

## **Afghanistan's stabilization through regional stabilization**

### **The role of bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan**

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**Documentation of the Expert's Roundtable on Pakistan and Afghanistan  
18<sup>th</sup> November 2008 Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Berlin / Germany**

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## Executive Summary

Seven years after the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and four years after the country's first-ever presidential election, a state of security and internal stability still seems to be far away. Besides a revision of U.S. and NATO strategies, cooperation with Pakistan and other regional actors is seen as essential to contain the instability in Afghanistan. Therefore, a comprehensive approach for the stabilization of the whole region has been the major demand of the Expert's Roundtable initiated and facilitated by Heinrich Böll Stiftung in Berlin.

The discussion brought together knowledgeable experts from Afghanistan and Pakistan with German and International representatives such as scientists, politicians and journalists. Expectations, and challenges for the region have been outlined with special emphasis on the bilateral relationship between both countries.

In the context of regional stability, a productive dialogue and cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is crucial. But even though there have been signs of improvements on a diplomatic level, the mutual relations of these neighbours are not only very complex, but also substantially stressed by certain conflicts, many of them rooted in recent history. Therefore, the possibilities of trust building measures between Afghanistan and Pakistan were major issue discussed within the Expert's Round.

After an outstandingly turbulent year, Pakistan successfully held elections in February 2008 and is finally having a civilian government, which already faces a fragmented political crisis. Next to tremendous economical and social problems within the country the central government lacks control over its Tribal Areas, which are used as safe havens by Al Qaeda and Taliban. Since insurgency and terrorism is gaining ground on both sides of the border, a strong cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan becomes even more important, not only with regard to security issues.

In Afghanistan the upcoming presidential election, scheduled in fall 2009, is essential for domestic stabilization and for the wider region as well. A disputed outcome and a non-credible election process will deepen the growing distrust of the political system and the presidential legitimacy in Afghanistan and might exacerbate the security situation in some districts. In this regard, hopes and concerns as well as political options for the International's have been vividly discussed from different point of views supporting a fair and transparent electoral process in Afghanistan next year.

Another essential factor in the structure of regional interests lies with the decisive role of the United States. Since there are already signs that newly elected US President Barack Obama is willing to pursue a comprehensive strategy in South Asia, the Expert's Roundtable discussed possible elements of a future US regional policy and its influence on the stabilization of Afghanistan, its neighbouring states and the broader region.

The final focus of the discussion was Germany's engagement in the region and its current foreign policy regarding Afghanistan and Pakistan with a special focus on the G8 Initiative. Following the question how Germany could support and encourage the Pakistan-Afghan peace process, concrete suggestions for further diplomatic initiatives have been put on the table. But assuming the biggest EU country might be able to play an important role to stabilize the whole region within a comprehensive approach, the necessity of having an open public debate in Germany regarding the extension of the German ISAF Mandate in Afghanistan has been pointed out.

## **(1) Expectations from Pakistan, Afghanistan and regional stability**

After turbulent a year, Pakistan successfully held elections in February 2008 and, since then, is finally having a civilian government. Expectations for a new beginning in the Pakistani government have been very high, but since the government is beset by one political crisis after another as well as facing tremendous economical and social problems within the country, it has been also unable to retain control over its Tribal Areas. An insurgency, that includes Taliban and other groups, is gaining ground on both the Pakistani and the Afghan sides of the border. The security situation in many parts of Afghanistan has been worsening as well, and poses huge challenges on holding successful presidential election scheduled in fall 2009. A regional approach seems to be necessary in order to stabilize the whole region. What is the actual situation in the two countries, and what expectations concerning regional stability do exist from both sides?

### ***Pakistan: Current situation and suggestions***

The first session has been opened by Dr. Farzana Bari, social scientist from Pakistan, deliberately describing the current political and societal scenario of Pakistan with a special focus on the situation in Pakistan's border areas to Afghanistan respectively FATA (*Federally Administered Tribal Areas*). Furthermore, she announced certain expectations, from the Pakistani point of view, concerning regional stability and the involvement of the International Community in this field.

Dr. Bari stated that the performance of the current coalition government is far less than desired in terms of addressing the economic and political challenges faced by the country, as well as a complete breakdown of the "Social Contract" between citizens and the state. Since years, the State of Pakistan has failed to dispense justice and to protect life, liberty, property, and dignity of the majority of citizens – furthermore, the oppressive state apparatus has been often used to violate citizen's human rights and to oppress nationalities, minorities and social movements (e.g. the latest *Lawyers' Movement*). For the new democratic government, the domination of armed forces and security agencies in politics is still a problem. As major challenges faced by the present regime in Pakistan, she announced the flight of capital, energy crisis, shortage of essential food items, high inflation, rising poverty and suicide bombing. Militancy and terrorism have created an environment of fear and insecurity. Especially in FATA, Civil Society is being paralyzed due to the security situation, which can be further characterized by threats to female NGO workers, attacks on NGOs' offices and kidnapping of their workers, killing of journalists etc. Thereby, Dr. Bari pointed out that the Civil Society's perspectives on militancy and terrorism is not at all integrated in the national policy to counter terrorism. In this context, she called for reviewing and revising the strategy of counter-terrorism in consultation with people from FATA and Civil Society organizations.

