



Centro Studi Internazionali

# Pakistan's new role in fighting terrorism in South Asia

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### **Methodological note**

*This paper aims to present the situation of Pakistan's current commitment to boost its international image and establish itself as a key player in Central Asia. In particular, the purpose of this publication is to analyze the different aspects of political, economic and security issues that this objective assumes in the agenda of Islamabad and the adopted strategies to maximize the chances of success in its efforts. To this end, the report will address three aspects: first, the context of internal security and the new attitude of the Pakistani authorities in dealing with the fight against Taliban militancy and regional terrorism. In addition to analyzing the evolution of the militant panorama in recent years, it will also tackle an in-depth analysis of the military Operation, Zarb-e-Azb, currently underway in the North Waziristan Agency, in the Tribal Areas (FATA). The second part of the document will be dedicated to the in-depth analysis of the new regional vocation of the country and the interest in strengthening its international relations, both with the players of the area and with third-party countries. It will analyze, in particular, the strategic implications of the special relationship with Beijing (with a focus on the China-Pakistan Corridor project) and the relationship of the Pakistani authorities with the new coalition government in Afghanistan. Finally, the report will examine the possibilities for the development of relations between Pakistan and Italy, to demonstrate those windows of opportunity that could make our country a privileged partner for a country, such as Pakistan, which, in the coming years, could prove to be a real keystone to the Central Asian region.*

*The report is the result of the trip to Pakistan that was made between June 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 by the delegation of the Ce.S.I. – Centro Studi Internazionali (International Studies Centre), led by the President, Prof. Andrea Margelletti, and formed by Dr. Francesco Tosato, Senior Analyst responsible for the Military Affairs desk, and Dr. Francesca Manenti, head of the Asia desk.*

*During the visit, which occurred in the cities of Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Peshawar, analysts of the Institute were able to meet institutional and military personalities as well as representatives of the Pakistani think tanks, to get a complete picture of the current situation of internal security and the ongoing efforts to counter a phenomenon, such as radical terrorism, which in recent years has caused huge losses in human and economic terms, as well as in development opportunities. This compilation of information has been reworked and is presented in a comprehensive framework that highlights the challenges that Pakistan is finding in its search to establish itself as a key player in Central Asia and the prospects of development in the relations between Islamabad, Europe and, in particular, our country.*

*The Ce.S.I. warmly thanks all parties who have agreed to meet the delegation and have made the exchange of ideas on which this report is inspired possible. The Institute expresses its gratitude towards the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) for hosting the delegation, organizing the agenda and every detail of the visit. A special thanks to Her Excellency Tehmina Janjua, Former Ambassador of Pakistan in Italy, and Colonel Wasim Qureshi, Military Attaché in Italy, for their valuable support in the organization of the trip.*

## CONTENTS

Introduction	4
The evolution of the Taliban militancy and the new strategy of counter-terrorism in Pakistan	7
The new dimension of military confrontation: Operation Zarb-e-Azb	17
Pakistan within the framework of regional relations	20
Conclusions	26
The relations to Italy: perspectives and recommendations	27

## Introduction

Pakistan has been facing a deep security crisis for almost fifteen years, which is rooted in and continues to be fueled by the many years of instability in neighboring Afghanistan. The porosity of about 2,500 kilometers of border between the two countries, in fact, has always favored the passage of fighters who were engaged in the Afghan territory, first against the Soviets in the '80s and, since 2001, against US and NATO Forces. They have seen Pakistan as a possible place of refuge. This trend has been particularly evident in the Pakistani Tribal Areas (Federally Administrative Tribal Areas - FATA), the region in the northwest of the country that has always been a stronghold against the Taliban insurgency in the country. This area, indeed, is separated from the turbulent eastern provinces of Afghanistan by a purely formal border, the so-called Durand Line<sup>1</sup>, which not only divides a population united by ethnicity (Pashtun), religious interpretation (Deobandi) and tribal system, but, by cutting it into two pieces of what was a whole village, it even separates families. The result is a substantial inconsistency of the international border that makes it particularly complicated to control the movement across the border. The

inability to accurately monitor the trans-border movement on the one hand, and the inaccessible morphology of the typically mountainous area on the other, actually prevent the security Forces on both sides of the border in their guarantee of control over the territory.

The collapse of the security situation in Afghanistan since 2001, therefore, has had inevitable repercussions on internal security in Pakistan. With the start of the US Operation Enduring Freedom against the Taliban government in Kabul and the leadership of al-Qaeda, guest of Mullah Omar at the time, the FATA have become not only an ideal logistic hinterland for groups of Taliban and Afghan mujahideen engaged in operations across the border, but they are also a haven for al-Qaeda militants on the run who, welcomed by the people according to customs dictated by their tribal code<sup>2</sup>, are integrated into the social fabric, thus rooting themselves in the territory. The presence of the jihadist group within a society, such as the Tribal Areas of Pakistan, already inclined towards a radical interpretation of Islamic law and in conflict with the central authorities in Islamabad, has exacerbated the extremism of local groups. The latter have started to look at the

<sup>1</sup> The border between the two countries is named after Sir Mortimer Durand, British diplomat who, in 1893, agreed on the division between the Kingdom of Afghanistan and British India with the then Emir of Afghanistan, Abdur Rehman Khan.

<sup>2</sup> The Pashtunwali is an ethics and behavior code of unwritten rules used by rural communities of ethnic Pashtuns. Among the fundamental precepts of this code are the principle of *melmastia* (hospitality) and *nanawatai* (protection).

al-Qaeda network as an opportunity to have the resources and funding to be devoted to their battle against the Pakistani government and, consequently, to seek greater operational collaboration with al-Qaeda militiamen.

The consolidation of such a synergy has led to a progressive heterogenization of the militant panorama present in the FATA, the result of a blend of the Pakistani Taliban, the Afghan mujahedeen, al-Qaeda militiamen and Salafist militant groups from other parts of Central Asia (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Xinjiang) who joined the insurgent ranks in FATA to contribute to the jihad in the region. This stratification has inevitably led, on the one hand, to a sharp radicalization of the Pakistani society, and on the other hand, to a strengthening of the operational capacity of the Taliban militancy and, with it, to a rapid deterioration of the security situation in the country.

This parable reached its peak in 2007, with the official announcement of the birth of Teherik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the umbrella group made up of different players of the insurgency and led by Baitullah Mehsud, an influential local leader of South Waziristan. The leadership of the group was formed by Taliban representatives of the seven agencies of the FATA (North and South Waziristan, Khurram, Khyber, Orakzai, Mohmand, Bajaur) and the districts of the current province of Kyber Pakhtunkhwa (Swat, Bannu, Tank, Lakki Marwat, Dera

Ismail Khan, Kohistan, Buner and Malakand). Strongly tied to the deep roots and local power enjoyed by better known commanders, the TTP was able to quickly assert its control over the area and to forge a strong partnership with a number of realities relating to the Taliban insurgency although it is formally independent and with an agenda autonomous from that of the newly-formed group. It is the case, for example, of Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), terrorist groups that are mainly active in Kashmir to counter the Indian presence in the region; or the so-called Haqqani network, a militant group operating in Afghanistan with strong ties both with the leadership of Mullah Omar and with the al-Qaeda network.

