



POST ROUNDTABLE REPORT  
**PAKISTAN - IRAN**  
RELATIONS

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**“Pakistan- Iran Relations”**  
(31 January 2018)

**Institute for Strategic Studies; Research and Analysis (ISSRA)  
National Defence University  
Islamabad**

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# Foreword



Pakistan and Iran are bonded together with historical, cultural, civilizational and religious ties for centuries. The bilateral relations between the two countries are anchored with very strong foundations, being immediate neighbors. The mutual ties of both the countries in evolving environment of the region have the potential for an upturn for common prosperity and security. In the recent past, there are some major developments in bilateral relations such as high level government and military dignitaries' visits to both countries which have reached to the understanding of increasing bilateral trade to over \$5 billion over the next five years. Therefore, in order to reap the benefits of engagement both the countries should proactively engage to remove all those irritants which have prevented both the countries so far to reap the fruits of close bilateral cooperation between the two neighbouring Muslim countries for socio-economic benefit of the people of this region.

In this context, the roundtable on “Pak-Iran Relations” provided an ideal setting to discuss mutual issues of interest especially Pak-Iran Gas pipeline, electricity projects, enhancing bilateral trade volume, linking Gwadar and Chabahar ports and Iran's inclusion into the regional cooperation projects like CPEC. The deliberations at the roundtable have benefitted both sides in reaching a consensus on the early culmination of all bilateral, diplomatic, military, security and economic projects for uplift of people of both the countries. It is heartening to see that both sides share unanimity of views on a host of issues.

I would like to appreciate all the scholars and academicians for congregating at this forum and bestowing us with their valuable reflections on the subject. I also congratulate the dedicated efforts of IS Branch in particular and ISSRA in general for the hard work that enabled this event to transform into an intellectually enriching endeavor for strong Pak-Iran ties.

**Lt Gen Majid Ehsan HI (M)**  
President National Defence University

# Perface



A Roundtable on “Pakistan-Iran Relations” was organised by ISSRA with a top brass Iranian delegation headed by His Excellency Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Mr. Mehdi Honardoost along with a panel of experienced academicians, ambassadors and foreign policy experts. The participants very candidly discussed a raft of convergent economic interests and security challenges posed to both the neighbouring countries for regional economic prosperity and security. The event being the first one at the start of the year marked it as an academic as well as practically elevating endeavour to ponder on the irritants and pitfalls hindering the culmination of Pak-Iran bilateral relations, especially realisation of economic projects for the people of both the countries.

The roundtable has proved to be successful in generating an introspective discussion on broader questions related to Pak-Iran relations including: overcoming impediments to bolster bilateral trade, IP Gas pipeline's materialisation, and how to expand regional cooperation through projects like CPEC. The take-aways from this dialogue included resolve and seriousness to adopt CBMs to bolster bilateral ties, priority to be given to IP gas pipeline project's early completion and creating a shared knowledge corridor connecting with Iran promoting regional innovations, socio-economic development and security arrangements for robust bilateral relations were among the few.

The compilation in the reader's hand carries a summary record of the deliberations held on our campus. It is my earnest hope that it will prove to be a stimulus for robust Pak –Iran ties in the days to come with people to people interactions and cultural exchanges. I am also very optimistic that it would help policy relevant circles to chalk out a firm and holistic approach in line with the consensus evolved on host of issues for brighter future of our region.

**Major General Muhammad Samrez Salik, HI (M)**  
Director General ISSRA

## Executive Summary of Proceedings

National Defence University, ISSRA organised a Roundtable discussion on “Pakistan-Iran Relations” on 31 January, 2018 which was a high profile event at the beginning of the year with an Iranian delegation headed by its Ambassador to Pakistan Mr. Mehdi Honardoost along with Defence Attaché and Research Counsellor. The Pakistani side was represented by DG ISSRA Maj. Gen. Muhammad Samrez Salik, HI (M), Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Director Iran and Turkey Mr. Junaid Sadiq and Assistant Director Mr. Fahad Rehman as well as qualified academicians, ex. ambassadors and foreign policy experts. Former DG ISSRA Maj. Gen. Ghulam Qamar HI (M) especially participated at the forum to share his first hand knowledge about Pak-Iran Relations with a particular focus on his recently concluded visit to Iran. The Roundtable provided an ideal platform for an exchange of candid views and suggestions between the Pakistani and Iranian sides as how to address irritants coming underway in bilateral relations which have been creating obstacles in realising peaceful and economically sound region focusing on its people.

The summary of the Roundtable was mirrored in the positive views of its guests who participated and generated discussions particularly focussing on enhancing bilateral relationship between Pakistan and Iran, and how to address impediments which have prevented both the neighbours so far to realise the full potential of their centuries'

long bilateral ties.

The formal proceedings started with DG ISSRA's opening remarks who while welcoming the Iranian Ambassador very rightly pointed out the changing World Order from uni-polar to multi-polar world. He underlined the importance of chalking out ways and means for improved Pak-Iran bilateral ties in the changing environment of the region. This was followed by Iranian Ambassadors' opening remarks who emphatically pointed out that it is high time for both nations to recognize their common and true enemies and work on the lines of having convergences on subjects of mutual interests necessary to strength bilateral ties in diplomatic, socio-economic, security and trade domains. In order to achieve it, both countries have great potential to accomplish more than the best desired results. Under a vigilant and united voice, co-operations can be forged to handle chaos and usher into an era of stronger ties. Iranian Ambassador's opening words were followed by a presentation delivered by Iranian Research Counsellor Mr. M.M. Zamani to apprise the participants of Iranian perspective on Pak-Iran Relations. He also congratulated the Pakistani side on the 70 years celebrations of Pak-Iran bilateral relations. Subsequently, Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Director Iran and Turkey Mr. Junaid Sadiq shed light on Pakistan's perspective and future potential for mutual ties between the two friendly and neighbouring countries. With these presen-

tations done, the house was opened for discussion on all important aspects regarding Pak-Iran relations. Dr. Ashfaque Hassan Khan, Dr. Nazir Hussain, Amb. Arif Kamal, Dr. Arshi Saleem, Dr. Mavra Inayat and Maj. Gen. Ghulam Qamar were among those who generated discussion on pertinent issues concerning Pakistan and Iran in thought-provoking and positive way.