Generally, Pakistan and its government could improve the strained situation in the region by revising its internal politics. In order to establish trust and faith among neighboring countries, Pakistan should internally strive for a non-interference policy, abandon the policy of appeasement towards insurgents and show the will to establish the writ of state in the conflict areas as well as initiate the process of administrative mainstreaming of FATA. A comprehensive development package for the conflict affected areas is needed whereas special attention should be given to the surrounding areas in development efforts so that *Talibanization* is contained. Furthermore, she proposed a national level media campaign to create a better understanding among the public that the fight against terrorism is a

genuine concern of Pakistani society itself, as well as that especially youth and women should be in the focus of all development efforts since they are the key stakeholders in peace efforts.

### ***Expectations towards the International Community***

Concerning the role of the International Community, Dr. Bari emphasized the need of helping Pakistan to steer the country out of the present economic and political situation. As possible areas of support, she mentioned to strengthen the democratic government by withdrawing the support to military establishment, comprehensive economic support for the development and the reconstruction of the country, technical support to security and law enforcement agencies as well as to support social movements that empower Pakistani citizens to have a choice and a voice. Furthermore, the International Community should support Pakistan to rehabilitate displaced population from FATA. Within all its assisting measures, the International Community should be very vigilant and serious in holding the Pakistani government accountable, especially for the financial support. At the regional level, Pakistan expects the International Community to play a catalytic role to bring all regional stakeholders at the table for a dialogue and to work out a peace strategy for the whole region, as well as to support democratization processes in Afghanistan and within the region. From her own personal perspective, Dr. Bari also asked the EU and International Community to challenge the unilateralism of the United States and its imperialist agenda, which always has used Pakistan as frontline state on behalf of its own interests in the region. In her mind, through an UN Resolution US and ISAF forces in Afghanistan should be replaced by an *UN Peace Keeping Force* with larger presence of soldiers from the Muslim world. That would undermine the rationale for those who justify this war as war of liberation against the foreign occupying forces, as well as reduce the interference of regional powers (Iran, Russia, India, and China) as none of them want America to stabilize itself in the region.

### ***Afghanistan: Security situation and complexity of reconciliation efforts***

Massoud Quiam, journalist from Afghanistan, spoke from the Afghan perspective about the options of political reconstruction and the reconciliation process within Afghanistan including talks to the Taliban and other insurgent groups, as well as about the role that the dialogue with Pakistan should play in order to peacefully stabilize the region. As he claimed, insecurity is definitely the main challenge at the moment for Afghanistan, especially because of affecting developmental projects as well as the whole process of reconstruction in the country. For the coming year, the presidential election and the role of this election for reconciliation are the strongest hope and, at the same time, the biggest concern of the Afghan people. They expect that negotiations with the Taliban should not result in restoration of *Talibanism* in Afghanistan, but to have more stabilization and cooperation with neighbouring countries like Iran and Pakistan. A functional and serious talk with Taliban has not yet been started. Who are the Taliban, and to whom one should talk to, is still the main question for the Afghan government and the International Community. Furthermore, any talk to the Taliban will only have a result, if a similar direct and serious negotiation is started with the Pakistan military establishment, as Taliban is just a part of, but not the whole problem. And there is even a third stakeholder – Al Qaeda – which the Afghan government is currently confronted with. To avoid supporting just Taliban fundamentalists and former Mujahidin leaders by such negotiations, Afghanistan needs a real Transition Justice Program – and the recognition that the security problems are just a part of other problems like drug trade, bad governance and lack of regional cooperation.

### ***Dialogues with Taliban: A way to reconciliation and peace?***

At first, there seems to be the necessity to differentiate between Pakistan Taliban and Afghanistan Taliban as these two types of Taliban have different conditions of existence and the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan should set different agendas to talk with Taliban militants. Dr. Bari even called on a more precisely selection of who is fighting or insurgent and out of which reasons. Especially in the case of Pakistan, she thinks that one shouldn't even talk about this policy of "Talking to Taliban". To those who are challenging the writ of Pakistani government, one should not adopt a policy of appeasement or give into any of their demands, e.g. for establishing *Sharia Law*, since this represents a violation of women's and humans' rights.

