

# GERMANY'S SOUTH ASIA STRATEGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

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## I. Historical Background

Germany is a country that is traditionally highly regarded in the countries of South Asia. The German people and German products are valued and generate a positive response in South Asia. This attitude of regard and even admiration is due less to the real engagement of Germany in any of the South Asian countries; rather it has historical roots and is based on perceptions which seem to be transmitted in the region from one generation to the next.

Among the historical reasons for this favourable view is the fact that Germany was never a colonial power in South Asia. On the contrary, Germany's political rivalry with Great Britain during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created the impression among the nationalist and anti-colonial popular movements that "the enemy of my enemy should be my friend". That was the reason why during World War I there was a group of young Indian nationalists in Berlin who had come for studies and who tried to influence the German public in favour of the Indian freedom movement hoping to get some political and material support. Those hopes of course never materialized. In a second 'wave' it was Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose who during World War II contacted Hitler and his government asking for support in his fight against British colonial rule. He had to leave Germany without any result. All initiatives which were taken by German foreign policy to act in South Asia such as the encouragement of the 'reshmi rumal' plot or the German support for the fakir of Ipi were weak and ill funded and were never successful.

Germany's disinterest in colonial expansion in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century was not so much an expression of its missing aggressiveness but much more due to the economic and political weakness of Germany at the time and a result of missing German unification. This gave an opportunity to German intellectuals, poets and writers to develop a rather romantic picture of the Orient. One of the most famous representatives of this romantic view of the Orient is the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Living at a time in Germany, when the idea of nationalism which eventually would close the minds of the people for the achievements of other cultures had not yet taken root. He was a real Weltbuerger - a global citizen. A strong believer in God but a critic of Christian religious tradition and church he took strong interest in ideas not Christian at all, philosophies, religions, poetry from far-away regions such as the Orient. For Goethe the Orient was the place where the wonderfully smelling spices come from, where good and righteous rulers ruled, where a highly sophisticated culture and civilization was producing deep philosophical wisdom, fabulous wealth, exotic textiles, perfumes, ornaments and surrealistically romantic stories and poetry. His "West-Eastern Divan", a collection of poems published first in 1819 reflected deep interest in the East. His studies of the Koran, the first translations of poems of the Persian poet Hafiz and the first translation of the Sanskrit drama 'Shakuntala' are landmarks in German Oriental scholarship of that time. Another example of this romantic view about India is the German Max Mueller who studied Sanskrit and became famous for translating the Vedas which he thought to be the source of the wisdom of the East. He never visited India during his life; may be the harsh Indian reality of poverty, dirt and repression may have destroyed his romanticism.<sup>1</sup> Needless to say that this romantic view of the East current in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century vanished after German unification in 1871 and its growing eagerness to join the rest of Europe in the push for colonies, cheap labour and resources and is largely absent in today's Germany. The only left-over from that period is an extraordinary large number of Sanskrit studies and traditional Islam studies in German universities. Even more, the persisting 18<sup>th</sup> century view about the East and ancient India in academics could be one of the reasons for the missing political conceptualization of German foreign policy with regard to South Asia and the realities there.

## II. The Current Situation

After the second World War Germany emerged as a divided country struggling to overcome the disastrous economic, political and psychological consequences of the military defeat. The division of the post-war world into a capitalist and a communist part and the beginning of the cold war era made it difficult for the two Germanies to overcome the fall-out of that war and its consequences.<sup>2</sup> With regard to their foreign policies both German states became dependent on the victors of that war who were not interested in an independent role for Germans in foreign policy. That may be the main reason why only in 1993 a first Asia concept of the Federal Republic of (re-united) Germany was formulated which looked at Asia as a whole and did not specify regional policies within Asia. This first concept was strongly focussed on the economic interests of the former FRG<sup>3</sup>. East Germany during its existence had been even more dependent on Soviet guidelines for its foreign policy and did not develop any independent concept.

