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## *Report – Book Launch*

# **“No Win War: The Paradox of US- Pakistan Relations in Afghanistan’s Shadow”**

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The Centre for Afghanistan Middle East and Africa at the Institute of Strategic Studies hosted a book launch of 'No Win War' by eminent journalist Zahid Hussain. The distinguished speakers at the occasion included, Senator Sherry Rehman, Ambassador Salman Bashir and Ambassador Asif Durrani.

The introductory remarks were given by Ms. Amina Khan, Director Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) at ISSI. While giving her remarks, she stated that the Book 'No Win War', authored by Zahid Hussain gives a valuable insight of the PAK-US relationship post 9/11 era in the shadow of the war in Afghanistan, making the book a timely and important addition to the existing literature on the subject. She further said that the book explores the connection between Pakistan's domestic political developments and US's foreign policy in the region, particularly Afghanistan, and sheds light on how the Pak-US relationship has often waxed and waned due to deviating views on Afghanistan. The book rightly highlights the efforts made by Pakistan as a facilitator in the Afghan peace process and how it helped the US and Taliban reach a negotiated settlement. She said that the author outlines the contradictions that have characterized Pak US relations and how relations have usually evolved in response to global or regional geopolitical realities. She also said that one may not entirely agree with the Zahid Sahib's views regarding Pakistan's alleged patronage of the Taliban and pursuance of the policy of 'strategic depth', which is an outdated narrative to say the least. She further said that overall the book brings a rather interesting perspective on the need for all sides to rectify past mistakes. The book also throws light on the fact that despite all odds a complete breakdown of US Pakistan relations is certainly not an option.

During his welcome remarks, Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry said that the book rightly summed up the two decades of Pakistan's relations with the US in terms of the Afghan war from an uneasy alliance to estrangement. He said that the majority of Pakistanis felt that the US war in Afghanistan was not Pakistan's war but was imposed upon them. He also agreed with the author that after their quick victory of their invasion of Afghanistan, the US mistakenly thought the Taliban was defeated. He went on to say that the mantra of sanctuaries present in Pakistan was grossly exaggerated and that the US and Pakistan had very different perspectives on how reconciliation in Afghanistan was to take place. Regarding the same issue,

he also expressed a difference of opinion with the author regarding the reorganization of the Taliban due to the presence of sanctuaries in Pakistan. In the end he said the end game is not in sight. We do not know in which direction the situation in Afghanistan will take. However, there is a unanimous consensus that everybody in Pakistan wants to see stability in Afghanistan. Ambassador Chaudhry also disagreed with the author regarding the assertion that the Haqqani network was a useful hedge for Pakistan against an uncertain outcome in Afghanistan but on the contrary, it was a massive security concern instead. He reiterated that Pakistan wants to see a stable Afghanistan as the country has suffered immensely from the turmoil in Afghanistan. Stability is key for peace, he concluded.

While introducing the book, the author, Zahid Hussain stated that the book covers two decades of Pak US relations. He went on to say that in order to get various perspectives, he has engaged widely with concerned officials and policy makers. While shedding light on the Pak US relationship, he stated that this relationship has been defined as the most oddest and complex. He said that during the 1990s, Pakistan was one of the most sanctioned countries but then 9/11 happened and the situation changed. Two countries are regarded as allies and at the same time enemies and that is how this new alliance after 9/11 was born. The relationship emerged after 9/11 is not based on strategic convergence and after 9/11 things changed and US wanted Pakistan to join it against the War on Terror and Pakistan had to join that alliance because that was a need of hour and it was bound in many ways to join the alliance, which was transactional from the very beginning. He further said that it was not Pakistan which got strategic depth in Afghanistan, it were the Taliban who got strategic depth in Pakistan. Pakistan's disagreement with US was very clear because they never had any exit plan and the counterinsurgency strategy of US could not work for them in Afghanistan and it ultimately lead to the defeat of US in Afghanistan. He further said that Pakistan's position was very clear on Afghanistan from the very beginning and it was the US which had no clarity.

Senator Sherry Rehman, while giving her remarks said that the book is an excellent contribution which brings forth the very clear eye view of Pakistan's diplomacy. The book has addressed so many questions, which also includes where Pakistan stands in today's world. She further said that the book reveals that the US has tend to have viewed Pakistan through the Afghanistan lens and the author has upended that lens. She said that the book is grounded in a clear view of Pakistan's

needs and the US's hubris and the book answers many questions through this prism. She further explained that the book points to the cognitive disconnect between the two frenemies and a trust that quite never settles down. Books like these are critical in unlocking many important aspects she concluded. She also said that while there are numerous books and literature on Pak-US relations, where Pakistan is always painted as the perfidious partner, whereas this book is a great service to the impoverished intellectual landscape. She went on to say that the author has throughout the book taken a very restrained aim at the American strategic confusion that has marked and lead the entire episode of America's strategic engagement in Afghanistan.

Ambassador Salman Bashir, while expressing his views about the book said that the book contains an important narrative of Pakistan which was essentially driven by the military and intelligence apparatus and that the Foreign office and the State Department did a lot of creative thinking into preventing the break up that has happened post 15<sup>th</sup> August. He said that the author has mentioned incidents that are the proof of honest advice from Pakistan to the Americans about the end game about and of the expected position after the US evacuates from Afghanistan. He further said that there was a systemic disconnect between US and Pakistan which has been the US's adherent ally. He further said that the book also gives a holistic and objective account on differing viewpoints and that the American and Pakistani interests clashed and intersected at several points during the past 20 years. There was a shared inability of both sides to understand the situation. He further said that the book also reveals the follies and foibles of those in the positions of power as well as the deep cultural disconnect the sheer inability of all sides to understand each other. Therefore, it pays attention to the gambits of intelligence agencies, which would often overlook moral or even legal norms to falsify and eventually mislead their own governments he stated.

Ambassador Asif Durrani, while talking about the book said that the book is an anthology of events starting from 9/11 up to the Doha agreement. He remarked that the book contains excellent characterization of America's involvement and interesting inside stories which make the book authentic and knowledgeable for the readers. Further, he said that the book contains how, unwittingly or wittingly, the seeds of war were sown and the bad blood between the future rulers of Afghanistan and the US started. He said that the author has captured the events beautifully and has mentioned the many challenges that were faced by Pakistan and they have

been captured in detail, including the behind the scene maneuvering of state missions. He also stated that the use of primary sources for writing this book is excellent which makes the book very authentic and a page turner. The book is a pleasure to read and helps remove many misconceptions regarding the happenings in Afghanistan and their impact on Pakistan, he concluded.