

CONTINUED ESCALATION IN US-PAKISTAN RHETORIC

[youtube]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdReptYAbk4>[/youtube]

The dramatic accusations made by Joint Chiefs Chairman Michael Mullen in yesterday's Senate Armed Services Committee hearing provoked immediate, strong reactions from Pakistan. Here is how the Washington Post described Mullen's testimony:

Last week's attack on the U.S. Embassy in Kabul and a Sept. 10 truck bombing that killed five Afghans and wounded 77 NATO troops were "planned and conducted" by the Pakistan-based Haqqani network "with ISI support," said Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The ISI is the Pakistani military's Inter-Services Intelligence agency.

"The government of Pakistan and most especially the Pakistani army and ISI" have chosen "to use violent extremism as an instrument of policy" to maintain leverage over Afghanistan's future, Mullen testified during a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta also testified.

As seen in the video above, Mullen's remarks provoked a sharp response from Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar:

"You will lose an ally," Khar told Geo TV in New York in remarks broadcast on Friday.

"You cannot afford to alienate Pakistan, you cannot afford to alienate the Pakistani people. If you are choosing to

do so and if they are choosing to do so it will be at their (the United States') own cost."

Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani also chimed in. From GEO:

The United States should take care of the feelings of 180 million people of Pakistan while issuing statements or commenting on important issues, said Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on Friday.

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He said, "Our 180 million people want to defend their motherland and its sovereignty".

"US cannot live with us and without us," he said and added "thus the United States should avoid sending 'wrong messages' which would affect the bilateral ties".

From these comments, it is clear that both Khar and Gilani are warning the US that Pakistan could withdraw all cooperation if the war of words continues.

I will stand by the prediction I made yesterday:

Should the US be successful in attaching some sort of cooperation requirement for US funding to flow to Pakistan, look for some sort of token move by Pakistan that will provide even more heated rhetoric. The situation likely will then be resolved by Pakistan grudgingly cooperating in an action against the Haqqani network. The most important point to watch for in this current "crisis" will be to see just how high in the Haqqani network Pakistan is willing to go in sacrificing a part of it to the US in order to keep their seemingly endless supply of US funds flowing.

Stay tuned for further developments.