

Event report: „Workable Strategies? Re-appraising Political Developments in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Region“

On April 30, 2009, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Washington held a public expert discussion with Ambassador Volker Stanzel (Political Director of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany) and Professor Marvin Weinbaum (Middle East Institute). The event sought to evaluate current developments and to discuss transatlantic strategies for stabilization of the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

Volker Stanzel reported on the situation in Afghanistan, which has become more positive, but is still far away from complete modernization, due to widespread corruption. Along with corruption, a lack of security is the second central problem – especially a large decline in security from the North to the South. Only through a systematic training of Afghan police and army can this challenge eventually be met. In addition, the situation in Pakistan has to be taken in consideration. According to Stanzel, Pakistan could be deemed to be a significant threat to the region since it harbors members of the Taliban and other extremist groups.

Marvin Weinbaum concurred with Stanzel's insight, adding that Pakistan suffers from a great lack of political leadership. Since it also possesses nuclear weapons, it must be considered one of the most dangerous states in the world. Weinbaum also explained that many people are mistaken by saying that this situation is dependent on the existence of al-Quaida. If Pakistan destabilised further it would be a threat to the entire region, with or without al-Quaida. The situation in Pakistan therefore demonstrates the most crucial aspect for a success or failure in Afghanistan. President Obama's recently published „AfPak strategy“ therefore could be a step in the right direction, since it focuses more on stabilizing Pakistan within the American regional approach.

Ambassador Stanzel underlined how difficult it is to estimate which groups within the Taliban one can work with, since there are moderate as well as fundamentalist groups. The Taliban do not gain support because of their ideology, but because of their ability to pay („Guns for hire“) and also through fear and intimidation.

Weinbaum pointed out that Pakistan runs the risk of becoming a *failed state*, especially since it is a country in which more than 80 % of citizens lack formal education. Stanzel added that since the challenges are so complex, a coherent strategy between all involved has to be the main objective.

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May 6, 2009, Washington DC