



April 2019

PAKISTAN AFTER THE ELECTIONS: BETWEEN GEOPOLITICS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Markus Gauster

In 2019, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is in the midst of a geopolitical struggle between China, USA and Russia for power, influence, resources and regional stability. Domestically the country is confronted with security, economic and social problems. Under these circumstances general elections were held in July 2018, which Imran Khan won. He now has to face a multitude of challenges. The EU and its member states should review its relations with Pakistan's new government, show confidence and strengthen relations at all levels. Austria could also set a course in this respect.

Domestic politics 2019

Imran Khan with his PTI (Justice party) obtained a clear majority in the elections and was appointed Prime Minister. This allowed him to break the dominance of the Bhutto and Sharif clans after 22 years of struggle. Although he enjoys a huge support of the Pakistani youth, the population now expects effective crisis management to overcome the sovereign debt crisis and corruption as well as the creation of jobs.

The Pakistani establishment (army, institutions, technocrats) has a major influence on the government's leadership, especially on foreign and security policy. Support for the Prime Minister can be expected as long as he allows the elites to go on. Many domestic issues (e.g. terrorism, energy crises, poverty) need to be solved in order to improve human security. Imran Khan promised to introduce a welfare state based on European examples. However, his party has taken over an empty treasury and is dependent on emergency loans. He is also challenged by a strong opposition; in particular Shabaz Sharif of the PMLN

(Nawaz party) and Bilawal Bhutto of the PPP (People's party).

Pakistan is rich in resources including rare-earth metals. Since its foundation in 1947, the country made substantial progress in the fields of democracy, higher education, pluralism or women's rights. Nevertheless, it could not manage to overcome its feudalistic structures and the illiteracy rate is still very high. Pakistan is a long way from predictability of legal decisions and effective separation of powers. However, the Supreme Court showed strength and dismissed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from his post for corruption in 2017. Anti-corruption authorities have been strengthened and the relatively strong, but often extorted media in Pakistan is uncovering abuses of the system.

In Pakistan, religion is often instrumentalized for political purposes. Imran Khan

has clearly spoken out in favour of taking action against Islamist extremists. However, they still have political leeway even though they hold less than 10% of the seats in parliament. Thus the blasphemy accusations of the radical party leader Khadim Rizvi in the case of Christian Asia Bibi in October 2018 found many supporters. In general, Christian and other minorities are facing increased pressure and little legal protection.

The Pakistan-India conflict

The roots of the conflict are to be found, amongst others, in the partition process of British India and in the struggle for independence of the Greater Kashmir region itself. Conflict items include ideological-religious differences (Muslims vs Hindus), resources (e.g. water) and claims for the entire Kashmir territory (approx. 275.000 km² with 31 million inhabitants).

Shortly after Pakistan was founded in 1947, India and Pakistan fought the first Kashmir war. Finally, they agreed on a UN-brokered ceasefire and subsequently on a Line of Control that divided the (former) Principality of Kashmir. UNSC Resolution 47 (1948) provided for a referendum on the status of Kashmir. However, this has never been implemented. The UN received the mandate for a military observer group (UNMOGIP since 1951), in which the Austrian Armed Forces provided the commander in 2001/02. UNMOGIP is authorized to perform monitoring tasks on both sides of the Line of Control and to investigate ceasefire violations.

The Kashmir question has become a tool for the conflict parties to assert their strategic security interests and influence on international level. Both countries make use of subversive methods (e.g. proxies). India accuses Pakistan of exploiting Islamist terrorist organizations (e.g. Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Muhammad) for attacking security forces in the India-controlled Kashmir Valley and radicalizing Muslims there. Pakistan perceives the Kashmir question as an

internationally neglected conflict in which the UN should do more in the interest of the Kashmiris and the referendum that is pending between two states since 1948. Pakistan is criticizing India's strong military presence in the Kashmir Valley (more than 500.000 security forces to control less than seven million Kashmiris), excessive attacks on civilians (e.g. with pellet guns) and repressive policies.

India justifies its military action in the Kashmir Valley to counter terrorism and extremism. In doing so, troops are protected by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act from 1990 that ensures their impunity. Tens of thousands of civilians have lost their lives since the beginning of the militant uprising of the Kashmiris in 1989. They have estranged themselves from India. Pakistan perceives itself as the protective power of the Kashmiris and is claiming a UN-led human rights mission for Kashmir, which India rejected. India is addressing the Kashmir conflict as a pure bilateral issue. This makes the implementation of the UNMOGIP mandate difficult. The importance of this mission is expressed by the fact that it can only be terminated by the UN Security Council and does not have to be extended annually. Without UNMOGIP, the conflict would be even more unpredictable.

Geopolitics and Geoeconomics

Pakistan is of strategic relevance to a number of major powers and often considered as their client. The Gulf States and especially Saudi Arabia make use of Pakistan as a proxy and religious-ideological agent. The USA are following a regional approach ("AfPakIndia" strategy). Their interest in Afghanistan is to contain terrorism, maintain permanent bases there and to keep Pakistan's nuclear weapons in safe hands. Pakistan's partnership with the US in their "War against terror" since 9/11 has several implications. Until 2001, Pakistan was a key player together with Saudi Arabia in supporting Taliban-insurgency in Afghanistan. Pakistan officially moved quickly to join the US-coalition and made

huge sacrifices to counter terrorism. Up to 10.000 Pakistani security forces and over 50.000 civilians have died since 2001. Pakistan has lost over 100 billion USD in economic power and investment opportunities due to armed conflict. In addition, the relationship with the USA has deteriorated considerably. US military and economic support for Pakistan peaked in 2010 and has declined steadily since then.

