

# Nuclear safety, nuclear stability and nuclear strategy in Pakistan

## *A concise report of a visit by Landau Network - Centro Volta<sup>1</sup>*

### 1. Introduction

Landau Network, an Arms Control Italian institution that is regularly been consulted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, proposed to organize a visit to Pakistan, with the purpose of having a better understanding of the security problems concerning nuclear weapons and nuclear material, of the situation of nuclear scientists and experts, of the development of Pakistani nuclear strategy, of Pakistani approach to arms control and confidence building measures. More generally the idea was to have a better understanding of the prospects of nuclear disarmament in the Indian subcontinent. After September 11<sup>th</sup> Pakistan has been at the epicenter of the antiterrorist campaign and collaborated with the antiterrorist coalition. But the impact of the Afghan war has been profound on Pakistan, and such issues such as the presence of radical Islamic movements, the existence of a relevant support for the Talibans inside Pakistan and, at the same time, the continuing confrontation with India may have serious effects on the nuclear situation in Pakistan and in the subcontinent. This is the reason for the timing of this visit.

The visit to Pakistan by Paolo Cotta-Ramusino and Maurizio Martellini of Landau Network was organized as follows. In Islamabad we had meetings (in chronological order) with the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) chaired by Dr. Pervaiz I. Cheema, The Foreign Office, where we were very kindly received by Hon. Abdul Sattar (Foreign Minister) and by Additional Foreign Secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan, the Institute for Regional Studies (IRS), chaired by Brig. Bashir Ahmad, the Institute for Strategic Studies (ISS), chaired by Min. Agha Shahi and directed by Dr. Shireen M. Mazari, the Foundation for Research on International Environment, National Development and Security (FRIENDS), chaired by General Mizra Aslam Beg, the Strategic Plan Division (SPD) of the Pakistani Army, where we were kindly received by the Director, General Khalid Kidwai and by Brig. Salik (Head of the Arms Control Division), the Foreign Service Academy Islamabad, with Amb. Niaz A. Naik, the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) directed by Dr. Shahrukh Rafi Khan. One of us (PCR) later had meetings with some journalists in Lahore (Ejaz Haider, Khaled Ahmed, Abbas Rashid). Altogether the total number of people that participated in the meetings and talked to us was between 70 and 80.

First of all we thank very much all our Pakistani friends for being so generous with their time and their efforts to make us understand the situation there. In particular we appreciated very much the fact that Foreign Minister Hon. A. Sattar and Gen.K. Kidwai took time from their very busy schedule to talk with us.

Prof. A. Nayyar of SDPI and of Quaid-i-Azam University and Ms. Ayesha Inayat of SDPI, organized all our meetings and helped us to find our way in Islamabad. We are very happy to express to them our sincere gratitude. Also special thanks to Prof. Pervez Hoodbhoy and Dr. Ejaz Haider

This visit has been suggested and encouraged by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and particularly by Secretary General Amb. G. Baldocci and by the General Direction for Asia and Oceania, that supported also part of the expenses. We want to thank in particular Min. I. Di Pace, Min. R. Miniero and Counc. R. Rosso. This report is part of a comprehensive case study for the General Direction of Political Affairs; warm thanks go to Counc. A. Cevese and to Counc. G. Iannuzzi. Discussions with the Head of the Policy and Analysis Planning Unit, Min. R. Toscano have been very useful.

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The Department of Physics of the University of Milan supported the expenses of one of us (PCR) and this support is gratefully acknowledged. We thank also the Italian Embassy, and particularly Amb. G. De Ceglie and Counc. G. Cutillo for their help in Islamabad.

Few words of caution about this report are needed. We tried to report here some of what we learned from the meetings and from talking informally with people. When we use quotation marks we intend to reproduce the precise meaning, if not the exact letter of what has been said. In the comments we try to distinguish our personal opinion from the general feeling we got from the discussions. We hope to have made this clear. We will gladly accept comments and corrections, being understood that the responsibility for the mistakes is only our own.

## **2. Pakistani Motivation for Acquisition and Retention of Nuclear Weapons**

In all the meetings we participated in, it has been repeatedly stressed that the motivations for Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons had to do almost exclusively with India's analogous decision and with the fact that India represents a security threat to Pakistan. Motivations based on prestige have been mentioned and denied, even though, on this point, we maintain legitimate doubts.

