

Pakistan says Obama pressure on militants hurts Afghanistan
Reuters
October 07, 2011

ISLAMABAD, Oct 7 — US President Barack Obama's warning to Islamabad over suspected ties to militants will hurt efforts to stabilise Afghanistan and fuel anti-Americanism, the chairman of Pakistan's Senate Foreign Affairs Committee said today.

Pakistan is seen as critical to bringing peace to neighbouring Afghanistan, but the United States has failed to persuade it to go after militant groups it says cross the border to attack Western forces in Afghanistan.

"This is not helping either the United States, Afghanistan or Pakistan," Salim Saifullah told Reuters. "There will be pressure on the (Pakistan) government to get out of this war," he said, referring to the US war on militancy.

Obama warned Pakistan yesterday that its ties with "unsavory characters" had put relations with the United States at risk, as he ratcheted up pressure on Islamabad to cut links with militants mounting attacks in Afghanistan.

He accused Pakistan's leaders of "hedging their bets" on Afghanistan's future, but stopped short of threatening to cut off US aid, despite calls from lawmakers for a tougher line over accusations that Pakistani intelligence supported strikes on US targets in Afghanistan.

Pakistan joined America's "war on terror" after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. But its performance against militants is a frequent source of tension between Washington and Islamabad.

Ties were heavily strained after US special forces launched a unilateral raid that killed Osama bin Laden in a Pakistani town on May 2.

They deteriorated further after the top US military official accused Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) spy agency of supporting a September 13 attack by the Taliban-allied Haqqani militant group on the US embassy in Kabul.

Saifullah said Washington's public criticism of Pakistan was counter-productive and would only play into the hands of militant groups.

"War in Afghanistan is passing through a critical phase, evolutionary phase," he said. "At this stage, muddying water is not appropriate. This is exactly what the militants want. They are playing to their tune. This is adding strength to them."

The United States has long called for a military offensive against the Haqqani network, which it says is based in North Waziristan, a global hub for militants on the Afghan border.

Analysts say Pakistan sees the Haqqani network — perhaps the most feared Taliban-allied insurgent group in Afghanistan — as a counterweight to the growing influence of India there.

Pakistan denies links to the group, which says it no longer operates from sanctuaries in

North Waziristan and feels secure operating in Afghanistan after battlefield gains.

Obama made clear that future US-Pakistani relations would depend heavily on whether Islamabad complies with Washington's demands to sever connections with insurgents.

But public demand from Washington will make Islamabad more reluctant to take action because caving in after constant pressure could be political suicide in a country where anti-American sentiment runs high, and the government is unpopular.

"This will create more tension and what the Americans want is not likely to happen in the near future," said political analyst Hasan Askari Rizvi.

Obama wants to stabilise Afghanistan as US forces are drawn down with the goal of ending their combat mission by 2014.

Instead of public confrontation, Obama should work more closely with Pakistan to bring peace to Afghanistan, said Saifullah.

"This is no time for this kind of (allegation) when they are pulling out, a troops drawdown," he said. "They should be seriously working on the endgame." — Reuters

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2011 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/world/article/pakistan-says-obama-pressure-on-militants-hurts-afghanistan/>