The two hour long exchange of views were moderated by DG ISSRA Maj. Gen. Muhammad Samrez Salik H (IM) who later on concluded the proceedings of the Roundtable by enunciating that Pak-Iran bilateral ties needed to be strengthened at all levels. The need of the hour is to focus on commonalities of interests and ways and

means to enhance level of cooperation between the two neighbouring, friendly and Muslim countries.

The Pak-Iran Roundtable platform helped in a comprehensive manner to clear the doubts and widen horizon of bilateralism about the dynamics of relations between the two countries. The fruitful discourse addressed the impediments that stood in the way of diplomatic, economic, social, trade & security and military domains for people of both the countries, hence providing a window of opportunity to engage and enhance mutual cooperation for finding solutions to the shared problems for own good and regional prosperity.



**Long Live Pak-Iran Friendship!**

## Concept Note

Civilizational overlaps, geographical linkages and historic underpinnings define relations between Pakistan and Iran. The regional conundrum drives the bilateral relationship but may not necessarily define them. The two countries may not have been able to manage the irritants that come underway the otherwise deep intrinsic ties between the two neighbours. Pakistan and Iran are the two countries which are not bonded together merely by geography, but share a civilizational proximity which is seldom enjoyed by countries in the region and periphery. Therefore, it becomes crucial to identify the hurdles and devise policies that allow moving forward while addressing the gaps to resolve impediments. Considerably, the idea of bilateral cooperation rests on the notion of enhancing cooperation for mutual growth

and development through regional projects like CPEC. Hence, facing the imperative to reinvigorate bilateral relationship, transcending external and internal fault lines, and moving ahead towards building structures of peace and prosperity are the need of the hour for socio-economic development of the region.

In this backdrop, a roundtable titled: Pakistan –Iran Relations, is organized at ISSRA NDU on 31st January, 2018. The intellectual activity is geared towards deliberating on avenues of mutual growth and development between the two countries. Primarily, it provides an opportunity to brainstorm on challenges and opportunities in the way of reenergizing bilateral relations while keeping in view the play of internal and external factors.

