

PAKISTAN AFTER THE ELECTIONS: EXAMINING
THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN
AND THE U.S.-PAKISTAN RELATIONSHIP

HEARING

OF THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH
AFRICA, AND CENTRAL ASIA,

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

March 20, 2024

Serial No. 118-90

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov>, <http://docs.house.gov>,
or <http://www.govinfo.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

59-877PDF

WASHINGTON : 2026

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas, *Chairman*

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey	GREGORY MEEKS, New York, <i>Ranking Member</i>
JOE WILSON, South Carolina	BRAD SHERMAN, California
SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania	GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
DARRELL ISSA, California	WILLIAM KEATING, Massachusetts
ANN WAGNER, Missouri	AMI BERA, California
BRIAN MAST, Florida	JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas
KEN BUCK, Colorado	DINA TITUS, Nevada
TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee	TED LIEU, California
MARK E. GREEN, Tennessee	SUSAN WILD, Pennsylvania
ANDY BARR, Kentucky	DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota
RONNY JACKSON, Texas	COLIN ALLRED, Texas
YOUNG KIM, California	ANDY KIM, New Jersey
MARIA ELVIRA SALAZAR, Florida	SARA JACOBS, California
BILL HUIZENGA, Michigan	KATHY MANNING, North Carolina
AUMUA AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN, American Samoa	SHEILA CHERFILUS-McCORMICK, Florida
FRENCH HILL, Arkansas	GREG STANTON, Arizona
WARREN DAVIDSON, Ohio	MADELEINE DEAN, Pennsylvania
JIM BAIRD, Indiana	JARED MOSKOWITZ, Florida
MICHAEL WALTZ, Florida	JONATHAN JACKSON, Illinois
THOMAS KEAN, JR., New Jersey	SYDNEY KAMLAGER-DOVE, California
MICHAEL LAWLER, New York	JIM COSTA, California
CORY MILLS, Florida	JASON CROW, Colorado
RICH MCCORMICK, Georgia	BRAD SCHNEIDER, Illinois
NATHANIEL MORAN, Texas	
JOHN JAMES, Michigan	
KEITH SELF, Texas	

BRENDAN SHIELDS, *Majority Staff Director*

SOPHIA LAFARGUE, *Minority Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND CENTRAL ASIA

JOE WILSON, South Carolina, *Chairman*

BRIAN MAST, Florida	DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota, <i>Ranking Member</i>
TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee	BRAD SHERMAN, California
RONNY JACKSON, Texas	GERALD CONNOLLY, Virginia
JIM BAIRD, Indiana	KATHY MANNING, North Carolina
MICHAEL LAWLER, New York	
RICH MCCORMICK, Georgia	

GABRIELLA ZACH Subcommittee *Staff Director*

C O N T E N T S

	Page
REPRESENTATIVES	
Opening Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Joe Wilson	1
Opening Statement of Subcommittee Ranking Member Dean Phillips	3
WITNESSES	
Statement of Hon. Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau For South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. State Department	7
Prepared Statement	9
APPENDIX	
Hearing Notice	32
Hearing Minutes	33
Hearing Attendance	34
MATERIALS FOR THE RECORD	
Statement of Michael T. McCaul, Chairman of Committee on Foreign Affairs .	35
Statement from Representative Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)	38
Testimony of Dr. Moeed Pirzada	40
Testimony of Dr. Sundas Ali	45
Testimony of Syed A. Hussain	46
Testimony of Dr, Salman Ahman	48
QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD	
Questions submitted to Donald Lu by Representative Chairman Joe Wilson ...	51
Questions submitted to Donald Lu by Ranking Member Gregory Meeks	53

PAKISTAN AFTER THE ELECTIONS: EXAMINING THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN AND THE U.S.-PAKISTAN RELATIONSHIP

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA,
AND CENTRAL ASIA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:15 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Joe Wilson (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. WILSON. Ladies and gentlemen, the Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia will come to order.

The purpose of this hearing is to discuss the post-election landscape in the very important country of Pakistan and the future of U.S.-Pakistani relationship, including the future of U.S. security assistance to Pakistan and Pakistan's role in the regional dynamics.

I will now recognize myself for opening statement, and then recognize Dean Phillips, who we are so grateful to have Dean back. He has been traveling around the country visiting and understanding the American people, and we just appreciate his passion of service. And so, Dean, thank you for coming back.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN JOE WILSON

Indeed, Congresswoman Kathy Manning did a really good job as the substitute, and so we are very fortunate. And, indeed, it indicates something that people—the American people need to know, and that is that Republicans and Democrats can work together. And, in fact, on this issue I am confident that Republicans and Democrats want what is best for the people of Pakistan.

With that in mind, since the catastrophic withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, the region has been stuck in a cycle of instability. Now that instability is further exacerbated by the domestic situation within Pakistan.

I was born with an appreciation of the people of Pakistan and South Asia. My father had served in The Flying Tigers, the 14th Air Force, in World War II, and he actually arrived in Karachi on his way to serve in Kunming, Shantou, and Xi'an in China during

World War II. So he had his beginning service right there in Pakistan.

He told me how hardworking the people of South Asia are. And when South Asians began buying—purchasing properties of hotels and motels across the State of South Carolina, I let them know that I knew who they were, I knew their reputation of hard work, and so I had the opportunity to represent the people of South Asia as they bought a majority of the hotels and motels, convenience stores, across the United States.

They have achieved—South Asians now have a per capital income twice that of the average American. This is just such a tribute to the hardworking talents of the people of South Asia.

I also had the opportunity to see the military cooperation between the U.S. Marines and the Pakistani military. I had the opportunity to visit a field hospital in Muzaffarabad several years ago after the earthquake, and it was so inspiring to see female doctors working with women who would only go to a female physician.

While I was there, one of the highlights of my service, a young Corporal Sulani came running up and said, “Hey, Congressman, I am here because of you.” And I thought, gosh, what did I do wrong to send you to an earthquake troubled area? Well, he identified himself, Corporal Sulani, and he said, “Hey,” and I realized—I remembered that our office had expedited his citizenship.

He was a Pakistani American who could serve in the U.S. Marine Corps, be there in a U.S. Marine uniform, speaking Urdu. How impressive that is, but it reinforced to me again the positive relationship, the mutually beneficial relationship, between the United States and Pakistan. This was a young marine who had been trained in the district I represent at Parris Island, South Carolina.

And then, on my visits to Islamabad, I have been so impressed and inspired by the people that I have had the opportunity to meet, government officials and military. Sadly, part of my visits have been very sad in that I visited a superstar, and that is Benazir Bhutto. It was so impressive to be at her home, and then tragically, several weeks later, she was assassinated, which is a reminder over and over again the destabilization that has been so catastrophic for the people of Pakistan, I know that the people of America want a stable, positive, and democratic Pakistan.

Pakistan currently is on the brink of economic catastrophe, much of which has been caused by the massive amounts of debt owed to a loan shark. The loan shark is the Chinese Communist Party. We are seeing a cautionary tale play out where the United States shifted our attention away from Central Asia and South Asia from Pakistan. The Chinese Communist Party stepped in to fill the void, and in doing so further destabilized the situation.

Threats to democracy in Pakistan extend beyond economic threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party presence. Just last month, there were widespread allegations of fraud and interference in the Pakistani elections. This is a critical point in defining the history of Pakistan where the country must choose between respecting democracy with rule of law or allow a military establishment to continue to control the direction of the government with rule of gun.

The Pakistani people deserve to have their voices heard. They deserve democracy and strong institutions. They deserve a govern-

ment that protects their rights. We have recently seen the threat posed by dictators with rule of gun invading democracy's rule of law—war criminal Putin into Ukraine, the Iranian puppets into Israel, the threats to the people of Taiwan, the actual invasion, sadly, even of the United States on the southern border.

We now have recognized that consistently supporting the people of Ukraine and Israel fight back against the malign influence of war criminal Putin and the terrorists supported by the regime in Tehran. We must support the people of Pakistan in their struggle for strong democratic institutions the same way, to support the values and American interests which are mutually beneficial to Pakistan and America.

I thank Secretary Lu for coming today to discuss the Biden Administration's policy toward Pakistan. I look forward to hearing from Ranking Member Dean Phillips.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER DEAN PHILLIPS

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to you, Assistant Secretary Lu, for joining us, and to all of you who are joining us today for a robust discussion about the recent election in Pakistan and also the future of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, which is of great importance to this country and of course Pakistan.

On February 8, over 60 million Pakistanis voted in countrywide elections. These elections saw record numbers of women, religious and ethnic minority groups, and young people running for seats in Parliament. It resulted in a range of political parties winning seats in national and provincial assemblies.

Despite these successes, the United States and international election observers have expressed concerns related to both pre-election and day-of-election irregularities, including the undue restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and assembly. The U.S. and like-minded countries have also condemned electoral violence, attacks on media workers, and restrictions on access to the internet and telecom services.

It is important that any claims of fraud or interference be fully and transparently investigated in accordance with Pakistan's own laws and procedures, and I am eager to hear from the assistant secretary regarding his assessment of that election, if the outcome was credible, and how the election fits into Pakistan's historical context.

It is also important that the United States-Pakistan relationship remain strong and rooted in our shared commitments to strengthening Pakistan's democratic institutions, supporting Pakistan's economy, cooperating on counterterrorism threats, and bolstering respect for human rights.

In addition to promoting democratic values, supporting Pakistan's economy is a key strategic goal of our bilateral relationship. After facing one of the worst economic crises in its history, Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund just signed a \$3 billion standby arrangement in 2023 that is set to end this April. Prior to this agreement, Pakistan's economy was marked by soaring inflation, a sharply depreciating currency, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, and mounting overseas debt.

To achieve fiscal stability and secure a longer-term IMF bailout, Pakistan will have to make structural economic reforms that will include controlling inflation and expanding the collection of the country's tax base. I do hope to hear from Assistant Secretary Lu's perspective on the new coalition government's willingness to work with the IMF and tackle Pakistan's very tough economic challenges in a serious and meaningful way.

