Pakistan at the Crossroads

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The Islamic Republic of Pakistan (IRP) – one of the largest Muslim states (the fifth largest in the world) and the only one that has nuclear weapons – is currently going through what is probably the most difficult period in its history. A combination of the growing terrorist threat, fueled by radical Islamism, Talibanization, ethnic separatism, and financial and economic difficulties has caused a deep, countrywide crisis.

Western experts and journalists like to make categorical judgments, declaring Pakistan "a failed state." Nevertheless, for all its problems * Pakistan still has the potential to consolidate, reform society, and defeat the extremists. Needless to say, this requires a clear and adequate understanding of the woes that have befallen the country. The most serious ones include the enforcement of Islamic practices in northwestern parts of the country on the border with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and the establishment of Pakistani and Afghan Taliban bases there; the invigoration of extremist activities in the east; the spread of the terrorist threat from Pakistan along the regional perimeter (Central Asia, China, and Iran); the spread of drug trafficking along the same lines; the weakening of Pakistani state institutions, the intensification of ethnic tensions, and the prospect of the country's disintegration; tension in relations with neighboring countries – Iran and Afghanistan, and the possibility of a conflict with India.

Pakistanis like saying that extremism and terrorism were brought into the country from the outside. Both the Russians, who "started everything" by invading Afghanistan in 1979, and the Americans, who are now unsuccessfully fighting in Afghanistan, are seen as the "real cause" of Pakistan's troubles. Sometimes it is asserted (by state and government

*Pakistan is invariably near the bottom the world's failed states indexes, prepared mainly by U.S. and other Western institutions (see, e.g., a report prepared by the influential U.S. journal Foreign Policy (July-August 2009)

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officials, among others) that terrorism is practiced not by Pakistanis, but by foreign "villains" – Afghans, Uzbeks, Arabs, and even Chechens (Pakistani authorities often claim that Chechens are active members of extremist groups, but have yet to present any evidence to that effect).

If one moves away from time-serving schemes, one will see that the causes of terrorism and extremism in Pakistan should be looked for in the 1980s (not to go too far back in history), when radical Islamist groups were being created and fostered by national special services, especially the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), the largest and the most influential among them, to neutralize Soviet presence in Afghanistan. After the Soviet troops were withdrawn, some Mujahedin units remained in Afghanistan, starting to "divvy up the spoils," and some were redeployed to the Indian flank, to southern Punjab and Azad Kashmir ("free Kashmir" – a part of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir that was placed under Pakistan's control after its independence was proclaimed) to wage jihad against the "evil neighbor." Far from disappearing, the link between these two extremist movements has, quite the contrary, even strengthened since then. [1]

> It seemed as if fate was mocking Moscow and Islamabad's attempts to establish a mutually beneficial partnership, and whenever it started acquiring a more or less concrete form, it would run into trouble.

Militant Islamism "matured" in the 1990s – the time when the Afghan Taliban movement emerged and developed, initially enjoying U.S. support and then passing under the ISI's control. Until 2001, Islamabad provided financial, military, and military and technical assistance to the Taliban, objectively facilitating the spread of religious radicalism and obscurantism in Pakistan. Not surprisingly, thousands of sympathizing Pakistanis went to help their "brothers in faith," when, after September 11, 2001, the United States launched an antiterrorism operation and invaded Afghanistan, while Gen. P. Musharraf's regime (October 1999-February 2008) took Washington's side, becoming its ally – under the threat of U.S. invasion of Pakistan. Their armed units were routed, many of their members were arrested, interned, jailed or sent to Guantanamo, but the Taliban forces and the ideas of Islamic radicalism were not eliminated completely.

As the inconsistency of Washington's Afghan strategy became increasingly obvious, armed Islamist groups redeployed and mobilized their forces. Field commanders were expanding zones of their control in Pakistani border areas, establishing Taliban ways and rules there. They also supported their associates on the other side of the border, setting up channels to provide arms and technical supplies to the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. The flow of illicit drugs started moving across the border in the opposite direction (the so-called southern route), which became the main source of funding for extremist groups in both states.

