

Testimony of Mr. Munawar “Sufi” Laghari
Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee Asia and the Pacific,
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Hearing on “U.S.-Pakistan Relations: Reassessing Priorities Amid Continued
Challenges”
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Chairman Yoho, Ranking Member Sherman, and members of the Committee

Let me thank you all for inviting me to this important hearing on US-Pakistan relations.

Pakistan is a topic of much media discussion, but the media does not discuss the realities I will inform you about today. There is little media and political discussion about Sindhis, who comprise about 14% of Pakistan’s population of just over 205 million people.

The Sindhi people are peaceful, pro-democracy, secular, and believers of mystic Sufism (mysticism).

When Pakistan became independent, the Sindhi people believed that becoming part of Pakistan would bring about regional peace, end to religious wars, end to resentfulness, and prevalence of justice and rights. But hostility and tensions in the region have never ended; religious extremism and differences have increased; Pakistan fought three wars with India; and it has been involved in many regional conflicts that have resulted in increased terrorism.

The United States can play a very important role in this region, particularly to bring about the eradication of terrorism and restoration of human rights.

The Pakistani State and its Links to Terrorist Groups

While American taxpayers help Pakistan, and Pakistan’s authorities have at times informed their American counterparts about killing a few terrorists in Wana and Waziristan, Pakistan’s security agencies also shelter the Taliban; Pakistan makes money from heroin and hashish trade through the Taliban; and more than two million students are going to madrasahs (religious seminaries) where they could be radicalized. These students get free food, education, and accommodation. They could be a threat to the whole world if they take control of nuclear weapons. None

of this could be done without the help of the military. Cases against them should be pursued in international courts.

Militant Islam is the most powerful weapon of the Pakistani Army. Islamic religious organizations have been, and will always be, their assets. They not only use these religious organizations against India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, but also against the United States and the whole world. They have created hatred against United States, India, and Israel.

There are many extremist religious organizations in Pakistan, but two types are the most influential: Fundamentalist Parties and Jihadi Organizations. Both are linked to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI).

A Focus on Sindh

Sindh can be contrasted with Pakistan's military-dominated state. Jihad, Islam, and the Army have always been features of the Pakistani state. Sindh's identity has always been peace, tolerance, coexistence, culture, and democracy.

Sindh has always been at the forefront of pro-democracy struggles against military dictators in Pakistan. Sindh played a leading role in the 1983 Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, while a harsh military crackdown led to thousands of Sindhis facing brutal torture, imprisonment, and death.

Sindhis have always had Sufi and tolerant tendencies, but Islam is forcibly imposed on them.

The percent of Urdu-speaking people has increased from four to eight percent, and this erodes Sindh's identity. We are losing our culture and language. Urdu has been imposed on us as a tool, and as long as you don't understand these ground realities, you will not be able to align American interests and relations with those of Pakistan.

Pakistan is a de-facto military state run by its army with total disregard to the country's civilian institutions. Islamic Jihadi outfits are protected and promoted by the army as assets and as an important Pakistani foreign and defense policy tool.

The mullahs and military have been the dominant force in Pakistan for a long time, and the state has catered to the interests of Punjabis and Mohajirs. Punjab has always been superior; Mohajirs have always been privileged. Meanwhile, Pashtoons, Sindhis and Baloch have always suffered.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES OF SINDHI POLITICAL DISSIDENTS and NATIONALISTS

Hundreds of political dissidents and Sindhi nationalist activists are missing in Sindh. They are kept incommunicado for months and even years as their whereabouts are not known to their families, friends, and party colleagues. No one is sure if they are currently dead or alive. They include political activists, writers, teachers, and publishers.

Their enforced disappearance is part of the so-called “strategic depth” policy of Pakistan’s army and ISI because these dissidents and nationalist activists are against the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) being built by China via Pakistan. Sindhis and Baloch are opposing CPEC tooth and nail. So writing or speaking against the CPEC Project is considered high treason or blasphemy in the eyes of Pakistani authorities, the military, and the ISI. One of the very few credible news magazines in the country, Pakistan’s monthly ‘Herald,’ mentions that “The intelligence agencies treat [the critics of CPEC] as their enemies,” (quoting a Sindhi nationalist G.M. Bhagat who was a former missing person himself). “Those who even whisper against CPEC are either kidnapped or killed.”

Hidayatullah Lohar is a headmaster for an elementary school in Nasirabad, in the Larkana division of Sindh. On April 17, 2017, while teaching a class, he was whisked away by armed ISI agents in an unmarked car in front of his students and colleagues. Since then, he has been missing, and his daughter Sassui, who is a computer science graduate, is running a campaign for his and other missing persons’ release. She and her brother regularly receive death threats.

Nangar Chana (also known as Faiz Rasool) has translated twenty one books on world literature and history into the Sindhi language. He was taken away by the intelligence agency’s men from the same town in August 2017. Nobody knows if he is dead or alive and no one knows his whereabouts.