Also within Afghanistan, the Taliban is a bit more complicated and has many different aspects of existence. One point, maybe the most important one, is the local and public support by the people of Afghanistan's South, whose real extent can hardly be appreciated, but which anyway gives the Taliban some sort of legitimacy for gaining political power – not because they are successfully acting, but rather because of the serious failure of the Afghan government. Furthermore, the Taliban is less coherent organized than it may seem – there is no element of control over a wider organization. Beside these obstacles, serious and effective talks to the Taliban aren't possible because of their rejection of the Afghan Constitution and other unacceptable preconditions like the total withdraw of foreign forces.

Nowadays, "Taliban" is also used as a name for a number of different actors including the Taliban itself, other insurgent groups, like *Hekmatyar* and *Haqqani* group, but also drug dealers, Al Qaeda terrorists etc. Most parts of them are not interested in any negotiation with the Afghan government or stabilization since this would be against their own benefit. On the other side, especially in northern Afghanistan, ethnic issues and disagreement with a corrupt government are the causes of insurgency and insecurity. Under these conditions, one has to recognize that the Taliban activities are not the main and only reason for Afghanistan's security problems, but also a result of bad governance in the country. In this sense, for Massoud Quiam, reconciliation does not mean to talk to Taliban only, but to try to include all opposite groups that gain for people's support and that's why already have a political weight in Afghanistan. Therefore, negotiations with militant groups who are operating as Taliban and, at the same time, bringing serious changes and justice into Afghan government by holding transparent elections and withdrawing the corrupt and criminals seem to be absolutely necessary.

### ***Discussion on the regional approach***

Several times, the lack of regional cooperation has been called a reason for instability and insecurity, especially in Afghanistan. With the priority of stopping at least the civilian casualties immediately – in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well – the primary focus should be set on the improvement of bilateral relations between the both neighbors. Therefore, the recent activities and meetings between the representatives of both the governments are a necessary precondition. But remaining on a diplomatic level, they won't have any direct influence on the security situation in cross-border areas as these terrorist, and often also criminal groups are acting outside the governments' control and deny the writ of state. However, to overcome this situation and reduce civilian casualties, Dr. Bari once again called on both, regional and international security forces to change their current strategy which is obviously not working right now.

In terms of building trust, it is very important that Pakistan and Afghanistan work out a common counter-terrorism strategy and cooperate in security issues. But there are also lots of other inter-state

tensions and distrust between certain regional powers resulting in an entire instability. Therefore, discussing a regional approach including also Iran, China and India seems to be necessary. But on the other side, as terrorism is not only a regional but a global problem, external factors responsible for the regional instability, e.g. the multiple and worldwide funding of terrorist groups, have to be considered, too. Furthermore, as long as foreign geo-strategic interests and presence in the region, like that of the United States, are not entirely discussed and clarified, Dr. Bari doesn't see a proper and comprehensive solution in concentrating "only" on the regional powers' responsibility.

From the Afghan perspective, an increased regional cooperation in terms of reconstruction, security and development is desired, too. But at the same time, Afghanistan still fears Pakistan's military and ISI – both not completely under control of Pakistani government – exerting influence on Afghan affairs and insecurity by supporting Taliban extremist. This is seen also due to a lack of cooperation between the Coalition forces and Pakistan as well as missing a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy.

However, Afghanistan seems to be already the battleground of different regional and now even international powers. Hence, another concern emerged in the context of a regional approach. Bringing together even more regional stakeholders like Iran, China, India, and Central Asian States to discuss a solution for Afghanistan, there is a high chance that every party will only strive for its own regional interests neglecting Afghanistan's national requests. But if Afghanistan will once again fall victim of the different interest of other powers, a peaceful stabilization of the country seem to be unreachable. Therefore, Afghanistan has to be at first internally enabled and strengthened to equally participate in such a regional approach for stabilization.

## **(2) Interim statement of the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan**

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is not only very complex, but also substantially stressed by certain blames against each other and different conflicts, most of them historically rooted. Nonetheless, a regional approach for stabilizing the region needs, more than anything else, the cooperation of these both countries. Since there have been recently signs of a slight improvement, at least on the diplomatic level – like President Karzai's first time visit to Islamabad on the occasion of oath taking ceremony of new civilian Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, both of Foreign Ministers have positively commented the development of mutual relations – new hope for a constructive dialogue, also within the *Peace Jirga Process*, is growing. Another question to discuss is, how and to what extent Germany could support the improvement of mutual relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan with special regards to the G8-Initiative?

