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One single pro-US, pro-Israel Pakistani stands up against his countrymen

By [Richard L. Benkin](#)

Earlier this month, the Pakistani National Assembly (N.A.) slavishly followed suit with most of the Muslim world and the United Nations (U.N.) General Assembly in condemning United States president Donald Trump's declaration that recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital. "Debate" on the resolution was characterized by threats of violence and knee-jerk condemnation of the U.S. and Israel. The resolution itself called the U.S. move "a direct attack on the Muslim *Ummah*," which is a significant term for it to use. *Ummah* is an Arabic word meaning "community" and is used to refer to a single, supranational community of Muslims with common interests that supersede any others. Its use implies that all Muslims would have the same or similar positions regarding the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Legislator after legislator dutifully condemned Pakistan's major benefactor (the U.S.). Former – and [disgraced](#) – prime minister Nawaz Sharif cried: "To hand over [to Israel] the holy city of Jerusalem, known historically for over millenniums [sic] as Al Quds Al Sharif, is to [add salt to the wounds](#) of the people who have been suffering untold miseries for 70 years." How misguided. The U.S. government did not hand over anything to anybody. Jerusalem *is* Israel's capital, and as U.S. ambassador to the U.N. [Nikki Haley](#) said, the announcement was "just reality" and something "the American people have asked for." That's how it works in a democracy but not how it works in places like Pakistan, where people are commanded to take the same position on every issue because they belong to the same, religious community.

Even in a country where dissent often carries a *de facto* death sentence, however, one member of Pakistan's N.A. and that Muslim *Ummah* rose in opposition to the resolution. Mahmood Khan Achakzai, leader of the [Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party](#), dared to stand and speak truth to the lie that all Muslims find Israel odious and are "outraged" to the point of violence by American recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Pakistan's semi-official newspaper Dawn did indeed report that Achakzai "ridiculed" the resolution, but it and the Pakistani government tried to sanitize his comments and ignore his open support for Israel and the United States – for that opposition contradicts the narrative they are trying desperately to promote. Dawn led with a banner headline reading, "[NA unanimously assails US move on Jerusalem](#)" (it was not unanimous), and it attributed Achakzai's opposition to mere procedural matters and his (and his party's) stance of neutrality on all international matters and focus on Pakistan's serious domestic issues. How can "a house that could not save the country's Constitution save the Palestinians"?

According to my Pakhtun (Pashtun) sources, however, "his speech was stopped and cameras turned down." His fellow party members told me he frequently responds to statements about "oppressed Palestinians" by pointing out that it is the Jews who face oppression and that the real focus should be how "Pashtuns are oppressed under the Pakistani army[.] ... Gaza and West Bank [are] none of our concern." That's heresy for those who demand fealty from all members of the Muslim *Ummah*. In fact, one notable distinction between non-radical and radical Muslims, including people who may not throw bombs but provide ideological cover for those who do, is the latter's insistence that Islam is a Muslim's single identity of consequence. Achakzai's public life has been devoted to the cause of self-determination for Pakistan's various nationalities, as opposed to the single Pakistani state that was created on the basis of religion and is officially an Islamic Republic.

This is not the first time Achakzai has bucked Pakistan's anti-U.S., anti-Israel wave in Pakistan's parliament. When the rest of the Pakistani parliament rushed to condemn Israel for its war with Hamas in Gaza, Achakzai said Pakistan itself [had become a Gaza](#) and cited "human rights violations, internal strife, aerial bombardment and displacement of tens of thousands of people from North Waziristan Agency." He refused to support Hamas and the Palestinians over Israel. According to other members of the Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, his recent actions showed the resolution on the U.S. action and "support for Palestinians [to be] a laughing stock."



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Dr. Benkin was helped with this article by Umar Daud Khattak, a young Pashtun Muslim, who works extensively for Pashtun freedom and strong ties with the United States and Israel.



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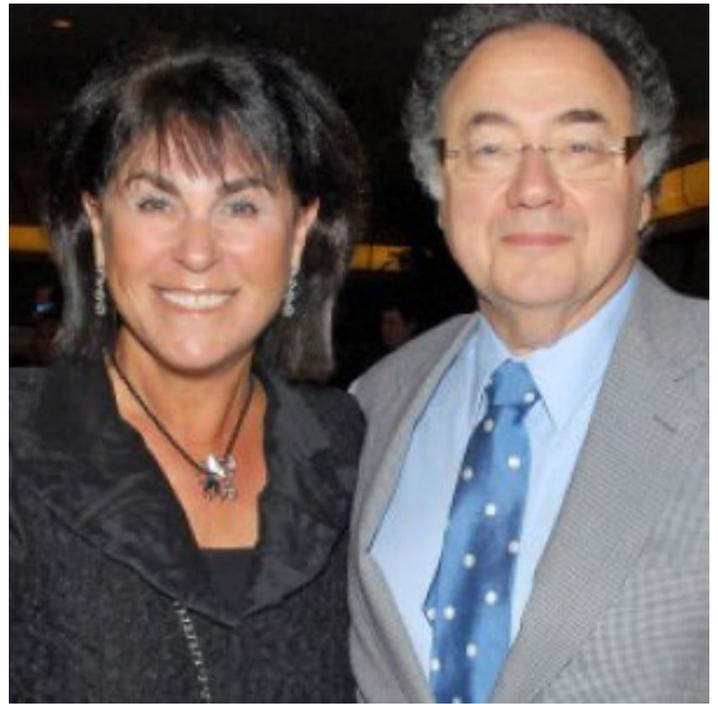
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