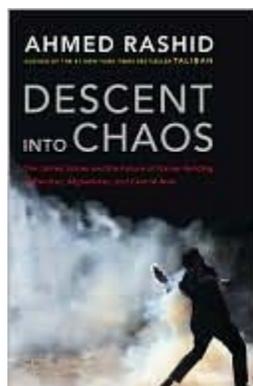


Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia

Ahmed Rashid , Joanne J. Myers

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to thank you all for joining us.

Today I am very pleased to be welcoming back a man whose name is synonymous with excellence in journalism, Ahmed Rashid.

For most of the 21st century America under the [Bush](#) presidency has been fighting a war on terror. Although the so-called war has defined our nation's domestic and foreign policy over the past seven years, the Administration's efforts have largely failed. The question is: Why?

One answer is that we are fighting the wrong war in the wrong place. Our guest sees the war in Iraq as a sideshow and argues that it is in Pakistan and Afghanistan where we should be focusing our attention and concentrating our energy and military forces, as these failing states pose a far greater threat to global security than the Middle East.

Ahmed Rashid has been covering this region since the early 1970s, acquiring unique knowledge about this vast and complex area. It has been said many times that there is no one more familiar with the issues, knows more about the players, or understands the consequences if we continue to ignore what is taking place in this part of the world than he. His reputation for possessing a scholar's commitment to meaningful research, a reporter's eye for detail and color, and a capacity to provide a nuanced vision that most Western journalists lack is justly deserved.

For those of you who have heard Ahmed speak at the Carnegie Council before, you know that with each successive visit he has provided us with information that would have been hard to obtain from anyone else but him. It was in April 2000, with the publication of *The New York Times* number-one best-selling book [Taliban](#), that he first introduced us to this then-unknown terrorist group. He was prescient in ominously warning us about the Taliban and the threat they posed to Afghanistan. At the time, he called for greater international commitment to help the Afghans. Unfortunately, the international community did not respond.

This time around, Ahmed alerts us to the potential danger still present in this part of the world. In [Descent into Chaos](#) he provides a shocking analysis of the crisis looming in Pakistan and the renewed radicalism threatening Afghanistan and Central Asia that will, if not addressed, impact deeply on the West. He also describes how the United States has ignored consolidating South and Central Asia, the homeland of global terrorism, in favor of invading Iraq.

While this book is about many things, in the end it is mostly about the American failure to stabilize the region after 9/11. It is also about our imprudent avoidance of carrying out nation-building on a scale that could have reversed the appeal of terrorism and Islamic extremism.

His conclusions regarding an unstable and nuclear-armed Pakistan, a renewed al-Qaeda profiting from a booming opium trade, and a Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan and Pakistan are devastating.

If you have read any of Ahmed's previous books, such as *Taliban*, *Jihad*, *Taliban and the Resurgence of Central*

Asia, or his articles, which have appeared in the *Washington Post* (in which today he has an op-ed piece he will tell you about), the *International Herald Tribune*, *The New York Review of Books*, or *The Nation*, I know you have learned a great deal about the nature of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asian politics. Today I promise you will learn a great deal more.

Please join me in welcoming our guest, my very special friend, Ahmed Rashid.

Remarks

AHMED RASHID: Thank you, Joanne. I think after that I should just sit down and sort of bask in glory. I don't need to say anything after that. Thank you again for another marvelous introduction.

Thank you so much, all of you, for coming, your excellencies, ambassadors, consul generals, all of you. I see a lot of lawyers here, which I find very intriguing. Let me just start.

You have been involved since 2003 in a very bloody war—5,000 dead, tens of thousands wounded, 300,000 suffering from stress disorders in the military; 1.6 million soldiers have been deployed three or four times to the war zones; the economy is in severe recession; the alienation from a large part of the Muslim world is very much still there; the social sector in the United States has been neglected largely. Now, all this what I am describing is about the war in Iraq. This is not what I consider as the real front that really needs to be addressed by the American government and the American people.

When Joanne said this is a sideshow, I'm not at all saying that this is a small war in that sense. What I am saying is what whatever happens in Iraq will eventually remain confined to the Middle East. It is a war that will be settled by the powers of the Middle East, with the help of the United States—presumably not this administration, because this administration has utterly failed to build any kind of regional consensus which could help settle the war. In order to settle the war in Iraq, you will need to speak to Iran, you will need to speak to Syria, and I'm glad some of the candidates now standing for the presidency are in fact talking about that.

But what I am trying to say is that Iraq remains essentially an Arab problem, a Middle East problem. Whether you stay or go, whether you withdraw your soldiers or maintain your soldiers, you will have to cut deals with the neighboring Arab nations.

There has been no terrorist attack on the American mainland or in Europe since 9/11 from Iraq. Iraq is not a global international threat. I am not even going to go into the other details about how this administration was proved wrong on WMDs [Weapons of Mass Destruction] and all the rest of it.