The Taliban's revival was facilitated not only by U.S. mistakes (the main one being the inability and reluctance to ensure the necessary conditions for an independent and popularly elected government to come to power in Afghanistan), but also by Musharraf's inconsistent counterterrorism policy. Alongside the use of military force, it was geared toward dialogue with extremists, including the signing of "peace" agreements. Such tactics only provided a short-term success, temporarily staving off confrontation with the Taliban. It came in the summer of 2007, following the storming of Islamabad's Red Mosque (heavily armed Islamic militants had holed up there, in the heart of the Pakistani capital). The Taliban opened hostilities across the northwestern region, retaliating with a series of suicide bomb attacks in the country's largest cities.

The moribund military regime managed to clamp down on extremists somewhat, but the "democratic" government that replaced it (as a result of general elections in February 2008) again sought dialogue and reconciliation. Half a year later, under U.S. pressure, combat operations resumed, interspersed with "peace" actions. According to one respected Pakistani political commentator, such tactics only played into the Taliban's hands, enabling them to consolidate their positions in the troubled northwest, creating a parallel power system there. [2]

The Mumbai events in November 2008 once again put the focus on the activities of jihadist organizations (especially Lashkar e Taiba, the largest and the most militant group) and highlighted Islamabad's rather limited readiness to restrict and suppress their activities. At the same time the tension that had developed in its relations with India served as cause for the Pakistani leadership to suspend combat operations in the northwest and even to consider redeploying troops stationed in the area closer to the border with India. That threat was not carried out completely, but the Taliban got a break that lasted almost half a year.

Fighting in the northwest of the country did not resume until late

April 2009 after the failure of yet another "peace deal" (an agreement with Tehreek e Nafaz e Shariat e Mohammadi, an outlawed organization based in the Malakand district), and ended with the restoration of constitutional law and order in the region. However, no matter what successes were achieved, it has to be admitted that the bloodshed and the heavy costs involved in dealing with the subsequent humanitarian crisis (more than 2 mln refugees) could have been avoided if Islamabad right from the outset had not made any concessions to the terrorists.

The root causes of Pakistan's inconsistent policy should be looked for in the "strategic" considerations of its ruling elite "both before and after Musharraf." Thus, some extremist groups or movements were regarded as "useful" in respect to ensuring national security. For example, jihadist organizations, which were carrying out hit and run operations, raids, and terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India, served as a means for exerting pressure on New Delhi. Islamabad "strategists" reasoned more or less as follows: Since India objectively is militarily and economically larger and stronger than Pakistan, the latter has a right to compensate for its vulnerability by secretly using the services of extremist groups.

Afghanistan is another neighbor that has had troubled relations with Pakistan. The Pakistani ruling establishment (mainly the military elite, which was traditionally calling the shots in the Pakistani state) saw the evolution of the Taliban movement in the 1990s and the quasi-state that they had created (the so-called Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) as a convenient opportunity for consolidating its hold in Afghanistan. In so doing, they used the concept of "strategic depth" – that is to say, reliance on Afghanistan purportedly enabled Islamabad to feel more confident and secure in the context of possible conflicts with New Delhi, especially taking into account the nuclear competition between these Asian players. Even now the Pakistanis are reluctant to burn all bridges and do not rule out the possibility of using the Taliban in the future to resume their expansion in Afghanistan. Hence Islamabad's favorite stratagem concerning the acceptability and desirability of dialogue with the "moderate" Taliban – both Afghan and Pakistani.

Pakistani analyst A. Rashid suggests that the attempts by Islamabad – mainly by its army and intelligence top brass – to play the Taliban and jihadist cards is a policy that had the opposite effect to what was intended, undermining statehood and the military, beheading the political elite, and threatening to plunge the entire country into bloodshed. As a result,

the Pakistani military came up against a threat from the monster that it had created. [3]

Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts are weakened by a systemic state crisis. After the February 2008 general elections and President P. Musharraf's resignation in August of the same year, democratic institutions in Pakistan never gained any real weight. As the military elite preferred temporarily to leave the political stage, ceding its place to "civilians," the administrative mechanisms remained the same, just as authoritarian as they had been. [4] A.A. Zardari, the widower of B. Bhutto, a prominent Pakistani state and political figure, the leader of the Pakistan People's Party, who was assassinated in December 2007, became the new president.

