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Book Launch Webinar:

AID, POLITICS, AND THE WAR OF
Narratives in the US-Pakistan Relations

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AID, POLITICS AND THE WAR
OF NARRATIVES IN THE
US-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

A CASE STUDY OF KERRY LUGAR BERMAN ACT

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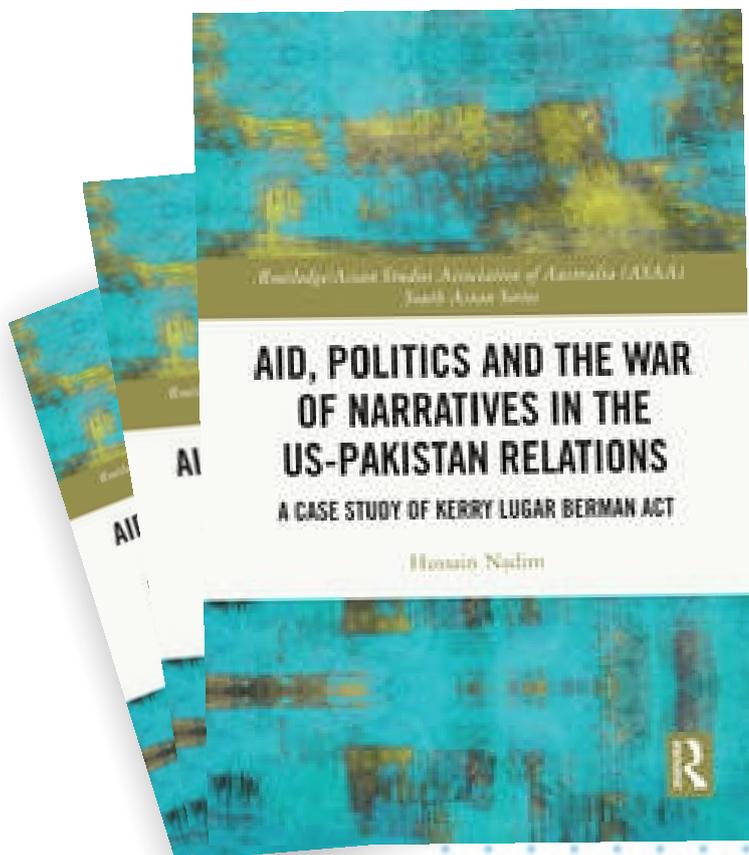
Dr. Hussain Nadim is the Former Executive Director of Communications & Reforms at the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI). The author discussed his book, "Aid, Politics, And The War of Narratives in the US-Pakistan Relations" in the webinar by posing a few questions. How much has actually aid been communicated? Aid is not as benign as we think, and you will find it most fascinating how a very small amount has been given, which I've proved in my research. There are four layers of this book which I think is fascinating because I have realized that so much of our politics is linked with what is happening around the world and their priorities. Despite that benign idea of security and development, underneath what was happening was the securitization and even militarization in the case of Pakistan. When you are taking money from abroad, one of the most important things that happened in Pakistan was that the donors had the leverage to define the priorities of the country. For them, the English-speaking world and the donor-led agenda allow them to be part of the global conversation, which is the new norm if you want to pitch yourself as a global expert. The winner was always the security and the military establishment rather than the development establishment.

Pakistan has received 33.4 billion dollars in U.S. assistance since 2001. That is not the aid, and it is the CSF, the coalition support fund, which is Pakistan's own money that has been reimbursed. Twenty-five percent to 30 percent of this supposedly 19 billion dollars that Pakistan has received has gone into administrative costs. Since 2013 we have not received a penny for the Kerry Lugar permit because U.S. priorities had already changed. The mismanagement of the program never really actually materialized on the ground because you were not able to even provide the level of funding you promised, so the promise was we would provide you with 1.5 billion. The local capacity of the U.S. Aid was only to spend about 250 million dollars. In 2011, the aid was about to spend one billion plus dollars. Since 2013 we have not received a single penny into the Kerry Lugar Berman bill because our priorities in the U.S. have already changed. Pakistan is going through the worst crisis in Pakistan at the moment with floods.