But then where is the threat coming from? The threat is coming from the part of the world that I live in, and that is from what is happening in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia. This has been described by some American generals as "Terrorism Central." Well, there is no doubt now that almost every single important extremist leader is now living on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. That is al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban, the Afghan Taliban, the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan, the various Chechyan groups, Kashmiris, Chinese extremists. Anyone in Asia, frankly, who is interested in global jihad and al-Qaeda philosophy is sitting there on the border, receiving training, money, and everything else.

Now, what I really try to look at is why didn't the United States understand what was going on in Afghanistan right after the victory or routing the Taliban in 2001. What I try to describe is basically that from 2001 to about 2004 there was a holding policy in Afghanistan. This administration was not interested in rebuilding or reconstructing the nation, empowering the government, empowering the people. Afghanistan was left to the CIA and to the Defense Department. They were given \$1 billion and they were told, "Make peace, empower the warlords, and let them run the country while we do Iraq. And if they can help us find [bin Laden](#) and al-Qaeda, that would be useful."

The problem was that half the warlords were in bed with al-Qaeda at the time. So they were receiving money both from al-Qaeda and from the Americans. And they certainly didn't help the Americans find anyone.

So what we had is we had three or four wasted years. Why I say "wasted" was simply I don't think any war in my memory was fought with so much enthusiasm, and welcomed with so much enthusiasm, by the local population. Now, with all due respect to the Afghan ambassador here, we are talking about people who are generally considered to be xenophobic, religious fanatics, anti-foreigners, anti-Christian, anti-white—whatever you like. And the Afghans have been very tough with all outsiders before. But 90 percent of the population—and I was there for a great deal of the time—really welcomed this.

Here was this huge window of opportunity, where a small country, population of 25-30 million maybe—it was not a big deal. Five or six billion a year from the United States, \$5 or \$6 billion from the rest of the world, for five-to-ten years could have put together a minimal infrastructure and institutions of governance, which would

have been more than sufficient for the Afghan people to have developed an economy that could have taken off. None of this happened.

I was in Kabul last week. I can tell you most of the city still gets only three or four hours of electricity a day. Now, we are talking seven years after 9/11.

It took four visits, which I have outlined, by President [Karzai](#), to convince Bush to build the first road in Afghanistan. That was back in 2003.

So we have this incredibly lackadaisical attitude in which the Americans were the lead nation, the Americans were to do everything, and the first surge that we see in Afghanistan was actually in 2004, just before the U.S. elections, when [Zal Khaliilzad](#) goes out as ambassador and he tries to change U.S. policy and bring in more money, more troops, more reconstruction. But the cynics were then saying at that time that this was more to do with the Bush election in 2004, because Iraq was already going down, and they needed a good example of something that was going right.

Now, if that surge had continued—unfortunately, Zal was then shipped off to Iraq as ambassador there—if that surge had continued, there was still enormous opportunity to do good.

I even maintain that as far as Afghanistan is concerned I think basically the goodwill for the international community is still there. It is much dirtied now. Too many civilians have died in bombing by NATO and American heavy-handedness. But essentially the Taliban campaign in south and eastern Afghanistan has been driven by fear, by terror, by forced recruitment.

We had 140 suicide bombings last year in Afghanistan. Most of the casualties were civilians. Now, there is no way you are going to tell me that the Afghans are actually supporting the Taliban, and thereby supporting suicide bombings which are killing their children. So what is happening is that this is a war of attrition that is being fought by the Taliban.

A U.S. general said to me very plainly last week, "We can dominate the country. We can't be defeated, but we can't hold. We can dominate but we can't hold."

Here the critique must rest to a large extent on some of the failures of the present Afghan government, the inability to really get their act on governance together.

Now, justifiably, President Karzai says, "Look, there were these four years in which nothing happened. There was no money. There was no work. What was I going to offer the people? I mean I couldn't create bureaucrats and policemen and Afghan soldiers out of nothing, when the international community was not there to help me." And in some ways he is right.

But of course, that vacuum of 2001-2004, what that has created is the present really bad situation. You have an out-of-control drugs issue, for which the international community really has absolutely no policy and is throwing it back on the Afghan government to try and prosecute some of the big traffickers. The real issue is that the United States does not have a drugs policy in Afghanistan, nor does NATO, nor do any of the major European powers.

We have massive corruption in the government. We have the lack of capacity in the ministries, seven years on, to actually govern properly. We have a lack of capacity in the provinces whereby governors and local officials can deliver goods to the people.

Now, certainly some of the excesses that are being carried out by the Afghans themselves today could be corrected. But the essential fault, I think, still lies in that period where that opportunity was lost.

Lastly, of course, we are dealing with a major insurgency now in Afghanistan. One-third of the country is now, if you like, in the hands of the Taliban, certainly at night and apart from where the foreign troops are. The east and the south are beset with an insurgency. In 18 months there has to be an election. Frankly, I don't see how there can be a presidential election in 18 months with one-third of the country really not being able to vote and the United Nations incapable of doing voter registration in these areas.

The key to this insurgency, which was the other second very, very big mistake made by the Bush Administration, were the sanctuaries in Pakistan. The Taliban leadership was given sanctuary at the very highest level by the Pakistani army in Quetta. They are still living in Quetta. The other allies of the Taliban, who have settled up in northern Pakistan, were also given sanctuary. They are also living in Pakistan. People know where they are living. I track them quite often. I know that [Gulbuddin Hekmatyar](#) was in such-and-such a city or such-and-such a valley. It's not difficult to do so.

