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Hearing Entitled "Pakistan After the Elections: Examining the Future of Democracy in Pakistan and the US-Pakistan Relationship"
House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024
Testimony of Dr. Sundas Ali

Esteemed Congress Members –

My name is Dr. Sundas Ali, and I was an Election Observer in Pakistan. Since the Election Schedule was announced in December 2023, I observed that one party in particular, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the party of the imprisoned former prime minister Imran Khan, faced difficult challenges. The party's candidates faced significant obstacles in submitting their nomination papers, and were not able to participate fully in election campaigning, such as corner meetings and election rallies. Many candidates faced arrests and an interruption in their homes, with their family members also facing torture. There were clear human rights violations during this pre-polling time period. The internet and phone network was also blocked on two occasions when PTI held online virtual election rallies.

Polling Day Observation:
On polling day, the election staff followed all processes diligently, as trained. The equipment and facilities offered to them were basic but they carried out their duties with hard work and sincerity. I did not detect any irregularities at the polling stations I covered, from 7.30am - 11:00pm.

Blocking the internet and phone network on polling day prevented many voters from being able to locate their polling stations, especially the polling stations in remote areas. I observed frustrated voters who arrived at the polling stations late, after voting time had ended. They explained their struggle and difficulty and had found the polling station manually by asking people. Blocking the internet and phone network denied voters of free and fair access to information, a fundamental human right.

I observed that there was a shortage of Polling Officers (only one was provided in each polling station), which contributed to long delays and consequently many voters not being able to vote. The behaviour of one Presiding Officer, in NA 121, was completely inappropriate. She was very rude to elderly voters and did not help them. During the vote counting process, she was also inconsiderate towards Polling Agents and took a very long time to issue Form 45.

Post-Polling Observation:
The internet and phone network outage continued until the next day, 9th Feb 2024, with a delay in polling results. Candidates contesting on an independent platform, primarily those from PTI, have challenged the Forms 45 and 47, that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has issued on their website, claiming that they are forged. There has not been a sufficient and timely response by the ECP, who although have set up election tribunals to hear these cases, has shown huge delays. The protests that have happened post-election have been full of violence.

Overall, my election observation in all stages of the election showed voter suppression, denying access to information, violence targeting supporters of Imran Khan, rigging, and delays in appeal cases.

Dr. Sundas Ali
Election Observer

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House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024
Testimony of Syed A Hussain

Honourable Congressman Joe Wilson, Chairman of the Sub-Committee and Honourable Committee,

Members, I take this opportunity to state that being a U.S. citizen of Pakistani origin with the best interests of the United States and Pakistan in view, I state that every democratic and constitutional norm has been violated in Pakistan by the military led by General Asim Munir, post General Elections of February 8/20/24.

Ironically, the vast majority of Pakistanis believe that the military has done this with direct involvement of the United States State Department. This is not only a very disturbing matter which entails extreme human rights abuses, undermining of democracy, theft of popular mandate, installing unelected governments of criminals and adversely affecting the future of the Pakistan-US relationship, it also has had a direct effect on the Pakistani diaspora in the United States. It is felt strongly that the US administration and our representatives must put a correction to this ruckus.

I myself have been subjected to transnational repression where the Pakistan embassy in Washington DC has been used as a conduit to threaten me by the military with a consequence of death for speaking on the subject. It is not limited to only me; Pakistanis have been hunted, killed and harassed by the military junta across the world to silence them against their unlawful acts.

It is requested that I be given a chance to further elaborate on my predicament where me and my family are at great peril of life and liberty, as well as elaborate on the evolving environment in Pakistan detrimental to the democracy and Pak-US relationship.

Syed A Hussain

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SUMMON TO THE ACCUSED

THE STATE VS LIEUTENANT COLONEL SYED AKBAR HUSSAIN (RETIRED) SON OF SYED HAZOOR HUSSAIN, FIR NUMBER 3054/23 DATED 15 AUGUST 2023, POLICE STATION SOUTH CANTONMENT LAHORE

To: **Lieutenant Colonel Syed Akbar Hussain (Retired) son of Syed Hazoor Hussain**

Whereas, charges of having committed, inter alia, offences triable by this Court of competent jurisdiction have been preferred against you, Lieutenant Colonel Syed Akbar Hussain (Retired), Passport # JK6894432, son of Syed Hazoor Hussain, as accused in the case under sec 31 (d) of PAA 1952.