The multidimensionality of the insurgency, on the one hand, and the heterogeneity of the agendas of the various groups on the other, have sometimes prompted authorities in Islamabad to adopt a pragmatic approach in the fight against militancy in the country, focusing their efforts on those groups such as the TTP, which represented a direct threat to the Pakistani institutions, while leaving greater room for maneuver in the formations with a more international agenda. This attitude has inevitably affected the fight against militancy for a long time and, as a matter of fact, it has caused any attempt to eradicate the insurgency from their strongholds to be in vain. Thus, the decision to adopt a policy of "double

standards" has contributed, albeit indirectly, to fuel domestic instability, and it has also alienated the support of the international community towards Pakistan, which started to be perceived not only as a place that was deeply at risk, and therefore unattractive to foreign investment, but also as a regional player with ambiguous relations with the Central Asian terrorist panorama.

In this context, 2014 was a year of decisive change for the peculiar relationship between militancy and authority in Islamabad. The generational shift and the subsequent internal evolution noted from the Taliban insurgency in the country and the change of the dynamics of regional security generated by the political transition and the end of the ISAF mission in neighboring Afghanistan have pushed the Pakistani government to change tack. Following the attack against the International Airport of Karachi, in June of 2014, and the bloody attack, on December 16<sup>th</sup> at the Army Public School in Peshawar,

where 145 people were killed, the Pakistani authorities and the Armed Forces in particular have decided to get rid of the historical distinction between "good and bad Taliban" and to pursue a synergistic and all-encompassing policy to combat terrorism.

The new approach, which aims to permanently store the dossier of the Taliban insurgency, could bring real benefits for the country: the strengthening of Pakistani efforts in fighting terrorism, in fact, could, on the one hand, lead to a real improvement of the internal security conditions; the other would allow Pakistan to boost its international image of a key player for regional stability. In this way, the country would not only fit itself into the long wave of economic development of what is known as the Asian Century, of which it has so far remained on the margins, but it could also establish itself as a regional trade, infrastructure and energy hub in all of Central Asia.



The evolution of Taliban militancy and the new strategy of counter-terrorism in Pakistan



Figure 1: Tribal Agencies (in yellow) and regional breakdown of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (in blue). Ce.S.I. Reworking

2014 was a year of crucial development for the security environment context in Pakistan. Almost ten years after its formation, the Movement of Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, TTP) is going through a profound internal evolution that has had a major impact on the operational capacity of the group. With the death of Hakimullah Mehsud, the former leader who was killed by a US raid in Pakistan's Tribal Areas in November 2013, intra-tribal rivalries to designate the successor as head of the group have exacerbated tensions between

the different military players, with natural consequences on internal cohesion. The leadership of the TTP since 2007, in fact, has been an expression of the Mehsud, influential Pashtun tribes in South Waziristan strongly rooted in the territory and therefore able to collect a broad consensus among the local people. It was Baitullah Mehsud, Hakimullah's father and former Emir of the TTP, to agree, in 2005, to a historic ceasefire with the Pakistani government to end the military action in the tribal agency. The charisma demonstrated in the

management of the relationship with the Armed Forces soon allowed Baitullah to strengthen his following in the Waziristan region and, two years later, to take control of the Taliban militancy in Pakistan, putting himself at the head of a movement with approximately 20,000 actual members. Though it is a phenomenon that has always interested all of the FATA, the Waziristan region (formed by the agencies of North and South Waziristan) under the leadership of Mehsud has become the epicenter of the insurgency and has allowed the local clans to benefit from trade and the flow of resources (material and financial) that came to this area to feed the group's activities.

Upon the death of Hakimullah, members of a rival tribe of the Mehsud, the Orakzai who were originally part of the homonymous agency, tried to gain the consent of some local leaders to impose their candidates (Mullah Gul Zaman and Hafiz Saeed Khan) for the leadership of the TTP. This attempt, however, provoked the reaction of the Waziri tribe<sup>3</sup>, which, although historically in conflict with the Mehsud for territorial issues, feared that the appointment of a leader from another tribal agency would have moved the heart of the militancy and, therefore, it would harm its interests, both in economic terms and social prestige. The impossibility of

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<sup>3</sup> Tribe originally from the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan to which it gives its name. The different tribal subgroups referred to it are allocated between North and South Waziristan.

finding a solution shared by several tribes prompted the central *shura* of the TTP to appoint a leader outside of the FATA.

In this context, the choice fell on Maulana Fazlullah, a member of the Yusufzai tribe and originally from the Swat valley<sup>4</sup> in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), thus outside the Tribal Areas. Having inherited the leadership of the Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM)<sup>5</sup> group from his father-in-law, Fazlullah began a fierce campaign in the early twenty-first century for the imposition of Sharia law in the Swat district and the adjacent Malakand that, together with anti-US and anti-government propaganda, allowed him to quickly establish himself as one of the leading figures in the Taliban militancy outside of the FATA. Despite the alliance with the TTP, which was announced in December 2007, Fazlullah has always remained quite external to the dynamics and power relations of the Tribal Areas. The military campaign agreement conducted by Pakistani forces between 2008 and 2009 in Swat, in fact, forced Fazlullah to seek refuge across the border and to establish the operational center from which he could pursue activities in Pakistan in the eastern provinces of

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<sup>4</sup> Fazlullah's family is originally from the village of Mam Dheray, near the town of Kanju, on the bank of the river Swat. Following Fazlullah's campaign to give an Islamic name to the places of the region, the village got the name of Imam Dheray.

<sup>5</sup> The TNSM is a Pakistani militant group that preaches the imposition of Sharia law in the country. It was founded in 1992 by Sufi Mohammed, father-in-law of Fazlullah, and banned by the then President Pervez Musharraf in December 2002.



Afghanistan (probably between Nangharar and Logar).

The appointment of Fazlullah, therefore, was more a choice of a political nature (dictated by the need to find a solution to the rivalry between the Orakzai and the Waziri which was mentioned earlier) than an assessment related to the actual power of the Taliban leader on the territory. The absence of a link with the tribal realities of the FATA and the lack of a large following within the militancy in Pakistan, therefore, have inevitably weighed on the consolidation of his leadership. Once he assumed the leadership of the TTP, in fact, Fazlullah was not able to bring the circa 20,000 fighters into the group from the Swat valley that had been previously agreed upon with the *shura* of the movement. Failure to comply with the given word, in fact, not only prevented the new emir from having a local force loyal to him so as to enable him to exercise his undisputed leadership, but it especially delegitimized his credibility in the eyes of other commanders, who already looked at the idea of having a foreign leader to the traditional circle of power with great skepticism. The designation of Fazlullah, therefore, altered the traditional balance of power and did so fail at bringing that transversal legitimacy within the TTP, which had until then facilitated the convergence of interests between different groups linked to it.

