



**“DILEMMAS OF DEMOCRACY: WORK IN PROGRESS IN
AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN”**

**SPEECH BY RT HON DAVID MILIBAND MP
FOREIGN SECRETARY**

**CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,
WASHINGTON
21 MAY 2008**

“Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.”

Those words of John Adams, the second President of the United States, have proved spectacularly untrue. Democracy has been a great survivor. In the final quarter of the twentieth century democracy marched across Latin America and Africa, and after the end of the Cold War, across central and Eastern Europe too.

But recently, the march has slowed. In some cases it has even gone into reverse. The questions have multiplied. The marriage of economic and political freedom has been questioned. We have heard as much talk of ‘democratic recession’ as of democratic growth. Some of the youngest and most fragile democracies face cynicism at home and fatalism abroad.

My plea today is that, with humility and care, we hold onto our idealism and belief in democratic values: a belief in the equal worth of human beings and their freedom to pursue a life of their choosing and the need for political systems to give vent to these aspirations.

The spread of democratic accountability is important to the pursuit of the UK’s national interest. Democracy allows competing interests and grievances to be channelled through politics rather than violence. It remains the best investment in prosperity and stability and the best insurance against famine and war.

And when 8 out of 10 people globally say they want to live in a democracy, when a country like Afghanistan, without an election for thirty years, can inspire 8 million people – 70 per cent of the electorate – to vote, when



countries like Indonesia and Turkey are finding their own ways of marrying democracy and Islam, I believe it is right to assert the universality of democratic values.

But while we must be resolute in defending the extension of democracy, we must learn lessons from the successes and failures of democracy's march, particularly in faltering states.

My argument is that democracy which lasts requires both a state that has the *capacity* to offer protection, welfare and justice to its citizens, and the *accountability* to ensure it acts as a servant, not a master, of the people. Without a functioning state, lawlessness and disorder prevails and citizens' liberties are at the mercy of powerful forces outside the state. Without accountability, through elections, through a free press, through voluntary association, through legal protection for human rights, the state's power goes unchecked, and citizen's liberties are at mercy of powerful elites within the state. The capacity and accountability of the state are the twin dimensions of democracy.

The democratic imperative

I want to talk about democracy and democratic values in two difficult, different and important test cases: Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan.

I do so because Pakistan and Afghanistan top the list of UK foreign policy priorities.

800,000 British citizens trace their origins to Pakistan. Less well know, there are some 80,000 British nationals resident in Pakistan. Migration has enriched both countries, but it has created risks: there are close links between terrorist activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan and in the UK.

We are brought together through past connections as well as present interests. Pakistan remains defined in some respects by the systems and structure of the British Empire – the Provincial structure, the division of the Pashtun tribal areas and the rest of Pakistan, the Durand line. And of course, Afghanistan was at the heart of the Great Game between Britain and Russia in the nineteenth century.



I make the argument here in Washington because the role of the United States is critical to the future of Pakistan and Afghanistan. As the biggest bilateral donor in each country, as Pakistan's largest trading partner, and as the largest contributing nation in ISAF you have influence in this region like no other nation. I am also conscious that – from Senator Biden's proposals to John Negroponte's recent speech at the National Endowment for Democracy - this country is one of the most fertile sources of debate and ideas about Pakistan and Afghanistan outside the two countries.

The dilemmas of democracy in Pakistan and Afghanistan illustrate the dilemmas faced by advocates of democracy worldwide. They are instructive examples precisely because they are different yet connected.

Pakistan has spent 60 years oscillating between military dictatorship and elected civilian government. Within a year of its birth, the chaos of partition was compounded by the death of Jinnah, Pakistan's founder, and a war with India in Kashmir that would shape its attitude to its security for decades to come. It took almost nine years for a Constitution to be agreed, and less than two years later it was swept away by a military coup. It has enjoyed 28 years of civilian government, but weathered 32 years of military rule. After 60 years' existence, only a sixth of Pakistan's land and sea borders are formally agreed.

Pakistan's latest return to democracy, after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, delivered results that were accepted by all parties. A broad-based government has emerged, not just in the centre but in the provinces too. But the government faces huge challenges – economic, given global trends, institutional, given the pre-eminence of the army, and political given the history between the coalition parties.