You read the story yesterday in *The New York Times*. A journalist drove a whole day through north Waziristan, in this tribal area. They didn't see a single soldier. They were driven straight to the camp of this Taliban leader.

So what should have happened? Well, there was an American policy to Pakistan that, because General [Musharraf](#) did what he did after 9/11 and he gave the United States access to Afghanistan through Pakistan, whatever he said went, whether it was to do with domestic policies and continuing his one-man rule in Pakistan, or whether it was related to giving sanctuary to the Taliban.

The deal with the Americans simply was: "You go after al-Qaeda. We're not interested in the Taliban."

There was a silence, a deadly silence, over this whole issue of the Taliban, which the Afghans were raising all the time. Karzai would come here, he would come and complain to Bush, and time after time after time—I mean it's even boring to recount how many times he did that—but absolutely nothing was done about these sanctuaries.

I was writing about these sanctuaries in 2003. I visited these sanctuaries. I visited Pakistani Taliban who had been fighting in Afghanistan, had come back, who were being directed by the military intelligence and the secret services. I wrote about it very openly. There were several problems after that appeared.

But by 2003 the Taliban insurgency had only just started. It was clear that as long as these sanctuaries—no guerrilla war today can be fought without a sanctuary. It is not possible, with the kind of technology and special forces and everything else that is available. You need recruits, you need ammunition, you need weapons, you need food, and you need training and you need a safe haven where you can sleep and rest, just as American soldiers need to sleep and rest and do R&R [Rest & Recreation].

Now we are seeing a panic in Washington. Suddenly, everybody from [Chertoff](#) to [Petraeus](#) to [Negroponte](#), to you name it, everyday there's a segment in the U.S. papers saying "Pakistan has to go after these sanctuaries." Well, I mean, for seven years these sanctuaries have existed. They are very consolidated.

And what these sanctuaries have created, which certainly I foresaw in 2003, was that you cannot isolate the Afghan Taliban leadership, house them in a city or in an area, and then expect them not to influence the local population. And of course that is what has exactly happened. As al-Qaeda remained untouched, the Afghan Taliban leadership remained safe in their safe havens.

They were able to mobilize large numbers of Pashtun tribesmen on the Pakistan side of the border. Today we call these people the Pakistani Taliban. Now, who are these Pakistani Taliban? The Pakistani Taliban were essentially—the best example is Batula Massoud. Batula Massoud started out life as a mule driver. He had two mules. He fought in the 1990s with the Taliban against the Northern Alliance. On his two mules he helped smuggle out Arabs after Tora Bora. He was one of many mule drivers and people who had horses and transport who could bring out al-Qaeda elements.

So these guys were essentially fixers. They brought them in. They gave them a safe house. They took money from the Arabs. They made a lot of money out of the Arabs. They gave them food, gave them some kind of shelter, sent them on their way, and put them in touch with other extremist groups in urban Pakistan, whereby many of these al-Qaeda were able to flee Pakistan and go back to the Middle East. I am talking just after the war ended in 2001.

Now, the tradition in Pashtun society is that the idea of the "big man" is very important. So you get money, then you sell your mules and you buy a pickup, and then you make more money and you buy—Batula Massoud now has about 50 pickups, personal, which he runs on a commercial basis, apart from the pickups that might be used for his militia.

Then you have a bodyguard. Then the bodyguard develops into a small 50-man band, and the band develops into a full-scale militia of 3,000 to 5,000 men. You are then the "big man" and you are then responsible. And then you need to fund it and you need to make alliances with people like bin Laden and all who are going to help you fund it.

All this growth was totally apparent to anybody who would have been looking at the situation in Pakistan in 2003.

What we have also today, of course, the most dangerous thing, is that a lot of the urban groups who were fighting in Kashmir, who were fighting in Central Asia—that is Pakistani extremist urban groups—have also now linked up with these Pakistani Taliban. So you have a remarkable phenomenon where you have illiterate, uneducated tribesmen who are living in the mountains, who don't know the cities, linking up with very sophisticated, well-educated boys who are able to carry out suicide operations and assassinations in Pakistani cities. And, of course, we saw the killing of [Benazir Bhutto](#) as a prime example of that.

So the crisis in Pakistan is getting more serious. Now, I think the U.S. dependence on Musharraf became slightly watered down last year when there was an encouragement for Benazir to go back and have a genuine election. There was a three-way deal that was struck, with the United States acting as a guarantor, that Musharraf would give room for a genuine free and fair election, allow Benazir to operate, and if she won the election she would be allowed to become prime minister.

Well, we know what happened with that. It didn't work out, unfortunately. She was killed before the elections. But nevertheless, her party is in power and they have made a coalition government, which is, unfortunately, riddled with a lot of problems amongst themselves.