The lack of charisma of the new emir and immovable reticence of tribal commanders to recognize Fazlullah as the legitimate leader of the movement triggered a spiral of mistrust and hostility between different factions, which inevitably resulted in numerous episodes of distancing from the new leadership. Back in May 2014, Fazlullah's decision to relieve Khalid Mehsud (aka Khan Said Sajna) of the position of commander of the TTP in South Waziristan to try to encourage a man closer to him, Sheharyar Mehsud (aka Shehbaz), caused the strong reaction of followers of the Taliban commander who had announced his exclusion from the group. Similarly, in August, Omar Khalid Khorasani, Taliban commander in the Mohmand tribal agency, announced his exit from the TTP and the formation of a new group, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, independent from the leadership of Fazlullah. This choice was motivated by the conviction of Omar Khalid and his followers that the new emir had distorted the original purpose of the Taliban insurgency (the imposition of Sharia law in the country) and had overshadowed the fight with the authorities in Islamabad to prefer activities that were more similar to organized crime and to conduct and carry on activities across the borders. Besides Omar Khalid, the *shura* of Jamaat-ul-Ahrar was comprised of Ihsanullah Ihsan, the former spokesman of the TTP, Mansoor Nazim Shura and Maulana Haidar of the Arakzai Agency; Maulana Adbullah from Bajaur; Qari

Ismail from Khyber; Qari Shakil Haqqani from Charsadda; Mufti Misbah from Peshawar and Maulana Yasin from Swat. With a leadership expression of militancy in different regions, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar seems to be the collection area of an old guard of the Pakistani Taliban who consider the tribal dimension a binding constraint in the power relations within the movement, and for which the only reason for the Taliban insurgency to be in the country is the systematic opposition to the state.

The above cases (Jamaat- ul-Arar and the group loyal to Khalid Mehsud) are just two examples of a series of defections that have produced what seems more and more to be a progressive dismemberment of the Movement of Pakistani Taliban and that may signal a real generational transition between the old and the new guard of Taliban. Compared to the traditional militancy, which historically focused its efforts on fighting the Pakistani government as an institution, the supporting skeleton of the TTP, in fact, now seems to be made up of younger activists, more independent than the traditional coordination with other insurgent groups present in the country and available for a greater involvement in operations across the border. This new generation, brought up in a context that has been strongly influenced by the presence of al-Qaeda and therefore radicalized according to the dictates of its ideology, is more prone to the call of the international jihad over the older generation and,

therefore, prefers to pursue an activity of a jihadist nature that transcends the fight against Islamabad *tout court*. In a time when the al-Qaeda network now seems to have lost much of their operational capacity, the interest in increasing the resources available and to enhance its influence in the area could push these new recruits to seek new shores to restore luster to its activity in the country.

A prime example of this trend seems to be represented by the decision by a group of militants to swear allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the self-proclaimed Caliph of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, IS) and to form a branch of IS (the so-called Khorasan province) in the region. Officially recognized by the Iraqi leadership on January 27<sup>th</sup> 2015, the new jihadist reality would be formed by both Afghan and Pakistani Taliban representatives, but would be operating exclusively in the territory of Afghanistan. Those originally named in the leadership include: Hafiz Saeed Khan, emir and former leader of the Arakzai Tribal Agency in the FATA; Shahidullah Shaheed, his deputy and former spokesman of the TTP; Abdul Rauf Khadium, supervisor responsible for recruiting in Afghanistan; Daulat Khan, commander of the Kurram Agency; Fateh Gul Zaman, commander of the Khyber Agency; Peshawar Mufti Hassan, commander for the city of Peshawar and Khalid Mansoor, commander of the Hangu district. However, a number of US raids last July, caused the death of Hafiz Saeed,

Abdul Rauf and Shahidullah, beheading, in fact, the leadership of the new group.

Although, at the time, the birth of a branch of the IS between Afghanistan and Pakistan spoke more to a change of flag of some Taliban leaders, motivated by purely local power dynamics, rather than a real jihadist vocation among its members, it is not possible to exclude that in the near future the echo of the success of al-Baghdadi, on the one hand, and a further shredding of the Pakistani Taliban militancy, on the other, could push new fighters to join the ranks of the IS in the province of Khorasan. This possibility, in fact, has represented a dual critical factor for the stability of the country.

First, it has inevitably multiplied realities relating to the insurgency committed to taking forward activities to destabilize the central government. In addition to the numerous uncovered offshoots from the TTP which have been mentioned earlier, the sensitivity shown by some sections of the Taliban militancy regarding the Islamic State has aroused a strong reaction from the leadership of al-Qaeda, which has always seen the territory found between Afghanistan and Pakistan as a stronghold. In September 2014, in fact, a few months after the *bayat* of the first Pakistani Taliban in al-Baghdadi, Ayman Zawahiri announced the birth of a new branch of the organization, Qaedat-al-Jihad (al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, AQIS). With an agenda focused purely on the imposition of Sharia law in the Indian

sub-continent, the new group aims to bring together fighters from India, Myanmar and Bangladesh in order to establish an administration in these territories inspired by the Taliban government that controlled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. The new organization intended to be a collector of representatives of the different, and historical groups of operating al-Qaeda affiliates, some from as early as the '90s, including Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (including Harakat-ul-Muhajideen, Harakat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami and the 313 Brigade, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, the Indian Mujahideen, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Turkistan Islamic Party), capable of boosting the image of al-Qaeda, both regionally and, above all, internationally. Despite the failed attempt to seize the *Zulfiqar* frigate of the Pakistani Navy in Karachi in September 2014, in fact, the group has not seemed to make that quantum leap that would allow it to be considered validated for all purposes as a new actor in an already dense international jihadist panorama. An intense air campaign waged by the United States in the Tribal Agencies between September 2014 and January 2015, in fact, caused the death of several al-Qaeda militants (including the military commander Ali Imran Siddiqi) and, consequently, helped reduce the operational capacity of the AQIS.

Secondly, the competition between the different entities for the primacy in the militant panorama and, consequently, for the control

of the territory, seems to have triggered a real rivalry composed of continuous demonstrations of force by the groups, with obvious impact on the safety of the population. In 2014 alone, the Taliban militancy managed to accomplish two bombings that profoundly shocked public opinion. In June, militants belonging to the TTP and the al-Qaeda group of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) stormed the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi, waging against the security forces who intervened to curb the situation for more than 24 hours. The incident, which resulted in the death of 36 people, showed not only the operational ability of the militancy, but has also highlighted the vulnerability of the control of the Pakistani authorities with regard to strategic infrastructures, such as an international airport. The assault on the Jinnah International Airport aroused a strong reaction from the Pakistani Armed Forces, who kicked off the Zarb-e-Azb Operation (Sharp Attack) in the FATA<sup>6</sup>.

However, the episode that really represented a break in the perception of the Taliban threat in the country was the attack on the military public school in Peshawar last 16 December, in which a group of seven armed men belonging to the TTP killed 145 people, including 132 children. The incident, the bloodiest in the last seven years, had such an impact on public opinion and on the Pakistani authorities that it could be

considered a crucial turning point in the attitude of the country towards the Taliban insurgency.

