



The Honorable James P. McGovern
U.S. House of Representatives
370 Cannon Office Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chris Smith
U.S. House of Representatives
2373 Rayburn Office Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: Submission to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing on
Transnational Repression Targeting Pakistani Americans**

Dear Representatives McGovern and Smith:

We are a group of concerned American citizens of Pakistani descent who have been directly subjected to transnational repression for exercising our constitutional right to criticize Pakistan's military-intelligence establishment, commonly referred to as the "deep state." This apparatus (led by the Pakistani Army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)) operates with impunity and exerts near-total control over Pakistan's domestic affairs and foreign policy. **This submission is offered in support of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's June 24, 2025, hearing on transnational repression. It provides concrete evidence of the escalating threats facing Pakistani Americans who engage in protected political speech and advocacy.**

According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 1.26 million individuals in the United States identify as Pakistani, making Pakistani Americans the seventh-largest Asian-origin group in the country. **While numerous members of our community are currently being targeted by Pakistan's security apparatus, we highlight here the cases of two prominent individuals: Dr. Salman Ahmed**, an internationally renowned musician and founder of Pakistan's largest rock band, and **Wajahat S. Khan**, an Emmy-nominated journalist and security correspondent. Both have faced ongoing threats, harassment, and coercion as a direct consequence of their public opposition to Pakistan's deep state.

The two individuals profiled in this submission have chosen to speak out despite the risks, and their cases have garnered the attention of U.S. federal agencies, including the FBI and the State Department. Yet, while they have managed to access limited support, the vast majority of Pakistani Americans (**including constituents in your own districts**) remain vulnerable, exposed, and unprotected by Pakistan's growing campaign of foreign intimidation.

Background and Context

Extraterritorial repression by the Pakistani state is not new, but the past few years have marked a dangerous escalation in both its intensity and coordination.^[1] Since 2022, Pakistan's military and intelligence services—most notably the **Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)** and **Pakistan Army General Headquarters (GHQ)**—have launched a sweeping campaign to eliminate political opposition, both domestically and abroad. This campaign began with the forced ouster of Prime Minister Imran Khan and has since expanded into a full-scale transnational repression apparatus targeting members of the Pakistani diaspora, particularly those affiliated with or sympathetic to Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

This state-directed campaign mirrors the playbooks of authoritarian regimes such as China, Russia, and India. **Under the direction of the ISI and GHQ, and with active participation from Pakistan's diplomatic missions**, the state has transformed its embassies and consulates into instruments of surveillance, intimidation, and coercion—operating well beyond Pakistan's borders. These efforts are not ad hoc or isolated, but rather form a deliberate, state-orchestrated strategy designed to suppress dissent, sow fear, and violate the rights of U.S.-based individuals engaging in protected political expression.

This campaign represents a coordinated, whole-of-government effort by the Pakistani state—**planned in Pakistan and executed on U.S. soil** by both official agents and unofficial proxies embedded in the diaspora. Its objective is simple: to silence criticism of the military-intelligence complex and reassert control over political narratives beyond Pakistan's borders.

The tactics employed include, but are not limited to:

1. **Collective punishment** through the arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and prolonged imprisonment of relatives of diaspora activists in Pakistan meant to coerce silence abroad. These actions constitute grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

2. **Legal and administrative harassment**, including the initiation of frivolous criminal and civil proceedings in Pakistan against U.S.-based individuals, revocation or suspension of Pakistani passports, and denial of consular services to punish dissent expressed from U.S. soil.
3. **Digital and cyber repression**, such as coordinated online trolling, hacking, doxxing, and disinformation campaigns carried out by state-linked actors and diplomats to discredit, smear, and intimidate critics.
4. **Direct surveillance and threats on American soil**, including ISI operatives posing as diplomatic staff who monitor protests, track activists, and relay threats (often relying on intimidation through family members still residing in Pakistan – *see point 1*).
 - **Weaponization of Pakistan’s judiciary**, wherein Pakistani Americans have been blacklisted, arbitrarily arrested during travel, or detained under spurious charges for peaceful political activity, including protest and journalism.

Case Studies of Two Prominent and Influential Pakistani-Americans

Dr. Salman Ahmad

Dr. Ahmad, a U.S.-based Pakistani American and internationally renowned musician, was a close advisor to former Prime Minister Imran Khan. He was traveling with then-Prime Minister Khan during an assassination attempt. Minutes after the near-fatal landing of their helicopter, Dr. Ahmad received an email from a high-ranking military officer within the Pakistani military “checking in” on him and the PM. In March 2023, Dr. Ahmad’s elderly father was approached in Lahore by an individual claiming to be an Army Brigadier, warning that Dr. Ahmad's life was in grave danger and advising him never to return to Pakistan. Days after Dr. Ahmad attended a private Zoom meeting with Rep. Maxine Waters and Prime Minister Khan, during which Khan described threats to his life. The following day, Khan was arrested, and Dr. Ahmad was forced to flee the country.