Terrorism and security challenges are also top of mind when it comes to the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship. Twelve militant organizations operating in Pakistan are designated FTOs, foreign terrorist organizations, under U.S. law, most prominent of course being Tehrik-e-Taliban, or the TTP, the Balochistan Liberation Army, Al Qaeda, and ISIS-Khorasan Province.

The United States has an interest in working with Pakistan to ensure that these organizations are unable to destabilize the region or attack the United States homeland. Particularly since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, Pakistan has faced an increased domestic threat from the TTP.

In 2023, TTP led bombings and gun attacks, killed over 1,000 Pakistanis nationwide, half of them security forces, marking the highest number of fatalities in 6 years. And just yesterday, the Pakistani government conducted air raids inside of Afghanistan it claims targeting TTP hideouts in the country. This comes in direct response to a suicide bombing targeting a Pakistani military checkpoint that killed at least seven Pakistani soldiers.

Beyond the threat of terrorism, in Pakistan's approach to Afghanistan, I hope that we will also examine Pakistan's regional relationships with Iran, Russia, and, of course, China. I am also deeply disappointed that the former Pakistani government announced that it would expel all unregistered foreigners from the country.

Pakistan is home to an estimated 4 million Afghan citizens, and approximately 1.7 million of those are undocumented. This leaves almost 2 million—2 million—people at risk of being deported back to a country under Taliban control that is facing prolonged economic crisis that has left two-thirds of the entire population in need—dire need—of humanitarian assistance.

What is more, many of these individuals have lived in Pakistan for decades, having originally fled Afghanistan in the 1980's during the country's occupation by the Soviets. Credible claims that Pakistani authorities have committed widespread abuse against Afghans living in Pakistan to compel their return to Afghanistan are extremely alarming.

I recognize and am incredibly grateful for the important work that the State Department and the Pakistani government have done together to ensure that Afghans with a potential pathway to the United States or other international partner countries are able to remain in Pakistan while their cases are adjudicated. I hope Secretary Lu is able to speak to this as well.

Pakistan and the U.S. celebrated 75 years of bilateral diplomatic relations just in 2022. Although it is important we continue to address the urgent issues I have mentioned so far, I envision progress toward more robust cooperation on global challenges, such as health and climate, technology, and trade.

Pakistan consistently ranks among the top 10 most vulnerable countries on the CRI, the Climate Risk Index, with 10,000 annual fatalities due to climate-related disasters and financial losses amounting to \$4 billion annually.

In July 2023, USAID announced over \$16 million in additional development and humanitarian assistance to support the resilience of communities in Pakistan that experienced 2022's historically devastating floods. These areas of cooperation highlight the work that we can do together to strengthen our communities and combat climate change as two peoples.

We also had the opportunity to deepen our people-to-people ties, strengthen Pakistan's business environment, and invest in innovative solutions to global health and clean energy. The opportunities for cooperation are endless as we understand from elections, both in the United States and Pakistan also, a government empowered by a strong democratic mandate is critical to addressing long-standing challenges and pursuing new opportunities.

I look forward to hearing from Assistant Secretary Lu about all the ways in which the U.S.-Pakistan relationship can advance our shared interests and continue to promote and strengthen respect for democratic values and human rights.

With that, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Ranking Member Dean Phillips.

It is really unprecedented, but to show how important the relationship is between the United States and Pakistan, we have an unprecedented number of Members of Congress who are not on the subcommittee who are requesting to have the opportunity to participate. And so I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Casar, and the gentleman from California, Mr. Khanna, be allowed to sit at the dais and to participate following all other members at today's hearing. Without objection, so ordered.

Additionally, I also unanimous consent that the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Pfluger, be allowed to sit at the dais and to participate in today's hearing. Without objection, so ordered.

And most unprecedented, to show how important this hearing is, and the relationship and appreciation and affection we have for the people of Pakistan, I now will be recognizing the chairman of the full committee, Congressman Mike McCaul of Texas, for an opening statement.

Mr. McCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and I agree with you there is a tremendous amount of interest in this hearing. I think I have never had so many members on the House floor come to me and say, "We need to have a hearing on Pakistan after the election." And I know the diasporas out across the United States have shown a lot of great interest and have voiced that to their Members of Congress.

I also want to thank Assistant Secretary Lu for testifying here today. I have always thought Pakistan is a very important country, and I have been there many times. It is a beautiful country, but it is often fraught with problems related to terrorism and other matters. And today they are facing many challenges, just the same. They just installed a new government after this controversial election.

Currently, Pakistan is experiencing a massive economic crisis, including record inflation and an overwhelming foreign debt. Pakistan's domestic situation has a ripple effect throughout the region. It is critical the United States works to promote economic prosperity and domestic stability within Pakistan.

I think the people of Pakistan deserve a country where democracy and rule of law are protected at the highest levels. The voters have displayed their commitment to participating in the process. Despite allegations of fraud and interference in the recent election, the people of Pakistan showed up to vote in unprecedented numbers, which is very positive.

However, I was deeply concerned by well-documented instances of interference in the February elections, including a terrorist attack at a candidate's political offices hours before the polls opened and, also, major internet and cell service shut-offs on election day. These events are serious and consequential. I have called for a full investigation into any allegations of interference or corruption in their recent elections, and I will be watching closely to see how these irregularities are being addressed.

Additionally, human rights in Pakistan must be respected for democracy to thrive. The failure to recognize basic human rights will unquestionably lead to a downward spiral. If human rights are ignored, the prospect of a democratic society will evaporate.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's security is at risk as the TTP and other terror groups have become increasingly emboldened. This is a direct result of the Biden Administration's disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. And we had a hearing just yesterday with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Milley, and CENTCOM Commander, General McKinsey. That deadly and chaotic withdrawal projected weakness on the world stage, and we see from history that weakness always invites aggression.

Our adversaries are now testing our resolve. And when they see weakness, they do exploit it. Pakistan has played an essential role in mitigating the effects of the Administration's withdrawal on regional security. It remains vitally important that the United States and Pakistan continue to work together to counter terrorism.

While challenges remain ahead, the United States and Pakistan must continue to work together to promote regional stability. We also know that if the United States pulls away from our relationship with Pakistan, the Chinese Communist Party will gain even more influence.

And while we seek to help nations thrive, CCP is only interested in a one-way relationship of debt-trap diplomacy. And Pakistan, in their ground zero for their Belt and Road Initiative, Pakistan is the CCP's ground zero for, you know, China's Belt and Road.

So, anyway, I look forward to working with my colleagues. It is in our best interest to have a vibrant and healthy Pakistan, one of democracy, economic prosperity, and stability. And I think working together we can work to make Pakistan a success in its role as a key regional security partner.

And so that, again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. I know there is immense interest in this across the Nation, and of course in Pakistan itself. And, with that, I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank you yesterday for the historic hearing that you conducted with General Mark Milley and General Frank McKinsey revealing clearly that President Biden did not abide by their recommendations that they withdraw the—surrender the appeasement was solely the responsibility of Mr. Biden.

With that in mind, we are pleased to have a distinguished witness today, Hon. Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs at the State Department.

Thank you for being here today. Your full statement will be made part of the record, and I will ask you to keep your spoken remarks to 5 minutes in order to allow time for members to ask questions and they, too, will be held to a strict 5 minutes.

I now recognize Assistant Secretary Lu for the opening statement.

STATEMENT OF HON. DONALD LU, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE, BUREAU FOR SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS, U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT

Mr. LU. Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, Chairman McCaul, colleagues, when I was a junior officer in Peshawar, Pakistan, 31 years ago, I got to see a Pakistani election up close. I got to see the irregularities in that election, but also the courage of the Pakistani people to come out and vote despite threats of intimidation and threats of violence.

If you will allow me today, I propose to say a few words about where the election on February 8 fell short, where we saw positive elements, and what lies ahead for U.S. policy in Pakistan.

The day after the elections, the State Department issued a clear statement. We noted undue restrictions on the freedoms of expression association, and peaceful assembly. We condemned the electoral violence and restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms. We condemned attacks on media workers and restrictions on the access to the internet and telecom services. And we expressed concern about allegations of interference in the electoral process and stated that claims of interference and fraud should be fully investigated.

If you will allow me, I will drill down a bit deeper into these observations. We were particularly concerned about electoral abuses and violence that happened in the weeks leading up to the polls. First, there were attacks against police, politicians, and political gatherings by terrorist groups. Second, many journalists, particularly female journalists, were harassed and abused by party supporters. And, third, several political leaders were disadvantaged by the inability to register specific candidates and political parties.

On the day of elections, an internationally respected local election monitoring organization said they were barred from observing vote tabulation in more than half of the constituencies across the country. And despite a high court order not to interrupt internet service on election day, authorities shut down mobile data services, the principal means by which Pakistanis access social media and messaging apps.

There were positive elements to this election as well. Despite the threat of violence, over 60 million Pakistanis voted, including over

21 million women. Voters elected 50 percent more women to Parliament than they had in 2018. In addition to a record number of female candidates, there were also a record number of members of religious and minority groups and young people running for seats in their Parliament.

Pakistani voters had a choice. A range of political parties won seats in the national and provincial assemblies. Three different political parties now lead Pakistan's four provinces.

More than 5,000 independent election observers were in the field. Their organization's conclusion was that the conduct of the election was largely competitive and orderly, while noting some irregularities in the compilation of results.

Pakistan is an important partner of the U.S. We share a commitment to strengthening Pakistan's democratic institutions, supporting the U.S.-Pakistan Green Alliance Framework, cooperating to counter terrorist threats from groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS, and bolstering respect for human rights, including the right of religious freedom.

Most importantly, the United States plays a critical role in promoting economic stability in Pakistan. We are the top destination for Pakistan's exports. We have been one of the most important investors in critical infrastructure over 76 years of our partnership.

For example, the U.S. Government is refurbishing now the Mangla and Tarbela dams, which provide electricity to tens of millions of Pakistanis. Our support for Pakistan over these decades has been in the form of development grants, private sector investment, and humanitarian assistance during the periods of its greatest need, including the recent catastrophic flooding.

Unfortunately, Pakistan is facing a mounting debt challenge after the past decade of elevated borrowing, including from the PRC. This year, nearly 70 percent of the Federal Government's revenue is expected to go to payments to service this massive debt. Pakistan needs economic reforms, and it needs private sector-led investment that will deliver economic growth for the Pakistani people and not dig their government deeper into debt.