In the past, in fact, the Pakistani authorities had always adopted a policy of pragmatism against the militancy, which led them to focus on the action against those groups that represented a direct threat to internal stability and to defer on those organizations that found refuge in Pakistani territory, but then they focused their actions in Afghanistan or India. This attitude was encouraged not only by some sections of the national security services, who were looking to compromise with the militancy as an opportunity to have a form of influence in the internal affairs of neighboring countries, but also from the government in Islamabad, for whom the possibility of establishing a dialogue with the Taliban had allowed them to resolve the main threat to the survival of the state itself. The scope of the events of Peshawar, which raised the indignation of the entire international community, prompted the government in Islamabad to change tack and adopt an iron fist in its strategy of anti-terrorism.

The fulcrum of the new commitment in the fight against terrorism is represented by the National Action Plan (NAP), a program announced by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014, and developed in collaboration with all the national security agencies in order to identify, track and eliminate criminal organizations and terrorist

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<sup>6</sup> For a complete picture of the Operation, please see *The Military framework: the Zarb-e-Azb operation*, p.18

groups, as well as their facilitators and financiers. It is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach that should allow the Pakistani authorities to effectively address the declensions that the terrorist phenomenon assumes in the different regions of the country: the Taliban militancy and the jihadist groups in the FATA; the groups with a mainly sectarian (Punjab) or separatist (Balochistan) agenda; organized crime and private militias, linked to local political parties (in Karachi)<sup>7</sup>. The fight against organized crime is an important element in the effort to stabilize the country, because the criminal groups have been the ones to establish and provide the network to all the militant organizations and, consequently, to increase the capillarity of their action throughout the national territory.

The implementation of the NAP is entrusted to the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), an agency that deals with coordination among all national entities (about 32) engaged in fight operations against terrorism and all forms of extremism, responsible for the formulation of a strategy capable of addressing the short, medium and long term critical issues and their implementation plan. Established in 2009, the NACTA, thanks to the NAP, should now see its powers strengthened and thus become the *deus ex machina* of the

operations of counter-terrorism within the country.

In particular, the competence of the NACTA, as presented by the Director Obaidullah Farooq Malik during the meeting with the delegation, is detailed in various activities:

- monitoring of public statements of sectarian or partisan character in order to curb the spread of religious extremism. This activity includes a seizure of publications and audio-visual aids that incite interreligious violence and/or jihad and an increase in the control over the use of the Internet and social media as a recruitment tool;
- regulation of the *madrasas* (whose number in the last thirty years has grown from 1,700 to more than 20,000) to intensify the control and reform the education system. The objective is to know, for each *madrasa*, the source of funding and support, the profile of the students enrolled (many students are foreigners from Nigeria, Somalia, China and the Philippines) and the programs taught. This activity is agreed upon and implemented in cooperation with the various provincial governors;
- prohibition of the organizations linked to the network of international terrorism, considered subversive or

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<sup>7</sup> This classification emerged during the meeting of the Ce.S.I. delegation with Obaidullah Farooq Malik, Director of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA)

that act in a way that is contrary to the interests of Pakistan. The arrangement provides a possibility to limit the freedom of movement of people who are part of these groups (seizure of passports), a ban on possessing weapons, and to organize public activities etc;

- monitoring and traceability of terrorism financing. The interruption of capital flows is crucial to break up the network of groups that work in Pakistan. At the moment, however, the difficulties of coordination between different bodies of the national security service, the registration and funding of actual trade with Afghanistan, as well as the lack of adequate training for operators, who find themselves having to deal with financial traceability for the first time, are slowing the establishment of an effective control system. Despite these difficulties the activity of the NACTA in this matter is supported by the cooperation with the US authorities, particularly the FBI. According to data provided to the delegation, up to this point \$ 2 billion have been frozen and just as much has been recovered from individuals and imams belonging to jihadist organizations. Cash flows used for radical Pakistani groups

have mainly come from Abu Dhabi, Australia, Thailand and Europe and have entered in the country through the donations to charitable non-governmental organizations or as private funds. To these, \$ 6 billion of the proceeds of drug trafficking have then been added;

- institution of the Counter Terrorism Force (CTF), an *ad hoc* interdiction force organized on a provincial basis, to support the local police Forces. It is a kind of SWAT-trained military force to engage the armed groups and operate in high-risk contexts. In cooperation with investigative operators they have tasks of gathering intelligence, investigation and reporting of terrorism cases to the public ministry. Though the information relating to anti-terrorism is centralized at the national level, each CTF conducts its activities in the sphere of its province's jurisdiction. The different nuclei of the CTF are the final and operating point in a chain that begins with the collection of information on behalf of the intelligence agency, that passes through the NACTA and ends with the transmission of information on behalf of the aforementioned to the jurisdiction's CTF. Although there is still a real coordination problem, the Pakistani authorities are



demonstrating that they wish to increase their efforts in this direction;

- dismantling of networks pertaining to organized crime, by increasing traceability in telephone communications and the seizure of weapons at the disposal of the criminal groups. In this direction, the operation carried out in the city of Karachi at the hands of the Sindh Rangers (a militarily organized police force on a regional basis) is proving to be particularly successful. Though it was inaugurated in 2013, the operation, in fact, is now completely managed by the NAP. The conclusion, last August, of the first phase allowed the security Forces to make an initial assessment of the campaign: in the last 23 months<sup>8</sup>, the Rangers have stopped 10,353 suspects, arrested 826 terrorists, 334 hitmen and 296 extortionists, as well as seizing 7,312 weapons and 348,978 munitions. The operation also allowed them to give a decisive crackdown against private militias linked to different political parties in the megalopolis. Born as private stock, these groups have fast become veritable armed cells involved in various forms of illicit trafficking, primarily of weapons and

drugs, contributing to a further deterioration of the already precarious security situation in Karachi.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of the NAP, the Islamabad government has given the green light as long as terrorism cases can be submitted to and judged by military courts, so as to streamline, and therefore speed up, its judicial process. Known as the 21<sup>st</sup> amendment and approved by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in early August, the measure should remain in force until the end of 2016 and is in addition to the reintroduction of the possibility of imposing the death penalty for terrorism cases, announced by Prime Minister Sharif in the weeks following the attack in Peshawar. These provisions, in addition to being an effective crackdown on terrorism, also determine a strong all-round strengthening of the influence of the military justice system and, more generally, of a dossier as delicate as national security.

The effort made by the Pakistani authorities in combating militancy began to first have positive results in the province of Kyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), the territory adjacent to the Tribal Areas that has always been affected by its proximity to the FATA and the *longa manus* of the radical groups, who see it as the closest target to carry on their activities against the state of Pakistan. As witnessed by the KPK Governor Mehtab

<sup>8</sup> Data that emerged during the meeting with the General Director

Ahmad Khan Abbasi<sup>9</sup>, in the last year the situation in the province and, specifically, in Peshawar has significantly improved, both thanks to the intense military operation currently underway in the FATA and an effective implementation of the NAP in support of the population. To try to erode the consensus that radical groups have obtained within different social environments, the Pakistani authorities are implementing a process of de-radicalization of the population, which passes through a substantial reconstruction of civil society, in terms of education, the fight against unemployment and consequent creation of new economic opportunities. Currently there are approximately 1.9 million homeless and jobless people, who need to be fully reintegrated within the social system. The improvement of security conditions, moreover, is determining a massive return of about 2,000 people to the province who had fled their homes during the military operations and to which now the Pakistani authorities are having to ensure the possibility of a quantifiable recovery of normal everyday life. It is a large-scale process, within which the management of the flow of refugees and illegal immigrants

from Afghanistan<sup>10</sup> inevitably fits in, who, thanks to the porosity of the border, are arriving in large numbers in the country. The massive infrastructural damage, known throughout the territory in recent years, contributes to making this process particularly difficult and the cost for reconstruction projects is increasingly burdensome for the state coffers.

