**Trump looking forward to meet Imran Khan**

*\* US president says he wants to have better relations with Pakistan, but in the same breath accuses it of 'housing the enemy'
\* Washington stopped $1.3bn funds because Islamabad has 'not been fair' to it*

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**WASHINGTON:** The Pakistan-US bilateral ties may soon see some improvement as the two countries have reportedly started discussing a proposal to arrange a meeting between Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Donald Trump.

The proposal for the Khan-Trump meeting came up after a major shift in the US president’s approach towards Pakistan early on Thursday morning. In a statement, Trump said he wants a ‘great relationship’ with Pakistan and is looking forward to meeting the country’s new leadership.

The US President underscored that his administration has initiated peace talks with the Taliban. He also announced that a meeting with the new leadership of Pakistan will take place “very soon”.

These remarks came in contrast to to Trump’s stance exactly a year ago, when he had said the United States ‘foolishly gave Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years’ and that Islamabad had ‘given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools’.

A month ago, Trump had written a letter to Prime Minister Imran Khan, seeking Pakistan’s help in the Afghan peace talks and support in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table to end the 17-year brutal war in the neighbouring country.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had met Prime Minister Khan in Islamabad in September last year and pressed him to take “sustained and decisive measures “against the militant groups threatening the regional peace and stability.

Earlier, South Carolina Senator Lindsay Graham, who is considered close to President Trump, told CNN in an interview that if Pakistan helped the US in bringing the Taliban to the table for negotiations, then the US would focus on counterterrorism and the IS.

While during a press conference at the White House, Trump blasted the United States’s extended involvement in Afghanistan, where it has waged its longest war against the militant group. He said that Washington was currently in talks with various actors, including the Taliban, in search of peace, but then called on regional powers to step up.

“India is there, Russia is there, Russia used to be the Soviet Union, Afghanistan made it Russia, because they went bankrupt fighting in Afghanistan,” Trump said in response to questions over whether he planned to scale down US military presence in the war-torn country.

Responding to Trump’s statement, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry underscored the importance of better ties between the two countries for regional stability. “Peace in Pakistan is linked to Afghanistan,” Chaudhry said in a tweet posted on Thursday. “The role of United States is extremely important for stability in Afghanistan.”

In his press briefing, the Foreign Office spokesperson also welcomed Trump’s statement, saying Pakistan is looking forward to positive engagement with the United States.

FO spokesperson Dr Muhammad Faisal said the regional and global situation is changing and President Donald Trump’s latest remarks are a welcome departure from his January 1, 2018, tweet.

In view of the US announcement of troops withdrawal from Afghanistan, the spokesman said that Pakistan shares a long border with Afghanistan and seeks peace and stability in the country.

“Currently, efforts are underway towards a political settlement in Afghanistan, hence, the withdrawal of US troops should be part of a peace process with a view to ensure that there is no power vacuum in the country,” he remarked.

He said It is Pakistan’s genuine desire that peace returns to Afghanistan so that the return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan could be started and an era of prosperity and normalcy could be realised in the region.

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