Finally, the Pakistani people deserve a country that is peaceful, that is democratic, and that is prosperous. We are working every day to support that vision. I thank the subcommittee—I thank the subcommittee for its leadership on developing our relations with Pakistan, and I pledge to work with its members as we execute our policy.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lu follows:]

HFAC MENACA Subcommittee Testimony on Pakistan Elections

March 20, 2024

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, colleagues,

When I was a junior officer in Peshawar, Pakistan 31 years ago, I saw up close a Pakistani election. I saw the election irregularities along with the courage of Pakistani voters who turned up despite threats of violence and intimidation. Three decades ago, it was a contest between Nawaz Sharif, brother of the current Prime Minister, and the late Benazir Bhutto, whose son and husband now lead the Pakistan People's Party.

Today, I propose saying a few words about where the election on February 8 fell short, where we saw positive elements, and what lies ahead for U.S. policy in Pakistan.

Election Irregularities

The day after the elections, the State Department issued a clear statement:

- 1) Noting undue restrictions on the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.
- 2) Condemning electoral violence and restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- 3) Condemning attacks on media workers, and restrictions on access to the internet and telecommunication services.
- 4) Expressing concern about allegations of interference in the electoral process and stating claims of interference or fraud should be fully investigated.

Let me drill down a bit deeper into our observations. We were particularly concerned about electoral abuses and violence that happened in the weeks leading up to the elections. First, there were attacks against police, politicians, and political gatherings by terrorist groups. Second, many journalists, particularly female journalists, were harassed and abused by party supporters. And several

UNCLASSIFIED

political leaders were disadvantaged by the inability to register specific candidates and political parties.

On the day of the elections, an internationally respected local election monitoring organization said that they were barred from observing vote tabulation in more than half of the constituencies across the country. And despite a high court instruction not to interrupt internet service on election day, authorities shut down mobile data services, the principal means by which Pakistanis access social media and messaging applications.

Progress in Participation

There were positive elements as well in these elections. Despite threats of violence, over 60 million Pakistanis voted, including over 21 million women. Voters elected 50 percent more women to Parliament than they did in 2018. In addition to a record number of women candidates, there were record numbers of members of religious and ethnic minority groups and young people running for seats in Parliament.

Voters in Pakistan had a choice. A range of political parties won seats in national and provincial assemblies. Three different political parties now lead Pakistan's four provinces.

More than 5,000 independent observers were in the field. Their organization's conclusion was that the conduct of the election was largely competitive and orderly, while noting some irregularities in the compilation of results.

U.S. Policy Going Forward

Pakistan is an important partner of the United States. We share a commitment to strengthening Pakistan's democratic institutions, supporting the U.S.-Pakistan Green Alliance Framework, cooperating to counter terrorist threats from groups like al Qa'ida and ISIS, and bolstering respect for human rights, including religious freedom.

Most importantly, the United States plays a critical role in promoting economic stability in Pakistan. We are also the top destination for Pakistan's exports. We have been one of the most important investors in critical infrastructure over the 76 years of our partnership. For example, the U.S. government is refurbishing the

Mangla and Tarbela dams that provide electricity to tens of millions of Pakistanis. Our support for Pakistan over these decades has been in the form of development grants, private sector investment, and humanitarian assistance during periods of greatest need, including the recent catastrophic flooding.

Unfortunately, Pakistan is facing mounting debt challenges after the past decade of elevated borrowing, including from the PRC. This year, nearly 70 percent of the federal government's revenue is expected to go to payments to service this massive debt. Pakistan needs economic reforms and private sector-led investments that will deliver economic growth for the Pakistani people and not dig their government deeper into debt.

Finally, the Pakistani people deserve a country that is peaceful, democratic, and prosperous. We are working every day to support that vision. I thank the subcommittee for its leadership on developing our relations with Pakistan and I pledge to work with the Members of your subcommittee as we execute our policy.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. You were precisely on time, and so—and Alexis is going to make sure that we are all 5 minutes.

And I want to commend Chairman McCaul again. We now have clocks that are large enough for people of age to read. So this is a really startling discovery here.

[Laughter.]

Mr. WILSON. We have really come—hey, we have come a long way to have clocks you can read.

But, no, this is so serious, and the 70 percent debt payment is just so horrific. But not only is it catastrophic to the people of Pakistan, but it is a message to other countries that think that they are working with people that they can trust. They are not. They are there for a purpose, and the time needs to begin on mine now, please.

And so as we begin, after the disastrous U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and with the 13 murdered Marines at Abbey Gate in 2021, where does the Administration see the future of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship? What are the Administration's top priorities for Pakistan?

Mr. LU. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. And, again, thank you for holding this hearing. It is obviously of great interest for Americans generally. Clearly, in the audience today we have lots of people who care deeply about Pakistan. We are at an inflection point in our relationship with Pakistan.

As you suggest, Afghanistan has been in conflict for 40 years, and Pakistan has been a country that has been caught up in that conflict. The end of the war in Afghanistan provides us all an opportunity—an opportunity to have a relationship with Pakistan on its own terms. And we are committed to doing that.

One of the major goals that we have with Pakistan now is to support the Pakistani people as they face this terrible threat of terrorism. Many of the members have discussed this, but this is a country where the people have suffered under the threat of terrorism in a way that I think no one on the planet has had to suffer.

The attacks, particularly in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, over the past few years have grown exponentially. We continue to see attacks being launched from Afghan territory, and you saw a major attack on Saturday in which seven policemen were killed by the TTP, the Pakistani Taliban, and we call on the Afghan Taliban to ensure that its territory is not used as a launching pad for terrorist groups.

Second, we are very focused on economic stability for Pakistan. For Pakistan to deal with its social, terrorism, and political issues, it needs a functioning economy. And we want private sector-led growth there, growth that benefits the Pakistani people, not growth which fuels profits by lender countries like the PRC.

And, last, we have a long partnership—people to people—with Pakistan. We want to see that grow. We want to see business-to-business relations improve. We want to see the ease of Pakistani Americans to travel to Pakistan and Pakistanis to travel to the United States. Those ties are critical.

I have two children in university right now. We have many, many Pakistani friends as they have grown up, but also in university. We want to see those numbers expand. Thank you.

Mr. WILSON. And, indeed, I am glad you—the Pakistani American diaspora is so important. And they have been so successful as entrepreneurs here in our country, and we want them to send a message back of how free market capitalism has such a positive consequence for the people of Pakistan.

Mr. Secretary, there have been unsubstantiated allegations that the U.S. Government has conspired to remove Prime Minister Imran Khan from power. What is your assessment of these untrue speculations?

Mr. LU. Mr. Chairman, I want to be very clear on this point. These allegations, these—this conspiracy theory, is a lie. It is a complete falsehood. I have reviewed the press reporting related to this—what is called the cypher in Pakistan, the alleged leak diplomatic cable from the Embassy here. It is not accurate. At no point does it accuse the U.S. Government or me personally of taking steps against Imran Khan. And, third, the other person in the meeting, the then-Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States, has testified to his own government that there was no conspiracy.

We respect the sovereignty of Pakistan. We respect the principle that Pakistani people should be the only ones choosing their own leaders through a democratic process. Mr. Chairman, we are grateful that you are holding this hearing today for us to talk about that process.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you. And, hey, your response is so good because it is so clear that you are correct, and we appreciate so much your clarity on the issue, and good people, indeed. You make a difference, so God bless you. Thank you.

And with that, I now recognize the ranking member, Dean Phillips.

[Disturbance in the hearing room.]

Mr. WILSON. The chair notes a disturbance of the committee proceedings. The room will be in order.

And we now proceed with Congressman Dean Phillips.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Lu, I appreciate your observations on the recent election, both the positive elements and also the challenges. In the State Department's post-election statement, the indication was the United States is going to work with the next Pakistani government regardless of the party. I just want to clarify that that has always been the case, correct?

Mr. LU. Yes, sir.

Mr. PHILLIPS. And the Department has also expressed concerns about human rights and democracy in Pakistan, where appropriate, but has never taken a position on who should lead an elected government in Pakistan. Is that correct?

Mr. LU. That is correct.

Mr. PHILLIPS. And the Department's statement also noted that claims of interference or fraud should be fully investigated. And since that aspect of the statement has gotten a lot of play in the Pakistani press and on social media, could you elaborate on what was intended by that statement?

Mr. LU. Representative Phillips, the Pakistani people, through their constitution, have created a system by which the Election Commission of Pakistan hears the complaints of Pakistani people, of candidates and political parties, to render judgments about election irregularities. We, as a partner of Pakistan, have called for that to be done transparently and fully and for the—for those found responsible for irregularities to be held accountable.

We can see a process whereby that is happening. The Election Commission of Pakistan has formed a high-level committee, which is now sifting through thousands of petitions from people across Pakistan who have complained about the very same things that we have noted in our statement.

We will be monitoring that process very closely. We will be encouraging the government and the Election Commission to make sure that that is a fully transparent process with the Pakistani public.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Mr. Lu, if you just might move your microphone just a little closer, it is a little hard for some of us to hear, too. Thank you.

This is not Pakistan-related per se, but it is your area of responsibility, so I want to ask also about India. I know the Administration is looking at accountability for the alarming allegations that a government of India official was connected to a murder for hire plot targeting a Sikh American here on American soil in New York City.

The Administration, of course, recently placed sanctions on more than 500 individuals relating to the killing of Alexei Navalny in Russia on Russian soil.

So my question is, are any similar sanctions or travel bans being considered for those who we believe may be responsible for the attempted murder of Mr. Pannun?

Mr. LU. Thank you, Representative Phillips. This is a serious issue—a serious issue between the United States and India. The Department of Justice has alleged that an Indian citizen, at the behest of someone working in the Indian Government, has attempted to kill an American citizen on American soil.

We take this in the Administration incredibly seriously and have raised it at the highest levels with India. We are, at the moment, working with India to encourage India to hold accountable those responsible for this terrible crime. What we can see is that India itself has announced that they have created a committee of inquiry to look into this matter, and we ask them to work quickly and transparently to make sure justice is done.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you. With the remainder of my time, I would like to talk about economic issues. If you could give an assessment of the current economic situation in Pakistan. Of course, a growing economy is good for stability, it is good for this partnership, and trade. I know it is still early, but if you could provide an assessment of how you see things right now, I would appreciate it.

