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PAKISTAN:
**THE SECURITY SITUATION AND ITS
IMPACT ON AFGHANISTAN**

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1. Introduction

In the last few weeks, only months after the elections of February 18, three events have caused the situation in Pakistan to take a drastic turn, and will have a crucial influence on country's future:

- the resignation of President Musharraf (August 18),
- the departure of Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) party from the majority's coalition (August 25),
- the election of Pakistan People's Party (PPP)'s leader, Asif Ali Zardari, as President of Pakistan (September 7).

Although the first event brought about numerous unknowns, it also fuelled hopes for the renewal of the process of democratization of the country's institutions. However, the second event brought the political climate back to the most discouraging moments of the 90's, when the civil governments, reinstated after a long interval of military regime, were unable to offer the country the stability it hoped for. As a result, the conditions were met for a return to an authoritarian regime. Zardari's rise to the country's highest position could add other tensions, despite his demonstration throughout 2008 of a notable capacity for mediation in a complex political context.

The disputes that have hindered relationships within the coalition involve very important themes, including measures to revitalize the economy, strategy for the war against terrorism, and the stance on Musharraf. However, what actually prompted the crisis was disagreement on the reinstatement of the Supreme Court and High Courts Judges (about 60) after their removal following the declaration of a state of emergency (November 3, 2007). The reinstatement was firmly supported by Sharif and was accepted several times – *obtorto collo* – by Zardari, who however always found a reason to postpone fulfilling his commitment.

Zardari's easy victory in the presidential election, in which he obtained 481 of the 702 votes, makes the path towards a new majority government smoother, although the smaller parties will be decisive. Therefore, the PPP must mediate with these smaller parties, accepting agreements that could risk compromising the continuity of its political program. At the moment, the religious political party *Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam - Fazlur Rehman - JUI-F*, with ties to radical Islamic elements, seems the most determined to take advantage of the new opportunities. On August 30 Maulana Rehman announced his support of Zardari's candidacy after obtaining some concessions, such as the stop of military operations in the Bajaur tribal agency.

The infighting within the majority coalition have negatively impacted the effectiveness of the cabinet led by Yousuf Raza Gilani. More often than not, Gilani was only able to individuate possible solutions to problems without making concrete steps to put them into action. He has lacked the necessary determination to handle the main challenges faced by Pakistan: the threat of terrorism and the economic crisis. They are complicated challenges that have both internal and international roots, and they have worsened because of a ripple effect stemming from bad decisions – or lack of

decisions – made by the former military regime. This is one of its most challenging responsibilities. Parallel to the deterioration of the security situation new tensions have arisen in Pakistan's relationships with India and the USA; tensions that the Pakistani authorities have not been able to properly address, because they were distracted by internal problems and clashes between the political parties.

Furthermore, the government has never given the impression that it is able to control its own military and security forces, in particular the country's main intelligence agency (Inter Services Intelligence - ISI). In fact, the attempt to transfer the ISI and the Intelligence Bureau (IB) from the Prime Minister's responsibility to the Interior Ministry to promote a more streamlined coordination with other intelligence and security services failed due to Musharraf's actions along with strong pressures from Defence's top leaders.

2. The "Talibanisation" of the country

Since the beginning of 2007 there has been an exponential growth in terrorist incidents often aimed at imposing the strictest interpretation of *Sharia*, in line with the approach imposed by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The religious and ideological principles promoted by mullah Omar's movement inspires armed groups and Pakistani extremist religious factions (which are also commonly referred to as Taliban). Indeed, in addition to supporting the *jihad* against the Kabul government and foreign forces in Afghanistan, these groups are fighting to turn Pakistan into a theocratic state. Their actions initially involved the FATA and the NWFP areas, and subsequently spread to the capital, Islamabad, and other key cities, with no serious opposition from the authorities.

Musharraf faced the terrorist threat with force, including military action in the areas where the situation was most dramatic, and with negotiation (peace agreements with North and South Waziristan), but his attempts were unsuccessful in both areas. Above all, his government was unable to plan a long-term strategy to give continuity to the stabilization process. Last February 17 (the day before the elections) a new agreement was reached with North Waziristan similar to the one signed in September 2006 which was later rejected by the extremists in August 2007. Currently the check points in the agency are controlled by the *Khasadar* tribal militia, yet extremist militants continue to patrol the streets, and government-run political and security structures are not much more than a formality.

