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Pakistani PM Offers Joint Patrols with Afghanistan

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Pakistan's prime minister has offered "joint patrols" and "joint posts" with Afghanistan as a means of bi-lateral verification of action taken against terrorist groups or their sanctuaries.

"Whatever it takes to fight terrorism ... Pakistan is totally open to that," Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said while briefing foreign journalists Tuesday in Islamabad.

The details of the bi-lateral verification methods could be worked out at the operational level, he said. But Abbasi insisted Afghanistan in turn needed to do more to fight terrorism against Pakistan.

"If you want statistics, there is much more happening across the border from Afghanistan than anything that happens from Pakistan into Afghanistan."

Previously, Pakistan and Afghanistan had agreed on coordinated, complementary operations on their respective sides of border. Pakistan has repeatedly faced criticism that it is sheltering militants who planned or carried out attacks inside Afghanistan.

In his policy speech on Afghanistan last month, President Donald Trump came down hard on Islamabad. "We can no longer be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organizations, the Taliban, and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond," he said.

Trump also berated Pakistan for taking billions of dollars of U.S. aid while "housing the same terrorists we are fighting."

But Abbasi says the United States has not demanded any specific actions from Pakistan since that speech. “We have not received a list of mechanisms,” he said, adding his country would continue to cooperate against terrorism as it has done in the past.

He also said Pakistan’s 70-year relationship with the United States should not be defined by Afghanistan alone.

The United States is holding back \$255 million in military assistance to Pakistan until it cracks down on militant groups that attack Afghanistan. U.S. officials have also hinted at the possibility of targeted sanctions against some Pakistani officials with ties to extremist groups.

But, with Beijing investing upwards of \$50 billion in Pakistan as part of its One Belt One Road project, U.S. aid has lost the sway it once held.

Pakistan has responded to the threats of cutting off financial aid by saying it does not want U.S. aid, but rather acknowledgement of its efforts against extremism during the past few years.

“If you go to Miramshah, you’ll see what we’ve done there, the casualties that the army has taken, the sanctuaries they’ve destroyed,” Abbasi said.

Pakistan also claims to have lost more than \$120 billion in terms of infrastructure damage and loss of investment since it joined the U.S. led war on terror.

The country has launched several military operations to clear out militant hideouts from the northern tribal areas near Afghanistan’s border. But U.S. and Afghanistan claim the actions have been more focused on Pakistani Taliban, militants that have challenged the Pakistani state. They charge that the groups focused on attacking Afghanistan or India have been largely left alone.

Pakistan denies those claims. “The ills of Afghanistan do not emanate from Pakistan,” said the prime minister.