In this context, the implementation of the NAP could bring important benefits in economic terms for the state. The Pakistani authorities, in fact, seem to have reached the realization that almost fifteen years of deep internal instability have caused economic losses of about \$110 billion for the country and have led Pakistan to remain excluded from the general economic growth seen from other Asian countries. The unpredictability of the terrorist threat, on the one hand, and the international partners' perception of the Pakistani state's doubtful commitment against militancy have affected the reputation of the country and, consequently, have drastically reduced direct foreign investment. In a time when Pakistan is likely to fall out of step with what is referred to as the Asian century, the Islamabad authorities now seem to want to focus on the internal stabilization in order to rehabilitate its international image, restore an

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<sup>9</sup> The delegation met the Governor at his residence, in Peshawar. The interview allowed us to have direct feedback on both the situation in the province and on the developments of the security situation in the FATA. The Governor of the KPK, shall act for the President in the administration of the Tribal Areas.

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<sup>10</sup> It is thought that about 1.2 million are not registered. This is due to the porosity of the border and poor border patrol roads. Some 20,000 people cross the border every day without being monitored.

environment conducive to economic development and thus try to take advantage of its position as a natural bridge between Central Asia and the Arabian Sea in order to establish itself as a possible new energy and trade hub of South Asia.

### The new dimension of military confrontation: Operation Zarb-e-Azb.

Operation Zarb-e-Azb began on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014 in response to the terrorist attack on the International Airport of Karachi carried out on June 8<sup>th</sup>, whose responsibility was claimed by the TTP and IMU. The military had actually prepared for the operation long before - as a consequence of the progressive deterioration of the security situation in the country - but it was later delayed to avoid jeopardizing the peace talks between the Pakistani government and the Taliban, which were scheduled for March. However, following the failure of negotiations between the parties and the bloody attack on the main Pakistani international airport, the military was given the green light to proceed.

The initial stage of Zarb-e-Azb consisted of a series of air strikes against the bases of the armed groups in North Waziristan (NW). Subsequently, some 30,000 Pakistani Army soldiers were mobilized in the same agency to comb every inch of the territory and liberate it from the terrorists affiliated to various groups active in the area: the TTP, the Hafiz Bahdar group, the Punjabi groups, al-Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of

Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and the ETIM. Gradually, related operations were launched in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and in the tribal agency of Khyber in order to restrict the freedom of movement of militants.

Military activities soon concentrated on a few militancy strongholds, that is, the town of Miranshah and the Shawal valley in NW, as well as in the Swat district in the KPK province. In order to minimize collateral damage and prevent terrorists from using civilians as human shields, the Pakistani Army, in collaboration with the civil authorities, prepared a plan for the temporary relocation of the population living in the areas subject to military operations. The relocation involved 700,000 people who were transferred to camps set up in the KPK province. Furthermore, in order to avoid civilian casualties, the Pakistani Armed Forces together with the ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) planned the military campaign as a coordinated series of intelligence based operations (IBOs), which included a resolute use of military force against pre-identified targets of high strategic importance for a limited period of time. This approach, which was certainly borrowed from the US and NATO experiences in Afghanistan, allowed the Pakistani Army to abandon the traditional and impractical fight against the insurgents based on heavy conventional operations in favor of more flexibility and precision thanks

to the synergies with the Pakistani Air Force and other Security Forces.

The effects of this new approach were especially evident in the operation launched to reconquer Miranshah, the main town in NW and real nerve center of the insurgent activities. The city was completely liberated thanks to coordinated air strikes with precision weapons and the deployment of ground forces. Thus, it was possible to seize large amounts of weapons and munitions and dismantle the complex logistics and communication networks, as well as the factories producing the deadly IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) that have claimed many victims in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Ce.S.I. delegation has found that the quantity of weapons, munitions and explosives seized in Miranshah was absolutely unexpected even for the Pakistani authorities, hence proving how pervasive the presence of militants was in the area.

In the wake of Zarb-e-Azb, the insurgents, under pressure of the Pakistani military, began to leave their hideouts in NW and cross the border with Afghanistan in order to take refuge, heading especially to the Nuristan and Kunar provinces. Disrupting this flow has been made difficult by both the morphology of the territory and the still thorny collaboration with the Afghan Security Forces. As far as the former is concerned, it should be noted that the 60-km-long border between Afghanistan and the FATA is really

just a line of many on a map, as it divides historically homogeneous villages and tribal communities linked by family ties. This means that the border is actually not respected and it is impossible for Security Forces (both Afghan and Pakistani) to control it effectively. In this regard, it is worth noting that the main crossing point between the FATA and Afghanistan is Torkham (located in the Khyber agency), where, according to the very data provided by the Pakistani authorities, only 400 people cross the border every day out of an estimated number of at least 3,000. With regard to the latter, the monitoring of the border between Afghanistan and the FATA is also difficult because of the not always idyllic relations between the Pakistani and the Afghan Security Forces, which sometimes result in downright firefights.

Despite the danger posed by the passage of militants to Afghanistan and some attempts to infiltrate in the country's big cities (especially in Karachi), the impact of Operation Zarb-e-Azb has been fully felt, bringing about an overall improvement of Pakistan's security framework if compared to the previous years.

In particular, in the first six months of 2015, there has been a significant reduction in all the major types of attacks typically used by the insurgents if compared to 2014.

Year	Suicide attacks	IEDs	Rockets	Kidnappings	Attacks on Security Forces
<b>2015 (first six months)</b>	9	186	373	40	154
<b>2014</b>	28	668	983	166	325

Table 1 Ce.S.I. Reworking of the data provided by Pakistani authorities and think tanks

Moreover, since the start of the military campaign, the Pakistani authorities provided official accounts that reported the elimination of 3.400 terrorists, the destruction of 837 bases of operations and the seizure of 253 tons of explosives and 18,087 firearms, including assault rifles, rocket launchers and light and heavy machine guns. In addition, the prevention activities related to Operation Zarb-e-Azb in the country's large urban areas resulted in the elimination of 218 terrorists and the arrest of 21.193 of others.

These results were made possible by an overall coordinated effort between the Pakistani Armed Forces and Intelligence, which saw the creation of 13.200 Intelligence Based Operations that, according to local authorities, led to the disruption of 40 terrorist cells linked to al-Qaeda and 90 related to the TTP. Due to its

inherent complexity, the military campaign necessarily suffered a high number of casualties among the Pakistani Armed and Security Forces. The official death toll reached 488 fallen officers and soldiers, while the number of injured amount to 1.914.