It has been also stressed that India's nuclear program predates the corresponding Pakistani program. India established the Atomic Energy Commission in 1948 while Pakistan established PAEC (Pakistani Atomic Energy Commission) in 1956, India tested a nuclear device in 1974, while Pakistan became nuclear capable around 1984 and tested its nuclear weapon only 17 days after India began its most recent series of nuclear tests in May 1998. It has also been said in the ISS meeting that Pakistan was ready to test years before 1998 (1984 has been suggested in the ISS meeting and 1987 has been written in a 1994-paper by Former Chief of the Army Staff, General Aslam Beg <sup>2</sup>), but refrained from doing so. Additional Foreign Secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan added in this respect that the international community underestimated the nuclear capabilities of Pakistan and believed that Pakistan, immediately after the Indian tests of May 1998, was not ready for its own nuclear test. As for the history of Pakistani nuclear program, it has been pointed out by Gen. Aslam Beg that by 1989 Pakistan had 6 devices and by 1991 it had 15 delivery systems, that the costs of the nuclear program in the period 75-89 has been of the order of 200 ml. US \$. We recall that foreign assistance to Pakistan came, among other things, from a 137 MW Canadian power reactor, US maraging steel for encasing uranium cores, Flash X rays machines from the Swedish firm Scandiflash, computers from Norway and a complex assistance from China<sup>3</sup>

Opposition to Pakistani nuclear program seems rather weak, at least by looking at the group of people we met. In fact some previous opponents of the nuclear program seems now to accept and justify the decision of testing. As an example, at the meeting with IRS, the director Brig.(ret) Ahmad told us that he initially disagreed with the nuclear program, but he feels now that nuclear testing was a necessary step, and that further testing is not necessary any more. The argument here was that Pakistan had to show India and the rest of the world that it was able to match India's nuclear capabilities. This last sentence was essentially agreed upon by most people we met.

There are of course people who believe that Pakistan (as well as India) should give up nuclear weapons as they require costly programs and provide basically no extra security. But a unilateral Pakistani nuclear disarmament was generally rejected and not even really discussed, since it appeared to lay outside the political reality<sup>4</sup>. A different question was whether Pakistan could abandon nuclear weapons jointly with India. The attitude here was more open; only once during our stay in Pakistan, one expert stated that Pakistan should retain nuclear weapons even if India decides to give up its nuclear capability. This opinion by ISS Director Dr. Shireen Mazari, was motivated on the basis of "security", but there was no further elaboration. On the contrary during our discussion with Gen. Kidwai of SPD it was stated that if India renounces the possession of Nuclear Weapons, Pakistan will follow suit.

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<sup>2</sup> Gen. Aslam Beg, *Pakistan Nuclear Propriety*, National Security, FRIENDS (2000)

<sup>3</sup> See K. Matinuddin *The Nuclearization of South Asia*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2002 and, as far as China assistance is concerned, see the Monterey Institute for International Studies, Center for Nonproliferation Studies database.

<sup>4</sup> This is consistent with the survey of Pakistani public opinion discussed in S.Ahmed & D. Cortright (eds) *Pakistan and the Bomb*, University of Notre Dame Press (1998).

The general attitude in dealing with India has been that Pakistan is interested in discussing with India issues related to nuclear weapons and other security matters, but it will not do so if the issue of Kashmir will be intentionally excluded from the agenda (see below the point "Kashmir"). Anyway, the prospect of removing nuclear weapons from the subcontinent did not appear a realistic perspective for the foreseeable future.

One of the questions that were discussed few times was whether the Pakistani nuclear capability had to be seen as an *Islamic Bomb*. This point of view has been generally referred to be a prejudice/misconception present in the West and particularly in Israel. It has been pointed out few times that no Islamic alliance centred around Pakistani nuclear capability has been established or even proposed. Pakistani nuclear weapons are not seen as a nuclear guarantee by any other state (Islamic or not Islamic). Furthermore no support for Pakistan has been expressed by Islamic countries when sanctions were in force after the nuclear tests of May 1998. Finally Pakistan did not commit itself to the nuclear defence of any other country, be it Islamic or not Islamic. Leaving the issue of the Islamic bomb aside, there are nevertheless concerns relating the nuclear infrastructure and the nuclear experts with the spread of Islamic radicalism in Pakistan. These problems will be addressed separately below.

### 3. Nuclear Control and Nuclear Structure

None of the people we discussed with had any doubt that nuclear materials and bombs are under tight control. There is a general agreement that no leak has ever been reported for any quantity (even grams) of Pakistani fissile materials. In fact no leak apparently happened, even though "the risk of nuclear proliferation has been in Pakistan for over 15 years" (Add. Secr. R.M Khan). Again there appear to be a general consensus that all nuclear weapons are under strict control, or, to use an expression by Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar, under "ironclad" control.