In order to underline their commitment to the struggle against extremism and terrorism, Gilani's government and the coalition that supported it tried to define a new strategy that favored political measures in restoring the country's security. In particular, Zardari declared his willingness to have an open dialogue with all parties, even those without representation in Parliament and those involved in fighting against the Pakistani government and its forces. He added that the campaign against terrorism should be redefined and the people should be made to understand that the fight against terrorism is not fought for the interests of the USA, but rather of Pakistan. Similar positions were taken by other majority leaders and by the chief ministers of the NWFP and of Beluchistan, who announced their willingness to open a dialogue with those responsible for the attacks and to

rely on force as a last resource. However, in practice, the new strategy has not been formalized in a coherent and realistic operative plan due to the clashes between the various factions of the former coalition and the mistrust between political and military leadership. The most serious problem is the use of force, which was rejected by the JUI-F, and accepted only in principle (but without conviction) by the PML-N.

When faced with an offer of peace, Pakistani Taliban groups initially demonstrated a superficial willingness to participate in negotiations. Their two main conditions were the end of collaboration with the US military and the introduction of *Sharia* to the tribal areas. Subsequently, they showed increased interest in negotiations, seeing the government's initiative as a possibility to gain more time to reorganize their forces and to get out of difficult situations¹. The negotiations were handled in a haphazard manner by both the provincial administrations and the federal government institutions². The negotiators achieved the most significant results in the Swat district, brokering a peace agreement with Maulana Fazlullah. Yet other more radical exponents and especially Baitullah Mehsud, leader of *Tehrik-e-Taliban* Pakistan (TTP) quit negotiations after the government, pressured by western countries (mainly the USA), as a condition to continue negotiations ordered them to stop conducting operations on Afghan territory against the Kabul government and foreign forces. Extremist groups took advantage of the government's decision to dramatically reduce military operations in order to enhance the chances of the negotiations. They took the initiative both in Afghanistan (where in some provinces there has been a reported increase of attacks of 50%) and Pakistan to strengthen their control of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and many areas of the NWFP. In this province they surrounded Peshawar, the fall of which seemed possible in several occasions³. The growing influence of the Pakistani Taliban has brought a more strict enforcement of the application of *Sharia* and the establishment of administrative structures parallel to official structures in the areas under their control.⁴

The increase in terrorist attacks in Afghan territory by groups based in the tribal areas have prompted Washington authorities to put new pressure on Islamabad's leadership for a tougher stance on the fight against terrorism. The possibility (or threat) of a unilateral action of US forces in the tribal areas against terrorist leaders and command structures has been brought up many times. On July 2, the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, stated that he had the authority to strike at Taliban and al-Qaida targets on Pakistani territory. He refused to elaborate if such an action could be carried out without Islamabad's consent, and if land deployments would also be provided for. According to the Washington Times, General Musharraf granted that authority to Washington when Pakistan joined the war on terror in 2001.

¹ For example, in the Swat district a military operation that started on November 12, 2007 forced Maulana Fazlullah and his militants to move to the most inaccessible areas.

² Specifically, while the government continued to emphasize that only tribal elders who needed to guarantee their respect by the militants active in their areas were involved in negotiations, military figures were in direct contact with commanders of subversive groups, including Baitullah Mehsud, which legitimized their role.

³ On June 16, sixteen Christians were kidnapped in a residential area of the city. They were later released.

⁴ Baitullah Mehsud has set up Islamic courts to carry out judicial and arbitration functions. Furthermore, a system of financial support to the *jihād* in Afghanistan was initiated, as well as new administrative and social services (schools and health services) run by the Taliban.

