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**TO:** Interested Parties  
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**RE:** Pakistan Background Memo

The situation in Pakistan is highly complex—a nuclear power in the Muslim world with a weak, unpopular civilian government facing an internal and international terrorist threat while lacking control over Pakistan’s powerful military and facing a budget crisis. Yet, as the 9/11 commission stated, “It is hard to overstate the importance of Pakistan in the struggle against Islamic terrorism” and events in Pakistan are crucial to the United States. As such, this memo is designed to help provide clarity by offering basic background information on political figures, military leaders, and the division of power within Pakistan. Further, it provides basic information on terrorist organizations operating within Pakistan.

## Basic Facts

- 6<sup>th</sup> Most Populous Nation (165 million people)
- Religions: 95% Muslim (85% of which are Sunni, 15% Shia); 1.6% Hindu; 1.6% Christian.
- Ethnicities: 45% Punjabi (A plurality in Pakistan, Punjabis are a minority in India); 15.42% Pashtuns (Significant minority in both Pakistan and Afghanistan); 14% Sindhis
- Major Cities: Karachi (18 million people); Lahore (10 million); Peshawar (2.9 million, located near Afghan Border); Islamabad (Capitol)<sup>1</sup>

## Recent History

While the nation functioned as a democracy for most of the 1990s, a military coup in 1999 seized power, with Gen. Pervez Musharraf claiming the title of Chief Executive and later, President.<sup>2</sup> Musharraf resigned in 2008, and elections between the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and other, mostly moderate Islamist parties, were held. Though, the election was disrupted by the assassination of PPP leader Benazir Bhutto, democracy returned to Pakistan and her party, the PPP, won a plurality of seats in the parliament. Bhutto’s widower, Asif Ali Zardari, became President while Yousaf Raza Gillani became Prime Minister.<sup>3</sup>

## Political Leadership

Currently, there is a civilian government, led by the PPP, in coalition with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. This coalition is generally considered to be centrist, or center-left. The opposition is represented by the center-right Pakistan Muslim

League. The Pakistan Muslim League, also known as the PML-Q, broke away from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (the PML-N) in 2001 in order to form a center-right party loyal to President Musharraf.<sup>4</sup>

Since returning to power, the civilian government has publicly committed to continuing to support fighting terrorism within Pakistan and in support of international efforts in Afghanistan. However, the central government, like the preceding Musharraf government, has signed cease fires with militants operating in Pakistan. In February 2009, attacks in the Swat valley led to a cease fire with insurgents, in which the civilian leadership accepted imposition of sharia on the Swat region. However, further incursions by insurgents and US and international pressure led to the government starting an ongoing military offensive against the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

## **Military Leadership**

Unlike the United States, the military remains largely outside of the control of civilian leaders. The military, the seventh largest in the world, is officially headed by Joint Chiefs Chairman Tariq Majid, but the Army Chief of Staff, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, is the most powerful military leader. The Army, by far the most powerful branch, consists of about 650,000 soldiers. Responsible for several coups in Pakistan, the military is currently staying largely on the sidelines in Pakistan's political debates.

Pakistan has structured its military to fight against India and its ability to fight a counterinsurgency is in question. Further, while the exact figure is not known, the Carnegie Foundation estimates Pakistan has between 30-55 nuclear weapons, while the NRDC estimates, based on the amount of uranium it possesses, 24-48 warheads.<sup>5</sup> The development of nuclear weapons, led by A.Q. Khan (known mostly for his involvement in selling nuclear secrets to North Korea and Iran), increased tensions on the subcontinent and a nuclear test led to sanctions being applied by the Clinton administration.<sup>6</sup>

Pakistan's intelligence service, the ISI is considered by many to be a "state within a state."<sup>7</sup> Though it is formally under the control of the Pakistani military it is fully answerable to neither the Pakistani military, nor the civilian leadership. In the 1980s, as part of the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan, the CIA trained the ISI and improved its operation. However, in 1990, U.S. sanctions against Pakistan, which included a total ban of officer training by U.S. forces, pushed the officer corps of Pakistan toward relations with Iran, radicalizing many new officers.