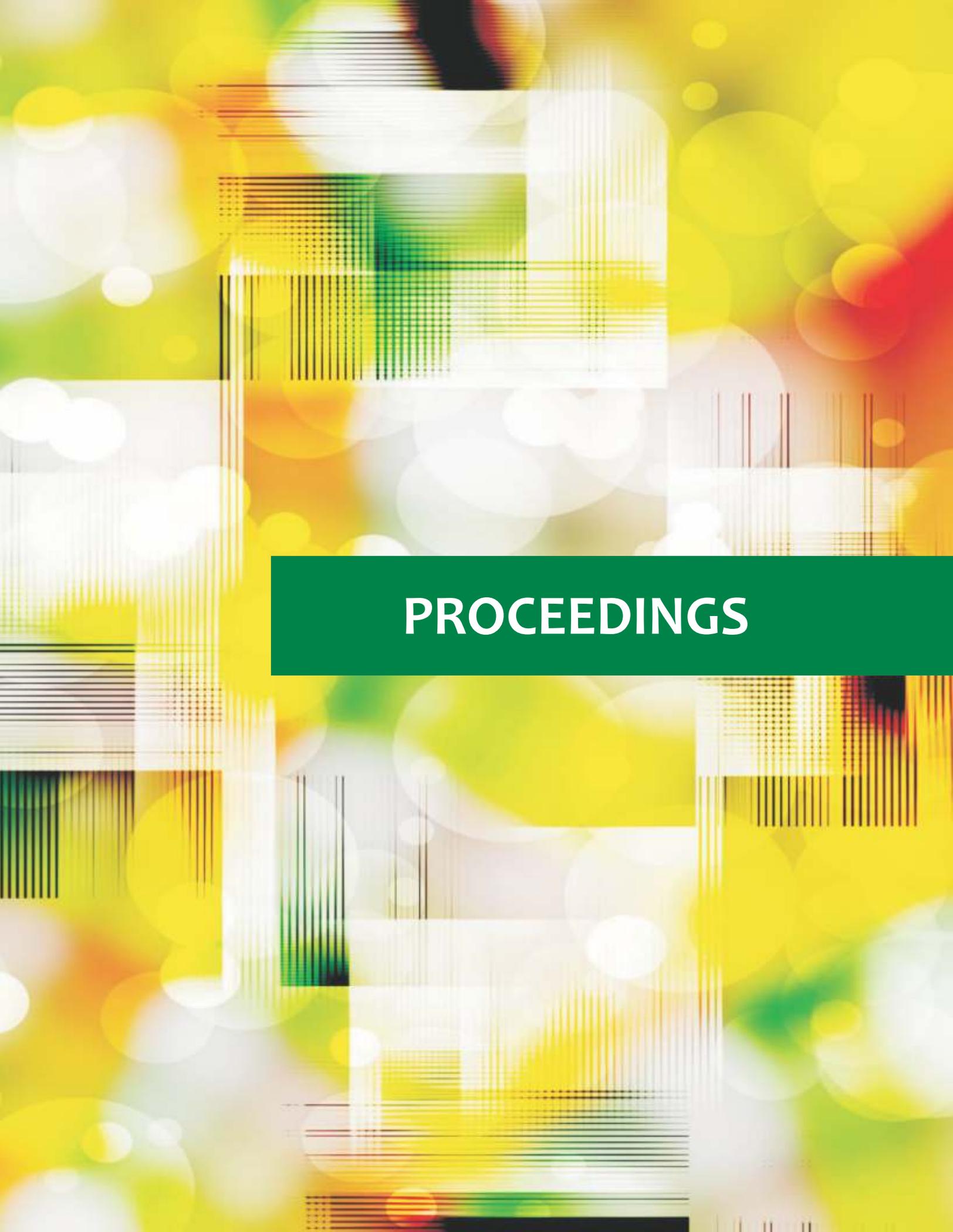


## Findings

- There are reasons why Pakistan's ties with neighboring Iran have hardly been robust. The current global and regional underpinnings provide both the countries sufficient space to raise the level of their own initiative and enhance cooperative agenda in all spheres of mutual interest.
- The Iranian side expressed more vigor and seriousness in improving bilateral relations in true spirit for the betterment of people of the region. It was hinted that Pakistan's policies so far had been influenced by the US pressure thereby creating impediments in the realization of agreed projects, commitments and agreements.
- Pakistan and Iran have much to gain through the expansion of ties, and an earnest effort in that direction is possible, provided the will is there. Iranian side has also shown great desire to be part of the regional cooperation emanating from China's BRI –CPEC project.
- Given the contemporary changing dynamics of geopolitics from unipolar to multi polar world and having seen the US as receding global power there exists a need to create a new block by including Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and China through BRI, thereby building connectivity with 68 BRI countries.
- There exists a dire need to strengthen bilateral Pak-Iran relations with Pakistan by overcoming impediments to bolstering bilateral trade, cultural exchanges, educational & academics, transportation, technological, political and military cooperation.

## Recommendations

- Governments of Pakistan and Iran should accord high priority, show seriousness and adopt result-oriented approach to bolster bilateral ties.
- Governments of both the countries to carry out frank and deep-seated discussions covering current regional and global trends in political, economic and cultural domains. An independent and national interest based policies are, therefore, considered imperative.
- Bilateral ties between the two countries should improve through policy formulation and institution of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). Early completion of IP gas pipeline and import of electricity from Iran may be given due priority, accordingly.
- It is time to create a shared knowledge corridor connecting with Iran and China under CPEC in order to promote regional innovations, socio-economic development for good of the people of this region and extra regional countries.
- A new regional block including Russia, China, Iran Turkey, and Pakistan may be constituted. Pakistan needs to support Iran in regional and global conundrums, shunning those policies making Iran segregated and isolated.
- Cultural, educational and technological exchanges be also given priority to provide impetus to the efforts in improving bilateral relations especially considering the neighborhood status of Iran.

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features a warm color palette of yellows, oranges, and greens, overlaid with a bokeh effect of soft, out-of-focus light circles. A complex network of thin, black and white lines, some forming grids and others as vertical or horizontal streaks, is layered across the image, creating a sense of depth and movement. A solid green horizontal band is positioned in the center, serving as a backdrop for the main text.

# PROCEEDINGS

## Introduction

A Roundtable on “Pakistan-Iran Relations” was held at ISSRA, NDU on 31 January, 2018. A top brass Iranian delegation headed by His Excellency Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Mr. Mehdi Honardoost including Defence Attaché and Research Counsellor attended the event. A panel of experienced academicians, ex ambassadors and foreign policy experts including delegates from Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as Pakistan's top notch economists attended the round table discussion. The roundtable provided an ideal platform for an exchange of views, commentaries and suggestions between the Pakistani and Iranian sides as how to address irritants coming underway in bilateral relations which have been creating obstacles in realising peaceful and economically sound region focusing on its people.

The event intended to discuss a raft of convergent economic interests and security challenges posed to both the neighbouring countries for regional economic prosperity and security. The discussion pertaining to key issues between Pakistan and Iran such as increased interaction in the field of education, industry, technical training, research & development, cultural exchanges, banking, security and expansion of bilateral economic ties generated significant discussion. At the same time concerns pertaining to major issues which have adversely affected

bilateral relations of the two countries, also generated positive discourse.

## Significance

The event followed up on the last year's roundtable in August, 2016 with an Iranian delegation invited to speak and share their views with Pakistani participants. Under the current international climate of improving relations between Pakistan and Iran with particular focus on increasing trade and people to people interaction, the discourse at the roundtable brought out pertinent lessons and a way forward. Both sides agreed that Governments of Pakistan and Iran need to tap on the civilizational overlaps, geographical linkages and historic underpinnings between both the neighbouring Islamic countries. Therefore, it becomes crucial to identify the hurdles and devise policies that allow moving forward while addressing the gaps to resolve impediments. Considerably, the idea of bilateral cooperation rests on the notion of enhancing cooperation for mutual growth and development through regional projects like CPEC. Hence, facing the imperative to reinvigorate bilateral relationship, transcending external and internal fault lines, and moving ahead towards building structures of peace and prosperity, is considered necessary for socio-economic development of the region.

4. After the arrival of the dignitaries including the Iranian delegation, DG

ISSRA, Maj. General Muhammad Samrez Salik, HI(M) warmly welcomed the guests and formally opened the Roundtable proceedings. The event started with the recitation from the Holy Quran.

