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Pakistan: Friend of Foe in the Fight Against Terrorism?

Good afternoon. It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss Pakistan's connections to terrorist organizations. Thank you for this opportunity.

After the terrorist attack on Easter Sunday that killed over 70 people in Lahore, Pakistani military and civilian leaders repeated their pledge to cease the dual track policy of viewing some terrorists as having utility and seeing others as posing a threat. However, in fact, the opposite has occurred; those distinctions have hardened and grown resistant to change instead. Most importantly, the calculus of the primary institution in Pakistan that wields power over these policies remains unwavering: the Pakistani Army.

Thus, it appears that there is no terrorist attack in Pakistan large enough to persuade the security establishment to abdicate the so-called "good militants." By "good militants" I mean those groups that the Pakistani security establishment sees as having utility. Instead, its relationships with the anti-India Punjabi groups Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohamed as well as with the Afghan insurgent groups, the Haqqani Network and the Afghan Taliban, will remain a deeply entrenched component of Pakistan's foreign and domestic security policies. One important reason that terrorist attacks in Pakistan do not alter the Army's calculus vis-à-vis these four groups is that, for the most part, they do not engage in violence in Pakistan. They concentrate their efforts outside of Pakistan, primarily in Afghanistan and, in the case of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohamed, in India as well.

This mindset reflects the Pakistani security establishment's three-pronged calculus towards militant groups, which I will focus on in my testimony today.

First and foremost, Pakistan's security establishment judges groups based on their utility vis-à-vis India based on its deep-seated belief and fear that India is inherently aggressive towards Pakistan and its ongoing dispute with India over Kashmir. Lacking the means to resolve its security competition with India, Pakistan retains relations with militant groups opposed to India and, by extension, Afghanistan as an integral part of its regional strategy. This includes Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network, which stems from Pakistani fears about Indian encirclement and a desire to prevent India from expanding its influence on Pakistan's western border. The Pakistani security establishment has successfully imbued a narrative in Pakistani society that emphasizes an existential danger to Pakistan from India; privileges the military as the only reliable provider of security for Pakistan; and thereby justifies its ongoing relations with militant groups. As the military's efforts to achieve conventional parity with India grow increasingly futile and as the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorates, it will continue to see utility in its militant partners.

Second, the security establishment evaluates militant groups based how they affect the threat in Pakistan. The so-called “good militants” not only abstain from attacks in Pakistan, some, particularly Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, discourage others from engaging in violence in Pakistan as well. In addition, the security establishment surely recognizes that a break in relations with these groups would dramatically increase the terrorist threat in Pakistan beyond the Army’s and the civilian government’s limited capacity to manage it. Breaking ties with the proxy groups runs the risk that they will turn their guns inward, dangerously compounding the terrorist threat in Pakistan.

Third, the Army weighs its capability to dismantle and defeat militant groups. Since Pakistan still lacks the requisite civilian institutions to deal with terrorism, confronting the “good militants” would fall to the Army. Yet a military approach alone will be insufficient and perhaps even counter-productive to deal with the problem. In the case of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohamed, any confrontation would occur in the Army’s Punjab heartland and would likely face resistance from within the Army and from the Punjab population. Should the Army choose to confront the Haqqani Network and the Afghan Taliban, it would exacerbate the already precarious security situations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Balochistan, respectively.

In assessing the Army’s four main proxy groups’ capability and their relationship with the Pakistani security establishment, it is worth briefly noting how relations with them have evolved. In the 1990s, the Army provided them and other groups with active assistance, which included resources, weapons, training, and even cover fire or shellings to enable cross-border infiltrations. In essence, it operated in the trenches with its proxy militant groups.

Under U.S. and international pressure, the security establishment altered the way it cooperates with its militant proxies, and its proxies have adapted as well. Currently, by far the most important asset that the security establishment provides is safe haven and protection. Overall, this is a less active form of support than in the past. Providing safe haven only involves *not* acting against groups, though the security services take it further and actively provide protection to their proxies as well. In the current environment, safe haven is also the most important asset the Army could provide for these groups. Under the protection of the Pakistani security establishment, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohamed, the Afghan Taliban, and the Haqqani Network have become highly capable and almost entirely self-sufficient organizations, other than their need for haven. They have ample other sources of funding, weapons, and equipment, as well as sizeable cadres of capable and experienced operatives. The Pakistani Army did its job well, and these groups no longer rely on the Army’s active support. They still sometimes benefit from more active support, such as the Inter-Services Intelligence’s assistance to Lashkar-e-Tayyiba in preparing for the 2008 Mumbai attacks, but the essential remaining asset they receive from the Army is safe haven. And, it bears repeating, all four groups depend on that safe haven.