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the civil war that followed, the ISI helped to install the Taliban in Afghanistan, hoping to stabilize that nation. One of only three governments to recognize the Taliban before 9/11, then-President Pervez Musharraf removed recognition of the Taliban after the attacks and ordered a purging of those who disagreed with his policy of driving out the Taliban. However, it is unclear whether the pro-Taliban element was driven out or merely silenced temporarily. Since 2001, Pakistan's military and ISI has been intermittently assisting Western forces in driving out Taliban supporters, while

some in the military and ISI have also been providing tacit support at times for the Taliban.<sup>8</sup> India alleged that the ISI was responsible for elements of the 2008 Mumbai hotel bombings and for an attack against the Indian embassy in Afghanistan, although the United States believes that al-Qaeda affiliated groups, not the ISI, were responsible for the attacks.<sup>9</sup>

## **Important Cities and Regions in Pakistan**

### **Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)**

This region, bordering Afghanistan in the northwest of Pakistan, is only nominally controlled by the Pakistani government. Many of the small tribes that inhabit FATA used to be fiercely independent, though they are now controlled mostly by the Pakistani Taliban.<sup>10</sup> Over 3 million people live in this region, which is close to the Afghani border. After 9/11, many al Qaeda and Taliban leaders, possibly including Osama bin Laden, escaping the US invasion of Afghanistan, came to Waziristan, a district of the FATA, seeking protection by tribesman. Waziristan provides easy access to Afghanistan, and serves as a staging area for attacks across the border.<sup>11</sup>

### **Northwest Frontier Province**

This province, containing over 20 million people, has long been a source of tension between the Taliban and Pakistani government. This region, in the Northwest of Pakistan along the border with Afghanistan, was the base for ISI and mujahedeen operations against the Soviets in the 1980s. Today, many Pakistani Taliban use it as a base for attacks on the Pakistani government, as well as on NATO forces in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

### **Swat Valley**

The Swat Valley, or just Swat, is a district of the Northwest Frontier Province. It is located around 100 miles from Islamabad. Located at the base of the Hindu Kush mountain range, it is known for its beautiful mountains, rivers, and lakes, and was once known as the “Switzerland of Pakistan,” a favorite spot amongst many tourists.<sup>13</sup> In the years after 9/11, the Taliban used this region to attack Pakistani government troops, until a cease fire in February 2009. Following the cease fire, which imposed sharia law on much of the valley, continued insurgent attacks and outcry from Pakistan’s western allies led to a Pakistani offensive against the Taliban, which is currently ongoing as of May 2009.<sup>14</sup>

### **Punjab**

The Punjab, a region that’s name translates to “land of five rivers,” is a region divided between India and Pakistan. It is by far Pakistan’s most prosperous region, with a population of over 80 million people.<sup>15</sup> The largest city is Lahore. While the years after partition with India were met with ethnic conflict, since the 1960s, massive industrialization led to this region becoming Pakistan’s most developed. Since that time, it has created almost half of Pakistan’s GDP, as well as being by far the most educated of the Pakistani provinces.<sup>16</sup>

## **Lahore**

Lahore, the second largest city in Pakistan, with over 10 million people, is probably Pakistan's most cosmopolitan city. Partially destroyed in both wars with India, Lahore was rebuilt during the 1960s and 1970s, and became the capitol of Punjab province. Historically, this city was isolated from Islamic radicalism. However, in 2009, the Sri Lankan cricket team, visiting to play the Pakistani team, was attacked outside the Gaddafi Stadium. This was the first major attack in Lahore, and evidence linking Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a group affiliated with Lashkar-e-Taiba, to the attack, both al-Qaeda affiliated groups, was found after the attack.<sup>17</sup>

## **Balochistan Province**

Balochistan province, the largest province of Pakistan by geographic area, is mostly rural. Situated on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Balochistan is comprised of ethnic Pashtuns, Balochs, and Brohis. Balochistan also contains considerable deposits of copper. This is one of the most conservative areas of Pakistan, with tribal loyalty playing a huge role in local politics. However, it is also loyal to the Pakistani government, and the US has used Pakistani airbases there to launch drone attacks against Taliban leaders in FATA.<sup>18</sup>