The army tends now, of course, to blame the civilians—"all these politicians are useless." The fact is, after coming out of nine years of military rule and a one-man dictatorship, you are going to have political problems. I mean there is no smooth transition to democracy. We faced this after [Zia-ul-Haq](#), when he was killed in the 1980s. We faced this earlier with [Ayub Khan](#), who ruled for ten years as a military dictator.

But there was enormous expectation placed on this. This election that we held in February really achieved two major things.

First of all, it eliminated the religious parties and it brought to power basically secular parties. The main party at the center, the People's Party, Benazir's party, is, broadly speaking, a secular party. And the main party in the Northwest Frontier Province, where most of the Taliban and al-Qaeda are based, is also a secular party, the Pashtun Party. It has very good links in the tribal areas. But they had been totally ostracized by the military and by the ISI, the Inter-Services Intelligence, literally for the last 20 years, because they were peaceniks, they were anti this kind of jihadism that the Pakistani army was following, and they were just outside the pale of the foreign policy.

There was the hope that after this election, as what happened in the 1990s, slowly there would be a weak civilian government. The army would continue to run foreign policy, it would continue to dominate policy towards Afghanistan and India, but slowly, slowly, the civilians would encroach upon this and be able to readjust foreign policy, not in defiance of the army but, if you like, in conjunction with the army.

Now, unfortunately, that has so far not happened, simply because the civilian government itself is beset with its own problems, and secondly because the army took a decision, well before the elections, to actually pull out of the tribal areas. This is what is creating the whole furor in Washington right now.

The army has told the Americans that: "We will pull out of the tribal areas; we will not train, as you want us to train, in counterinsurgency and mountain warfare. We are going back to the front where our real enemy is, that is India. We are going back to the plains of Panjir. We are giving you the militias, the paramilitary forces. You can retrain them and they will be mounting border guard duty, et cetera, and deal with the Taliban."

Now, I think this decision was taken several months before the elections. Basically what has happened is that the civilian government has been lumped with this decision. It has not had a choice. It was not asked whether, either/or, do we do this or not do this? The military said, "This is what we are doing. We are pulling out."

Now, what reason has the military been given to do this? Well, the military, first of all, says that there has been no progress with India, India still remains a serious threat, et cetera. And to some extent that is true, because Musharraf did sign a peace agreement in 2004. There has been no movement from the Indian side on helping resolve Kashmir, even though Musharraf put forward several proposals. In fact, Pakistan has dropped most of its demands that it had going back to UN resolutions in the 1950s. It has dropped them in order to try to facilitate peace with India on Kashmir. But there has been no movement and there has been no support from the United States for trying to bring India and Pakistan together.

The army is obsessed with India. There is no way you can deal with the Pakistan army unless you are going to give it some kind of security guarantees from India. The biggest security guarantee is a resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

You can imagine the landscape of this book. I am traveling from Central Asia to Afghanistan to Pakistan, and now we are in India. You cannot deal with this puzzle, or this jigsaw, without getting all these pieces into place.

Secondly, I think the American attempt to deal with India on its nuclear weapons and to make the Indian nuclear bomb, if you like, acceptable while keeping the Pakistani nuclear bomb out on a limb as a kind of still a criminal activity has really antagonized the army, has turned the army very anti-American, and has made the army say: "Well, you know, we are fighting against al-Qaeda. Our troops are dying. And what do the Americans do, these great allies of ours? They go and get into bed with India and cut a deal on the nuclear program and leave us out in the cold."

So there is enormous resentment on the side of the Pakistani establishment regarding this issue. And again, I think this has to be tackled in a different way, in a more diplomatic way. It will probably be very difficult, because of course cutting nuclear deals with countries like Pakistan that have proliferated hugely around the world are very sensitive and very difficult. But nevertheless, I think the India factor remains very important.

The second thing is that I think the strategic aim of the army is still to have a pro-Pakistan government in Kabul. Now, that doesn't mean that Pakistan is backing the complete control of Afghanistan by the Taliban. It would like to see perhaps a coalition government between certain elements in Afghanistan and the Taliban. But, in other words, take Afghanistan back 100 years, eliminate Indian influence in Afghanistan and the influence of a few more foreign powers, and bring Afghanistan back into the kind of umbrella of being pro-Pakistan rather than pro-India.

Now, I think anybody who knows Afghanistan and the progress it has made in these last few years and the character of the Afghan people thinks this is a complete pipedream. It is just not going to happen. The Afghans have been resisting foreign intervention for the last 25 years of the kind that they didn't like—the Soviets, the intervention of the neighboring countries, et cetera, et cetera. And they are certainly not going to put up with, even the Pashtun population—and two-thirds of the Pashtun population live in Pakistan; one-third live in Afghanistan—even the Afghan Pashtuns are not going to accept a kind of tutelage of Pakistan.

So what really I am trying to do in this book is to cover this enormous landscape. I don't think a book has been written like this since 9/11. There have been a lot of books on Pakistan and books on Afghanistan and books on the war and what I did and what the CIA did and what colonel so-and-so did in winning the war, et cetera. But I think to be able to put this into a context you've got to understand the whole puzzle and you've got to be able to link all these pieces together.

