

Pakistan should not be given even a dollar: US diplomat

A week after US President Donald Trump's letter to Prime Minister Imran Khan seeking Pakistan's help in bringing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiation table, a top US diplomat has once again accused Pakistan of harbouring terrorists and insisted that "Pakistan should not be given even a dollar". In an interview with an American magazine, The Atlantic, Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the US, insisted that the US should not give money to those countries that go behind "our back and try and stop us from doing things".

"I think we just blindly allow money to keep going without thinking that this is real leverage. We have to use it. The one example I'll give you is, look at Pakistan. Giving them over a billion dollars, and they continue to harbour terrorists that turn around and kill our soldiers-that's never okay. We shouldn't even give them a dollar until they correct it", she said.

The latest tirade against Pakistan comes a week after President Trump wrote a letter to Prime Minister Imran Khan and sought Pakistan's help for 'his most important regional priority' of achieving a negotiated settlement of the Afghan war.

Pakistan immediately welcomed Trump's new initiative through the letter in which he also emphasized that Pakistan and US should explore opportunities to work together and renew their partnership.

"Since Pakistan has always advocated a political settlement to end war in Afghanistan, US decision is welcomed", Foreign Office spokesperson Dr Mohammad Faisal said, while expressing Pakistan's response to President Trump's letter.

However, the Foreign Office spokesperson was not available for comments on the latest tirade against Pakistan by the top US diplomat at the UN despite telephone calls and text messages on his cell phone.

A senior diplomat, who requested not to be named, said that last week talks between Pakistan and the US during the visit of Ambassador Zalmay Khalidzad, the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, were "constructive" and free of any negative messages.

"The primary focus of the talks was Afghanistan's reconciliation process on which Pakistan has a principled stance that the political settlement is the only best available option...it is something that the Trump administration has also realized now", said the diplomat, adding that Pakistan reiterated its steadfast support for a negotiated settlement of the Afghan conflict.

Lt Gen Talat Masood (retd), a senior analyst, said the US has been using pressure tactics on Pakistan since long, but the Trump administration has now realized that the continued bashing of the country has proven counterproductive.

"Irrespective of the latest comments by Nikki Haley, I believe that there is change of mind in Washington as they want to settle the things in Afghanistan as soon as possible", he said, adding that the continued war in Afghanistan without any gain is a serious source of concern for the Americans.

Former ambassador, Ali Sarwar Naqvi pointed out that the latest development in the Pakistan-US relations following Trump's letter to Prime Minister Khan should not detract their importance subsequent to comments by a diplomat who is leaving the job by the end of this month.

He pointed out that Prime Minister in his interview has clearly stated that Pakistan will not be a hired gun of the US anymore. After remaining unsuccessful for several years in Afghanistan, he said that the US now wants a respectful withdrawal from the country.

"Peaceful and stable Afghanistan is in the best national interest of Pakistan as well but the need of the hour is that all the stakeholders in Afghanistan should sit on the negotiating table and devise an effective plan of action with mutual consensus," he concluded.

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