Dr. Hussain Nadeem has written in much detail about how the ruling elite in this country has essentially used Pakistan's vulnerabilities, whether it is terrorism or poverty. It is not all about the donors. What it does serve is the interests of the local elites that are trying to get legitimacy in the political domain. The world is pitching itself, and Pakistan is in a very negative light from a vulnerability angle anxiety-inducing angle. U.S. foreign assistance to Pakistan in 20 years is that Pakistan has received 33 billion dollars which cut down to about 19 billion. It has been again reduced to five billion dollars a year. This is not by accident, this is by design, and it is by a sheer U.S. agenda that you have kept these vulnerabilities as vulnerabilities because these vulnerabilities allow you a stake in the global competition and conversation.

Pakistan's political elites use the vulnerabilities of the country to create a bubble that is more connected to the bubble abroad than to the local reality over here. Pakistan provided the most upwards of a trillion dollar services we provided to the Americas, and we got the worst market, says Mr. Rehman. In a single year, the USA spent 48 million dollars on a project on decentralization and evolution in Pakistan. There is a lot of money that flows around in the development circle. Ten cents are the figure that we put in Pakistan, and again the way that 10 cents go is also very interesting because much of it is going into consultancy pieces as well.

Inspector general: Most of the contractors are the same thing. You create one very nice-overly project, and then you start selling it wherever the U.S. aid is going the same project everywhere without any context to the local situation. He adds: There is no one specific thing happening. It's kind of like a state of quantum where a lot of things are happening to serve the interest of multiple stakeholders. Within the empire, there were also east Indian companies. Sometimes the east company becomes larger than the empire in the periphery countries. You create a great PowerPoint, and then you just change the word Vietnam to Pakistan to India to use, but they serve as PR firms instead of consulting firms in most cases. So again, with the contractors is the same thing you create one very nice lovely project, and then you start selling it. Wherever the US Aid is going, the same project is everywhere without any context to the local situation. It's what we would call chronic capitalism here, and they call us corrupt, and we accept the corruption, you know, accusation, but they are not corrupt. They can never be corrupt, and their rules give them, as you said, one size fits all.

Much of the aid is packed with the security interests of our local and foreign elite. The problem is our inability to talk about anything except security and geo strategy in Pakistan. The public intellectually is more white than the donors; they don't even want to consort with the Pakistani intellectuals.

China has never been used to this foreign aid development. It has been only 10-15 years, and they're going around the world. In the last seven years, they have been learning to be seen as an empire. Chinese are very good with dealing because they don't want to get into the nitrates of the political space of Pakistan. Pakistan has a unique methodology; altogether, it's a very micro-managed structured system. The problem is Chinese go with the plan. In the real world, the plans usually don't work out, but in China, it works. In countries like Pakistan, there is one suicide bomb blast, and the entire plan is toppled over, which raises frustration among the Chinese.

Pakistan is a country that is the next supplier of brains to the world. You are going to leave the country here, so quite frankly, we are a talent-repellent country. The U.S. or whatever these agencies don't send their best people here; in fact, they're less than average people who come in for technical assistance. Our best people go overseas, so if you think of talent trade, we lose out in a big way. Of course, we lose on the talent side. Pakistan is a country of two parallel worlds. The moment you step into the digital world, you're no more from Pakistan. The future of the world is becoming many universes, the metauniverse, and soon there will be a universe of Twitter, then an amazon universe, and the google universe, and all of them require different talent sets. So you will be recognized really by what universe you belong to instead of your nationality. The more your associate with what type of universe, the more you will be successful. For example, if you learn python coding, you go into google. If you've learned to program, you may be going to Twitter.

Pakistan's future in the workforce in the labor market is that we need to move from analogue global to the digital world, says Hussain. Foreign aid and donor projects, including talent and capacity building projects, shift the ownership and owners of the burden from the people that are supposed to do it to consultants that are there for short-term only consultants.