The second thing I'd just like to tell you is that I was doing a lot of reporting. I was there in most of the most important places while these things were happening over the last seven years. So this is not a book in which I go back and I ask people in retrospect: "You, Secretary of State, what were you thinking back in 2002?" I was being able to deal with these people and meeting a lot of these people at that specific time when they were taking these crucial decisions.

So the difference with this book, and perhaps something—if you look at [Bob Woodward's book](#), or all these kinds of books which try to summarize what went on in the past by interviewing people in the present, most of my interviews were conducted on the spot with people who were grappling with these decisions at that time. I think in that sense you get a more honest appraisal of why did the Americans take these decisions, or why did they abandon Afghanistan, why did they turn a blind eye to Musharraf, or all these kinds of questions, and, of course, regarding what the Afghans were doing and what the Pakistanis were doing in a similar way.

I hope it's not a difficult book to read. I do hope you buy one. I hope you buy one for one of your friends or one of your family members. I think this book should really circulate. I think it is terribly important for this election.

Actually, this book was four years in the writing. I was supposed to deliver this book two years ago. So you can imagine the patience of my editors at Viking. I keep telling my Afghan friends this is a never-ending story. I have been following Afghanistan for 30 years. It just doesn't stop. But I really thought the assassination of Benazir and all that was a cutoff point for this book, and the change that came in Pakistan.

I am very glad that the publisher has brought it out. I think it is an important book for your elections, simply because I think it puts things in much greater perspective than perhaps you have read anywhere else.

Secondly, I think it is very important to understand, especially for Americans, especially for the statements that are coming out of the administration now about a possible al-Qaeda attack before the elections either in Europe against American targets or on the mainland, it is terribly important to ask, seven years down the road, how you are still in this situation where the extremist movements in my part of the world have not gotten less but have actually expanded and they now control vast chunks of territory. They can train. They can bring in Germans and Danes and Dutch and Americans to train and presumably send back to their home countries at some stage. How has al-Qaeda managed to expand into Pakistan in the way it has expanded? I think all these questions are extremely important for Americans, and particularly for this election.

Thank you very much.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: Thank you very much. I have known Ahmed for a long time. I think we know him here for his famous books, but he is known in Afghanistan and in Pakistan and in the region by all his articles. He has been a constant observer of developments. I am happy that by his thorough analysis many of the assumptions we have can be proved, and sometimes we have not dared to talk about it publicly and openly.

I have some points to make. I think the objective or the aim of the international community or the U.S.-led intervention in 2001 was how to end the safe havens of terrorists in the region and how to make the government of Afghanistan not to be a threat to others and to be able to defend its country. Unfortunately, none of these objectives have been achieved yet.

It is absolutely right that the establishment of a functioning, competent, and clean state in Afghanistan is one of the preconditions for success in Afghanistan. But creating or establishing such a state requires resources. It also requires a security environment. It also, I think, needs to benefit from a coordinated international effort. At the same time, I think it is also a process that requires building the capacity that is essential for a state to function and operate as a competent state.

This is a process that has been started, and it is a process in the making. But we think, in retrospect, we could do much better if there were coordinated efforts, if there were more resources, if there was more attention and focus on state building.

There are some aspects of the job for President Karzai that are difficult to ask a person to meet all the challenges. I am not going into details. But, for example, accommodation of the elements and forces that were part of the war was a necessity that made the job of establishing a clean environment very difficult for President Karzai or for anybody else, because the idea was to avoid instability.

So it is something still we face as a problem. For example, when a few months ago or a few weeks ago the government decided to arrest one of the warlords and the forces were there to take him, he received at least 23 calls from foreign embassies in support of him. So we have such problems.

What I am saying is—I am not trying to defend the government. But I think still the U.S. presence and help is a constant in Afghanistan. How did they work? This is a question in retrospect. But still, I think if the idea is to succeed in Afghanistan, still we should do it together. That was my comment.

QUESTION: Two aspects of American policy that you criticize in your book. First of all, early on in your book you indicate that the CIA is in fact fairly well monitored, despite everything, but you do make the statement that the American Defense Department is not. I think that Senator [Carl Levin](#) of Michigan, who is the chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee and who has been pretty much on the backs of the military, would disagree with you on that comment. That's number one.

The second part is this. I think that the training camps in Kandahar have been very, very well known to the American political and intelligence community for years. In fact, *The New York Times* did articles on them in the early 1990s and the like. But my question in this regard is this: At the time of the 9/11 activities, the bombings and all of that, who could the United States have gone to to help in that area, knowing that Pakistan had in fact been both training and supporting through the ISI and everything else all of the various extremists that you are talking about in Kandahar?

You couldn't ask the Iranians to do it. So essentially, they had to put the pressure on the Pakistanis, knowing that the Pakistanis really were also involved in the training of these. What would have been the alternative to that kind of policy?

AHMED RASHID: First, let me just say to you that when I spoke about the U.S. military I was speaking about 2002-2003. I think there has been a huge, huge improvement in the Defense Department, especially since [Gates](#) came in, and especially since changes were made in the high command both in Iraq and especially since the [Counterinsurgency Manual](#) came out. I think that has been a huge improvement.

