

Forum agrees to iron out differences between US and Islamic World

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The fifth US-Islamic World Forum concluded here yesterday on a positive note with the delegates expressing their determination to take the dialogue to wider areas and try to narrow down differences.

"There was a general feeling that ignorance and paranoia are keeping the two sides divided. Mutual respect has emerged as the key word for fostering better relations and understanding," said Carlos Pascual, Vice-President and Director of Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings, the US, while giving the concluding remarks at the conference yesterday.

Use of words was one the major issues raised in the discussions.

"There was an agreement among the participants not to use terms like Islamic terrorism. Terrorism is unIslamic and Muslims are among the victims of terrorism," said Pascual.

He said it was proposed to use "violent extremism" while referring to terrorism.

Most participants expressed concern over the growing military budget in the US and called for a shift in focus. They felt the need to develop partnerships instead of unilateralism, and end conflicts that widen the chasm between the US and the Islamic world.

The delegates urged to pursue the two-state formula to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue and called for a viable political solution to the Iraqi crisis.

Democracy was another hotly debated issue in the conference. The discussions focused on the forms of democracy, ownership of democracy, dialectics between faith and state and tolerance and choice. The need to provide more space for non-state organizations in the Islamic world was underlined, said Pascual.

The alleged human rights violations in Guantanamo Bay raised concern among the delegates, with many of them calling for closing down this detention camp.

A participant expressed hope that opening of the Brookings Institution Doha Center would promote research focusing on the region, with participation of regional counterparts.

Another delegate proposed to identify the differences in perceptions among the two sides as well as the areas of common interest, which he felt would help in future discussions.

There was also a proposal to involve more policy makers as well as members of the American business community in the future forums.

Pascual said the purpose of the Forum was to provide a link between politicians, intellectuals and policy makers in the US and the Islamic world to foster better understanding.