Despite being in the United States, Dr. Ahmad, his wife, and children continue to face routine threats. As a form of collective punishment meant to intimidate and silence Dr. Ahmad, his sister and brother-in-law – both U.S. citizens residing in Karachi – were violently targeted by masked men, some in police uniform, who broke into their home without a warrant and abducted

his brother-in-law who was detained without charges for five days, during which Ahmad received direct threats and coercive demands from unidentified agents to surrender his Twitter credentials and publicly denounce the May 9, 2023 anti-military protests.

The FBI and State Department intervened to secure Shahid's release, acknowledging this as a serious case of transnational repression. Since then, Ahmad's sister has ceased regular communication out of fear, and both she and her husband continue to suffer trauma and surveillance in Pakistan. This pattern of retaliation—targeting family members abroad to silence political dissenters in the U.S.—is not only a violation of international human rights standards but a direct affront to American sovereignty and the personal liberties of U.S. citizens.

Wajahat S. Khan

Mr. Khan, an Emmy-nominated journalist and legal permanent resident of the United States, is among the most well-known independent reporters to be targeted by the Pakistani military-intelligence complex. In 2018, Khan was effectively blacklisted in Pakistani media after being warned by colleagues and military officials that then-Chief of Army Staff General Qamar J. Bajwa had personally ordered him sidelined from being featured on mainstream media networks. Following threats to his safety, and after being briefly detained and interrogated by the ISI for a story he'd published on the Army Chief for *The Times*, Mr. Khan left Pakistan for New York where attended Columbia Journalism School and was elected the President of his class.

Although he initially stepped away from Pakistan-related reporting, he resumed independent coverage in 2022, focusing on military overreach and civil-military dynamics through a widely followed YouTube channel with a significant Pakistani and diaspora viewership. In 2023, just days before the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, he conducted one of the last interviews with the ousted leader for the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based non-partisan think tank where Mr. Khan is a senior fellow. Soon after, he was charged in Pakistan with sedition, terrorism, and incitement—without summons, due process, or legal representation—and was declared an “absconder” by an anti-terrorism court.

The threats quickly extended to his personal life. In May 2024, Mr. Khan's then-partner began receiving threatening phone calls from authorities in Pakistan and ended their relationship out of fear for her safety. Then, an attempt was made to abduct Mr. Khan's brother-in-law, a

prominent Karachi-based businessman (who was forced into hiding for his safety, and only emerged after making an arrangement with the authorities to disown Mr. Khan and disassociate with him publicly). The authorities also demanded that Mr. Khan's sister record a fabricated propaganda video denouncing him as an agent of foreign powers (namely, the U.S. and India). She refused, but has since severed communication with him to protect her family. Since then, Mr. Khan's sister's bank accounts have also been frozen by the authorities, along with the personal and business accounts of his former in-laws. The FBI has formally acknowledged the threats against Mr. Khan as a case of transnational repression. Mr. Khan has lost the ability to report freely and travel outside the United States due to the cancellation of his passport. His ex-wife no longer permits Mr. Khan's daughters to visit him out of fear for their safety.

Recommendations

We commend the Commission for treating transnational repression as a pressing and evolving threat. We urge Congress to treat transnational repression not only as a human rights violation but as a serious national security threat. The Pakistani state's campaign of intimidation and coercion against U.S. citizens and residents undermines the rule of law and violates the constitutional rights of Americans. If left unaddressed, it will embolden further incursions by foreign governments on U.S. soil.

We respectfully call on the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and Congress to:

1. Launch a formal investigation into the Pakistani state's transnational repression of Pakistani Americans, including the ongoing surveillance, intimidation, threats, and collective punishment through family targeting of hundreds across the country.
2. Publicly name to hold accountable and impose sanctions upon the individuals directing these abuses. Specifically:
 1. **Field Marshal Asim Munir**, Chief of Army Staff
 2. **Mohsin Naqvi**, Federal Interior Minister
 3. **Lt. General Asim Malik**, Director General, Inter-Services Intelligence
 4. Other relevant senior officials within Pakistan's **Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)** and provincial police chiefs that are involved in operationalizing threats and harassment.

3. Direct the U.S. Departments of State, Justice, and Homeland Security to:
 1. Assess and publicly disclose the extent of Pakistan's transnational repression activities within the United States;
 2. Designate implicated Pakistani officials as inadmissible under the relevant visa and sanctions authorities;
 3. Issue clear guidance on protections for diaspora communities targeted by foreign intelligence services.
4. Support legislative measures that define and criminalize transnational repression as it pertains to Pakistani Americans.

[1] Fabien Baussart, *Pakistan's Intimidation of Its Citizens Abroad*, *Modern Diplomacy* (Mar. 29, 2021), <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2021/03/29/pakistans-intimidation-of-its-citizens-abroad/>.

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

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