And whereas, for this purpose, the Court has been convened at Chunian Cantonment; Pursuant to order of the Court, dated 23rd February, 2024, you, Lieutenant Colonel Syed Akbar Hussain (Retired), son of Syed Hazoor Hussain, as the accused, is hereby summoned and required to attend, in person, proceedings of the Court in the titled matter, from day to day until duly discharged, on **23rd March 2024 at 1100 hours**.

Whereof you shall fail at your peril and the matter shall be proceeded against you ex - parte.

Given under my hand at Chunian Cantonment on the 23rd day of February, 2024.

SEAL OF THE COURT

PRESIDENT OF THE COURT

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Hearing Entitled "Pakistan After the Elections: Examining the Future of Democracy in Pakistan and the US-Pakistan Relationship"
House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024
Testimony of Dr. Moeed Pirzada

My name is Moeed Pirzada. I have a multi-disciplinary background; I graduated as a medical doctor/physician from Pakistan but left medical practice to work for Central Superior Services (Core Group of Civil Services with Federal Govt), later studied International Relations from Columbia University, New York and Law from London School of Economics, UK as a Britannia Chevening Scholar selected by British Foreign Office. Worked as a TV Anchor and Editor Strategic Affairs, with major TV networks in the UK and Pakistan (Geo, ARY, Express, Dunya News and State Broadcaster Ptv), I am founder Editor of online publication (Global Village Space, GVS). I have written extensively for publications in Pakistan and internationally and have appeared in international media like BBC, Al Jazeera, TRT and CNN-IBN. I am active on social media platforms (X, FB & YouTube) and am being followed by more than five million across the world (with significant % in the US).

As TV Anchor, I interviewed leaders and decision makers from across the world like Secretary Clinton, PM Benazir Bhutto, PM David Cameron, PM Shahbaz Sharif, President Musharraf, President Mehmood Abbas, President Hamid Karzai, PM Imran Khan, Admiral Mike Mullen, Senator John McCain, Amb John Bolton (NSA), Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud (Saudi FM), FM Hina Rabbani Khar, FM Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Congressman Greg Casar and many others. As a leading journalist I thus enjoyed access to the highest level of Pakistani political governments, foreign office, and the military leadership. Given my focus on international relations, and my role as an Editor, I maintained close liaison with foreign missions in Islamabad, Pakistan. I was thus briefed (On Record & Off the Record) by all sides on key moments of crisis and transitions in national and regional developments.

I have been resident in the US since the first week of Nov 2022, when I was forced to leave Pakistan (Oct 25) after receiving repeated threats because of my writings on Twitter (X) – and after the assassination of my journalist colleague, Arshad Sharif. (murdered on Oct 23, 2022). In June 2023, FBI warned me of potential threats to me, and I, with their permission, went public with it on Twitter.

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Briefing on Decoded Cipher in PM Office – April 2022

I was privileged to be part of select 10 prominent journalists of Pakistan, who were briefed on the declassified copy of the Cipher sent by Ambassador Asad Majeed, from Washington (Mar 7, 2022) on his meeting with Asst Secretary Central & South Asian Affairs, Mr. Donald Lu. Cipher was not given in hands, but was read out by a federal minister (Mr. Asad Umar). While language, apparently used by Asst. Secretary Donald Lu, was offensive but it can be understood in the context of emotions that prevailed in Washington, on the eve of Russian invasion of Ukraine and PM Khan's untimely visit, and emotions not understood in Islamabad. However, what struck me was the substance of the message, reportedly, conveyed by Donald Lu, to Ambassador. "If PM Imran Khan Govt is not removed, in the vote of no confidence, then it will be tough going ahead" –

I wonder to this day, to whom Lu was sending that message? Since Ambassador Majeed reported to the PM through Foreign Secretary and Foreign Minister who worked directly under the PM Khan. Who was Mr. Lu sending his warning and message to remove the Imran Khan govt? And why did Mr. Lu think that going to Russia was PM Imran Khan's personal policy decision?

