

Pakistan urges restraint by new US envoy for Afghan peace

04/10/2018 09:39 by admin

Khalilzad, a former ambassador to Afghanistan, has previously called on the US to declare Pakistan a terrorist state unless it stops harboring insurgents.

The Trump administration has suspended military assistance to Pakistan, saying it isn't doing enough to eliminate Taliban safe havens in its territory. (File)

Washington: Pakistan's top diplomat on Wednesday urged the Trump administration's new envoy for reconciliation in neighboring Afghanistan to be more sensitive to Pakistani opinion than he has been as a private citizen.

The recent appointment of veteran US diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad has raised hackles in Pakistan. Khalilzad, a former ambassador to Afghanistan, has previously called on the US to declare Pakistan a terrorist state unless it stops harboring insurgents.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said that there's been a negative reaction in the Pakistani press to the appointment because Khalilzad "has made statements in the past which have not been, to be put it mildly, very friendly to Pakistan."

"He's been given a new role, and I hope, I would urge him to be more sensitive to opinion in Pakistan," Qureshi told the US Institute of Peace, a Washington think tank. "Obviously, as individuals, we can say what we want, but once you have an official position you have to be more restrained and you have to be more sensitive, because only (then) can you be an honest broker."

While Qureshi was responding to a direct question on the issue, it's unusual for a foreign diplomat to comment directly on how a particular US official should conduct himself. Qureshi stressed the need for the US and Pakistan to arrest the slide in their troubled relationship.

Khalilzad will begin his first trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan as envoy on Thursday. He will also visit the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, according to an announcement from the State Department.

"Khalilzad's mission is to coordinate and lead US efforts to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table," the Wednesday announcement read. The trip "reflects the Administration's intent to support, facilitate, and participate in a peace process in Afghanistan," it added.

The Trump administration has taken a tougher stance toward Pakistan. It has suspended military assistance to the country, saying it isn't doing enough to eliminate Taliban safe havens in its territory. It also wants Pakistan to use its influence to get the Taliban leadership to enter negotiations with the government in Kabul on ending the 17-year war in Afghanistan.

Qureshi criticized US suspension of military aid but was upbeat about his talks on Tuesday with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

"I was expecting a very hawkish approach, a dressing-down approach. That, pleasantly, did not take place," he said. "I felt that Secretary Pompeo was ready to listen, which I thought was very positive."

Qureshi said there was a "convergence" between the governments in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States to seek a peace settlement to end the Afghan war. But the Taliban have so far refused to negotiate directly with Kabul, saying they want to talk with the US, which has about 14,000 troops in the country.

Qureshi said Pakistan will "use all its influence" to persuade the Taliban to join a peace process, but its influence has diminished. The Taliban, he said, would have to feel that it's in its interest to negotiate.

- AP