

The Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue
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TARIQ ALI

Editor of "New Left Review"

PAKISTAN

On the Flight Path of American Power

Moderator:

Gudrun Harrer

Senior Editor "Der Standard"

Tuesday | May 12, 2009 | 19.00 h

Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue | Armbrustergasse 15 | 1190 Vienna

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Tariq Ali, writer, journalist and film-maker

Born in Lahore in 1943. He was educated at Oxford University, where he became involved in student politics, in particular with the movement against the war in Vietnam. On graduating he led the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. He owned his own independent television production company, Bandung, which produced programmes for Channel 4 in the UK during the 1980s. He is a regular broadcaster on BBC Radio and contributes articles and journalism to magazines and newspapers including *The Guardian* and the *London Review of Books*. He is editorial director of London publishers *Verso* and is on the board of the *New Left Review*, for whom he is also an editor.

His fiction includes a series of historical novels about Islam: *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992), *The Book of Saladin* (1998), *The Stone Woman* (2000) and *A Sultan in Palermo* (2005). His non-fiction includes 1968: *Marching in the Streets* (1998), a social history of the 1960s. A book of essays, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, was published in 2002. It was followed by *Bush in Babylon: The Recolonisation of Iraq* (2003), *RoughMusic: Blair/Bombs/Baghdad/London/Terror* (2005), *The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power* (2008). His books are republished in several languages.

Gudrun Harrer

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The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power by Tariq Ali
Deutsche Ausgabe: **Pakistan, Ein Staat zwischen Diktatur und Korruption**
Diederichs Verlag, München 2008

"A well-informed, compelling narrative...Ali uses his own encounters with historical figures - Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto...they add an urgent, intimate layer to the narrative." *The Guardian*

"Pakistan is the most dangerous country in the world...Yet most Americans don't realize how much of the Pakistani peril is our own fault. *The Duel* ... should be read for an understanding of, first, what role America has played in creating this dangerous mix and, second, why many Pakistanis see us as responsible for their problems." *The Washington Post*

In cooperation with *Dialog zwischen den Kulturen*.

Gertraud Auer

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I would like to very warmly welcome you Tariq, Gudrun Harrer thank you for moderating this evening. I'm very glad you came in such a great number tonight to listen to Tariq Ali who was here three years ago for the first time. And I'm very grateful to Mr. Gosch from the Dialogue of

Cultures who is our partner in bringing Tariq to Austria. I don't want to steal you more time, I would like to leave the floor to Gudrun for having a short introduction of our guest of tonight and then I think you will enjoy very much Tariq's talk. Thank you.

Gudrun Harrer

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, welcome again, Tariq Ali. I really don't think we have to introduce you here. As Gertraud said you have been here three years ago. But of course everyone knows you, and you see how many came to hear you. Tariq Ali is a writer, a journalist, and a filmmaker. He was born in Lahore in 1943 when it still was British India, educated at Oxford University. And I think you became involved very early in student politics and in politics generally. Tariq Ali comes from a very distinguished, some say feudal family of politicians. But already your father looked for new ways of thinking. Tariq Ali also was engaged as an activist against the Vietnam War, and then began a career as a journalist, writer. He owned his own television channel. He was a filmmaker, regular broadcaster, journalist, and book author. It is common on such occasions of course for a moderator to say that the lecture, that a book, a guest as you, a discussion is timely. But if I say it now all of you know that this is not mere talk, this is not just for being polite. It is simply true. I really don't think Pakistan ever has been as present in Western media as during the last months. At least I do not remember it. Something has changed in the discourse a little bit. When we discussed Afghanistan during the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s Pakistan was always part of that discourse as a country where many strings were pulled and not only because of the Afghani refugees there, the famous Madrassas, but also because Pakistan simply was a major player. Today there is also another side to it. Pakistan sometimes looks like a victim of the war in Afghanistan. Or does it not? We will hear that from you. Tariq Ali said in an interview which I did yesterday that the United States are ready to destabilize Pakistan in order to carry on their failing war in Afghanistan. But who or what exactly is destabilizing Pakistan? Is there really a danger of a new cooperation between Taliban and the so called Al Qaida as also Mr. Obama seems to think and what is exactly the aim of Taliban, Al Qaida and so on? Why do the Americans stick to their war so desperately? Certainly not only for the sake of poor Afghans. So we have to talk also about the geopolitical aspects of all of it. Lots of questions to our guest, to whom I give the floor now.

Tariq Ali

Thank you very much to Gertraud for inviting me here and to Gudrun for her kind words.

The subject of this talk as has been advertized is the subject of my latest book *Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power*. The reason I gave that title is not to make a cheap point but the fact is that Pakistan has been on the flight path of American power ever since the 1950s. And the book is actually an account of US policies in that region which have had a very deep and profound effect on the internal life of Pakistan. It's a book not just about the current situation but also about the history of that country and its tormented relations with the United States which have now reached a climax in some ways. If we start, however, and see what the latest problem is and then we can possibly unravel some of the history.

Pakistan has existed for over 60 years and for half its life it's been ruled by the military. The pattern began in the late 1950s when the United States was fearful that elections might be won by democratic parties which would take Pakistan out of the security bets into which it was trapped or willingly went, whichever way you look at it, or its elite willingly went and a number of political parties were advocating for Pakistan to be a neutral country like India at that time. And in order to prevent the country's first ever general election a military coup d'etat was organized which lasted for ten years, and at the end of that ten years the country broke up. I don't want to go into the details of that breakup. So now you have two countries from what was one, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Many of you will remember that Bangladesh used to be East Pakistan. The reason for that breakup was largely internal. It was the incapacity of the ruling elite, military and civilian, to see that the Bengalis had justified grievances, economic and political. So when they won a majority it was decided to crush them. And there were massacres, tens of thousands of people died. Then the Indians intervened. And that was the end of old Pakistan.

New Pakistan began with some hope, it has to be said, and because there was a politician in power elected by popular votes for the first time who had succeeded in winning large parts of the country on a very radical program of social reforms which he promised would modernize and change the face of the country forever. It was essentially a social democratic program, massive land reforms, health and education systems for the country, etc., things which everyone could agree with, but the poor wanted it desperately. The tragedy is that

this was a politician, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the father of Benazir Bhutto, who I think was the only civilian politician Pakistan has had who had the real possibility of changing the face of that country. It didn't happen. For a variety of reasons he didn't do it. No land reforms were pushed through of any serious sort. No real reforms took place in the urban centers of the country. Education remained a privilege for the wealthy. No health system worth speaking of. What did happen was that some ill fated and badly judged nationalization which alienated the entire local entrepreneurial class who took their money abroad? Pakistan actually gained nothing in that period. And after that when India exploded a nuclear device it was obvious that the Pakistanis would not be long behind. And Bhutto declared in public that we are going to build a nuclear weapon. And if we have to eat grass for a thousand years we will eat this grass but we will get our nuclear weapons. Now everyone knew who would have to eat grass in Pakistan. It certainly wouldn't be the elite. And this panicked the United States. This is no secret now. All the documents are out into the open. And they organized a coup d'etat to get rid of him. Kissinger had warned him at a meeting in Pakistan to stop the nuclear development. Kissinger's words were, if you don't desist on the nuclear question we will make a horrible example out of you. The good doctor was always blunt in his threats. He didn't mince too many words. And that's what they did. A coup d'etat was organized. Bhutto was tried and hanged.

