

USA Military Aid to Pakistan – Recent Developments

Pakistan's geographical location and borders sharing with states like India, Afghanistan and Iran made it impossible to achieve peace without weapons and military advancement. Pakistan has always been under constant threat of being attacked directly or circuitously. We are witness to all the attempts of subverting Pakistan from within and India has been actively participating in that. By keeping in view the deterioration of economic condition and increase in advanced defense system USA has been providing military assistance to Pakistan since long. The unfortunate incident of 9/11 became a challenge for Pakistan to fight against terrorism and militancy along with other internal and external challenges.

To crack down on militants and their safe havens in Pakistan USA passed five year plan 2009-2014 under former president Barak Obama and \$7.5 billion worth of assistance was provided. This bill also created a bit of cleft between civil and military leadership in Pakistan because it was looked upon as threat to sovereignty by military. Along with internal and external security threats, even though Pakistan lost thousands of citizens and military personnel and billions of dollars to this fight, it was constantly hammered to destroy militant's safe havens in Pakistan and USA kept warning Pakistan that if they found any traces of attacks on USA soil back to Pakistan there will be severe consequences.

After Obama the pressure mounted when Trump started the chant of "Do More" because Pakistan was given \$33 billion since 2002 to fight the militants and accused Pakistan of quietly supporting Haqqani network and providing militants with safety on their soil. It was said that rather fighting terror, Pakistani military used \$200 million funds for armament, anti-missile defense system and fighter aircrafts including F-16s

when the terrorists had no air attack capability. Pakistan has received about \$15 billion over the past 15 years including funds for Foreign Military Financing, Pakistan Counterinsurgency Capability Fund and International Military Education and Training funds. In January 2018, USA announced that it was suspending \$900 million of security aid and military equipment to Pakistan because it failed to fight effectively against terrorists and militancy.

Pakistan was ashamed and accused internationally for not putting “enough efforts” and just using USA for the sake of money. The relationship was sore between Pakistan and USA until the recent meeting of president Trump and PM Imran Khan where the PM of Pakistan emphasized that USA and Pakistan need to have a good working relationship to proceed ahead on good terms. Trump showed optimism by saying that USA and Pakistan have better relationship now and that USA State Department will provide Pakistan \$125 million for its F-16 aircraft’s technical assistance. PM Khan further assured president Trump that Pakistan will do whatever it takes to keep going the peace process and that there are and never will be any safe havens for militants in Pakistan.

Religious Extremism: Lynching against Minorities

The minority question has been controversial in India. With the success of Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and other extremist religious groups, atrocities against minorities in general and Muslims in particular have increased. BJP, Shiv Sena and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) are thriving with an agenda of turning Indian secular

state into a Hindu state. India is well known for its political framework and shared historical background. It has operated under the precursor of secularism to deal with its ethnic, cultural and multi-religious diversity. But the conflict between this secular ideology and minority rights remained unresolved.

Article 29 to 30 and 35A to 35B of the Indian constitution, talks about minority rights but the word minority lacks a legally acknowledged definition. Similarly, the word secularism is highly misinterpreted with anti-religion phenomena. Religion-based and under-privileged class minorities of India are marginalized in the socio-economic environment. The ideal of secularism has failed to serve equal opportunities and rights to the Indian minorities.

Current wave of Hindu extremism has shaken the foundations of the secular India. It is becoming difficult for minorities to live in India with their religious and ethnic identities. Animosity of Hindu religious fundamentalists are not only limited to Muslims but other minorities including Sikh and Christian fraternity had also been a subject of majoritarian violence, hatred and anxiety. The contradiction in the secular principles of the state was evident when Muslim community was singled out in 1992 Babri Mosque incident and the state could not protect and control the masses. Similarly, in 2001 Muslims were the victims of hatred in communal riots when fundamentalist groups settled Dalits against them. Moreover, Kandamal riots in Orissa (2008) members of Christian community became the victim of communal violence and relief administration was stopped by the administration from taking any relief work.