Although Operation Zarb-e-Azb was a tactic success and allowed Pakistan to re-establish State authority over the FATA by inflicting a big blow to the insurgents in their safe havens, it is nonetheless clear that, on a strategic level, long-lasting results will only be achieved by eliminating the root causes of the social and economic problems that have always plagued the tribal areas. That is why Pakistan is implementing a comprehensive strategy that combines the ongoing relocation of the population previously evacuated from NW with a circa

one-billion-dollar plan that includes economic aid and infrastructure building. This will be accompanied by close intelligence monitoring aimed at limiting the interference of external actors interested in destabilizing Pakistan by collaborating with militants. Specifically, the Pakistani authorities are strongly convinced that the RAW (Research and Analysis Wing, India's intelligence service) has played an active role in supporting groups opposed to the stabilization of the FATA.

Consequently, military pressure on the tribal areas is likely to remain considerable for at least another year and be characterized by an increasingly massive recourse to the use of drones, not only for reconnaissance and intelligence purposes, but also to attack highly strategic targets. In this regard, it should be noted that just last September 7<sup>th</sup>, Pakistan announced to have completed its first attack by a (nationally produced) "Burraq" drone against a terrorist cell in the Shawal valley (NW) and to have eliminated three high-ranking militants.

The use of drones in attack missions is just the latest example of how Operation Zarb-e-Azb has marked an evolution of Pakistan's overall military doctrine in the fight against the insurgency and in the way the militancy is now regarded in the country - that is, as a threat to be decisively defeated in order to enable Pakistan to move on and focus on

the path towards economic and social development. It is worth mentioning that, according to the data provided to the Ce.S.I. by the authorities and National Defense University (NDU), the war on terrorism in the country has killed 62,648 civilians, 10,000 military and 21,800 terrorists since September 9<sup>th</sup> and has also inflicted economic losses estimated at \$ 67 billion (more than \$ 6 billion in lost export), a cost which is clearly unsustainable for a developing country aspiring to raise to the protagonists of the "Asian Century".

### **Pakistan within the framework of regional relations**

Islamabad's new momentum in the struggle for internal stabilization is part of a broader political agenda with which the government wants to establish Pakistan as a key player in South Asia. In fact, beyond intensified efforts to combat terrorism inside the country, the government is carrying out a thorough reconfiguration of its relations - focusing primarily on the regional ones - to try and strengthen its political and economic influence. This ambition revolves around three fundamental and often interrelated dossiers on the agenda: the resolution of the crisis in Afghanistan, the consolidation of relations with China and the restraint of Indian power.

It has been a year since the new coalition government in Afghanistan was formed and Pakistan has been paying great attention to



the developments within its neighboring country. The ongoing instability that has plagued it in the last fifteen years continues to have a major impact across the border, making the process of stabilization in Afghanistan a strategic priority for the government in Islamabad. In particular, given the relocation of much of the TTP in the eastern regions (between Kunar and Nuristan) in the wake of the launch of Operation Zarb-e-Azb<sup>11</sup>, as well as the impossibility of retaining effective control over the common porous border, the Pakistani authorities regard the resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan as a necessary condition for the successful eradication of the militancy in the FATA. Thus, Islamabad is trying to increase cooperation with Afghanistan, both at civil and military level, although Kabul is still immature to independently address the Taliban threat in its full extent. Despite the Afghan Security Forces (Afghan National Security Forces - ANSF) receiving assistance and training by NATO troops in the last decade, the disengagement from field operations and the gradual withdrawal of international forces have provided ample evidence of the difficulties the ANSF continue to have to ensure security on the whole national territory. In this regard, Pakistan is deeply concerned about the steady weakening of the Afghan military and police Security

Forces, which last year lost about 22%<sup>12</sup> of their staff, not only because of the heavy death toll due to counter-militancy operations, but also because of frequent defections and desertions. The weakness of the military on the one hand, and, on the other, the easy corruptibility of the police, especially in more rural areas of the country, continue to be critical to internal stability. In such contexts as in Afghanistan, where ethnic and tribal ties often prevail over the sense of belonging to the state and the respect of central institutions, the failure of the authorities to guarantee the safety of the population could strengthen the power of several warlords - former paramilitary commanders with a strong influence at local level - especially in the northern regions. On the basis of the strong consensus gained in the territory, these warlords might feel encouraged to form and employ militias to independently manage security within their territorial enclaves, which would have major repercussions on internal cohesion. The creation of peripheral centers of power which could be alternative to, but above all more effective than central authorities would create a centrifugal force capable of undermining the long-term sustainability of Afghan institutions.

The influence of local leaders in the national political life is indeed a primary cause for the sharp slowdown in forming the new government and it is regarded by the

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<sup>11</sup> Data provided during the talks between the Ce.S.I. delegation and and Pakistani Security Forces staff.

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<sup>12</sup> The percentage was estimated by the Security Forces staff during the meeting with the Ce.S.I.

Pakistani authorities as one of the main problems that jeopardize the strengthening of bilateral relations. After the presidential elections held in the country in June 2014, it took about nine months to new President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah to balance the demands of the different local potentates that had supported the two candidates in the election campaign and to form a government that would combine the interests of the relative supporters. Although, apparently, Ghani is trying to distance himself from the warlords, especially from the circle of power that governed the country under President Hamid Karzai, the obstructionism met by the new president from those who now sense the danger of being excluded from the old power-sharing fights is creating considerable friction on the process of consolidation of central institutions.

Such an internal contrast makes Afghan politics extremely volatile and, consequently, does not allow the current government to pursue a broad and ambitious political agenda that can help rebuild internal stability in the medium and long term. This difficulty has emerged in its full extent during the attempt at reconciliation between the leadership of the Afghan Taliban and the Kabul government. The reopening of the dialogue with the political representatives of the insurgents has always been an important point on President Ghani's agenda since he took office in September 2014, but so far, it has always ended in a stalemate. Pakistan is

very interested in this process as well, because it considers it crucial to begin a credible stabilization in neighboring Afghanistan and, therefore, to limit the spread of instability caused by the Taliban across the border. In recent months the Pakistani authorities have played a pivotal role in establishing a point of contact between Kabul and the *Quetta Shura* (the political leadership of the Taliban). After the first attempt to open negotiations failed in March 2015 due to a leak to the media, the representatives of the Taliban and the Afghan government's negotiating team met officially on July 7<sup>th</sup> in the town of Muree, approximately 45 kilometers from Islamabad, during a first historic meeting which was attended by both China and the US as observers.