And that left a very deep mark on the country, much more so than even the first coup d'etat because this second big coup d'etat carried out by General Zia Ul Haq brutalized the country's political culture and it coincided with the Soviet entry into Afghanistan. And General Zia suddenly became in the eyes of the West a plucky defender of freedom. And many of the groups who are now plaguing the country, extremist religious groups, were set up officially at that time from above, from within the military to help fight the Jihad in Afghanistan and defeat the Russians. The origin of all these groups dates back to the decision by the United States to use the Pakistani army as usual as a surrogate to fight the war with help from irregulars and to train the Mujaheddin to defeat the Russians. And they did it. It was a brutal war. It was an ugly war. And of course my position at the time was that the Russians made a very big mistake to intervene. I wrote that the week after the Soviet intervention saying that this is going to create a mess in the region from which we won't recover for at least thirty years. Because it was obvious what would happen. It would become a big focal point of the cold war/hot war and the Americans would get their revenge for the defeat in Vietnam and try and inflict a real punishing defeat on the Russians. And Brzezinsky says that's what the plan was, we laid a bear trap and the bear fell into it. But the bear falling into it is one thing. Pakistan's political culture deteriorated very sharply, both in the country and within the military itself. And those ten, eleven years of General Zia's dictatorship was in my opinion the worst years in the country's history, left a very deep mark and we still haven't totally recovered from them.

It's important to understand the genesis of what is going on now. So you have that.

Then you have 9/11. And the Pakistani military is now asked by the United States to overturn the only victory it's won against a foreign enemy because most of the victories of the Pakistani army have been against its own people. This was the first time when they took Kabul using the Taliban. It was the time that they had scored a victory outside the country. And they were now asked to unravel it. And they did unravel it, it has to be said. Musharraf unraveled it. He told the Taliban government not to fight back. They told all the people they were supporting, don't resist the Americans, you'll be killed, which was actually sensible advice from their point of view, it wasn't foolish, and your time will come. And the time came very rapidly when you had a situation in Afghanistan. The Americans in my opinion had a window of opportunity from six to eight months. If they had planned a social reconstruction of the country, rebuilt the country wrecked by long wars, etc. they might have won some support at that time and people might have looked kindly on this business. But by and large it was obvious within six months that wasn't going to happen and the mess became deeper and deeper. The effect of asking Pakistan to unravel this business almost cost Musharraf his life. There were three big attempts on his life because people he'd betrayed and in a sense he had given what the big trust of the Pakistani military had been. The three attempts on his life he was lucky to survive. One of them almost took him off. But he survived. And since then he was allied with the United States but he couldn't do everything they demanded because he is a general, he knows what the military situation is, and he knows what the situation inside the Pakistani military is. So he went as far as he could with the United States, but beyond that it was difficult to go.

Meanwhile what was going on in Afghanistan was that the war was beginning to escalate and the pattern was the same classical pattern you see in all occupations and resistances which goes essentially like this. You have a guerilla resistance force. It hits selected targets. The methods it uses are not so important. It begins to

make life difficult for the occupying power and those who are supporting it. The occupying power decides to hit back. But as long as the resistance continues to function and exist it's a defeat for the occupying power. Even if they carry out some hits and destroy sections of the resistance it's still a victory for the resistance because they don't believe in conventional warfare. But it's a setback for the occupying power. And for the United States the pattern began was very similar as in other wars. Guerillas fire, you get information, this is where they are hiding, you go and bomb the villages where they are hiding. When you bomb the villages you kill lots of innocent people. When you kill innocent people in a culture where the feeling for revenge is very strong, where clan loyalties, family loyalties are very dominant people say we are going to have our revenge. So people from families who have been killed say okay, that's the last straw; we are now going to join the resistance and fight. And so slowly this process has been escalating, so much so that on three occasions even the puppet president brought into power by the United States, Hamid Karzai, pleaded with the United States publicly, please don't kill so many Afghani civilians, because he saw he was getting more and more isolated in that country which he is technically supposed to rule. But once you have the logic of an occupation and you try and maintain it then this is what happens, lots of innocents die. It's happened in previous wars. It's happened in Iraq in the most grotesque way. But in Afghanistan it began to happen. And the size of the resistance grew so that British intelligence reports now indicate that this is no longer the same group that was in power in Afghanistan. It's a neo-Taliban which has added lots and lots more recruits from the Pashtun tribes, and it is essentially fighting for independence. It has become the voice of the Pashtun national movement. Now, once that happens then it becomes virtually impossible to win the war, militarily. And I think every single advisor to Obama, not everyone, but the majority of advisors to Obama are now saying this to him in private, you can't win this war militarily. And it's too late to win the war any other way. That window of opportunity has gone.

So it's a disaster story. And what you do when you confront a disaster like this, if you want to be completely straightforward you have to say okay, we have to devise an exit strategy and pull out. Or if you don't want to accept that this is what's happening you have to blame someone else for all the things you are doing. And the United States, and I have to say the Obama administration, and this was Obama's line even when he was campaigning for the presidency on this particular issue, he said the solution is to send more troops and to tell Pakistan to seal off the Pakistan-Afghan border and to stop the Afghans from coming into Pakistan, and the Pakistani army has to go and if necessary bomb villages on the border, remove people from these regions, and help us actively or there is going to be trouble. Well, the Pakistani army was already beginning to do that but they can't do it in a way in which they completely open up fissures within their own ranks. How could they do that? They are military people. And I know for a fact and all the Western intelligence agencies know it even better than me that lots of soldiers sent to fight on the orders of the United States refuse to open fire on the guerillas. So you would read newspaper reports saying, twenty soldiers captured, fifteen soldiers captured. Captured by whom? By four guerillas, by five guerillas, by a small band, ten people capturing sixty soldiers? Impossible! What was happening? They were shouting in Pashtu or Urdu saying don't kill us, we are fellow Muslims, why are you killing us, we are like you. And soldiers were refusing to open fire. And many junior officers said, we will not go on a second tour of duty to that region again. And this naturally made the Pakistani military high command nervous because they don't want their army to split. If that happens it's a disaster story in that country.

So instead of understanding this, the United States, it seems to me, without thinking about this too carefully has decided that in order to maintain the occupation of Afghanistan they are now going to destabilize Pakistan. So you have grown attacks, you have had bombings of Pakistani villages by the United States, and massive pressure put on the Pakistani military to go and kill people. Now any military when asked to kill its own people by a foreign power will find it difficult to do. Some do it, we know. But it's not an easy thing to do especially if you don't want to do it. And this is now creating a lot of tension. And all this publicity about Pakistan in the American media and Hillary Clinton saying, Pakistan represents the biggest threat to world peace, and all this nonsense, it's pressured. It's designed as propaganda and pressure on the Pakistani military to do what they are told. And it is foolish.

What is the propaganda? Let's analyze it. One that Pakistan is on the verge of collapse. It isn't unless the United States does something very serious and sends in an occupation force into parts of the North-West frontier province. That will then split the Pakistani military. Either the military would fight, or the generals who didn't want to fight would be pushed aside, or lots of soldiers and officers would leave the military, take off their uniforms and fight with their weapons. This is obvious and it's not a big secret either. American experts like Steven Cohen who know the Pakistani army very well say it at the Brookings Institution and

other think tanks. They talk about it publicly, don't do it. But it carries on happening. The second argument is that there is a big danger in Pakistan of the Jihadi groups; Al Qaida is named which I'll come to in a minute, and its allies capturing the nuclear facility of Pakistan. Look, this is so crazy and so stupid, and designed to frighten citizens not in Pakistan, but frighten the citizens in the United States. It's telling stories to frighten the children at home. This is why we are there, it's no longer Afghanistan, it's Pakistan's nuclear thing, what if the Jihadis capture it and blow it up, who? India? Hardly likely. Israel? Hardly likely. What will they do even if they do? But we know that the Pakistani military is half a million strong. None of the Jihadi groups can match even a tiny segment of this army. We know that the nuclear facility is the most heavily guarded facility in Pakistan as it is in every other nuclear state. And we know that four or five top military people are the only people who know the codes as to how to even use the weapons. We know that the United States nuclear experts have been into that facility, and have further strengthened the security, and given Pakistan all the latest equipment they need to make sure no one can use them. So what is this joke about Jihadis capturing? It's like if the Iranians were to say there is a big danger that the Israeli settler on the occupied Westbank are about to capture the Israeli nuclear facility. If Ahmadinejad were to say that people would laugh, and rightly so. Or if someone were to say that born again Christian groups in the United States have found out where the nuclear facility is and they want to capture two missiles, to target who? I don't know-abortion clinics? It's on that level, this argument. It's crazy because it doesn't make any sense at all to use this argument.