### ***Mutual relations from the Pakistani perspective***

After shortly summarizing some events in recent history and their meanings to the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship, Imtiaz Gul, journalist from Pakistan, pointed out the current state of cooperation and trade with Afghanistan by substantial figures. On the diplomatic level, he announced, at least the atmosphere has also changed. The *Peace Jirga* and another "Mini" Jirga, that took place in Islamabad the month before, have been good beginnings in the basic. In his view, at least the optics has changed, but whether the semantics have also changed, one has to wait for the outcomes of upcoming meetings. Despite of these positive steps in the right direction, the mutual mistrusts still runs

very high. Imtiaz Gul considers the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship essentially as a “hostage” to a few factors:

- (a) One reason for the mutual mistrust, particularly within the security establishments of the both countries, he sees due to the fact that both are still mired in a Cold War mentality, and there is the need to notch them away from that Cold War mind-set.
- (b) Furthermore, the Indo-Afghan cooperation is still viewed with growing discomfort by the Pakistani establishment, because of the general concerns of an encirclement of Pakistan through an Indo-Afghan-American nexus.
- (c) Overlooked by a lot of people is to what extent the drugs play a crucial role, how the drug money fuels the insurgency, plays out in the mutual relation in making it for both the governments difficult to normalize the situation. Pakistan views Afghanistan as an increasingly Narcotic-State, where 93% of the worldwide opium is grown and where a lot of people are involved in the drug trade, even politicians in the Afghanistan government, who have a certain interest in continuing the turmoil.
- (d) Another factor is the US-Iran standoff. Since the US don't want Iran to export their gas to Pakistan via Afghanistan, the interest of both the countries are concerned as no one can benefit from the planned pipeline project – neither Pakistan from the gas, nor Afghanistan from the transition fees.

In order to overcome this situation of inherent contradiction and mistrust, Imtiaz Gul argued for a really transparent and agreed approach of how to bring Pakistan and Afghanistan together? How to coordinate anti-terror war, based on mutual trust, how to promote trust between the intelligence agencies and the US-NATO-Coalition forces and opening a dialogue between the establishments (security establishment, interior ministries and military) of both the countries. As most important point, he mentioned to work on the common Afghan prejudice that the murder, destruction and insecurity in Afghanistan is caused by Pakistan alone, and therefore to make the Afghans understand that Pakistan's idea of gaining strategic depth through Afghanistan has crumbled under the burden of circumstances rising out of 2001. The forces, that Pakistan used to pursuit this policy once, are now threatening the State of Pakistan itself.

### ***Mutual relations from the Afghan perspective***

Generally, Massoud Quiam agreed with Imtiaz Gul about the urgent need to build trust between the countries in order to solve many regional problems. The most important point for him is that Afghans still assume Pakistan and Iran having played the major role in the civil war in 1992, which destroyed the Afghan infrastructure left by the Communist regime. Furthermore, Pakistan is commonly seen as the creator of the Taliban and played role in their emergence in the country in 1994, whereas Afghan people have suffered too much from the Taliban regime. And still the Taliban is one of the most serious problems in the whole region while Pakistan's intelligence agency stands accused of supporting the terrorism of Taliban in Afghanistan.

Of course, there are also hopes for improving the relationship. Now, Pakistan having a civilian government, it seems to be the best time to start more cooperation and dialogue between Pakistan and Afghanistan governments. Also Massoud Quiam considers the *Peace Jirga* as a positive step in the right direction, but he remained very sceptical whether this *Jirga* process will bring serious change into the current situation, since many members of the Afghan Parliament, being representatives of the Afghan people, do not agree or support certain decisions made by that *Peace Jirga*.

### ***What can be done?***

During the discussion, there had been a wide consent about the fact that in behalf of building mutual trust between Pakistan and Afghanistan, each side has to consider seriously the existing concerns of the other side and both should start an open and transparent dialogue about their issues. Afghanistan, for instance, could decrease Pakistan's concern of an "Indo-Afghan-American encirclement" by clarifying the meaning of their relations to India and may be also talk about the possibility of recognizing the *Durand Line*, even if in a very long-term perspective, but to start anyway a dialogue on this very important issue.

Concerning the accusation, Pakistan would still have strategic interest in destabilizing Afghanistan, Imtiaz Gul called very reliably on distinguishing between some individuals within the ISI who, in behalf of their personal interest, keep on interfering and the State of Pakistan that meanwhile suffers from its former policies as well. Since these individuals mentioned do not represent the common opinion of the Pakistani government or people, one shouldn't stuck in history, but looking forward and arriving to some conclusion that might be helpful in creating an environment of trust between the both countries and fighting the common enemy, namely the Taliban.

### ***The role of Germany***

The question, how Germany could support the dialogue and process of trust building between Pakistan and Afghanistan, has been discussed contradictorily. While, from an Afghan point of view, a lack of German interest in Pakistan-Afghanistan issues has been announced – because of them focussing more on Central Asia and Russia –, other experts considered this comment as too much simplified, for instance referring to the G8-Initiative. The critical point Massoud Quiam mentioned, is that Germany as a leading nation within the EU would affect the interest of other European countries in Afghanistan, as well as the insurgent groups are totally aware of the dissent within the NATO-Coalition forces. In this context, he expects Germany to increase development projects and broaden its engagement and presence also into the South of Afghanistan.