There has been a gradual increase in the number of attacks against Muslims and low-caste Dalits since 2014, by the groups claiming to protect cows, considered sacred by Hindus. The government under PM Narendra Modi has failed to stop these incidents of lynching. Currently a 10 minute video of a 24-

year-old Tabrez Ansari from Jharkhand caught the attention of religious minorities all across the globe. Tabrez was tied to a pole and was beaten for 12 hours. He was forced to chant "Jai Sri Ram" (hail Lord Ram) a Hindu hardliner slogan. Similarly, a 15-year-old boy was set on fire for not chanting this slogan.

There has been series of incidents in India where the victims were attacked for allegedly not chanting "Jai Sri Ram". At present it seems that BJP is following soft Hidutva policy and has been ineffective to duly recognize the minority rights and champion their cause.

UN Security Council concerned as bombing continues in Syria

While the carnage continued in Syria, with Russian-backed Syrian government forces killing at least 45 people in the Damascus suburb of eastern Ghouta, the United Nations Security Council on Wednesday expressed concern over the country's humanitarian situation and renewed calls for the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire.

The sitting president of the body for the month of March, Dutch Ambassador Karel van Oosterom, said after the closed-door session: "The cessation of hostilities was discussed. The Security Council reiterated its call for the implementation of Resolution 2401."

That resolution called for a 30-day nationwide ceasefire and was passed by all 15 members of the Security Council on February 24.

The Security Council special session was called by France and the United Kingdom in an effort to persuade Syria and Russia to comply with the resolution.

Death from the skies

As the Council met, however, Syrian forces continued to pound the rebel-held suburb of eastern Ghouta with a massive bombing campaign. Government forces besieged the enclave four years ago but the last 18 days have seen intense bombing that has killed some 850 people and displaced more than 10,000 of the area's 400,000 residents.

The gruesome spectacle has outraged the international community and, above all, humanitarian organizations attempting to bring assistance to trapped residents. Although Russia enacted daily, five-hour bombing pauses starting on February 26, little aid has reached residents.

Impossible to deliver aid

On Monday, when a UN aid convoy arrived in eastern Ghouta, it was the second of 2018 and the first since the Assad-regime initiated its current bombing campaign. According to a spokesman for the World Health Organization (WHO), Syrian authorities removed medical supplies such as surgical items and trauma treatment kits from the convoy, claiming they could be used to treat rebels.

Not all of the supplies could be unloaded by aid workers due to ongoing airstrikes, which forced a hasty withdrawal from the area.

Residents have been hiding in basements for weeks to improve their chances of survival. Aid workers said, "A lot of children told us they have not seen daylight in 20 days, they haven't left the basements because it is too dangerous to go outside."

The UN says 12 percent of children under the age of 5 in eastern Ghouta suffer from acute malnutrition.

Collective punishment

Rather than honoring the calls for a ceasefire, Syrian government forces have stepped up their campaign in an effort to cut the city in half and isolate the rebels.

There is still no end in sight to the Syrian war, which started nearly seven years ago. As unclear as the roster of belligerents and their alliances may be, the one thing that is clear is who is bearing the brunt of the violence: more than 340,000 people have been killed since 2011 and millions more have been displaced.

Courtesy: DW News

NPC 2018: China's resolve to protect peace, stability in South China Sea unshakeable, says Wang Yi

China's resolve to protect peace and stability in the South China Sea is unshakeable, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Thursday (March 8).

"China's position is firm and consistent," said Mr Wang.

Speaking on the sidelines of an annual meeting of China's parliament, Mr Wang said some outside forces were trying to muddy the waters in the disputed region.

China follows a responsible approach to the South China Sea issue, taking into account interests of the Chinese people, historical facts, regional peace and the international rule of law, he added.

China has repeatedly accused countries outside the region – generally a reference to the United States and Japan – of trying to provoke trouble in the South China Sea while China and its neighbours are trying to resolve the matter through diplomacy.

Courtesy: The Strait Times