

US Congress rejects amendments to cut funds for Pakistan

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Washington: The US House of Representatives has rejected by vote two amendments to cut Washington's assistance for Pakistan, the media reported on Saturday.

Nawaz Sharif

While debating the annual Defence Appropriations Act for the financial year 2017 on Friday, Congressman Ted Poe of Texas and Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard from Hawaii moved an amendment to cut the Coalition Support Fund (CSF) for Pakistan from \$900 million to \$700 million, Dawn online reported.

Another lawmaker, Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, submitted a separate amendment calling for ending all CSF assistance for Pakistan.

Earlier in May, the US House of Representatives had approved \$900m CSF outlay for Pakistan as part of the annual Defence Authorisation Bill.

The house rejected both amendments by voice vote but resorted to a recorded vote after both Congressmen insisted on it.

The amendment moved by Poe and Gabbard was defeated by 230 to 191. Rohrabacher's amendment was defeated by 336-84.

The CSF was set up to reimburse US allies for the efforts they make for fighting terrorism. It links Pakistan with Afghanistan but the US Senate passed a bill last week, proposing a separate fund of \$800m for assisting Pakistan. The new proposal also de-links Pakistan from Afghanistan, recognising that Pakistan has its own strategic importance.

The house, however, is still working with the old arrangement, which would soon expire, requiring Congress to work out a new arrangement. Any new arrangement has to be approved by both the Senate and the House.

However, three Congressmen criticised the proposed amendments.

Rodney Frelinghuysen from New Jersey, who chairs the Defence Appropriations Committee, explained the mechanism of the CSF saying that the fund allows the Secretary of Defence to reimburse any key cooperating nation for logistical and military support. This includes providing access, specialised training to personnel, procurement and provision of supplies and equipment provided by that nation in connection with a US military operation.

Pakistan, he said, was a key route for supplying US troops in Afghanistan.

He insisted that all payments were made in arrears and following notification to members of Congress on appropriate committees.

The ranking Democrat member of the Committee on Appropriations, Congressman Peter Visclosky also opposed the amendments. He said that US legislation had in -built oversight mechanism to ensure that funds were released only when it had been certified that Pakistan is cooperating in counterterrorism.

Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, co-chair of Pakistan Congressional Caucus, highlighted Pakistan's own actions

in counterterrorism.

She also warned the house that Pakistan had nuclear capability and this was another reason for staying engaged with it.

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