If you look at U.S. troop performance now in eastern Afghanistan, where they are based, it is much more people-orientated than U.S. troops have ever been anywhere before, whether we look at Vietnam or Korea or anywhere else. And certainly they are doing a huge job, a very successful job.

In fact, I was joking with people that actually now it is far more beneficial for journalists to sit with U.S. officers rather than to sit with U.S. diplomats because the officers are better educated, they are better read, they know the issues on the ground rather than from the top down, they know the issues from the ground. I mean it's a real joy to meet some of these younger officers.

But the question still remains. I put this to someone who is an American officer, who was explaining all the achievements that have been done in eastern Afghanistan. I said, "That's fine. You've got this area, this town, this village, or ten villages. How do we connect this now to building a state?" That is the problem. You can perform wonderfully in your niche or in your area, but how do you make the interlinks with Kabul, with the government, reestablishing?

This is not a job for the military. The military's job is to create that niche of peace, stability, security, development, et cetera, et cetera, and to make sure the Taliban are kept out. The rest of the job is up to other parts of the U.S. government and other parts of the international community and the Afghans themselves. I think this is the big problem right now.

The second part. Well, if you're talking about before 9/11—you know, I wrote my Taliban book in 2000, and the end chapter is all about what the United States should be doing in Afghanistan or for Afghanistan in order to get rid of al-Qaeda. I give a whole range of things, which include helping the Northern Alliance.

Pressure was never put adequately on the Pakistani government. Only after the fiasco of the [Kargil War](#), when [Clinton](#) had to pull the chestnuts out of the fire and rescue [Nawaz Sharif](#), who was then prime minister, only then did Clinton demand that in return you help us get bin Laden. But by then it was too late because 9/11 was literally already around the corner.

But really there was very little—I think there were a large number of things the United States could do. But the United States was not, as a government, as a state, focused on the threat. There were elements in the administration—you know, [Clark](#) and other people and the CIA—there were elements in the administration who were focused on the threat. But this was not a national-level policy decision. That was a tragedy.

Of course, when the Bush people came in, they didn't take the threat seriously at all also for the first nine months. The first meeting of principals, as it's called, was held four or five days before 9/11. That is nine months after the administration came in.

This is, I think, one of the big problems. The intelligence was not able to get its message across to Clinton or to Bush in a serious enough way. Other parts of the administration were not alerted.

But I think there was an enormous amount that could have been done. Would it have averted 9/11? I really don't know, because 9/11 was a plot hatched in Afghanistan, but it used outsiders from the United States. You didn't have a sleeper cell here which was activated. So it was a plot that was in fact very diffuse and it would have been very difficult to catch all elements of it.

QUESTION: I wonder if you have a comment on the effort and the success of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan, how they contribute or add to or take away from building the state and a viable government in Afghanistan. Thank you.

AHMED RASHID: I think the PRTs have been a very mixed bag. First of all, the problem with the PRTs is that every military that is in Afghanistan—and there are about 40 contributing countries—have their own version of the PRT, of what they will do and what they will not do.

So the Germans in the north, for example, will do, frankly, very little as far as helping the people, building. They will do governance, they will train police, they will train local bureaucrats, and they will do bridge building and school building. But they, for example, won't resolve conflicts between Afghans, which is adjudicate in that region.

Now, that's something that the Americans are doing in the east, which has become very successful. They are actually adjudicating between tribes and bringing tribes together so that they can stop fighting amongst themselves and actually combat the Taliban.

Unfortunately, I think the PRTs need to get their act together in a much more coherent way. It's very complicated because there's NATO, there's the United States, and every country has caveats as to what they will do or not do.

The second thing is that only the Americans so far have this ability to have a budget in which they can actually do development work, down to the captain or the second lieutenant on the ground. They can actually go and build something or make something or give something, which other PRTs can't do. Other militaries, European militaries, split development completely apart from the military.

Now, this argument is really—Afghanistan is a prime example. One of the big issues faced by the development community is how do you do development in the midst of insurgency; is it possible? The big development agencies, like [DFID](#) [UK Department for International Development] and [CIDA](#) [Canadian International Development Agency] and [USAID](#) [United States Agency for International Development], do not do this. They don't go in the middle of an insurgency and start building bridges.

So how are you going to then—I mean the NGOs, some of them, most of them, won't because of the security risks, et cetera, and many of them are psychologically anti working with the military because they want to be neutral, they want to help all people, including even possibly Taliban sympathizers in the villages. They don't want

to be associated with the American military or something else.

Frankly, I think one of the really big tragedies is that Afghanistan has proved to be—far more in fact than Iraq—a real melting pot of the failure of development policies. These are the kinds of problems that we are going to face in the next 50 years. I think there has been very little international effort to flesh them out.

How do NGOs work? Can they get over working with the military? Should the military be doing this kind of development work? How are these big agencies structured? Are they like big elephants now, white elephants, useless? I have a very strong critique of AID in my book, as to the way it operates and its big failures.

So it's a very pertinent question, but it's a bigger question. We are faced with insurgencies in Africa and all the rest of it. How do the development community and the militaries deal with development issues?