As a matter of caution, we would like to add that if and when nuclear weapons and nuclear materials are moved around into different locations, this poses a significant extra stress on the security system, requiring a tight control of multiple locations and means of transportation. So security may differ in ordinary times and in times of crisis. For instance reports have been made that after the beginning of US bombing of Afghanistan (different components of) nuclear weapons have been moved to (possibly 6) separate locations of the country<sup>5</sup>. Conjectures were also made about transfers of nuclear weapons through Gilgit in Northern Pakistan. The exact amount of bombs and/or nuclear material was obviously not known by most of the people we met and those who know did not disclose any exact number. As a general reference we can consider the estimates of David Albright who says that the total amount of Pakistani fissile materials is roughly enough to produce 30-50 bombs<sup>6</sup>. Gen Aslam Beg in the FRIENDS meeting made some reference to keeping (in the future) the total number of devices between 75 and 90 just to readdress the conventional balance vis a vis India, that possesses an army three times as big as Pakistan, an air-force five times as big as Pakistan and a navy six times as big as Pakistan. The bombs have been declared by Gen. Musharraf to be in a "disassembled state", meaning probably that the fission core is kept separately from the non nuclear (ignition) components. Nevertheless, according to General Kidwai of SPD, the bombs can be assembled "very quickly". The same General Kidwai stated that Pakistan has "ground and air capability for the delivery of nuclear weapons". This apparently means that bombs/warheads can be delivered by airplanes and/or missiles. Gen. Kidwai said explicitly that nuclear artillery is not part, at the moment, of the Pakistani nuclear programs.

According to the same Gen. Kidwai, there are now no such things as PALs (Permissive Action Links) to prevent unauthorized use of nuclear weapons. It has been pointed out by some participants in the IPRI meeting that keeping the weapons in an unassembled state makes PALs unnecessary. In fact, it has been said, again in the IPRI meeting, that the emplacement of PALs would be needed only if the weapons themselves are assembled and, as a consequence, the emplacement of PALs could be interpreted as a sign that Pakistan is moving towards a quicker nuclear reaction capability. According to Foreign Minister Sattar there was the possibility that a group of Pakistani officials may visit the US to discuss issues concerning such issues as PALs and control of nuclear devices.

There is some grey area here, according to us. PALs do not exist, but, at the same time, weapons can be assembled "very quickly" and so also the reaction in a situation of crisis can be relatively "very quick". This

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<sup>5</sup> See e.g. M. Ijaz & R. J. Woolsey *How secure is Pakistan's Plutonium* The New York Times (Nov. 28. 2001)

<sup>6</sup> David Albright *Securing Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Complex*, Oct. 2001 [www.isis-online/publications/terrorism/stanleypaper.html](http://www.isis-online/publications/terrorism/stanleypaper.html)

raises some important questions about the effective control of nuclear weapons in moments of crisis. This is an important area in which, according to us, international cooperation with nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states could be developed. The impression is that an offer of cooperation to technically improve security and safeguards of nuclear materials and nuclear weapons can be and probably will be positively considered by Pakistan, provided that some obvious conditions are met, such as the protection of classified data and the absence of intrusive activities.

General Kidwai stated further that the safe control of nuclear weapons is guaranteed by a "3-men rule", namely any procedure involving nuclear weapons requires the concurrent decision by 3 persons. This has been contrasted to the 2-men rule that apparently exists in various US nuclear operations. In the US though, multiple devices to prevent unauthorized use are ubiquitous and, most of them, quite sophisticated.

In February 2000 the Strategic Plan Division (SPD) has been established in order to improve the control of nuclear operations. As explained by Gen. Kidwai and Brig. Salik of SPD, the SPD itself acts as a secretariat for the National Command Authority (NCA) headed by the Head of the Government that deals with all aspects of Nuclear weapons. More precisely the NCA is a "military-political-scientific forum" assisting the Head of Government in all nuclear matters. Here follows a brief description of the structure of NCA.

The NCA is divided into two committees the Employment Control Committee (that supervises the employment policy and the possible actual use of nuclear weapons) whose Deputy-chair is the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Development Control Committee that supervises the nuclear development program, whose Deputy Chair is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC). In both committees it is understood that the chairman is the Head of the Government.

Besides the Chairman and the Deputy-chair, the members of the Employment Control Committee are: the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Interior, the CJCSC, the Services Chiefs and the Director of SPD who has the role of Secretary of the Committee. Other people can be invited according to specific needs.

Besides the Chairman and the Deputy-chair, the members of the Development Control Committee are: the Services Chiefs, the Heads of concerned strategic organizations (such as the Scientists), the Director of SPD who has the role of Secretary of the Committee, the Services Strategic Forces (for the operational control).

As the names suggest the Development Control Committee deals specifically with the planning and development of nuclear forces, while the employment Control Committee deals with what can be defined broadly as "nuclear strategy" including targeting policy and the conduct of nuclear operations. The issue of Pakistani nuclear strategy is discussed below as a separate point.

Gen. Kidwai stated that practically all (99%) of the nuclear decisions pertain to the Head of Government and that no "delegation of authority concerning nuclear weapons is planned". After 1998, the management of nuclear weapons, with the establishment of NCA and SPD became a "transparent institutionalised capability". This has also the purpose of "reassuring the world that everything is under control".