The US has carried out numerous raids in tribal areas, generally by unmanned Predator aircraft. One of these raids⁵ killed Abu Khabab al Misri, an expert in chemical weapons and an important al-Qaida leader⁶. On the other hand, the killing of 11 members of the Frontier Corps on June 11 attack, caused a great deal of tension between the military commanders of the two countries. Similarly strong reactions followed a ground raid conducted on September 3 by US helicopter-borne troops in the village of Musa Neka Ziarat (South Waziristan) where approximately 20 people were killed, most of whom were civilians. The latest raid marks a turn in the US strategy, with more air and missile attacks on terrorist targets and the use of special forces. The new guidelines were approved by President Bush last July. The September 3 attack was followed by other 4 raids in less than 10 days.

The debate in Washington regarding political and military operations on Pakistani territory lasted for months. Military and intelligence groups were requesting Bush to allow more flexibility in the field against militants infiltrating Afghan tribal areas. Nonetheless, some Pentagon officials urge caution because the violation of Pakistan sovereignty provokes anger throughout the local population which could jeopardize the security of and the transport of supplies for foreign forces in Afghanistan⁷.

Facing an offensive by insurgency groups and pressured by the US, Pakistan's government was forced to reconsider its policies regarding extremism and terrorism. In particular: changing the priority of dialogue to the priority of militant disarmament; reinforcing their commitment to initiate necessary economic reforms to improve living conditions for the local population; and threatening the use of force to reestablish the authority of the state. Above all, the operations in the tribal areas were trusted to the military. Besides responding to a clear operative need, this decision aims at putting an end to the substantial disengagement of the military, which was concerned to risk a further decline of its popularity. Unless the political leaders take full responsibility, the military is in fact reluctant to be involved in a war that the population considers to be principally in the interests of the US.

Large scale military operations were hence launched both in the FATA and the NWFP. Some of these operations have already been concluded and have resulted in agreements with the militants (in the Hangu district and in the Khyber tribal agency). The result was a reduction of violence, yet it has not created the conditions necessary for a lasting stabilization of the security. Other operations are still underway (Bajaur agency and Swat district). These are causing a significant number of casualties among civilians, and have forced hundreds of thousands to flee from their homes⁸ to seek shelter in refugee camps which often lack the most basic utilities.

⁵ July 28 in the South Waziristan tribal agency.

⁶ August 12, in a helicopter raid in the Baiaur agency, Abu Saeed al Masri, a.k.a. Mustafa Mohammad Alina was killed along with 17 other militants.

⁷ *Associated Press*, 9 August 9 2008.

⁸ More than 250.000 in the Bajaur agency alone, 40.000 of whom have fled to Afghanistan.

The renewal of military operations has provided terrorist groups with the justification to end peace talks⁹ and they then launched a new campaign of attacks not only in the border areas with Afghanistan but also the country's main cities¹⁰.

The attacks are accompanied by new statements of willingness to enter into negotiations. These are clearly aimed at causing divisions within the government coalition and at frustrating the attempts to agree on the fight against terrorism. This initiative has not yet been successful because the government has rejected Baitullah Mehsud's cease fire offer and banned the TTP, based on the Anti Terrorism Act, and also called for a freeze of its assets. This action seems to indicate a hard-line stance. However, in practice it is ineffective as the TTP does not require banking institutions for its financial movements. In any case to achieve results further measures are required. A positive sign for the government is the recent decision of the *Salarzai* tribe (Bajaur agency) to form a militia of about 4,000 volunteers to fight off the Taliban from their area. On July 19, a *jirga* of 17 tribes in the Orakzai tribal agency promised full support to with the government in case the Taliban attempts to use their territory for attacks on government security forces. However this progress could be neutralized by Islamabad's decision to suspend military action in tribal areas during the Ramadan period. This possibility, which was envisaged to take in consideration the requests of the JUI-F and local parliament, could give the militants the possibility to recuperate their losses, to replenish ammunition stocks, to reorganize themselves and to continue planning future attacks. This leaves the pro-government militias facing the Taliban alone, which could be seen as an abandonment of the tribal leaders who had the courage to stand up for the people in the face of the militants.