East and West German foreign policy was tilted towards India as the largest country with the largest economy and may be also because of the mentioned historical romantic traditions idealizing India. In addition, East Germany had a preference for India because of India's attachment to the Soviet Union through the treaty of friendship and mutual cooperation concluded in 1972.<sup>4</sup> West Germany had mainly economic reasons for their tilt towards India. Pakistan was viewed as a US ally by East Germany and, therefore, had a low priority in its foreign relations. It came into focus of West Germany policy in the nineteen sixties during Ayub Khan's rule when a rather active economic development aid program was run in Pakistan. Pakistan during that time was regarded as an example of successful development policy.

Gradually German foreign policy in Asia according to their own evaluation<sup>5</sup> has given a growing emphasis to the export of political institutions and ideas of democracy, human rights and other enlightenment values to Asia even if this in some cases would hamper their economic interests. After 9/11 all Asia related policies of the West and of Germany came under an

increasing focus of security related issues. A specified foreign policy concept for South Asia was for the first time in German history developed and presented to the public in 2002 on the occasion of an event named "Asia Day of the German Foreign Office – German foreign policy after 9/11" on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 2002 in Berlin. The document which is available on the webpage of the German Foreign Office<sup>6</sup> formulates in 17 pages the priorities of German foreign policy in South Asia for the medium-term perspective. A closer look at the text reveals no basic changes in the concept from the earlier policy. The focus on India which is seen as the new upcoming world power is obvious and has been declared to be one of the basic principles of German foreign policy in the region. Indo-German relations are based on an "Agenda for German-Indian partnership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" signed in 2000. A German-Indian parliamentary group and a German-Indian consultation group containing publically well known personalities of the two countries are among the planned initiatives. Pakistan – at that time under a Musharraf-led government- was promised support on the way towards a return to democracy, but apart from political advising and support in education, human rights and the like promoted through the German political foundations active in Pakistan and NGOs, no concrete measures, especially no economic initiatives or investments have been envisaged. With regard to economic cooperation the paper says that Pakistan is unattractive for direct investment plans but some scope for cooperation in the fields of telecommunication and engineering are identified in a general way. Though accepted in 2002 the concept does not elaborate on the war in Afghanistan and how it might influence mutual relations. A policy update might have been made but is not displayed on the webpage of the Foreign Office.

On the basis of this foreign policy concept Germany is trying to manage its relations with South Asia including Pakistan and Afghanistan. It can be said that this is a rather defensive policy concept without a clear vision for the region as a whole and with a heavy tilt towards India. It seems that even more than sixty years after the end of WW II and twenty years after the reunification of Germany the restraint that was put on German foreign policy has not fully been overcome. In addition, the focus of Germany today seems to be more on the EU and EU extension

problems and right now on economic difficulties at home. Pakistani expectations of a closer cooperation with and reliance on Germany face, therefore, a rather dim outlook for success. That has apart from the conceptual restraints practical and home-grown reasons.

Against all hopes and expectations, since 2002 the economic and political situation in Pakistan has destabilized rather than improved. Pakistan's active involvement in the 'War against Terror' has resulted in a destabilization of this country which is anyway troubled with a weak state apparatus. The ordeal around the dismissal of the Chief Justice of Pakistan and the fatal treatment of the Lal Masjid crisis in 2007 have added to the undermining of state institutions and have spread militancy from the tribal into the settled areas and the cities of Pakistan. The PPP government in place since 2008 is busy undoing the few attempts of the Musharraf era for stabilizing the political system such as democratization of the inner party structures through intra-party elections, accountability and promotion of higher education. The judiciary which has been under direct attack in Pakistan since 1998 by both the governments of Nawaz Sharif and Musharraf is now being undermined by the PPP government. The verdict of the Supreme Court of Pakistan on the NRO which has been declared null and void *ad initio* is not implemented by the government given the consequences for their sitting representatives. The scandal of fake degrees of quite a number of parliamentarians from all parties is undermining the credibility of the National Assembly. For Germany which is so much more interested in the transfer of Western values and institutions to South Asia than it is in economic aid or investment this is a clear sign that their focus away from Pakistan is right. Growing corruption in all walks of Pakistani life, deterioration of the security situation and the promotion of non-issues like the re-naming of provinces instead of dealing effectively with the economic downturn is unlikely to urge Germans to 'do more' for Pakistan.