Meeting in PM Office before Russia Visit (Feb 22, 2022)

I was earlier (Feb 22, 2022) part of the meeting in the PM Office (along with a few journalists & think tankers) to participate in a discussion on Russian Visit (scheduled Feb 23-24, 2022). Visit was public since the second week of January and was to take place in the first week of Feb 2022, it was rescheduled due to the Winter Olympics in Beijing where various leaders were suddenly invited including President Putin and PM Imran Khan.

In the meeting on Feb 22, attended by Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Foreign Secretary and many former Ambassadors to Russia, NSA, many cabinet members, PM Imran Khan was the only person who expressed his doubts about the wisdom and timings of the visit, expressing fears that war on Ukraine looked likely and how will this visit be seen internationally. All others informed him that since the visit had been planned much earlier, it would be insulting to the Russians, and a serious setback to Pak-Russia bilateral relations to cancel it at this point. It was understood that Army Chief, Gen. Bajwa was consulted and was on board without any objections.

So, inside the decision-making circles of Pakistan, there was total inability to understand the historic and political significance of potential war in Europe and the wider fears it inspired. But it appeared obvious that no formal request to cancel the trip had been received by the PM or Foreign Minister's Office, from Washington, till that time (Feb 22, 2022). I later learnt (from PM team) that NSA Jack Sullivan called Dr. Moeed Yousaf, Pakistan's NSA, in the morning of Feb

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24 , and asked him to cancel the visit, at a time when the Pakistani PM and his delegation were in a hotel next to Kremlin and Russians were practicing Guard of Honor near the Hotel. Has Secretary Blinken or his team made any formal contact with the Pakistani PM or Foreign Minister asking them to cancel the Russian Visit? When? What happened?

Unprecedented Media Suppression in Pakistan

Media suppression seen in Pakistan since the clandestine removal of Imran Khan Govt (engineered by Army Chief, Gen. Bajwa) in April 2022, is unprecedented in the country's recent history. With my background explained above, I can confidently assert that such a situation has not been since the martial law of Gen. Zia. (1979-1985 Martial Law). Since April 2022, journalists have been beaten blue on roads, abducted illicitly, tortured, stripped naked, detained endlessly (Jameel Farooqi, Imran Riaz Khan, Ayyaz Amir, Sami Ibrahim and others) and silenced by bringing media tycoons under state pressure.

Political workers, and activists have been treated even more harshly. More than 4,000 houses were raided, in one single night, in May 2022, to arrest political leaders and workers, one day before a call for Long March given by former PM, Imran Khan. Families were beaten and harassed to impose a climate of fear and helplessness. This state tyranny has continued without any lapse since then. At one point, the Govt, in just one province of Punjab, admitted arresting almost 10,000 political workers. Hundreds are still under arrest, civilian courts are dysfunctional or helpless, Supreme Court judges have been forced to resign under duress and military courts are trying civilians.

While all this has been happening, the US State Dept, under Assistant Secretary Lu, has been making occasional comments that looked more “optics” and less substance.

Murder of Prominent Journalist Arshad Sharif

One of the most prominent journalists, household name and face in Pakistan, TV Anchor, Arshad Sharif, had several irrelevant cases registered against him, for charges ranging from treason to terrorism and was receiving death threats – on his criticism of the then Army Chief. Arshad fled to Dubai for safety, but Pakistani authorities pressured the Dubai/UAE Govt to repatriate him. While Dubai authorities refused his repatriation, they forced him to leave (Arshad narrated details to me on phone). He then wanted to reach US or UK but US and UK embassies acted unsympathetically, he was refused visas on the grounds that he needs to apply from within Pakistan – ignoring that he faced death threats inside Pakistan.

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Arshad, in desperation, ran off to Kenya, was murdered on Oct 23, 2022 in a classic case of political assassination. It was blamed on Kenyan police but everyone in Pakistan understands that the masterminds of his killing are in Pakistan. It's believed that he was made an example, to intimidate Pakistani media, for his bold criticism of the then Army Chief. Most of these facts find mention in "Fact-finding Report" by Pakistani police. But instead of meaningful investigation and follow up, officers were transferred and side-lined and "Fact Finding Report" was suppressed, giving credence to the fears that masterminds of journalists' murder were well entrenched inside the power structure.