5. Welcoming remarks by the DG ISSRA and the Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan, His Excellency Mehdi Honardoost were then followed by a presentation by the Iranian delegate titled “70 Years of Pak-Iran Relations”. Iranian presentation was then

followed by a presentation delivered by Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Director Iran and Turkey to apprise the audience of Pakistani perspective on the bilateral relations between the two countries. The interactive session was then initiated after a tea break. Concluding remarks were offered by both the DG ISSRA and the Iranian Ambassador, followed by a group photo of the participants of the roundtable and the lunch.

## Opening Remarks by DG ISSRA

A Roundtable was organized by the Institute for Strategic Studies; Research and Analysis (ISSRA) on 31st January 2018 to discuss Pak-Iran relations in light of new geopolitical challenges and to draw pertinent lessons as a way forward to improve bilateral relations with Iran and stability of the region.

The roundtable was chaired by Maj Gen. Muhammad Samrez Salik HI (M), DG ISSRA. During his opening remarks he welcomed the Ambassador of Iran H.E Mr. Mehdi Honardoost and other participants of the Roundtable and briefed them about the aim for organizing the roundtable discussion, i.e. to discuss bilateral relations of Pakistan and Iran. He said that Iran and Pakistan are immediate neighbors having historical, cultural and social ties. He stressed it is high time to boost the relations by eradicating the impediments to ensure regional security upon that take full advantage of the bondage both countries enjoy. He further reaffirmed the commitment



of both countries to spawn understanding of the most significant issues that come underway with the aim to address the aberrations in mutual relations and expand socio-economic ties to their common advantage.

It was also mentioned that Pak-Iran relations have always been cordial apart from some issues. Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan after its independence in 1947 and during the 1965 war with India, it supported Pakistan's stance. Concurrently, in 1979, Pakistan was amongst the first countries to recognize revolutionary state in Iran. Later, during Iran-Iraq war Pakistan remained neutral while Karachi port served as a major conduit of non-lethal supplies to Iran under the sanctions regime. Last but not the least, Pakistan strongly opposed any military option against Iranian nuclear programme. It is equally acknowledgeable that Pakistan and Iran have granted one another most-favoured nation status for trade purposes and both sides have an abiding interest in de-escalating tensions in Baluchistan and its adjoining areas.

He also added that the discussion will generate attainable results and the forum is geared to discuss the emergence of changing geopolitical situation in the region, while chalking out ways and means for improved bilateral ties for successful culmination of multiple energy projects which are in the offing given the removal of sanctions on Iran, as a result of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between Iran and the P5+1 countries. In this new setting, both the countries underline the importance of recalibrating relations to their mutual advantage. There is no denial of the fact that the two countries' relationship has also carried the imprint of

unhelpful factors such as instability in Afghanistan, sectarianism, presence of militant manifestations and alleged manipulation from external actors through proxy wars. These issues have resulted in low volume of bilateral trade and people to people contacts besides an absence of strategized relationship. Although trade volume between the two countries currently stands at about one billion USD; however, agreement to increase bilateral trade to five billion USD is also considered as a positive step for improving bilateral ties. Exchange of visits of premiers of both the countries in recent times also carry positive connotations.

The chair stressed upon the significance of ensuring long-term peace and creating a conducive environment in the larger regional setting viz-a-viz Pakistan's desire for the two important ports of Gwadar and Chahbahar is not to be seen as rivals but should be taken as sister ports. Their roles should not cause unease to the other; rather, the two ports should complement each other. Iran-Pakistan (IP) Gas pipeline, on the other hand, is the flagship project between the two countries and needs to be brought to its culmination. To strengthen the socio-economic relationship further, Iran can also be connected with the China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) at the same time enhancing cooperation and devising effective mechanism through collaborative efforts for mutual security cooperation, border management, smuggling and

narcotics control with Pakistan.

In the end, it was mentioned that the current global arena is faced with extremism and elements of instability with the potential to disrupt the global security order. There are in fact notions that restrict opportunities for materializing the goal of long-term stability and prosperity of the world. With the enormous cost of blood and money that has been tallied by the efforts for building world peace, it seems clear that nations need to seriously consider and adopt concerted approaches to accomplish their goals of economic well-being and security of its people. Hence, in the contemporary setting, the relationship of Pakistan and Iran not only faces challenges but also faces opportunities. The challenges are getting immune from intra-Gulf tensions and India's increasing ingress in West Asia. At the same time Pakistan's

relations with US and the need for greater trust between Iran and Pakistan are worthy of attention. Conversely, opportunities relate to Iran's rapprochement with the West and its desire to reconnect with the world by participating in the epic projects like CPEC for the potential it carries for trans-regional economic connectivity and prosperity. The Chair also thanked the participants and organizers of the event for arranging an intellectual discourse that would generate policy guidelines while bringing ways and means for ensuring cordial and all-inclusive mutual relations between Pakistan and Iran.

## Opening Remarks by H.E. Mehdi Honardoost, Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan

H . E . M e h d i to recognize Pakistan Hoonardoost, the as sovereign state. Iranian Ambassador Historically, both to Pakistan, thanked states have shared DG ISSRA for an amicable relation. organizing the In the current subject roundtable international setting it and inviting them to is important that both discuss a very countries support the important topic i.e. atmosphere of Pak-Iran relations. brotherhood and He also said that Iran increase their was the first country interdependence



most importantly via trade and cultural exchanges. Unfortunately, due to hurdles and trade barriers bilateral trade between Iran and Pakistan has not reached its full potential and therefore, it is not the best representation of ties between both nations. No banking transaction channel exists between the two countries and a road map is required to settle the transaction issue, as lack of banking channel directly impinges on low trade volume between the two. However, in the past two years there has been a renewed interest in improving relations due to which there have been increased interactions of representatives from both sides.

