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Pakistan: Today's Crisis and U.S. Policy

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you. Pakistan today is going through the most severe crisis it has faced in the past eight years. Its future matters profoundly to the United States and to the region, so it is a good time to take stock of U.S. policy.

I would like to sketch out briefly the multiple crises Pakistan now faces. I conclude that the United States needs to put its weight behind a return to civilian rule through free and fair elections, a separation between the offices of President and Army chief, and reducing the army's role in domestic politics, while ensuring that the army's essential role in national security is properly institutionalized. Generous economic aid and properly targeted and conditioned military aid are part of this. The U.S. should not intervene in the tribal areas. And the United States urgently needs to try to strengthen and broaden the anti-terrorism consensus within Pakistan.

Three short-term dramas are playing out in Pakistan. The first is a challenge to the basic authority of the government to keep order, best exemplified by the kidnapping and other lawless activities carried out by the Red Mosque leadership and their students. Musharraf's decision to respond was welcomed by all but the most hard-line supporters of the militants, and briefly strengthened his position. Once the death toll became known, however, it was followed by a rash of suicide bombings, not just near the Afghan border

but as far away as Karachi, leaving another 200 or so people dead. The extremist threat to Pakistan's government and society is still with us.

The second drama is the spillover from the conflict in Afghanistan. The demise of the agreement between the Pakistan government and the tribal leaders in Waziristan is the latest development on this front, although from my perspective that agreement never really went into operation, so its death should not be front-page news. This relates to the speculation about whether the United States will or should intervene militarily in the tribal areas to prevent Al-Qaeda from using them as a sanctuary.

The third drama stems from Musharraf's decision to suspend the Chief Justice last March, which the Supreme Court has now overturned. The decision and the government's response, including the May riots in Karachi that left 40 people dead, shattered Musharraf's legitimacy and his popular support. It appears to have awakened considerable popular resentment against the army, and concern within the army.

The Supreme Court's ruling last week was a serious embarrassment to Musharraf. It also interferes with Musharraf's strategy of seeking reelection later this year, with the presidential election preceding the legislative elections, and with Musharraf retaining his post as Army chief. The legal provisions governing both the sequence of the elections and Musharraf's dual positions are complex and confusing, but it is clear that both will be challenged in the courts. Musharraf can no longer be confident that the courts will support him.

The United States needs Pakistan as a committed partner in the struggle against terrorism and insurgency, especially in the Pakistan/Afghanistan border region. It needs a Pakistan government that can keep order and has legitimacy, one that will not allow

Pakistan to be used as a platform for insurgency or irredentism in either Afghanistan or its nuclear-armed neighbor India.

My recommendations for U.S. policy focus on three things: support for Pakistan's return to elected, civilian government; dealing with Pakistan's frontier area; and military and economic aid.

Pakistan's political future matters profoundly to the future peace and governability of the region. The Supreme Court ruling has given us – and Pakistan – an opportunity to stand up for the rule of law. This is the only way to set Pakistan on the course toward “enlightened moderation” that many Pakistanis believe is their country's birthright. The United States has welcomed the Supreme Court decision. Accordingly, we need to make clear as events proceed that we expect the coming elections to be fully free and fair, with Musharraf choosing between the offices of president or army chief.

This may seem like an odd time for the United States to be taking a strong stand for moving back to a freely elected government and democratic institutions. This policy, however, is not just a reflection of American values. It also reflects a hard-nosed judgment about the relationship between the Pakistan army and the militants who threaten to destroy the progressive, modern Islamic character of the state that underpins real policy cooperation with the United States. In the past, when the Pakistani state has cracked down on extremist militants, the army has often pulled its punches, making sure that militant groups remained alive and available to work with them across Pakistan's tense borders in the future. That policy, I believe, is doomed to failure. Extremism cannot be kept half-contained in this fashion. It poses a mortal danger to Pakistan's domestic well-being. As long as the army remains in charge of policy, it is unlikely to treat the

extremists as the enemy they are, and will not be able to end the domestic threat they pose. Doing this requires a committed political government, with full legitimacy. The army will of course play a critical role enforcing the government's policies and defending Pakistan. But this role needs to be anchored in a set of institutions in which elected political power is firmly in charge, and fully accountable.

Musharraf may be in trouble, but he is the leader in Pakistan today, so making this shift of emphasis without undermining his ability to make decisions will be tricky. Since he has said he wants to hold elections on time, and does not want to move toward a state of emergency, the policy I propose is in line with his stated goals. But it also recognizes that Pakistan's best shot at dealing with the danger of violent extremism comes from moving back to a government that enjoys full legitimacy.

Regarding the problem of the tribal areas, I strongly oppose direct US military intervention. I can think of no quicker way of turning all of Pakistan against the anti-terrorism goals that are so important to the United States, and turning the Pakistan army into a hostile force. Support for Pakistan's operations in the frontier area is another story: there we should be generous and creative.

But bringing the tribal areas under control is the work of a generation, and will require political and economic as well as military means. We do not understand the tribal society, its complex web of relationships with Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the fragile economy there, well enough to leave it in better shape than we found it. I support a major development program, despite the substantial risk that some of the money would go astray. Without jobs for the youth of the tribal areas, I don't see how one can begin the

long task of bringing them into the government net. But let us be clear that this will not bear fruit for several years.

My final recommendation deals with assistance programs in Pakistan. I have long believed that we need to use our economic assistance to build a long term relationship with Pakistan. We should increase it relative to military assistance, and should hold it largely immune to the political ups and downs of the relationship. We should be programming our economic aid rather than giving it in cash or quasi-cash form, and we should be using our assistance to build up Pakistan's investment in its own people, in education and health.

Military assistance is also an important expression of our long-term commitment to the people of Pakistan, but here it is important to draw some distinctions we have not drawn in the past. Military sales should focus in the first instance on equipment that will help Pakistan with its vital counter-terrorism goals. Military sales that relate more to general defense upgrading should take a back seat, and should be contingent on Pakistan's effective performance in countering militant extremists, both along the Afghan border and elsewhere. If we continue to find that Pakistan's army is hedging its bets in Afghanistan and providing support for the Taliban, or for domestic militant groups, we should put this type of military sales on hold.

My other recommendation is more general. The administration has tended to speak of Musharraf whenever it is asked about policy toward Pakistan. I think we need to shift our emphasis to the whole of Pakistan. Obviously, leaders are important, especially in troubled countries at troubled times. But the sustainability of Pakistan's political system and its ability to grow new leaders are absolutely critical to the goal of combating

terrorism that has been at the top of our list for the past six years. This means that we need the Pakistani political system – or as many parts of it as possible – to buy into the goal of eliminating extremist influence in Pakistan. Especially since the invasion of Iraq, this has become a very tough job in a country where public opinion now regards the United States as a country that “attacks Muslims.” Hence my final recommendation. We need to listen to what Pakistanis are saying about their hopes for a better future for their country. If, as I suspect, there is widespread but amorphous sentiment for “enlightened moderation,” we need to help strengthen and deepen that, and to show by our actions that this is where we want to go, together with Pakistan.