The US State Department, usually vocal on abuse of human rights and media freedoms, throughout this period, acted mostly with indifference. It occasionally commented but mostly referred to whatever was happening in Pakistan as the country's internal matter.

Internet Shutdowns, Crack Down on Social Media & Blocking Twitter (X)

After the ruthless taming of Pakistani newspapers and traditional tv media, US conceived and created global platforms (Twitter/X, YouTube, Facebook etc) provided avenues of expression and global connect with world-wide diasporas (including the US Pakistani communities) to the 240 million people of Pakistan (with over 150 million handheld devices). Soon these platforms came under tyrannical scrutiny, with new laws, regulations, ordinances, and hundreds of ordinary citizens making political comments were picked up, often without any due process of law, beaten and harassed into silence.

When this did not work, the internet and platforms became the target. Repeated shutdowns of the internet before and during elections happened – all documented by international monitors like Net Blocks and reported by the media. Now Twitter (X) has been blocked in Pakistan, since Feb 17, after a top election official confessed to massive rigging in Feb elections.

Transnational Repression

Bill to reduce "Transnational Repression" was introduced in 118th Congress in March 2023, FBI has already established a hotline to deal with complaints of Transnational Repression. Senator Merkley, Senator Ben Cardin and others have been vocal about its importance. But the State Dept has yet to tell Pakistani authorities about its implications.

Journalists like myself and Wajahat Saeed Khan (New York) and other Vloggers and commentators on Twitter have either found terrorism cases registered against them with serious repercussions or family members in Pakistan harassed. All these acts fit neatly within the ambit of Transnational Repression.

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In the case of myself (Moeed Pirzada) and other journalists based in the US (Wajaht Saeed Khan, Shaheen Sehbai) and Sabir Shakir (exiled in the UK) human right and media organizations (like Amnesty, HRW, RSF) have taken notice and issued statements. Yet the State Department under the watch of Asst. Secretary Donald Lu remains oblivious and has yet to take a meaningful position.

Concluding Prayers:

Post-war liberal world order rests upon US proactivity; it's already under stress due to the rise of illiberal regimes. Pakistan, with 240 million population, is the 5th largest nation state, second after Indonesia and the only nuclear power of the Muslim world. It is confronted by serious economic challenges, political, ethnic and sectarian fault lines and is like a pressure cooker on fire. Discussions with state department officials (off the record) reveal they totally rely upon the Pakistani military to keep things under control and have no other tools of meaningful engagement. This traditional approach needs revision.

Military is under stress; it may find it difficult to deal with the crisis it has created through chaotic decision making. Pakistani political parties and military both may benefit from a sustained meaningful engagement by the State Department and the US Congress to help the military disengage from politics, take Pakistan step by step towards genuine multiparty democracy, media freedoms and rule of law. It's important to act before it's too late.

Sincerely,

Dr. Moeed Pirzada

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March 20, 2024
Testimony of Dr. Salman Ahmad

Esteemed Congress Members –

PERSONAL BACKGROUND
My name is Dr. Salman Ahmad. I am a Pakistani-American from Rockland County, New York. I am a medical doctor, professional musician, author, filmmaker, and activist.

During my career, I helped form Vital Signs and Junoon, two of South Asia's most iconic pop-rock groups with Pakistani and American band members. Over the last decade, I've volunteered my medical and musical services to strengthen health, education, democracy, and human rights in Pakistan through what I call rock and roll activism. Under former Prime Minister Imran Khan's government, I worked on reducing polio rates and Pakistan's highly effective COVID-19 program. I also served as an advisor to Prime Minister Khan on arts and culture.

US CITIZEN FAMILY MEMBER IS ABDUCTED AND TORTURED
Since the toppling of Prime Minister Khan's government in April 2022, my life, my family's life, and the lives of many Pakistani Americans have been under constant threat. Indeed, since 2022, Pakistan has been backsliding into a tyrannical military dictatorship.