Before I go on just one small footnote on this constant conflation of everything in the public mind: Al Qaida-Taliban, Taliban-Al Qaida. Look, if you read all the intelligence reports of Western intelligence people who write publicly and in the United States, serious intelligence people who write, they say that Al Qaida is no longer a threat. They actually write it, saying it's not been able to do anything serious since 9/11. We have captured a lot of them, and by the way they have been captured not by war and occupation but by patient police work carried out in Pakistan by the Pakistani intelligence agency. So it's not a threat anymore. At most people say they've caught between 1.500 and 2.000 members. That is pathetic actually, the figure. It's the size of the Red Brigades in Italy in the 60s and 70s, a bit more than the Baader-Meinhof-Group and allied groups of which Joschka Fischer was a member before becoming German foreign minister. All these things are way exaggerated. So why exaggerate it? You have the Taliban, the neo-Taliban which are now fighting a war on their own. You mix it up with Al Qaida only to confuse your own public because in that part of the world no one believes it. It's a foolish game which should be stopped. And especially intelligence journalists in the United States shouldn't write this nonsense. Some of them don't, it has to be said, and attack it. But quite a lot of the mainstream media in the United States takes it up and it's mimicked by their European lovers. And it's foolish because it just misleads people.

Coming back now to Pakistan and Afghanistan. I've been saying these things what I'm saying to you more or less for ten years. Yesterday there was an article published in a liberal website in the United States called the "Huffington Post". The article was written by Graham Fuller who was the CIA station chief in Kabul, vice-chair of the CIA national intelligence council, someone who knows that region well, who initially used to be a hawk, suggested the most absurd notions for dealing with Afghanistan. He now published an article which has been quoted in the press and which should be reprinted all over Europe so people feel that this is a normal debate. He makes essentially five points. The first point he makes, military force will not win, and more troops will make the situation much worse. Second, the Taliban now represents Pashtun nationalism more than any extremist Wahabi religion or being agents of Saudi Arabia. Third, it's a fantasy to imagine that the Pakistan-Afghan border could ever be sealed. The same things some of us literally have been saying since 2002/03; because for those of you who don't know, this is a border which goes for thousands of miles through mountainous regions. And in some parts of that world literally here is a Pakistani village in the tribal areas, and here is an Afghan village. There is just a tiny space here, that's the border. You can't even mark it because the people who live on both sides of the border speak the same language, share the same culture, intermarry, meet each other regularly, and that has been the way since the British Empire first imposed this border in the 19th century. It's impossible to construct an Israeli fence or an Israeli wall, you can't do it which they are trying to do on the Mexican border and this monstrosity the Israelis built to divide them from the Palestinians. You can't do that. And the CIA guy, I'm glad they've now recognized it. He's been there for some time and he now knows it. The other point he says, I was astonished, he said, a US-Nato withdrawal from Afghanistan is imperative for the stability of the region. And the last point he says is that we have to accept that the US presence in the region is part of the problem, not the solution. This is being said now by not only mainstream people but by serious intelligence people who have been serving in that region. And

why? because that's how they see the situation, and they are right. You can't carry on like this unless you really want to destroy Pakistan and its stability.

Some wilder elements on the shows of the American intelligence agencies come up with throwaway lines occasionally, well, maybe we can create Pashtunistan, unite the Pashtuns of Pakistan with the Pashtuns of Afghanistan, make that one state. Let the Iranians have Eastern Afghanistan and the Central Asian state of ???, split Afghanistan, split Pakistan. Maybe we could split Beluchistan from Pakistan and unite it with Iranian Beluchistan. That would strike a blow against Islamabad and Teheran simultaneously. But you know these are fantasies. You can't behave like that in many parts of the world today. They found that out even in Iraq that they couldn't give the Kurds a sort of protectorate because of the impact that would have on their big ally Turkey next door. And then they withdrew from that argument. For a long time they were planning to make Northern Iraq and Israeli-American protectorate like Jordan essentially. But then they saw the Turks said if you do that we are going to be very, very angry, we are not going to take this lying down. And since Turkey is a pillar of Nato, the Eastern flank they used to call it, now the Eastern flank is in Afghanistan. But before that Turkey used to be the Eastern flank. They retreated on that. And these fantasies about dividing Pakistan and Afghanistan, what do they want to get? If you really want to fulfill your worst prophecies, I say to the Americans when I debate them in that country, then carry on like this because the Jihadis will never capture the Pakistani nuclear business, that is just a joke, but you split the Pakistani army and you create a civil war situation in that country and then all bets are off. No one can predict what's going to happen. So that is the situation.

The last point I make is that these are the external problems in Pakistan. But it would be foolish to pretend that there are no internal problems. And these internal problems go quite deep. And one of the biggest internal problems is that the instability of the Pakistani political order, the continual intervention by the military has not allowed any organic development of that country and its institutions to take place. And it has also encouraged the creation of a political class which is totally venal and corrupt. So we now have two sets of politicians vying for power. And the competition between them is who can make more money when they are in power. And I will be blunt with you. The decision of Benazir Bhutto to hand over her political party to her family just like that, you leave a will in the 21st century saying that my party belongs to my family and my son will succeed me, until my son comes of age the husband will act as the Prince Regent. It was appalling actually and showed how Pakistani politics remain feudalized. But she did it. And that's the reason this guy who the United States is a pliable instrument is suitable as president. They green lighted this business after her death. But he hasn't got an idea in his head. I'm sorry. I say this in Pakistan as well; I'm not just saying it here. It's a tragedy for our country that this guy is the President of Pakistan. Whenever you return to the country the stories you hear of the enormous corruption which is taking place even as we speak. And that is bad enough. But the real problem is that the elite which has developed in Pakistan, the economic and political elite, very closely interrelated and interlinked, has done virtually nothing for this country and its people. People say, how come there are so many religious schools and Madrassas? Well, one reason is that they were encouraged by the Pakistan government and the West when they needed them. But there is another factor that you have a country where there is 60% illiteracy, really, if the truth be told, where you go to a poor peasant household with five, six kids and you're a Mullah, a religious leader, and say you've got five or six children, give me one your boys, we will educate them, we will feed them, we will cloth them. The Jesuits used to say give me the boy and we will show you the man. And these guys say give us a kid and we will feed him. They don't say we will show you a Jihadi. But that is what many of them do. Now, if you're a poor guy you're quite relieved actually that someone is thinking about you. But why the hell doesn't the Pakistani state think about this and create an education system? All the millions and billions that go into the pocket of politicians and big business and the military, a tiny percentage of that could have been used to set up teachers training universities and create a proper education system so that every family in the country had a stake in something and felt that their children would be educated.

When I was researching my book I would go into many different parts of the country and just walk into people's homes and say, what would you like the most? I promise you I'm not exaggerating. I did this in many, many cities. No one ever said to me, we would like more religion. No one. What people said was, we want education for our children, we want running water, and we want electricity which is affordable. Elementary economic demands! And no government in Pakistan has been able to deliver that. And that is a fantastic indictment of these regimes. It doesn't matter which group of politicians or which groups of generals are in charge, no one cares about what happens below. And this is a country now of nearly 180 million people. And that is quite a dangerous situation because the price of wheat has shot up over the last

year. One reason is a lot of wheat has been smuggled into Afghanistan. It is needed to supply bread to the armies and God knows what else. So there is a shortage of wheat, the basic crop in Pakistan. Many people, including middle and lower middle class people, certainly lower middle class people, cannot afford to buy this food anymore. The price of rice is high. And you have a situation which I described in my book which really shocked me. I normally think nothing that happens in that country shocks me. This shocked me; that the UN development statistics say that over the last twenty years the average height of a Pakistani citizen is going down because of malnutrition. They don't have enough food to eat. That's the problem with Pakistan: the total inability of the elite to provide not even an extravagant but a basic social structure for the country and its people to survive and live in peace. Why Western politicians haven't understood this, those who have been dealing with Pakistan primarily, the United States, escapes me.