The SPD itself has 35 officers<sup>7</sup> and is divided into 4 directorates: 1. Operations and planning, 2. Strategic weapons, 3. Arms Control and Disarmament (headed now by Brig. Salik), 4. C<sup>4</sup>-I<sup>2</sup>-S-R which stands for Command-Control-Communications-Computer-Intelligence-Information-Surveillance-Reconnaissance.

#### **4. Control of Nuclear Scientists and Personnel dealing with Nuclear Weapons**

A delicate question in any organization dealing with nuclear weapons and fissile material concerns the reliability and the trustworthiness of scientists, technicians and military people that have the responsibility of handling the weapons and the fissile material.

Gen. Kidwai reminded us that before 1998 the Pakistani nuclear program has been initiated and handled by few people at the top level. After Pakistan nuclear capability was made public in 1998, the need of creating a controlled, transparent (and presumably much larger) structure became apparent.

We discussed in the SPD meeting the screening and control of personnel. We learned that key people are screened and controlled by 4 agencies (ISI, Military Intelligence, Intelligence Bureau, SPD). Every aspect of

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<sup>7</sup> According to Gen. Kidwai , most officers of SPD are graduated from Quaid-i-Azam University.

each person's life is reportedly controlled, including families and relatives. Such screenings are repeated every 2 years. We also learned that military people (of lower levels) involved with nuclear operations are professionally selected by ISB (Interservice Selection Bureau) with an average success of 5%, and screened by professional psychiatrists. Top-level people (including scientists) are controlled by their organizations and *not* psychologically screened. In this sense there is no such a thing in Pakistan as an American PRP (Personal Reliability Program).

While we were in Pakistan, there was much debate about two nuclear scientists Sultan Bashiruddin Mehmood and Abdul Majeed that were arrested for alleged cooperation with the Talibans. Gen. Kidwai acknowledged that these arrests created much problems for Pakistan in terms of public image. In all the meetings we participated, there was though a general consensus that these scientists did not have (at least recently) direct responsibilities in the nuclear program. This is not the same as saying that they were incompetent in nuclear matters, as has been reminded to us by some physicists.

A key issue surfaced here especially during our private discussions with our colleagues physicists. There is a large sector of physics graduated and physics scholars that are involved in the nuclear program, at various levels of responsibility. For the classes of Quaid-e-Asam University, in some specific years, the majority, if not the totality, of the students graduated in physics ended up in the nuclear program. Political and religious attitudes in the Pakistani scientific community are certainly diversified, but there is a growing influence of Islamic radicalism. This influence needs not to be dominant in the scientific community to create problems. It is enough that few people with some critical knowledge decide to help some terrorist organization to build even a crude nuclear device. As an example we were told about scientists with experience in cold implosion (implosion of spheres possibly of  $U^{238}$  that will not create a nuclear detonation). A physicist with this experience will be very useful (possibly essential) in preparing a plutonium implosion bomb for any organization/state that illegally acquired plutonium from anywhere. (e.g. originating from the former Soviet Union). And there are physicists with this kind of experience, having political attitudes bordering to Islamic radicalism, which could in principle answer yes to a request of help from a radical organization.

In conclusion it seemed to us that the risks of nuclear proliferation in Pakistan may be more significantly linked to the acquired nuclear expertise combined with pro-radical political attitudes, than with the actual risk of leakage of fissile material or of nuclear weapons (at least at the present quantitative level of material and weapons ). This is the conclusion that was suggested to us by some key physicists, even though it should be pointed out that many people in the various meetings tried to reassure us that no scientist will be in position to work for a non-state organization in the development of nuclear weapons. There appeared to be anyway a general consensus that the international community should keep increasing the level of the security of all nuclear infrastructures worldwide.

## 5. Pakistani Nuclear Strategy

It is well known that Pakistan does not have a "No First Use Policy"<sup>8</sup>. Pakistani nuclear weapons will be used, according to Gen. Kidwai, only "if the very existence of Pakistan as a state is at stake". This has been detailed by Gen. Kidwai as follows:

"Nuclear weapons are aimed solely at India. In case that deterrence fails, they will be used if

- a. India attacks Pakistan and conquers a large part of its territory (space threshold)
- b. India destroys a large part either of its land or air forces (military threshold)
- c. India proceeds to the economic strangling of Pakistan (economic strangling)<sup>9</sup>
- d. India pushes Pakistan into political destabilization or creates a large scale internal subversion in Pakistan (domestic destabilization)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In the ISS meeting the *no first use policy* has been defined as "totally illogic" by one participant

<sup>9</sup> Examples of economic strangling of Pakistan included a naval blockade and the stopping of the waters of the Indus river

<sup>10</sup> The political destabilization and the internal subversion scenarios are considered as distinct possibilities.