B. Bhutto had lived in exile for almost 10 years (at home she, as well as A.A. Zardari, faced corruption charges). Her return in the fall of 2007 was orchestrated by the Americans. "Big Brother" was irritated by the independence of P. Musharraf's military regime, and a plan was devised to alter Pakistan's political map so as to make the Islamabad ruling clique more responsive to outside pressure. It involved a kind of an alliance (Musharraf + Bhutto), which, Washington hoped, would ensure its reliable and complete control over Islamabad. Under the deal, corruption charges against B. Bhutto and her husband were dropped. To that end, P. Musharraf issued a special decree on national reconciliation (whose legitimacy was rather questionable, however). Nevertheless, the plan was unviable due to the fact that two bright and independent political figures (like the two proverbial Russian bears) were unlikely to get along well "in one lair" – each of them would sooner or later have started a power struggle. Reality played a nasty trick on the "political engineers" from the White House. B. Bhutto's assassination placed her widower at the head of the Pakistan People's Party and the country as a whole – a person who is hardly the best possible figure to steer Pakistan out of its acute crisis.

Like P. Musharraf, he started acting over the prime minister's head, putting the government under his direct control. The lawmakers' role remained purely symbolic: MPs do not have any significant influence on political or economic decisions. Unlike P. Musharraf (who had a reputation of a "solid statesman"), A.A. Zardari's ambitions were not backed up with an appropriate reputation either at home (including in his own party) or abroad. He failed to show himself as a politician who could competently steer the ship of the state. The Pakistani government that he led not only failed but did not even attempt to work out an effective reform pro-

gram to overcome economic recession and neutralize extremist elements. [5]

A.A. Zardari mainly succeeded in "court" intrigue, personnel shake-ups at the top, and the elimination of his political opponents. Sometimes that resulted in domestic upheavals, as, for example, in March 2009 (an attempt to put the squeeze on the brothers N. and Sh. Sharif, the leaders of the opposition Muslim League), when an opposition procession marched from Lahore to Islamabad. A state of siege was declared in the capital, and the president eventually was forced to offer concessions to his political opponents.

"Leaderism," characteristic of Pakistan's party system, played a nasty trick on the People's Party, which, after coming to power, has lost a significant share of its former appeal and is now turning into an amorphous, sluggish organism. B. Bhutto was hugely popular and charismatic, supporting the entire party structure. By contrast, her widower's "legitimacy" as leader is questioned by many members of the Pakistan People's Party. His "enthronement" (alongside his young son Bilawal, who became party co-chairman) was an attempt to take advantage of "Bhuttoism" as a party ideology. An alternative platform was not even considered: PPP members only formally regard themselves as social-democrats, but A.A. Zardari obviously lacks experience to rally his associates and ensure national progress.

The state apparatus, which functioned more or less adequately under P. Musharraf, is now unbalanced, largely disorganized, and eroded by corruption, which, to all intents and purposes, is not being fought. The breakdown and disintegration of state mechanisms is there for all to see: Bureaucracy is unable to ensure normal economic activity in the country, power supplies (rolling outages in Pakistan are common practice), administrative control, the legal process, etc. Coordination between various agencies and departments has worsened dramatically.

In this situation, the opposition is not eager to replace the PPP at the helm and assume responsibility for pulling the state out of the abyss of the crisis. N. Sharif's Muslim League, which is rapidly strengthening its influence and gaining political points, has adopted a wait-and-see position, while other opposition groups (for example, clerical parties, such as, for example, Jamaat e Islami) have weakened and divided.

Pakistan's foundations are also being eroded by ethnic contradictions and separatism. Tribes and nationalities based in Baluchistan, the Northwest Frontier Province, and Sindh have always expressed discontent with the fact that federal administrative agencies are dominated by

people from the fourth province, Punjab, the most densely populated and industrially developed. On the practical level, discontent manifests itself in the rise of nationalist sentiments and protests against the "Punjab oppression." In Baluchistan, a number of separatist movements and "fronts" are fighting against the government, using terrorist methods.