Mr. LU. Not only is it really important for the Pakistani people that they have economic stability and economic growth, it is important for America. We have lots of investments in Pakistan. There are lots of franchises and American businesses working throughout Pakistan. Their success is our success.

One of the issues I think that we face with the Pakistani economy is a real difficulty to invest and to trade there. We are calling on Pakistan to reform many of the ways it does business with foreign partners, and in doing that they will attract American investment, but they will also attract investment from the Pakistani private sector.

Pakistani investors are smart. They want to work in a place where they can make money. And so some of the things that we are calling for are reform of the regulations that will allow repatriation of profits out of the country, cutting down bureaucratic red tape, and more predictable regulations.

If Pakistan is willing to do that, I think you will see large numbers of American investors flocking to Pakistan. It is a really interesting place to invest if it had the right conditions.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, sir.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Ranking Member Dean Phillips.

We will now proceed to Congressman Rich McCormick of Georgia.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to point out that we, in Congress, have a job to do. This is an incredibly important topic, and I think out of respect for those people who are interested in this topic, the people who want to be disruptive should be gaveled out and removed from this hearing.

I think anybody who has earned this place, whether you be in Congress or be a military member or be somebody from Pakistan or be somebody who is interested in this topic, should be respected. And those people who break the rules, should be removed from and not be allowed back in in future, because this continues to waste our time.

And with that, I am going to move, with your permission, Chair, to have these people removed before I continue.

Mr. WILSON. So ordered.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Thank you. All three that were speaking out. Thank you. They are wearing red, in case you can't figure out who they are.

[Disturbance in the hearing room.]

Mr. WILSON. The committee will suspend while the Capitol Police restore order.

[Recess.]

Mr. WILSON. Congressman McCormick will now continue with his full 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have been interrupted in the previous hearings, and I just want to make sure we have some order.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate you. And I thank you, Secretary Lu, for your testimony today.

Today's topic is very important to me. Whether we like it or not, the U.S. future cannot include isolationism from the rest of the world. American leadership will be required for our country's future success and to ensure America remains first in the world. We

must remain robust partnerships and alliances with nations that share our interests and values.

As nations like China and Russia and violent extremist organizations threaten global stability, it is critical for U.S. interests for South and Central Asia countries, such as Pakistan and India, to continue developing stable and transparent democracies. That is why I introduced House Resolution 901 with my esteemed colleague from Michigan, Representative Dan Kildee. The resolution affirms U.S. support for democracy and human rights in Pakistan.

I am looking forward to H.Res. 901's consideration later this afternoon as the House Foreign Affairs Committee marks it up.

As I am sure you are aware, Pakistan recently conducted the largest election in its history, but these were unfortunately marred by allegations of fraudulent activity and electoral violence. Watchdog groups raised the alarm over reports of political repression, suspension of interest, access on election day, delays in election results, and more. Currently, the Election Commission of Pakistan is reviewing many of the election results in individual parliamentary constituencies, and the Pakistani judicial system is investigating and educating—adjudicating irregularities.

In fact, the Ambassador from Pakistan came to my office yesterday and talked about what they were going to try to do to mitigate these problems. With all this being said, there must be full, credible, and independent audit of these election results.

Secretary Lu, do you think—and the State Department have confidence in Pakistan's judicial process and its ability to adjudicate claims of wrongdoing?

Mr. LU. Thank you, Representative McCormick. If I might—just before I answer that question, just say a word about protests. We have just tremendous respect for the Pakistani-American community. We pride ourselves in the State Department and in my office about talking to Pakistani-Americans, because they are the people in our vast country who care the most about this relationship. They have something genuine to offer because of their deep knowledge and the deep concern they have of the future of the country.

And so I want to join the voices of this committee to say how important their involvement is, how much we respect them. We try to listen to them at every opportunity. I hope they are also listening to all of you and to those of us who are trying to guide this policy.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Absolutely. And I will say, respectful conversation is always paramount for me. I have met with constituencies, I have people who have come here from all over the United States that I have met with in my own district on this topic. There is a time and a place for everyone to speak, and that is order. That is something that we have worked hard for.

Mr. LU. Well, one of the things that I have faced over these last 2 years is some of these allegations—unfounded allegations—have resulted in regular death threats against me, threats against my family, involvement of local police. There is a line of acceptability, and I do think at times some of the free speech has verged into threats of violence, which is not acceptable in our society.

Sir, if I could answer your important question. The Election Commission of Pakistan in past elections has rerun elections where

there has been a finding of electoral abuse. We have seen that over and over. In fact, in this election, they have already ordered the rerun of elections where there has been violence.

As we know, there have been candidates who have been killed in this election. There has been some terrible violence that preceded the election. We call on the Election Commission to fulfill its constitutional role in Pakistan to be the watchdog over these elections and to act in a non-partisan way. We all will be watching this process very, very closely.

As to whether they will do it, it is up to the Pakistani people to make sure their institutions are functional and are upholding their constitution.

Mr. McCORMICK. Thank you. And do you think that the Pakistani government has the ability to continue to improve and be accountable and be a good partner going forward as the United States needs them to be in that region?

Mr. LU. Pakistan is such an important partner of ours. They are a major non-NATO ally. We have deep national security interests with Pakistan, not least of which is the fight against terrorism, not only terrorism that affects Pakistanis but terrorism that affects Americans. And Pakistan has been a partner in our resettling of Afghan refugees to whom we owe a debt, and we are grateful to the people and the government of Pakistan for that cooperation.

Mr. McCORMICK. Thank you, sir.

I yield.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Dr. Congressman Rich McCormick of Georgia.

We now proceed to Congresswoman Kathy Manning of North Carolina.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome back to my good friend, Dean Phillips. And thank you, Assistant Secretary Lu, for your service to our country.

I want to focus on the plight of women in Pakistan for a few minutes. I am very concerned about the treatment of women in Pakistan, including female journalists and women harassed and arrested at protests and rallies leading up to the election. As you know, Pakistan is routinely rated near the bottom of the world in terms of women's inclusion, justice, safety, and security.

So can you talk to us about how the State Department is working to address gender-based violence and highlight and improve the safety, the rights, the inclusion, and representation of women in Pakistan's democracy.

Mr. LU. Representative Manning, such an important question. I wish I had my wife here sitting next to me. I met my wife in Pakistan. She was an American refugee worker working with Afghans. But her academic subject matter of specialty is gender-based violence, and she has worked in Pakistan on this very issue.

What I would say about Pakistan, its human rights, the rights of women, I say about many countries, but I really mean it, which is we, as foreign partners, aren't going to be able to change Pakistan. Who will change Pakistan? Pakistani people will. And we see that very strong desire of women across Pakistan to be heard, to be represented, and to have their rights respected by the institutions of government, as well as by the rest of society.

I see great victories in Pakistan every day, as I mentioned, double the number of women elected to this Parliament.

Ms. MANNING. And do you see—

Mr. LU. Incredible.

Ms. MANNING. Do you see that as a positive moment that will actually give hope and perhaps achieve new things for women in Pakistan?

Mr. LU. I see the emergence of female leaders in Pakistan at every level as being the examples that will lead their society forward. You are entirely right. At the village level in Pakistan, lives for women are incredibly difficult. I see more women today in senior positions in business. I see them on the high court. I see them in Parliament. I see them as ministers.

Honestly, some days Pakistanis are doing better than Americans on some of these questions. It is a struggle for all of us, but I do credit the very brave women and young girls who are leading this path in Pakistan. And I think, as foreign partners, we need to put our resources, our public statements, and our activism behind Pakistani female leaders.

Ms. MANNING. And can you give us some idea of the percentage of participation of Pakistani women in the economy? And are there hurdles to greater participation? And is there anything we can do to encourage greater participation?

Mr. LU. One of the real issues for every business in Pakistan, but particularly for women-owned businesses, is access to financing. And so one of the things that I have seen over the course of my career, and particularly in Pakistan, is the emergence of these micro finance projects, because largely women-owned interests—businesses are not the massive textile mills or the steel plants. They are small businesses. They are businesses run out of homes or small shops in local communities.

If women have access to that financing, women will succeed in business. USAID, the EU, the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, many, many of Pakistan's donor friends are investing in those types of businesses, while the PRC and other countries are investing in literally roads to nowhere that bleed the Pakistani people of their resources year after year.

Ms. MANNING. So we have certainly talked about giving women access to more financial opportunities in this committee. I hope we will continue to do that in the future.

Because you have mentioned China, let me walk into this question with the little time I have left. Pakistan faces a grave challenge—has faced grave challenges in recent years from flooding, from indebtedness to creditors like China. What more can we do to counterbalance what China is doing and the debt that they are helping create in Pakistan?

Mr. LU. We can compete. Where we fail overseas, we are not present. Where we compete, we always win because we have a better offer. We offer private sector-led investment for profit-making enterprises that benefit local people and not just the lender countries.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. My time has expired.
I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congresswoman Kathy Manning of North Carolina.

We will be proceeding to Congressman Mike Lawler in one second. Even before, I want to thank you for pointing out the different allies working with Pakistan, and one that you left out, which is so significant, and that is South Korea. To go from ashes 60 years ago to be one of the wealthiest countries on Earth is an example throughout the Indo-Pacific and South Asia of achieving a per capita income of \$44,000 for each citizen, who would ever imagine? And I know that Korea has been vitally interested in developing economic ties with the people of Pakistan.

With that, we now proceed to Congressman Mike Lawler.

Mr. LAWLER. Thank you, Mr. Lu. I know many of my colleagues touched on the election irregularities and some of the concerns about it, so I want to segue a little bit.

Just a few weeks ago, the government of Pakistan approved plans to begin construction on a pipeline to transport natural gas from Iran to Pakistan. Iran constructed its side of the pipeline years ago, and now Pakistan has finally decided to move forward.

Mr. Lu, do you view this pipeline as Pakistan aligning itself with Iran?

Mr. LU. I mean, it is a really interesting question, Representative Lawler, because Pakistan and Iran just traded missile and drone strikes a few weeks ago. So has been true over time that Pakistan and Iran have had ups and downs in their relationship. They are at a pretty low point today.

