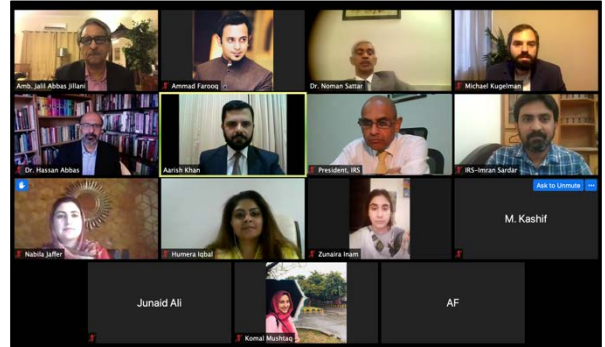




# Institute of Regional Studies

## US policy towards South Asia to remain same

ISLAMABAD November 2, 2020: The participants of a webinar organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) titled “US Elections 2020: Possible Implications for the Region” here on Monday were of the view that US policy towards South Asia is not likely to change much with the outcome of the upcoming presidential election in the United States.



Dr Michael Kugelman, the Asia Program Deputy Director and Senior Associate for South Asia at the Woodrow Wilson Center, was of the view that US relations with India, its concerns related to counter-terrorism, and peace process in Afghanistan would continue to determine US foreign policy towards South Asia, notwithstanding the outcome of the election. He added that US policymakers will continue to find answers to questions related to framing of Pak-US relations amidst the planned troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, managing Indo-US relations through an informal security cooperation arrangement, and integrating its South Asia policy into its broader Asia policy.

Former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan Amb Jalil Abbas Jilani maintained that notwithstanding Pakistan’s exemplary relations with China, Pakistani policymakers would want to maintain friendly relations with the US as well. He was of the view that Pakistani decisionmakers would be more confident in pursuing better relations with the US under a Biden administration than a Trump administration merely by way of long-term consistency if nothing else. Dr Kugelman was of the view, however, that Biden administration might appoint some Obama administration officials who are not favourably inclined towards Pakistan to key positions once again, which might create some issues for smooth-sailing of Pak-US relations. Amb Jilani, nevertheless, emphasized the need for resumption of strategic dialogue between Pakistan and the US.

Dr Hassan Abbas, Distinguished Professor of International Relations at the Near East South Asia Strategic Studies Centre (NESAC) at the National Defense University in Washington D.C., stated that post-election US policy towards South Asia needed to be viewed through an emerging global context which comprises five elements: greater level of global competition with the emergence of China, the increased role of religion in geopolitics, the future of peace in Afghanistan, the decreasing centrality of oil in global economy diminishing the need for stability in the Middle East, and the challenges to global cooperation emerging out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Abbas argued that if Joe Biden becomes the president of the US, he will pursue a more hands-on approach toward Pakistan. He added that while Biden would want better relations with India, his administration will be more vocal on human rights issues than the Trump administration. Dr Abbas did not see Biden changing the Trump administration’s policy towards Afghanistan and maintained that the US could play a better role of crisis-manager between India and Pakistan if he got elected. Dr Noman Sattar, Professor at Air War College, Karachi, called managing India-Pakistan relations the biggest test for the new US administration.

At the end of the session, President IRS Amb Nadeem Riyaz gave his concluding remarks and thanked all the participants of the webinar for their candid discussion and thoughtful remarks.

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