As civil power structures degrade and crisis related phenomena deepen, hopes in Pakistan are being pinned on the army, which is seen as the only organized and disciplined part of society. It took less than two years for the pendulum of public sentiments and sympathies to swing from the almost general enthusiasm over the overthrow of the "military dictatorship" (P. Musharraf) in the opposite direction – a striving for a strong government, albeit not democratic, but one capable of ensuring at least some order. Army Chief of Staff Gen. A.P. Kayani (who holds a key military position in Pakistan) is becoming increasingly popular. By acting as a mediator between the A.A. Zardari team and the opposition, he played a significant role in that the "big march" did not lead to mass riots and possibly even armed clashes. A.P. Kayani's popularity further increased as a result of the army's efforts to overcome a humanitarian crisis (more than 2 million displaced persons) caused by the military operation in Malakand. The Pakistani press likes to speculate on the topic, to the effect that sooner or later the army chief of staff will issue a challenge to the civilian president, especially considering that relations between them – for all their formal courtesy – are far from perfect.6

Almost throughout Pakistan's entire history, the army has served as the backbone of the state, its foundation. It has developed into a powerful economic and socio-political corporation largely regulating the country's life. [7] Plenty has been said and written about the omnipotence of the military (the monopolization of key sectors of the national economy and agriculture, control of the financial flow, the fanning of chauvinist sentiments, and the fueling of contradictions with India in an effort to show its relevance). [8] However, the fact remains: Without the military, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan would simply have disintegrated, which would most likely have plunged it into chaos and lawlessness.

This also holds for the issue of Pakistan's nuclear weapons – i.e., concern in the West, as well as in Russia, that they could fall into the hands of extremist elements. In Pakistan's context, the military is the only force capable of ensuring the reliable protection of nuclear facilities and nuclear materials. Such is reality, and any complaining about the nontransparency of the country's nuclear command and control system (its

civilian "dimension" is just a facade) is a purely rhetorical exercise.

That much is understood, among others, by the United States, Islamabad's largest Western partner. The U.S.-Pakistan alliance that has evolved by now, in effect, comprises two alliances – one with the country's civilian leadership and the other with its military. The first suits the Americans because the "democratic" authorities greatly depend on them, and does not suit them because the same authorities are utterly helpless in the political, economic, and other spheres. As for the military, it plays in an entirely different weight category, featuring autonomy, independence, and the reluctance to accept any rules imposed on it. By acting via A.A. Zardari, the White House has more than once attempted to make the military establishment less recalcitrant and place it under its control (especially energetic attempts along those lines were made with regard to the ISI, a core of the Pakistan military machine), but each time the armed forces managed to uphold their "immunity."

Another reason for Washington's concern are the long-standing connections between the ISI and other military special services, as well as mid- and top-level officers, and extremist groups. They go back to the years of the Soviet war in Afghanistan (incidentally, at the time, extremist groups were created by Pakistani special services with direct assistance from the CIA) and the way they are used remains a "big issue." M. Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other high ranking U.S. military officials do not rule out that important information about combat operations in the northwest of Pakistan could be leaked to the Taliban through the ISI.9 Nevertheless, the military today is the only serious force that is able to ensure the integrity of Pakistan and deal with the terrorist threat. So Washington has to bet on it, effectively returning to the policy that it attempted to abandon in 2007-08.

As for U.S. interference, it should be noted that Americans behave in Pakistan like masters: Local authorities do not make a single serious step without a nod from them. Influential Pakistani officials, cabinet members, members of parliament, and party leaders are regularly called in to the US embassy to be put on the right track. Many in Pakistan, not least members of the ruling elite, resent such aspects of the assistance from across the ocean, but they dare not risk refusing: After all, then they would end up without the substantial U.S. aid.

