



## **Pakistani Official: U.S. Aid Won't Hurt Sovereignty**

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October 14, 2009

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- Pakistan's foreign minister said Wednesday that senior U.S. lawmakers have eased fears that a multibillion-dollar American aid package would interfere with Pakistan's sovereignty.

U.S. lawmakers, however, have no plans to change the bill, which has already unanimously passed both chambers of Congress and now awaits President Barack Obama's signature into law.

A week ago Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi dismissed complaints about the aid bill during a trip to Washington. On Tuesday, Qureshi, in an about-face, made a rushed return visit amid angry cries in Pakistan that the bill is an attempt to interfere with the powerful military and the weak, U.S.-backed civilian government.

Democratic Sen. John Kerry, a co-sponsor of the bill and head of the Foreign Relations Committee, told reporters after meeting with Qureshi for the second time in two days that a statement attempting to clarify points in the bill would be entered into the congressional record.

Qureshi called the explanatory statement "historic." But lawmakers frequently put comments and documents - even congratulatory notes for local sports teams - into the congressional record. They do not have the force of law. Fred Beuttler, deputy historian of the House of Representatives, said an explanatory statement is merely an attempt to make the intent of Congress clear.

"Everybody is on the same page, and we are very clear about the intentions of the legislation," Kerry said of the statement that emerged after Qureshi's hastily arranged meetings Tuesday and Wednesday with senior lawmakers and Obama administration officials.

The bill would provide Pakistan with \$1.5 billion a year over the next five years to spend on democratic, economic and social development programs. Pakistan's military and others, however, have objected to language that links money for counterterrorism assistance to Pakistan cracking down on militancy and meeting other conditions.

The congressional statement says that no conditions are placed on the \$7.5 billion in nonmilitary aid.

The legislation requires the U.S. Secretary of State to report to Congress every six months on whether Pakistan's civilian government maintains effective control over the military's budgets, chain of command and top promotions.

The statement said the bill's requirements are "accountability measures" placed on the United States to ensure that the aid directly benefits the Pakistani people. It said that the bill does not seek to micromanage Pakistani military or civilian affairs, "including the promotion of Pakistani military officers or the internal operations of the Pakistani military."

"Any interpretation of this act which suggests that the United States does not fully recognize and respect the sovereignty of Pakistan would be directly contrary to congressional intent," the statement said.

Rep. Howard Berman, the Democratic chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the bill is "a reflection of our desire to be long-term partners with the Pakistani people."

The stability of nuclear-armed Pakistan is deemed crucial to U.S.-led efforts to battle extremists in South Asia.