In May 2023, fifteen masked men scaled the wall of my Pakistani-American sister's home in Karachi. They broke down her front door Gestapo-style and rounded up all of the family members. My sister demanded to see a warrant, but they had no documents to identify who they were. They took my brother-in-law, my sister's husband (also a US citizen), hostage in an unmarked black unmarked truck. They questioned him over my alleged anti-state activities. My brother-in-law was interrogated and tortured, and he was told that I needed to turn over my Twitter (now X) password. He was also told that I had to delete my posts critical of Pakistan's military chief, Asim Munir, and his predecessor, General Bajwa.

I worked frantically behind the scenes and thankfully, was able to secure my brother-in-law's release and also helped in the release of prominent designer (US citizen) Khadija Shah, who was detained for seven months for exercising her constitutional right to protest peacefully.

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS
Friendship in Pakistan carries grave risks.

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The stakes escalated dramatically for me in October, 2022 during a humanitarian flight with former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his team to support a relief event for Flood victims in Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan.

As we flew back to Islamabad, the helicopter pilot informed us that both engines had failed. It was a near-death experience. Miraculously, the pilot managed to execute an emergency landing—on a cricket pitch, of all places.

A subsequent public investigation revealed that the helicopter's fuel had been tampered with and the engines had been sabotaged.

This was my first, but not my last, encounter with an assassination attempt.

In December 2022, I found that an "unknown person" in Balochistan had filed a case against me for sedition and treason because of my anti-martial law tweets.

In March 2023, a person who identified himself as an Army Brigadier approached my 86-year-old father (also a US citizen) in Lahore. He told my father, "Your son's life is in grave danger," and said that I should leave Pakistan and never return.

PRIME MINISTER IMRAN KHAN IS OUSTED

According to The Intercept, an unknown number of Pakistani Americans continue to languish in Pakistani jails for their support of democracy and human rights. Also, many relatives of Pakistani Americans have been put on the Exit Control List, preventing them from leaving Pakistan to instill fear and silence the voices of Pakistanis living abroad.

On May 8, 2023, Representative Maxine Waters, Imran Khan, and I had a confidential Zoom conversation in which Imran Khan told Representative Waters about these assassination attempts and the threat to democracy and human rights in Pakistan.

On May 9, 2023, the day after this private Zoom conversation, former Prime Minister Imran Khan was abducted by military commanders from inside the High Court in Islamabad.

Since Khan's ouster and subsequent imprisonment, the Pakistani "Establishment," which consists of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Pakistani Army, has inflicted a relentless campaign to suppress perceived dissent. Many Pakistani Americans have found themselves unwittingly caught in this dragnet.

US citizens of Pakistani origin are being subjected to a restriction of our freedom of expression, speech, and religious belief. We have faced enforced disappearances, military courts, and

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harassment and arrest for being human rights defenders. This is the most dangerous form of martial law Pakistan has experienced in its history. It has distorted constitutional institutions and made a mockery of law and order.

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

As the Pakistani government ratchets up its stalking, intimidation, and assault on innocent Pakistani Americans, I have had many conversations with U.S. law enforcement officers, including the FBI, and officials at the Department of Homeland Security. All have indicated to me that the United States is taking the threat of transnational repression very seriously.

Globally, transnational repression is one of the most severe threats to human rights, democratic governance, and state sovereignty. In the last year alone, we have seen several high-profile cases, including the murder of an Indo-Canadian in Canada and the targeting of Indian Americans and Chinese Americans by foreign intelligence agencies on U.S. soil.

A politically and economically unstable Pakistan poses a global threat. The United States cannot afford violations of the fundamental rights and safety of Pakistani Americans. The United States cannot and must not turn a blind eye to the ongoing undermining of principles of democracy, justice, and the rule of law in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The Pakistani Establishment is under the misguided notion that it can operate without fear of repercussion or international scrutiny. The above examples highlight just how emboldened the Pakistani military, intelligence agency, and current government have become in their campaign of widespread transnational repression marked by brazen and chilling acts of violence and intimidation.

As the country emerges from what the New York Times has described as “the least credible election” in its history, I say with great regret that the Pakistani state has completely lost the plot.

Nowhere is safe for us Pakistani Americans who are being targeted by the Pakistani Establishment. I implore you to act now and act fast to address the dire threat Pakistani Americans, at home and abroad, face. Thank you for your time and your support.

Yours sincerely ,
Dr. Salman Ahmad

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