The option of sending more German troops has been seen very divers within the discussion. While some experts outlined the necessity of more international security forces in Afghanistan, others argued that especially Germany shouldn't be called on active militarism. Instead, their current contribution to reconstruction and development have to be further focused on strengthening civil society movements, in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well, and restoring "normal" live in the boarder regions. In case Germany is desired to play a trust-building role by initiating diplomatic dialogues with neighbouring countries, the Afghan government has to come up with concrete propositions, too.

Consensually, the sole stockpiling of international military forces in Afghanistan will be counter-productive without a changed comprehensive strategy. Afghanistan's own security forces and administrative structures have to be strengthened to an extent that the presence of foreign military can no longer be used as an "excuse" for insurgency.

### **(3) Interest of the regional powers concerning legal elections in Afghanistan**

Since it is apparent, that the substantial deficit of the presidential legitimacy in Afghanistan can exacerbate the security situation in some districts, the indication for stabilization of the country and of the wider region depends on the credibility and a clear outcome of the presidential elections next year. Therefore, current expectations have been discussed from the Afghan and the Pakistani view, as well as the options for the International Community to support the concerted efforts to carry out legal election in Afghanistan.

#### ***Hopes and concerns of the Afghan society***

Concerning the 2009 upcoming presidential election in Afghanistan, Abdul Jabbar Naeemi – as former Governor of the Province of Maiden Wardak from the Afghan point of view – summarized the main expectations and concerns of Afghan society. Thereby, he highlighted two major topics: (1) the importance of continuing the democratic process in Afghanistan by following the timetable for elections suggested by the *Bonn Agreement* and anchored in the Afghan constitution, as well as (2) the hope of the Afghan people for free and transparent elections ensured by an independent *Election Commission*, which has to be facilitated by the Afghan government in cooperation with the International Community – just in this way, legitimacy of the election can be proclaimed.

To increase the creditability of the coming presidential election in 2009, which might be considered as questionable, especially because of the very poor security situation in many provinces and districts of the country, A. J. Naeemi mentioned the following suggestions:

- (a) A country-wide security plan implemented by Afghan security and NATO forces,
- (b) The involvement of different media, local and international, maybe in terms of a campaign to raise the awareness for the democratic process among the Afghan people,
- (c) The encouragement of democratic institutions (political parties on a democratic basis) and civil society, women associations, religious scholars, tribal elders, members of parliament and of the provincial councils. Therefore, in each province, workshops and seminars should be held in order to promote a better understanding of the value of vote casting.
- (e) As for the presidential election in 2004 the Afghan refugees in the neighbouring countries (Pakistan, and Iran) were allowed and facilitated to take part of this election, a similar arrangement for the upcoming presidential election in 2009 should be available for these Afghan citizens. Therefore, a transparent mechanism for their registration and vote casting has to be discussed and implemented.

Furthermore, A. J. Naeemi hopes that by the involvement of Afghan security forces and NATO forces the security situation will then allow the population in the whole country to vote – as for the legitimacy of this election it is more than important that the people of all Afghan provinces should be in the position to cast their vote without any threats. Since everyone is aware of the problematic security situation in the country, one should not think that the majority of the population will take part of the election in 2009, but also consider that the legitimacy is just guaranteed if a maximum people can participate the election. In order to hold free and transparent elections in all parts of Afghanistan, some international advisors and monitors are required for the independent *Election Commission*. In this context, it is necessary to get active international support and the expertise of international democratic institutions in order to improve legitimacy of the mentioned election as well as to ensure the continuity of the democratic process in Afghanistan.

### ***Expectations and hopes from Pakistan's side***

Then, Imtiaz Gul reported about the expectations, hopes and desires discussed in Pakistan concerning the presidential elections in Afghanistan. Generally, he agreed with A. J. Naeemi that Pakistan also is expecting a fair, free and transparent electoral process and, like everybody else, it realizes the importance of holding democratic election in Afghanistan for improving the overall regional situation. As an outcome, they hope for an Afghan president who speaks up its own mind and who is able to strike a balance in the relations with India and Pakistan. That president should not be driven by the self-interest to only keep himself in power and will hopefully be a person who serves the Afghan solution of problems instead of accepting recipes prepared by someone from somewhere else. This point, he claimed, is a problem for Pakistani politicians, too, as they are also often seen just as marionettes of the Americans which decreases their credibility for the people and within the society.

To improve the bilateral relationship, it would be important that the next Afghan president realizes the many competing interests and many players in the region which make the situation so much complicated as it is, and stops claiming Pakistan alone responsible for all the problems of Afghanistan. By stopping this *blame-game*, both the countries could focus together on common threats and interests. In this context, Pakistan desires a dispassionate dialogue with Afghanistan on the security issues, customs and drugs in the border areas and the empowerment of the communities living along the *Durand Line*. The discussion of these issues has to be addressed realistically, rather than emotionally and should not fall victim because of distrust on any side. Therefore, Imtiaz Gul sees a need for a massive outreach public awareness campaign by the Afghan ruling elite. One has to work on clichés and prejudices against Pakistan that are still reflected in the parliament, in the media and which directly poisons the public opinion in Afghanistan. All in all, Pakistan hopes for a strong Afghan president that looks forward and speaks out the importance of a constructive bilateral relationship between the neighbouring countries.