Dependence not on its own resources but on outside assistance in dealing with internal problems has commercialized Pakistan's foreign policy – moreover, not only in relations with the U.S. but also with other

countries. In 2008-09, the "freebie" mood (Pakistanis themselves ironically refer to their country as an "international beggar" [10]) acquired such a large scale that Pakistan's approaches toward some partner or another were in effect made contingent on the possibility of receiving financial aid. From every indication, the Americans and "westerners" are purposely getting the Pakistanis hooked on this paradigm, making sure that they do not "get off the needle." A case in point is the creation of a U.S. sponsored group known as Friends of Democratic Pakistan, which, on the one hand, raises funds for Islamabad, but on the other, sees to it that the Pakistanis follow a course responding to Western interests.

First of all, financial support hinges on Pakistan following B. Obama's regional strategy, which, as a matter of fact, was not met with much enthusiasm in Islamabad. In particular, it resented the term AfPak, coined by the Americans: It is wrong to put Afghanistan on a par with Pakistan, since Afghanistan is in fact the main source of the terrorist threat, whereas Pakistan should be treated not as an object of efforts by the international community but as a subject, in the same league with the United States, the Europeans, and so on. Furthermore, there are concerns that the intensification of efforts by Washington and its allies in Afghanistan will "squeeze" the Taliban out to Pakistani soil.

To what extent B. Obama's strategy will help normalize the situation in Afghanistan and in the region as a whole is a separate matter. Rather, it is a palliative version of a new and effective policy. In our opinion, such a policy should help responsible and democratic governments come to power in Afghanistan and Pakistan – a key precondition for the successful fight against terrorism. It seems that at present, the U.S. strategy does not take into account all the specifics, complexities and contradictions of Afghan or Pakistani development – e.g., the fact that the Taliban, jihadists and other "bad guys" did not fall from the sky, but appeared in the course and as a result of this development, so it will be impossible to simply "go and eliminate" them. This requires long-term and consistent efforts to normalize and modernize Afghanistan and Pakistan, and support processes that would weaken the extremists and push them to the sidelines. In this respect, rather little has been done since September 2001. In a certain sense, the paradigm of U.S. intervention in Vietnam is being repeated: Reliance on military force and the backing of an unpopular government fuel anti-U.S. sentiments and sympathies for the "insurgents," who under different circumstances would hardly have gained such broad support. The majority of Pakistanis are anti-Taliban, and they only put up with

them out of despair. What is to be done if the "legitimate" authorities are ineffectual and corrupt, while U.S. aircraft regularly deliver missile strikes on border areas, killing civilians alongside the militants?

U.S. political philosopher Professor Noam Chomsky warns that Washington's actions could ultimately play into the hands of the Taliban, which has always dreamed of acting on behalf of the entire Pashtu population, which is the largest in Afghanistan and dominant in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, where the main battles with extremists are being fought. If Taliban ideology merges with Pashtu nationalism (which is highly active in each of the neighboring countries), the outcome of that could be "Islamic Pashtunistan," which would mean the disintegration of Pakistan and Afghanistan. [11]

One can hardly expect that a miracle will happen in the foreseeable future and the Americans will get the better of the Taliban. Needless to say, they will continue "patching up the holes," keeping the two regimes afloat and pressing them to take effective steps in the fight against the terrorist threat, and this can go on for some time, but not forever – taking into account the well known "overstrained empire" factor.

The further course of events in Pakistan could follow several possible scenarios:

1) Real democratic changes, the coming to power of a government capable of improving the socio-economic situation in the country and cutting off the extremists, who rely on the poorest and downtrodden sections of the population (there are millions of them in Pakistan), from their support base. Taking into account the undeveloped state of Pakistan's civil society and political parties, and the absence of a party that would be able to translate democratic principles into reality, as well as the domination of feudal-aristocratic clans in the country, this scenario is the least likely of all.

2) The expansion of the Taliban, who seize Islamabad, as was the case in Kabul in 1996. That could happen if the Americans indeed ditch Pakistan and cast it to the whims of fate, while the Pakistani army and Special Forces come to terms with the extremists on some grounds or other. The probability of the second scenario is also not very high, if only because nuclear weapons are at stake on the Pakistani field. Nor will the Pakistani military give up its monopoly of these weapons, while even in the worst case situation, the United States will do all it can to prevent weapons of mass destruction from falling into terrorist hands.

