

Pompeo visits Pakistan to demand “reset” in support for Afghan war

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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph Dunford staged a brief, four-hour visit to Pakistan on Wednesday. Coming just after the election of Pakistani Prime Minister and former cricket star Imran Khan, they aimed to browbeat Islamabad into continuing its support for the bloody NATO war in Afghanistan.

Pompeo met Khan, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. “We made clear to them that—and they agreed—it’s time for us to begin to deliver on our joint commitments,” Pompeo said. He declared, “I hope we can turn the page and begin to make progress, but there are real expectations. We need Pakistan to seriously engage to help us. ...”

After Pompeo left, the US Embassy in Islamabad said he had called “for Pakistan to take sustained and decisive action against terrorists and militants threatening regional peace and stability.”

Pompeo traveled on to India, Pakistan’s historic rival, which, amid explosive shifts in global geopolitics, Washington is grooming as a key regional ally in the confrontation with its long-term strategic rival, China. It was an unambiguous message that Islamabad should bow to US demands for an escalation of bombings and drone murder, or lose out as Washington develops its ties to India.

Before Pompeo’s trip, Washington repeatedly threatened to financially strangle Pakistan. Trump set the tone with a New Year’s tweet saying Washington “has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!”

Shortly before Pompeo’s trip, Washington canceled a

\$300 million Coalition Support Fund payment to Pakistan, to pay for army attacks on sympathizers of the Afghan resistance inside Pakistan. Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Kone Faulkner said: “Due to a lack of Pakistani decisive actions in support of the South Asia Strategy, the remaining \$300 million was reprogrammed.” Ahead of the talks, Pompeo also announced his appointment of a figure who is unpopular in Pakistani ruling circles, Zalmay Khalilzad, as the new US special adviser in Afghanistan.

With Pakistan’s dollar reserves plunging to only two months’ worth of imports, US officials threatened to cut off loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The *Financial Times* of London reported on Sunday that senior Pakistani officials are drawing up plans for Khan to seek a \$12 billion IMF bailout, which would entail deep attacks on the Pakistani working class.

US officials are making clear they may torpedo even this loan, in an attempt to do financial damage to China and cut off its economic ties to Pakistan. Pompeo told CNBC television: “Make no mistake. We will be watching what the IMF does. There’s no rationale for IMF tax dollars, and associated with that American dollars that are part of the IMF funding, for those to go to bail out Chinese bondholders or China itself.”

This reflects bitter US opposition to China’s investment of more than \$60 billion in the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. This consists of oil storage facilities at the Pakistani port of Gwadar and a 3,000-km network of pipelines, railways, and motorways from Gwadar, through Pakistan, and across the mountainous Pakistani-Chinese border to Kashgar in western China. It also entails cooperation on air transport, rail infrastructure, wind and hydro power,

and fiber-optic communications—all of which are unacceptable to Washington.

Pompeo's visit recalled the bone-crunching terms Washington presented to Pakistan in 2001, as the US launched its war in Afghanistan. Richard Armitage, then a US Deputy Secretary of State, called Islamabad to threaten to bomb Pakistan "back to the Stone Age" if it didn't cut its ties with the Taliban and support the invasion, though Washington itself had been courting the Taliban just shortly before.

After 17 years of war, and the escalation of US drone murder into Pakistan under US President Barack Obama, US-Pakistani relations are even more fraught today. Despite broad opposition among Pakistani workers and rural poor to US drone strikes and killings in Afghanistan, and the vast economic costs to Pakistan of bowing to the US diktat, Washington intends to give Islamabad no option but a humiliating capitulation to its demands.

It is demanding that Islamabad join in the NATO bloodshed that is now under way. On Sunday, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) released news that 1,692 civilians were killed, with a total of 5,122 casualties, including 3,430 injuries, in the first six months of 2018. Now, 2018 is on track to be the year with the most NATO bombings in Afghanistan since 2001.

Pakistani ruling circles are concerned as Washington seeks to obtain greater Indian involvement in Afghanistan. India and Pakistan have fought three wars, and Pakistan has always opposed any Indian military presence in Afghanistan. Pompeo, however, has hailed India as "a true strategic partner" and the key to US success in counteracting growing Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific region.

After Pompeo left Pakistan, defense analyst Zahid Hussain stressed Islamabad's frustration that its relations with Washington have been reduced to a one-point agenda: Afghanistan. "The United States seems only to see Pakistan through the prism of Afghanistan," he said. "The main thing is we would like to be allies with the US, but with dignity."

Hussain advised Pakistan to try to broaden discussions with Pompeo "to explain its own national security concerns," such as its long-standing military and now nuclear rivalry with India.

The Pompeo visit was also an exposure of Imran

Khan, and an object lesson in the bankruptcy of hopes that Pakistani bourgeois politicians might oppose imperialist war. Khan was the undeserved beneficiary of mass anti-war sentiment, having posed as an opponent of the Afghan war, proposing to stop trucks supplying NATO troops from crossing from Pakistan into Afghanistan in order to protest US drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal regions bordering Afghanistan during the period of 2011 to 2014.

In 2012, Khan denounced US drone murders in Pakistan to the BBC: "At first I will strive to convince the US to stop these attacks, but if they refuse to do so I will ask our air force to shoot down drone intruders."

As his party's fortunes rose, however, he sharply toned down this rhetoric. During the election campaign, Khan declared that his aim was to cement "mutually beneficial" ties with US imperialism. Just after the July 25 elections, he said Pakistan would not join the "war on terror," as it is not Pakistan's war to fight.

After Pompeo's visit only two months after he took office, Khan was no longer talking about shooting down US drones. He declared he was "optimistic" about relations with Washington. "You know I'm a born optimist," he said. "A sportsman always is an optimist."

Foreign Minister Qureshi, who had described US-Pakistani ties as "almost non-existent" before Pompeo's visit, said: "We had an excellent meeting. I'm very happy with the meeting we had."



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