So it's the combination now of external pressures and internal crises that makes the situation at the moment quite edgy and dangerous. And this is why what Graham Fuller, the former CIA chief in Afghanistan, is saying should be taken very seriously. It's better he says it. I've been saying it since the war began that this is going to make things worse. But when people like him begin to say it it has to be taken seriously by the political leadership in Washington and their allies in Europe because otherwise we will be in very serious trouble.

Thank you.

Harrer

Thank you Tariq for this really very thrilling lecture. We could have heard much more of it. It is very tempting for me now to just continue my interview of yesterday, but I will give the floor also to the audience, but will use my position to ask you the first question. You were mentioning Karzai pleading with the Americans. A few days ago he said in CNN, stop the bombings. Of course nobody takes him seriously, also in Pakistan. Forget what you said now about the ruling class. But even if there would be somebody else would it be possible for the president in Afghanistan, for Zardari to refuse to pursue a different policy. For example, Bill Gates, the American defense minister, said one week ago, we will not send troops to Pakistan. And nobody says my God, what are we talking about? Pakistan is a sovereign country and somebody discusses sending troops there. It is absurd.

Ali

It's absurd. But the thing is when you see pictures of Obama summoning Karzai and Zardari to Washington it reminds you of things, a schoolteacher summoning two boys in his class and saying you have been misbehaving, learn how to behave, or if you go further back a Roman governor summoning people who are not carrying out their orders and saying, behave yourself, why are you not carrying out your orders? That means that is the impression they have of these guys. We put them where they are because the US brokered the deal to get rid of Musharraf and get the Bhutto family back, the result of which is Zardari, unfortunately. And they think that these are people who will do their bidding. And the more Zardari does the bidding of the United States, he is already despised, but he becomes even more unpopular if that is possible. The question is in Pakistan at the moment in terms of the political alternatives to Zardari you have the Muslim League of the Sharif brothers who are also essentially into making money but they have a bit more to them in the sense that they have tried to become traditional politicians. Whether they can deliver anything and speak up for the Pakistanis, all the opinion polls are shying, reflected even in a sort of rather liberal newspapers like "Dawn" an growing anger with the United States for destabilizing the region. And ultimately the question is, when will the army come back. And many people are asking this question. When will the army come back? When the army is there, after five years people get tired and say when will the politicians come back? The politicians have been in power for just over a year and people are already fed up, saying when will the army come back. There is no figure in the country who has the respect of the people as such except the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He is very widely respected. And were he to become President of Pakistan he would speak with real authority because he would speak on behalf of the people. But I don't think there is any chance of that at the moment because with great difficulty they got permission from the US Embassy to let him remain Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. So the notion that he would get permission to become President of Pakistan is not possible. So we have this big problem.

Question

I am the Ambassador of Pakistan here. I don't want this to be a Pakistani affair but let me begin by saying that I do not intend to damage your credibility by saying that what you have said you couldn't have said it

better about Pakistan. I have basically one comment to make and a question to ask because I agree exactly with what you have said, one couldn't disagree with your analysis. My comment is, you talk about the present political system in Pakistan. We are talking about the Pakistani People's Party. Benazir Bhutto died; this was unprecedented, never happened anywhere in the world that you bequeath your party to your family. You are right, I agree with you. But then there was an election and the people voted for the People's Party. And this has been a consistent pattern in Pakistan that the People's Party whenever there is an election, except the second time when Benazir Bhutto lost, when people didn't turn out, 70% of the population didn't come out to vote. And I'm quoting your book on that. And the people have accepted that. You have your view on this thing about President Zardari being very corrupt, people comment about his credibility etc. But the point is people voted for him and he is the President. And we have got to accept that because that is what the people of Pakistan want. Next time there is an election he will be thrown out if he doesn't deliver. My question to you is, you didn't mention why the Americans are there in Afghanistan. You didn't say anything on that. And that is very important. Okay, you gave the analysis which we can agree with. But why are the Americans there? Are they after Al Qaida? Or are they as you said rather comically that they want to break up Beluchistan and they want to do this and they want to do that. Let me give you my take on that which is that the Americans have not forgotten 9/11, and they will never give up unless they are sure that OBL has taken care of. I say this because of two historical situations which we can all refer to. One is when the Americans bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki the war was over. The Japanese were in retreat. McArthur was pushing them back. But the Americans wanted to deliver a lesson to the Japanese; you do not attack my mainland. And they came and bombed those people, 145,000 one time, 35,000 one time. The same is the case with the Iranians. Because of the hostage incident in Teheran the Americans have refused to talk to the Iranians all this time. They don't talk about this thing. But you got to say this thing. That this is the reason, this American pride, how dare you come and do this thing to us. This is my take on it, let's hear your comment to it.

Harrer

I referred to it also in my introduction. Do you also think there is some real geopolitical, China and so on?

Ali

It's very rare for me to have any official in Pakistan agreeing with me in public so I'm delighted. Far from my credibility being damaged I think you should be careful. I'll come to Afghanistan and the United States in a minute. But the point you make about Pakistan that the People's Party was voted for by the people this is absolutely true. I don't disagree with it. People do that in countries where there are certain traditions. And the People's Party is still in the memory of people a party which they think will act on their behalf. This is gradually dying out. And I think we will see this if there is another election soon. But Zardari was elected indirectly. He was not elected in a presidential election which I do not believe he would have won because he is even despised by many people in his own party. But he was elected by the Members of Parliament that had been elected by the people. So it's an indirect election. And in fact the presidency in Pakistan should be constitutionally an ornamental post. It shouldn't have any power at all. It's the Prime Minister who should have the power. And I hope that the Pakistani Parliament will defend its rights and push, cancel all the amendments which were made by military people in the past giving the President more powers than he should have. Either you have a presidential system or a parliamentary system. I don't think we particularly disagree on that that people vote for these parties, but simply because people vote for these parties it doesn't mean that what they do is right. They usually and always let down the people who vote for them

On Afghanistan: Why is the United States there? I think the initial response of the United States, if you look at all the documentation which is now available and more is coming out, and if you even look at Oliver Stone's movie on George Bush that discussion is in there that the first gut response of Bush and Cheney after 9/11 was, let's take out Iraq. So people said to him, including the CIA, but you know, we can't blame Saddam Hussein for the 9/11 attacks. And they said find links between him and Al Qaida which made the whole world laugh because everyone knows the Bathists, whatever else they are, are basically secular and hate religious extremism, and that the countries they build, Syria, Iraq, were like that whatever their other problems. They were then talked out of that and said we can't hit Iraq just yet. But that was the obsession of the Bush administration, to change the regime in Iraq and sort out the Middle East as they put it. But they were finally talked out of doing that. And so the war in Afghanistan, I have characterized it as a war of revenge. The people in that country tolerated Al Qaida there, they hit us, we are going to hit you. But we are living in the 21st century. So you can't just say that. And if you look at what Bush actually said, what were the war aims of the United States in Afghanistan. The war aims as declared by the President the weeks

following 9/11 were the capture of Osama Bin Laden dead or alive. The phrase was used, dead or alive, like in old Western movies. And the second was the removal of the Taliban government and the capture of Mullah Omar who has been giving refuge. The Taliban government was toppled as I explained because of the Pakistani intervention very easily without many problems. And the Northern Alliance and the Americans took the country. But what they said were the major objectives, the capture of Osama Bin Laden and the capture of Mullah Omar, they couldn't achieve. With the entire latest most advanced technological surveillance network they couldn't find Mullah Omar who is blind in one eye, walks with a limp because he was wounded in the war fighting the Russians on behalf of the United States. No one could find him. The last reports we received from American journalists covering the war was that they said, we have talked to people in Afghanistan and they have said that the last sighting of Mullah Omar was he was on a motorbike heading for the desert. You know, it's the sort of script for a Steve McQueen movie. But that is what they said. And Osama disappeared. My own feeling is that even if it was found out that Osama had died, however, if that had happened in the first year who knows what the response would have been. But they don't talk even talk too much about that now. I think they have been trapped by the logic of war and occupation in Afghanistan. We talk about why they did nothing in Afghanistan at a very early stage. It's because it was a side show for the Bush administration. They really wanted Iraq. Even while they were in Afghanistan they were constantly talking about Iraq. They could never put enough troops in Afghanistan because they were planning the war against Iraq. And that's what they did. I don't think Bush and Cheney and that regime cared too much. So that was in terms of their self declared aims in Afghanistan.