## **Quetta**

The city of Quetta, located in Balochistan province, is considered to be the "fruit basket" of Pakistan. Its location along the main roads connecting Pakistan with Iran and Afghanistan meant that this city was crucial for centuries in relations between the local tribesman and their Afghani and Persian neighbors. Today, it is known for being a hotbed of radical activity. It is believed that Osama bin Laden's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawhiri, is hiding in Quetta<sup>19</sup>. It is also the location of the founding meetings of al Qaeda in 1988.<sup>20</sup>

## **Kybhar Pass**

The Kybhar Pass is the mountain pass, at over 3,000 ft, that connects Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is an important trade route between central Asia and South Asia, as well as an important strategic point. It is a crucial supply route for US and NATO forces and has been the scene of major attacks that have occasionally shut down US supply lines.<sup>21</sup>

## **Jammu and Kashmir**

Jammu and Kashmir are the two most northern provinces of India, and are the source of a long-running conflict between India and Pakistan. India claims that a 1947 agreement between it, the Muslim leader of Kashmir, and the British Viceroy, make it an integral part of India. However, Pakistan claims that, unlike other Muslim-majority provinces, which were given a plebiscite to decide which country they were to join, Kashmir was not, and as a majority Muslim territory, should have been a part of Pakistan. Since the partition in 1947, several wars have been fought over this territory, and India has long accused Pakistan of funding Islamic militants to attack Indian troops, both within Kashmir, as well as in the rest of India. Indeed,

many Islamic militants have used Kashmir as a recruiting tool, especially within Pakistan proper. Recently, President Obama discussed the idea of having President Clinton serve as an envoy to help Pakistan and India negotiate a successful end to the conflict.<sup>22</sup>

## **Pakistani Terror Groups**

### **Lashkar-e-Omar** (Lah-sh-kar ee O-mar)

Lashkar-e-Omar, translated as the Army of Omar, is a fundamentalist group, formed from three older terror groups, including elements of al-Qaeda and the Taliban and is named after Taliban leader Mullah Omar. Founded in January 2002, its primary aim is to attack Americans and American interests. The current leader is Qari Abdul Hai. It is responsible or has claimed responsibility for a number of prominent attacks, including the beheading of American Daniel Pearl, the bombing of the Sheraton Karachi, the US Consulate in Karachi, and a church in Punjab.<sup>23</sup>

### **Lashkar-e-Taiba** (TAH-ee-bah)

Based in Muridke, this group was founded by Hafiz Muhammad Saed and is strongly-alleged to have connections to the ISI. Closely allied with the Taliban, it has a strong fundamentalist element, declaring itself the enemies of Jews, Hindus, Israel and India. Despite this professed hatred for Jews, most of its activity has been against India, especially within Kashmir and Jammu. Some of the attacks it has orchestrated include Mumbai in 2008, and several of its members were suspects in London's Underground bombings in 2005, several attacks in Delhi, and the Mumbai train attacks.<sup>24</sup>

### **Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP)** (SEE-pah ee sah-HAH-ba)

Based in Bangladesh, SSP's objectives are to establish Pakistan as a Sunni state and eventually restore the caliphate. SSP focuses its attacks on Sunni Pakistanis. While now a violent organization, it also has taken part in elections, as a separatist Sunni party, however it has not participated in an election since 1993 (when one of its ministers was elected in a coalition government in Punjab). It is believed that 9/11 hijacker Ramzi Yousef was associated with this organization, and it was outlawed by Musharraf in 2002.<sup>25</sup>