The prospects for Afghanistan are still more fragile. Afghanistan has been torn apart by decades of conflict. A Cold War clash between the West and the Soviet Union was followed by disintegration into civil war. More recently, Afghanistan became the frontline in the fight against international terrorism.

The consequence is a country that is the 5th poorest in the world. A whole generation has missed out on education, and talent has been lost to the



diaspora. It has the lowest female literacy rate in the world. And it has a state that has never effectively governed outside Kabul.

Facing this litany, the temptation is to say that democracy is beside the point. But Benazir Bhutto got this right: “Democracy is morally right...and democracy is the only viable way to contain the growth of extremism, militancy and fanaticism that now threatens the world...We are fighting now for democracy to safeguard people’s rights and also to safeguard the unity of Pakistan. Our goal is to ensure that through empowerment, employment and education, regions of my country cease being the Petri dish for international and national terrorist plots that threaten us all.” The same could and should be said of Afghanistan.

Building democracy

Pakistan has spent 60 years discovering, sometimes painfully, the difficulties of making democracy work. The lesson in Afghanistan has been shorter, but perhaps more intense. We must reflect on the experiences of both these countries and the implications for how we support democracy.

The first is to reject the false choice of political reconciliation versus military action.

Afghanistan and Pakistan need effective security forces. They need to take on, with international help where necessary, those committed to violence. But there is no military solution to the problems of the FATA or the Gereshk Valley. Over 800 members of the Pakistani security forces have lost their lives since 2002 in the struggle to maintain security in the border areas. Yet the extremist threat has grown. So we need to separate those determined to impose their views by force of arms from those willing to accept the freedoms and limits of a constitutional order. We need to incorporate as far as possible the full range of competing interests within public politics.

In the Afghan Parliament, today, Mullah Rocketi, formerly a Taleban commander, sits in the same debating chamber as military commanders from the Communist era such as Noorulhaq Olumi or Mohammed Gulabzoi.



Security measures can deal with symptoms, but politics is required to address underlying causes. That is why I welcome President Karzai's efforts to reconcile all parties to Afghanistan's constitution. Pakistan's government needs to maintain a dialogue with groups, often outside the political mainstream, to lead them away from violent extremism and into politics. PM Gillani has said he will take forward proposals for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to look into "injustices committed against the people of Balochistan and other provinces".

There will be elements that will resist democratic principles and the rule of law and will remain committed to violence. The Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan must, with our support, be able to defend their own people, by force if they have to. But in both Afghanistan and Pakistan there are people who have been recruited to violence not by ideology but to further their interests. By including these people into the political process, by giving them a voice and persuading them to play by the rules, I believe you strengthen the state rather than subvert it.

The second lesson is that countries need democratic and effective states not just democratic and credible elections.

Afghanistan and certain parts of Pakistan suffer from the weakness of the state. The governments struggle to perform the basic functions of a government: to provide protection, welfare and justice. They compete with networks outside the state, accountable not through elections but kinship networks and tribal structures.

Elections are, therefore, always indispensable but never enough. Without effective state capacity, to provide protection and administer justice, democracy is superficial. In both Afghanistan and the FATA, people live in fear not just from the Taliban and terrorist attack, but also from criminality. A strong police force and an independent judiciary accepted by the population are critical to ensuring that differences are settled on the basis of rules, not force. The Frontier Crimes Regulation, which was introduced in 1901 to subjugate and discipline the Pashtun tribes along the Durand line, and which legitimises collective punishment, is something which the majority in FATA wish to see reformed or abolished.

In Afghanistan, corruption within the police and their failure to tackle serious crime corrodes the trust of Afghans towards their government. The progress made in developing an effective Afghan National Army is a huge



step forward. But there needs to be a similar effort to build a credible police force and effective judicial and penal systems to back them up. Too many ordinary Afghans tell us that they see the Afghan National Police – in many rural areas the *face* of the state – as part of the problem not part of the solution.

Security and justice provide the basic platform. But for citizens to remain loyal to the state, it must also provide the basis for economic welfare and social development, from health and education to basic infrastructure, including water supplies, energy production and transport.

Less than two percent of the population of Pakistan pays tax. The basic democratic bargain – taxation in return for representation and accountability – is undermined. Of the money the government does have, only 9% was spent on social development last year. It is telling that Pakistan has the seventh largest army in the world, is the eighth nuclear power, but comes only 130th in the human development index.