The references to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with respect I think it was not revenge in that case. All the evidence now accumulated shows that they wanted to try out the nuclear devices and they wanted to fire a shot across the bows of the enemy that was still in formation, former ally, communism, the Soviet Union. I think Hiroshima and Nagasaki were essentially designed as military shows to say to the Russians this is what we got, so don't try anything crazy. Not that the Russians were in a position to do anything crazy. At that time their country was bleeding from twenty million dead. Hiroshima, Nagasaki was the beginning of the cold war. It wasn't revenge. If they wanted revenge they could have hanged the Emperor of Japan who after all gave the authority to declare war and sanction Pearl Harbor. But they kept him. They didn't destroy the Japanese army. They took a few people away from the top. They took people away from the top in the German army and then reconstituted it very quickly after the Second World War. And in Italy 60% of Mussolini's people were kept on in the army, police, judiciary. The only country in the world where they decided to dissolve the army totally was Iraq. They had never done it before. And later regretted that they had done it because of the mess it created. So I think they don't act simply for motives of revenge. They see how they can use a situation for the overall advantage of their imperial interests. That is how the United States operates.

To the question Gudrun posed. Some have argued, and by some I mean the not very intelligent Dutchman who is the Secretary General of Nato, Mr. Scheffer, he gave a talk at the Brookings Institution. And when some Americans who are all pro-United States, 200%, when a guy at the Brookings Institution said to him, could you explain to us as the Nato Secretary General why we are in Afghanistan, is it to rebuild the country, to transform it, he said no, it's not got anything to do with that. But he said, now that we are here we cannot ignore the fact that the center of the world economy is shifted eastward, that China is the biggest rival we have, and so we are in a country with borders with China, and we have bases in perpetuity here it's a good thing. Now, even if I don't believe that this was authorized by anyone, but he actually said that. And for the Nato Secretary General to say that, what does he think? The Chinese are blind or deaf that they can't hear what you are saying and they are going to let this happen in perpetuity. It's just a joke. So essentially they are scrambling around to find reasons to stay there. But there are no reasons. In my opinion they will have to develop an exit strategy and get out.

Question

I am from Afghanistan. I don't want to comment on the assessment on the internal situation in Pakistan. I think you explained very well the developments in the past and present. But I would like to make only two comments about the Afghan-Pakistan problem. You used the word that Afghanistan is occupied and the war there is a resistance against occupation. I just wanted to draw your attention to the fact that the word occupation in this case may not be the same as it was valid in the case of Russia when it came to Afghanistan. They were saying that Afghanistan was occupied by Russia and the war against was a resistance war, it was true. But the war now is not a war of Afghans against the occupation forces in your terms. It is the war against terror. It is the war against internal problems which are caused in a certain part of

Afghanistan. If you remember that the other parts of Afghanistan, north and west, there is no problem, there is relative calm. But it is only part of Afghanistan where the insurgency from Pakistan has increased in the past and the war has also increased in those parts of Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan is not a resistance against occupation; it is a war against terror which has been repeatedly, particularly by your fellow colleague, Ahmad Rashid... In his both books he has very clearly indicated the role of ISI in supporting the Taliban and insurgency into Afghanistan and thus creating the war in that part of the country. The other thing, you put it very clearly, President Karzai is seeing and asking the Americans to stop bombing Afghans and stop killing civilians. But you didn't quote President Karzai who repeatedly also asked the Americans and Nato forces, please do not search terrorists in Afghanistan, you have to go outside Afghanistan, they are outside, across the border, their headquarters are there and you have to look. And I think if there is any response to this request of President Karzai it is the belated response of the Americans where they have thought and included now Pakistan also in this war and the so called Afghan Pact Agreement which perhaps we are discussing here. My last remark is, you said that the last time we heard from Mullah Omar was several years ago when he was riding a motorbike. But for your information, two weeks ago I saw that there was a very detailed interview led by Nick Robertson with Mullah Omar who explained his ideology and also his program of going into the war and extending the war both in Pakistan and in Afghanistan.

Question

My name is Gottfried Strasser, I'm an aid worker for Hilfswerk Austria, frequently travelling to Pakistan. Why are the lawyers so silent at the moment? Because they played an important role in ousting Musharraf, and as far as I'm informed there hasn't been a big outcry at the moment.

Question

Harald Osel, I'm working for an Austrian oil company. Actually I'm to a certain degree glad to hear that many have problems to fail to understand the reason for the war in Afghanistan. It is to a certain degree completely beyond my understanding that this happens every few decades. The biggest powers in this world are going every few decades to Afghanistan. It was the Soviet Union before and a couple of decades earlier it was Britain. Of course you can say that there are different reasons for these different superpowers. But is there possibly a common denominator? It is really culmination of interest in this Afghanistan by the big powers of the world which is extremely surprising to me. I have a second question. If I imagine myself to be a Pakistani Taliban, some kind of Pashtun tribe leader in the Swat Valley, but of a secular nature, I believe I would not act differently than the Taliban are doing because by establishing the Sharia law they create a kind of independence from Islamabad which is very helpful for their cause of creating their independence in the North-Western frontier. In addition I would get the benefit that the Punjabi soldiers of the Pakistani armies have difficulties to shoot at me. By that I would have brought me in a very good position. Do you think that at the end this could create a situation where there will be a splitting of Pakistan along a religious line, of the more fundamentalist Pakistan and the more secular Pakistan?

Ali

To the gentleman from Afghanistan: We can't get into semantic debates about what is an occupation and what is not an occupation. When you have foreign soldiers from the United States of America and several European countries in a country keeping a government in power which would not exist were they not there then I think you have to describe that as an occupation whatever your views on the government. It could be argued that the German occupation of France wasn't an occupation because the large majority of people initially supported it whether we like it or not. It took the French resistance to get off the ground. But it would be foolish to argue like that because it goes against the reality and against all the factual evidence. And when you quote Hamid Rashid you don't impress me at all because this guy who once was a very serious and independent minded journalist is currently working as an advisor to the American administration. So he writes what he thinks they want to hear which is not good even for that type of journalist. You should try and say things which, if you're a real friend of the United States, tell them the truth instead of what they want to hear. Also he is a very close personal friend of Karzai as the first chapter of his book explains very clearly and regards him as the savior of Afghanistan which is certainly not the opinion of most journalists who have visited that country from different parts of their world regardless of what they think about the American intervention in that country. I don't want to go on at you about this. But even Salme Halizahd, the Afghan-American centrally involved with Bush I and Bush II administrations recently wrote an article in the International Herald Tribune saying that Karzai is a disaster. Now this is a guy who implanted him there, he's like a sort of God son. So when he says a thing like that then at least you should take him seriously because he knows what he is doing and he is after all the first US Proconsul in Afghanistan.