Although a second round of talks was planned for the end of the same month, the Taliban stepped back and broke off the negotiations with Kabul after the unexpected announcement of Mullah Omar's death - the historical leader of the *Quetta Shura* - by anonymous sources within the Afghan Security Services. Mullah Omar, about whom no news came in after his flight from Afghanistan in 2001, was always a deeply charismatic figure recognized as an inspiration across the whole Taliban militancy. Although rumors about his death had been circulating for years, he actually died in April 2013; his figure had always been used to good advantage by both the Afghan authorities and the *Quetta Shura* in

order to implement their political agenda. On the one hand, in fact, the secrecy about Mullah Omar's death allowed the Taliban leadership to capitalize on the fascination and the evocative power of his personality to motivate the militants on the ground to carry on a united fight against the central authorities. On the other, denying the death of such a charismatic character who had been fundamental to the insurgency allowed the government in Kabul to utilize the messages which were attributed to him and sporadically published in support of the peace process to give it greater legitimacy and increasing the effectiveness of each attempt at dialogue with the *Quetta Shura*.

Although it is still unclear how many and which parties both within and outside the militancy were aware of Mullah Omar's fate, such a revelation, coming just before the scheduled date for the reopening of negotiations between Kabul and the *Quetta Shura*, seems to be a deliberate decision to try to bring the negotiations to a difficult stalemate. In this respect, it is not to be excluded that the revelation of Mullah Omar's death is part of the political calculations of various warlords, mostly Tajiks, and some members of the power elite of former President Karzai (as mentioned earlier), who have always been hostile to the inclusion of Taliban

representatives in the rebalancing of internal political power<sup>13</sup>.

The recent cooperation established between Afghan and Pakistani authorities to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table has not been limited to the political process of reconciliation, but has also involved the Armed Forces and Intelligence Services. As a matter of fact, the cooperation agreement between the two countries in the field of coordination in border operations and counter-terrorism dates back to last May. In particular, the two Intelligence Services, the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) and the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding to seal and regulate a partnership in the area of information sharing, cooperation in Based Intelligence Operations (BIOs), investigation and counter-terrorism operations. Although still in the running, the cooperation should focus on the Taliban militancy as well as allow close monitoring of those groups who claimed to be affiliated to the Islamic State (ISIS) of self-proclaimed Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. According to Pakistani Security Services, ISIS in Afghanistan is still limited to certain circles of the militancy, in particular, young, third-generation Afghans, some groups of Taliban who are on a collision course with the *Quetta Shura* and are looking to strengthen their power over the

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<sup>13</sup> According to some representatives of the Pakistani institutions that met with the Ce.S.I., the program of reconciliation has not been strongly opposed by those actors.

territory, and those militias of foreign fighters (the few Arabs left in the country together with Uzbeks, Kazakhs and Chechens) mainly operating in northern and eastern Afghanistan.

Islamabad's interest in stabilizing regional security is an important item on the political agenda which is shared also by China. The latter is concerned that instability in neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan could affect the security in the independent region of Xinjiang, the historic homeland of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a militant group affiliated to al-Qaeda that is fighting for the independence of Xinjiang from the Beijing government.

The consolidation of the relationship with China is a strategic priority for Islamabad, which sees Beijing as an important ally to strengthen its role within the region. Although relations between Pakistan and China go back to a long time ago, in the past two years Beijing and Islamabad have shown that they have increasingly been focusing on bilateral cooperation to bring about an overall structural change in the region and transfer it into the so-called "Greater South Asia". This ambition is shaped by considerable infrastructure investment that should link the trade and energy routes along the traditional Silk Road with the Arabian Sea. The project, known as

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)<sup>14</sup>, aims to connect the new Gwadar deepwater seaport (operated by the state company called China Overseas Port Holding Company, COPHC) located in the Pakistani Balochistan province with the city of Kashgar in the Chinese western Xinjiang region. The project was launched during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping in Pakistan last April. It was announced that Beijing would allocate \$ 46 billion for investment in the Pakistani energy and infrastructure sectors, with enormous potential benefits for the economy of Islamabad.

It is estimated that about 33 out of \$ 46 billion will be invested in energy projects (in particular, in new coal power plants to tackle the 6,000-megawatt/h production deficit currently afflicting Pakistan), while \$ 10 billion will be devoted to the actual infrastructure projects between Gwadar and Kashgar (new roads and railways, modernization of existing tracks, two new gas and oil pipelines). Finally, it has not been specified what the remaining \$ 3 billion funds will be spent on (probably on school and civil infrastructure).

The underlying objective of the CPEC for China is to finally gain sea access for resources and goods produced in the west of the country, in order to try and rebalance the situation which so far has favored the richer southern and eastern regions. In this

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<sup>14</sup> The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor was the stone guest in all the meetings held between the Ce.S.I. and the Pakistani think tanks.

respect, Pakistan is strategically located in the Arabian Sea and could serve as a regional hub along the track of the new "Silk Road" to bring Chinese goods to the Indian subcontinent and the Arabian Peninsula and, vice versa, raw materials and hydrocarbons from the Gulf to Beijing, bypassing the Strait of Malacca.

On the other hand, the CPEC is an incredible opportunity for Pakistan, a country of 200 million inhabitants who are mostly young and unemployed and which has hardly been able to benefit from the economic development in Asia so far because of the constant internal instability hindering substantial foreign investment. Therefore, in Islamabad's view, the Chinese projects could prove pivotal to reduce the domestic unemployment rate and solve the problem of frequent power cuts, which have greatly undermined the country's productive capacity. The CPEC's economic impact could also be further increased by the possible creation of Special Economic Zones, areas designed in support of the CPEC where many Chinese industrial conglomerates could have their headquarters and create considerable allied activities for the local economy. If the plans were actually fulfilled, the first CPEC related facilities should become operational in 2017.

The corridor between China and Pakistan could offer the Islamabad government the possibility of enhancing its relations with another important neighbor, Iran. In a time

when the success of the nuclear negotiations conducted in the past two years between Tehran and the so-called P5 + 1 group (the USA, Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany) has brought to an opening of Iran to the international community, Islamabad is very interested in the possibility of revitalizing bilateral relations. An improvement in this direction would lead Pakistan to pave the way for an intensification of trade and economic relations between the two countries, which have dramatically fallen in the last three years because of the international sanctions imposed on Iran<sup>15</sup>. In particular, it would be in Islamabad's interest to involve Iran in the energy network provided by CPEC, so as to implement the much-needed project to build a gas pipeline in order to transfer natural gas extracted from Iran's South Pars field to the Gwadar port.

