work as topical and relevant to Pakistan's prevalent situation.

While presenting the summary observations, conclusions, lessons and synopsis of the panacea for a possible resolution of the current crisis in Pakistan from his edited book on *Insurgencies and Terrorism in South Asia: Lessons for Pakistan*, Yusuf observed that all regional states- whether it is democratic India, the monarchic Nepal, the majoritarian democratic state of Sri Lanka, or a state dominated by civil-military imbalanced as is the case of Pakistan- the strategy to counter insurgency stayed almost identical. The paradox of balancing the use of force and non-violent intervention by the states through political dialogue or economic development in the affected regions for countering the insurgents remained predominant. With the South Asian states relying more on the use of force, the situation has exacerbated even further. In an absence of the realisation that every insurgency has different dynamics and therefore needs different counter-strategies, the imbalance has generated more confusion. For instance, an element of sympathy has been observed due to the collateral damage caused by the intense use of force in certain sections of the population. There has never been a one size fits all strategy. Only those states that identified the difference between core reasons and add-on reasons that sustained insurgencies could do better in countering these insurgencies at the earliest. Yusuf identified four core reasons for the expansion and extension of the insurgency in South Asia:

- i. The unfinished process of nation-building left over from the decolonisation process. In case of Pakistan, however, political ideology is the number one driver;
- ii. The dilemma of negotiating or fighting with the insurgents. Negotiations are generally done with those who inflict the maximum damage;
- iii. Public opinion and its build-up by the state to garner support for its policies. States deliberately manipulate through the conflation of narratives;
- iv. And lastly, the role of an external third party, which is originally a constant factor.

This confusion in the identification of detrimental elements and the ensuing lack of clarity generates susceptibility, whereby giving space to the insurgents to operate. On the other hand, it disconnects the people from the state, and adds to the vulnerabilities in the process of nation building as a consequence.

According to Yusuf, Pakistan faces two major terrorism/insurgent challenges today:

- I. Stemming from intolerance of diversity, specifically religious and ethnic;
- II. A conflation of narratives- in Pakistan, these narratives are confounded between political Islam, an anti-America paradigm, and the state-society disconnect.

Therefore, Pakistan needs to establish the confidence of its people in the state by improving the civilian law enforcement apparatus, and the day-to-day security of civilians. The moderate religious clerics must be invested upon to gain the maximum dividends. A holistic strategy to counter insurgency must believe that although the challenge is bigger than the ability of the state, the eventual benchmark should be to have a normal functional state rather than one riddled with unchecked violence.

The talk was followed by a vigorous question and answer session, which emphasised a comparative analysis of insurgencies continuing in South Asia in general and Baluchistan in particular. The role of media and external forces was yet another aspect covered during the discussion. Nevertheless, the formulation and implantation of an inclusive approach to counter insurgencies was a unanimous assertion by the participants. At the end of the session, ISSI Chairman Ambassador (R) Khalid Mahmood thanked the audience and the speaker for his incisive presentation. He commented that the true understanding of insurgencies and counter-insurgencies lies in their context, and therefore requires individual and separate investigation, stating that the counter insurgency in Kashmir cannot be confused with the insurgencies in FATA or Balochistan, as they all carry individual premises.