Not only in trade, but also in the realm of education and science, there exist, vast possibilities for collaboration through speedy and smart diplomatic channels. The Pak-Iran Gas Pipeline project would lead to an economic uplift in Pakistan, where Iran, the largest provider of gas in the region can help Pakistan to overcome its energy deficiencies. But for this to culminate into reality, it is important that both countries overcome impediments being laid out by the international community. To overcome the shortages of electricity in Pakistan, the Iranian transmission lines can also be used. For stronger ties, it is of utmost significance that the relations between both countries are made tangible to the people, both between the parliament and the common man. Thus, one can say that for a better future, Iran- Pakistan need to focus on

commonalities such as:

- The youth population bulge between both countries is big where Iran like Pakistan has a huge population of individuals under 35. In Iran, 65% of the population is under 35 and in Pakistan the figures are also almost similar.
- The menace of narcotics has hit both countries and the geographical location is being exploited for the purpose of narcotic trade.
- Both countries are seeking trade potential to improve their relations in the region.
- Terrorism and extremism are great concerns for both countries and it should be noted that there is “no good” or “no bad” terrorism. All terrorism is bad terrorism and it directly stems from illiteracy and poverty. It has already plagued Afghanistan. Daesh, after its defeat in the Middle East, is trying to gain its foothold there. Therefore, Pakistan and Iran need to join hands to counter the common threat which terrorism and more specifically, Daesh poses.
- Both states can consider more common projects in the form of CPEC connections with Chabahar which has all the ingredients of becoming a regional game changer.
- A united front against the West is the need of the hour.

It is high time that both nations recognize their common and true enemies and work on the lines of having a free trade agreement. The issue of trade needs to be addressed in steps which involve that both come forward and forge a partnership while becoming more vigilant of their enemies. The recognition of Jerusalem as the legitimate capital of Israel by the USA needs a lot of questioning and further probe in order to address issues related to ulterior objectives of the big states. Conspiracy theories should not allow tensions to

simmer and escalate between Iran and Pakistan and the foreign powers should also not be allowed to manipulate relations. Most importantly, Iran and Pakistan are both Muslim states. Islam teaches peace and tolerance towards all and it should be implemented in its true spirit. Therefore, there is a great potential to achieve more than the best. Under a vigilant and united voice, co-operations can be forged to handle chaos and usher into an era of strongerties.

## Presentation by Mr. M.M. Zamani, Research Counsellor, Iranian Embassy

Iran and Pakistan are now celebrating 70 years of friendship and it is important to take a glance at the trajectory of relations over these years. Historically, both countries have remained on brotherly terms since Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan as a sovereign state thus setting the foundation of relations based on trust and respect. Ties have remained strong both post and pre-Iranian revolution owing to religious and historical background, cultural similarities and economic, political, military and defense understandings. After the end of Shah's regime, both countries stood the test of times and remained close due to an independent foreign policy, defying international pressures. Under the political developments in the last few years, the world has been ushered in to a new era of global power struggle which is why the current dynamics of relations are of utmost importance. Both countries hold a vital



status in the region and Muslim world, hence, can play a significant role in global

power politics. Trade target between both nations has been set at \$5 billion whereas the total trade volume amounts to 1.32 billion. Given the trade potential, the trade volume should have been higher. It is appreciated that the graph shows a growth trajectory, however more needs to be done to strengthen trade links. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipe line is an important strategic project and both nations can reap numerous benefits from its strategic location. Economic relations can further be improved in the following domains:

- a. CPEC & Chabahar
- b. Roads and Railways
- c. Agriculture and Livestock
- d. Oil, gas and electricity
- e. Cement and construction
- f. Food items
- g. Tourism

16. To promote tourism, the Pakistan-Iran train service has to be restarted soon and ties need to be further strengthened in the realm of defense and politics. In the recent past, the Iran-Pakistan naval exercises have been an effort in the same direction. Internationally, both countries share the same stance on the illegal occupation of Palestine and the plight of the Palestinians. The recent statement of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei on the issue of Kashmir not only depicts the inherent like-mindedness of both states but also a united international front on the

national interests of both countries. The presidents of both nations have condemned the US move to declare Jerusalem the capital of Israel, terming it a violation of the Muslim sentiments and a jab at the sacredness of Al-Aqsa mosque. Recently, Foreign Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif held separate meetings with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif. Even Pakistan's foreign Minister Mr. Asif said US Army has failed in resolving issues facing Afghanistan as there could be no military solution to the Afghan problem, thus validating Iran's stance. Both nations have faced numerous issues and their enemies are mutual, regionally and internationally, and both countries need to stand united to resist international pressure in order to effectively propagate the narrative of "No more" in response to "Do more". The international community needs to recognize Pakistan's efforts in fighting against terrorism and Iran's right to a sovereign defense program without any sanctions. While at the same time, Iran-Pakistan can overcome pressure by forging an alliance based on mutual interests so that their friendship story can continue for years to come.

## Presentation by Mr. Junaid Sadiq, Director Iran & Turkey, MOFA



Relations between Pakistan and Iran are imbued with mutual passion. These ties are based on a shared history spanning over centuries, with shared faith, tradition and culture. Language is a basic linkage between the two cultures and the connection between Urdu and Persian is well known, reflected in the fact that about 40% vocabulary of Urdu is borrowed from Persian language. Whereas these deep rooted ties are further augmented by enhanced people to people contact. Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan after its independence, after which the relations continued on a smooth trajectory even during the 1979 Iranian revolution,

where Pakistan was the first country to recognize this dispensation. Simultaneously, Iran has also stood by Pakistan in difficult times, particularly during the 2005 earthquake during which Iran's support to Pakistan is praiseworthy. Last year in November, 2017 unfortunately one of the deadliest earthquakes hit Iran, in which thousands of lives were lost, alongside thousands injured and dislocated. Pakistan extended full support to Iran in this time of crisis and was one of the few countries from which Iran accepted humanitarian supplies.

