

Testimony to the United States Commission On International Religious Freedom

Steve Coll
President
New America Foundation
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the commission about political and security conditions in Pakistan and how they are affecting the human rights climate in the country and in the region.

Pakistan is passing through a period of instability, which began early in 2007, which has few direct precedents in its history. The country has endured military coups, separatist rebellions (resulting, in the case of 1971, in the loss of half of its territory), sectarian violence, organized crime, and other forms of civil conflict. It now faces an insurgency waged by the Taliban and allied extremist groups which, in its claims of Islamic legitimacy and justice, challenges the government in many important ways. Never before has a religiously motivated insurgency controlled such large swaths of territory as the Taliban now do. Never before has an Islamic insurgency substituted itself for state institutions in substantial areas of the country, as the Taliban have done in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and sections of Northwest Frontier Province.

The character of this embryonic state within the Pakistani state is visible today in Swat, which as recently as a decade ago was a vacation destination where secular state institutions predominated and where the local culture, although influenced by an ardent religious minority, was nonetheless pluralistic. As they have done previously in the F.A.T.A., local Taliban leaders have lately enforced an unforgiving code of Deobandi- and *Salafi*-influenced Islam that precludes, among other things, education for girls that had long been taken for granted locally.

Some commentators have suggested that the United States should accommodate or at least accept the takeover of Swat as a product of local culture and conditions which the U.S., in any event, is in a poor position to influence, given the local unpopularity of American foreign policy. This analysis is mistaken, in my judgment. Public opinion in N.W.F.P. and surrounding areas is not a mystery. Just a year ago, Pakistan staged democratic elections that were judged by international observers as largely free and fair. Voters in N.W.F.P. overwhelmingly rejected the religious parties that had governed them for the previous five years – parties that were considerably more moderate and committed to pluralism than are the Taliban. The takeover of Swat and F.A.T.A. is rooted in multiple failures of the Pakistani state, and it is an insurgency enabled to some extent by the local

population, but it should not be misjudged as an expression of popular will. It is, to a much greater degree, a product of intimidation and violent coercion by a militia force that has, unfortunately, proven to be more effective than the Pakistani state in the pursuit of its objectives. It is also a product of longstanding collaboration between the Pakistani security services and Islamic radicals.

The complex history that has led to the recent scenes of school burnings, stoning and other crude justice in Swat would require a book-length treatise to describe. I look forward to exploring those themes and sections of this background that are of particular interest to the Commission. I have been asked, however, to address several subject areas concerning the nature of Islamic extremism in Pakistan today, and the interaction between those extremist groups and the Pakistani security services. I will do so briefly in this formal statement. Finally, I will offer some short observations about U.S. policy.

Islamic extremism in Pakistan today resides in a network of networks. Some of the formally organized aspects of these networks, such as Jamat Islami, a political party with historical ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, have been present in the country since its creation in 1947. Most trace their histories to a more recent period of religiously motivated war funded in part by outside powers, including the United States. Militia offshoots of the Jamat, for example, such as that led by the Afghan Islamic radical Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, acquired wealth, arms, and military experience during the anti-Soviet wars in Afghanistan of the 1980s. Other groups came of age during the gradual intensification of violent sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shias in Punjab and in cities such as Karachi and Quetta. Still others, rooted in Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province (such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed) arose after the 1980s, equipped and motivated to fight in Kashmir. From this government-connected paramilitary stew arose two groups that would become of particular interest to the United States: Al Qaeda, which was founded in Peshawar, Pakistan, during the summer of 1988, and the Afghan Taliban, which was founded in October, 1994, along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with tentacles in the Afghan city of Kandahar and the Pakistani city of Quetta.

For many years, analysts tended to regard the Taliban and Al Qaeda as self-isolating. The latter was made up of foreigners who struggled to integrate into local populations. The Taliban seemed to be a product of Afghan refugee camps and borderland madrassas whose radical, Deobandi-influenced interpretations of Islam were out of step with Pakistani culture. They seemed, too, to be an expression of Pashtun grievance and nationalism within Afghanistan, and even where they attracted Pakistani volunteers, these tended to be Pashto speakers, not mainstream Punjabis or urban dwellers. The Taliban remain a Pashtun phenomenon in Afghanistan, and while there is no census of its membership in Pakistan, it is likely that its volunteers today are predominantly Pashto speakers. But one important and threatening change in the structure of Islamic radicalism in Pakistan today involves the breakout of the Pakistani Taliban from the self-isolating regionalism of the past.

