

MANSOOR IJAZ REJECTS SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS, DOES NOT GO TO PAKISTAN FOR TESTIMONY

[youtube]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPebe5kc nMo>[/youtube]

Today is the day on which Pakistani-American businessman Mansoor Ijaz was scheduled to provide testimony before a judicial commission in the Memogate controversy that has heightened tensions between Pakistan's civilian government and its military. In many ways, Ijaz stands as the central character in the case, as he was the first to mention the existence of the memo at the heart of the controversy and was responsible for delivering it to US authorities. Remarkably, although the memo seeks US help in supporting the government's removal of top leaders in Pakistan's military and intelligence forces, and despite Ijaz's claims that he and former Ambassador to the US Husain Haqqani are close friends who worked together to produce and deliver the memo, Ijaz now claims that he wants military protection if he is to return to Pakistan and that he fears the government will seize and destroy important electronic evidence in his possession. Such a change of apparent allegiance is not surprising, given Ijaz's controversial past.

The Express Tribune provides a short description of Ijaz's refusal to come to Pakistan:

Despite assurances on full security from the judicial commission probing the Memogate scandal, Pakistani-American businessman Mansoor Ijaz has once again refused to come to Pakistan to record his statement, *Express News* reported on Tuesday.

Ijaz's counsel, Akram Sheikh had earlier today – on the directives of the commission – written an email to his client to inform him that the commission had given assurances that he would be given full security on arrival.

Sheikh later distributed copies of Ijaz's email response to the three judges.

A much longer article on the latest developments is carried in Pakistan Today, in an article that opens with the statement that the "government finally succeeded in scaring away Mansoor Ijaz":

The counsel for Ijaz, the Pakistani-American businessman at the centre of the memo controversy, expressed his reservations on the security arrangements meant for his client's appearance before the judicial commission, saying his client would be ready to record testimony before the commission either in London or Zurich. The commission had told Ijaz to appear before it personally to record his statements on January 24. His counsel, Akram Shaikh, told reporters at the Supreme Court building that he had held a teleconference with his client after meeting the Islamabad Police inspector general and had briefed him on security arrangements that had been made for him for his appearance before the commission.

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Shaikh added that Ijaz's arrival under protection of a station house officer (SHO) as announced by the prime minister on Sunday was highly deplorable, adding that Ijaz had a concrete fear that electronic evidence in the memo case could be completely destroyed or tampered with. Shaikh added that Ijaz

was also concerned that Pakistan's money should not be wasted and thus did not want law enforcement agencies to waste their money on him. "So, he wants to record his statement while sitting in his office in London. He is ready to tell the truth and present all grafts to the commission." Days before Ijaz's planned visit to Pakistan, the Parliamentary Committee on National Security, which too is investigating the memogate, had issued summons to Ijaz to appear before it on January 26. Interior Minister Rehman Malik had said if the committee desired, Ijaz's name could be included in the Exit Control List (ECL). "It seems like a well-orchestrated trap to hold Mansoor Ijaz indefinitely in Pakistan after his deposition before the commission, therefore, Ijaz has decided to make a request to the commission to record his statement in strict compliance with the order of the Supreme Court of Pakistan... in London or Zurich," said Shaikh. He added that his client had decided to file an application to the commission to record his statement outside Pakistan after reviewing security arrangements for his planned visit. The lawyer said he had informed Ijaz of "fundamental changes" in the security arrangements, which he claimed were a "stark violation" of the commission's orders issued on January 9 and 16.

Interestingly, it appears that the threat of placing Ijaz on the Exit Control List has been reduced a bit. Returning to the Express Tribune article:

Appearing before the commission today, Interior Minister Rehman Malik had also said that Ijaz's name has not been placed on the Exit Control (ECL), and added that his ministry had issued a

clarification in this matter. Malik had earlier warned that the government will put Ijaz's name on the Exit Control List, if requested by the parliamentary committee formed to probe the scandal.

Meanwhile, Haqqani seems to have had more than enough from Ijaz. From the Pakistan Today article:

In a letter submitted by Haqqani's counsel with the memo commission, Haqqani said: "The attitude and conduct of Mansoor Ijaz clearly shows that he is playing with the sentiments of the nation and also wasting the precious time of this honourable commission, despite the fact that this honourable commission has acceded all his requests/demands on all issues. Even the High Commission of London granted him visa after office hours to facilitate his appearance before this honourable commission."

"Mansoor Ijaz (American national), wanted to record his statement before the Honourable Commission, for which, he sought number of adjournments through his counsel Mr Akram Sheikh i.e. 9.1.2012 and 16.1.2012, but today, he has also not attended the proceedings of honourable commission without lawful reason or excuse. It is on the record that Mr Mansoor Ijaz through his counsel requested to the Honourable Commission for his security in Pakistan and grant of visa to enter Pakistan without any condition. On which, honourable commission has accepted all his demands and even the dates are being fixed on the desire of his counsel Mr Akram Sheikh Advocate. Learned Attorney General and government of Pakistan has arranged fool-proof security arrangement in compliance of the order of this august commission dated 9.1.11 and

16.1.11," the letter added.

Haqqani said the act of non appearance by Mansoor Ijaz was based on malafide, ulterior motives and all his statements published in newspapers and aired through TV channels (national and international) were fake, bogus and untrue, which were also against the interests of Pakistan, which was why he had not come to Pakistan to face/attend the proceedings of the commission despite orders.

It is hard to argue with Haqqani's description of Ijaz's actions, which seem aimed at increasing tensions rather than cooperating with the investigation. It will be very interesting to see how the judicial commission chooses to proceed. Will they go along with Ijaz's new demand to be interrogated in London or Zurich or will they choose to finish their investigation without taking testimony if Ijaz does not come to Pakistan?

A bigger question, though, is whether Ijaz fears coming to Pakistan not only because of security concerns but also because he fears that the investigation will produce evidence of crimes for which he will be prosecuted. That would certainly explain his attention to whether he is to be placed on the Exit Control List.

Update: The judicial commission has adjourned until February 9 and has insisted that Ijaz come to Pakistan then to deliver his testimony:

Giving Ijaz another opportunity to appear, a three-member judicial commission adjourned until February 9 and said they would ask the Supreme Court to extend their mandate, which was due to end on Saturday.

"The commission cannot go abroad because the Supreme Court has restrained Husain Haqqani, so in the same way, Mansoor Ijaz's statement should be recorded in

Pakistan," said Justice Qazi Faez Isa.

The judges earlier summoned Interior Minister Rehman Malik to explain how the government could protect Ijaz.

"He will be given box security. I assure you that his name will not be put on exit control list," Malik told the commission.