We in turn asked Gen. Kidwai if he did not think that the above conditions for the use of nuclear weapons were at the same time too broad and too vaguely defined and how he considered the risk of inadvertent nuclear conflict in the subcontinent. The answer has been that there will be no risk of nuclear conflict assuming “rational decision making” by the interested parties. The example of the cold war, when no nuclear conflict was initiated, has been quoted few times to support the idea that India - and Pakistan - will stay clear of the nuclear threshold and restrain from an aggressive behavior that could trigger a nuclear reaction. Asked if Pakistan has prepared something like a ladder of nuclear escalation, Gen. Kidwai answered that of course there were options available in the nuclear response, but he re-emphasized few times that nuclear war will not happen since India and, for that matter, Pakistan will avoid getting close to the nuclear threshold. Also there has been no discussion about the possible consequences of Pakistan nuclear attack on India, namely on the effects of Indian nuclear retaliation. This possibility has been discarded again on the basis of the fact that rational decision making will keep both countries away from the nuclear brink. Anyway, Pakistan does not intend to develop (and make public) for the time being, a “nuclear doctrine” in a fashion analog to the nuclear doctrine considered in India

Let us add now a brief comment of ours: it seems that the combination of the diversity and broadness of the motivations that may justify the use of nuclear weapons, on one side, and the use of the nuclear threat to enforce a rational decision making, i.e. a not too aggressive behavior, by the opponent, on the other side, is suggesting a vision of the type *doomsday machine* (to use a well known expression by H. Kahn) for Pakistani nuclear weapons, that is not reassuring. It is also clear that nuclear weapons are perceived in Pakistan as an instrument to countervail a manifest conventional inferiority<sup>11</sup> vis a vis the Indian military force. Presumably Pakistan feels or will feel compelled to enlarge and diversify its nuclear arsenal so to increase the nuclear options<sup>12</sup> and make the threat of nuclear retaliation more credible. If this diversification will move Pakistan away from a doomsday machine vision, it will also increase the likelihood of the use of nuclear weapons in a situation of crisis. Thus the Indian subcontinent may follow on a reduced scale (but not necessarily on a reduced risk) the pattern of the US-USSR nuclear race during the cold war. The alternatives may come from dialogue and the development of arms control negotiations directly between India and Pakistan on one side and from some kind of international constraint and pressure on the two nuclear programs in the subcontinent, on the other side.

In the IPRI meeting it has been pointed out that public discussion on nuclear strategy and, more generally, on all things pertaining to nuclear weapons, is scarce. The motivation for this has been directly ascribed to the existence of a military regime. The perception has been also expressed that the military regime is also responsible for the strict control over nuclear assets and nuclear scientists and for the fact that there has been no loss of either material or scientists.

## 6. Pakistan and Arms Control

Nobody denied that Pakistan is in principle interested in the broad spectrum of arms control initiatives (be them local or general). Let us have a quick review of the various arms control issues that have been mentioned or discussed. We express here just the general agreed position that surfaced in the meetings and not necessarily the official Government position.

a. *CTBT*

The CTBT has been killed by the US. Nevertheless if India agrees to sign it, Pakistan will follow suit. Pakistan does not intend, for the time being, to restart nuclear testing.

b. *NPT*

Pakistan is interested in keeping some basic provisions of NPT (such as safeguards), but will not accept to adhere to a discriminatory regime.

c. *FMCT*

Pakistan agrees to a ban of production of fissile material not limited to weapon-grade material

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<sup>11</sup> As a general reference, let us recall that NATO doctrine of extended deterrence in the cold war period, made constant reference to the possible use of nuclear weapons to countervail conventional inferiority vis a vis the Warsaw Pact military forces and refused to issue any no first use declaration (and still does it). Pakistani position is tuned along these lines.

<sup>12</sup> In the IPRI meeting an explicit reference to the need for Pakistan to acquire a *second strike capability* has been made.

d. *CBMs*

Pakistan is interested in developing CBMs with India. Reference has been made (by Gen Kidwai) to missile test notifications and to the fact that Pakistan did notify India, while the contrary has not been always true.

e. *NWFZ*

Has been proposed by Pakistan in 1974, with no success.

f. *Missile Proliferation and BMD*

Pakistan will not transfer missile technology to other states following MTCR criteria. No discussion has been made about transfer of missile technology to Pakistan. A question in this sense by us got the answer that Pakistani missile production is indigenous. On BMD, Pakistan is seriously concerned about possible acquisition by India of BMD technology.

## 7. Kashmir

The Kashmir situation is at the core of India-Pakistan relations. According to Add. Foreign Secretary R.M. Khan, the main concern of the Foreign Office are Kashmir, Security and Terrorism (in that order) Both Add. Secretary R.M. Khan and Gen Kidwai stressed that "any solution that will be acceptable to Kashmiri people will be acceptable to Pakistan". This is reportedly the official Pakistani position, as expressed by Gen. Musharraf.