### ***Emphases on the process, not on the person***

Consensually, the focus of the next presidential election in Afghanistan has to be primarily set on the electoral process taking place under democratic conditions, rather than on the candidate who will finally become the next president. In this context, from the U.S. American point of view, there seems to be no favourite candidate, as it is much more important that this president possesses legitimacy due to people's vote. Therefore, the United States will support the electoral process technically through its political foundations *International Republican Institute* (IRI) and the *National Democratic Institute* (NDI), as well as through the private organization *International Foundation for Electoral Systems* (IFES). The work of these organizations always supported and will focus on the democratic procedure, rather than on a special election result. Also from the Pakistani view, none of the candidates is especially favoured, since this would be against the democratic process itself. For Pakistan, it is most important that the Afghan people elect a president who will be in the position to start a constructive dialogue with Pakistan on urgent common issues. From the International Community, and especially Germany, it is expected to neutrally render assistance on the technical level, like supporting the work of the *Election Commission*, educate independent election observers etc. Focussing on the electoral procedure being fair and transparent and not supporting a special candidate is the only way that the next Afghan president won't be seen once again as a marionette of the West and really gains legitimacy by the Afghan people.

### ***Further concerns***

Many concerns still exist, whether and how this election can be held in a transparent, democratic and credible manner. First of all, there is the instable security situation in some provinces and districts of Afghanistan. How credible and legitimate will be the election result, if in some areas the election can't be really carried out because of insecurity? To create a secure environment for the voters all over Afghanistan will be the major challenge in the next coming months. Secondly, concrete options have to be found guaranteeing a maximum participation of female voters and the numerous Afghan refugees situated in neighbouring countries. Otherwise, the whole administrative structure and electoral system currently practised in Afghanistan doesn't base upon very democratic principles. The Afghan president accumulates the major power of decision and other governmental posts often miss a proper division between legislative and executive power. The *Single Vote System* inevitably results in an election of personalities and undermines a "real" democratic participation of the people by voting for political ideas or the program of a political party. In this context, it is also questionable to what extent any presidential candidate really represents the will and power of the Afghan people. However, the possible interference of any other regional actor or international power – beyond the facilitation and technical support of the electoral procedure itself – has been consensually seen as counter-productive to the improvement of credibility and legitimacy of the Afghan presidential election in 2009.

### **(4) Role of the US – Regional approach of the new US Administration**

One essential factor in the regional interest structure resides in the decisive role of the United States. Since there are already signs that newly elected US President Barack Obama is willing to pursue a comprehensive and interlocking strategy in South Asia, the Expert's Roundtable discussed possible future elements of US regional policy and its influence on the stabilization of Afghanistan, its neighbouring states and the wider region.

### ***The expected strategic change***

Besides increasing its own military forces in Afghanistan, the new US Administration will focus further more on hunting and eliminating Osama bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders. A reassessment of their strategy towards Pakistan and support of its military is predictable, which does not mean the finishing of US support for the Pakistani military at all. But a comprehensive strategy that also includes developmental support for strengthening civil and democratic efforts in Pakistan is needed.

For the time being, as John Bauman, former representative of the US Foreign Ministry, announced, one can not be sure and still has to wait for what the changes in US foreign politics will be, because nothing concretely has been pronounced by Obama during his election campaign – since other issues, like the financial crises, were more urgent to the American people at that time. Anyway, Obama and his aides will strive for a regional approach that includes discussing the role of India within the region as well as finding a solution for the Kashmir conflict which seems to be a source of instability in Pakistan. That would be also essential for fighting terrorism in the South Asian region and ending the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Furthermore, Bauman was sure that the personal character of Barack Obama, the choice of his consultants and new Foreign Minister as well as their political efforts are going to have more impact on the situation in South Asia than any possible military intervention.

Nonetheless, the new US Administration will ask his NATO partners, especially the countries of the European Union, for more military support in Afghanistan. Accepting this fact, Dr. Citha Maass from

the German *Stiftung für Wissenschaft und Politik* (SWP) highlighted that in Europe a comprehensive strategy toward Pakistan has not yet been worked out, whereas in the US and Canada appropriate consulting papers are at least existing – what ever is possible and really going to be implemented.