It's true what you say about Mullah Omar. I was referring to the first few years after the war. We now know where he is obviously. But if you really believe that was going on is a war against terror you should know that the Obama administration have decided not to use that phrase anymore because it was inaccurate. And the British government likewise and most European countries were already unhappy with that particular phrase. So it's foolish to use it. You don't fight war against terror because if you declare that it's a war against terror you can never win because terrorism as such largely is the propaganda of the deed, carried out by small groups of people. There is a long historic tradition in Europe which goes back to the anarchist terror in the 18th and 19th century, or the last example we see was in the 60s and 70s, in Germany, in Italy, even in Japan, these countries were small groups emerged and carried out acts. And that is what Al Qaida did. In terms of damaging the United States economically or militarily, what was the damage? They actually strengthened the United States ideologically by doing. But they boast about it, they say we hit it. And it was a sensational act. So it was propaganda by the deed, that's all. It's different from writing an article in a newspaper. But its impact is not so dissimilar though of course it was used as such. So I don't agree with you on any of that.

And even if only the Pashtun section of the Afghans want the Americans out which isn't true because when the Americans announced that they were going to have bases in perpetuity there were demonstrations all over Afghanistan against that including in Herat, big demonstrations in Herat. And the Iranians protested quite strongly as well. But the Pashtuns after all, Southern Afghanistan represents a majority of the population, 60% of the country. So if 69% of the country is opposed to foreign armies then, whether you like it or not, they have a right to demand that they get out. And Karzai is so confident of his own support that he still refuses to have Afghans guarding him.

Why are lawyers so silent at the moment? Because their main demand was related to the judiciary. The Pakistani legal profession is not well known for its militancy as is the legal profession elsewhere. Lawyers by and large tend to be cautious, conservative people. And the same is true in Pakistan. It is just the way the Chief Justice was kicked out by General Musharraf that angered large numbers of people and the lawyers started a movement against it. But the Chief Justice has now been rehabilitated, so their particular demand has been won. And these lawyers are not homogenous. They belong to different political parties, different factions, different groups, so they can't behave and operate like a political party.

To the other questions, why do big powers invade Afghanistan with monotonous regularity? You seem to imply that it was a new form of military tourism, but it isn't really, nor is it an attempt to teach the American citizens world geography in which they are notoriously weak. The only time they concentrate on a country other than their own is when the United States is fighting a war against it. But that is not the reason. The British invaded Afghanistan in the 19th century. Because Afghanistan was always a fiercely independent state the British felt that the Afghans were providing aid and arms to some of their people fighting against the British in British controlled India during the British Empire. So they fought two wars. And they didn't win those wars. They carried out a lot of brutal actions, by the way, which is why the Afghans still remember parts of Kabul that were destroyed. The Russians invaded Afghanistan for very particular reasons. The pro-Soviet regime that had come to power in Afghanistan didn't have popular support outside some of the cities. And a rebellion had begun against it, obviously backed by the United States and its allies. But they couldn't control it. And the only way they found of dealing with it was through massive and brutal repression. I remember pictures in the Kabul Times under Herfisol Amin of people who had been killed. And they were saying, these are the enemies of the people. You knew, Pol Pot type rhetoric was used. And the Russians felt that this was damaging their cause and that they would get rid of Herfisol Amin, but they thought about it very hard. They made the wrong mistake. We now have seen the documents of the Politburo. Two meetings of the Soviet Politburo voted unanimously against intervention. Their allies in Kabul were saying: you have to come. They said no, this is a disaster story. Between the second and third meetings of the Politburo something happened which we don't know. That's not part of the military archive. People say that they were fed false information by the United States saying that Herfisol Amin is a CIA agent working for us. Who knows? We don't any of this. Till we have the facts we can't say. But something happened between the second and third meetings where they decided by a majority to go in, with Juri Andropow, the head of the KGB, voting against and advising very strongly against going in. And the rest is history. It was a ten year occupation. The pattern was not dissimilar to what is going on now. It got worse and worse. And you can argue even that some Afghans supported them. It's not that nobody supported them. Some Afghans did, but they were in a majority. To their credit, what the Russians did do which this occupation hasn't done is that

they did actually build a lot of schools, and technical schools, and educate women, etc., but it wasn't enough. The Afghans didn't like being occupied by the Russians. The notion that they didn't like that, but they love being occupied by the Americans because it's the liberation is just people live in a fantasy world.

Could Pakistan split up along religious lines? I think this is very unlikely. In my opinion what has happened in Swat is not a good thing, it's a disaster, it shouldn't have happened. And when news broke in Pakistan of some of the supporters of the people who are very keen on Sharia flogging a woman in public, and that was shown on Pakistan television and in the Pakistan press, there were demonstrations, angry demonstrations all over Pakistan against it, so much so that this group said we didn't do it. They were lying. But they had to deny because the unpopularity of these measures was very great. Historically whenever Pakistanis have been allowed to vote in a general election, less than 10% and usually under 5% have voted for even the moderate religious parties. There is no support for most of this amongst ordinary Pakistani people. I outlined the problems they face and what they would really like. So I don't think there is any chance of a split along religious lines in any case. For people who know the country this business of Wahabi style politics is very new to Pakistan and that region. It comes during and after the Russian intervention in Afghanistan because a lot of Saudi money came in and preachers. But the tradition of Islam in what now constitutes Pakistan is a very soft, Sufi tradition in all the regions, Punjab, Sind, and the Frontier. A Sufi existentialist tradition of religion.

And I give you just one example to make this point. After Musharraf attacked the Red Mosque and destroyed it and said there was an arsenal, just leaving aside the rights and wrongs of that. It was mishandled, badly done, it shouldn't have been allowed to reach that state, whatever. But everyone wrote there is going to be a gigantic backlash. There was one demonstration in Peshawar. The number of people on that demonstration was 1.000. At the same day in the Punjabi city of Kазoor they were celebrating the anniversary of one of our greatest Sufi poets, Baba Bolesha. 30.000 people gathered to mark his anniversary, sing his poems and his songs. And this is a side of Pakistan you rarely read about in the American press. It's very rare to read about that. Or I give you an example of another ongoing struggle which has been won by peasants. In the military farm in Okara, one of the districts in the Punjab, these are farms created during the British period to just grow food for the army, to provide, to meet the needs of the military. These farms are staffed by peasants, and the British did a deal with them that after a hundred years the land will belong to them. The army tried to privatize this and the peasants resisted. This was about five, six years ago. Half the peasants on these lands are Christian peasants, Punjabis, but Christian peasants. They fought, Christians and Muslims, as brothers and their wives collaborated to make it impossible for the military to take that land away from them. I remember at that time saying to various people who make television films, why don't you go and film this struggle, you say this country is about to fall apart, the fundamentalists are taking over, here you have Punjabi Muslim peasants and Punjabi Christian peasants working together to stop the military taking their land away, isn't it wonderful way to demonstrate the diversity of life in that country. No one was interested because people only want to see what they want to see.

Question

I am an Austrian citizen of Iraqi-Arab origin. My relationship to this whole issue is basically through my former graduate of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna. Otherwise I work as a management consultant, so very far away from all of this, but I am an observer. What I missed on your analysis is actually despite of all of this diplomatic love and tenderness that the United States has shown in the last few weeks towards Iran in order to bring them into some sort of a peaceful resolution to the issue, if you are Arab you would feel, you would know that there is an urgent need in the Arab countries, especially if you look at Egypt, you look at the Saudis, to deal with the Iran issue. And you also see in Israel Benjamin Netanyahu going around to Egypt to try to form some sort of a front as we were told to confront the Iranians. How do you think, especially knowing the fact that the Pakistani intelligence service, the ISI, is or will probably be asked along the same lines as we have seen it in Afghanistan to do some service for the Americans or any other Western power before any sort of conflict could take place with Iran if that were to take place? What effect will that have if Iran were to be confronted militarily on Pakistan, especially taking into fact that there is a quiet, prosperous, and vibrant Shiite minority in Pakistan who could be part of some sort of a conflict or escalation?