The Kashmir issue is not what motivated Pakistani nuclear weapons, according to Add. Secretary R.M. Khan, but still being Kashmir at the center of India-Pakistani dispute and being India the main security threat, as perceived by Pakistan, it is true that any shift in the Kashmir issue, either positive or negative, will affect substantially the security and the nuclear stability of the subcontinent.

We heard (e.g. from Add. Foreign Sec. Khan) that Pakistan is interested in discussing with India on Kashmir and other issues, with no preconditions. In particular Pakistan is prepared to discuss issues of nuclear safety and stability. But Pakistan will not accept to open a discussion table with India that will intentionally exclude Kashmir. In Pakistan, Kashmir is seen as an outstanding problem, a proof that "the agenda of partition with India has not yet been completed" (as said by Gen. Kidwai).

Let us recall that Kashmir is a very emotional issue for Pakistan (as is for India). It is a direct reminder of the tragically painful separation between India and Pakistan, it brings with it all the tensions that are generally associated to regions that are forcibly divided in two parts with no possible communication, it triggers national pride and national hostility towards the opponent. It is an issue of religious identity where the strong Islamic identity of Pakistan has to deal with the fact that the Islamic majority of Kashmir is under Indian rule. This help explaining the level of political support that even extremist groups can obtain in Pakistan. Supporting insurgents in Kashmir has been for the past Pakistani governments a relatively convenient position in terms of domestic policy, but a dangerously and risky one in terms of confrontation with India. Containing extremist groups (such as Lashkar-e-Taiba) and radical religious organizations, has been on the contrary objectively not an easy task for Pakistani governments and, over all, a task, up to recent times, seldom undertook. The situation did not become better after the nuclearization of both India and Pakistan. In fact the dramatic consequences of a nuclear confrontation and the belief that nuclear weapons will be not used or will be only used as a weapons of last resort (as the rule of rational decision making dictates) may encourage more aggressive postures, as far as conventional confrontation is concerned. So nuclear weapons do not necessarily bring stability at the conventional level, as the Kargil experience<sup>13</sup>, or the more recent confrontation between India and Pakistan, shows. In fact Kashmir may be very well the trigger that may start a nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan<sup>14</sup>

There has been little discussion in our meetings on the necessary concrete steps that would allow a better relation with India and hence a return to the spirit and the letter of the Lahore declaration, but the general feeling is that this return is considered necessary. The impression we got also was that international initiatives aimed at resurrecting a serious dialogue between India and Pakistan on nuclear stability, Kashmir and other contentious issues between the two countries would be welcomed at least on the Pakistani side.

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<sup>13</sup> See e.g. W.P.S.Sidhu: *Nuclearization of South Asia :The Kargill experience*, in USPID, *New Challenges in the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction* (proceedings Castiglione Conference 1999)

<sup>14</sup> On the risks of nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan see *India, Pakistan and the Bomb* by M. V. Ramana and A. H. Nayyar in *Scientific American* Dec. 2001

## 8. Islamic Radicalism and Terrorism

Inevitably in many of our discussions we dealt with the spread of Islamic radicalism in Pakistan. The concerns in this connection were:

1. Fear that radical Islamic movements may destabilize Pakistan and possibly transform Pakistan into the first radical Islamic country possessing nuclear weapons
2. Fear that radical Islamic movements may influence military people and/or scientists dealing with nuclear weapons and fissile materials

In particular we were interested in understanding how our Pakistani colleagues view the impact of the Afghan war and the campaign against Al Qa'ida on the internal political situation of Pakistan.

As for the first question concerning the relation between radical Islam and Pakistan and the risk of Pakistan being "Talibanized" or transformed into a radical Islamic society, some basic data have been reminded to us by many people, including Foreign Minister Sattar and Brig. Ahmad of IRS. The Islamic parties or groups (including Jama'at-i-Islam [Party of Islam], the fractions of Jami'at-i-Ulema-i-Islam [Gathering of Religious Scholars of Islam] and of Jami'at-i-Ulema-i-Pakistan [Gathering of Religious Scholars of Pakistan]) have an electoral consensus of the order of 5-6% with maybe a higher political influence (of the order of 10%) and certainly a lower political representation (few seats) due to the structure of the electoral system. On the role of the madrassas in the education systems and hence in the shaping of the society, we have been reminded that there are about 6,500 madrassas in Pakistan. Children who go to madrassas (and study the Qu'ran in Arabic while doing most of the readings in Urdu) belong generally to the lower classes of the population and represent no more than 10-12% of the population of children. Middle class children go to public schools and higher class children go to private schools. Madrassas-educated people do not go in the Army, not even into the lower levels. Moreover Army officers have all received a higher education (and speak English).