### **Propositions for supportive measures**

Since Dr. Maass located the causes for the current regional conflicts mostly within the concerned countries, she also didn't see US foreign politics – what ever that is going to be – as the only key to solution. Nonetheless, the US government could carry out supportive measures to strengthen solution-oriented dialogues between the regional actors looking for a comprehensive regional stabilization. A first step would be to analyze the reasons of conflicts including the threat potentials and security interests of the particular regional powers. In the case of Pakistan, for example, their biggest fear is to be encircled respectively “sandwiched” between a government in Kabul being close friend with India on the one side, and India itself, by Pakistan still perceived as a primary menace, on the other side. Concluding, Dr. Maass proposed different options for the US playing a stabilizing role in regional politics.

- (a) The US could function as a moderator of the rapprochement between Pakistan and India, not primarily focussing on the Kashmir issue, but generally fostering the since 2004 ongoing process of rapprochement and bilateral dialogue. Turning to account its influence positively on both of the countries, the US has to show diplomatically, not at least to take away Pakistan's fear concerning the latest *Nuclear Deal* between US and India.
- (b) The US could also play a deescalating role on the tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since therefore the inclusion of the Pakistani military and the ISI seems to be absolutely necessary, the new US administration should come up with an adapted strategy toward these actors, but has then a good chance to affect constructively on a rapprochement between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- (c) In this context, it would be also very important, that the US will call upon India for more transparency concerning their interest and activities in Afghanistan. By decreasing Pakistan's fear of getting encircled by India, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan can be deescalated, too.
- (d) Since the upcoming presidential election in Afghanistan will have a huge influence on the bilateral relations to Pakistan, Washington should “encourage” President Karzai not to over-stress the so called *Pashto Card* – means to call for votes on the basis of Pashto tribal loyalty – for gaining his re-election. Because, even if the foundation of a *Great Pashtonistan* is absolutely unrealistic at the moment, only the idea forces “traditional” and latent fears in Pakistan which are really unproductive in terms of decreasing tensions between the both countries.
- (e) Especially the US could contribute to an improvement of technical controls along the *Durand Line*. In order to enforce the monitoring and controlling of the cross-boarder traffic in both directions – also under security aspects – the adoption of ID cards and quotes for Afghan migration labour on the Pakistani side could be technically supported by the US. Furthermore, but in a very long run, the new US administration could and should work toward Afghanistan's recognition of the *Durand Line* as an international border, albeit in a very long-term perspective.
- (f) To stabilize the situation in FATA-Areas, the US should immediately stop any missile attacks on Pakistani territory from their basis in Afghanistan, since this has to be considered as absolutely counter-productive, furthermore, only increases the Anti-Americanism among the Pakistani people as well as weakens the civilian government in Islamabad. Instead, the US should further improve

their support of the Pakistani security forces in FATA agencies by enhancing their counter-insurgency training measures. Another advice to the new US administration would be to revise the currently common practice of purchasing local collaborators in the FATA agencies, but searching for serious local partners on behalf of economic developmental cooperation, vocational education and capacity building in the Tribal Areas.

- (g) Generally, a comprehensive approach to regional stabilization has to focus on common interests of the regional actors like sharing energy resources via pipelines, improving spacious transit routes, etc. Enhancing the regional trade relations and initiating cooperation on track-II-level are further option for supporting development and stabilization in the region, also by external actors like the US.

### ***The importance of personality and personal relationship***

To the question, if the personality and character of Mr. Obama will have a decisive influence on the future developments in Pakistan or Afghanistan, John Bauman answered positively. From his point of view, Barack Obama has already shown that his attitude towards political and other opponents focuses on discussion, not on punishment. Therefore, and in contrary to G.W. Bush, he will strive for fair dialogues and consensual solutions in questions of the South Asian foreign policy of the US, too.

Furthermore, the efforts of cooperation with regional stakeholders by any foreign actor have to be considered within the cultural background of the South Asian region. Since individual contact and personal relationships have a high relevance in this culture, any foreign activity in terms of negotiation, reconstruction efforts and conflict solving will only have success if matching these cultural preconditions. In order to establish durable and effective cooperation, any foreign actor has to work on trust building by continuity of personal presence and disinterested support.

## **(5) German initiatives for a regional approach**

The final focus of the expert's discussion was set on Germany's engagement in the region and its current foreign policy regarding Afghanistan and Pakistan with a special focus on the G8 Initiative. Following the question how Germany could support and encourage the Pakistan-Afghan peace process, precise propositions like further diplomatic initiatives within the region have been put on the table.

### ***Striving for a regional approach in German foreign policy***

German Parliamentarian and expert on security issues Winfried Nachtwei admitted that regarding Afghanistan different strategic mistakes have been made over the last years – by Germany as well. At the moment, the negative destructive dynamic is considerably stronger than the positive reconstructive dynamic. In this context, Nachtwei outlined the increase of security incidents, which have nearly doubled compared to the last year, intensified attacks on the supply logistics of the NATO forces and the decreased accessibility to certain districts for governmental and non-governmental measures. With special regards to the upcoming presidential election, the major challenge is to regain lost credibility within the population. That requires reconsidering the strategic approach for Afghanistan including a more regional focus. With special regards to the German policy, Nachtwei pointed out the importance of certain issues in order to stop and possibly reverse the current negative trend.

