

Pak to get US aid only if it takes demonstrable action against Haqqani Network

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Washington: A Senate panel has approved a legislation which blocks USD 300 million US military aid to Pakistan unless the Defence Secretary certifies to the Congress that Islamabad is taking demonstrable steps against the Haqqani terror network.

The Senate Armed Services Committee, which renewed blockage of USD 300 million coalition support fund to Pakistan subject to action against the Haqqani network like previous year when it passed the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA)-2017 last week, has however argued in favour of continuing security assistance to Pakistan.

NDAA-2017 is scheduled to come up before the Senate for voting, during which several Senators are expected to bring in amendments to this bill.

Senate version of the NDAA differed with that of the House on many issues, including Pakistan.

The House version of the bill, which was passed last week, calls for blocking USD 450 million of the USD 900 million US aid to Pakistan in coalition support fund.

The Senate version has reduced both the figures to USD 300 million and USD 800 million, respectively.

However, for release of this fund, both seek certification from the Defence Secretary that Pakistan is taking demonstrable action against the Haqqani network.

NDAA 2016, which ends on September 30 this year, makes it mandatory for the Defence Secretary to certify that Islamabad is taking action against the Haqqani network for the release of last USD 300 million of the coalition support fund to Pakistan.

"The Defence Secretary has not taken a decision yet," Navy Captain Jeff Devis, the Pentagon spokesman, told reporters yesterday when asked if Ashton Carter has issued the Congress-mandated certification.

In its report accompanying NDAA-2017 sent to the Senate, the Senate Armed Services Committee noted that Pakistan has been a long-standing strategic partner of the US and believes that the bilateral relationship between the two countries will continue to be strong and enduring.

The Committee, which passed NDAA-2017 before the weekend's US air strike on Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Mansour in the Af-Pak border region, in its report noted that since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Pakistan has been a vital partner in US efforts to combat terrorism in South Asia.

"The committee believes that stability in the region cannot be achieved without stability in Pakistan itself and that fostering a strong, stable, and secure Pakistan is consistent with the national security goals of the United States," the report said, adding it recognises that some have criticised security assistance for Pakistan in recent years.

"However, the committee believes that security and stability within the borders of Pakistan is vital to the stability of the region and to transregional efforts to combat terrorism more broadly," the report said.

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