The centrality of safe haven is important to recognize because it also influences the kind of leverage that the Army has over its proxy groups. The Army could re-commence larger-scale, more active forms of support. However, for now, U.S., Indian, and international pressure have led it to dramatically reduce such support, and the leverage that the Army has over its proxy groups is mostly coercive. Its main power comes from its ability to expand and restrict their safe haven.

Yet the Army’s relationships with Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohamed, the Haqqani Network, and the Afghan Taliban have proven resilient. These are the relationships that survived the tremendous fallout from 9/11 and its aftermath. While the United States has been deeply unsatisfied with

Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts and cooperation, once-friendly militants saw Pakistan's cooperation with the United States as a betrayal and turned their violence against their patron. For Pakistan, it was the worst of both worlds. However, these four groups retained their relationships with the Pakistani state and have benefitted enormously from it.

While the first rationale still dominates in the Pakistani security establishment's calculus, all three reasons—the proxy groups' utility against India and Afghanistan, their mitigation of the domestic threat and ability to worsen it, and the Pakistani state's limited ability to confront them—mutually reinforce the ongoing relationship with them and ensure that these ties will remain intact for the foreseeable future.

Next I would like to discuss each organization in turn and briefly describe the nature of their relationship with the security establishment. In addition, I would like to point out the complications that may follow in the highly unlikely event that Pakistan cuts ties with them.

Lashkar-e-Tayyiba

By far the closest group to the Pakistani security establishment is the anti-India, Punjab-based organization, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, which is the only major militant group in the region that adheres to Ahl-e-Hadithism. More than any other group, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba is woven into the fabric of Pakistani society and operates as an extension of the Pakistani state. It is steadfastly loyal to its patron, even demonstrating domestic utility by challenging the legitimacy of extremist groups that attack Pakistan. In so doing, Lashkar also parrots the Army's narrative that terrorist attacks in Pakistan are the product of a "foreign hand," an oblique reference to India, Afghanistan, and the United States. For example, earlier this year, Hafiz Saeed—the leader of Jamaat ul-Dawa (JUD), and, by extension, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba—publicly accused the United States and India of supporting the Islamic State's inroads into Pakistan.

Jamaat ul-Dawa, which engages in social service provision and proselytization efforts in Pakistan, has long attempted to falsely portray itself as separate from Lashkar. However, in an indication of how secure the organization is in Pakistan, JUD recently shed this obvious fiction of separation when it claimed a Lashkar attack in Kashmir in February on Twitter.

In another indication of Lashkar's comfortable position in Pakistan, the group recently set up so-called "sharia courts" in Punjab, essentially creating a parallel judicial system, by some accounts with support from local law enforcement. This reflects the way in which the group occupies space unfilled by the government, though with the government's support and in support of it.

If this evidence is not sufficiently persuasive to convey the depth of Lashkar's safe haven and protection in Pakistan, I would point out that Lashkar is the only currently operating terrorist group that I am aware of that has not lost its top founding leaders in nearly 30 years *or* experienced an organizational splinter of consequence.

Though Lashkar-e-Tayyiba has not conducted a major attack in India since the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the reverberations of this attack are still being felt as other groups have adopted a similar modus operandi after the "success" of the Mumbai attacks. I assess that Lashkar has not conducted another major attack primarily because of pressure from the Pakistani Army to abstain from attacks that could cause international pressure. However, this restraint has come at a cost for the United States and Afghanistan, as Lashkar has re-directed its operatives to Afghanistan in order to

keep them engaged and loyal. Lashkar probably fears that if it does not provide an outlet for its fighters, they will defect to other, more active and less constrained organizations.

However, should a rupture in relations between the Army and Lashkar occur, a Lashkar unleashed from the Pakistani state would be far less restrained in its violence against India and in Afghanistan. In the highly unlikely event that the Army breaks ties with Lashkar, we can expect Lashkar to engage in large-scale attacks in India. It is also possible that Lashkar would expand its operations outside of South Asia.

Jaish-e-Mohamed

Jaish-e-Mohamed—another Punjab-based, anti-India organization—has recently re-emerged after a period of relative quiescence. After 9/11, Jaish-e-Mohamed grew deeply divided about whether to retain a relationship with the Pakistani state. This resulted in an organizational split with a faction of the group turning against the Pakistani state and becoming involved in numerous attacks in Pakistan.