3) The Taliban create their own state (Pashtunistan) on a territory

straddling Pakistan and Afghanistan. For such a scenario to materialize, the U.S. has to pull out of the region.

4) N. Sharif's Muslim League comes to power as a result of general (early) parliamentary elections, which can probably help stabilize the situation in the country for a while and halt its disintegration. However, N. Sharif's experience in running the state (in 1990-93 and 1997-99) is not very reassuring.

5) The military returns to the political stage. Objective preconditions for that are developing, the only question being, at exactly what point the top brass will consider it necessary to start playing out this scenario. That will require a favorable confluence of circumstances – for example, mass riots that the government will be unable to handle or uncontrollable expansion by the Taliban, the threat of extremists seizing large cities (see Scenarios 2 and 3).

Therefore, Pakistan today is at a crossroads, the vector of its development not being entirely clear. Nevertheless, taking into account the fact that the country has ended up in this situation not without the impact of external factors (i.e., unceremonious intervention by the United States and the West), one well-known recipe should be recalled: "Fighting fire with fire." Needless to say, this is not about rejecting Washington's aid and recommendations, but about rectifying the imbalance in Pakistan's foreign policy by expanding regional links, primarily with its largest neighbors, including Russia. Naturally, an adjustment of a foreign policy course cannot be a panacea for all problems, but it will help shape an international environment that will facilitate constructive changes in Pakistan, not impede them.

The regional dimension has always been part of Islamabad's political thinking (with a special focus on rapprochement with Muslim countries in the Gulf and the Middle East, as well as China), but to a varying degree; however, after the Anglo-Saxon experiment to "democratize" the Musharraf regime, it significantly shrank. The A.A. Zardari government's pro-U.S. and pro-Western bias resulted in Islamabad distancing itself somewhat from such traditional partners as Saudi Arabia, PRC, and others. In a policy reversal in late 2008 (which was related, among other things, to a crisis that had hit the country, with which it was unable to cope by relying on the West alone), the Pakistani ruling elite started "revitalizing" the regional dimension, giving close attention in that context to invigorating its relations with Russia, among others.

Throughout their entire history (Russia officially recognized the

Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1948), their development was uneven, except for some periods (mainly the 1970-80s). It seemed as if fate was mocking Moscow and Islamabad's attempts to establish a mutually beneficial partnership, and whenever it started acquiring a more or less concrete form, it would run into trouble.

The intensification of ties achieved in the first half of the 1990s was wiped out by Pakistan's backing for the Taliban in Afghanistan, who a priori were anti-Russian.

Following Prime Minister N. Sharif's visit to Moscow in April 1999, the decisions that were made at the time (on Russian participation in a project to modernize the Karachi metal plant, a project to assemble Russian compact cars in Pakistan, etc.) remained on paper. Their implementation was impeded by P. Musharraf who came to power in October of the same year and who did not favor a rapprochement with Russia, at least not at the initial stage of his rule. His government was sympathetic toward the Chechen separatists, giving them shelter, which heightened tensions in bilateral relations. It took several years before the issue was resolved, and the relations improved. In 1993, P. Musharraf visited the Russian capital and signed a number of important documents, which could have given a boost to bilateral cooperation. Unfortunately, in the following several years all new projects (in the oil, gas, and metallurgical sectors, as well as outer space) were foiled either by bureaucratic obstacles or by the sluggishness of large Russian companies that were not particularly interested in developing the Pakistani market.

High hopes were also pinned on Russian Prime Minister M.E. Fradkov's visit to Islamabad in April 2007. However, literally a couple of months later internal contradictions sharply heightened in Pakistan, and the country was swept by a wave of terror, which forced its Russian business partners to adopt a wait-and-see position.

Since the start of the current decade the volume of bilateral trade has grown by 600-700 percent, but is still rather insignificant – worth less than $600 million. Joint economic activity is at its minimum level. The only success story is the assembling of Kamaz trucks at a small plant in Sindh.