Question

Karin Kneissl, writer and teacher. My question is regarding the perception of the exit strategy. Quoting Fuller you said the United States is part of the problem and solution. When the United States and Nato in particular will withdraw from Afghanistan, how can they camouflage the whole perception? Because once

again in the last 200 years it has been a group of shepherds that was able to throw out the then important army. Regarding the fact that the political party becomes the family property, this unfortunately is also true for instance for Lebanon. When you think of the PSP and other parties there they belong to certain families, to the Jumblats and whatever. So I think it is not a particularly Pakistani problem. It is a problem of all those countries where we have never seen political parties but feudal groups running parliaments and keeping the parties. So I wouldn't say something specific to Pakistan.

Question

My name is Rao, I'm a US citizen of Indian origin across the border from you from Punjab. In your analysis you seem to be extrapolating the Bush policy to the Obama policy. We voted Bush out and we are proud of that. We are proud that we got rid of him. There is indeed a change. You seem to imply that we are going to carry on the same policies of the Bush administration. The second question, you never mentioned another big player in the area, India. You never even used that once.

Ali

It's nothing personal.

Question

The reason I bring that up is because India has gotten away from the confrontation fact and has focused on the economy, and has reformed itself, and is doing well. So as a positive influence on Pakistan to see India doing well would that have an impact on the development of Pakistan? And finally, you always seem to throw in a few conspiracy theories. You never mentioned the impact of Israel, and APAC, and the neo-cons on US policy.

Ali

By the way, I really avoid conspiracy theories, I never use them, and I dislike the use of conspiracy theories on virtually any subject. So to answer the last question first about APAC and the Israel lobby in the United States this isn't a conspiracy theory, it's a fact. The two very senior US academics, John Mersheimer and Stephen Walt, from the conservative side of American society have written a very strong book on this lobby and its influence on American politics and how it distorts American politics. And there is now at least a debate going on. The last big victory of this lobby was the massive pressure on Obama not to appoint Charles Freeman as one of his intelligence advisors because someone from the lobby found that six months ago, two years ago Charles Freeman has said that the Palestinians should be better treated. So we know the power of this lobby. It's not a big secret and no one even tries to hide it.

But I'll start with your questions first. There are obviously differences between Bush and Obama. I never implied that there weren't. But on Afghanistan and Pakistan Obama has taken up a more aggressive policy than the Bush-Cheney administration. That's just a fact whether you like it or not. He said he was going to do it. Many people thought he was saying this because he was against the Iraq war, he wanted to pull out of Iraq, so he wanted to be muscular on another American war. But it seems that it wasn't simply pre-election demagoguery because the policies they are carrying out now indicate an escalation of the war. There is within the Obama administration and especially between his advisors a very serious debate going on of which what I read out from the CIA guy's article today is an indication, that there are many people at the top of the administration and within the intelligence agencies who are extremely nervous about what they are doing. On this question he is worse so far than Bush. On other matters it's very positive that they are saying they are closing to down Guantanamo. We should feel relieved at that; the fact that torture has become a big point of discussion in American politics. We should feel relieved about that. These are positive things. As far as the American economy is concerned, again there is a continuation of what was done under Bush that Obama has gone for the saver solution of surrounding himself with those very Wallstreet advisors who are partially responsible for this crisis instead of choosing new faces with new ideas who could find ways out of this crisis instead of using a bandage and saying the real problem is, nothing was wrong with the architecture of the neoliberal system, that this is a small accident and we will repair it. That is the attitude in Washington at the moment. And I think it goes much, much deeper than that and what is required is something like the New Deal of the 30s, i.e. you need social democratic ideas and Keynesianism of a radical sort in the United States to lift the country out. And it means thinking ahead and not just spending billions bailing out banks. You can't do that in a country which is already heavily indebted to China and Japan, the two big Far Eastern players.

About India and Pakistan: The reason I didn't go into it because it's a very big issue and I can't deal with it simply now, but just to give you some idea what I feel about it. You may be very happy with shining India and the Indian economy. But more farmers are committing suicide in India than in any other part of South Asia because of the impacts so called shining India is having on them. The fact that three of the largest Indian billionaires went and boast for photographs with Narinder Modi, the semi-fascist Chief Minister of Gujarat state, who actually presided over pogrom of poor Muslims in that country which is now being revealed by numerous enquiry reports, is an indication of the way is going. I don't think it's by any means positive. And lastly there is a great deal of talk about Tibet in the world press and what the Chinese have done in Tibet, and fair enough. But there is very little talk about Kashmir and what goes on there. And in my opinion successive Indian governments over the last decade have created a regime in Kashmir, brutalities, torture, you read the Amnesty International reports, and that problem lies at the heart of relations between India and Pakistan because as long as that question of Kashmir is not sorted out we will not have any demilitarization by the two countries. And certainly the Pakistani military will resist. The big problems in South Asia, Kashmir, the Tamil question in Sri Lanka. And they can only be sorted by collective political agreement to give these regions autonomy within a larger entity whether it's a union like the European Union, South Asian Union, I don't know. But something like that needs to be considered because this can go on endlessly. The Sri Lankan Buddhist regime is killing lots of Tamils now. Lots of civilians are dying. And we don't need to do this. We don't need any more deaths in Kashmir of anyone, either the Kashmiri people, or Indian soldiers, or the Jihadis who used to be infiltrated by Pakistan but which Musharraf did stop. Till these questions are dealt with simply because India is the richest and largest power we can't say, that's fine, carry on doing what you do. It is responsible for some of the mess and it has to accept this responsibility. There has been a big, big shift in Indian political culture over the last fifteen to twenty years, and I think one has to register it. And the treatment of the Muslim minority in India, I will be frank with you. I'm not a religious person and I never have been. But it is a disgrace. And the official report of the Indian government in how the Muslims were treated said that, the Congress government. They said that the treatment of Muslims is appalling, they are discriminated against on any level. On some issues their condition is even worse than the tribal people who live in the tribal areas of India. And this has all become accepted in West as well because of the so called war against terror, a wave of islamophobia. All the extreme right groups in Europe target Muslims, all of them.

And the question which comes to my mind is the following. Given that for the last two decades at least, if not more, we had had endless talk and education, and rightly so, on the Judean side of the Second World War and what the Third Reich did to the Jews which is absolutely correct it should be. But something must be wrong with that education and the way it's carried out if very similar arguments are used against another minority. And if you read in many parts of Europe, not just Germany, even in the British press, what was written about Jewish immigrants in the 20s, and 30s, and 40s you find it very similar to what is being written about Muslims. They have a strange religion, they were funny things on their head when they pray, some of them have long hair, they have strange diets, they pray on Saturdays, not on Sundays, and they are all Bolsheviks. And against the Muslims, the first three are the same, they have funny clothes, they have a funny religion, they are not part of us, they are the enemy within, and they are all terrorists. So Jewish bolshevism becomes Islamic terrorism. And it feeds on the same sort of prejudices today. But people who are totally opposed to what happened in the 30s and 40s during the war can't see the links between the two, and this is frightening. It is not good for European culture because you have now millions of Muslim workers in Europe and you have to understand that mistakes shouldn't be repeated, especially in countries like Italy where Berlusconi's successor could well be Fini in direct line of descent from Benito Mussolini. There has to be some understanding of what is going on. And this islamophobia feeds today.

What is an Israeli general doing in Kashmir for God's sake advising the Indians on counter-insurgency operations? Isn't it enough to do what they are doing to the Palestinians that they want to sort of expand?