During counter insurgency operations, because the army is demoralized and ill prepared military commanders heavily rely on air and artillery fire, with the risk of collateral damage (destruction of buildings not used by militants and loss of civilian life). In fact, up to this point in time the military organization and training was geared towards the conventional threat of neighboring India. According to some experts at least three years are needed to prepare the Pakistani army for effective counter insurgency actions against militants who make use of non conventional tactics (suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices). The level of effectiveness and reliability of the paramilitary forces is even lower (in particular the Frontier Corps, Frontier Constabulary and *Khasadar*) as they are formed primarily by locally recruited elements with an ethnic-tribal and social conditioning. Progress can be made with the help of the US which has prepared specific plans, and has made necessary funds available. Yet the implementation of these plans is delayed due to the strained relationship between the two countries.

At the moment the FATA region is almost entirely controlled by Pakistani Taliban who guarantee protection, shelter, and refuge to the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaida. The military has not been able to protect tribal elders, civil leaders, and other local figures who oppose terrorists. They have been killed, or forced to flee the region (there are about 400,000 refugees in a population of

⁹ On July 17 Baitullah Mehsud ordered the NWFP government to step down within 5 years or be prepared to face the consequences.

¹⁰ The most serious on August 21 in Wah, about 30 km northwest of Islamabad, one of the top cities of defence industries in the countries. Two suicide bombers blew themselves up at the entrance to the Pakistan Ordnance Factory (POF), killing at least 78 people and injuring 100, many gravely.

about 3.5 million)¹¹. It has become evident that the war against terrorism in tribal areas can only succeed as a part of a comprehensive plan encompassing legislative, administrative, economic, and social measures, which would help the FATA to improve its conditions, now characterized as backward and underdeveloped. The region is still ruled by colonial law, the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), introduced in 1872 and revised in 1887 and 1901, which basically has remained intact until today.

The area has always been neglected by the successive regimes, except during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. It was then needed as a gathering place and refuge for the *mujaheddin*, fighting Moscow's troops. The insufficient financial resources made available to the FATA in the federal budget brought about a serious underdevelopment with a per capita income 50-60% below the national level. Consequently, 60-70% of the population lives below the poverty line. Although the area contains significant natural resources which would allow an elevated growth, there are currently no plans for developing these resources. The educational situation is even more serious: the literacy rate is 27% for men and 2.1% for women (compared with 56% and 33% at national level), while religious education in *madrassa*, (generally extremist) is flourishing.

In his government program Prime Minister Gilani had outlined the abrogation of the FCR as an important qualifying point. This elicited perplexity and even open hostility in certain local circles and from religious parties that feared measures imposed on them that did not take into consideration the historical, tribal, and local social background. A commission was established to prepare a draft revision of the FCR, yet its essential points are not yet known. Any decision regarding the FATA must carry substantial support. The political majority and the opposition must work together intelligently and with determination to isolate extremist groups and gain the trust of tribal leaders and the local population. This will be only possible if the plan of action succeed in: increasing the area's standard of living; consolidating the power of representative bodies, so far overshadowed by religious institutions; accelerating social and economic development; improving the level of education and the respect for human rights. Success could be compromised from the start by ideological bias or the desire to follow shortcuts for electoral or political reasons.

The strategy needed for the FATA requires a long period of time and needs to be implemented in phases: first, political and economic measures are necessary to mark a change in the decades of neglect. The measures should bring rapid and concrete results in the areas of social welfare and security. Such a breakthrough could create the circumstances required for more ambitious programs. In the second phase, the Pakistani forces counter insurgency ability should be maximized to successfully face the terrorist threat. And thirdly, a detailed plan of reform is necessary to fully integrate FATA into the federal system, and to promote an enduring and sustainable economic development.

3. The nature and consistency of insurgent groups present in the FATA

In the FATA several groups and formations are active with diverse origins that are all more or less interconnected, even though their common operative projects are sometimes difficult to

¹¹ *The Friday Times*, 8-14 agosto 2008.

identify. The main groups are al-Qaida, the Pakistani Taliban, and the Afghan Taliban. Cells of smaller groups have also been identified, as well as groups which do not hold *jihad* in Afghanistan as their principle objective.