Hopes for a new breakthrough emerged in the summer of 2009. In the course of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Yekaterinburg on July 16 and a four-party meeting in Dushanbe on July 30 (between the presidents of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Russia), D.A. Medvedev met with A.A. Zardari, and then in a tripartite

format, he met with A.A. Zardari and Afghan President H. Karzai. Plans were outlined for cooperation in such priority areas as the fight against terror and drug trafficking, as well as economic cooperation. Although the Russian-Afghan dimension is more palpable in this context, cooperation with Pakistan is also an essential part of this initiative, as indicated by the head of the Russian Federation in no uncertain terms.

Alongside the assistance provided to Islamabad in training and equipping army and law enforcement units involved in the fight against terror and the strengthening of customs and border controls, the possibility of joint economic projects is also being considered. Obviously, the most promising one is Russia's participation in an ongoing multilateral project (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan) to transmit electricity from Central Asia to Pakistan via Afghanistan. Another could be Russia's involvement in plans to develop the regional railroad network across Central Asia to Russia and on to Europe.

Islamabad is also showing interest in closer participation in the SCO, regarding it as a kind of a "regional anchor" that will make the Pakistani state more stable. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which currently has an observer status, seeks to become a full-fledged SCO member and join the SCO's regional anti-terrorism structure, the SCO Banking Council and the SCO Business Council. SCO membership is also seen as a way – alongside Pakistan's "all weather partnership" with China – of establishing closer ties with the other leader of the Shanghai community, Russia, and thus enlisting the backing of the two largest states in the region.

Meanwhile, there is a certain measure of wariness within Russian political and especially business circles toward Pakistan. So far there is some doubt about the expediency of intensifying cooperation with it. I have often heard the following assessments from Russian business executives and government officials: Pakistan is a country with low international ratings, an unstable domestic situation, and an unstable leadership that lacks independence and that follows a rather inconsistent policy. Hence the conclusion that while maintaining links with Islamabad at a more or less acceptable level, there is no need to force their development.

This approach has its logic, but it lacks a long-term view. The fact is that the processes unfolding in Pakistan directly affect Russia's national interests. It is not only that its Central Asian "underbelly" is extremely vulnerable (the export of terrorism and drug trafficking) or that it is impossible to ensure reliable security in the region without normalizing the situation in Afghanistan and, therefore, in Pakistan: It is vital to con-

solidate our economic positions in the region, not allowing other countries to fully control the market. The Americans, Europeans, Chinese and other large international players are well informed about Pakistan's problems, but they take a long-term view, seeing Pakistan's role in the context of regional contradictions, and understanding that this country is not only an outpost in the fight against extremism but also an important economic playground. Russia should not remain on the sidelines, waiting for the situation to stabilize without its participation. Results can only be achieved by a proactive, assertive policy, as is evident, in particular, from the "Pakistani" dimension of the Yekaterinburg summit and Russia's subsequent efforts to expand its ties with Islamabad.

NOTES

[1] See: Ansari Masood. "Two to Tango," *The Herald.* June 2009, pp. 29-30.

[2] See: Yusufzai R. "Are We Losing to Taliban?" *Newsline.* May 2009, p. 25.

[3] Rashid A. *Descent into Chaos.* Allen Lane, 2008, p. XXXIX, 385.

[4] Singh R.S.N. *The Military Factor in Pakistan.* Lancer. New Delhi, 2008, p. 414.

[5] The Pakistanis are quite outspoken about this. See: "The advent of Asif Zardari," *Dawn.* July 12, 1979.

[6] See: "Is the revolution already over?" *The Herald.* April 2009, p. 38.

[7] See, for example: Siddiqa A. *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy.* Oxford University Press, 2007.

[8] See: Singh R.S.N. Op. cit.

[9] "Mullen sees rise in Afghan violence," *Dawn*. April, 2009.

[10] Inayatullah. "A Personal View," *The Nation.* June 18, 2009.

[11] URL: http: //www.chomsky.info/interviews/20090401.htm; "Chomsky on AfPak crisis," *The Nation.* July 5, 2009.