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Georgetown University Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding

A Discussion on Recent Developments in Pakistan

Bunn Intercultural Center 270, Georgetown University, January 30th, 12:00 PM – 2:00 PM

The Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University hosted a discussion on the current political crisis in Pakistan as the nation approaches its parliamentary elections on February 18th. **Shireen Hunter, Ph.D.** gave introductory remarks and moderated the discussion, while **Mumtaz Ahmad, Ph.D.** and **Marvin Weinbaum, Ph.D.** analyzed what went wrong over the past two years and **what steps Pakistan and the United States can take to recover stability in the country.**

Mumtaz Ahmad began by recognizing the widespread Pakistani disapproval of **President Pervez Musharraf's**. He claimed that the people view their leader as “part of the problem, not part of the solution.” Ahmad **broke down the government's shortcomings into four problems.** First, the administration is incapable of extracting sufficient funds through taxation due to rampant corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency. Second, the government struggles to control the entire geography of the country, consequently allowing for an increase in incidents of terrorism. Third, the country has suffered worsening income disparity which has fueled concerns of a possible economic disaster. Fourth, Musharraf's rule seems illegitimate to many Pakistanis, as his rise to presidential power while wearing a military uniform is unconstitutional.

Ahmad chronicled Musharraf's conflicts with the Supreme Court and demonstrated how Musharraf's actions against the state's judiciary have further damaged his credibility with the people. One example was the removal of **Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry** who was sympathetic to issues of human rights and disappearances. According to **Ahmad**, this incident promoted significant discontent among the general population.

Towards the end of his remarks, Ahmad noted that the media had caricatured **Benazir Bhutto** as a saint, Musharraf as a demon, and **the United States as a gangster due to its manipulation of foreign governments.** He argued that these depictions were unrepresentative of the truth, since Bhutto had been charged with corruption and abusing the platform of democracy for personal gains of power. Similarly, he believed that **Musharraf was not a monster and did want to transition to a civilian government.** Finally, he defended U.S. policy makers for their intervention, saying that the American government believed that Musharraf and Bhutto could successfully share power. **Musharraf would command the military and ensure the country's safety, while Bhutto would run domestic matters and be the “face to the Western World.”**

Marvin Weinbaum was critical of the United States' perspective of Pakistan since September 11th. According to him, Pakistan was headed towards political opening but was obstructed due to U.S. counterterrorism efforts. Weinbaum claimed that **the U.S. latched on to Musharraf**

without proper consideration of the political terrain. What was worse, he says, is that the U.S. government was unprepared for the possibility of Musharraf falling from power.

While the full support of Pakistan's military was attractive in the wake of September 11th, Weinbaum believes that their armed forces were ill-equipped to combat terrorism. The army had been trained for a traditional war against India and lacked the training and capabilities to fight a more abstract enemy.

Weinbaum concluded with **several policy recommendations for the United States.** “**We’ve got to be unequivocally for democracy, not just in rhetoric.**” Currently, Pakistan views the United States as an unreliable friend. He urges the administration to shed this designation by using steady diplomacy. Finally, while unconcerned with the threat of an Islamic extremist achieving power, he pressed that the United States must continue to monitor Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

During the question and answer session, Ahmed responded to a question regarding the role of religious leaders in the state by claiming that most prominent religious leaders are in favor of a **full parliamentary democracy with civil liberties**, as well as the removal of Musharraf. Another attendee questioned the role of U.S. aid to Pakistan, which is mostly directed at the military. Weinbaum agreed that the **aid should be distributed throughout different sectors of the government, such as healthcare and education.** However, he noted the difficulties in structuring the aid towards these programs, since Pakistanis often suspect that the United States only contributes in order to strengthen its influence.