

THE US MUST STAY THE COURSE ON THE TERROR ISSUE

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

Ahead of secretary of state Mike Pompeo's visit to Islamabad on September 5 with the American military chief, the US has signalled it is serious about its demand that Pakistan crack down on terrorists operating from its soil and choke their funding. This has come in the form of a move to cancel the payment of \$300 million as reimbursement from the US Coalition Support Fund for Pakistan's expenses on the war on terror, mainly in support of operations by foreign forces in Afghanistan.

This is in addition to the cancellation of another payment of \$500 million from the Coalition Support Fund earlier this year and the suspension of security aid worth nearly \$2 billion in January on the orders of President Donald Trump. Mr Trump had famously accused Pakistan of providing only "lies and deceit" for \$33 billion in aid over nearly two decades, and recent remarks by top US officials indicate the thinking of the Trump administration hasn't changed. Defence secretary, Jim Mattis, said last week the "primary part" of discussions between Mr Pompeo and the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, General Joseph Dunford, and their Pakistani counterparts will be the need to act against terrorists. Furthermore, the US seems in no mood to relent, despite Pakistan's assertion it is playing a key role to end the fighting in Afghanistan. This is largely because of the large amount of information in the public domain about the continuing activities of groups such as the Haqqani Network and the Afghan Taliban, whose leadership is based in Pakistan. For India, Pakistan-based groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed continue to be a concern, with videos recently shared on social media showing JeM operatives openly raising funds during Eid-ul-Azha despite Pakistan being placed on the "grey list" of the Financial Action Task Force for failing to curb terror financing.

Pakistan's leadership is expected to argue in meetings with US officials that it can still play a central role in ending the war in Pakistan, but this can only happen if it stops backing and providing safe havens to top commanders of the Taliban and Haqqani Network. Except for a token reference to the 2015 National Action Plan for terrorism, Pakistan's new Prime Minister Imran Khan has given no hint of what he plans to do to counter terror. The US must stay the course so that Pakistan's support for the Taliban doesn't allow the militants to strengthen their position in Afghanistan.

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