According to US National Intelligence experts al-Qaida is taking advantage of political tensions in Pakistan to strengthen its presence in the areas bordering Afghanistan. From these areas it is thought to be capable of organizing attacks on US territory, especially in the election period. The experts point out that since the beginning of 2006 there has been an increased collaboration between Pakistani militant groups, including those operating in the Jammu and Kashmir, and the network of Osama bin Laden. This alliance is particularly strong in the FATA where al-Qaida has been able to rebuild –, although on a much smaller scale and with much higher risk – the logistic, operative, and command structures that were available in Afghanistan prior to 2001. It is also worth noting that:

- despite the losses, even at commanding levels, al-Qaida has been able to maintain a high operative capacity thanks to a multi-headed command structure that allows the transfer of the leadership of operations to other members in case of death or capture, or promotion of new commanders;
- Osama bin Laden, with the assistance of Ayman al-Zawahiri, continues to direct the terrorist organization and is an inspirational leader on both ideological and operative level, even if, for security reasons, he is not able to follow the details of the operations;
- al-Qaida is preparing cells for attacks against western targets, including the USA. These cells are made up of US and European nationals, and legal residents who have access to the United States without Visa¹².

Currently Osama bin Laden's terrorist network in the Pakistani tribal areas contains a few hundred fighters (according to different sources, less than 500), who are mainly from North Africa or the Middle East. Alongside these fighters, there are groups of militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and Chechens. Their number could still be high and could possibly top 1,000. Their presence has often provoked tensions among the local population and conflict with the Pakistani Taliban.

The tribal areas offered the Afghan Taliban, after its escape from Afghanistan in 2001 and 2002, a safe haven where to establish logistic and training bases and a command center from which it was able to progressively re-launch its battle against the new Afghan government and the foreign army. *Madrassas* and refugee camps near the border supply a stream of volunteers for operations in Afghanistan. Whereas the leading structure of mullah Omar's movement (*Rahbari shura*) is assessed to be in Quetta, Beluchistan, there are operative groups in the FATA that act primarily on a provincial level. Notable among these is the group founded and directed by Jalaluddin Haqqani, a legendary figure in the war against the Soviets, who is presently turning over command to his son, Sirajuddin. From his base in the North Waziristan tribal agency (in the village of Dande Darpa Khel, near Miramshah), Haqqani's militants carry out attacks in an area spanning from the central-eastern provinces of Afghanistan up to Kabul. In the capital the group organized the attacks on the

¹² *Dawn*, August 13 2008.

Serena Hotel (January 14), and against the Indian Embassy (July 7). Although the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaida agree on an ideological and operative level, on many occasions there are notable differences in objectives.

The Pakistani Taliban consist of different groups often of a tribal nature and at times in a state of conflict among themselves. Many are under the banner of the TTP, led by Baitullah Mehsud, who, among the commanders of Pakistani extremist groups, has the tightest ideological link with al-Qaida. Though he swore loyalty to mullah Omar, Mehsud follows his own agenda that, not only supports the *jihād* in Afghanistan, but also promotes the imposition of *Sharia* in Pakistan and the fight against Islamabad and its security forces. Currently the TTP numbers approximately 10,000 - 15,000 militants; a third of them directly commanded by Baitullah Meshud. Other Pakistani Taliban groups, not associated with TTP, are those led by Maulvi Nazir (South Waziristan), Hafiz Gul Bahadur (North Waziristan) and Mangal Bagh Afridi (leader of *Lashkar-i Islam*, active in the Khyber tribal agency).

Finally, in the tribal areas there are also cells of *Jaish-e Mohammad* and *Lashkar-e Taiba*, which are mainly involved in fighting against the Indian forces in Jammu and Kashmir.

4. The role of the ISI: part of the problem instead of the solution

The complicity of the ISI, or of some of its structures, firstly with mullah Omar's Taliban movement, and secondly with Pakistani Taliban groups, is widely discussed and generally accepted as a fact, even if the exact nature and its extent is currently not completely clear. This complicity has historical, ideological, and ethnic roots that go back to the period of Soviet occupation of Afghanistan when General Zia-ul-Haq was able to offer billions of dollars in financial aid, supplied by both the USA and countries of Middle East and Gulf region, to support the *jihād* in Afghanistan and strengthen the Islamitisation of Pakistan. This strategy was carried out by religious parties and movements, which used ISI funding to create a network of refugee camps and *madrassas* in border areas. In those places military training and *mujahidin* indoctrination were provided for the *jihād* against Soviet troops and the government of Kabul.