- (a) The necessity of a self-critical and independent evaluation of German efforts and contributions over the last seven years. Thereby, the analysis of previous failures is especially important for developing a promising strategy.
- (b) Germany, together with other ISAF forces, should insist on its stabilization approach and not make the mistake of responding to the insurgency by acts of war. The strategic dissent within the NATO, between the basic approach of stabilization / security promotion versus an aggressive suppression of insurgency, has to be openly discussed and resolved.
- (c) German reconstruction efforts should increasingly pursue a local approach respectively promote local ownership on the basis of cultural competence, advisory skills and continuity.
- (d) The efforts and measures of reconstruction have to be also better adapted to the increasing challenges. Meeting the requirements and spending limited resources directly and strategically is as essential as a better coordination between the engaged nations' efforts to cover all provinces of Afghanistan.
- (e) A regional approach should focus primarily on Pakistan and its border regions to Afghanistan. Non-military developmental cooperation, as it is already well practised by German organisations, has to be retained and increased. The G8-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Initiative introduced by Germany is a further option to facilitate practical cooperation in the border regions concerned.
- (f) The promotion of further diplomatic initiatives that focus on the wider region might be also helpful. However, for the development of a comprehensive strategy one has to consider not only the German perspective, but to think in the context of the European Union.

### ***Propositions for German diplomatic initiatives***

Concerning possible German initiatives for a regional approach, Dr. Citha Maass called for primarily analysing the expected elements of the future US foreign policy. Even if there are already signs that a new strategy will focus on a regional approach, one should precisely ask for the long-term strategic interests of the United States in the wider region. And beyond promoting democracy and “war on terror” in Afghanistan, to what extent these interests can be really shared by Germany?

Different factors make it absolutely necessary for German politics to prospectively think about political and diplomatic alternatives instead of military options. Since the ISAF engagement is less supported by the German public, the question of legitimacy will be raised at least in occasion of Germany's next election in September 2009. Furthermore, the demand on a comprehensive NATO strategy concerning counter-insurgency in Afghanistan has to be filled with “life”, respectively by a bunch of concrete political measures. As the Obama administration will surely request more military engagement from Germany, diplomatic options should be prepared and then provided either alternatively or at least complementary to the new regional approach of the US.

First of all, in the context of the G8-Initiative, the Afghan-Pakistan peace dialogue should be further supported by Germany. Remaining sceptic toward the current “productiveness” of a dialogue between Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, Dr. Maass proposed other diplomatic initiatives between certain regional actors which could be especially encouraged from the German side.

- (a) Afghanistan / Pakistan / Iran; since Pakistan and Iran have a common interest in relative regional stability, especially that Afghanistan does not fall back into a state of civil war like after 1992.
- (b) Afghanistan / Iran / Central Asian States; Germany is diplomatically in good position to break the current silence and carefully promote dialogues between these regional actors, maybe not on the official, but on a track-II-level.

(c) “Friends of Pakistan”; within this new initiative, Germany could encourage the dialogue between Pakistan and India calling on more transparency of India’s engagement in Afghanistan.

What could be topics discussed within these regional initiatives? Since the primary objective is trust building between the actors, the issues should focus on more general topics, like options of economic and technical cooperation, or common interests, like trade, energy and transit routes. Without too high expectations on concrete outcomes or solution, the participants shall be encouraged to start dialoguing at all. At best, contact and trust building between different representatives of the civil societies could be promoted by such dialogues and can be facilitated on “neutral territory”.

### ***Further discussion***

Afterwards, the presented suggestions have been discussed in a wider context. Consensually, strategies and measures of the Internationals need a further interlinks between local and regional approaches. Beside regional initiatives, the strengthening of Afghanistan’s internal forces and administrative structures must be increasingly considered, especially on a local level. Otherwise, the commitment of Afghan people – for their own government as well as for the presence of Internationals – will further decrease due to their daily experienced frustration.

Another point of discussion was the necessity of starting an open public debate within Germany regarding the German engagement in Afghanistan. If Germany wants to play, also in future, an important role to stabilize the whole region within a comprehensive approach, the German government needs the backing of its people. In fact, the public attitude towards the German ISAF Mandate in Afghanistan and its yearly prolongation has never been very positive and, until now, most German politicians were not willing to raise this topic at all. Nonetheless, it will appear on the agenda of the election campaigns in occasion of the next *Bundestagswahlen* (Federal Elections) in September 2009. In order to gain the public support for necessarily continuing the German engagement in Afghanistan, realistic appraisals and a profound and comprehensive strategic approach have to be presented.