

Interview with Abbas Rashid:

HBS: For Germany, the issues of Afghanistan and the whole region are especially vibrant. That's why I would like start with some questions on foreign politics.

Afghanistan and its Western allies agreed at the London Conference to push peace efforts in more comprehensive ways, including a new initiative aimed at reconciling moderate Taliban insurgents.

Rashid: They are making those moves and they may even get some response from many of the Taliban groups. But I think the real test of the strategy will come once the troops are actually withdrawn. Because the problem with the strategy is partly that it presumes that the Karsai Government has a kind of credibility that it actually does not have. It is probably not realistic that this Government is able to hold the ring, while this process takes shape.

HBS: Afghanistan shall take increasing control for its own security from the end of this year, which the United States and its NATO allies hope will allow them to cut troop levels in Afghanistan. How and in which way the outcome of that London Conference are perceived and discussed in Pakistan? What will the scheduled withdraw of western troops actually mean for Pakistan and its stability?

Rashid: I think it is clear that now that you have a withdrawal timetable given by the US. The problem is that the regional dimension to this issue is not given sufficient attention. If for instance Pakistan and India see their interests in Afghanistan in ways that are antagonistic to each other then we are not at a long term solution. In fact we have lost more soldiers than ISAF in fighting the battle with the militants, but in the same time the army remains India-centric. Further, Iran has interests in Afghanistan and so has Russia. If those tensions are ignored and remain, you are not thinking of a long term solution.

HBS: You think the discussion in Pakistan is still more focussed on the Kashmir-Conflict or about the conflict at the Afghanistan border?

Rashid: I would say it is much more focussed on the western border. Absolutely! But $\frac{3}{4}$ of Pakistan Forces do the main deployment on the eastern border. You have to look at those constraints in terms of what kind of expectations you have. The other part is that India has legitimate interests in Afghanistan-centralising energy. But equally Pakistan has legitimate interests as well.

HBS: Pakistan's Chief of the Army Staff General Kayani offered (last week) that Pakistan will train the Afghan National Army which would help improve relations between the two nations. On the other side, this reflects Islamabad's rising concern over Indian influence in Afghanistan, since India made a similar offer. He warned that it is essential to address Pakistan's long-term strategic concerns for stability in the region and reiterated the stance that only a friendly Afghanistan would provide a "strategic depth" for Pakistan.

In Pakistan you find a lot of apprehension with regard to India establishing a much greater presence there in Afghanistan undermining its influence. Unless you sit around the table and reconcile these issues, including Iran and Russia which are central to the problem, you won't find a solution.

How do you assess the COAS viewpoint on regional security? And what are, in your own point of view, the long-term strategic concerns of Pakistan?

Rashid: I would not go along with the concept of "strategic depth". It is important for all the players and that is why it should be a regional solution. What Pakistan can rightfully assert is that we would not want to see India in this kind of a predominant role there. But this is not to

say that Pakistan can dictate what kind of government Afghanistan has. What they can try and assure is that there are no outside influences that are taking it to another direction. But now you got these interests in Afghanistan playing themselves out. This is why this has to be reconciled not by making Afghanistan into an arena for a proxy war between India and Pakistan that continues to destabilize Afghanistan and of course the rest of the region. India and Pakistan have to look at their own outstanding disputes and settle those in order to be able to have a framework for dispute resolution that actually works. If you remember the US special representative, Mr. Holbrooke, initially was going to have India as well within his ambit of operations. But of course India protested strongly so that was left out. Again you are not going to see a proper solution if you start leaving out the key actors in this.

HBS: General Kayani said also the success of military operations in Swat, South Waziristan and other tribal regions have caused substantial decline in cross-border attacks on NATO forces in Afghanistan. Furthermore, he rejected the perception that Pakistan did not want to take on the militants in North Waziristan, but said it is important that the military consolidated its hold before starting another army offensive.

How do you assess the strategy of the Pakistani military and the stated success in fighting the militants on Pakistan's own soil?

Rashid: It is widely recognized that the operation in Swat in South Waziristan have been successful and they have been difficult with lots of casualties. US-Defense Secretary Gates was there again to push for the operation in North Waziristan. But what is happening now is that Pakistan is saying to the Americans: "You are now distinguishing between good and bad Taliban. You are fighting but also negotiating at the same time. Why should you not allow us to do the same thing?" Their strategy could well be that we consolidate our gains. This would also send a message that we can do this. But at the same time be open to negotiations as the Americans are doing.

What is the current situation in Pakistan concerning the interior politics and the relation between legislature and executive?

Rashid: It's a very difficult situation. One thing has to do with a petition that is already in court about the fact that under the judgement president Zadari could not have been a candidate at the time he stood for the elections. If this is decided upon the presidency could be challenged by the court. Many people feel that this might take judicial activism too far because it will end up politicising the court in some way. Legally Zadari is president and he has immunity under the constitution against criminal proceedings and by constitution only through impeachment or removal because of inability a sitting president can be removed from office. You would have to have in a joint sitting 2/3 of the members of parliament voting for the resolution the president to be impeached. Their idea is: This is a political issue it should be decided politically. Let there be a resolution table by the opposition and let them try to get 2/3 of the votes.

HBS: You think this could have big influence on destabilising the situation?

Rashid: It could, if things proceed this way. If the parliament doesn't do anything about it and the court continues in this direction it will become politicised. People feel that there is already corruption all over the place, so if action is to be taken it should be taken by the parliament. Then the people, the representatives have decided. A large majority is convinced of the fact that he's not the right president so he can be impeached. But if it doesn't work out that way it does have the potential for instability.

HBS: Facing weak economic performance and inflation, permanently increasing prices for oil, gas, food and everyday household items on the one side, as well as shortages of

electricity and gas each day on the other side, the livelihood of Pakistani people seems to be definitely in decline.

How do you reflect the government's failure to deliver and to what extent the Pakistani society is able and willed to bear these conditions any longer?

Rashid: This certainly a major factor. Partly it has to do with something that goes back years, decades. That is Pakistan's turning into a security state rather than a development state spending much more on the military rather than on health, education and energy and water and these issues. This is certainly something that is worrisome. Some other factors are those this government has inherited. For instance the extremism that we have now seen for many years obviously will not attract investors from outside, it will also hold people inside; but this is not a making of this government. The energy part also has to do with the fact that for almost 10 years we have not invested in any major energy project.

Still, a few steps have been taken, for instance on the national finance commission award, which is a distribution of resources among the provinces; after many years it has an agreement on that. This can be seen as major achievement by the people. Further, they have started to put this package together for Baluchistan, which helped to stamp rising radicalism in this area. This is some work on the positive side but not really enough.

HBS: Can you point out one thing that may have a lot of influence on the people?

Rashid: Education and health - those are key issues. Personally I'm very interested in education. That is certainly something that successive governments have not been able to do. You need to put in steps that reverse the huge inequalities that you see in Pakistan, with a small elite making huge gains. You need to reform the tax system, support agriculture in different ways. Maybe have some kind of rural land reform. All of those things matter and of course in terms what other countries can do. There is a lot of assistance the US is now promising in the civil sector, 1,5 Billion a year for the next five years. That is good. But I think what is more important is much more of a market share for things that Pakistan has an advantage in, textile and leather and so on. That is what gives more employment. Under Musharraf you we were growing 5 to 6 percent, but a lot of that growth actually came from low employment. It's very important to gain a greater market share in Europe or US or elsewhere.