Now to other questions: To the lady saying that the only handing over of political things is not restricted to Pakistan. This is of course absolutely true. I was saying that the method in which it was done in Pakistan was very sad for Pakistan, that a political leader has a handwritten will in which the party is officially handed over. That's what happened. In the case of Walid Jumblat, the Druse tribes which support him elected him by acclamation because that is tribal culture in Lebanon. More interesting is the case in the whole of South Asia where you have dynasties and dynastic rule in Bangladesh, in Sri Lanka, and of course in India where the big debate in the Indian press is whether Rahul Gandhi is a better choice or Priyanka Gandhi. I have written a book on the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. My own advice would be that Priyanka is a better choice but I don't

want to interfere in family matters. So it is true that this part of a certain South Asian culture of paying tribute. And in each case it is caused by the death of people in the family. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged by the military. His daughter was given his mantle because the sons were abroad. Ms. Bandaranaike's husband was killed by Buddhist fundamentalist in Sri Lanka, in Ceylon, she became M. Rahman killed in Bangladesh, his wife inherited. So it is linked to that. I know all that. My criticism was of the mechanisms by which the political leadership of a party was treated as retainers essentially. I hope that will change.

Now the big question of US relations with Iran. I have never been convinced by all the rocket rattling that went on over the last five years by Bush and Cheney on Iran. I never believed it would happen and I will tell you why. Whatever the Israelis wanted and their neo-con friends in the Bush administration, they may have wanted all that. And if the Iraq war had been a big success for Bush they might even have, you know what the Israeli ambassador the day after Bagdad fell? The Israeli ambassador to the United States told the New York Times, wonderful, congratulations, now onwards to Damascus and Teheran. Publicly! but the Iraqis began to resist very quickly. Even though it was a minority the resistance began very quickly and soon the Americans were trapped in there. And that also put off people in Iran or Syria who might have been tempted to say come, please liberate us. No one says that now after Iraq has lost a million people and there are two and a half million Iraqi refugees. So whatever the Bush-Cheney gang might have wanted there was one very strong voice in that administration which was a realist voice, and that was the voice of the Pentagon and the American generals who said, attacking in Iran, have you lost your marbles, you want to fight a war on three or four fronts, one in Iran, the Iranians will then break all links on Iraq and will tell their people in Iraq go and kill Americans, they will do the same in Afghanistan, and they will tell Hezbollah to mount offensives in Lebanon. You want to do that? Why? You want our people to die? You can't do it. The Pentagon stopped all this nonsense very rapidly. I wrote a long article for the Guardian at the time pointing out that they couldn't do it. It was just logistically impossible for them to fight a war on four fronts, and the casualty rates would be so high that even though it's not a conscript army America would start to feel the pain. They couldn't do it. And what would the gain of that be for them? Because the United States knows fully well and the Iranians know this but are embarrassed by it that without tacit Iranian support the United States could have taken neither Iraq nor Afghanistan. That's a fact. The Iranians operated on the principle of the enemy of my enemy is my friend, always a bad principle in politics, and told the Americans go in, we are not going to stop you taking Iraq because they knew that ultimately they would also be the beneficiaries as they are. The American take-over of Iraq has made Iran the strongest player in the region. Likewise in Afghanistan. And so the Obama administration which knows all this is now in a sober way getting a balance sheet together and saying we have to do a deal with Teheran. they know it. And whatever the Israelis might say there is no way the Israelis could launch an attack on the nuclear reactors in Iran without the green light from the States. There is no way they will do it. The Israeli standing in the world after Gaza is the lowest it's been for a long, long time. They have done many worse things than Gaza. But for some reason the attack on Gaza affected people much more globally. And there is a big campaign now in the United States, boycott, divests, and sanctions against Israel which is worrying them. They say it, this is a big worry to us because many American campuses are joining this movement. So it is not easy for the Israelis to do it on their own, and the Americans don't want to do it. I don't know whether you saw when Ahmadinejad when he went to the United States the last time he was on two big US television shows which you don't do unless the green light has been given. Larry King on CNN, which was a love feast. Hallo Larry, high Mr. President, how are you. No touch questions at all. And finally Larry King said, you know I've never been to Teheran, could I come? Please come, be our guest, Larry, my home is your home, Larry. And likewise on the Charly Rose show, exactly the same thing happened. They didn't ask him tough questions. The only time he was asked a tough question was Amy Beard on an alternative show by mistake, Amy Goodman's Democracy Now, and Amy said, you talk a lot about being hostile to the United States, but you backed them in Iraq and Afghanistan, and he couldn't reply at all because they weren't expecting this question from an American television interviewer. So as far as Iran is concerned I think it is in the interest of the United States, rational interest of the United States, to do a deal with Iran because who is going to be the caretaker for Iraq? They will need Iran. And they need Iran also if they want to reach an exit solution from Afghanistan. They need Russia, Iran, and Pakistan. These three countries are crucial for them in order to have an exit strategy, a well thought out exit strategy from Afghanistan. And I think Obama does realize this which is why the rhetoric is no longer the same in relation to Iran, and they are not going to go for any adventures there. The Saudis and the Egyptians can say what they want, but the Americans aren't going to change on that.

Question

I am the ambassador of India. I would first like to thank you for keeping up with your reputation. It was a brilliant presentation which we have all come to listen to. I would normally have refrained from talking. But I think you were very unfair and, I have to regret to say, untrue.

Ali

On Kashmir.

Question (Ambassador)

On India, largely a mix of falsehoods, partial truth, and I just tell you.

Ali

That is a serious charge. What's the falsehood?

Question (Ambassador)

You talk about treatment of Muslims in India. I wish there was a grain of truth in what you said. No Indian report we've doctored about discrimination. The only country which guarantees, you have to take things in perspective. The report was a step to understand the problems. It documented the condition. There was no talk in it of discrimination.

Ali

I've read the report.

Question (Ambassador)

Yes, you read the report. There is no discrimination. There is a lot to say. What do the census population figures say about the population of minorities over a period of time in Pakistan? What are the figures about minorities? And how do minorities increase in population in India if there is discrimination? You were not fair, you were untrue. This is not correct. It's not a matter of view. When you say about Kashmir you don't talk about Pakistan's role. You are taking it as self-evident truth; I forget the word you used, but a very derogatory word.

Ali

Brutal repression in Kashmir.

Question (Ambassador)

No. Respect the record of the votes in Kashmir. People have spoken. I don't want to take more time, but I have to point it out.

Ali

It was your duty to point it out.

Harrer

Thank you for your contribution. It's a completely different discussion also now what you started.

Ali

But I must just reply very briefly because it would be an insult to His Excellency if I didn't reply. He has made a serious charge. I wish I had brought that report with me and I would have read out extracts to you because I have written about it. And I will now, because you have said this, put extracts from that report when I get back to London up on my website and people can access it and read it for themselves and judge for themselves. Don't believe me, judge for yourselves. The notion that the population of minorities doesn't rise if they are repressed is a joke. The Palestinian population has been rising too. The demography of Palestinians in Israel has been such that it panicked the Israelis into exporting a lot more Russians because they said if this carries on we could be a minority in Israel. It's not that the repression of Muslims in India is systematic as to that of Palestinians in Israel. But there are some areas in which it has been very bad. And especially the area I mentioned explicitly was Gujarat where terrible crimes were committed.

Question (Ambassador)

That was an incident, it's not repression. Why don't you talk about constitutional guarantees? That's the law.

Ali

The constitutional guarantees were also given to Kashmir one day. They have been largely respected. But one guarantee that was made by Nehru, before his death he sent the Kashmiri leadership Sheikh Abdallah on a mission to Pakistan which was do or deal, we can't carry on like this, see what a deal is acceptable which is a very honorable thing to do. He died when Sheikh Abdullah was in Pakistan. But essentially the big question is that whether or not partition should have happened is a separate question, but once it's going to happen and all the Muslim majority areas in India are allowed a vote on whether they want to be with Pakistan or with India, the right of the Kashmiri people to determine that, and this was not a tiny province or a very small princely state, has been denied even though Pandaji himself said that the Kashmiri people would be allowed to determine that future. And now ...

Question (Ambassador)

You are completely wrong.

Harrer

Now I take over. We will ask Ms. Auer to organize a next panel discussion on Kashmir.

Ali

Let's have a proper discussion on this.

Harrer

We cannot do it now. I thank the audience very much for the patience. We are much over time. You were a wonderful audience. Thank you and good evening.