Pashto-speaking Taliban have clearly linked up with Punjab-based, Kashmir-groups such as Lashkar and Jaish. They have also built support networks in cities such as Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. The most vivid expression of this morphing or evolution of the character and reach of Islamic radicalism occurred during the summer of 2007, when a motley crew of well-armed radicals occupied the *Lal Masjid*, or Red Mosque, in the heart of Islamabad. Only a costly Pakistan Army operation eventually expelled them. The political demography of the Red Mosque radicals offered a disturbing forecast of where we are today: Young volunteers from Southern Punjab, who peeled away from their Kashmir groups to get in on the action in the capital; radical preachers influenced by transnational ideology and boasting of connections to Al Qaeda; and emerging Pakistani-identified Taliban whose focus was not the pursuit of power in Afghanistan, but a takeover – or at least rising influence – at home.

As the Commission is aware, the history of these and related Islamic radical groups is inseparable from the history of the Pakistan military and its principal foreign intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, or I.S.I. Beginning in the 1980s, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, I.S.I. has systematically funded, armed, protected and directed Islamic radical groups from their bases on Pakistani soil. Initially, the military leader Zia ul-Haq pursued this policy, in collaboration with the United States and Saudi Arabia, to raise the costs to the Soviet Union for their invasion of Afghanistan, and to protect Pakistan from any extension of Soviet ambitions. During this period, Pakistan discovered the potential value of Islamist militias as instruments of its security and foreign policies in South Asia.

In particular, Pakistani generals became focused intently on what they regarded as an existential threat from India. With a much larger population and industrial base, a proven nuclear capability, and a growing economy, India promised, eventually, to overwhelm the Pakistani military, no matter how fiercely it trained and no matter how much modern military equipment it was able to purchase from the United States or Europe. Pakistan's generals identified two ways to secure their country and to keep India off balance: To acquire a nuclear deterrent, and to promote Islamist militias, particularly in Kashmir, as a low-cost mechanism that would keep the Indian military tied down, wary of escalation, and generally off balance.

The full history and organization chart of I.S.I., from the birth of these covert action campaigns in the 1980s until today, has never been published in open sources. From the accounts of those familiar with I.S.I.'s structure, it is an exceptionally large and well-resourced organization, staffed by military officers, but relying as well on retirees and contractors, and organized into functional and regional bureaus. I.S.I. has had a bureau focused on intelligence collection and covert action in Afghanistan since at least the early 1980s. It developed a similar bureau for Kashmir after an uprising erupted there in 1989. These bureaus are among the sections of the service that have undertaken the most intense collaboration with Islamist groups.

I.S.I.'s relationship with Islamic extremist groups in Pakistan has varied over time and across different theaters of operation. The best open source evidence suggests that its

collaborations with Al Qaeda have been limited, and have involved such projects as the use of Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan to train Kashmiri jihadi volunteers during the 1990s. After September 11, I.S.I. actively collaborated with the Central Intelligence Agency and other U.S. forces against Al Qaeda. There is also some evidence, although it is not so frequently available in the open sources, that I.S.I. has at least occasionally worked both sides of that conflict, with officers occasionally tipping off or otherwise communicating with Al Qaeda targets. It is difficult to imagine, for example, that Osama Bin Laden could have remained at large for so long without at least some cooperation from elements of the Pakistani state. In any event, the ability of Kashmir-oriented jihadi groups and leaders to operate openly on Pakistani soil – delivering speeches and sermons, recruiting and training – provides the most transparent evidence that the Pakistani security services continue to collaborate with at least some Islamic extremist groups.

