



TILLERSON'S VISIT TO PAKISTAN-MORE OF THE SAME

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



Pakistan is one country that the current US Administration can neither recognise as an important ally nor put it on the sidelines. In the past few months Washington has shown nothing but complete confusion on the future of its relation with Pakistan - a front line country in US's war on terror. The recent visit by the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to Pakistan to fix the fraying bilateral relations between Pakistan and US has failed to produce results that were being expected.

The relations between both the countries have deteriorated even further under the Trump Administration specially after the US used Pakistan as a scapegoat of its failures in Afghanistan.

Tillerson, in his visit, met with Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, the military chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif, DG ISI Lt. Gen. Naveed Mukhtar and other top officials at the PM office. The agenda topping the visit remained the same - demanding action against Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network¹. The 'do more' mantra and the blame game has yet again taken the relationship by storm. Tillerson pressed upon Trump's views that more needs to be done by Pakistan and that it must increase its efforts to eradicate militants and terrorists operating within the country².

Pakistan on the other hand brought the issue of Kashmir to the table in its talk with Rex Tillerson. Pakistan made it clear that a successful resolution of the Kashmir dispute is as important as peace in

¹ Kamran Yousaf, "Tillerson Talks Tough to Incredibly Important Pakistan," The Express Tribune, October 24, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1540159/1-tillerson-arrives-islamabad-high-level-talks/>

² Kamran Yousaf, "Tillerson Talks Tough to Incredibly Important Pakistan," The Express Tribune, October 24, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1540159/1-tillerson-arrives-islamabad-high-level-talks/>

Afghanistan for stable and secure environment in the region. It will be difficult to look for peace in Afghanistan while staying aloof to the ongoing conflict in Kashmir, which for decades has been a source of crisis between Pakistan and India. Also discussed was the border management on the Pak-Afghan border region and the effort that Pakistan is pursuing by itself in order to curb the illegal flow of drugs, and terrorist activity.

The US, yet again, is looking at Pakistan through the lens of Afghanistan, India and China which is evident by the stopovers he has made; first in Afghanistan, then Pakistan, and after that to India. As clichéd as it sounds, the US has continuously failed to recognize Pakistan as a country which has a lot to offer besides its military support in fighting extremism in the region. Similarly, the US has also failed to accept the current situation in Afghanistan as its policy failure.

Tillerson's visit has not produced the results that were being expected. Although, while in Kabul, he made it abundantly clear that the future of US and Pakistan relations will be conditions based³, which to some extent has been the case up till now. The visit was over-powered by a repetition of the US narratives which Pakistan has been listening to for long. To say the least, the Trump Administration is still stumbling to put together a policy framework with regards to its current and future relationship with Pakistan.

The US, up till now, has failed to produce a consistent policy for Pakistan, it has been transactional and will remain the same way no matter how many official or unofficial visits take place between the two countries. Pakistan on the other hand, has made it clear that it will work with the US on the basis of equality and not take dictations from the US if it goes against its national interest.⁴ The US has relentlessly accused Pakistan of harbouring terrorists, while it has failed itself to target and take out terrorist networks in Afghanistan where its military is in full control - the growing presence of ISIS in Afghanistan is one example. On the contrary, military operations carried out by Pakistan against extremist factions, with limited resources, compared to the US has been significantly successful.

³ Antonio Olivo and Carol Morello, "Secretary of State Tillerson makes Unannounced Visits to Afghanistan, Iraq," Washington Post, October 23, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-sec-tillerson-makes-secret-visit-to-kabul/2017/10/23/ae082006-b7f0-11e7-99c6-46bdf7f6f8ba_story.html?utm_term=.e5b71dd6aaf2

⁴ GEO News, October 10, 2017, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/161953-pakistan-wont-take-dictation-from-anyone-if-against-national-interest-khawaja-asif>