### III. The ideological background of Germany's foreign policy

It is important to understand the mindset behind this German attitude in order to be able to understand political priorities and attitudes and to develop a suitable strategy. This is right not only with regard to Germany and German policy but also with regard to European policy in general and it also partly explains American attitudes. One of the amazingly insightful and clear expressions of this was General McChrystal's remark in his assessment of the situation in Afghanistan in 2009 that "the conflict in Afghanistan is not a war in the conventional sense but a war of ideas and perceptions."<sup>7</sup>

As a result of Enlightenment which took place in Western Europe in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century certain values became prevalent in European thinking and world view and on the basis of this, corresponding political institutions were developed. Some of these values are 'reason' (meaning that everything in this world should be logical and understandable through human reason), secularism (meaning the separation between church as a representative of God which is regarded as unreasonable and the state and life in this world which should be organized according to human reason) and thirdly, individualism (meaning that the individual and his/her needs and rights carry prevalence over all others including those of the community). This state of affairs was the result of a specific development in European thinking from the classical time and the specific role the Christian church had played in European history as well as the devolution of the traditional community-based European society by the economic development of capitalism. On the basis of this European development of Enlightenment and the French revolution which shaped first French and later European societies according to those enlightenment values a world view was created which defined 'progress' as material progress exclusively and looked at human development from a universalist point of view. That meant that the European model of development was thought to be the defining concept of progress. This had to be the road the rest of the world had to take in order to 'progress'. The fact that the intellectual development of Enlightenment was limited to Western Europe and that its ideas were 'exported' to the colonies America,

Canada, Australia and New Zealand through European migration only while the rest of the world such as Africa, Asia, parts of Eastern Europe and South America had not experienced such a development and accordingly were holding on to very different values and world views is conveniently forgotten and disregarded by the West today.

This should explain why the West in general and Germany in particular is so interested in universalizing enlightenment values and the institutions based on them to the rest of the world: it is in the first place to spread 'progress' and it is in the second place to secure a leadership role over those countries and people who had to be enlightened with these ideas. This leadership role would of course come handy when the economic interests of the West are to be secured. Colonial rule from the 18<sup>th</sup> century had been justified by this world view regarding it as a 'civilizing mission' to spread Enlightenment values and 'progress' to territories lacking them and conveniently hiding economic self-interest behind this curtain of Enlightenment expansion. Since the end of World War II with the downfall of the old colonial empires and their European representatives Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands the initiative has shifted to the US to take the lead in creating a new strategy of neo-colonial domination of the world. While Germany and "old Europe" (quote of former US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld) have lost the initiative in this 'war of ideas' they still represent those same values and the agenda to spread them in order to make 'progress' possible in the rest of the world. After the collapse of communism which is widely perceived as a victory of Enlightenment values many of the Eastern European as well as Asian countries have enthusiastically taken to democracy and market economy. This is taken as proof that this model of parliamentary democracy combined with market economy is the right and the only way towards 'progress', which is why efforts to promote these values and institutions in countries like Pakistan and even Iraq and Afghanistan are strengthened.