We are tracking this planned pipeline between Iran and Pakistan. Honestly, I don't know where the financing for such a project would come from. I don't think many international donors would be interested in funding such an endeavor.

We have also not heard from the government of Pakistan a desire for a waiver of American sanctions that would certainly result from such a project. Instead, what we are undertaking in the Administration is to have a conversation with Pakistan. What are Pakistan's other alternatives? How can we compete for that business? Where can they find other non-Iranian sources of natural gas? And how can we help Pakistan think about the transition to clean energy?

Pakistan is very interested in providing energy through solar, through wind, through hydro. How can that begin to replace their dependence on coal and other hydrocarbons?

Mr. LAWLER. OK. So have you expressed direct concern with the Pakistani government on this issue?

Mr. LU. We are in consultation with the Pakistani government on this issue. Yes, sir.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. I mean, my concern is that Iran is the greatest State sponsor of terror. They use the illicit Iranian petroleum oil trade to finance terrorism. Since Joe Biden took office, nearly 88 billion in increased revenue has resulted because of lax enforcement on sanctions. It is why I introduced the SHIP Act, to increase secondary sanctions on the purchase of Iranian petroleum. It passed through the House overwhelmingly, with bipartisan support, and has since stalled in the Senate because the White House doesn't want it.

So, from my vantage point, when we talk about other alternatives that Pakistan may be able to engage on, why don't we start by cracking down on the illicit oil trade? Why is the Administration taking a very lax approach to cracking down on Iranian petroleum?

Mr. LU. Sir, the Administration will uphold both the letter and the spirit of all sanction laws, particularly those related to Iran.

Mr. LAWLER. Do you think an increase of 88 billion in revenue is upholding the letter and spirit of the law?

Mr. LU. Sir, I am not an expert in Iranian energy exports, but what I know as a person who has a car that is fueled by gasoline is all of us have paid for higher gasoline after Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. And I—

Mr. LAWLER. Well, that is also—

Mr. LU. Sir?

Mr. LAWLER [continuing]. a result in this country of us limiting production of oil and natural gas in this country. That is why we are dealing with our own energy challenges.

Mr. LU. Sir, if I can—

Mr. LAWLER. Across the globe—

Mr. LU [continuing]. answer your question, I—

Mr. LAWLER. Well, you went in a total non sequitur, but sure.

Mr. LU. I fully support the efforts by the U.S. Government to prevent this pipeline from happening. We are working toward that goal, sir.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. How does the Administration view Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban?

Mr. LU. With suspicion, sir.

Mr. LAWLER. And so what are we doing, based on that suspicion?

Mr. LU. So I think it is well known that previous governments of Pakistan have had close relations with the Taliban. Currently, the greatest terrorist threat faced by the people of Pakistan emanates from Afghanistan. And the relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban is about the same as the relationship between the United States and the Taliban. It is very strained and difficult.

We have a very important dialog with the Pakistani government about the Taliban, how to help shape its behavior, how to help make sure the Taliban upholds its commitments.

Mr. LAWLER. Last question. Why was the—why was Pakistan excluded from the Administration's Indo-Pacific strategy?

Mr. LU. Sir, it is a way that we define the Indo-Pacific. And it is not only this Administration, it is the last Administration as well. For whatever reason, I suspect it has to do with COCOM authority between the Indo-Pacific Command and Central Command. The dividing line of the Indo-Pacific is the line between Pakistan and India.

Mr. BURCHETT.

[Presiding] Time is up. I am going to have to cut you off, Mr. Lu. There is a new sheriff in town. It is me.

Mr. LU. I recognize the sheriff's authority.

Mr. BURCHETT. Brad Sherman from California, you are recognized, sir.

Mr. SHERMAN. We have substantial leverage in Pakistan in two ways: first, the IMF, where we have a loud voice and we should

use it more often; and, second, we could deny visas to high-ranking Pakistani officials.

We need to focus on human rights in Pakistan. I am particularly focused on Sindh and the disappearances there, the forced conversions of young girls forced to convert and then marry old men. And we have seen throughout Pakistan a blasphemy law that allows a person to complain, and all of a sudden someone who is not Muslim usually is subject to detention and even execution.

But the greatest problem is Dr. Afridi. That is something we discussed in this room last decade again and again. He is in jail for 14 years. We released Viktor Bout to get an American back. And the message to everyone in the world—and this is a national security risk—is don't cooperate with the CIA, because if you are an American national, we will move heaven and earth to get you out. But if you are the one foreign national who did the most for America of anyone this century, you will rot in jail.

The Pakistanis have said that they will do a Siddiqui for Afridi trade. Ms. Siddiqui didn't kill any Americans, tried to, ought to be in jail, is now perhaps incapacitated anyway. Will we trade Siddiqui for Afridi? And, if not, will we ban from entry into this country those who are holding her hostage, Dr. Afridi hostage? Or do we just turn our back on any foreign national? The man who is responsible for getting Bin Laden is in a Pakistani jail.

Mr. LU. Representative Sherman, I first want to thank you personally, but also thank this committee and the Congress—

Mr. SHERMAN. Sir, I have one—I will yield 10 seconds to say Siddiqui for Afridi, yes or no?

Mr. LU. Mr. Sherman, I have been in this job for more than 2-1/2 years. I have never had a Pakistani official raise with me—

Mr. SHERMAN. They have told me. They have told your predecessor. They have told the State Department. Afridi is in jail. You haven't done anything about it, and he is the man that helped us get Bin Laden.

But let's move on.

Mr. LU. Sir? Sir, if I can just—

Mr. SHERMAN. Sir, I only get 5 minutes.

Mr. LU. Go ahead.

Mr. SHERMAN. We have the exit control list where hundreds of American citizens are prohibited from leaving Pakistan. Will we treat them the same way we deal with everyone else who is wrongfully detained in Russia and elsewhere? What are we doing to get American citizens who have not been even charged with a crime out of Pakistan if they want to leave?

Mr. LU. Representative Sherman, we work every day on behalf of American citizens in Pakistan. As you note, there are some laws that have put undue restrictions on Americans. We have had a very positive track record—

Mr. SHERMAN. But hundreds—I mean, hundreds are still there, and the IMF loan goes forward. And we allow the top generals in Pakistan to visit the United States when American citizens can't leave Pakistan and come to the United States. We then have the vote tabulation system, and they have banned the bat, the symbol of the PTI. Then they banned the batsman.

And this is—I mean, there have been flaws in other Pakistani elections, but this is perhaps the greatest flaw. And we are told, and the Pakistani Ambassadors told me, well, this is just the ordinary working of the Pakistani judicial system. That is the same judicial system that has Dr. Afridi in jail for 14 years for getting Bin Laden.

Do we have faith that Imran Khan has not been the victim of selective prosecution? Or is it apparent that he has been?

[Applause.]

Mr. LU. Sir, following the rioting on May 9, the day Imran Khan was arrested, the U.S. Government has raised our concerns about the mass detention of members of the opposition, to include the PTI. We have raised concerns about the use of military courts—

Mr. SHERMAN. If I can interrupt, there is one thing you need to do. The American ambassador needs to visit Imran Khan in prison and make sure that he lives to tell the tale of how he was wrongfully imprisoned through selective prosecution.

I yield back.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Sherman. Excellent questions.

Representative Baird is not here, so I am the next in line. Secretary Lu, could you provide insight in the involvement of the military in the politics of Pakistan?

[Applause.]

Mr. BURCHETT. Hold on. Y'all don't need to clap for me. I am good. I am good. We are good. Thank you, all.

Go ahead, brother.

Mr. LU. The Pakistani military is the sixth largest military in the world and the largest of any majority Muslim country. The U.S. military has historically had very close relations with the Pakistani military. Our generals and their generals have trained together decade after decade.

It is an important part of Pakistani culture. I have lived in Pakistan. I have seen that for myself. The Pakistani military is an important institution. We respect, in this Administration and all past American Administrations, the constitutional principle that the Pakistani military must be kept under civilian control. It must be answerable to the President.

Mr. BURCHETT. But is it?

Mr. LU. Answerable to the President, sir, who is the commander in chief, and responsible to civilian control.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay. Do you all at the State Department intend to conduct a review of the most recent elections in Pakistan?

Mr. LU. Sir, we have conducted that review, and we have found a number of election irregularities that I have detailed today.

Mr. BURCHETT. Right.

Mr. LU. What we are undertaking right now is a monitoring of how the democratic institutions of Pakistan will address those irregularities. It is—

Mr. BURCHETT. I would suggest to you that a strong letter is not doing a whole heck of a lot. I would tell you that this country needs to start using its economic might to correct some of these wrongs. These people are being mistreated. You know, I am not much on bureaucrats. I don't like writing letters. I like delivering it personally, and I think that is something we could do.

Did the U.S. ask for former Prime Minister Imran Khan's removal after he visited Russia?

Mr. LU. We did not, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay. There are people who believe you were involved in the regime change in Pakistan. Can you speak on that? [Applause.]

Mr. LU. Sir, I was absolutely not involved, nor were any Americans involved with that process.

Mr. BURCHETT. None whatsoever.

Mr. LU. None whatsoever, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. Not contractors, not—

Mr. LU. None. Not one.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay. And aid to Pakistan being withheld—is aid to Pakistan being withheld because Pakistan refused to vote against the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the United Nations General Assembly?

Mr. LU. No, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right. I have a little more time left. Do I have any members—I tell you what. Okay. Hang on for a second, you all. I am not used to this.

All right. Well, I will end mine then. I will—Representative Schneider from Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Chairman Burchett.

Mr. BURCHETT. Oh, wait. I am sorry. It is not you. It is Amo. I am sorry. Do you all want to fight it out or can I—

Mr. SCHNEIDER. No. Go ahead.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay. I apologize. I am new at this. That is why they don't let me do this very often.

Mr. AMO. Well, you are doing a great job, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. BURCHETT. That is just because I recognized you.

Mr. AMO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to Ranking Member Phillips. And greetings, Assistant Secretary Lu.

