



Countering Transnational Repression Targeting Pakistani American Pro-Democracy Advocates

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Executive Summary

Transnational repression—the practice of governments targeting critics living abroad through harassment, coercion, and violence—poses an urgent threat to U.S. sovereignty, national security, and human rights. This white paper highlights the systematic campaign by Pakistan's military regime under General Asim Munir to intimidate and silence Pakistani American activists, journalists, and dissidents living in the United States. This briefing outlines the nature of the threat, provides documented case studies, and proposes a concrete action plan for U.S. lawmakers and institutions.

Definition of Transnational Repression

According to Freedom House (2021), transnational repression includes actions by a state to silence, intimidate, or harm critics abroad violating the sovereignty of host countries and the civil liberties of their residents.¹

Key Findings

- Pakistan's military regime has engaged in transnational repression through abductions, threats, surveillance, and coercion targeting U.S. citizens and residents.
- These activities frequently use embassies and Pakistani local courts as instruments of repression.
- Family members in Pakistan are regularly targeted to pressure or silence dissidents abroad.

Background:

Over the past few years, several Pakistani dissidents have died under suspicious circumstances abroad, pointing to a disturbing pattern of transnational repression. These include journalist Sajjid Hussain in Sweden, human rights activist Karima Baloch in Canada, and journalist **Arshad Sharif**, who was murdered in Kenya after likely being tortured. In the Netherlands, a murder-for-hire plot targeting blogger Waqas Goraya led to a conviction in 2022.^{2,3}

U.S. lawmakers have increasingly condemned attacks on Pakistani dissidents. Reps. Greg Casar and Ro Khanna urged sanctions and visa bans, targeting Pakistan's military leadership. Rep. Brad Sherman, after

¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression>

² <https://www.declassifieduk.org/how-pakistan-attacks-critics-living-in-the-uk/>

³ <https://www.dropsitenews.com/p/audio-pakistan-global-critics>

a 2023 human rights briefing, called for action against transnational repression and for democratic governance in Pakistan.^{3,4}

Documented Case Studies in USA

1. **Muhammad Ahmad Noorani (March 2025)**
 - U.S.-based journalist and founder of Fact Focus.
 - His brothers were abducted by Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agents in Islamabad after he published an exposé on alleged corruption involving General Asim Munir.^{5,6}
 - Legal petitions were ignored; international condemnations followed.
2. **Bilal Ansar Khan (July 2023, March 2025)**
 - Graduate student based in the U.S. who started speaking up on Twitter and TikTok against the abuses in Pakistan.
 - His family has been harassed on at least two occasions because of his speaking up (and not backing down).
 - He does not feel comfortable sharing details because of the fear of an aggravated reprisal in case he does so.
3. **Dr. Shahbaz Gill (June 2024)**
 - Former chief of staff and advisor to Imran Khan and U.S. permanent resident.
 - Ghulam Shabbir brother of Shahbaz Gill was abducted from his home in Lahore by armed men, some in Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) uniforms.⁷
 - Amnesty International identified this as part of a broader pattern of enforced disappearances.
4. **Wajahat Saeed Khan (November 2023)**
 - Veteran journalist and U.S. permanent resident.
 - Received threats at his New York residence.³
 - In June 2023, Islamabad police accused Khan and other journalists of "abetting mutiny" and inciting attacks on military sites during the May 9, 2023 events.⁸
5. **Lt. Col. (Ret.) Syed A. Hussain (June 2023)**
 - U.S. citizen, former officer in Pakistan Army.
 - Testified that Pakistan's military used its U.S. embassy to issue threats.⁹
 - Summoned under the Pakistan Army Act, highlighting use of military courts.
 - In June 2023, Islamabad police filed a First Information Report (FIR) accusing Hussain, along with others of "abetting mutiny" and inciting attacks on military properties during the events of May 9, 2023.⁸
6. **Dr. Salman Ahmad (March 2023)**
 - Musician and activist.
 - His U.S. citizen brother-in-law was abducted and tortured for refusing to surrender social media credentials.⁹
7. **Dr. Moeed Pirzada (November 2022)**
 - Veteran political analysts and U.S. permanent residents.
 - Forced into exile after threats following the assassination of Arshad Sharif.⁹
 - Pirzada was alerted by FBI of credible threats in 2023.

