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Security Challenges involving Pakistan: Policy Implications for the Department of Defense

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me to testify this morning. I'm sure every witness who has spoken to you about Pakistan in the past six years has used the words "critical time." I'm not going to break that pattern: it is a critical time in a country that matters profoundly to U.S. security.

In the past six months, Musharraf has been seriously weakened, the major non-religious political figures have been diminished, and the U.S. has been publicly involved in the deal-making leading to Pakistan's next government. The biggest security challenge for the U.S., however, comes from the newly emboldened violent extremists who are challenging the authority of the Pakistani state. U.S. policy needs to address both the decline in political legitimacy and the problems posed by violent extremists.

Musharraf's ill-advised decision six months ago to try to fire the Chief Justice unleashed strong pent-up frustration. The most positive feature of this turbulent period was the surge in courage by the Pakistani judiciary, which has so often bent under pressure from the executive. Musharraf's response, a series of repressive measures, left him significantly weaker than before. His decision to throw thousands of political opponents into jail suggests that his approach to government will be very different from what we've seen the past few years.

His opposition is divided. His bitterest opponent, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, returned to Pakistan only to be re-exiled to Saudi Arabia, a move that made clear Musharraf's willingness to ignore judicial rulings but also effectively removed Sharif from the election process. The other major non-religious leader, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, has been negotiating an understanding with Musharraf and plans to return to Pakistan next week. The "understanding" has apparently given her far less than her supporters thought reasonable, and has in the process tarnished her political leadership.

I expect that Musharraf's election will eventually be confirmed by the Supreme Court, and that legislative elections will be held in January. The government that follows these elections is likely to be an uneasy one. Musharraf will be one power center. He believes in "unity of command," and is not interested in power sharing. Both his political party and perhaps the army will be strongly tempted to manipulate the election to minimize Bhutto's claim on power. If Bhutto does participate in government, she will strongly defend her turf. And assuming that Musharraf does retire from the army, that institution will be under new leadership, and will be a distinct power center no matter how careful Musharraf has been to promote officers loyal to him.

The government's biggest challenge will be a nasty and violent campaign by extremists, both those connected with the Afghan Taliban and home-grown movements that had been brazenly defying the government's authority last summer in Islamabad's Red Mosque. This campaign has involved both military engagements, like the clashes in the Tribal Areas last weekend, and a rash of suicide bombings and other attacks all over Pakistan that have specifically targeted the army. The death toll since July is at least several hundred. State authority looks weak, and the army looks inept.

An effective response to this kind of campaign requires a canny mixture of military and political tools. In the past year, we have seen no evidence that the Pakistan army has adequate counter-insurgency skills, or that the government has the political tools needed to integrate the tribal areas into Pakistan. I support the administration's request for development funds for the tribal areas, but this will be the work of a generation. In the meantime, the Pakistan government and army will probably use their traditional approach: maintaining relations with the extremists while trying to keep them under control. Musharraf may see this hedging tactic as a way to keep some sympathy from

the religious parties. In other words, where the U.S. has hoped for boldness, we may find a newly cautious Musharraf. I don't believe that hedging can work.

What makes this heady mix of political turmoil and extremist challenge particularly dangerous is the change in the U.S. position in Pakistan. On my last two trips to Pakistan, I was struck by the number of people who called the campaign in Afghanistan "America's war." During the past six months, Musharraf's opponents have made the U.S. a symbol of opposition to him. And the deep U.S. involvement in Musharraf's effort to work out a political understanding with Benazir Bhutto has reinforced the perception that the United States is choosing Pakistan's government with no regard for the wishes of the Pakistani people. We have set ourselves up to be blamed for all the shortcomings of Pakistan's government – and have set the stage for a successor government to use anti-Americanism as a rallying cry at a time when the U.S. needs more than ever to make a common front against terror with the governments in both Kabul and Islamabad.

We urgently need to re-position ourselves so that this government and an eventual successor can work with the United States without risking its political life.

How can we do this? Start with forthright support for genuinely free and fair elections. Don't make excuses for the repressive actions of the government. Give high priority to our economic assistance, and use it in ways that benefit people. The greatest boost to our national standing in Pakistan in recent years came when the United States responded with such speed and dedication to the earthquake in Kashmir. The watchword should be that the United States wants a relationship with Pakistan that can continue from one set of leaders to another.

Second, work with the army on military issues – including helping it address its shortcomings in counter-insurgency – but do not build up its political role. Emphasize the primacy of civilian leadership.

Third, the United States needs to give top priority to developing a common strategy with Pakistan on Afghanistan. This is critical for our anti-terrorism goals, but it is also critical to the effort to stabilize Pakistan, as I've been discussing. The continuing insurgency in Afghanistan and its ability to find shelter in Pakistan feeds the extremist threat within Pakistan.

We have a number of tripartite U.S.-Pakistan-Afghanistan institutions already. I am arguing for raising the level of these tripartite consultations, and working together to build up a credible government in Afghanistan, not just improve border control. In the final analysis, a stable Afghan government would be the best thing that could happen to Pakistan's security. If we can begin now to establish the structures and relationships through which Pakistan and Afghanistan could cooperate in this endeavor, possible future governments will have a foundation on which they can build, to everyone's benefit.