It has been stressed that the majority of the Pakistani population is moderate, as far as religious beliefs and practice are concerned. Many are "Sufi-oriented" (Brig. Ahmad, IRS) Still the influence of Islamic radical movements is probably higher than what the above numbers and the above arguments suggest. Gen Zia-Ul-Haq was a devote muslim, trained in Saudi Arabia and heavily supported by the United States. He pushed ahead the process of Islamization of the society, introducing and/or enforcing strong laws aimed at putting the Shari'iah at the center of many regulations and codes of conduct. For example we discussed with Foreign Minister Sattar the well-known blasphemy law that mandates capital punishment for blasphemy offenders. There have been 395 people accused and 134 charged of blasphemy. Actually there 122 pending cases of blasphemy. These people cannot be paroled since the felony they are accused implies capital punishment. There is a laws forbidding bank interests, which is troublesome for the economic system, and, on a less dramatic side, there are laws forbidding eating lunch during Ramadan. More generally the strict adherence to Islamic rules is required by law in many instances and there is hardly political support for repealing these laws. Apparently even the present Government would have difficulties in eliminating them

Religious feeling was and is very high in Pakistan and religion has been seen as the defining cultural and ideological glue of the society. Moreover the contentious relation with India and the religious identification of Pakistan feed each other since 1947. A more secular attitude has a rather limited diffusion in the Pakistani society, one notable exception being made by sectors of the upper class and of the intellectuals. One of the reasons is that, in order to gain ground, a more secular vision of the society should be matched with economic and social opportunities and perspectives, with interaction with other parts of the world. All of this is scarcely available to the bulk of the Pakistani society.

The Afghan war and the antiterrorist campaign brought conflicting results. To start with, a significant number of radical Pakistanis went to Afghanistan to support Al Qa'ida and the Taliban. Possibly hundreds up to one thousand of them died in the Afghan war. Foreign Minister Sattar suggested that these dramatic events gave a fatal blow to the credibility of those radical religious leaders who sent these young people to fight in Afghanistan. But, according to us, it could also be pointed out that the families, friends and coworkers of the many dead people could be very well also upset with a Government that cooperated with the US in the destruction of the Taliban forces and that, apparently, appears to care very little about the destiny of these young (deceived) "freedom fighters".

The Taliban government has been supported by Pakistan in the past for reasons that have to do primarily with the need of having a relatively friendly neighbor on the western border and with the need of protecting communication routes to Central Asia. The official support to the Talibans stopped after September 11<sup>th</sup>, as is well known, but ideologically motivated sympathies were not erased as pointed out e.g. by Zafar N. Jaspal in the FRIENDS meeting<sup>15</sup>.

Again it has been pointed out to us (by Foreign Minister Sattar) that the demonstrations in support of the Taliban were much more modest than what appeared in the western press. On October 8<sup>th</sup>, the peak of pro-Taliban demonstrations was reached with a total of 165,000 demonstrators in the whole Pakistan (of which 30,000 in Karachi, 10,000 in Quetta, 10,000 in Peshawar). The consequence of these data, has been pointed out to us, is that the majority of the population is far from being fanatic about the Talibans. It also true that after September 11<sup>th</sup>, Gen. Musharraf increased the repression of radical Islamic groups and so any open support for the Taliban may endow some risk.

There has been a discussion, of the risk - before and after September 11<sup>th</sup> - for Pakistan to be talibanized<sup>16</sup>, or transformed into a radical Islamic country. Whenever this subject was touched even marginally in the meetings, this possibility has been outrightly rejected: We heard again and again that Pakistan is a responsible country and that would not fall into the trap of Talibanization. In private conversations (*not* with actual or retired Government officials and military) we had at times a different impression. During the Government of Nawaz Sharif there has been a push for further Islamization, some clerics have been very vocal and active in the push for talibanization and there were even high ranking officials reportedly favouring talibanization. A downturn of Pakistan towards a radical Islamic society could possibly have happened then. One impression we got is that such a downturn could be considered as an option by a weak leader in order to contain the opposition and gain support among particularly aggressive sectors of the population.

As a side remark, let us point out that radical Islamic groups may be very aggressive when nuclear capabilities are concerned. Foreign Minister told us that the Jamaat-i-Islam party defined a *traitor* who ever supports the signing of the CTBT by Pakistan.

Given the present position of Gen. Musharraf, radical Islam is now under pressure. The forced retirement of some Generals, the partial disempowerment of ISI, are symptoms of this pressure. But, speaking about the retirement of 3 Generals, Foreign Minister Sattar, emphasized that, due to a change in the organizational structure of the Army, they have been superseded in their normal carrier and, hence, as customary in these cases, they took retirement. In this, Foreign Minister Sattar did not see at all the repression of a political dissent

In conclusion the possibility of a Talibanization of Pakistan seems not to be a real danger now, but opinions vary about the risk in the past and in the future.