To recall, both the countries also signed an official Treaty of Friendship in the year 1950 and a Boundary Agreement in the year 1958. Iran supported Pakistan in its wars with India in 1965 and 1971 and Pakistan sustained against international pressure to act against Iran during a protracted conflict in Iraq in 1980. It is also worth- mentioning that the two countries never had any political differences in the past. Within this purview, in the last three years we see that the trajectory of bilateral relations is also on the rise. The former PM gave a bilateral statement in 2014 and again visited Iran in January 2016 to help reduce tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia as a gesture of mediating between the two friends of Pakistan. President Rouhani visited Pakistan in back to back high level visits in 2016 and 2017 to attend the ECO Summits in Islamabad. This shows the

importance given to Pakistan by the leadership in Iran. Hence, there has been a substantial increase in bilateral exchanges in 2017. Chairman senate and speaker National Assembly visited Iran in 2017, the Foreign Minister and National Security Advisor visited Iran in the same year, whereas the COAS visited Iran in November, 2017. In fact, this momentum of bilateral exchanges has considerably increased over the past few years which are regarded as very encouraging sign for ensuring improvement in bilateral ties between the two neighbouring countries.

In the economic terms, during the years of sanctions on Iran, the relations suffered tremendously. However, now both the countries have achieved milestones. Particularly, when the two sides recently started working on drafting a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which will hopefully be signed in coming years. The non-availability of banking channels between Iran and Pakistan has been a major impediment in improving these ties. Keeping this in view, the year 2017, a banking and payment agreement was signed between the two countries. This was a historic step towards achieving the bilateral trade target that the two countries had planned to achieve.

In this regard, the 20th session of Pakistan-Iran joint economic commission was held in April 2017, where the Minister of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) led the delegation to Tehran; hence, implying that the economic cooperation is on the

right track. The other venture is the IP gas pipeline which is a mega project with the potential to boost the relations. It envisages a transfer of 750 million cubic feet gas to Pakistan every year over a span of next 25 years. The biggest impediment on the IP pipeline was the sanctions on Iran and non-availability of funds. While, the Government of Pakistan is prioritizing to fill up gaps between the energy needs and shortages in the country, hence, this pipeline project will be completed if bilateral cooperation remains on track. As far as cooperation in the field of electricity is concerned, currently only one project is being run which includes a transfer of 70 MW of electricity from Iran to areas of Mand, 4 MW to Taftan and Mashkel - small towns in Baluchistan. Iran has also offered to extend this transfer up to 1000 megawatts and then onwards to 3000 megawatts. Furthermore, the two sides have also signed a sister ports agreement in the year 2014, for cooperating between Gwadar and Chabahar, alongside constructing a rail and road linkage for enhancing this cooperation.

In the security domain, last year there were concerns raised by Iran about border management of the 900 km joint border. In order to discuss these issues both the countries have also established a joint Border Commission. The 21st session of this Commission was held in October 2017 whereas the 22nd session will be held in Iran in the next couple of months. Last year, first session of the Higher Border Commission was also held at Tehran led by

the foreign ministers of both the countries. IGFC and Director General-Pakistan, Iran and Turkey (MOFA), led this delegation to Tehran. The 9th session of special security commission was held at Tehran in August 2017, where the security resource issues were discussed. These enhanced steps have also contributed towards security management on the border between the two countries. As a practical step, Pakistan has also raised a new Frontier Corps Southern Command in order to protect the joint border.

In the regional context, both the countries are privy to the flux in Afghanistan and also to its ramifications. Where the developed world paid lip service in terms of assistance, both the countries have given refuge to millions of refugees in the name of humanitarian assistance. Despite these

efforts, their societies have suffered in terms of proliferation of drugs and illegal weapons and would not like to see another round of violence in Afghanistan. Hence, they support the democratic dispensation in Afghanistan and understand the need to work together for a regional goal of peace and stability. In this regard, the first session of bilateral consultations at the Director General level on Afghanistan were also held last year at MOFA informally.

Nonetheless, the way forward rests on the notions of strengthening the bilateral economic ties, encouraging a candid and open bilateral discussion on issues of mutual concern and to expedite actions on projects like the IP gas pipeline and the ones related to the transfer of electricity from Iran.

## Interactive Session



In the interactive session, the participants commented and asked a number of questions from the Iranian Ambassador that related to the issues impacting the Pak-Iran relations and the regional environment. These include: the commonality of interests between Iran and Pakistan, issues impacting the relationship, Iran's synthesis of Islam and modernity, India-Iran defence relations, Iran's inclusion in CPEC, bilateral trade, and ways to improve the relations. The mainstay of the interactive discussion was the candid and open replies by the Iranian Ambassador to the queries raised by the participants. A summary of the deliberations is given in the ensuing paragraphs.

Pakistan-Iran relationship is rooted in civilization and heritage complemented by commonality of interests. While heritage is not a matter of choice for either, the relationship was not impacted by the negative statements coming from Tehran and Iranian media during the Iranian Revolution period from 1979 to 1981. One still recalls a directive from Gen Zia-ul-Haq issued from the presidential office that gave clear directions of "meeting Iranian requests within fifteen days". The commonality of interests relates to economic interests, stability in Afghanistan and broader regional context, countering terrorism and CPEC. But, we still have to see the Arab - Persian agitation and its proxy manifestations impacting the commonality of interests. From Iranian point of view, there are no other two countries like Iran and Pakistan without any conflict in the region. Therefore, both

Iran and Pakistan can come together to overcome the issues such as; stability in Afghanistan, economic linkages and countering US influence in the region. No doubt, Taliban in Afghanistan are the part of the country and for many reasons it is not easy to keep them away, so, we need to find an inclusive solution for the country's stability. Moreover, the management of Afghan refugees for which both Iran and Pakistan are passing through, is not very easily manageable and takes lot of resources, energy and effort. Regional connectivity is very important for economic growth and stability. For Iran is ready to join the CPEC and believes that connectivity on ports Bandar Abbas, Chahbahar and Gwadar could be one important and right step in the positive direction. Additionally, the two countries can also start joint naval exercises and port visits to increase military cooperation.