The weakness of basic services compromises Pakistan's security. We have seen in Pakistan how, where there are no alternative schools, madrassas have filled the gap. By investing far more in education, including in the tribal areas, the new government can provide a choice for the Pakistani people. The new government has boldly made tackling terrorism its number one priority. But they have also made clear that addressing unemployment and poverty is critical to the future of Pakistan, and have promised to introduce a minimum wage.

In Afghanistan, progress in welfare services has been made, but from a much lower base. It used to be illegal for girls to go to school. Almost two million girls are now receiving primary education. In Jaghori, 85 Hazara women sat the concours this year for Kabul University. In 2001 there was only one health clinic in the district of Lalsar Jangal. Today there are 17.

Third, democracy must be built from the bottom up as well as the top down. Central government can feel remote from the daily concerns of Afghans and Pakistanis, so building capacity and the rule of law at the local and provincial level must be a priority. In Afghanistan the National Solidarity Programme, which the UK has supported to the tune of \$75m, has led to the establishment of 20,000 Community Development Councils which plan, manage and monitor development projects, such as rural roads, wells and schools.



In Pakistan, the legacy of British rule was the dominance of the Punjab within national politics, and a tribal belt of ungoverned space. The answer is to strengthen the capacity of district and provincial government and its connection with central government. It is no coincidence that it was in the FATA - where levels of health and literacy are well below the Pakistani average, and where there is no effective rule of law - that 23 out of last year's 57 suicide attacks in Pakistan took place. Nearly half of the people in this remote, neglected region cite illiteracy as a major cause of "Talibanisation". That is why the new Government is right to emphasise the need for more economic and political development and better governance in FATA. There is evidence that ordinary people there want reform too – people want the restrictions on political parties in FATA to be lifted.

Fourth, democracy cannot work effectively when power is concentrated in one institution – be it the army or the executive. Stability requires an equilibrium in the distribution of power, within the different arms of the state – parliament, judiciary and the army - and between the state, civil society and individuals.

The imbalance of power between the military and civilian dimensions of the Pakistani state has been the source of continuous instability. The army's stranglehold on politics has prevented democratic government from maturing and moving beyond personality politics to proper policy-based debate.

Given the nature of Pakistani society, the army will need to continue to play an important role. But the army's commitment to stay out of politics must be sustained. It must be prepared to accept civilian administration, even when that involves rebalancing the budget away from defence to allow for more money to be spent on economic development and social welfare.

An independent judiciary is critical in protecting democracy from manipulation and corruption, and ensuring that differences are settled on the basis of rules not force. But building an independent judicial system in Afghanistan where it costs \$115 to feed the average family for a month, yet judges are paid less than \$100 and prison guards just \$42, is an enormous task. The international community will need to provide support, both through finance and training.



The informal checks and balances outside the state are arguably just as important in holding government to account. The vibrant Pakistani media – despite reversals at the end of last year - helped to shape the debate about the need for free and fair elections. The independent media in Afghanistan, though challenged, has an important role to play in holding the Government to account and keeping people informed in the run up to the elections of the next two years. Civil society organisations or NGOs can strengthen governance by providing a platform for people to engage with the state.

The final lesson is that Afghanistan and Pakistan need to stop blaming each other and recognise their shared interests and work together. If the terrorist threat continues to be shunted back and forth across the Afghan-Pakistan border, democracy will have little chance of success. There needs to be a common strategy to tackle the insurgency.

This requires a reassessment of historic priorities. Pakistan has traditionally focused on the threat from India. But India and Pakistan's relationship in the last five years has improved markedly. Earlier today Indian Foreign Minister Mukherjee met Pakistani Foreign Minister Qureshi. Afghanistan, Pakistan and India have agreed in principle to a gas pipeline that would bring gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan and on into India. The hope is that shared risks – between Afghanistan, Pakistan and India – on terrorism and resource scarcity – create the impetus for cooperation across the region.

International Engagement

So far, I have set out the opportunities and responsibility open to those within Pakistan and Afghanistan. I want to end by discussing the role of the international community in supporting progress towards real democracy in both countries.