QUESTION: In terms of basic geography and geopolitics, is future Western aid in addressing the problems of Afghanistan dependent upon a friendly and cooperative regime in Pakistan?

And also, you haven't mentioned NATO in any important way. Where is NATO's resolve in terms of addressing the problems in Afghanistan?

AHMED RASHID: One thing I'd point out is when NATO went into Afghanistan in 2005 much of their intelligence was derived from the Americans. The American intelligence on southern Afghanistan was about zero, because the capacity had just been taken out and sent off to Iraq. I mean satellites and all the bells and whistles that go with U.S. intelligence.

NATO was told that this is a reconstruction/ peacekeeping mission. You don't have to look at anything. You treat Afghanistan as a single country, with concrete borders, as you would a European country. Now, this was a country with seven neighbors, completely porous borders, beset by an insurgency which was a transnational movement, in the sense that the Taliban were both from Pakistan and from Afghanistan, plus other transnational extremist movements based in Central Asia which used Afghanistan, extremist movements in Iran which used Afghanistan.

The real fault here was to treat Afghanistan as a single theater of battle or a single theater of peacekeeping, whereas Afghanistan was far more complex than that.

So for the first two years NATO didn't want to hear about Pakistan, they didn't want to hear about these sanctuaries, they didn't want to know about them—"This is something the Americans should deal with because the Americans are dealing with Pakistan and Musharraf and all the rest of it." That was really tragic.

NATO is only now waking up. Now, only this week, we've had the NATO Secretary-General go to Pakistan and deliver some very harsh messages. It has taken months and months for NATO to develop a policy—I wouldn't say a strategy, but a policy—towards Pakistan.

In my reckoning, there is no way you can stabilize Afghanistan without ending the sanctuaries in Pakistan. There is no point. Otherwise, how many tribesmen are you going to kill? I mean you can keep killing tribesmen. But this insurgency has a finite end to it when the sanctuaries are ended. This insurgency does not have a finite end to it as long as you keep killing insurgents. Only with the end of the sanctuaries can you then also start talking to the insurgents.

I think one of the big mistakes being made right now—as you may know, there is a huge effort, everybody is talking to the Taliban, or everybody says they're talking. The Americans say they're talking, Karzai says he's talking, the Brits say they're doing their own thing, the United Nations is doing their own thing.

I would just put the whole thing upside-down. I would say: Great. Okay, you want to talk to the Taliban, that's fine, and there are a lot of Taliban who are perfectly reasonable and just a bit fed up that would probably come back. But you need to end the sanctuaries. Why? All the support basis that is coming, is coming from Pakistan. Their families are in Pakistan. There are many instances where Taliban families have been held hostage by the Pakistanis precisely so that the menfolk don't go and talk to the Karzai administration.

The strategy of talking to the Taliban has to be reversed. The sanctuaries have to end and then you can talk to the Taliban.

QUESTION: If you are able to solve the problem of the sanctuaries and move on to the next stage, how far will the writ of the government in Kabul extend to the borders of Afghanistan? If you look at the broad sweep of Afghan history, going back more than the 25 or 30 years that you referred to in your introduction, how practicable is it to have a government in Kabul whose writ extends to the nominal borders of the country?

AHMED RASHID: I think that's a really important point. That is something that is being discussed and debated by Afghans constantly.

The West basically delivered a very centralized constitution in 2004, which provides for essentially presidential rule basically, a far more centralized system perhaps than Afghanistan has enjoyed before.

Now, I think the idea behind that, with the United Nations and all, was that we need to deal with the major insurgency, bring the refugees back, et cetera, et cetera, with a strong center, and then eventually the constitution can be modified, there can be changes made, et cetera, and then we can diffuse power to the provinces.

The opposition in Parliament, of course, is demanding a parliamentary system of government, with a president who should be a figurehead and a prime minister and a cabinet which is directly elected, chosen from the Parliament.

So there is a huge debate in Afghanistan on this. It continues, it will continue into the next elections, which are in 2009.

But I agree that I think there has to be greater decentralization, greater authority and power. But you can't do that when you've got the Taliban sitting in one-third of the country. You can't diffuse power when you are dealing with an insurgency. It's not possible at the moment.

So I think at the moment the system is probably the correct one. But I think at the back of many people's minds is: Then how do we evolve this into a better and more decentralized system?

QUESTION: In terms of the sanctuaries, with the new administration, what policies would you suggest? Can they go into Pakistan? What power do they have to bring about change? What are the options? And also, if you could, something about the drug trade. You said there wasn't a drug policy. What would be a good drug policy?

AHMED RASHID: Again, I hope you read the book, because a lot of these answers are there.

Pakistan is obviously very complicated. But I think the key is that the United States has hung on far too long to Musharraf. Musharraf is now the most unpopular man in the country. His party was defeated in the elections roundly. He is now a hindrance to any kind of democratic development and, more importantly for the Americans, any kind of change in Pakistan's foreign policy.