These ties remained intact after Soviet troops pulled out of Afghanistan (1989) and the fall of Najibullah's pro-communist regime (1992), and they continued in many respects to the present day. The religious extremist movements became an internal and international political instrument to defend Islamabad's interests in Afghanistan and they also play a role in the greater scheme of the strategic conflict with India over the control of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Moreover, these ties have been used to impede the country's democratic reform by weakening its liberal parties.

Even after Musharraf's decision to side with the USA in its war on terror the ISI continued to support the Taliban, in the conviction (as Ahmed Rashid writes), that the US wouldn't stay long in Afghanistan and it was consequently necessary to keep the "Taliban card" in hand to ascertain future influence in Pakistan, and to frustrate the spreading of Indian influence. The Pakistani Defense sector, of which the ISI is an integral part, continues to believe that in case India attacks Afghan territory is of major strategic importance to its forces. For this reason analysts were not

overly surprised by evidence of ISI's involvement in the suicide attack on the Embassy of India in Kabul (July 7), which caused 58 deaths and over 140 injured. According to Open Sources reports, the attack was carried out by a group traced back to Jalaluddin Haqqani, assisted by ISI. The spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry in Islamabad called these accusations "rubbish", while the military spokesperson defined them as "malicious propaganda". The New York Times reported that on July 12, the Vice Director of the CIA, Stephen E. Kappes, arrived in Islamabad with proof that ISI agents provided assistance to certain terrorist groups, specifically those led by Jalaluddin Haqqani.

Afghan and Indian authorities had already denounced the ISI's active role in the attack on the Indian Embassy. In particular, India's National Security Advisor declared (July 12) that his government had "a fair amount of intelligence" regarding the accusation. Reputable western newspapers had already analyzed this hypothesis in great detail. According to them the attack was part of a maneuver of certain factions of the ISI to frustrate the efforts of the new Pakistani government and President Musharraf, to re-establish the influence of the military in the country. The attack was also aimed at sabotaging the progress made with India, the only positive legacy of the former President. Hatred of India and the hope of regaining control of Kashmir have always been Pakistani's strongest cohesion factors. The *jihadists* could partake in this grand scheme by reducing attacks on Pakistani territory in exchange for supporting the ISI in attacks in Afghanistan and India¹³. Furthermore, the Pakistani press reported that during Gilani's state visit to Washington (last week of July), President Bush stressed that USA agencies were hesitant to share information due to the ties that certain sectors of the ISI's entertain with militants.

The ISI has tried to take advantage of these contacts to create division within the Taliban nexus, marginalizing the groups and leaders with close ties to al-Qaida and who are committed to the *jihad* not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan¹⁴. At the moment the success of this strategy appears to be very doubtful. It would allow the ISI on one side to recuperate credibility and influence in the country by guaranteeing greater security, and on the other side to continue to hold the "Taliban card". In this way developments in Afghanistan can keep being influenced and Pakistan's strategic interests being protected, by assuring strategic flexibility in maneuvering armed forces in case of an attack by India.

6. Conclusion

The easy victory of Zardari in the September 6th presidential elections seems to open up new opportunities for the country, accelerating the process of consolidation of democratic institutions.

¹³ *The Times*, July 8.

¹⁴ The "fingerprint" of intelligence groups seems clear in the decision of Maulvi Nazir, Taliban leader in Ahmadzai Wazir's tribe of South Waziristan, and Hafiz Gul Bahadur, Taliban leader in the tribe of Uthmanzai Wazir and the Daur of North Waziristan, both considered filo-governmental, to unify their two groups and start a new "local" Taliban movement for the war in Afghanistan. Gul Bahadur is commander, Maulvi Nazir is the vice and Mufti Abu Haroon is the spokesperson. Given that the tribal area is surrounded on three sides by Mehsud's tribe, the coalition formation aims clearly at challenging the domination of Baitullah Mehsud and his militants. Outreach was made to Haji Namdar (leader of the group *Amir bil Maroof wa Nahi Anir Munkir* of the Khyber agency) and of Shah Sahib (Mohmand agency), but they were recently killed by players linked to Baitullah Mehsud. *Jamestown Foundation (Global Terrorism Analysis)*, July 25 2008.

