Note on 19th March 2003 Round Table Conference
North Pakistan at the Crossroads of Central and South Asia

North Pakistan's political radicalization and Jihad movements in an emerging international security environment

Graduate Institute for Development Studies - Geneva
Distributed by C. Galez

Organisation and Participants:
The round table was carried out in two phases: a morning private meeting amongst experts and, an afternoon public session. The experts' group was constituted by:

Mariam Abou Zahad, Political Scientist, Paris
Inam-ur-Rahim, Co-Author, 'Swat, An Afghan Society in Pakistan, Peshawar-Pakistan
Zafar Iqbal Cheema, Quaid-i-Azam Fellow, St Antony's College, Oxford University
Yunus Samad, Lecturer in Sociology, Bradford University
Dietrich Reetz, Political Scientist, Centre for Modern Oriental Research, Berlin
Robert Templer, Asia Projects Director, International Crisis Group, Brussels
Gilbert Etienne, Professor Emeritus, Institutes of International and Development Studies, Geneva
Hall Gardner, Professor & Chair International Affairs Department, American University, Paris
David Line, Editor, Asia Intelligence Service, London.

Observers who attended the morning session included Mr. Jean Pierre Stroot, Chairman GIPRI and co-organizer Pugwash meetings (Geneva); Ms. Fiona Blyth-Kubota, UNOHCHR (Geneva); Ms. Edith Ballantyne, former President Women International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF - Geneva); Susanne de Sousa, OCHA (Geneva); Mr. Indranil Banerjee, SAPRA India. About 60 people from NGOs, the academia, diplomatic missions and institutions such as OHCHR, UNHCR, UNIDIR, ICRC, UNICEF, World Economic Forum, and UNITAR attended the afternoon public session.
The Fonds National de Recherche Scientifique (FNRS - Bern) financed the event organized by the Graduate Institute for Development Studies (IUED - Geneva), the Centre de Recherche sur l'Asie Moderne (Institut Universitaire des Hautes Etudes Internationales - IUHEI/IUED - Geneva) and the Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS - Geneva). The following organizations were associated to the event: Geneva International Peace Research Foundation (GIPRI), European South Asia Forum (ESAF - King's College, London).

Claire Galez, Director CSAS and Prof. Alain Viaro (IUED) chaired the meetings.

**Proceedings:**

Mr. Inam-ur-Rahim made the first presentation at the morning session. His analysis started with an assessment of the Swat Valley's ethnic-religious component in its current as well as historical perspectives. He focused on the Afghan character of the population, which, he stated, bore historical, cultural and ethnic commonality with Pukhtun Afghans across the Durand Line. In 1969, the Swat Valley, situated North of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP), lost its independent status. In 1973, Pakistan extended the jurisdiction of its Federal Constitution to the Valley, incorporating the areas into NWFP under the status of a Provincialy Administered Tribal Area (PATA). In Rahim's opinion, even if the region drew large benefit from Pakistan Federal government's loose administrative control over it, the imposition of PATA resulted in the loss of the region's traditional administrative, political and judicial set up and thus in a power vacuum of sorts.

On the other hand, the decade-long Afghan war of 1979 transformed the economic, social and ideological landscape in the Valley. Both events left a deep imprint on the region, ultimately resulting in the present assertiveness of Islamist parties and their consequent victory in the elections of October 2002.

Ideologically, the reminiscences of mid-XIX century struggle against the British Raj, whose advent had then marked the liquidation of three and a half century old Muslim rule, find resurgence in a modern form of Jihad in the region, which is principally anti-American in content. In 2002, several thousand Pukhtuns went to fight alongside the Taliban under the banner of a local Islamist movement called Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM). This too contributed in the rise of Islamist political parties in the October 2002 elections.

Notably, according to Rahim, there is no substantial support for cross-ethnic movements emanating from Mingora or the Swat Valley. There seems to be little interest in the Kashmir issue or in those issues of international reach (Chechnya, South East Asia, etc.). Rahim's contention is that it is from other areas of NWFP, Punjab and Sindh rather than from Swat, that Pakistan-based Islamist armed movements provide the support structure for trans-national and anti-India groups. Rahim attributes the sharp upswing in recent electoral results in favour of Islamist
parties in NWFP to several causes: (a) the 1973 imposition of Pakistan's constitutional formal rule (b) the impact of 1979-89 Afghan war, (c) recent American strategies in the region and (d) ethnic solidarity with Afghan Pukhtuns.