I think the need to strengthen the civilian government is paramount. We've received \$10.8 billion worth of aid from the Americans since 9/11, and \$8 billion of that has gone to the military. Now, if you ask me has any Pakistani seen an American hospital or an American university or an American college or an American road or anything built in Pakistan in the last seven years, the answer is absolutely nothing. So what do you expect Pakistanis to feel? Yes, you needed to help the military do certain things, but then you also needed an ally in the people of Pakistan.

I think that needs to be corrected. The whole aid program needs to be corrected. Supporting the civilian government I think is terribly important.

[Joe Biden](#) recommended just before the elections that there should be a democracy dividend and that the civilian government should get \$1 or \$2 billion in aid for specific civilian projects as a result of the elections. I thought that was a brilliant idea. Unfortunately, it hasn't been taken up by the Bush Administration, but it is certainly there amongst the Democrats in Congress.

But the key remains the military. I talked about India. I talked about the need to bring India and Pakistan together and to do more on the diplomatic front to do that. I think the United States needs to really enter into a strategic dialogue with the military, and to find out what the Pakistani military really wants and needs and why it does what it does. This is something that again I think the administration has been very, very reluctant to do.

They have just taken the word of whatever—Bush says, "I look into the eyes of Musharraf and I trust him." That's it. That's a "strategic dialogue." One would like to see a little more than looking into your eyes and trusting you than just that. But a better understanding of what the Pakistani military's fears are, what their insecurities are, what their ambitions are, and what could be done to meet some of them and mitigate some of them.

QUESTION: Thank you for being so revealing and so passionate. I'd like to return to some of the themes that have been discussed. You've had limited time, but the emphasis has been on the external international forces and the military. And yet experience from all the experts on Afghanistan that I've heard has to go back to the tribal

basis and the warlords. The Brits found this out, the Russians found it out, the Americans, everybody else. We had a Brit here, naturally remembering the history. And we know that the drug trade has been continuing for a very long time.

In Pakistan, the political parties are often regionally based, as with Benazir Bhutto. And there is so much corruption and so many other things going on indigenously.

So what can be done by the Afghans themselves, by the Pakistanis, who want to control the tribal areas? There has to be responsibility for the local people.

AHMED RASHID: I agree completely. The whole idea of the [Bonn Agreement](#) was—I'm sorry. I haven't answered the drugs question somebody asked, but I will.

The whole idea of the Bonn Agreement was that there was going to be a shared partnership between the international community, which would look after security and rebuild the army and do all that kind of stuff, and the Afghan government would do its bit, as you say, all the groundwork that was needed to be done. Of course, that hasn't happened.

Now, at the end of the book I do have a strong critique of the performance of the Afghan government, because I think in areas that it *can* do something—such as, for example, corruption, naming and shaming drug traffickers and these kinds of people—it should be able to do more. If it has to defy neighbors, friendly countries, sometimes to do this—you know, they have to take some tough decisions.

Now, on the drugs issue, for example, it is really depressing to see all these foreign soldiers literally setting up camp in fields of poppy, which is what I have seen, because the foreign soldiers are under orders not to touch these poppies. I am against foreign troops being used for eradication and for upsetting the farmers and all the rest.

First of all, poppy is being grown because of the problems, because there has been no investment in agriculture, absolutely none, in seven years. I mean water, canals, farm-to-market roads, seed, new crops, et cetera, et cetera, new genes of crops, et cetera. None of this has happened. Farmers have been forced to grow the easiest and most lucrative crop, which is poppy.

Now, what the international community really needed to do much earlier on was to support a policy of interdiction, which the Afghans could not do. That is, catch the big guys, catch the traffickers, and slam them into jail, do whatever you have to do, even take them abroad. The Americans have taken a couple of people abroad. But even if you have to take them abroad to be put on trial, do that, because the Afghan justice system may not have the capacity to try them.

But you needed a very hardnosed policy on interdiction. At that time, the Afghan government couldn't go chasing drug traffickers. It didn't have the capacity. It didn't have the soldiers, it didn't have the helicopters, et cetera. You had all that, the international forces.

Now, of course, it has gotten completely out of hand. Now you have ministers in the cabinet who are drug traffickers. You've got governors in the provinces who are drug traffickers. The more you delay a process of dealing with this, the more the government is going to become a drugs government basically, and it will be more difficult to break that vicious circle. If you remove two ministers now, you could destabilize the whole country.

As the first speaker said, one warlord Karzai wanted to arrest and there were 24 telephone calls. One neighboring country I know tried to prevent that.

It's a vicious circle that gets even more vicious as we carry on, and we have to break that. I think the international community has to have a policy—a strategy, a policy—which takes on the responsibility of doing some of it and puts some of it on the Afghans. But that's what we lack at the moment.

The Americans want to spray. We have an ambassador who wants to spray the poppy fields. The Brits are refusing to spray. There's a big division in NATO as to spray or not. Other people are saying spraying is not the issue; get the traffickers. If you get the traffickers and you capture actual heroin, you then deal with the problem. If the farmers are not able to sell the heroin because the traffickers are being nabbed, that is the way to deal with the problem, not to annoy hundreds of thousands of farmers who then promptly go and join the Taliban.

JOANNE MYERS: Thank you for another wonderful illuminating morning.

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