However, Pakistan finds itself in an extremely difficult situation, and it needs a highly gifted leader in order to face it. At the moment there are doubts whether Zardari has the ability to guide the country towards a future of stability and progress, even though until now he has been able to defend PPP's central role and to keep dialogue open with the main players of the national political scene. The new president's gift to negotiate must immediately be put to use to ensure the government's survival, as it currently does not hold the majority. While keeping the door open to the PML-N he will have to promote the formation of a new coalition that includes the *Muttaida Qaumi Movement* (MQM) and the groups that are forming in the aftermath of the crisis in the *Pakistan Muslim League - Quaid-i-Azam* (PML-Q), the party that supported Musharraf.

Currently the main threat facing the country is the rekindling of the insurgency. National and foreign terrorist groups have taken over a significant area of national territory, setting up their own administration and imposing their own "laws". The reaction of state agencies to this aggression has been completely inadequate, if not complicit. The errors made over the last years by both the military regime and the opposition forces have helped spread the conviction among the population that the war is being wholly fought in the interest of the USA. Therefore the new leadership must demonstrate its capacity to strengthen the state's ability to fight back, lifting the morale of the security forces and it must succeed in convincing the people of Pakistan that it is in their best interest to defeat militant groups. The militants are attempting to impose their extremist vision of state and society by means of violence. In the process the progress made by the country in the last decades will be nullified. The greater the involvement of the population and the political forces, the greater the possibility of victory. Zardari faces the challenging task of balancing expectations of different sides. On one hand there are western governments (above all, the USA) that are concerned about the logistic and operative support that the militant groups operating in the tribal region offer the insurgency in Afghanistan; on the other hand there are the elements in the coalition that are against the military's involvement in actions against militants. In any case Pakistani authorities must not give in to pressures to make agreements with terrorist groups that allow them to manoeuvre in Afghan territory in exchange for the promise to end the campaign of attacks in Pakistan. Terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan mutually fuel each other, as they share the common goal of establishing an Islamic state based on the most rigid interpretation of *Sharia* and on the denial of principles of democracy and liberty.

Western governments could play an important role in the stabilisation of the political and security situation in Pakistan. Over the last few years they have observed the evolution of the country's situation and the recent re-launch of the progress of democracy with concern and with hope. It is advisable that in the future western countries, especially the United States, avoid making the errors of the past in offering the country substantial funding without monitoring how the funds are being used. The necessity of giving proper support to the civil sector compared to the military one was also clearly underestimated. In this framework it is interesting to note the US Congress' proposal of a bi-partisan law to triple the non-military funding (to 15 billion dollars in 10 years) and to create Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZ) in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas to free the local population from the influence of extremist groups. There is also progress to be noted in changing the process of military funding, which until now has been largely distributed as

“reimbursements” (perfunctorily justified). In future the funding will be tied to the successes achieved in the war against terrorism.

Nonetheless the assumption that Islamabad will blindly follow US orders should not be made. The population that already has strong anti-US sentiment, would consider that unjustifiable. Instead, it is important to exercise patience in the understanding that things take longer in Pakistan politics, just as the characteristic values of the culture differ from other countries. Any action, such as air and ground attacks in the tribal areas, that could undermine the authority of local institutions should be avoided. Victory over al-Qaida and the Taliban in Pakistan can only be achieved in cooperation with Islamabad’s leaders, who must assume their responsibilities. Unilateral attacks leading to the neutralisation of non strategic targets might give tactical advantages, but at the same time they would add to the climate of mistrust between the governments. The Pakistani government cannot be passive without losing credibility and authority when faced with a violation of its territory and sovereignty. The leaders in Washington who hope for unilateral actions of US forces on Pakistani territory must keep in mind that Pakistan’s cooperation was required for the military operations that caused the fall of the Taliban regime. Logistic support for foreign troops in Afghanistan depends on the accessibility and the security of the roads in Pakistan that connect the Indian Ocean’s ports with the mountain passes of Chaman and Torkham. Islamabad has great power in helping or hindering ISAF and Enduring Freedom’s activities in Afghanistan.