The most perceptive criticism of the case for democratic governance comes not from those who contest whether democracy is in our national interest or whether it represents a universal value, but from those who argue that democracy is driven primarily from changes within countries rather than external influences, and that democracy cannot be forced.



We know from our history that democratisation happens primarily because of local dynamics and pressures: a state concedes representation when it needs more resources or when a growing middle-class demands political power commensurate with its economic weight. But outsiders have a legitimate interest and make a difference – for good or ill.

First, a commitment to democracy requires military support not its denigration or denial.

In Pakistan, the new Government and the Chief of the Army Staff recognise the need to strengthen the counter-insurgency capability of the army. We should be ready to respond to any requests for assistance.

In Afghanistan, we, along with our allies and partners in NATO, the EU and the international community need to provide long term commitment to both military and civilian capacity. Troops will continue to be needed to provide the space for diplomatic and civilian efforts. But we must speed up our efforts to switch our forces from a combat to a training and mentoring role, with Afghanistan's own forces leading the struggle to secure the state. And alongside troops, the priority must be to provide the support needed to build the critical institutions of the state and the economy, from judges and police trainers to support for agriculture, water and energy production. Civilian capacity must match military capacity.

Second, our aid budgets can provide a significant platform by enabling the democratically elected governments in both Pakistan and Afghanistan to respond to the needs of their people. If government capacity is a fundamental requirement of democracy, our investment in state-building and infrastructure must be as important as investment in military assistance. And our investment should be linked to outcomes, including the improvement of democratic governance.

The UK has doubled our development spending in Pakistan to almost \$1 billion over the next three years and are prioritizing good governance and the delivery of basic services. In Afghanistan, almost 80% of our funding goes directly through Government systems to help deliver schools, teachers, hospitals, doctors and other services to benefit the Afghan people. In Pakistan the figure is 83%. Aid flows need to be timely and transparent so that the government can plan its own activities and parliaments can have open debates about expenditure.



Third, diplomacy. Many in the region overestimate our influence. They believe that, behind the scenes we continue to manipulate events and determine the political path. That is counter-productive for our own interests, and for Pakistan, undermining Pakistan's sense of ownership and responsibility over its own affairs. Supporting democracy means supporting principles not personalities, institutions not individuals. Politicians come and go; some are more helpful to our agenda, some less. But it is the independence of the judiciary, the professionalism of the armed forces, the impartiality of the Electoral Commission and the authority of the police that will guarantee responsible and accountable government in the long-term.

In both Afghanistan and the FATA we need to accept that government reconciliation efforts will reach out to people that we are uncomfortable with. We have a right and a duty to say clearly when we think the Governments of Afghanistan or Pakistan are putting our forces in the region or our citizens at home at greater risk, making deals which leave extremists free to attack us. But the process of reconciliation will be infinitely more legitimate and effective if it is locally owned.

Conclusion

A month ago, on a visit to Peshawar, I sat and talked with the relatives of some of those killed whilst attending political rallies in Pakistan. I was struck by the fact that they all wanted to talk about politics. Yes some of them wanted to voice their frustration at Western interference in Pakistan. Others just wanted an effective attack on the conditions that give rise to radicalisation. But they all wanted a say. They all had views and wanted the power to shape their lives accordingly.

The same deep desire for democracy exists in Afghanistan. The first elections in Afghanistan for 30 years were greeted with a high level of public enthusiasm. Every wall and lamppost in Kabul was festooned with colourful campaign posters. Rural areas saw large numbers of women, nomads and elderly men eager to take part in the elections and trying hard to understand voting procedures with guidance from polling station staff.

Democracy is not an overnight sensation. It takes tens, sometimes hundreds, of years. It suffers setbacks, periods of crisis, descends into danger, threats from within and without. But it survives because it is, after



all, the will of the people. Democracy exists to still the conflicts that will always flare up between peoples. The only thing they need to agree on is that they will settle their differences not by the time-honoured method of force majeure but by the difficult, protracted, noble pursuit of politics.

It is sometimes a matter of life and death even to make this case. When the brave and unfortunate in tyrannical societies risk the wrath of the oppressor to do so, the very least they can expect from the fortunate is their support. We will find our national interest served if we offer that support. We will do right by ourselves. But, more than that, we will do right by them.