Having said that, one should not infer that there is a widespread support for American intervention in Afghanistan and that the status of the relation between Western and the Islamic world is considered to be a positive one<sup>17</sup>. On the contrary, in all the meetings we participated, it has been pointed out, by about everybody, that the relation between the Western and the Islamic world were critical, that the general perception is that Islamic countries are on the "loosing side". The most common expression used was the feeling of being "hurt". Examples of this "being hurt" ranged from Palestine (to which everybody referred to), to Kashmir and to Bosnia. The perception of Pakistan being on the side of the humiliated Islamic countries is reinforced by the difficult economic situation. To use an expression of Foreign Minister Sattar, the general perception is that the "economy is declining in this part of the world".

We now come back to the second question we began this section with, namely the possibility of radical Islam influencing scientists and technicians dealing with nuclear weapons. Much about this has been discussed above (in section 4): in order to have nuclear scientists and technical experts to work for the construction of nuclear weapons for other states or for non-state actors there is no need for Islamic groups to gain full control of Pakistan: much less is needed. One of the question that was widely discussed in various meetings was, in fact, how many people and what kind (and size) of laboratory structures will be necessary to develop

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<sup>15</sup> He also added that [ideologically] dedicated scientists and nuclear weapons could create a "lethal mix"

<sup>16</sup> Reed in this respect the article by Khaled Ahmed in The Friday Times of December 7-13, 2001 *Was Pakistan being Talibanized*

<sup>17</sup> To have a feeling of the degree of anti-western hostility even among intellectuals, see e.g. Pervez Hoodbhoy *Muslims and the West After September 11*, to be published in the proceedings of the 2001 Castiglione Conference

a clandestine nuclear program (*not* supported by a State). Here again opinions were diversified. Some people stressed that possessing fissile materials and good basic knowledge (and on top of that *experience*) would allow a very small group of people to build a crude nuclear device (e.g. of the gun-assembly type). Other people (including some physicists) believed on the contrary that, besides the acquisition of fissile materials, good size laboratories would probably be needed in order to start a primitive clandestine nuclear program.

## 9. A Final Note on Improving Relations between Pakistan and Western Countries

As a final remark, let us start with some considerations by Foreign Minister Sattar on the basic priorities for Pakistan. These are 1. Revival of the Economy, 2. Improvement of Government, 3. Eradication of Corruption.

In fact Minister Sattar added that the elimination of corruption could be considered as the top priority, given the tragic record of previous Pakistani governments (between B. Buttho and N. Sharif about 34 bn. \$ were drained, during ten years, in the corruption vortex). Dealing with these priorities will be anything but easy<sup>18</sup>, different kinds of external help and support will be needed and European countries and the US should take their responsibility

The combination of radical extremism, economic impoverishment -and lack of perspectives-, national humiliation, territorial disputes, critical governmental structures and nuclear weapons is a dangerous cocktail and no western country should feel exempt from taking their shares of responsibility in this part of the world. Western countries should invest here for the sake of guaranteeing peace in a very critical area.

A message that we heard during our meetings and outside them, has been about the importance and the usefulness of keeping contacts (economic, cultural, scientific, also military, etc.) with the rest of the world and particularly with western countries. Moreover contacts and relations with India are plagued by all sorts of disputes and by a deeply sedimented animosity. Pretending that India-Pakistani relations are something that pertains only to the two countries and that they are to be resolved only by them without any cooperation from the outside world could be a shortsighted attitude.

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*Note added on February 11, 2002*

We received few comments about our report coming from Pakistani officials. They do not put in question the content of our report, but still we would like to share them with the readers:

- It has been pointed out to us that the four thresholds considered in section 5, that would trigger a Pakistani nuclear reaction were “purely academic”. The comments go on saying, “These are matters which as elsewhere, are primarily the responsibility of the political leadership of the day. ....The elaborate command and control mechanisms introduced with the establishment of the National Command Authority which is Chaired by the Head of State and assisted by political and civilian leaders ...ensure the highest level of responsibility and due deliberation on all matters of strategic importance”. Still we underline that the four thresholds were explicitly mentioned to us and this has not been denied.
- It has been pointed out that “Pakistani assets are not on hair-trigger status” and that Gen Kidwai did not deny the existence of PALs. The difference here is minor: still to the best of our recollection we were told that only the 3 –men system was in place as a guarantee against unauthorized use. But again we have to remember that weapons are (were) still in an unassembled state.
- The only “factual error” that is ascribed to our report is “the suggestion that even the lives of families and relatives of persons working in sensitive organizations are “controlled” ”. We remember that the screening of families and relatives of people to be included in the nuclear structure was referred to as a part of the security procedures. This would be a common practice in all the nuclear countries.

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<sup>18</sup> Incidentally constitutional changes will probably precede the general elections that are scheduled for autumn 2002