Iran undoubtedly seeks the reduction of US influence that it has gained through unlawful invasions in the regional countries. Unfortunately, many of our brotherly countries are playing in to the American hands and hurting their own brothers and sisters, willingly or unwillingly. Iran's estranged relations with US can be ended in a second if it closes to eyes to Palestine issue which Iran is not ready to do. Many of Iran's Arab Brothers have forgotten this issue and they are now reaping the benefits of the US friendship. On the other hand, due to the US actions, many of the countries in the world are now relooking at their foreign policies and one is hopeful that step by step

people would come to realize the reality that how much US is harming our interests in the region.

Iran and Pakistan are geopolitical reality and suffering from three Us: Unutilized, Undermined and Use of non-state actors. First, it is a failure on both sides that they have not been able to utilize the relationship to its full potential. This is evident from the fact that in seven decades, despite having no major conflict, the bilateral trade remains meager about one billion USD. Second, the relationship is undermined by either US, KSA or India. Third, use of non-state actors is an issue that both Iran and Pakistan are suffering from for the last three decades or so. Now, Daesh is taking strong footholds in Afghanistan. The question here is that how to reduce the trust deficit between the two countries. Why some third party intervention should impact the relationship of brotherly countries either by overt or covert means. To safeguard Pak-Iran bilateral relations from third parties impacting bilateral relations, both countries should recognize their common enemies in the region. In recent two years due to efforts from both sides, we were able to reduce the mistrust to some extent; and there is a realization at the highest level at least during the last two years to improve the relations. Even today's roundtable was aimed at reducing the trust deficit and improving the relationship. Moreover, both countries ought to utilize the youth factor to improve the relationship.

Whereas, Iran's synthesis of Islam and

giving an impression of modernity while engaging with the world is intriguing; one wonders about India-US increasing relations and Iran's position on that. As for lot of good or bad reasons, giving India a larger role in the region raises flags in many minds. A natural question is that if there are any contradictions in Iranian actions. The Iranian Ambassador said, "Iran was the first country to fight against Taliban, ISIS and Daesh; no one can deny this fact." "We believe in the smiling face of Islam" and, "We believe in our values". India on the other hand, has been using psychological war against Pakistan and Iran very successfully. In this endeavor, US has been supporting it. Twenty years ago, India wanted to use and build multibillion dollars projects in Chahbahar, however, after a decade; it invested 35 million but then later used over 100 billion for psychological war against the two countries. India and US have spent a lot of money to create Iran phobia. Moreover, Iran's trade with India is less than or about 2 billion dollars. Also, Iran is under its supreme leadership which gets authority from the religion, and a religious leader cannot lie as unlike the contemporary modern leadership. Therefore, there isn't any contradiction or misunderstanding in Iran's words and actions. "If there is a misunderstanding, be sure that it is because of your neighbor and not mine", the Iranian Ambassador responded candidly.

Before 2009 bilateral economic relationship between Pakistan and Iran used to be more than 1.5 billion USD and

then it came down to less than 1 billion USD. No doubt, the economic relationship a decade ago started getting down due to a lot of external influences. But, now, there is a realization and this will lead both the neighbouring countries to improve the relationship on this front. Also, to improve the economic relationship, the business community has to be proactive. The unfortunate reality is that Indian businessmen are more active than the Pakistan's businessmen. For a vibrant economic relationship between the two neighbours, the business community on both sides will have to be more smart and proactive.

It is encouraging that Iran wants to join CPEC, but, keeping in view the Indian actions to counter CPEC and India- Iran strategic relations, one wonders that how Iran would balance the relationship. Iran's relations with some countries are not dependent on other countries and it establishes the relations on mutual interests and gains. Moreover, Iran-India strategic relations are "over emphasized" and be sure that it is the part of "India's psychological warfare against Pakistan". On Kashmir, Iran's Supreme Leader clearly stated that Kashmiri people have the right to self-determination and to preside over their destiny. Moreover, major states keep irritants in the region, every time they need to build up pressure on us, they flare up one issue after another and one of these issues are terrorism and Iran phobia provide an excuse of similar kind. Therefore, in the face of this psychological war, we will have to be

more vigilant than in the past because the face of region is changing. If we can develop a common understanding amongst the states including; Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia and Turkey - the countries dominating the regional scenario - the region can be stabilized. The flashpoint is Afghanistan that we all need to stabilize. Yet, Afghanistan cannot be stabilized without Pakistan in the reconciliation process.

Pakistan and Iran have all the ingredients in place for an excellent relationship, but question is that why we don't have it. The answer relates to inconsistent policies on both sides. For example, Iran used to be passionate about Kashmir but then it cooled down on this issue gradually. Moreover, we should not shy away from discussing thorny issues like Afghanistan, Chahbahar etc. Changing perception in Iran and Pakistan about one another should include people to people contact; these should start with common people to people interaction covering academia, students, universities, film makers, and artists, etc. and not to remain limited to the parliamentarians and the top leadership of both the countries only. Additionally, there should be efforts to increase the number of Pakistani cultural centers in Iran and vice versa. In a nutshell, for a better and improved relationship, consistency of policy and strong will are what is required on both sides. Consensus was also developed to increase people to people contact through formal policy guidelines initiated by both the Governments.

