

Statement for the Record
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Pakistan: Challenges for U.S. Interests

Testimony of Robert L. Grenier
Chairman, ERG Partners

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to thank you and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss one of America's most difficult, complicated, trying – and also important – foreign relationships. My knowledge of U.S.-Pakistan relations is primarily informed by my practical experience in helping to manage those relations, dating back to the mid-1990s.

At the start of the Clinton administration, in 1993 and 1994, I was a Special Assistant to the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, on loan from CIA, deeply involved in an annual terrorism review which nearly resulted in Pakistan's being placed on the formal list of state sponsors of terrorism. In 1999, I was posted to Islamabad as the CIA station chief for both Pakistan and Afghanistan. My three-year tenure in that position spanned both the lowest and, arguably, the highest points in recent U.S.-Pakistan relations, when 9/11 propelled Pakistan from being a heavily sanctioned, near-pariah state to a front-line U.S. ally in the then-recently proclaimed "global war on terror."

After leaving Pakistan in 2002, I later returned to active involvement in U.S.-Pakistan affairs from 2004 to 2006, this time as Director of the CIA Counter-terrorism Center. At that time, Pakistan remained, by far, America's single most important foreign counter-terrorism partner. It is perhaps emblematic, however, of the deep-seated differences and suspicions which have always lurked just beneath the surface of U.S.-Pakistan relations even in the best of times, that in the five years between my retirement in 2006 and the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011, we went from a situation where the bin Laden raid would undoubtedly have been carried out jointly, to one where the U.S. felt constrained to conduct this operation unilaterally, with good reason in my view, despite the predictable consequences for bilateral ties.

As I look back now at the history of U.S.-Pakistan relations over the past 50 years and more, it is clear that there is a repetitive cycle at work. The reasons for U.S. dissatisfaction with Pakistan may have evolved over time – from past reluctance to deal with anti-democratic military regimes, to abhorrence of atrocities in East Pakistan in the early 1970s, to concerns over nuclear proliferation and Pakistani support to Kashmiri militants in the '80s and '90s, to today's preoccupation with Pakistan's tolerance of the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network. Through it all, however, the U.S. has been willing, episodically, to overlook its concerns with aspects of Pakistani behavior and to subordinate those concerns in the face of what have

appeared, at the time, to be overriding national security priorities – only to revert to a more contentious relationship when those interests no longer pertained.

Thus, in the 1980s, the U.S. was willing not only to overlook growing evidence of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program in deference to joint U.S.-Pak support to the anti-Soviet Afghan Mujahiddin, but also to provide Pakistan with generous economic and military rewards in the bargain. In the 1990's, however, with the Soviets safely expelled from Afghanistan, those rewards were abruptly replaced with Congressionally-mandated sanctions.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the cycle began again. Needing a platform for operations in Afghanistan and a partner to intercept al-Qa'ida militants fleeing that country, the U.S. was again willing to subordinate its broader concerns with Pakistani-based militancy in Kashmir and with Pakistan's ambivalent attitude toward the Afghan Taliban – which I should note was manifest almost from the start of the U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan. Once again, the U.S. was willing to provide extensive financial support to Pakistan, much of it tied at least loosely to Pakistani support of U.S. operations, and to Pak military deployments along its western border. And although much has happened in the interim, that is the essential bargain which has pertained ever since.

As U.S.-Pak relations have gone through these cycles of boom and bust, and as U.S. policy toward Pakistan has alternated between one extreme and the other, some things have remained constant. Pakistan, for its part, has clung stubbornly to its own perceptions of national interest, and has generally refused to compromise those perceived interests, even when their pursuit has seemed irrational or self-defeating to U.S. eyes – whether in the context of nuclear weapons doctrine, in its assessment of the threat from India, or in its calculus regarding both foreign and domestic militant groups. Pakistani adherence to its perceived interests, in fact, has persisted, irrespective of U.S.-administered punishments or inducements. This has generated considerable outrage and frustration on the U.S. side, particularly in recent times on counterterrorism, where the fight against radical Islamic militancy is seen in both practical and moral terms. Pakistani fear of seeing Islamically-inspired militants unite against it, and its resulting insistence on making at times overdrawn and wishful distinctions among militant groups based on the degree of proximate threat they pose to Pakistan as opposed to others, leads to U.S. charges of double-dealing, particularly when the U.S. believes it is paying the bill. To the U.S., the struggle against violent extremism is a moral imperative – a view which Pakistan, used to making practical compromises with militancy in the context of both foreign and domestic politics, simply does not share in the same way.

U.S. frustration is mirrored on the Pakistani side by its perception of the U.S. as a fickle and inconstant partner, which does not recognize Pakistan's heavy sacrifices in a violent struggle against Pakistan-based extremists which has been fueled, in large measure, by Pakistani support for U.S. counterterrorism policy. That assertion may sound jarring to American ears, given the perceived limitations in Pakistani counterterrorism policy, but it is a view firmly held by the extremists themselves. Pakistani resentment of America is driven by the perception that the U.S. will never be satisfied by what it does, and given the serious underlying differences

between the two, the Pakistanis are right: The U.S. is unlikely ever to be satisfied, and perhaps justifiably so.

