

US Rolls Out Red Carpet for Pakistan Army Chief as India Wavers on Anti-Russia Stand

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US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Tuesday will host Pakistan Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa at the Pentagon for talks amidst signs of enhanced military engagement between the two countries.

Last week, Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was in the town meeting top officials of the Biden Administration, including Secretary of State Tony Blinken.

Bajwa will be accorded an "enhanced honour cordon" at the riverside entrance of the Pentagon by Austin following which the two will be holding a meeting on bilateral and regional issues.

America's engagement with Pakistan, in particular with its military, has increased in recent months. Last month, the US announced a \$450 million F-16 fighter jet sustenance package for Pakistan — a move that was widely speculated as retaliation of India's reluctance to criticise Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

The F-16 package drew criticism from Indian external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, who called on the US to reflect on its relationship with Pakistan, and observed it 'is not fooling anyone' by claiming support for Pak's F-16 was meant for counter-terrorism.

"At the end of the day... to say I am doing it for 'counterterrorism'... you are talking of an aircraft of the capability of a F-16 (and) everyone knows where they are deployed. You are not fooling anybody by saying these things," he said.

The US state department spokesperson Ned Price defended the decision.

“We don’t view our relationship with Pakistan... our relationship with India... in relation to one another... both partners of ours with different points of emphasis...” he said, responding to Jaishankar’s criticism.

“We look to both as partners, because we do have in many cases shared values. We do have in many cases shared interests. And the relationship we have with India stands on its own. The relationship we have with Pakistan stands on its own,” he said.

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