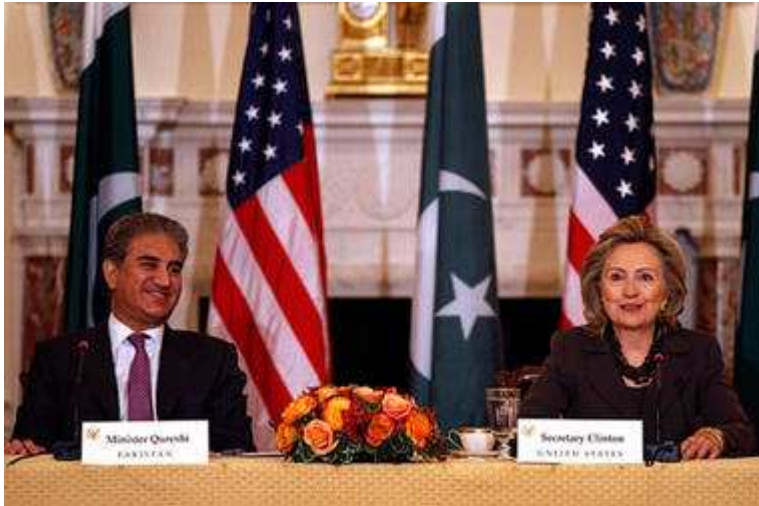


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Pakistan aid: US offers \$2 billion more -- but attaches conditions

Privately, the US warned Pakistan that it risks losing this and other American aid if it does not adopt a more aggressive stance toward militants. The Pakistan aid package was announced Friday.



Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Pakistan's foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi speak during the US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue Plenary Session at the State Department in Washington, on Oct. 22.

(Larry Downing/Reuters)

By Howard LaFranchi, Staff writer

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Washington —

The US is offering Pakistan \$2 billion in new military aid as part of a classic carrot-and-stick approach to what is perhaps the single most crucial country in the international battle with Islamist militancy.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced at the conclusion Friday of a three-day “strategic dialogue” with Pakistani senior officials a new five-year military assistance package designed to prod Pakistan into taking a harder line with militants. Those extremists range from groups bent on bringing down Pakistan’s fragile democracy to Al Qaeda and other organizations more focused on international terrorist acts.

“The United States has no stronger partner when it comes to counterterrorism efforts against the extremists who threaten us both than Pakistan,” Secretary Clinton said in announcing the Pakistan aid package. The two delegations, she said, had “productive discussions” about the need to root out extremist groups that “threaten the security first and foremost of the people of Pakistan, of neighbors, of the United States, and indeed of the world.”

But the offer of new military aid came with a privately issued warning – the stick in the equation – that Pakistan risks losing this and other aid the US offers if the government does not adopt a more aggressive stance toward militants.

Despite whatever tough words the US had for the Pakistanis in private, prospects for a radically different approach from Pakistan toward the extremists groups are not good, some regional experts say.

“I don’t perceive Pakistan changing its objectives, and that’s really the core issue here,” says Malou Innocent, a foreign policy

analyst focusing on Pakistan and Afghanistan at the Cato Institute in Washington. "Since 9/11 we have pushed, prodded, and threatened ... and it's clear to me that Pakistan is not going to alter its internal politics or shift its security policies no matter how much aid the US gives."

Pakistan has undertaken offensives into some militant strongholds, but it has not launched into others like North Waziristan and has left unscathed other groups the US is focused on, Ms. Innocent says. Those groups include the Haqqani network, which some US officials now consider the most powerful Taliban-affiliated organization in Pakistan; the Quetta Shura, the Afghan Taliban leadership located in Pakistan since being ousted from Afghanistan; and Al Qaeda.

During the three days of meetings, Pakistani officials emphasized their country's role as a key partner for Washington in the international battle with extremism. But at the same time, they were adamant that Pakistan will do things its way and will not bow to American interests.

Pakistan's foreign minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, said at the meeting where Clinton announced the new military aid that the "prophets of doom" who predict an irreconcilable split between the US and Pakistan are "dead wrong." But Mr. Qureshi also used his Washington visit to lay down red lines for the partnership, saying at a speech earlier in the week at the Brookings Institution, "Pakistan's sovereignty is and will remain nonnegotiable."

That comment appeared to refer to recent tensions between the two countries over a stepped-up US campaign of unmanned drone attacks against suspected militant havens in Pakistan's northwest, and more specifically over a recent US helicopter attack that killed three Pakistani soldiers.

Pakistan closed a crucial border crossing for nearly two weeks over the attack, disrupting NATO supply lines into Afghanistan.

Pakistan's military and civilian government have said that the country does not have the money or military equipment for launching large-scale offensives against militant havens. The US offer of a multiyear, multibillion-dollar military aid package – which would run from 2012 to 2016 and would be graduated in terms of the money offered – appears designed to answer that complaint and perhaps quiet that excuse for inaction.

But the US Congress has become increasingly impatient with Pakistan's reluctance to go after groups like Al Qaeda, leading some analysts to anticipate resistance to another aid package to Pakistan. Congress last year approved a five-year, \$7.5 billion package of civilian aid aimed at boosting development and strengthening Pakistan's fragile democratic institutions.

Announcement of the new military aid package coincided with confirmation from Obama administration officials that existing US military assistance is to be cut off from a number of Pakistani Army units suspected of having committed abuses including torture and summary executions. The suspension of funding was issued in accordance with the so-called Leahy Amendment (after Sen. Patrick Leahy (D) of Vermont), which bars US military assistance to units committing abuses.

"This will turn into a very, very messy fight in Congress," says Innocent of the Cato Institute. "After a decade, there is just a lot of frustration with the effort Pakistan has put forward."

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