I know we have touched on some of the election issues before. But like many other members of this committee, I am concerned, concerned by the trends, but also concerned by the elections specifically. As we know, in early February, the elections were held after a nearly 3-month delay. That raised serious concerns about the democratic process in Pakistan.

I also know that the State Department joined other international election observers in expressing concern that the election included undue restrictions on freedoms of expression, association, and assembly. So, you know, I want to reiterate my personal concern. The incoming that I have received has really been illuminating and suggested that there is more that we can do.

I could share the chair's urging in his recent remarks that our country uses its levers to ensure that democracy is upheld. That is also why I am proud to co-sponsor House Resolution 901. This resolution reaffirms the House of Representatives' strong support for democracy in Pakistan and urges the government of Pakistan to uphold democracy and protect fundamental rights.

But as we, you know, look more broadly at human rights in Pakistan, the State Department, your agency's most recent human rights report highlighted significant human rights challenges in

Pakistan, including restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

Credible threats of violence, harassment, abductions, and killings by security forces, political parties, and other groups have led citizens and journalists to self-censor their speech for their own safety. The State Department found that the Pakistani government's failure to investigate and prosecute attacks on free speech and the press have effectively led to restrictions on free speech and the press in a very dramatic way.

You know, really, what I want to hear is, how can and how will the United States work with the Pakistani government to support meaningful change to promote freedom of speech and freedom of the press?

Mr. LU. Sir, I have the pleasure and responsibility of reading the Pakistani media on a daily basis. And I will confirm what is in our human rights report is there is both self-censorship and occasionally active censorship in Pakistan today. At the same time, what I read in the Pakistani press is a cacophony of voices. There is actually competition in the media with respect to things that are said and not said, as well as in social media.

And so one of the most damaging things that we see today are restrictions on social media, because like the rest of the world, Pakistanis are getting a lot of their news and information through the internet. And so when internet gets—the internet gets pulled down or X gets throttled, as it has been now for several weeks, it denies the Pakistani people from getting the kind of diversity of reporting and information that they deserve.

We are talking to the Pakistani government at the highest level about these issues. We are also working year after year in the trenches with Pakistani civil society to help to train journalists about fact checking, about responsible sourcing of their information, about journalistic standards. And what I can also see is, while there is censorship, both self and active, we can also see the development of some truly excellent journalism coming out of Pakistan and some very brave journalists who defy these sensors and still produce things that call into question the government or the military or the Americans or any number of other institutions of authority.

Mr. AMO. If I may, what exactly have those conversations yielded with the government? Because, I mean, it is one thing to have them, but it is another to be pursuing, you know, some outcomes that are beneficial to the values that we uphold here and we want to see in a real active democratic society.

Mr. LU. I do think it is important for both the Administration and the Congress to say loud and clear that we are watching what happens in Pakistan. We are watching closely its human rights record, what it does with respect to religious freedom, and what it is doing on free speech.

I grant you, I don't know that what we say today affects exactly what they are going to do tomorrow, but over time if we let up on these values it is going to be worse because they can see that there are no consequences for these violations.

Mr. AMO. Well, my time is expiring. The only thing that I want to leave you with is I think we have a responsibility to make that

concern clearer, more active, and seek the outcomes that we believe in in maintaining our democracy.

My time has expired.

Mr. LU. Yes, sir.

Mr. AMO. I yield back to the chair.

Mr. WILSON.

[Presiding] Thank you very much.

And we now proceed to Congressman Brad Schneider of Illinois, and of course it is really easy to get confused between Gabe Amo and Brad Schneider. They both come from assorted northern states, Rhode Island and now Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Chairman Wilson. And no good deed going unpunished, Gabe asked the question I wanted to ask, and thank you for your answer. I am going to build on that.

You know, in your written testimony, you concluded that the Pakistani people deserve a country that is peaceful, democratic, and prosperous. Quotes. And we just talked a little bit about what the United States can do, but let me just say here that a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous Pakistan is not just important to the Pakistanis. It is in the interest of the United States as well, and that is why we are having this hearing.

And I thank the chairman for calling it, and we are addressing what has been discussed, very real concerns about the election, but also recognizing, as you noted in your testimony, the positive elements seen in the election and how we build upon them. I hope we continue those conversations.

I want to shift gears a little bit and touch on Afghan deportations, though. I share with others the deep concern of these mass deportations of undocumented Afghans back to Afghanistan where they are going to live in horrible humanitarian conditions under the Taliban.

Human Rights Watch claims that Pakistani authorities have committed widespread abuses against Afghans living in Pakistan to compel their return to Afghanistan, including by confiscating property, destroying documents, and physically abusing individuals. Has the U.S. raised these concerns with the government at all? And how is the U.S. working with the international community to push back against this policy?

Mr. LU. Thank you, sir. We have had discussions with the Pakistani government at the highest levels about these deportations. As you know, as has been well documented, over half a million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan following this effort by the Pakistani government to remove illegal foreigners.

From the first day of that process, we have been in touch with the Pakistani government, both about the humanitarian consequences of this mass deportation but also to try to protect those Afghans who have a pathway to coming to the United States. There are thousands of Afghans who worked with us, who worked with our Embassy or our military, who have fled to Pakistan and sought sanctuary there. We have been very keen that those Afghans are allowed to stay, so we can process them.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And they are still in processing, so—

Mr. LU. And they are. And the Pakistani government has actually on this one issue been very supportive. We are grateful for that.

On the broader issue, we are talking with the new government now about trying to make sure that the rights of Afghan refugees are respected. We are thankful, right, the Pakistani people have hosted over 3 million Afghan refugees now for over 40 years. It is historic in proportion. That sacrifice does not go unnoticed.

At the same time, we very much hope they work with the UNHCR as they enter this next phase where they are trying to figure out whether more people are returning, whether some of those who have returned are able to come back to Pakistan, and those—the needs of those refugees are being met.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you.

Mr. LU. Yes, sir.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And I have raised this previously with the Ambassador, Pakistani Ambassador as well, and look forward to working with you to make sure that happens.

I will shift gears again. We touched on this. I will pick up where Mr. Lawler left off. Pakistan-Iranian relations, you mentioned the escalation, the recent escalatory environment, the strikes in January. Where do you see that moving? Do you think the strikes were one-off occurrences or something that could continue to escalate in the future?

Mr. LU. Sir, as you know, the strikes were not only against Pakistan. They were against three countries simultaneously by Iran. It is reprehensible and irresponsible for Iran to lash out against its neighbors for terrorism that exists in Iran itself.

So, as you may be tracking, those three missile and drone strikes that happened in January followed a really terrible terrorist attack that occurred within Iran. And the government of Iran clearly felt like it had to respond in some way. They responded in the worst way possible by firing missiles at targets that they probably didn't well understand, which for our information ended up killing lots of civilians in three countries, including in Pakistan.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And with my last—

Mr. LU. We have strongly condemned Iran's actions.

Mr. SCHNEIDER [continuing]. few seconds, can you just touch on the U.S. messaging to the Pakistani government regarding their direct engagement with Tehran on security matters, especially in the context of our concerns, our mutual concerns, of nuclear proliferation and Iran's nuclear program?

Mr. LU. Sir, we have warned them about our red lines, legislative, but also in terms of how we cooperate with Pakistan. If they get into bed with Iran, it will be very serious for our relationship.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Okay. We need to reiterate that again and again and again.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Brad Schneider of Illinois.

We now proceed to Congressman Greg Casar of Texas.

Mr. CASAR. Thank you, Chair, and thanks also to the ranking member for having me here today.

Mr. Lu, I am sure you are aware I led a letter, alongside 30 of my colleagues here in Congress, to the State Department, as well as to the President—you have got it right there—talking about credible allegations of election rigging in the Pakistani elections. And we urged that the Administration withhold recognition of the new government in Pakistan until a credible and transparent investigation on election interference had been conducted.

I know that the U.S. Embassy congratulated Mr. Sharif, quote, “on his assumption of the office of Prime Minister,” but I haven’t seen a statement yet from the State Department itself. So just so we are clear, at this point, yes or no, has the U.S. officially recognized the new government in Pakistan?

Mr. LU. Representative Casar, I would like to answer with a yes or no. The actual answer is a little more complicated, if you will allow me. The government of the United States, we don’t actually go around recognizing or withholding recognition of new governments. That is not something we do anywhere around the world.

What we do do is we decide whether we are going to engage with a government. And so, yes, you have seen actions by our Ambassador, our Embassy. We are in every interaction with this government stressing the importance of accountability for election irregularities, sir.

Can I just also add, your letter is incredibly important. It is important that the Pakistani people, the Pakistani government, hear not only from the Administration but from Members of Congress, and having so many of them speak together has real influence.

The Administration largely agrees with your recommendations. We have done many of the things that you have proposed. We have said publicly and privately that we want to see transparent and credible investigation of election irregularities. We have called for accountability for mass detentions of people in the opposition, and we have said loudly and clearly that military trials for civilians accused of crimes after May 9 is not in keeping with international norms.

Mr. CASAR. I appreciate that. And so in other cases, for example, in the case of Venezuela or some other countries, where the State Department has spoken out very clearly about election rigging, and we can talk about—you know, separately about how it is that we treat those governments or treat those countries, but it seems that when we have had allegations of election rigging that we have spoken out much more clearly than in this case. And I would urge that we continue to speak with the level of moral clarity that we have in other situations. But I appreciate your recognition and speaking out here today about how it is not okay for us to be having journalists jailed, for Twitter to get shut down, for there to be this continued very clear to me interference in democracy.

Given the credibility allegations of fraud and rigging, what gives you confidence that this government will have the democratic legitimacy necessary, not only for the interests of the Pakistani people, but for the interests of the United States?

[Applause.]

Mr. LU. Sir, the political and economic stability of Pakistan is important for the United States. It is important that the Pakistani people—

Mr. CASAR. And I am short on time. Is it just—is it your sense right now that there is going to be that democratic legitimacy? Or is that—or do we have real concerns? I am sorry. I have one more question for you, so just give me a——

Mr. LU. Sir, I think that is up to the process ongoing now in the Electoral Commission of Pakistan.

Mr. CASAR. One more question. Most security assistance to Pakistan has been suspended since 2018. Recently, the Pakistani Ambassador said that Pakistan is awaiting a decision from the U.S. on increasing military sales and financing. Yes or no, are there ongoing conversations about increasing military assistance to Pakistan?