There is another facet to this also. European modernity in its conviction that it is the only right path towards 'progress' has developed quite an amount of aggressiveness towards that part of the world which had to be converted to its values and institutions. This aggressiveness was visible during colonial rule in the colonies and even outside direct colonial rule. This is the imperialist design which wants to impose its 'progressive ideas and structures' through military power. After the collapse of traditional colonial domination after World War II under the new leadership of the US many such imperialist wars to extend the political, economic and ideological domination of West have been fought. Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan are examples of this.<sup>8</sup> While 'old Europe' and especially Germany has not taken a leading role in this - Germany avoided participation in the Iran-Iraq war – it could not uphold this position under intense American pressure as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan show quite clearly. The new NATO strategy called 'NATO 2020' developed under the leadership of the former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is another sign that this attitude is not going to be revised even in future despite the disastrous situation of the war in Afghanistan. In 2002/3 there was a strong mass-based anti-war movement in many western countries including the US with millions of people going into the streets to protest against a war in Iraq which was disregarded by the respective democratic governments and finally fizzled out. This clearly showed that in this post-modernist era democracy has become less expressive of the will of the people and is occasionally manipulated. There is no such pressure of street power visible today in Europe or the US – on the contrary, nine years of propaganda of nurturing fears of Islam and Muslims have resulted in a situation where Islamic symbols like the holy prophet of Islam can be officially maligned under the cover of freedom of expression, the dress code of Muslim women living in European countries is interfered with by the law and Germany for instance is trying to create something like a 'united church of Islam' so as to deal with Muslims residing in Germany.

#### **IV. The way forward**

In 2007 during Germany's presidency in the EU the Friedrich-Ebert- Stiftung, the political foundation of the Social-

Democratic Party of Germany, initiated a project on the future of German foreign policy under the title 'Compass 2020'.<sup>9</sup> The authors have selected those regions of the world which they thought would be the important ones within this timeframe. In Asia they have focused their attention on China, ASEAN, Central Asia and India – not South Asia. Pakistan and Afghanistan are left out. This shows that even for the foreseeable future Germany is not planning to change its focus with regard to South Asia and Pakistan. India is envisaged to be at the center of German foreign policy attention. The reason for this is clearly mentioned in the paper which is available on the webpage of the Foundation: This reason is India's growth rate at an average of 8 per cent and a perceived sharing of interest in an international order based on democracy and human rights.<sup>10</sup> In the article about the importance of the ASEAN the authors again point at the main reasons for this selection: The "strategic pivotal function," which the German EU Council Presidency in 2007 has attributed to ASEAN, ultimately results from the political weight attached to the approximately 560 million consumers comprising this market as well as to the political role ASEAN countries are playing in the region.<sup>11</sup>

**How to proceed from here?** Any revised relationship between Pakistan and Germany would need changing attitudes and conditions on both sides. Given the domestic situation in both countries and the pressures arising from that as well as their integration into political and military alliances - Pakistan within the US war against terror and Germany within EU and NATO - no short-term substantial changes can be reasonably be expected. All that could be done is to recommend ways for an improved understanding of each other's positions and of ways towards practical implementation of some new initiatives. This is attempted in the following for both sides.

### **Germany**

As has been stated Germany's foreign policy focus on India is a long-term decision grounded in the sheer size, the economic potential and the rising political importance of that country. It is an expression of the huge opportunities the Indian market is offering and of the rapid economic development of

India during the last decade. Therefore, it would be unreasonable to expect any change in this policy orientation.

Germany's political focus in Pakistan so far is directed at the promotion of Enlightenment values like human rights and secularism and at Enlightenment institutions like parliamentary democracy. As has been demonstrated there has been no Enlightenment in South Asia and as a consequence, Pakistani society is based not on individuation but on communities such as tribes, castes and biradris. The family and extended family system is almost entirely intact and when talking about the rights of individuals we have to recognize that those rights are secondary to the right of the community in cases of clashes between the two. A secularization process has never taken place in Pakistan. Therefore, promotion of Enlightenment values presupposes a change in the social fabric of Pakistani society which is as yet non-existent or at most minuscule..

How did this social change occur in Europe? Together with a movement known as the 'renaissance' in the ideological field it was triggered through the change in the economic system and the development of capitalism. Therefore, in order to promote social change in Pakistan, changes in the economy should be promoted, both in an improvement and intensification of agriculture as well as in the development of new industries and the improvement of existing industries so as to make them compatible in the international market. This would at the same time fight poverty by creating jobs, enhance food security and promote training and education of the work force.

