

U.S. TO CANCEL \$300 MN AID TO PAK.

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India's interests

Souring of ties: Pakistani demonstrators in Lahore protesting against the U.S. proposal to cut aid in January. AFPARIF ALI

The U.S. military plans to cancel \$300 million in aid to Pakistan due to Islamabad's lack of "decisive actions" in support of American strategy in the region, the Pentagon said on Saturday. The U.S. has been pushing Pakistan to crack down on militant safe havens in the country, and announced a freeze on aid at the beginning of the year that an official said could be worth almost \$2 billion.

The Defense Department has sought to cut aid by \$300 million "due to a lack of Pakistani decisive actions in support of the South Asia Strategy", Lieutenant Colonel Kone Faulkner said. "We continue to press Pakistan to indiscriminately target all terrorist groups," Mr. Faulkner said, adding that the latest aid cut request was pending Congressional approval.

Pakistan has fought fierce campaigns against home-grown militant groups, and says it has lost thousands of lives and spent billions of dollars in its long war on extremism. But U.S. officials accuse Islamabad of ignoring or even collaborating with groups, which attack Afghanistan from safe havens along the border between the two countries.

Role in Afghanistan

The White House believes that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency and other military bodies have long helped fund and arm the Taliban for ideological reasons, but also to counter rising Indian influence in Afghanistan. It also believes that a Pakistani crackdown could be pivotal in deciding the outcome of the long-running war in Afghanistan.

U.S. frustration has boiled over before: President Donald Trump's predecessor Barack Obama authorised drone strikes on Pakistani safe havens.

But Mr. Trump's aggressive language has especially angered Pakistani officials.

"The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools," Mr. Trump wrote on Twitter earlier in 2018. "They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!"

Pakistani leaders disputed the \$33 billion figure, insisting that around half of the money relates to reimbursements, and the Prime Minister's office accused Mr. Trump of ignoring the great sacrifices the country has made to fight extremism.

In March, a senior U.S. official said that Pakistan has "done the bare minimum to appear responsive to our requests", and concerns over a lack of action by Islamabad against militant groups still persist.

Pakistan's new Prime Minister Imran Khan has repeatedly blamed Islamabad's participation in the U.S.-led anti-terror campaign for the surge in terrorism on home soil over the last decade and has vowed to rebalance Islamabad's relationship with Washington.

Mr. Khan has also shown a willingness to hold talks with militant groups and sought support from religious hardliners in the run-up to elections last July.

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