Mr. LU. No. Ongoing conversation about large-scale increases, no.

Mr. CASAR. That is good to hear. Given that the U.S. has already sent hundreds of millions of dollars in aid, are there any steps the State Department is taking to ensure that the aid we send is not used for any of these abuses that you have identified?

[Applause.]

Mr. LU. Sir, absolutely. There is very close monitoring of where our military assistance goes around the world, including to Pakistan. For example, the F-16s sold to Pakistan over 40 years ago have active U.S. technical security teams monitoring their use every day.

Mr. CASAR. Thank you for that. Has the U.S. identified any units of military or security forces that would not be eligible for aid?

Mr. LU. Yes.

Mr. CASAR. We have identified those. Thank you. Thank you for your clear answers. Thank you for being here through this hearing, and I hope that we can after this hearing continue the work of making sure that we actually fully investigate the election and that we actually make sure people are let out of jail that were put in there unfairly because democracy in Pakistan, of course, will serve the people of Pakistan, but it is so clearly in the United States' interest.

I started out on this seeing the failures we had in Latin America of prioritizing military relationships over democratic relationships, and it never served us there and it won't serve us in Pakistan or anywhere else. So thank you so much, Mr. Lu.

Mr. LU. Thank you, sir.

[Applause.]

Mr. CASAR. I yield back, Chair.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Greg Casar of Texas.

And now proof that we have got really good people from Texas on both sides, Congressman August Pfluger of Texas.

Mr. PFLUGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for letting me waive on to this committee. I know that we have been having this discussion between several members—bipartisan discussions—on this very important issue.

So I very much appreciate the ability to waive on today and, obviously, have some concerns about what has happened in the past few weeks and months, and appreciate you being here, Mr. Lu. Thank you for your time today.

These questions have probably been asked, but I want to ask them again. As an interested citizen, as somebody who believes in free and fair elections, and really just want to get a general assessment regarding the fairness of the elections in Pakistan, what your general thought is before I go into some deeper questions.

Mr. LU. Sir, we share the view of local election observers who have in summary said this was a competitive and orderly election, but they note irregularities in the compilation of the results. That should be fully investigated.

Mr. PFLUGER. Do you believe that the recent election was free and fair?

Mr. LU. Sir, we have never used the term “free and fair” in the characterization of this election.

Mr. PFLUGER. To what level, then, would you say interference happened?

Mr. LU. Sir, we have expressed, and I have said this multiple times today, serious concerns about the pre-election environment, violence occurred, terrorism and political violence. We have expressed concern about the failure to register individual candidates and political parties, the mass arrests of those in opposition, the shutdown of the internet, and the censorship and pressure placed on journalists.

Mr. PFLUGER. Do you believe that those without those specific examples—and would definitely like to hear more examples, but without those examples of interference—I am not sure if you are going to use that term—but please tell me what adjective you would use to describe it. And without those things having happened, would the election results be different?

[Applause.]

Mr. LU. Sir, you ask an important question, and I think the answer to your question is the Election Commission of Pakistan, should it find that these irregularities are substantiated, should rerun elections where there has been interference. And that is the way the Pakistani people will know—it is probably unlikely that an American diplomat will know whether or now the results would turn out, but they will turn out the way they should if the Election Commission reruns constituencies.

Mr. PFLUGER. What is the Department of State doing to urge Pakistan—the government of Pakistan, those that govern the elections, to do just that?

Mr. LU. Sir, we have made very clear public and private statements. We have said so clearly to Pakistan’s leaders but also to election officials, that there is an expectation of all of Pakistan’s partners, not only the United States, that they conduct elections with integrity.

Mr. PFLUGER. So you believe these should be fully investigated and adjudicated?

Mr. LU. Yes, sir.

Mr. PFLUGER. Tell me what this does to the relationship between the United States and Pakistan if they are not investigated, if they are not adjudicated, if they do not decide to rerun their elections?

Mr. LU. We have enjoyed 76 years of partnership with this country. It will be an impediment to our relationship if Pakistan does not have a democratic process that upholds its own constitution. It

will retard our ability to have the type of relationship we want in security matters, on business fronts, and people to people. All of that suffers if Pakistan is not a full democracy.

Mr. PFLUGER. Recently, I marked up in the Committee of Homeland Security a bill that will soon go to the full committee—in the Homeland Committee on transnational repression. Is the State Department monitoring reports of transnational repression made by Pakistani Americans? And, if so, what steps is the State Department taking to address these topics?

Mr. LU. Sir, we are tracking transnational repression around the world, including with respect to allegations made about Pakistan. We are looking very closely at the examples offered. If we find that they are substantiated, we will address them directly with the Pakistani government.

Mr. PFLUGER. I thank the witness.

Mr. Chairman, once again, thank you for letting me waive on. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman August Pfluger of Texas.

[Applause.]

Mr. WILSON. And I want to thank the witness for the valuable testimony and the members for their questions. The members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witness, and we will ask you to respond to these in writing.

Pursuant to Committee Rules, all members have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record, subject to the length limitations.

Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:41 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia
Joe Wilson (R-SC), Chairman

March 13, 2024

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held at 10:15 a.m. in room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Wednesday, March 20, 2024

TIME: 10:15 a.m.

LOCATION: 2172 Rayburn

SUBJECT: Pakistan After the Elections: Examining the
Future of Democracy in Pakistan and the US-
Pakistan Relationship

WITNESSES: The Honorable Donald Lu
Assistant Secretary of State
Bureau for South and Central Asian Affairs
U.S. State Department

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chairs

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day Wednesday Date March 20 Room 2172

Starting Time 10:15 am Ending Time 11:04 am

Recesses ☐ (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chair Joe Wilson

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☐

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

Pakistan After the Elections: Examining the Future of Democracy in Pakistan and the US/Pakistan Relationship

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Wilson, Mr. Burchett, Mr. Baird, Mr. Lawler, Mr. McCormick, Mr. Phillips, Mr. Sherman, Mrs. Manning, Mr. Amo, Mr. Schneider

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Pfluger, Mr. Casar

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*
attached

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or
TIME ADJOURNED 11:04 am

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia

118th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: Pakistan After the Election: Examining the Future of Democracy in Pakistan and the US Pakistan Relationship

Date: 3/20/24

Convened: 10:15am

Adjourned: 11:4am

Representative	Present	Absent	Representative	Present	Absent
Mr. Wilson (SC-02)	X		Mr. Phillips (MN-03)	X	
Mr. Mast (FL-18)		X	Mr. Sherman (CA-30)	X	
Mr. Burchett (TN-02)	X		Mr. Connolly (VA-11)		X
Mr. Jackson (TX-13)		X	Mrs. Manning (NC-06)	X	
Mr. Baird (IN-04)	X		Mr. Amo (RI-01)	X	
Mr. Lawler (NY-17)	X		Mr. Schneider (IL-10)	X	
Mr. McCormick (GA-6)	X		<i>Mr. Casar (TX-35)</i>	X	
<i>Mr. Pfluger (TX-11)</i>	X				

Since 2001, Pakistan has been a key ally of the United States in our regional efforts to combat terrorism and instability.

Our two countries have enjoyed a relationship based on mutual efforts to promote security and stability in the face of some of the worst terror threats the world has seen.

And since the Biden Administration's disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, and the subsequent takeover by the Taliban, it has become more important than ever that the US work closely with Pakistan.

Pakistan has played an essential role in mitigating the effects of the Administration's withdrawal on regional security.

Although the United States no longer maintains a presence in Afghanistan, we still have vital interests in the region, and encouraging Pakistan's domestic security and stability is essential to our larger regional strategy.

Today, the situation in Pakistan is tenuous. The country just installed a new government after a controversial election, and Pakistan faces a massive economic crisis.

We know that Pakistan's domestic situation has a ripple effect throughout the region, and it is critical that the United States work to promote economic prosperity and domestic stability within Pakistan.

The people of Pakistan deserve a strong and stable country, where the fundamentals of democracy and rule of law are protected at the highest levels.

Pakistani voters have displayed their commitment to participating in the process: despite allegations of fraud and interference in the recent election, the people of Pakistan were not deterred, and showed up to vote in unprecedented levels.

I have called for a full investigation into any allegations of interference or corruption in these recent elections and I will be watching closely to see how these irregularities are addressed.

Beyond the elections, the new government in Pakistan has a number of challenges ahead.

The economic situation in Pakistan is dire, as the country faces record inflation and a currency crisis.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's security is at risk, as the TTP and other terrorist groups have become increasingly emboldened since 2021.

Pakistan's new government must work to protect its people from domestic and regional terrorism, while also ensuring that the government respects the human rights of its citizens.

Pakistan has a history of human rights violations, and these circumstances must be improved for democracy to truly thrive in Pakistan.

While challenges remain ahead for Pakistan, the United States must continue our strong relationship, in order to promote regional stability and provide Pakistan with an alternative to its increasingly cozy relationship with the CCP.

And while US security assistance to Pakistan has largely been frozen for the past 6 years, the US still has a responsibility to ensure Pakistan has its security needs met.

I look forward to working closely with my colleagues in the House to promote domestic stability within Pakistan and set Pakistan up for success in its role as a regional security partner.

I thank Chairman Wilson for holding this hearing, and I thank Assistant Secretary Lu for testifying today.

Today, Pakistan is facing many challenges. The country just installed a new government after a controversial election, and Pakistan is experiencing a massive economic crisis including record inflation and overwhelming foreign debt.

Pakistan's domestic situation has a ripple effect throughout the region, and it is critical that the United States work to promote economic prosperity and domestic stability within Pakistan.

The people of Pakistan deserve a country where democracy and rule of law are protected at the highest levels.

Pakistani voters have displayed their commitment to participating in the process: despite allegations of fraud and interference in the recent election, the people of Pakistan showed up to vote in unprecedented numbers.

I was deeply concerned by well-documented instances of interference in the February elections. A terrorist attack at a candidate's political offices hours before the polls opened. Major internet and cell service shut offs on election day. These events are serious and consequential.

I have called for a full investigation into any allegations of interference or corruption in these recent elections and I will be watching closely to see how these irregularities are addressed.

