

Afghanistan's stabilization through regional stabilization

The role of bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan

**Executive Summary of the Expert's Roundtable on Pakistan and Afghanistan
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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.