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“Pakistan should not seek a strategic relationship with the US. Instead, we should aspire for a Working Relationship, which is cordial and dynamic, and does not curtail our sovereignty and national interest.”

- Ambassador (R) Riaz Khokhar

These were the views of former Ambassador Riaz Khokhar at the Guest Lecture organised by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute here in Islamabad, today. Ambassador Khokhar has been Pakistan’s envoy to Dhaka, New Delhi, Washington, D.C. and Beijing before becoming Foreign Secretary in 2002. The lecture on ***‘Improving Pakistan-US Relations: Ways and Means’*** explored Pakistan’s relationship with the US, in light of the former’s ties with China and the latter’s with India. He also discussed Prime Minister Imran Khan’s meeting with US President Donald Trump and the situation in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK).

Ambassador Khokhar opined that Pakistan and the US have been allies and we have shed blood for collective cause and interests. Therefore, neither side can easily brush this relationship aside in spite of President Trump’s choice of hard words at times and vacillating approach towards Pakistan. ‘My take is that we should not be emotional about our relationship with the US, one has to take a cold-blooded attitude in interstate relations. What we need is ***“a Working Relationship.”***’ The US was a superpower and the only way forward is to have sustained

diplomatic dialogue, and to collaborate in areas where there is convergence such as trade, energy, transport, technology and especially, education, he recommended.

He shared that Pakistan's relationship with the US cannot be analysed in isolation since



the international order is in flux, with China rising phenomenally, Russia re-asserting itself, and the Middle East in extreme turmoil. 'Every US security document over the past few years identifies China as a major threat for the US, followed by Russia, North Korea and Iran. Pakistan has historic relations with China that go as far back as the 1950s. This is a solid, iron-clad strategic relationship which neither side should allow anyone to undermine,' he stressed.

On the issue of Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to the US, Ambassador Khokhar strongly held the view that while both leaders 'clicked' and had chemistry, the US' main interest remains Afghanistan since there was realisation in Washington that there is no military solution to the Afghan tangle. It has to be an Afghan solution, and how far Pakistan could go towards helping them in resolving it. He said that 'while the Taliban are now on the negotiating table, Pakistan does not have overwhelming influence over them nor over the ethnic mosaic of Afghan tribes. It would not be in Pakistan's interest to give



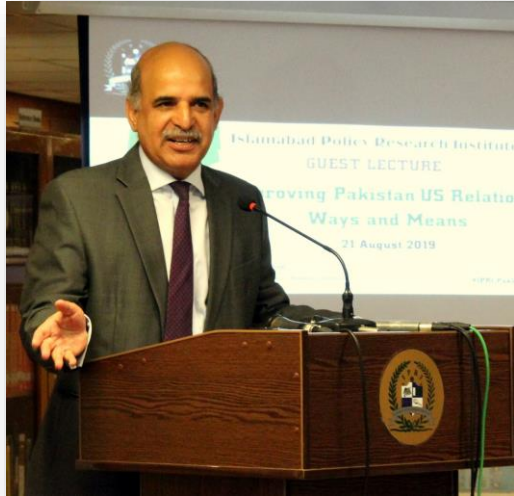
any guarantees or get involved in the actual terms and conditions of a settlement agreement. Pakistan is not seeking an Islamabad-made solution to the Afghan problem.'

Ambassador Khokhar pointed out that India was also an important actor influencing Pak-US dynamics. The US expects India to be a partner in the containment of China. In this regard, Pakistan's overall endorsement of the Belt and Road Initiative may also be problematic for Washington. Western countries have a soft corner for Delhi. That is why India is painted as a responsible nuclear power, he said.

Discussing the rising tensions in Indian Occupied Kashmir, the Ambassador remarked that mild US statements on Indian atrocities were indicative of where their sympathies lie. 'War is neither an option for India nor for Pakistan, both have nuclear capabilities. Pakistan would like to live in peace and harmony with India. We should engage with India but not beg for a dialogue.'

A dialogue has to be in the interest of both countries. As far as Kashmir is concerned India has never agreed to third-party mediation, and I doubt they ever will,' he observed.

Earlier, welcoming the eminent speaker, diplomats, senior academics, students and media channels, President of IPRI Ambassador (Retd.) Khan Hasham bin Saddique provided a brief historical overview of Pak-US relations and said that despite multiple centres of power emerging around the globe, the US remains a preeminent power given its economic, technological and military muscle. 'Unfortunately, our relationship with the US has historically suffered due to



lack of trust on both sides and one word which best describes this relationship is *transactional*,' he opined. Vice Admiral Saddique remarked that 'our relationship with Washington is also hyphenated with India with whom the US has developed strategic relations, primarily as part of its China Containment Policy.' He highlighted the consultative role being played by Pakistan to facilitate the US in bringing a peaceful solution in Afghanistan. He hoped that the in-depth and open discussion on the subject would focus attention on furthering cooperation in areas of trade, development and education. 'Both sides recognise that despite some policy divergences and challenges to their bilateral ties, they need

each other. Working together will accrue mutual benefits, whereas, antagonism will serve neither party. Both share the common desire of a peaceful region free of terrorism and extremism,' he concluded. An interactive Question-Answer session followed the talk. ■