USA and China are competing to promote their arms deals with Pakistan and create dependencies. For example, the operational readiness of the Pakistan Air Force (operation of the F-16) depends on US-maintenance. Pakistan is therefore endeavouring to increase its room for manoeuvre with armaments from China (e.g. development of the JF-17 Thunder fighter jets). Russia is another major influencer that sold Mi-35 combat helicopters to Pakistan and offered to act as a mediator in the India-Pakistan conflict.

China's traditionally strong ties with Pakistan have peaked with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). More than 40 billion USD are guaranteed to be invested in Pakistan's weak infrastructure and energy sector. China can thus secure transport routes and may use ports like Gwadar as economic hubs and permanent bases. In the medium term, CPEC may facilitate more jobs for the young Pakistanis (62% are under the age of 30). As there is a lack of skilled workers in Pakistan, a huge Chinese workforce is currently on the job there. In addition, China's loans increase Pakistan's long-term dependency. India perceives CPEC with suspicion as its strategic options are diminishing.

The nuclear dimension

The conflict between India and Pakistan is often classified as a "recessed war" and has entered a phase of low intensity since 1999 (Kargil crisis). Their nuclear deterrence and ambiguity strategies help to avoid a full-scale war. They did not sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), but

stress that nuclear weapons should only be used for self-defence. However, there is a latent danger that crisis-ridden developments (e.g. Pulwama attacks 2019 or the Balochistan question) could lead to escalations. New military technologies and hybrid forms of attacks could also have unpredictable effects. The arms race continues unabated - peace is not in sight.

Pakistan and Afghanistan

The tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan remain serious. The armed conflicts in Afghanistan and the Pashtun Belt and deep mistrust stand in the way of coexistence. Secret service activities to eliminate militant leaders characterize this intelligence based war. The dispute of water distribution along the border with Afghanistan (dams are reducing water supplies) and India's activities in dam construction in Afghanistan are causing tensions. For Pakistan, this is also about maintaining the „strategic depth“ that India as a good ally of Afghanistan wants to diminish.

For years, the Pakistan military has not engaged the tribal areas. There, insurgents on both sides of the border (e.g. in the regions of Wasiristan and Khost) could move and operate quite freely and execute attacks against US forces and NATO troops in Afghanistan as well as targets in Pakistan. Numerous US-drone strikes on terrorist camps could hardly change much. Only after the attack on a military school in Peshawar by Pakistani Taliban at the end of 2014 did Pakistan take massive action against militant groups with air force and ground troops. Although this adds to security, it did not improve the socio-economic situation of the population. Up to two million inhabitants were forced to resettle.

Since 2018, Pakistan has been trying to increase security by expanding border fences along the Durand Line. However, Afghanistan did never recognise this border. Another challenge for both countries is the the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKAP), focusing on 'global Jihad'.

Some developments could indicate a rapprochement between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Imran Khan favoured peace talks with the Afghan Taliban, and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offered a constructive dialogue. However, rhetoric has to be turned into action.

Migration issues

Pakistan has long presented itself as an immigration country and has welcomed up to seven million Afghans, especially since 1979. The open borders did have positive (border trade) and negative consequences (terrorism). Nowadays, about 1.5 million registered and more than one million unregistered Afghans live in Pakistan. In the meantime, 75% of these Afghans were born in Pakistan, but denied the right to citizenship.

Migration pressure is increasing due to the deteriorating socio-economic situation. However, many expect a (voluntary or forced) return to Afghanistan to be less secure than staying in Pakistan. Not only the Afghans, but more and more Pakistanis try to migrate to Europe.

Conclusions and solutions

-Relations between India and Pakistan have become tenser in February 2019 after the attacks on Indian security forces in Kashmir (Pulwama), airspace violations and the downing of an Indian fighter jet by Pakistan. This indicates an escalation, but has to be seen in the context of the national elections in India in 2019.

-The Indian government under Prime Minister Modi is facing increased tensions between Hindus and Muslims, while Pakistan has to solve its economic and social problems. Religious extremism is often ci-

ted as the biggest threat to both countries.

-The Kashmir question will continue to shape the security policies of both countries. Imran Khan has always stressed the need for political solutions.

-Concessions or confidence-building measures are hardly to be expected. The conditions for a dialogue are unfavourable.

-India is ambitious to present itself as a responsible economic power. This implies certain leverage effects to discuss détente processes with regard to Pakistan.

-(Sub-)conventional approaches and disputes are to be expected any time and there is a risk of unintentional escalation. The USA, China, Russia and the UN have an interest in ensuring that there is no nuclear conflict, but their influence is limited.

Recommendations

-International mediation should be strengthened so that the UNMOGIP mandate is also fully supported by India.

-The EU should increase cooperation with Pakistan and focus on confidence-building measures, de-radicalisation and free trade agreements.

-Austria should enhance its cooperation with Pakistan because both countries are involved in peace operations. A renewed participation of the armed forces in UNMOGIP and cooperation in mountain training are options for Austria.

-Pakistan offers more opportunities than risks for investors in the long term through China's Silk Road initiative. Austria's cooperation efforts should therefore also be expanded in the export and import sector.

Impressum:

Copyright, Production, Publisher: Republic of Austria / MoD, Roßauer Lände 1, 1090 Vienna

Edited by: National Defence Academy Vienna/IFK, Stiftgasse 2a, 1070 Vienna

Periodikum der Landesverteidigungsakademie

Printing: Reproz W 19-XXXX, Stiftgasse 2a, 1070 Wien



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