Why? Attitudes within the high command of the Pakistan Army, and within I.S.I., are sewn with many sources of complexity. First, there remains a widespread belief in the military command that India does not accept Pakistan's right to exist and is pursuing a long-term strategy aimed at destabilizing or at least demilitarizing the country. Even where Pakistani officers may not sympathize personally with the Taliban or its allies – particularly, for example, on the issue of girls' education – they may nonetheless regard these groups as a necessary instrument against India. Second, commanders in the Pakistan Army have, at best, a jaundiced attitude toward their partners in the United States, and particularly toward what they see as America's self-interested and myopic focus on its own security goals, even if the pursuit of those goals comes at Pakistan's expense. Third, the Pakistan Army lacks the institutional imagination, capacity and doctrine to wage effective counterinsurgency war against the Taliban, even where its commanders may see it as in their interest to do so. Fourth, after many years in which it enjoyed unrivaled popularity, Army commanders recognized that the public has come to hold their institution in lower regard than before, to the point where Army officers may be afraid to wear their uniforms in public markets, for fear of abuse. Given these attitudes, the Army is understandably focused on rebuilding its reputation and its professional strength; to wage a risky war against Islamic groups rooted in the population is a difficult campaign for an institution lacking in self-confidence and national popularity to undertake successfully. Finally, there is a fundamental question of strategy and outlook: Some officers in the Army see themselves as guardians of a constitutional inheritance that aspires to democracy, pluralism, and modernization. These officers may ultimately see normalization with India as both conceivable and in Pakistan's long-term interest. Other officers do not.

The Army and the Taliban are both responsible for human rights violations in Pakistan today. Under the cover of the U.S.-sponsored Global War on Terror, for example, the Army detained hundreds of separatist leaders from Baluchistan and Sindh whom the Army regarded as threats to national integrity. These detentions have lately eased somewhat, but they suggest the sense of impunity that the Army continues to enjoy, even under the notional control of a democratic administration. For its part, the Taliban has imposed a rule of terror in many parts of the country where popular attitudes, as measured in recent free elections, make clear that they are not welcome. The Taliban now

offer a banner of quasi-legitimacy under which any young band of car thieves, smugglers, heroin runners or nihilist thrill-seekers can travel. Last year, I collected self-produced Taliban videotapes distributed in Pakistani markets as part of the group's propaganda drive. The scenes reminded me of the most degraded areas of West Africa in the early 1990s – uncontrolled groups of heavily armed teenagers traveling in trucks, kidnapping and terrorizing civilians, staging show trials and meting out rough justice, including decapitations, without any sense that they might be held accountable.

For many years, the United States has defined its goals in Pakistan narrowly and inconsistently. Pakistan does not need outside help in defining what sort of country it wants to be. The founding vision of Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the goals of its early constitutions – although degraded by years of military intervention and manipulation – remain at the center of the political aspirations of many Pakistanis in civil society, the media, business, politics, and even in the security services. As in any society, including our own, the struggle to achieve, preserve and renew these values has proven difficult. But the United States does not need to invent the idea of a modernizing, democratic Pakistan; it only has to learn how to constructively support, rather than retard, a project that Pakistanis themselves have identified and persisted in, sometimes under great pressure and at great cost, as their own national project.

A stable, modernizing, pluralistic, tolerant, democratic Pakistan at peace with its neighbors and itself is in the interest of the United States, India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan alike. Achieving such an outcome from here will not be easy. In the short term, the goal must be stability and political reconciliation within the existing democratic order. In the longer term, yes, it will be critical to encourage and coerce the Pakistani security services into seeing that it is in their corporate interest to break once and for all with the jihadi groups they have so long nurtured or tolerated. But trying to change the behavior of the Pakistan Army incrementally is a loser's bet. The Army has dodged and weaved through generations of American policymaking; it is well-practiced at the art. To concentrate on reforming the security services alone is, in effect, to accept many of those services' premises about what matters and how strategy should be conceived. Ultimately, the goal of the United States must be to promote peace and normalization between Pakistan and India. Only through trade, travel, cooperation and a process of voluntary demilitarization will the Pakistan Army and intelligence service gradually withdraw from the patterns and practices that have brought the country so low. This evolution of a difficult military into a constructive institution in a modernizing democracy has precedent – more persuasive in some cases than in others, but in all impressive – in such comparable countries as Turkey, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In the first and the last of these examples, creative, persistent American policymaking contributed to the result, but in the end, it was the lure of regional economic integration and legitimacy that persuaded these militaries to change their ways. In South Asia, such a comparable source of encouragement is available in only one direction: Through peace and normalization with India.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these observations, and I look forward to exchanging views with members of the Commission.