Additionally, human rights in Pakistan must be respected in order for democracy to thrive.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's security is at risk, as the TTP and other terrorist groups have become increasingly emboldened since the Biden Administration's disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

Pakistan has played an essential role in mitigating the effects of the Administration's withdrawal on regional security, and it remains vitally important that the United States and Pakistan continue working together to counter terrorism.

While challenges remain ahead, the United States and Pakistan must continue to work together to promote regional stability. We also know that if the United States pulls away from our relationship with Pakistan, the Chinese Communist Party would gladly take our place.

I look forward to working closely with my colleagues in the House to promote democracy, economic prosperity, and stability within Pakistan and set Pakistan up for success in its role as a key regional security partner.

“Pakistan After the Elections: Examining the Future of Democracy in Pakistan and the US-Pakistan Relationship”

House Foreign Affairs Committee

March 20, 2024

2172 Rayburn

Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

The Pakistani elections on February 8 marked a crucial juncture for a nation grappling with severe economic crises, a devastating 2022 flood, and region-wide security threats. Since Pakistan’s independence, the U.S.-Pakistan relationship has been complex and multifaceted, with both countries sharing common interests in regional stability, counterterrorism efforts, and economic cooperation. As we discuss the future of democracy in Pakistan and the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, it is imperative that we reflect on the significant challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We must work to secure a strong bilateral relationship rooted in mutual democratic values, respect for human rights, and a joint commitment to regional peace and stability.

The United States established formal diplomatic relations with Pakistan following its independence in 1947, and the United States has remained one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment and Pakistan’s largest export market throughout its history. Cooperation increased between our two countries during U.S.-led military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the United States relied on Pakistan’s airports and logistical support. Since the withdrawal in August 2021, Pakistan has served as a hub to relocate vulnerable Afghans to the United States and has been essential for maintaining over-the-horizon capabilities against terrorist organizations that threaten both U.S. and Pakistani national security. The United States Congress appropriated \$11 billion in economic, development and humanitarian aid, and nearly \$8 billion in security-related assistance from FY2002-FY2016 before the Trump Administration implemented a ban of security aid, a ban that has been sustained under the Biden Administration.

The February 8 elections were held against the backdrop of a major economic crisis in Pakistan, characterized by high inflation, low foreign reserves, weakened currency, and anemic recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic and historic floods that affected more than 33 million people and submerged one-third of the country. Pakistan will need to make meaningful reforms that include reduction of the budget deficit, controlling inflation, and expansion of the tax base to meet the requirements set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Following a once in a lifetime environmental disaster in 2022, it is extremely concerning that Pakistan moved forward with building a 300-kilowatt coal power plant in Gwadar, to be built with funding from Chinese state-owned entities. The United States must provide a real alternative to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to interrupt China’s malign influence and coercive economic behavior in the region. Pakistan, in turn, must turn to the United States and other democracies to work towards a green economy, one that will benefit Pakistan’s environmental and economic resilience.

As we navigate the post-election landscape in Pakistan, we must acknowledge the irregularities that marred the electoral process in Pakistan in the lead up to and during the February 8th elections. Violence, arbitrary detention, restrictions on freedom of expression and association, and the suspension of telecommunication and internet access in Pakistan during this time period are unacceptable and inconsistent with our shared democratic values. The rights of

all Pakistanis to make their voice heard at the ballot box, independent of which candidate they support, must be defended loudly by the United States. Efforts to disenfranchise illiterate voters in a country like Pakistan, where literacy rates stagnate around 60 percent, must be condemned. The United States must continue to advocate for the removal of blasphemy laws that violate the basic freedoms of expression and religion that all peoples should enjoy. That is why I am proud to cosponsor H.Res.901, a resolution that supports democracy and human rights in Pakistan. The bilateral U.S.-Pakistan partnership must be based in our shared strategic interests and democratic values.

As we deliberate on the future of democracy in Pakistan and the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, it is essential that we engage in a comprehensive assessment of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Our commitment to supporting democratic governance in Pakistan is not only a reflection of our values, but also a strategic obligation for regional stability and security. I look forward to hearing from our esteemed witness today as we seek to gain a deeper understanding of the path forward for democracy in Pakistan and the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. Thank you.

**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 Pvt), 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.

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

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.

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.

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

**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

**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 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

SUMMON TO THE ACCUSED

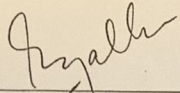
THE STATE VS LIEUTENANT COLONEL SYED AKBAR HUSSAIN (RETIRED) SON OF
SYED HAZOOR HUSSAIN, FIR NUMBER 3054/23 DATED 15 AUGUST 2023, POLICE
STATION SOUTH CANTONMENT LAHORE

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.




PRESIDENT OF THE COURT

**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. 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.

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

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

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
A/S Don Lu by
Representative Wilson (No. 1 to No. 1)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024**

Question 1:

In Pakistan, USG-funded Non-Governmental Organizations have faced persistent challenges in securing host-country registration through the Pakistan Ministry of Interior. Being unregistered can impede organizations' operations and ability to implement programs. What discussions have the State Department and USAID had with the Ministry of Interior to resolve the issue?

Answer 1:

The U.S. Department of State continues to work with the Pakistani Government to enhance its bilateral relationship and institutional cooperation. During and immediately after the 2022 floods, we saw progress from the Ministry of Interior (MOI) in easing restrictions on international non-governmental organization (INGO) registration. During all high-level engagements with the Ministry, we continue to encourage the MOI to increase transparency in the registration process of USG-funded INGOs and to remove and modify policies which hamper this process.

In October 2023, several USG-funded INGOs received notification from the MOI that their existing registration, which is formally called a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), would not be renewed or that their

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
A/S Don Lu by
Representative Wilson (No. 1 to No. 1)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024**

new MOU application would not be favorably considered. Each of these INGOs has initiated a formal appeal process with the Ministry and, while the appeal process is on-going, none have been asked to cease operations in Pakistan. Since October, USAID has regularly consulted with each of the INGOs, and none of them are requesting USG intervention at this time. The INGOs have pre-existing relationships with the Ministry and informed USAID that they prefer to work through the established appeal process first.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Donald Lu by Ranking Member
Representative Gregory Meeks (No.1 to No.4)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024**

Question 1:

How have you engaged the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to express concern over the sale of goods and the lack of enforcement or oversight of goods that flow to Russia and support their war against Ukraine?

Answer:

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the United States has maintained close diplomatic engagement with the Government of Kazakhstan including regular in-person visits and consultations with relevant government officials on sanctions issues. This engagement has led to an intensified focus by the Government of Kazakhstan on enforcement, such as an increase in the number of personnel that monitor and control exports.

As a result, we have seen a reduction in the transshipment of sensitive dual-use items through Kazakhstan but continue to monitor closely and engage with the Government of Kazakhstan on specific concerns as they arise.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Donald Lu by Ranking Member
Representative Gregory Meeks (No.1 to No.4)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024**

The United States also has a regular dialogue with the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and has expressed concern with the government's lack of enforcement and oversight practices. We have imposed sanctions on companies in the Kyrgyz Republic who are engaged in the transshipment of controlled goods and will continue to engage with the Kyrgyz to build their capacity to monitor the shipment of controlled items.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Donald Lu by Ranking Member
Representative Gregory Meeks (No.1 to No.4)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024**

Question 2:

What European countries or companies are using Central Asia as a workaround to our sanctions regime, and how are we working to stem the flow of these crucial exports that support Russia's war and weapons production?

Answer:

The United States works closely with our European Union counterparts to identify entities or individuals responsible for sanctions evasion. This engagement includes the designation of individuals or entities who have engaged in sanctions or export control circumvention to benefit Russia's war against Ukraine. As an example, on February 23, 2024, the U.S. government designated individuals and entities located in Belarus, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Turkey, and Serbia.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Donald Lu by Ranking Member
Representative Gregory Meeks (No.1 to No.4)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024**

Question 3:

Jackson-Vanik denies Permanent Normal Trade Relations status to current and former nonmarket economies unless they adhere to certain freedom-of-emigration requirements. What is the rationale for maintaining Jackson-Vanik applicability for Kazakhstan?

Answer:

It is the position of the Biden Administration that Jackson-Vanik should be repealed and Permanent Normal Trade Relations should be implemented for Kazakhstan. The original imposition of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment was a reaction to the Soviet Union's restrictions on the freedom of emigration for Soviet Jews. After the collapse of the USSR, Kazakhstan inherited the restrictions of Jackson-Vanik. Kazakhstan is a member of the World Trade Organization and successive Congressional reports have found Kazakhstan to be in compliance with Jackson-Vanik since 1997.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Donald Lu by Ranking Member
Representative Gregory Meeks (No.1 to No.4)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024**

Question 4:

Despite reforms under President Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan has begun backsliding on religious freedom and democratization, including through arrests of independent media in Karakalpakstan. How have you raised these concerns in engagements with the Government of Uzbekistan?

Answer:

After President Mirziyoyev took office in 2017, Uzbekistan made important progress in the human rights space, ending systematic forced labor in Uzbekistan's cotton harvest and ratifying Central Asia's first law combatting domestic violence. However, Uzbekistan's human rights reform process has slowed. The United States continues to encourage Uzbekistan to make progress on fundamental freedoms of speech and association, foster political openness, and create more space for civil society.

Secretary Blinken delivered strong messages on the risks of human rights backsliding during his 2023 trip to Uzbekistan where he met with both Foreign Minister Saidov and President Mirziyoyev. Since 2022 Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Assistant Secretary Donald Lu by Ranking Member
Representative Gregory Meeks (No.1 to No.4)
House Foreign Affairs Committee
March 20, 2024**

Zeya also has delivered hard messages to multiple high-level delegations from Uzbekistan.

U.S. Ambassador to Uzbekistan Henick and other U.S. officials frequently remind Government of Uzbekistan officials that Uzbekistan's reform progress and rising reputation on the world stage will be hampered by widely publicized incidents of arrests and police harassment of individuals exercising their protected rights. The U.S. Embassy in Tashkent works closely with the Government of Uzbekistan to identify opportunities to jointly advance freedom of religion, freedom of the press, democratic reforms, and gender equity and equality.