So far German economic interaction with Pakistan is focussed on aid not on investment and trade and on sectors such as healthcare, basic education and renewable energy instead of agriculture and industry. This focus should be shifted from aid to investment or aid should at least be supplemented by investment projects in both agriculture and industry which would create sustainable development and employment opportunities.

So far projects have been focussing on remote and underdeveloped areas like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

(KP). Given the precarious security situation in those areas today future projects should be initiated instead in the underdeveloped areas of Sindh and of the Seraiki belt which are more peaceful while civil war is going on in the tribal regions. Successful constructive work is hardly possible in a destructive surrounding as the Afghan situation is showing.

With regard to the basic aims of German foreign policy such as the promotion of Enlightenment values it might be useful to initiate a discussion at home regarding Enlightenment values and the whether European conception of 'progress' is truly universal and the only option. Can the development that had taken place in Europe centuries ago possibly be repeated in South Asia? In the face of a society based on different communal structures and in the absence of secularization the complete substitution of the values connected with this different situation seems to be either impossible or a very long-term project. Such cognition would open the way for an attitude towards accepting the different structure of Pakistani society and its values as given and taking them into account while designing foreign policy and practical steps within their context.

Another possible mode of dealing with Pakistan could be to see it not so much as the break-away part of India but as a part of the political region comprising of Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Central Asian republics. There are many good reasons for taking this view. Historically and ethnically Turkish and Iranian influences in the shape of political, economic and cultural contacts between those regions as well as exchange of population have been characteristic over many centuries. Mughal rule which was of Turko-Mongolian ethnicity and central Asian culture has promoted this connection over several centuries. Equally close has been the interaction with neighbouring Afghanistan with many Pashtun tribes crossing into the subcontinent and ruling parts of northern India. Iranians have come and settled in the subcontinent as administrators, craftsmen and Islamic proselytizers. The ancient silk route connected those territories and people with each other and with China rather than with today's India. The on-going war in Afghanistan is also vividly illustrating this connection; the war-

waging parties are more and more realizing that a solution of the conflict is impossible without the involvement of Iran, Pakistan and the adjoining Central Asian republics. Therefore, it makes good sense to view Pakistan as a part of this region which is strategically situated at the intersection of the Near East, Central Asia, Russia, China and India. Peace and economic development in this region is a precondition for European and German projects like energy security and strengthening of independence from Russian energy supplies. In that sense Germany could re-evaluate Pakistan's role and importance and German involvement in Pakistan.

### **Pakistan**

The German foreign policy strategy in Pakistan or any change in it is of course not a one-way affair. It would require a change in Pakistani positions as well which is not an easy demand. While one of the areas where change would be needed was of course the relationship between India and Pakistan there is also a realization that this is not going to happen soon because it needs the willingness of both sides. The deep distrust and enmity between the two will not vanish as a result of sporadic rounds of bilateral talks.

Another issue in this regard is the factual non-functioning of SAARC. As can be seen in the German foreign policy concept for South-East Asia for instance, Germans prefer to deal with ASEAN so as not split forces too much. They would prefer a well-functioning SAARC also. But this is not in sight as yet. It is this situation which should make Pakistan on its side realize that while efforts to come to terms with India and within SAARC should not be given up a turn towards the western neighbours specially the ECO countries would offer new vistas and opportunities for economic and trade development.

Partly this has already been realized with regard to Iran. The IPI power project which has generated strong resistance from the US has been persisted on and signed by Pakistan. There is some cooperation between the two countries in the security field especially with regard to checking the growth of the terrorist

group Jundullah which operates in the frontier region between the two countries and is said to be aided by the CIA. But there is much more room for improving and developing relations with Iran. Iran has from the very beginning of Pakistan's existence been a good neighbour having recognized Pakistan as one of the first countries in the world.

Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan have traditionally been difficult which is in the first place due to of the disputed nature of the borderline. The war in Afghanistan is another problem which makes the relationship between the two neighbours ambivalent. And last but not least Indian efforts to create and nurture anti-Pakistani feelings and attitudes are an impart factor. But again, there is growing realization that the fate of both countries is interconnected: peace and stability in Pakistan depend to a great amount on peace and stability in Afghanistan. It is quite clear that the economic development of Pakistan is also closely connected to Afghan cooperation; so is the extension of those relations towards central Asia.