### **Jaish-e-Mohammed** (JAH-ish)

JeM, a terrorist organization based in Pakistan, was founded in 2000, and is primarily focused on Kashmir. The United States, UK, and European Union consider JeM to be a terrorist organization, and one of the most dangerous in Kashmir. It was founded by Maulana Masood Azhar, one of the most wanted men in India. A 2004 CRS report named JeM as the "principal terrorist organization in Jammu and Kashmir."<sup>26</sup> One of the four men arrested in 2009 for a plot to attack a Bronx synagogue allegedly told the informant he was interested in joining JeM, though no other link to the group existed.<sup>27</sup>

## **Islamic Struggle Movement (HuJI)**

Harkat-ut-Jihad al-Islami (Har-KAH-t), or the Islamic Struggle Movement, was formed in 1984 in Afghanistan. Originally an organization to fight the Soviets, it eventually exported jihad into Jammu-Kashmir, through the ISI, which funded many of its earlier operations. While originally funded by the United States during the Soviet-Afghan war, HuJI has remained strong and active in Pakistan, allegedly responsible for several attempts to overthrow the Bhutto government in the 1990s.<sup>28</sup> Many of its followers come from tribal Northwest Pakistan. It has claimed many attacks within India and Pakistan, including the 2008 Marriott Islamabad bombing, which killed 60 people, including one American.<sup>29</sup> Several American diplomats were the alleged target, however, as were 30 marines also staying at the hotel.<sup>30</sup>

## **Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (Pakistani Taliban)** (Teh-REEK)

The Taliban in Pakistan, or Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, is the main Taliban group within Pakistan and are led by Mullah Fazlullah. Consisting of many fundamentalist students, its goals include enforcement of sharia, unification of all fundamentalist groups to fight NATO forces, and resistance against the elected Pakistani government. Formed in 2002 when NATO forces, along with Pakistan, began attacking the Taliban both within Pakistan as well as within Afghanistan. It operates from the FATA, and has been listed as a terrorist organization by the Pakistani government, as well as by the United States.<sup>31</sup>

## **Afghanistan Taliban**

Another group affiliated with the Taliban in Pakistan is the Afghani Taliban. Since it came to power in Afghanistan in 1996, the Taliban have been led by Mullah Mohammed Omar. This group, currently headquartered in Pakistan, attacks US targets and its supporters within Pakistan's FATA, as well as in eastern Afghanistan. While many of the attacks are violent, many of them are attacks on a "Western" way of life, including imposing sharia, forcing women to dress modestly, destroying TVs showing western—or perceived western—programming, destroying cinemas, destroying satellite dishes, and intimidating women to stay off the street without their husbands'.<sup>32</sup>

## **Pronunciations**

**President:** Asif Ali Zardari (Ah-sif Ah-li Zar-dah-ree)

**Prime Minister:** Yousaf Raza Gillani (You-sef Rah-za Geh-lah-nee)

**Former PM:** Nawaz Sharif (Nah-Wahz Sha-REEF)

**Former PM:** Benazir Bhutto (BEN- ah-zeer BOO- toh)

**Foreign Affairs Minister:** Shah Mahood Qureshi (Shah Ma-HOUD Koor-Esh-ee)

**Chief of Staff of the Army:** Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani (Ash-FAHK Par-Vez Kah-AH-nee)

**Director of ISI:** Lt. Gen. Ahman Shuja Pasha (AHH-mehd shoo-JAH PAH-shah)

## Endnotes

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- <sup>17</sup> Jason Burke, Issam Ahmed, and Saeed Shah, "Laid back Lahore Faces Frightening Future" *The Guardian* (UK) March 8 2009.
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- <sup>22</sup> Joe Klein "Interview with Barack Obama," *Time Magazine*, October 23, 2008.
- <sup>23</sup> South Asia Terrorism Portal, Institute for Conflict Management.
- <sup>24</sup> BBC, "Who are the Kashmir Militants?" April 6, 2005.
- <sup>25</sup> South Asia Terrorism Portal.
- <sup>26</sup> CRS Report, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," February 6, 2004, p. 43-44, available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RL32223.pdf>.
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- <sup>28</sup> Amir Mir, "HuJI Chief Still at Large," *The News* (Pakistan), September 23, 2008.
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- <sup>31</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "Pakistan's New Generation of Terrorists," February 6, 2008.
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