⁴ <https://sherman.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/sherman-convenes-briefing-on-human-rights-in-pakistan>

⁵ <https://x.com/amnestysasia/status/1902326181820842331>

⁶ <https://cpi.org/2025/03/exiled-pakistani-journalists-brothers-abducted-another-journalist-disappears/>

⁷ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ASA3382552024ENGLISH.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/16/rights-press-bodies-slam-pakistan-crackdown-on-critical-voices>

⁹ <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/7361-Informational-Materials-20240321-1.pdf>

- In June 2023, Islamabad police filed a First Information Report (FIR) accusing Dr. Moeed Pirzada, along with other Journalists of “abetting mutiny” and inciting attacks on military properties during the events of May 9, 2023.⁸
- In May 2025, a leading newspaper in Pakistan publicly disclosed Moeed Pirzada’s U.S. home address, property records, and financial details—including his LLC registration and tax-related transactions—placing him and his family at serious risk. Given his history of fleeing Pakistan due to threats to his life, this disclosure raises grave concerns about his safety and constitutes a potential act of transnational repression.¹⁰

Escalation in June–July 2025: Tech Suppression & Hostage Tactics

Transnational Repression emanating from Pakistan is reaching new heights. It now seriously threatens the freedoms guaranteed to American citizens and residents under the U.S. Constitution.

On June 14, 2025, Pakistani American communities from across the United States staged a peaceful demonstration outside the Embassy of Pakistan in Washington, DC. Within 48 hours, Pakistani authorities—utilizing electronic surveillance and internal databases—identified the relatives of key speakers inside Pakistan and abducted several of them. While a few Americans have since reported these incidents to the FBI, most victims have been intimidated into silence. Although the FBI has continued documenting such instances, the failure of both the FBI and the Department of Justice to pursue concrete, deterrent actions have emboldened Pakistan’s military-led regime to expand its campaign of silencing dissent across borders.

In an alarming new phase, Pakistani courts—now functioning as tools of the executive—have begun issuing directives to U.S.-based technology companies to censor dissent originating abroad. In early July 2025, multiple journalists and content creators based in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia received notifications from Google/YouTube informing them that Pakistani magistrates had ruled their YouTube channels to be in violation of Pakistan’s cyber laws. The platform warned that unless these individuals complied with the Pakistani court orders—despite operating entirely within countries with strong constitutional protections for free speech—their channels could be removed without further notice.¹¹

Implications for U.S. National Security and Democracy

- **Threats on U.S. Soil:** Foreign intelligence activities in the U.S. jeopardize domestic security.
- **Violation of Civil Liberties:** Surveillance and intimidation of U.S. residents infringe on constitutional protections.

Recommendations

To address the growing threat of transnational repression by Pakistan’s military regime, we urge the following actions:

1. **Hold a Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing Focused on Pakistan**
Convene a full hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee dedicated to Pakistan's escalating transnational repression and human rights violations. Survivors, legal experts, and human rights advocates should be invited to testify on:

¹⁰ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1314058-from-fleeing-pakistan-to-1m-house-moeed-pirzada-s-us-property-purchase>

¹¹ <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/society-equity/more-than-two-dozen-critics-pakistan-government-face-youtube-ban-2025-07-09/>

- Targeting of political dissidents and journalists abroad
 - Arbitrary detentions, torture, and military trials of civilians
 - Electoral manipulation and authoritarian consolidation
2. **Support the Pakistan Democracy Act (H.R. 2311)**
Introduced by Reps. Joe Wilson (R-SC) and Jimmy Panetta (D-CA), this bipartisan legislation is critical to holding Pakistan's military and government officials accountable. The Act:
- Sanctions individuals responsible for political persecution, transnational repression, and election fraud
 - Directs the State and Treasury Departments to assess Global Magnitsky Act sanctions on General Asim Munir
 - Bars visas and U.S. entry for individuals complicit in gross human rights abuses
 - Requires congressional oversight of U.S. foreign policy toward Pakistan
3. **Initiate Federal Investigations into Transnational Repression**
Direct the FBI and Department of Justice to open formal investigations into foreign intimidation, coercion, and surveillance targeting U.S. citizens and residents by Pakistani state actors or their proxies.
4. **Apply Financial Pressure via International Institutions**
Condition all U.S. financial assistance—directly or through institutions like the IMF and World Bank—on verifiable progress in restoring democratic governance and halting acts of transnational repression.
5. **Enforce Targeted Travel Restrictions**
Impose visa bans and travel restrictions on Pakistani military and intelligence officials involved in political repression and transnational threats against diaspora communities.
6. **Strengthen U.S. Laws Against Transnational Repression**
Support the Countering Transnational Repression Act of 2025 (H.R. 2158), introduced by Rep. August Pfluger (R-TX), which would amend the Homeland Security Act to establish a DHS working group tasked with monitoring and combating foreign repression and associated terrorism threats.

Conclusion

The unchecked spread of transnational repression threatens the safety of American residents and the democratic values of the United States. If left unaddressed, it will encourage authoritarian regime of Pakistan to expand their reach into diaspora communities with impunity. The United States must act now to protect its citizens, reaffirm its commitment to human rights, and send an unequivocal message that repression will not cross borders unchecked.

First Pakistan Global (FPG) is a U.S.-based nonprofit organization committed to advancing democracy, protecting human rights, and strengthening civil society in Pakistan. Through policy advocacy, public education, and international engagement, FPG works to support a democratic future for Pakistan rooted in constitutional governance and the rule of law.