

## Paper on Public Event

# Pakistan and the West

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, October 26, 2009

Written by Susanne Mahrwald

Two years ago Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf resigned and elections in 2008 put a civilian government back into power. Pakistan's civil society and especially the lawyer's demonstrations made a new democratic beginning possible. But domestic challenges are rising, due to military conflict in different parts of the country, insufficient energy supply and a global finance crisis which hit Pakistan hard.

The Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung and the Social Science Research Centre Berlin (WZB) invited guests from Pakistan to discuss these issues with the German public:

**Imran Khan**, Chairman of the Political Party *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf* (Movement for Justice)

**Ahsan Iqbal**, Chief Coordinator and Information Secretary of the *Pakistan Muslim League* (Nawaz Sharif) and Member of National Assembly

**Athar Minallah**, Lawyer at the Supreme Court of Pakistan and former spokesperson for the Chief Justice of Pakistan

**Bushra Gohar**, Senior Vice President of the *Awami National Party* and Member of National Assembly

The public event was moderated by **Susanne Koelbl**, journalist and author. The main focus of this event was certainly the ongoing "Talibanisation" of the country, the recently started military offensive in South Waziristan and the role of the "War on Terror", being the most controversial aspect of the event.

According to Imran Khan, terrorism is an idea, which cannot be fought with bombs rather than with other, better ideas. The previous years have not brought any results, instead the situation turned from bad to worse. In his opinion, Pakistan was dragged into this war, although no Pakistani was involved in 9/11 and al Qaeda was trained only in Afghanistan. According to Imran Khan, the US led war on terror in Afghanistan has fostered militancy and extremism in Pakistan particularly after General Musharraf has launched a military operation in FATA in 2004. At present, there are numerous different groups of different background and motivation in the country and the Pakistan army is again bombing the tribal areas without any success. Therefore, Imran Khan favours a political dialogue to isolate the real hardliners - the terrorists. Military operations only create more chaos and more resistance in the form of militancy and terrorism.

Bushra Gohar, however, disagreed with Imran Khan that there have not been any problems with regard to militancy prior to 2004. Pakistan was actually supporting militant groups already after the creation of Pakistan. National policies included the training of militants who were fighting the wars in Kashmir. Later, during the military dictatorship of Zia ul Haq in the 1980ies, when he supported the War on Afghanistan, militants were funded and trained in Pakistan with financial and technical help of the US. Also, the Pakistani intelligence agencies and the military were actively involved in creating the present terrorists groups. Bushra Gohar further explained that the secular *Awami National Party*, which took over the provincial government of NWFP of the military-mullah alliance called the MMA (*Muttahida Majlis-e Amaal*) after the 2008 election, has tried to initiate two dialogues: one with Sufi Mohammad in 2008 and another with Maulana Fazlullah, which failed because there was no serious will of the militants to find solutions. Even the peace deal of the military in 2004 failed. Nevertheless, Bushra Gohar agreed that the problem of militancy cannot be won by only conventional military means. There needs to be a consensus of all political actors; military strategies have to be reviewed; the intelligence must be effective and

reliable and the civilian law enforcement needs to be strengthened. Furthermore, peace deals and dialogue can only be initiated successfully if the militants lay down their weapons.

As a response, Imran Khan agreed that there were militants before 2004, but they were under control of the intelligence agencies. However, he claimed that particularly after 2004 the number of suicide attacks raised continuously and each military operation in the country was followed by even more suicide bombings and attacks. At present, almost every day terrorist attacks struck the country.

Also, Ahsan Iqbal emphasized the fact that the militants originated in times of the Afghanistan War in the 1980ies. It was the CIA and the University of Nebraska developing curriculum breeding militancy. As a frontline state Pakistan had to face the impacts of war, including the inflow of millions of refugees, drugs and weapons trafficking as well as instability and militancy. Even nowadays, the critical situation in Pakistan and in the tribal areas in particular is closely linked to the situation in Afghanistan. Therefore, Ahsan Iqbal stressed the fact that there must be a comprehensive approach of all stakeholders - Pakistan, Afghanistan and the international Community for the solution of militancy in the region. Furthermore, the military operation in Waziristan will only have some success if the border to Afghanistan is sealed in order to prevent any further border crossings of militants from Afghanistan to Pakistan and vice versa.

Athar Minallah, as a non politician, has different views about the current situation. Conceptionally, it must be analysed whether the Taliban, militants or whatever they are called are recognised as a political entity or as an entity that is threatening the sovereignty and integrity of the state. In the latter case there cannot be any negotiations with this entity at all. He further stated that the entity Pakistan has to deal with continues slaughtering and terrorizing innocent people and blowing up government institutions such as schools and security buildings with the purpose of threatening the sovereignty of the state. In Athar Minallah's opinion there cannot be any negotiations with this entity and any negotiation with this entity, which was already done in the case of Swat, is only surrender. In his opinion, former rulers have allowed the militants to attack the country and therefore the Pakistani state is responsible for the destructions so far. However, it is the task of the state to protect its boundaries and its territory. Pakistan can only save itself.

Another point of the discussion was related to the political leaders Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto who were considered to be corrupt and who plunged the country into political chaos during the 1990ies. Later, the people of Pakistan welcomed and appreciated the military coup of Musharraf in 1999 ending the misruling of the corrupt government of Nawaz Sharif. In 2007 the same political figures were celebrated as heroes or saviours of the country, when both politicians returned to Pakistan from exile. Therefore, the questions were raised why the political parties do not present new leaders and why those parties are paralyzed, when their leaders are out of the country. As a response Ahsan Iqbal stated that in the light of the current challenges the party and also the state need an experienced leader like Nawaz Sharif whom the majority of the people trust. For this reason, there is no need to appoint a new, inexperienced political leader. According to Athar Minallah the people of Pakistan have to decide, which leader should rule the country whether it is Nawaz Sharif or Imran Khan. The result must be respected. The democratic institutions must be strengthened in order to establish and ensure the Rule of Law. Bushra Gohar added that for the first time in Pakistan's history political parties play a crucial part in solving the problem of the country and they are realizing that the people of Pakistan demand solutions.

Then the question was raised what the West can do to support Pakistan. Bushra Gohar emphasised that the West mostly supported military dictatorships in Pakistan and poured in military aid. However, as the people were in need of urgent help during the IDP crisis for example it seems that Pakistan had to beg for assistance and aid. The west should not interfere, but must play a role for ensuring peace and stability in the region. According to Ahsan Iqbal the west needs to support local solutions because any solution dictated by the west becomes a most controversial issue. Furthermore, the Pakistan-Afghanistan border needs to be sealed in order to curb drug and weapon trafficking and other cross border activities that create problems within Pakistan. In regard to economical aspects, he also stated that Pakistan does not want aid but fair trade tariffs and investments. In addition, Pakistan needs access to higher education in the USA as well as in Europe to train future political leaders, who might turn Pakistan into a developed country.

As a concluding remark Athar Minallah stated that Pakistan has created the mess prevailing in the country and cannot blame others for that. Imran Khan added that Pakistan is facing the biggest crisis in its history suffering from an economic collapse, massive corruptions, militancy and terrorism, lack of governance but at the same time there is still hope for a way out of this crisis also because there is an independent Supreme Court, which is an important precondition for democracy.