## Wrap – Up Remarks by DG ISSRA

Director General ISSRA wrapped up the session by commending participation of the Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan H.E. Mr. Mehdi Honardoost, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and all the distinguished contributors for a fruitful discussion session on Pak- Iran relations. Profound gratitude to the Embassy of Iran was conveyed for their collaborating efforts with ISSRA, NDU. The DG opined that Pakistan and Iran are inevitable partners as they share geographic as well as cultural commonalities and both countries should increase cooperation in all fields of life. Efforts should be made to bridge up gaps present between the governments and people of both the countries and shun any notions of mistrust and suspicion regarding each other. Both countries being regional neighbors should focus on the commonalities of interests and ways and means to enhance level of cooperation. However, keeping in view the geo-economic interplay, both the countries should have realistic expectations from each other. The neighboring countries' policy towards each other should not be India centric, rather, it should be based upon convergence of mutual interests and shared commonalities. National interests of our natural neighbors must be respected in the path of cooperation and bilateral relations. The transformation of Global Order posed certain restrictions on both the countries, before this transformation sometimes between 1979 to 1988, Pakistan and Iran had brotherly relations, however, there were challenges and difficulties afterwards. Now in yet another changing World Order where the US is seen as a



waning power and China as waxing power, uni-polarity is converting into multi polarity. The world is moving towards the Integration of Civilizations as opposed to the Clash of Civilizations against the backdrop of Chinese aspirations. It is worth praising as to know how Iran has guarded its national interest, integrity and resolve to stand against a super power as a nation exhibiting the attributes of nationhood, determination and resilience. This example of Iran has shown the world a lesson that any nation with such attributes can stand against all odds without losing its ground.

The Pak-Iran Round Table platform helped all the participants in a comprehensive manner to clear the doubts and widen their horizon about the dynamics of the relations between the two countries. The fruitful discourse addressed the impediments that stand in the way of economic, social and security domains for people of both countries, hence providing a window of opportunity to engage and enhance the mutual cooperation and finding solutions to the shared problems as regional partners.



The background is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features a dense field of soft, out-of-focus bokeh circles in shades of yellow, green, and white. Overlaid on this are various geometric patterns, including vertical and horizontal lines, grids, and semi-transparent rectangular blocks in white and light green. The overall effect is a complex, layered visual texture.

# ANNEX A

## Schedule Roundtable on 'Pak –Iran Relations'

Time (Hrs)	Activity
0945-1000hrs	Arrival & Reception of Guests
1000-1005 hrs 1005-1020 hrs	<b><u>Opening</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Recitation</li><li>· Welcome Remarks by DG ISSRA</li><li>· Introductory Remarks by HE Iranian Ambassador H.E. Mehdi Hoonardoost</li></ul>
1020- 1035 hrs	Presentation by the Iranian Delegate Pak-Iran Relations – Iranian Perspective
1035- 1050hrs	Presentation by the Pakistani Side Pak-Iran Relations – Pakistani Perspective
1050- 1105hrs	Stretch Break
1105-1245 hrs	Interactive Discussion
1245-1300 hrs	Wrap up remarks DG ISSRA
1300-1305 hrs	Group Photo
1305 hrs	Lunch



# ANNEX B

## List of Participants “Roundtable Pak – Iran Relations” (31 Jan 2018)

S #	PARTICIPANTS	Designation	Contact/Address
1.	H.E. Mr. Mehdi Honardoost	Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan	Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Plot No 222-238, St No 2. Sector G-5/1Islamabad 051-8318901-3
2.	M.M.Zamani	Research Counselor	Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Plot No 222-238, St No 2. Sector G-5/1 Islamabad 03008551093051 8318901 - 3zanaburab@yahoo.com
3.	Brigadier Mohsin Riazat	Military Attache Iranian Embassy	Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Plot No 222-238, St No 2. Sector G-5/1Islamabad 051-8318901-3
4.	Mr. Junaid Sadiq	Director (Iran & Turkey)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs 3rd Floor, S.Y.K Block, Constitutional Avenue, Islamabad, 051-9207764
5.	Mr. Fahad-u-Rehman	Asst Dir MoFA (Iran – Turkey)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs 3rd Floor, S.Y.K Block, Constitutional Avenue, Islamabad, 0333-3309457
6.	Maj Gen Ghulam Qamar HI(M) (Retd)	Former DG ISSRA	0304-8888888
7.	Dr. Ashfaq Hassan Khan	Renowned Economist	Dean School of Social Science and Humanities, NUST H-12 Sector, Islamabad Tel : +92-51-90853500
8.	Dr. Nazir Hussain	Academician	Associate Prof, IR Department QAU, Islamabad Phone: 05190642262- 0300-5178697
9.	Brig Dr. Waseem Ishaque (Retd)	Academician	Assistant Professor IR NDU 0320-8557279
10.	Amb Arif Kamal (Retd)	Former Ambassador	House 5 Naddi Kinaray Street Bani Gala East, Islamabad 03013163666
11.	Dr. Mavra Inayat	Academician	Professor International Relations Quaid-i-Azam University, 0300-9162666
12.	Dr. Arshi Saleem	Academician	
13.	Dr. Asma Khawaja	Academician	Prof. IR NDU 03335160251

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features a warm color palette of yellows, oranges, and greens. Overlaid on this are various geometric and organic patterns: a grid of thin black lines, a pattern of vertical and horizontal white bars, and a series of overlapping, semi-transparent circles in white and light yellow, creating a bokeh effect. The overall aesthetic is modern and dynamic.

# PICTURE GALLERY























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