The momentum shown by the authorities in Islamabad to reconfigure relations with neighboring states is, therefore, based on the interest in overcoming the structural weaknesses (energy shortage, limited infrastructures, industrial weakness, unemployment) that so far have hampered the country's economic growth when compared to other actors in Asia. However, it should be noted that the very strengthening of bilateral relations with countries such as China, Iran and Afghanistan is seen by the Pakistani

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<sup>15</sup> Trade amounted to \$ 214 million in the 2013-2014 period, compared to \$1.5 billion in 2008-2009.



authorities as an opportunity to get a new and more valuable ace to play in the historic competition with the Indian power. The tense and controversial relations with New Delhi, in fact, remain a priority on Islamabad's political agenda. As the Ce.S.I. delegation was told by Col. (R) Muhammad Hanif, Research Fellow at the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), the Pakistani government believes that India is trying to isolate Pakistan through bilateral agreements

## Conclusions

The Ce.S.I. delegation's visit to Pakistan has created the opportunity to directly get to know the new approach taken by the Pakistani authorities on the fight against terrorism and internal insurgency. Compared to the past, the Pakistani establishment now seems determined to increasingly adopt a policy of zero tolerance towards the militants. The increase in military efforts in this direction (with the launch of Operation Zarb-e-Azb) is apparently linked to the will to participate in international efforts to combat terrorism, but also to a purely national objective. After more than a decade in which militant movements destabilized the country, the Pakistani authorities have realized the huge economic damage which has been inflicted and are trying to react. Pakistan must chase the Asian economic growth, penalized by the lack of foreign direct investment due to its internal instability. This is likely to slow down the country in what has been repeatedly referred to as the Asian

with the surrounding countries to exclude Islamabad from regional trade, as well as to sabotage the CPEC to prevent its beneficial effects on the country's growth. In this regard, according to the Pakistani authorities, India would be fomenting instability inside Pakistan by financing both the separatist militancy in the southern province of Balochistan and the anti-Pakistani militant movements in Afghanistan.

Century. Consequently, closing the chapter of insurgency once and for all, reviving its image as a bulwark of the fight against terrorism and creating a stimulating environment for economic development are the priorities on Islamabad's agenda to establish the country as a trade and energy hub in South Asia. In addition, the government can take advantage of greater support among the local population resulting from the strong emotional impact felt in the wake of the attack to the military school in Peshawar and the failure of negotiations between the government and the militancy due to the persistent refusal of the TTP to accept the Constitution as basis for peaceful coexistence. For a country such as Pakistan, which is deeply sensitive to national pride, defiance of the institutions and founding principles of the Constitution means, in fact, a clear dissociation from the social and national community.



As for international relations, Islamabad seems to be particularly focused on its rebalancing within the region. In conclusion, the Pakistani enthusiastic perception of China's role in the country cannot go unmentioned. All institutional and non-institutional stakeholders have stressed the importance of the long friendship between Islamabad and Beijing and the historic opportunity represented by the CPEC to finally change the face of the country. Although this enthusiasm is undoubtedly linked to the traditional close political and cultural relationship between the two, it is clear that the billions which China is investing in the country are fueling the hopes to aid a speedy economic recovery.

Consequently, in the context of balancing political and trade relations in South Asia, the European institutions should take action in order to increase the levels of cooperation, also in the form of direct investment in the country. In this way, Europe could take on an important role in a country with a great potential for development that looks set to become a central actor on the regional stage.

### The relations to Italy: perspectives and recommendations

As emerged during the journey, Pakistan's current objective in establishing itself before the international community as a key player for the future developments of South Asia could open up important opportunities for Italy, which, compared to many other

European countries, already enjoys a privileged relationship with the authorities in Islamabad. Indeed, our country has always demonstrated a considerable political and economic commitment in supporting the Pakistani authorities in their efforts both for greater internal stabilization and strengthening of Islamabad's position at international level.

Italy has been one of the first countries to contribute to various funding programs for rural and urban reconstruction, poverty reduction, improvement of health and education systems, as well as for the reconstruction and development in the border areas with Afghanistan. A part of these projects (for a total of about € 80 million) has been realized by implementing the Pakistan-Italian Debt for Development Swap Program, the debt conversion agreement signed in 2006. A more structured definition of the development cooperation programs between Italy and Pakistan has been included within the Strategic Engagement Plan (SEP), a strategic partnership agreement signed in 2013 to regulate cooperation in the field of politics, economy, culture, security and defense.

The relations between Pakistan and Italy have also been fostered over the years by the sharing of common interests in the international arena. The two governments have played an important role within the United for Consensus Group, the movement

promoting a reform of the Security Council of the United Nations to increase the number of non-permanent seats and boost the efficiency and the effectiveness of the Organization. Furthermore, Italy has always supported Pakistan in the development of its relations with the international community. In addition to the support provided to Islamabad for the seat in the Security Council and in the Human Rights Council, the Italian government has promoted the requests of the Pakistani authorities to grant the country the preferential tariff treatment access to EU markets through the implementation of the Autonomous Trade Preferences.

Besides political and economic aspects, Italy-Pakistan bilateral relations are reinforced by the bridging role played by the Pakistani community in Italy, which represents an important component in the sectors of industry, agriculture and trade. Being well integrated into the Italian society, the activism of this community facilitates intercultural exchanges between the two countries and consequently promotes the development of mutual understanding, which is essential to ensure solid cooperation in the long run.

In this regard, strengthening the role of Pakistan as a strategic hub for the political and economic development of the region may allow Italy to find a privileged partner with whom to boost its presence in South Asia. Following the travel experience in the

country and what has emerged from several meetings held with senior policymakers and think tanks in Pakistan, the Ce.S.I. delegation proposes the following policy recommendations for Italy to strengthen the bilateral relations:

- At a time of great effort on behalf of the Pakistani authorities to successfully end the fight against the internal insurgency, Italy could strengthen the cooperation between Italian and Pakistani intelligence services to share *best practices* in terms of information sharing, information systematization and coordination between the various Forces operating in the territory. In addition, special attention should be paid to prevent and monitor the danger of recruitment through social media.
- As emerged from several meetings, the Pakistani authorities are convinced that Italy has always proven to know and understand Pakistan better than many other European countries. In order to reinforce this perception, Italy could intensify exchanges at both diplomatic and civil society level to deepen mutual understanding and revive the image of Pakistan among the Italian population, thus further stimulating the integration of

- the Pakistani community in the Italian society.
- The Italian government could continue to serve as an important point of contact between Pakistan and the EU. Currently, Islamabad-EU relations are well established, but still primarily limited to the economic dimension. With its traditional role of mediator, Italy could stimulate the deepening of relations and push the European Union to look with increasing interest at the stability of South Asia and assume a role in the resolution or mitigation of regional tensions.
  - Pakistan is an important partner for our country in terms of military cooperation, and this relation has been greatly strengthened by the Italian military presence in Afghanistan. In order to contribute to the stabilization of Afghanistan and the subsequent national disengagement from Kabul, Rome should continue giving military assistance to Islamabad, providing it with surplus material from our Armed Forces within advantageous conditions. Specifically, Italy should help equip Pakistan with systems of personal protection for soldiers (especially bulletproof vests), as well as armored vehicles and anti-mine and anti-IEDs vehicles. These devices are essential to limit losses during counter-insurgency combat operations.
  - Given the interest of our country in the stabilization and security of the SLOC in the "Enlarged Mediterranean", opportunities for cooperation and joint training between the Italian and the Pakistani Navy should be favored, especially in view of the role that Islamabad could assume in international trade after the development of the Pakistan-China Corridor.
  - With regard to the national Defense industry, Pakistan has been an important market for missiles, drones and sensor applications for several years now. Such an advantage over other European competitors should be preserved and possibly increased in view of the strategic position and economic potential which Islamabad is going to have in the future. This could be achieved through the implementation of specific G2G agreements enabling Pakistan to buy Italian weapon systems within advantageous financial conditions, involving the national banking sector (similarly to what is in place in major European countries for their key partners).