

**Notes of the conference given by His Excellency Ghalib Iqbal,
Ambassador of Pakistan in France
February 17, 2014**



France-Amériques and Forum du Future were privileged to host his Excellency for a talk.

President Siefer-Gaillardin, in his welcoming words, emphasized the association's role as a lieu for the exchange of international issues and ideas.

In his introduction, Admiral Betermier, said that the Ambassador took his current position almost exactly one year ago.

His Excellency candidly spoke about **“the challenges faced by Pakistan today”**. He stressed that there was scant information about Pakistan in Europe and he would like to explain what Pakistan is and what possible turn the regional situation may take once the international forces have left Afghanistan. And what are the short term predictions?

Geographically, Pakistan touches Iran and Afghanistan to the West, China in the North and India to the East. Hence, on one hand while it is very closely affected by developments concerning these neighbors and their politics, on the other Pakistan is also the most viable economic bridge among them. Not everything is very good in Pakistan, but sadly even minor events solicit very negative reactions.

9-11 happened and it scarred the psyche of the International Community. Americans started feeling they were not safe. Conspiracy theories abounded. These theories were closely tied to the Taliban, al Qaida. Historically, Maktab Al-Khidmat remained a close ally of the West during the Soviet invasion, as was Pakistan in the frontline of the international resistance to the Soviet threat. Ben Laden too was ready to fight with the mujahidin against the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. Soviets withdrew after defeat and the Taliban arrived. It was a time when Pakistan needed international support and assistance in tackling the issues that are now in the fore front, but Pakistan and the entire region was abandoned at a critical

moment. The tug of war between diverging political and economic interests in Afghanistan destabilized the situation.

Afghanistan has many ethnicities, some Pushto speaking, some Persian speaking. The majority of the population is Sunni, but there is also a visible Shia minority. There are different languages. Due to commonality of language, there is a general perception that the Taliban are pro Pakistan. The northern alliance comprises various ethnicities that are considered anti Taliban because they speak a different language. The northern alliance feels that economically, it is better to do business with Iran than with Pakistan. Hence in essence, more than the linguistic or ethnic affinities, the whole issue relates to political and economic interests.



The military government of Pakistan needed support and was lured to position itself in the fight against terror: “you are with us or against us” was the US message. Therefore, Pakistan joined with the USA. The consequences were heavy as it resulted in massive problems including Political, financial and

Economic not to forget the tremendous human and social losses suffered by Pakistan.

His Excellency noted that a political mistake takes a generation to repair, an economic mistake takes three generations to repair and a Social mistake at times remains unrepaired even after several generations. Mistakes made in Afghanistan, and its consequences, have altered the psyche of a whole new generation of Pakistanis. A roller coaster ride of events in the region during and after the cold war and in the post-9/11 period, when Pakistan staunchly kept supporting the world against soviet and terrorist threats, has divided the public opinion. We have been led to a situation where many wonder as to “who are the good guys and who are the bad guys”.

Conflicts around Pakistan and the impact on Pakistan:

Who are the militants in Pakistan? Tensions propped up in the name of religion were the creation of vested groups. These tensions gave birth to various extremist organizations

springing up in Pakistan as well as attracting many extremist groups that settled in the Pakistan-Afghan bordering regions. A stretch of over 2600 Km, uncontrollable, porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan provided ideal environment for these developments. In Pakistan, the main issue is extremism not the sectarian tensions, as some may tend to believe.



How to see Afghanistan? Is Afghanistan the problem or is Pakistan the problem? Again, truly the problem is extremism, and extremism needs to be curtailed through political, military and economic solutions.

Lets look at the situation from different angles: Afghan, Pakistani, West or NATO.

US war against terror: how do we look at it?

Perceptions are important. The Americans and the West believe that al Qaida attacked the World Trade Centre and therefore the military and LEAs are heroes since they are fighting bad people. An overwhelming majority of people in Pakistan believe that Al Qaida, the TTP (Pakistani Taliban who are opposed to the Pakistani government), and the rogue segments of the Taliban are bad: they are attacking the people, the troops, in the name of religion and destroying the economy. They need to be defeated. However, a multitude of groups within Pakistan, though in a very small minority but militarily inclined, don't agree; they think the west is wrongly trying to subdue them and their religion. This makes the situation very tense and complex.

The Afghan point of view: "Afghanistan is my country". Historically, everyone who has come here has been defeated. We are a fiercely independent and proud people sharing the great traditions of 'Pashtunwali' or the 'Afghan code of conduct'.

Long term peace and stability in Pakistan can only be ensured if there is stability in Afghanistan. But the solution must come from the people of Afghanistan themselves; it has to be an Afghan-owned, Afghan-led solution to be successful. The up-coming elections are vital! They will determine what happens in the region and in the world.

The world therefore needs to monitor the elections and support the Afghan nation to determine a solution that they will be willing to respect and uphold in the years to come.

Pakistan government is committed to whole-heartedly supporting such a happy solution determined by the Afghans.

With its other neighbor, India, tensions have been frequent and have led the two nations to war three times in history. The extreme tension led Pakistan to develop its nuclear capacity as a minimum deterrent. Hence both nuclear neighbors now have to settle their differences peacefully. The various actors in the region around Pakistan need to achieve conflict resolution within their borders and in relations to Pakistan to pave the way for regional peace and economic progress.

The road ahead for Pakistan, and its region?

Pakistan is a very resilient nation! Despite the difficulties, it kept its course and today is another successful democracy of the world. For the first time in its history, a democratically elected government handed power to another elected government, after historic elections in Pakistan in May 2013. Even though there are law and order challenges in some particular regions, the social and economic life continues and flourishes without much concern. All those who have been to Pakistan or know it, are a witness to the buoyancy of this nation. While the current negative perceptions and remaining law and order issues discourage foreign investors, economic development is the only way out for Pakistan. The people need access to schooling, to jobs, to security. Access to energy and in sufficient amounts is crucial to economic development. Well aware of these challenges, the Government of Pakistan is taking all necessary measures to rectify the situation which have already led to positive results.

Politically, Pakistani nation is quite balanced and moderate in its outlook, thinking and way of life. Results of the last elections are a testimony to this fact. The extremists are a very small minority but they are keeping the majority hostage. This majority has stopped talking but they need to come out and start talking. They need to express themselves as they did in the elections. There is a need for them to join hands together. You can beat the bad guys or talk to the bad guys. The government has initiated talks to give a chance to peace. In fact, negotiations are the most desirable panacea towards conflict resolution everywhere in the region.

The goal should be better standard of living for all through education, economic development and peace.

The Pakistan government as well the entire nation is giving a chance to peace. It is hopeful. It is optimistic.