

Pakistan Unlikely to Act Against Haqqani for the Time Being: Rashid

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Ahmed Rashid

Despite continuing pressure from the United States, Pakistan is unlikely to act against the Haqqani network at least for the time being, bestselling author and journalist Ahmed Rashid told TOLOnews in an exclusive interview.

TOLOnews: How serious is the tension between Pakistan and the United States at the moment?

Ahmad Rashid: I think it's very serious. I think the real danger is that the US will take some unilateral military action such as stepping up drone attacks or possibly bombing and that could lead to you know both countries are going to war with each other literally. I mean this is very strange considering that Pakistan was supposed to be an ally of the United States in combating terrorism over the last ten years and the situation has now deteriorated to the point where they are literally in conflict to one another.

TOLOnews: Do you think the US would take the option of carrying out ground operation on Pakistani soil?

Ahmad Rashid: No, I don't think it will do ground operations. I am hoping of course that talks will begin between the two sides at a high level and the issue will be defused, but there is no question that the main sticky point which is that the US is demanding that Pakistan take action against the Haqqani Network, Pakistan is unlikely to do anything about that at least for the time being.

TOLOnews: Why do you think that is the case?

Ahmad Rashid: Well, I think you know because the Haqqani have been very close the Pakistani military and intelligence services for many many years and they have done great services for them and Pakistan is not going to suddenly dump them and change the policy and secondly there is a domestic factor here that politicians and etc have been rallying around, the military who has been taking this hardline with Americans, I don't think the military or the government can suddenly change track and go after Haqqani. I think there will a lot of public unrest in the country if they did.

TOLOnews: What if there is a choice between the Haqqani and Americans for Pakistan?

Ahmad Rashid: Well, I don't think it's in America's interest either to create such a situation either or such a crisis situation. Maybe, there could be stepped up actions by Pakistan, greater pressure to restrain Haqqani wherever they are and prevent them carrying out attacks in Afghanistan. Some kinds of halfway measures, for the time being satisfy the US and restore the relationship. Don't forget that that still 50 or 60 percent of the goods for the US military comes through Pakistan. There are little to what the US can do to pressure Pakistan because Pakistan of course can stop those supplies and it will be a real crisis.

TOLOnews: What would be the consequences of the US-Pakistan tensions in Afghanistan?

Ahmad Rashid: Well, I think you know for Afghans it will be very serious because it will distance Pakistan even more from Afghanistan and the fears and suspicions that many Afghans have regarding Pakistan and its intelligence services, its support for the Taliban and Haqqani's - all these suspicions will grow even more and there will be more distrust. I think the hope that President Karzai had of leaning towards Pakistan to help him talk to the Taliban and bring about the negotiated end to the war, I think that has probably been put on hold right now with death of Professor Rabbani. There is I think a very serious crisis between Pakistan and Afghanistan and could get worse if Americans take military actions against Pakistan.