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### PRESS RELEASE

#### One-Day Workshop: Potential of Pakistan's Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

‘2017 should be the Year of Decisions for Pakistan’, said Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed, while speaking at a one-day workshop on ‘Potential of Pakistan’s Soft Power and Public Diplomacy’ organized by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute here in Islamabad today. Discussing his recent trip to Washington, as Special Envoy of the Prime Minister on Jammu & Kashmir, Senator Hussain highlighted how the trip included extensive meetings with think tanks, officials of the US State Department and exclusive media interactions with both American and Indian media as well as the Kashmiri and Pakistani diaspora. ‘The national narrative and sentiment was presented with facts, logic and wisdom’, he remarked. He highlighted that this is the first time in the Kashmiri struggle when the extra judicial killing of young Kashmiri leader Burhan Wani has led to a popular, indigenous, spontaneous and widespread freedom movement in IJK. In his eloquent address, he pointed out what Pakistan needed more than anything else was rapid response ideas and issues crafted on the basis of facts, logic and wisdom in order to revamp its global image. Quoting from Jinnah’s famous Life magazine interview, he said that the Quaid knew decades ago that Pakistan would be the pivot around which world politics would revolve. And now that is indeed the reality. 2017 is Pakistan’s window of opportunity, this is the time when the UN has finally agreed to a fact finding mission to Kashmir and even the OIC has acknowledged the issue’s critical nature; this is a time when the Indian Prime Minister Modi has overplayed his hand and it has backfired on his home turf viz a viz the BRICS meeting. ‘Pakistan has a strong case, we have just had bad lawyers. The strength of soft power emerges from a country’s civil society and its people, not the government,’ he said. ‘The Pakistani nation needs to let go of its defeatist mentality. Almost all battles we face in life are won or lost in our minds’, he said.



Ambassador (R) Sohail Amin, President IPRI, in his welcome address said that different countries use soft and hard power in different ways and the best results are obtained when both are aligned and supplement each other through smart power. Pakistan needs to develop a sound

policy to advance its soft picture through media, tourism, literature, art and painting, information technology, music, theater and effective public diplomacy, he recommended.

In his opening presentation, Tahir Mehmood, Editor Hilal Magazine remarked that the problem in and with Pakistan is that the percentage of self-defeating domestic narratives is alarming. The reason behind such narratives is often based on the various global indices in which Pakistan continues to do poorly. From the UN Human Development Index to its governance indicators and Ease of Doing Business variables and Satisfaction with Life Index, Pakistan needs to go a long way. 'Pakistan does not need to sell a glamorous image like India does, what we are is a resilient nation, one which has had successful operations against terrorism and terrorists unlike NATO and the U.S.; a nation whose army is both professional and peaceful with a long list of sacrifices and roles as UN peace keepers.' In today's complex world and the period of history we live in, Pakistan needs to be cognizant of the world around, in the time we live in, and then structure the means to enhance our influence to ensure both our survival and progress, he said. In his view, Pakistan needs a well-calibrated soft power diplomacy strategy. 'Use of soft power should be a policy tool then mere projection of a soft image', he stressed.

There is no smoke without fire and so we cannot deny that Pakistan has problems, but then so do other countries, including India with its shocking rape and poverty statistics; and even the United States. But principally and fundamentally the narrative on and about Pakistan from its very creation has been crafted by the



Indian intelligentsia, in its foreign policies, its movies, books and lobbies. Modi has only sharpened the axe, the plot has belonged to the Indian administration for decades. And now post 9/11, the US has joined this bandwagon, according to Dr. Moeed Pirzada, political analyst, TV anchor and columnist. What needs to be understood is that this is done for one reason alone: Both India and the US need unfettered access to the Central Asian states without bargaining. And all the negative publicity about our country comes from this economic imperative. Pakistan's often tenuous civil-military relations have not helped matters. Pakistan's Foreign Office has also become a stagnated and failing institution with weak leadership, he argued. The FO's focus should be on an audience that may be receptive to our message, like Africa and the Middle East rather than the US and UK. At least those posted in these regions should know and understand Arabic language in order to network and interact, he remarked. From the Ministry of Information only meant for domestic consumption and equally weak trade and tourism ministries, greater vision is needed to turn things around. The government should sponsor thematic documentaries and movies on Sufism; the Swat operation; defeat of the TTP; the reforms package in Balochistan; and even produce authentic works on the East Pakistan history, he suggested.

Former Ambassador Ali Sarwar Naqvi, Chairman, Centre for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Islamabad, while discussing ways and means of investing in public diplomacy

said that lobbyists don't really deliver unless they are familiar and also sympathetic to a country's situation. All global powers including U.S. should not be taken as friends. World powers shape narratives according to their interests which can be both ruthless and generous at various times. 'One needs to tread carefully under an elephant's feet to avoid being crushed,' he said. Agreeing that the Foreign Office has gradually weakened, he pointed out that it was because the more educated young people are no longer opting for public service and preferred other professions. Language training of diplomats should be given priority. Exploring and exporting the diversity of our culture is the means of investing in public diplomacy while lack of intellect and innovation in employing smart power remains a challenge, he concluded.

According to Ambassador (R) Fouzia Nasreen, there is a need to put aside more financial and human resources to complement Pakistan's positive efforts. Credibility of the national narrative and training of young diplomats along modern lines is also critical, she said.

'Not only is Pakistan a misunderstood nation, we are seen as exporters of threats. Our nuclear assets are our pride but the world sees them as a threat', according to Dr Muhammad Mujeeb Afzal 'What is missing is the jargon of modernity from our diplomatic and national narratives.' Despite being 'victims' of political entanglements, we have risen above and our Army's role in Zarb-e-Azb is a testament to this, he declared.

One of the discussants also pointed out that Pakistan's media moguls only highlight the bleak and broken aspects of the country to boost channel ratings, while in fact they should emulate channels like PTV World, which is often boxed as a pro-government channel, but is at least showcasing documentaries and talk shows on the positive aspects of Pakistan's rich and unique culture, traditions, history and wondrous people. Another discussant from NUML was of the view that soft power cannot do anything without hard dollars.

As a country and as a nation, at this critical phase in our history, we cannot just leave ourselves to the vagaries of time or at the mercy of a few countries who are creating an image of Pakistan which is unlike the ground realities through money and force. Pakistanis should not be naïve that everything will be all right, magically or providentially. We are now on a crucial trial of our history to determine how we restore the Quaid's legacy in Pakistan. Not by force or violence, but through the vision of our founding fathers, the panelists stressed.