Sandhiya is a young girl who has recently graduated with a degree in civil engineering from Karachi’s NED University of Engineering and Technology and has won a gold medal with distinction. She was sad along with her family on the day of her graduation because her father Inam Abbasi, who was the publisher of anti-jihadi books, was kidnapped by the Pakistani military and its intelligence agencies. He is still missing.

There are more than one hundred missing Sindhi political dissidents and nationalist activists. A culture of impunity prevails from the government towards their abducting agencies. Fear is established among people of Sindh as well as judges and lawyers who do not dare take their cases, except with few exceptions. So it is very difficult for people to talk against these enforced disappearances. However, I have been able to obtain a list of 54 missing persons (list is submitted hereto).

Several victims of enforced disappearances were killed through torture. Their dead bodies were punctured with drill machines, burnt with cigarettes, and were finally discarded in desolate places with pieces of papers marking their names. Some had papers with “Jeay Sindh” (“long live Sindh”) recovered from their pockets.

The names of others who were forcedly kidnapped and killed are Raja Dahar Bhambhro, 26 year old Sarwech Pirzado, and Muzafar Bhutto. There are Sindhi nationalist activists and leaders who were killed on the spot or burnt alive in their cars. For example, wheelchair-bound Sindhi nationalist leader Muneer Choliani was stopped while he was riding a car with his family members, taken out of the car, and shot to death. Qurban Serai, Maqsood Qureshi, and their colleagues were burnt to death in their cars in separate incidents. Sindhi Nationalist leader Bashir Khan Qureshi was also killed.

RISE OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM & PATRONAGE OF HAFIZ SAEED AND DAESH [also known as ISIS]:

It is interesting to note that Hafiz Saeed and his party goons roam freely and hold public rallies in Sindh, especially in the Thar area bordering India. They have a huge network in Sindh. They recruit Sindhi youths for jihad in Kashmir. Daesh is infesting universities in Sindh and recruiting young women for war in Syria and Iraq or even as sex companions to the terrorists of Daesh. Twenty young girls are missing from their homes in Sindh and have joined the ranks of jihadis of Daesh abroad. One example is young girl, Norain Laghari, who was arrested from Lahore while plotting suicide attacks. Norain was kept under military patronage and pardoned. While Sindhi nationalists are harassed, hunted, kidnapped, abducted, tortured, and killed because they are resisting and opposing jihadi terrorists groups being nurtured by Pakistani military and intelligence agencies; especially ISI in Sindh.

Secondly, the jihadi groups I mentioned are committed to destroying the pluralistic fabric of Sindhi society as they send suicide bombers to destroy Sufi shrines. Last

year, they attempted to destroy the shrine of the great saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at Sehwan, killing 60 men, women, and children.

Hindu temples and Sufi shrines are their prime targets as well the Sindhi Hindu community.

The Pakistani army and intelligence agencies have never treated Sindhi Hindus as equal to Muslim citizens. “We want to convert their women to Islam, kill their men, and recruit Sindhi Muslim youths to fight against India,” Hafiz Saeed delivered in his infamous sermon in Thar.

In Mithi, the district headquarters of Tharparkar, Hafiz Saeed has illegally occupied, and allotted the land of a local girls college to construct a Madressah. Recently, and in the same town, two Hindu youths were gunned, down but their killers have not yet been arrested.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER TARGETED

The Pakistani military has now started targeting human rights defenders who call out human rights violations in Sindh. They took away Punhal Sario, the chairperson of Voice for Missing Persons of Sindh. I am thankful on the behalf of the Sindhi people to Congressmen Brad Sharman, Adam Schiff, and their staff for their efforts to release Mr. Sario. He was released apparently on the condition that he not open his mouth. Otherwise, they know how to silence him.

As you are aware, they have also tried to silence me but to no avail. Over two years ago, the Pakistani military and its intelligence agencies assassinated my only brother, Dr. Anwar Laghari, a law abiding, non-violent, political activist and social worker, after I wrote a letter to President Obama while former Pakistan Army Chief General Raheel Sharif was visiting White House. This past October, my young nephew, Asad Laghari, who was one of few water experts in the country, was found “dead under mysterious conditions” as stated by police. His murder mystery is an open secret as he was murdered by Pakistani military and intelligence agencies, believed to be in Sindh, because I was organizing a news conference and working with members of Congress on the release of Mr. Punhal Sario. No investigation was conducted, and no arrests were made in the murders of my brother and nephew.