In the course of the discussion that ensued, all experts agreed that there are four types of Islamist armed movements based in Pakistan:

- NWFP radical ethnically motivated (Pukhtun) Islamic movements related to Afghanistan
- Punjab based - principally anti-Shia and anti-Christian groups
- Throughout the country, pan-Islamic fundamentalist armed movements linked to, or of, Al Qaida brand, variably benefiting from State's support
- Groups financially and/or logistically supported by the State apparatus, specifically directed against India and devoted to the Kashmir cause.

The ground common to these movements is that they operate from Pakistani soil, and each promotes its Islamic credentials within and outside its immediate environment. The difference between them is: (a) their political, religious and territorial ambitions, (b) their level of dependency on Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), and, therefore, the collusion of interests they have or have not with the Federal government and the Army. The experts attributed the rise of Islamist parties in national politics to the historical predominance of the Army in domestic affairs, the role of the ISI, the negative role of a corrupt political class and the education curriculum including that of the religious seminaries (Madrassas). The rise to power of a six Islamist parties' coalition (MMA) now sitting on the opposition bench at the National Assembly signals a significant shuffling of Pakistan's social and political equations. If, however, this does not necessarily signal a radicalization of an ordinary Pakistani, it certainly augurs the transformation of Pakistan's power structure both on the domestic and foreign policies fronts as well as within the Army.

Mariam Abou Zahad and Dietrich Reetz delivered their papers in the afternoon public session. Each focused on different types of Jihad groups, their profiles and roles both within the Pakistani society and in relation to pan-Islamic networks. The experts described the role of the Federal government, the Army and the ISI in selectively and alternatively sustaining or trying to reduce the level of influence of some of these groups. They also thought that external causes, such as the US post 9-11 anti-terrorist laws, contributed in exacerbating radical feelings. It was clear that, although Pakistan had become the first victim of its compromising Islamist policies, yet the Federal government and the Army deliberately maintain a level of ambiguity in their dealing with radical Islamist and Jihad groups. Pakistan has indeed long sought to achieve simultaneously the status of a leading State in the Islamic world, the status of a successful model of Western-Muslim cooperation while pursuing an idiosyncratic anti-India foreign/defence policy.

Prof. Yunas Samad analysed the erosion of fundamental social, political and legal
standards in Pakistan. He emphasised that, while successive governments in Pakistan (civilian or military) survived on an anti-India agenda, fundamentalism was allowed to foster on the domestic front and acquire international dimensions. Prof. Samad also blamed the US and some other powers for interfering in Pakistan's affairs for their self-aggrandisement, helping corrupt politicians and military rulers stay in power in Pakistan. On the economic front, Prof. Samad asserted that, at the end of the day, lifting of economic sanctions and debt cancelling would only serve the military junta rather than alleviate the suffering of an impoverished population and providing it the standard of decent life. He suggested that in Pakistan, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is an offshoot of failed domestic and foreign policies, and now, it is the entire concept of nation-state that is at stake.

Zafar Iqbal Cheema exposed Pakistan's notion of its strategic interests. He said that Pakistan developed its nuclear programme by force of circumstances and insisted that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is very safe and could, in no circumstances fall in the hands of Islamist radicals. Cheema's main contention is that Pakistan has unfortunately surrendered its interests to those of the United States. Musharraf, as Zia did earlier, appointed a face-saving Prime Minister but there is no democracy in Pakistan.

Members of the audience and other experts reacted rather strongly, arguing that if Pakistan had changed gears post-1971 and respected the Simla Agreement in letter and spirit, it would not have engulfed itself in a sterile but costly conflict with India. Secondly, as long as Pakistan is not reconciled with its own 'raison d'être', there is no scope for the achievement of social and economic cohesion in the country or constructive regional and international relations. Thirdly, UNIDIR's director, Patricia Lewis, objected to Cheema's contention that there were enough provisions and safeguards with regard to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. Ms. Lewis said that, contrary to India's, Pakistan's nukes were in the hands of the army rather than under the preview of a civilian government. On the other hand, India's nuclear doctrine is much more transparent in comparison to that of Pakistan. Keeping in mind Indo-Pakistan's awkward bilateral relations, this was not reassuring.

Dietrich Reetz strongly opposed Cheema's views saying that Pakistani leaders deliberately maintain double or even triple standard policies, one for Western consumption, the other for Muslim countries' consumption and a third one for domestic consumption based on 'existing on anti-India slogans'. In Reetz' view, as long as Pakistan pursues a policy of parity with India and as long as it looks beyond its borders (including towards Afghanistan and across the LoC in Kashmir) there is no scope for the country's, and by extension, the region's stability.

Follow up proposal:

Publication of the experts' papers.