In 1985 the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was formed with Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey as its only members, but Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan joined in 1992. This has been a beginning on which Pakistan could base its revised policy in future. The ECO given time and attention could emerge as a potential Muslim common market. So far political rivalries, especially between Iran and Turkey, have limited its effectiveness. But with Turkey's economy developing quite forcefully while its prospects of being admitted as a member of the European Union remaining rather bleak it can be expected that Turkey will as a consequence turn towards its eastern neighbours which would greatly help raise the efficiency of ECO. Pakistan's relationship with Turkey has traditionally been friendly and close; there is a lot of potential in the economic as well as in the political sphere for its promotion.

Within Pakistan one of the problems hampering German engagement is bad governance and the presence of corruption in all fields including in government institutions. The fact that

the Pakistani state is weak and law and order is deteriorating does of course not encourage German enthusiasm. The destructive role of the sitting government in the degree fraud matter for instance does substantial harm to goodwill and trust in the Pakistani establishment and in their will to fight corruption and fraud. It destroys the image of official Pakistan, its parliament and its government in a degree that nobody seems to realize or to care about. Notions of Pakistan being a 'failed state' are created by such failures more than by real insufficiencies in material conditions.

#### **V. Conclusion**

The need to bring peace and stability to the region of which Pakistan is a significant part should be the driving force for a re-consideration of Germany's South Asia policy concepts. This will be if at all a gradual process which also includes the need to end the war in Afghanistan. But with the enthusiasm for this war diminishing and the 2011 withdrawal date of the US forces in sight it may be the right time to start thinking about what comes next. Germany has not lost all of the good-will which it used to own in the region and especially in Pakistan. Therefore, Germany could play a leading role in the process of healing the wounds which the war has caused not only in Afghanistan but in Pakistan as well. For this a new concept is needed based on the realities of the present. The time of Goethe and Mueller is gone and it will not come back. It would be unreasonable to try to build foreign policy concepts on it. But what about the Enlightenment values to which Germany is subscribing? Equality is one of them. A focus on this idea of equality and balance in the dealings with the country and the people could be a ground on which a new policy concept could be based. The proposed inclusion of Pakistan into the region Iran/Afghanistan/Central Asia could be a viable way for restructuring foreign policy concepts.

In order to realize the idea of equality it will be necessary to re-think the presumed universality of Enlightenment values and the ways to reach them. This needs a discussion which partly had been started by Heidegger and some other German philosophers. History shows that economic development can

take place without Enlightenment values as China, Japan, India and even Turkey show vividly. That means that the cultural and religious traditions of those countries have not hampered their economic progress which could mean that there is no need to westernize these societies. We may concentrate on the economic sphere with technology transfer, opening of markets and investment in agriculture and industry.

### Notes

1. It is a telling fact that Germany is represented culturally in Pakistan by Goethe- Institutes and in India by Max-Muller-Bhavana.

2. The first Secretary General of NATO H. L. Ismay once noted that the task of the Nato was to keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans small. <http://www.presseportal.de/pm/59019>

3. Bundeszentrale fuer politische Bildung <http://www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/YZSD32.html>

4. As an East German I had the impression in 1989 that while East Germany had a preference for India West Germany should have one for Pakistan which turned out to be wrong

5. See <http://www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/YZSD32.html>

6. <http://www.bpb.de/files/PTSRIL.pdf>

7. Commanders initial assessment, 30 August 2009, [http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment\\_Redacted\\_092109.pdf](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf)

8. The problem of terrorism or countering terrorism is connected to this but is outside the scope of this article.

9. [www.fes.de/kompass2020/regionen.htm](http://www.fes.de/kompass2020/regionen.htm)

10. [www.fes.de/kompass2020/pdf/Indien.htm](http://www.fes.de/kompass2020/pdf/Indien.htm)