FORCED CONVERSIONS OF YOUNG HINDU GIRLS TO ISLAM

Young Hindu women are being forcibly converted to Islam and made sex slaves for Islamic extremists with the help of local extremists, the so-called spiritual leaders of certain shrines and Mullahs in Sindh. Hindu women and girls, some as young as 12 and 13, are kidnapped and forcibly converted to Islam and married despite legislation against child marriages in Sindh. Judges are either silent or biased. Parental refusal to marry their 12 or 13 year old daughters is ruled as blasphemy. As a result of social stigma and disgrace, the parents of girl victims have no other option but to migrate to other countries, preferably to India. Thus, Hindu communities in Sindh are reducing in number due to these forced marriages of their young girls. To be a Hindu parent of a young girl means to write off your daughter into forced conversion and forced marriage. It is a preplanned, national conspiracy that pro-jihadis call “purify the land of the pure of the Hindus”.

So-called pro-Islamist jihadi spiritual leaders and mullahs, who are instrumental in forced conversions of young Hindu girls, are backed by the Pakistani military and the ISI. Some of those spiritual leaders are responsible for distributing money to the families of jihadis killed in Kashmir and Afghanistan and others are known to be linked with dictators such as the late Gaddafi in Libya and Assad in Syria.

So again, conditions in Sindh are very difficult for religious minorities, Sindhi political dissidents, and nationalist activists, and Sindh has seen an influx of terrorists and jihadists who have opened around 50,000 madresaahs along both banks of the Indus River and near national highways that connect traffic to Afghanistan. A few years ago, a caravan of trucks carrying logistics for US and NATO forces was attacked and burnt down in Shikarpur by the madressah’s young goons and pro-Taliban JUI (Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam) mullahs. Thousands of young Sindhi recruits are the strength of the jihadi organizations.

It is high time that the United States recognizes the alarming situation and human rights violations in Sindh, and reconsiders the nature of their relationship with Pakistan, their military, and the ISI. The US should also better its relationship with the pluralistic people of Sindh.

US AID TO SINDH

Honorable members of Congress, people of Sindh are delighted with recent steps to stop military aid to Pakistan. At the same time, the Sindhi people are happy to see US aid of several billion dollars over the past decade for health, education, women’s empowerment, and women’s health. An allocation of 19 million dollars is worth spending for three universities and for child education in Sindh.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. There is critical need to enhance non-military and humanitarian aid in fields of education, health, women's empowerment, child protection, human rights, and democracy.
2. There will never be a better time to permanently cut all military aid to the Pakistani military and its intelligence agencies in order to permanently end enforced disappearances of anti-jihadi, pluralistic, Sindhi political dissidents, nationalist activists, writers, poets, publishers, journalists, civil society members, teachers, and translators.
3. The Pakistani military and ISI should be held accountable for fraud and abuse of U.S. resources, equipment, and money which they used to hunt down anti-jihadi Sindhi and Baloch dissidents instead of going against the jihadis and terrorist groups including the Hafiz Saeed and Haqqani network.
4. Declare the Pakistani Army and intelligence agencies as rogue forces that promote and protect inhuman and anti-US jihadi forces. They have become a threat to the peace and security of South Asia and the civilized world.
5. The children of the Pakistani military elite often come to the US to study. Their fees and expenses are paid with laundered money. Family members of the military elite should be sanctioned, and the sources of their funding should be aggressively investigated.
6. Tolerance toward modern western values should be another test for receiving visas. One indicator of such tolerance could be competence in local languages other than Urdu, such as Sindhi and Balochi. Neglect of local, tolerant cultural traditions in Pakistan is typically seen upon the adoption of the dominant Urdu language.
7. Restrict exchange programs that allow Pakistani scholars to gain access to and insights into US thinking. Since 9/11, Pakistan has gained significant sophistication in dealing with the US, while US has not benefitted in a similar way. These exchanges are not serving US interests.
8. Restrict visas for Pakistani scholars whose primary qualification is their criticism of Pakistani policy. These visas are not serving any useful US

interest and are simply offering a convenient career path for some in Pakistan.

9. Help empower Sindhis to assert their tolerant culture and identity. Recall that coastal Sindh and Balochistan are what allow otherwise landlocked Punjab to have global influence. The Sindhis and the Baloch do not share the aggressive, expansionist aspirations of Punjab. Their subjugation by the Punjab, wholly against the principles surrounding Pakistan's founding, give the Punjabi-dominated military access to a vast amount of resources, markets, and international waters. History shows that empowering Sindh and Balochistan would prevent their territory from being used to create chaos around the world.
10. Ask the Administration to raise its voice against human rights violations in Pakistan, especially of Sindhi and Baloch people, in appropriate international forums, including U.N. bodies.
11. Ask CRS to report on corruption in Pakistan in general and especially in Sindh. This committee should also ask the US Ambassador in Islamabad and the Consulate in Karachi to meet the families of victims of enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings.
12. Ask the State Department to raise issues of Human Rights violations, especially enforced disappearances in Sindh, as a critical issue in bilateral relations with Pakistan.

Thank you.