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U.S. Suspends \$800 Million In Aid To Pakistan

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The Obama administration's decision to suspend \$800 million in aid to the Pakistan's military signals a tougher U.S. line with a critical but sometimes unreliable partner in the fight against terrorism.

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NPR's Jackie Northam Reports On The U.S.-Pakistan Relationship

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Transcript

President Barack Obama's chief of staff, William Daley, said in a broadcast interview Sunday that the estranged relationship between the United States and Pakistan must be made "to work over time," but until it does, "we'll hold back some of the money that the American taxpayers are committed to give" to the country's powerful military forces.

The suspension of U.S. aid, first reported by *The New York Times*, followed a statement last week by Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, that Pakistan's security services may have sanctioned the killing of Pakistani journalist Saleem Shahzad, who wrote about infiltration of the military by extremists. His battered body was found in June.

The allegation was rejected by Pakistan's powerful military establishment, including the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency, which has historic ties to the Taliban and other militant groups and which many Western analysts regard as a state-within-a-state.

George Perkovich, an expert on Pakistan with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, said Mullen's comments and the suspension of aid represent "the end of happy talk," where the U.S. tries to paper over differences between the two nations.

Daley, interviewed on ABC's *This Week*, suggested the decision to suspend military aid resulted from the increasing estrangement between the U.S. and Pakistan. "Obviously there's still a lot of pain that the political system in Pakistan is feeling by virtue of the raid that we did to get Osama bin Laden," Daley said.

Panetta told reporters traveling with him to Afghanistan on Saturday that the U.S. would continue to press Pakistan in the fight against extremists, including al-Qaida's new leader, Ayman al-Zawahri.

"We have to continue to emphasize with the Pakistanis that in the end it's in their interest to be able to go after these targets as well," Panetta said. "And in the discussions I've had with them, I have to say that, you know, they're giving us cooperation in going after some of these targets. We've got to continue to push them to do that. That's key."

The U.S. has long been unhappy with Pakistan's evident lack of enthusiasm for carrying the fight against terrorists to its tribal areas, as well as its covert support for the Taliban and anti-Indian extremist groups.

But tensions ratcheted up in January, when CIA security contractor Raymond Davis shot and killed two Pakistanis who he said were trying to rob him. They spiked in May, when U.S. forces killed bin Laden during a covert raid on a home in Abbottabad, the location of Pakistan's military academy.

The Bin Laden Raid

The early May raid on bin Laden's compound was carried out by U.S. Navy Seals, without giving Pakistan advanced knowledge. Shortly after, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, in his former role as CIA chief, suggested Pakistan's military was either complicit or incompetent for not knowing bin Laden was living in Pakistan.

Shuja Nawaz, director of the South Asia Center at the Atlantic Council, says the raid and the criticism have had a big impact in Pakistan.

"All of this has really kind of spooked the Pakistanis, and particularly the military, that came under a lot of criticism at home. So they're reacting largely to shore up their domestic base again."

Not long after the bin Laden raid, Pakistan took its own unilateral actions, says Brian Katulis with the Center for American Progress.

"Pakistan ordered U.S. special forces, trainers to leave a few week ago. A couple of weeks ago, the defense minister said that the drone strikes the U.S. was conducting from Shamsi airbase in Pakistani territory had stopped, and that they were requesting the U.S. to pull out its infrastructure there."

In a written statement, a Pentagon spokesperson indicated that Pakistan's decision to eject the American military trainers is what prompted the U.S. decision to withhold military aid. And if the American trainers can't get in, they also can't send in military equipment needed by the Pakistanis.

Nawaz, of the Atlantic Council, says this is a dangerous circle, and that neither side is going to come out ahead because the U.S. and Pakistan need each other. Nawaz says most of the supplies to American troops in Afghanistan run through Pakistan.

"The U.S. certainly needs Pakistan for its air and land line of communication, particularly in this final two or three years of the Afghan campaign. And Pakistan certainly needs the U.S.' financial assistance to continue its own fighting against terrorism on the western border."

A Pause In Military Aid

The \$800 million in suspended aid represents 40 percent of the \$2 billion in U.S. military aid to Pakistan, and according to the *Times* includes money for counterterrorism operations.

The report said some of the money represented equipment that can't be set up for training because Pakistan won't give visas to the trainers. About \$300 million was intended to reimburse Pakistan for the cost of deploying 100,000 troops along the Afghan border, the newspaper said.

A senior U.S. official confirmed that the suspension came in response to the Pakistani army's decision to significantly reduce the number of visas for U.S. military trainers. "We remain committed to helping Pakistan build its capabilities, but we have communicated to Pakistani officials on numerous occasions that we require certain support in order to provide certain assistance," a senior U.S. official told The Associated Press. The official was not authorized to discuss the issue publicly and spoke only on condition of anonymity.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently told senators that "when it comes to our military aid, we are not prepared to continue providing that at the pace we were providing it unless we see certain steps taken."

California Rep. Howard Berman, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said Sunday that he agreed with the administration's decision. "I have repeatedly expressed concern over sending assistance to Pakistan's military as elements of it actively undermine the country's democratically elected government and institutions, and I'm relieved the Pentagon shares my concerns," Berman said.

Pakistan army spokesman Maj. Gen. Athar Abbas declined comment on the suspension. He pointed to comments by Army Chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, who last month said U.S. military aid should be diverted to civilian projects.

Hasan-Askari Rizvi, a Pakistani political and defense analyst, said the U.S. decision to suspend aid is an attempt to increase pressure on Pakistan, but he believes it could hurt both sides.

"The Pakistani military has been the major supporter of the U.S. in the region because it needed weapons and money," said Rizvi. "Now, when the U.S. builds pressure on the military, it will lose that support."

Rivzi said the move could make it harder for the U.S. to push the Taliban into peace talks, in preparation for its withdrawal from Afghanistan. At the same time, he said, the Pakistani military relies on U.S. aid in its fight against militant groups.

"This kind of public denunciation needs to stop, and they need to talk," Rivzi said.

"They shouldn't go to the brink because both will suffer."

But Abbas, the Pakistani military spokesman, said the loss of aid would have no effect on military operations. "In the past, we have not been dependent on any external support for these operations, and they will continue," Abbas said.

Perkovich, the Carnegie Endowment expert, called the suspension of U.S. aid "overdue."

"We've been trying for years to get, persuade, push the Pakistani army to conduct military operations on their border with Afghanistan, especially in North Waziristan, and they've said it's not in their interest, that they're overstretched already," Perkovich said in a telephone interview from Paris. "I think it's smart to say, 'We hear you.' ... If the army doesn't want the support, we hear them and we'll withdraw the support."

Perkovich said if billions in U.S. financial aid didn't change the behavior of the Pakistan military, then withdrawing it probably wouldn't either. The shift in the administration's policy was prompted by recent tensions, he said. But it also grew out of the U.S. decision to begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

"That decision to withdraw from Afghanistan finally enables us to focus on Pakistan, and basically confront the reality that Pakistan's the bigger problem," he said.

Perkovich said he doesn't think Pakistan will shift its policies in order to restore U.S. military aid. But he said the suspension could have some positive effect in the long run, by forcing Pakistan to take a hard look at the dominant role the security services play in Pakistan.

"Internally in Pakistan, there's going to be a much more intense debate now on whether the Army has put the country on a good course," he said.

This report includes material from NPR's Jackie Northam and The Associated Press

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