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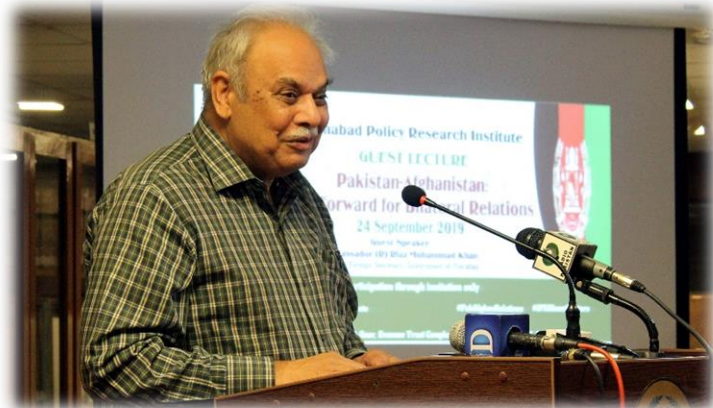
PRESS RELEASE

IPRI GUEST LECTURE

24 September 2019

***PAKISTAN SHOULD NOT TRY TO PLAY SPONSORS OR CUSTODIANS
OF THE TALIBAN.
FOR ANY PEACE SETTLEMENT TO FIND TRACTION IN AFGHANISTAN, IT
MUST EMERGE FROM THE AFGHANS THEMSELVES.***

For Pakistan, it is better and safer to interact with Afghanistan on the basis of established state-to-state norms because this is a relationship from which we cannot insulate ourselves nor simply push aside. There are few examples in the world where 50,000 people cross a border, unrecognized by one side, on a daily basis without any papers. This, in itself, and the people-to-people interactions make Pak-Afghan relations very close and intimate. “However, there is also the relationship between Islamabad and



Kabul; and here we need to be cautious not to make policy statements or give **directions on Kabul’s behalf**. Pakistan should not treat Afghanistan as its fifth province or liability. Let them work out their issues on their own. How the Afghans run their country, or want to, is their business. Not ours.”

These were the views of **Ambassador (R) Riaz Mohammad Khan, Former Foreign Secretary,**

Government of Pakistan at the Guest Lecture on ***Pakistan-Afghanistan: Way Forward for Bilateral Relations*** organized by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute here in Islamabad today.

Ambassador Khan providing his insights from the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to signing of the Geneva Accord said that Soviet withdrawal did not prevent continuation of the conflict; the same is feared if the Americans leave Kabul precipitously. “The current peace deal was tenuous to begin with since it was pushed by President Trump due to his re-election bid and past campaign promises. It had limited support from defence and diplomatic heavyweights in Washington because

negotiations without a ceasefire or reduction in conflict gave Taliban the upper hand. Withdrawal without a plan of action to ensure that there is no civil war and the gains on the ground are not lost is unwise,” he said. Pakistan should also have a policy of having no favorites in terms of future Afghan governance even to contain the mischief of India who will have to go through Kabul and Washington, not the Taliban. “We will not target the Taliban or their families; and be candid and upfront on this approach with Washington and Kabul,” he advised.

He was of the view that the Afghan conflict is complex and Afghanistan is riven with deep schisms of a political, ethnic, sectarian and ideological character. The hope that this 40-year old conflict has run its course depends on two trajectories: reduction in violence and some form of intra-Afghan dialogue for a political settlement. “Reduction of violence will depend on a formal or informal ceasefire which is inextricably linked to the question of a timeline for withdrawal and the compulsions of the current US President” he stressed.

The Ambassador observed that the leadership in Kabul needs to understand the miseries of their own people and think beyond the acrimonious past and work towards a coalition plan for peace in their country. “The Taliban also need to be cognizant that while return to talks seems unlikely, especially



before the Afghan elections, they would have to give more than they had conceded before, they would have reduce violence, if not complete ceasefire. They will have to scale down their positions,” he remarked.

On the role of Pakistan, he observed that the focus should be on looking at positive results rather than kudos for helping

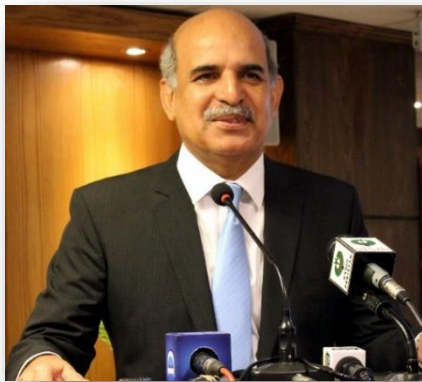
the process. Ambassador Khan lamented that “Pakistan’s four decades of involvement with the Afghan conflict has led to monumental losses. We missed out on opportunities offered by globalisation, ascendance of geo-economics and the opening up of Central Asia. Our aspirations for becoming a hub of economic activities for surrounding regions remained just a dream. Instead, we have been sucked into the vortex of extremist and religious violence and obscurantism ravaging the region especially the greater Middle East. Now we have pinned hopes on CPEC, but for realising the potential of that great enterprise, we need to rethink Afghanistan.”

Ambassador Riaz Mohammad Khan further discussed that stability of both countries go hand-in-hand, and the way forward is through mutual understanding and good working relations. The concept of improved regional connectivity, prospects of Belt and Road initiative, especially CPEC, will only materialize if there is an end to the political turmoil and war in Afghanistan. “The interests of both

nations overlap, peace in Afghanistan, guarantees prosperity in Pakistan, vice versa.”

On India’s presence in Kabul, he held that India has its own nefarious agenda for the region which has nothing to do with establishing lasting peace. Ambassador Khan concluded that future of Afghan peace now largely depends on US policy under President Trump and the Afghan elections. Both are likely to determine the nature of Pak-Afghan relations as well. “However, at the same time, Islamabad must ask for an end to Afghan-based subversion against Pakistan. Besides reconciliation, other issues including management of the border, the fence, Afghan transit trade facilities also need to be worked out with Afghan counterparts. This is time for active diplomacy. Our friends can help. But success will rest on the clarity of our position,” he urged.

Earlier, **President IPRI Ambassador Vice Admiral (R) Khan Hasham bin Saddique**, welcomed the esteemed speaker, diplomats, academicians and journalists in his inaugural address. He said that the situation in Afghanistan had become a sordid affair – evolving from infamous strategic depth to the current strategic mess, the pipelines of TAPI remain a pipe dream. “Despite hosting more than 2 million Afghan refugees for decades, the animosity that stems from Afghanistan is palpable. Peace in South



Asia can only be realized through peace in Afghanistan. To meet such ends, Pakistan has been making strides to play its role in achieving peace in the neighborhood,” he remarked. He further said that the recent stalled US-Taliban negotiations were actively facilitated by Pakistan. India, on the other hand, with its USD 3 billion investment, has had cold feet about the peace process since it does not want a peaceful Western front for Pakistan.” US President Donald Trump’s overtures during Prime Minister Imran Khan’s visit were reflective of Pakistan’s efforts and role in establishing peace in Afghanistan. “Regional countries want trade connectivity with Afghanistan and beyond. Trade, of course,

can only thrive if peace and stability is achieved. For Pakistan, it is important that we synchronize our bilateral narrative with Afghanistan keeping in mind the engagement of regional players”, he concluded.

An interactive Question Answer session followed the talk.