Once again, U.S.-Pakistan relations are at an inflection point. In recent years, U.S. relations with Pakistan have been driven by the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. But there has been a qualitative change in the nature and aims of the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, and the dynamic of U.S.-Pakistan relations needs to change with it. Indeed, I would argue that much of the current frustration in U.S.-Pakistan relations is driven by backward-looking desires and concerns which simply no longer apply. The U.S./NATO military posture in Afghanistan is a small fraction of what it once was. The U.S. no longer aims to defeat the Taliban; instead it hopes merely to keep the Kabul regime from being defeated. With U.S. ends and means having changed so drastically in Afghanistan, it is highly unrealistic to suppose that Pakistan is going to make up the difference. Pakistan cannot succeed in bringing the Afghan Taliban to heel where 150,000 U.S. and NATO troops and hundreds of billions of U.S. dollars have failed, and what's more, they're not going to try. Pakistani influence in Afghanistan, despite long-standing legend to the contrary, is distinctly limited. Pakistan's leadership understands that a Taliban victory in Afghanistan would be a strategic disaster for itself, but lacking the means to decisively influence events there – and continuing to harbor serious doubts about the strategic orientation of the Kabul regime – it is disinclined to take the risks involved in trying to do so.

As Afghanistan settles into a dynamic stalemate of indeterminate outcome, it is time for the U.S. to refocus on its long-term fundamental interests in South Asia. The reasons for America's post-9/11 obsession with Afghanistan are clear enough – I was present, after all, at the creation – but long-term U.S. strategic interests in Pakistan in fact dwarf those in Afghanistan. Arguably, we have allowed the tail to wag the dog for too long, and it is time to reorient our policy.

Pakistan is now engaged in a long, complicated, twilight struggle against religiously-inspired extremism, both internally and across its borders. For Pakistan, this is not simply a matter of finding, fixing, and eliminating committed terrorists. Ultimate victory will necessitate addressing the hold which various forms of extremism have long exerted on large portions of its own body politic, and thus the political environment in which important policy decisions are made. Long-term solutions for Pakistan will involve social and educational reforms as much as military action. Given Pakistan's importance in global counterterrorism policy, its status as a nuclear-armed state, its troubled relations with India, and its location at the heart of a highly important but politically unstable region of the world, the U.S. has a considerable stake in the outcome of this struggle, and would be well advised to maintain a constructive engagement with Pakistan at multiple levels.

In Pakistan as elsewhere, the U.S. must balance achievable goals with effective means. This may well dictate a lower overall level of U.S. expenditure in Pakistan than we see currently, but the dynamics and motivations behind those spending decisions must fundamentally change. Afghanistan will continue to loom large in U.S. calculations, but it will inevitably recede in importance. As the U.S. navigates this shift, it will have to accept that in many areas, Pakistan and the U.S. will simply have to agree to disagree. Although the U.S. and Pakistan share largely

similar strategic goals, both at home and in Afghanistan, the disparities in perspective, in priorities and in tactical approach between the two will continue to necessitate an essentially transactional relationship. That relationship will inevitably be contentious, but it need not be cripplingly acrimonious.

Quite frankly, one of the most important challenges limiting effective cooperation between the U.S. and Pakistan will be what I regard as an endemic deficit in effective national leadership in Pakistan. The U.S. has a long term interest in encouraging effective civilian governance in Pakistan, and a military leadership fully subordinate to democratic control. Our active pursuit of that long-term aspiration should be limited, however, by two facts: The first is that U.S. ability to effectively influence the evolution of civil-military relations in Pakistan is distinctly limited, to say the very least. The second is that the civilian political leadership in Pakistan has traditionally been both venal and incompetent, lacking both the moral will and the capacity to do what is necessary to address religious extremism and other overarching national challenges. While the military has not always been distinctly better in this respect, and in fact considerably worse in the foreign context, the fact is that the Pakistan Army is by far the most effective and capable institution in the country. And while the dysfunction at the heart of civil-military relations in Pakistan would take some time to describe, it is often driven by an understandable frustration on the part of the military with the ineffectiveness of its civilian leaders. Frequently, simple considerations of efficacy will continue to necessitate our dealing directly with the Army to get things done.

Again, limited U.S. means will have to be calibrated in Pakistan against achievable goals in light of U.S. priorities going forward. That said, given overarching U.S. interests in the region, there will be many worthy candidates for U.S. assistance, both direct and indirect. Social cohesion and stability require Pakistan to address serious deficits in water, energy, and social services – particularly education. Pakistan's National Action Plan against terrorism will require material resources, as well as political courage and focus. There is a crying, long-term need to fully incorporate the Federally Administered Tribal Areas into settled Pakistan, and thus to eliminate long-standing terrorist safehavens. And Pakistan's conventional military forces will need to be maintained if we are to avoid quick recourse to nuclear weapons at a time when Kashmir remains a social and political tinderbox, and the threat of Indo-Pak war still hangs like an incubus across the region.

In short, the U.S. dares not turn its back on Pakistan as it seeks to protect its serious national security interests in South-Central Asia. Wise policy going forward will require the U.S. to rebalance the overly Afghan-centric policies of the recent past, to accept, however reluctantly, those aspects of tactical Pakistani behavior it cannot change, and to focus instead on priority, long-term goals which can actually be achieved. Such a policy will often feel less than satisfying, but it is, in my view, the only responsible way forward.