This split badly damaged the pro-state faction of Jaish-e-Mohamed, but the group appears to have recovered, mostly notably conducting an attack in January against an Indian Air Force station. Many observers suspect that Jaish's recovery was due in significant part to support from the security establishment, specifically as part of its efforts to coopt hostile elements. Jaish provides an avenue for militants who turned against the state to return to the pro-state fold. In order to make Jaish an appealing group to return to, the security establishment is apparently willing to allow it some latitude to strike in India. Jaish-e-Mohamed is intimately familiar with the faux crackdown charade enacted by security services that followed its attack in January and will, yet again, wait until international pressure subsides to re-emerge unscathed.

Unlike the other proxy groups, Jaish-e-Mohamed members have engaged in some sectarian violence in Pakistan and probably continue to do so. The group adheres to Deobandism, and is integrated into the broader Deobandi militant tapestry, which includes numerous anti-state elements and has been responsible for much of the sectarian violence in Pakistan.

If the Army were to turn against Jaish-e-Mohamed, it would likely cause extensive violence in Punjab, which is Pakistan's most populous and politically powerful province, and home to the Prime Minister. Both Jaish-e-Mohamed and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba are deeply embedded in the fabric of Punjabi society. Consequently, a confrontation in Punjab could even threaten to the stability of Pakistan.

The Haqqani Network & The Afghan Taliban

As mentioned earlier, the Haqqani Network and the Afghan Taliban also enjoy sanctuary in Pakistan. Both have personnel operating in major cities in Pakistan, but concentrate their presence in areas of Pakistan directly across the border from their respective strongholds in Afghanistan. Specifically, the Afghan Taliban has an extensive presence in Balochistan, and the Haqqanis find haven in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

Of the two, the security establishment is believed to enjoy closer relations with the Haqqanis. Their relationship pre-dates the formation of the Afghan Taliban. Notably, the Haqqanis have been willing to strike Indian targets in Afghanistan, almost certainly at the Pakistani military's behest. The Haqqani Network's extensive infrastructure in North Waziristan was one of the main reasons

that the Pakistani Army was so reluctant to conduct military operations there. When the Army finally launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014, the Haqqani Network had suspiciously relocated to Kurram, strongly suggesting that the group was forewarned of the impending operation. Though the Haqqanis emerged unscathed, some reports indicate that the military operations in North Waziristan caused tensions between the Haqqani Network and the Pakistani security services. However, with the Haqqani Network's leader, Siraj Haqqani, occupying the number two position in the Afghan Taliban, this relationship is as important as ever to the Army. While there is no affection on either side, both the Pakistani security establishment and the Haqqanis recognize that they need one another in equal measure. In contrast to the relationships with the Punjab-based groups, Pakistan's relationships with the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network are based on convenience and mutual interests and managed through coercion.

Unfortunately, Pakistan believes it cannot simultaneously uproot the Afghan militant groups from their haven in Pakistan and deliver them to the negotiating table. In the unlikely event that Pakistan moves against the Afghan insurgent groups' safe havens, it would lose its leverage to pressure them to engage in peace talks. From Pakistan's perspective, its investment in supporting the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network has paid dividends by ensuring that it has a place at the negotiating table and will have a say in Afghanistan's future. Put simply, it is not going to throw away that investment now.

In pointing out the consequences of unlikely ruptures in Pakistan's relations with these four groups, I by no means am justifying or excusing them. Instead, I wish to point out the Frankenstein situation that Pakistan has created for itself and that any future efforts to extricate itself from it will come at a cost and produce new threats with which the United States would have to grapple.

Dealing with the "Bad Militants"

We've talked about the so called "good militants," but now I would like to conclude my testimony by discussing the Pakistani security establishment's approach to hostile militants. As is well known, Pakistan's counterterrorism cooperation with the United States has been critical to the progress made against al-Qaida. In its efforts against hostile militants, Pakistan has sustained tremendous losses and expended significant resources. It has engaged in—or at least acquiesced to—cooperation with the United States that was unpopular domestically and that stoked hostile militants' antipathy.

Of note, fatalities to date this year in Pakistan from terrorist attacks are substantially lower than in recent years, notwithstanding the attack in Lahore on Easter that killed over 70 people. Some of this decrease in violence is attributable to the military operations in FATA, which pushed many Pakistani Taliban members and other hostile militants across the border into Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, Pakistan faces a resilient threat from the likes of the Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, al-Qaida, and others. Its effectiveness in dealing with these threats has been and will continue to be seriously hampered by its false dichotomization of "good militants" and "bad militants"; its vacillation between appeasement and scorched earth tactics; and its self-serving and erroneous focus on external actors as the source of its internal threat.

First, and most important, Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts will remain hamstrung by the artificial boundary it has attempted to erect between good militants and bad militants. The categorization of militants as friendly or hostile fails to account for the inter-twined nature of the

Deobandi militant groups in the region. For the Deobandi militant groups, organizational loyalties and membership are fluid and inter-organizational cooperation is common. This means that Deobandi militant groups allied with the Pakistani state, specifically Jaish-e-Mohamed, the Afghan Taliban, and the Haqqani Network, collaborate extensively with groups hostile to the Pakistani state, including the Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. In addition, al-Qaida, though not Deobandi, is fully integrated into this militant network and works closely with these groups as well. Groups hostile to Pakistan have exploited this loophole, such as to find safe haven in North Waziristan under the Haqqani Network's protection until military operations finally commenced in 2014.

Second, Pakistan's long-term success against militants will suffer from its proclivity towards cooptation and appeasement. It has repeatedly come to modus vivendis with militant groups that are willing to concentrate their violence outside of Pakistan, usually in Afghanistan. These arrangements are often unstable and provide groups with breathing room to recover and regroup before returning to violence in Pakistan. In the meantime, Afghan and Coalition Forces and Afghan civilians bear the brunt of these arrangements. It is not a sustainable solution, and it comes at the expense of Afghanistan's security.

Third, on the other end of the spectrum, the security establishment uses scorched earth tactics to eliminate militants, which includes "forced disappearances" and "encounters," i.e. extra-judicial detentions and killings. With a civilian judicial system unable to effectively prosecute terrorists, the military's tactics were given the veneer of legality when the civilian government acquiesced to allow military courts to deal with terrorist suspects and re-instated the death penalty in January 2015.

While few may lament the removal of hardened terrorists with significant blood on their hands, the security services' impunity causes two major issues. First, it encourages a cycle of revenge and retaliation with militants that has no end. The cycle of violence will continue in perpetuity as long as death is the primary way of dealing with militants that cannot be coopted. Put bluntly: the scope of the terrorist threat in Pakistan is not one that Pakistan can kill its way out of.

In addition, this impunity threatens Pakistan's civil society, the media, and the prospects for democracy in Pakistan. These same tactics are used against vocal critics of the military and dissidents in Balochistan. The authority to kill and to disappear people is not limited to irreconcilable terrorists; it extends to others deemed adversaries of the military's position of power in Pakistan.

Yet with less than six months left before the 21st Amendment expires, there is little sign that the civilian criminal justice system has undergone the necessary reforms to enable it to effectively handle terrorism-related cases. The civilians have, once again, failed to take the steps needed to play a meaningful and constructive role in combating extremism.

Lastly, the Pakistani Army's diagnosis of the sources of the domestic terrorist threat virtually guarantees that it will not apply an effective long-term solution. The Army persists in seeing the domestic threat as driven not by blowback from its decades of support for militant groups, but by a "foreign hand," a veiled reference to India, Afghanistan, or the United States. By looking outward for the source of the threat, the Army thereby absolves itself of its role in nurturing extremist groups and religious intolerance for decades and ignores the domestic drivers of extremism. As a

result, it is unlikely that the Army will make the requisite changes to truly degrade the threat, rather than temporarily disrupting it.

Conclusion

I realize that the prognosis that I have offered is grim. It includes a Pakistan committed to relations with highly capable and dangerous militant groups. The relationships between the Pakistani security establishment and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohamed, the Haqqani Network, and the Afghan Taliban may bend, but they are unlikely to break. I see the decrease in violence from terrorist attacks as temporary in light of Pakistan's inaccurate diagnosis of the source of the threat as externally driven, its support for groups that work closely with its adversaries, deep systematic flaws in Pakistan's counter-extremism institutions, and the ongoing cycle of retribution, not to mention the persistent underlying conditions fueling radicalization. I am skeptical of Pakistani pledges that they will deal with the "good militants" once they have taken care of the "bad militants." The bad militant problems are not going away and, in the meantime, the "good militants" will grow stronger and will become even more difficult for the Pakistani security establishment to confront. I hope that by shedding light on this situation, it will help the United States to better respond and manage the challenges ahead.

With that, I thank you for your attention and look forward to your questions.