

Pakistan, the United States, and the West: David Speedie Interviews Anatol Lieven

Anatol Lieven , David C. Speedie

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[Anatol Lieven](#)

DAVID SPEEDIE: Anatol, welcome to Carnegie Council. We've been working on this for a while. I'm delighted that it has come to pass.

Let me just briefly say that Anatol Lieven, in addition to being an old friend, is also a genuinely transatlantic scholar of some authority. He is a former senior associate at the [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) in Washington. He previously covered Central Europe for *The Financial Times*. He also covered Pakistan, Afghanistan, the former Soviet Union, and Russia for *The Times* of London. He is the author of various award-winning books.

I should mention immediately that he will have a new book germane to the topic we'll be discussing today, called [Pakistan: A Hard Country](#), coming out in the early part of next year.

He is currently a professor in the War Studies Department at King's College London and a senior research fellow with the [New America Foundation](#).

Again, welcome, Anatol.

We are going to talk mainly about Pakistan, which is the topic of your book. The title is very evocative—a very hard country, indeed, and a country that has seen great hardship recently.

Immediately we ought to address the current crisis, [the flooding](#), which in terms of affecting about 30 million people, is the equivalent of the Kashmir earthquake, the Asian tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina combined. Clearly, it is a major catastrophe for the country.

You were in the Swat Valley last year that the flood impacted from north to south. What have you heard and how do you see this affecting the future trajectory of Pakistan?

ANATOL LIEVEN: It clearly has a very bad blow, and it will set them back economically a long way.

It is possible, however, to be too apocalyptic about these things. If you look at the history of Bangladesh over the past two generations, they have suffered a series of extremely severe floods, with casualties running, not just into the thousands as in Pakistan, but into hundreds of thousands sometimes.

These societies, however, have an extraordinary resilience. The society of Bangladesh has changed remarkably little as a result, in part, of course, because to put it brutally, mud huts are easy to rebuild. It's not as if you are in fact getting modern cities washed away. But the damage to infrastructure has been very great.

DAVID SPEEDIE: And farmland too, which is lost.

ANATOL LIEVEN: No. The farmland will recover. The loss of animals is particularly bad.

What I'm afraid of is that, according to predictions of the World Bank six years ago concerning the melting of the Himalayan glaciers—they didn't make this mistaken prediction that they would melt completely by 2035, but they are quite clear that they are melting, and over the next century they will melt very severely. They predicted in this report in the medium term, as a result, there will be very serious floods, followed of course in the long term by catastrophic droughts. It could be that this is the beginning of a pattern.

Obviously, if we see these floods beginning to recur every two or three years, then the damage to the country is then becoming a bit apocalyptic. Then one is talking about damage to human society in that part of the world on a catastrophic scale comparable to some of the great historic disasters of the past.

DAVID SPEEDIE: The question, of course, is: Even after the floods, what is there to come back to? Because the situation was not exactly—we'll get into your definition of a hard country here perhaps. This is a country where already there's a request for significant easing on the severe restrictions from the 2008 IMF loan because of the floods. But even before the floods, economic reforms apparently were certainly not being met.

It's a starkly divided country, with different provinces that are all being beholden or enthralled to political families.

Nine thousand schools have been lost, apparently, in the floods, I read somewhere.

The Financial Times [quotes](#) 33 percent living in poverty even before the floods, although there is some debate over that number. But a *Financial Times* article had a dramatic prediction in terms of apocalypse: You will have 20 million people attacking the cities in desperation, presumably, if this pattern continues.

Do you think the apocalypse is a ways off?

ANATOL LIEVEN: If you get these floods every few years, then yes, that will happen. But two things.

Nine thousand schools: In my experience, but this is well attested by formal observations by aid organizations, there is a strong likelihood that perhaps as many as half of those schools were in fact schools only on paper—the money had been stolen by politicians or bureaucrats. Or, if they had been built, the politicians were using them as everything from cow byres to houses for their relatives.

In other words, the thesis of my book basically is that there are immensely strong social forces to do with kinship roots and land owning and patronage that give this country a remarkable degree of stability. But unfortunately, those very same forces also hinder, and even sometimes stop completely, progress and development, as with these schools.

The landowner politicians get the school supposedly for the village, and then they steal it themselves. But they distribute the benefits to a certain limited number of people in the village, who then support them. That is a very strong anti-revolutionary force. That is one of the things that has prevented Islamist radicalism for the moment from spreading in the country.

DAVID SPEEDIE: On that topic, one of the criticisms that I certainly consider to be valid—and I remember [Stephen Cohen](#) wrote a book on it a few years ago, called *The Idea of Pakistan*.

Certainly, in the United States there is this tendency to see Pakistan as being important really for two reasons: first of all, the nuclear question; and second of all, the potential support for extremist groups—the Pakistan Taliban obviously, and the role of the [ISI](#) [Inter-Services Intelligence] in conniving with the Taliban.

However, the support for [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#) and other groups has never seemed to be that robust. In elections they have never gotten more than 10-12 percent.

But, getting back to the immediate crisis, the Taliban called for armed rebellion and protests against the government's inadequate response, as they put it, and the army according to *The Financial Times*, has ruled out expanding any operations against militant groups.

Is this something of a watershed? Is this something where you see a potential for a new level of support for extremist organizations?

ANATOL LIEVEN: We'll have to see. It would be wrong to jump to conclusions. These processes tend to be incremental.

One thing that is already observable is that because of the efficiency and the honesty of their charitable work, just as after the Kashmir earthquake, some of these organizations, and particularly the formal political charitable face of *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, [Jama'at-ud-Da'wah](#), are making significant strides in spreading their influence and gaining support, because people have been impressed by the help that they have given.

Beyond that, you have to unpack these things in Pakistan.

A sort of classic double question, or triple question, if you ask ordinary Pakistanis is, "Do you support the Afghan

Taliban"—support is perhaps the wrong word—"do you sympathize with the Afghan Taliban?"

The response in the overwhelming majority of cases would be: "Yes. They are like the Afghan [mujahideen](#) fighting the Soviets in the 1980s. They are fighting against an alien, illegal occupation of their country. They have the right to do that."

Second question: "Would you like the Pakistani Taliban to carry out an Islamic revolution in this country and impose Taliban-style rule?" The overwhelming reply to that is: "No. We sympathize with the Afghans fighting against foreign invaders. We don't want a Taliban system here in Pakistan."

There is an additional nuance, and this is very important to the security forces, which is that they are going along with—how far they are supporting is less clear, but they are certainly going along with—the Afghan Taliban, sheltering them in Pakistan and so forth. That is obviously an active campaign against us.

They are keeping terrorist groups operating against India on the shelf for possible future use. Since the [Mumbai attacks](#), there hasn't been another major attack. Equally, they're not cracking down on them.

What, however, they are doing is giving tremendous help, as British intelligence testify, to the West, in stopping Pakistan-based terrorist attacks against us, a) because they have no strategic interest in that; but secondly, because they know that that would essentially bring the roof down on their heads.

You can't simply extrapolate their attitude toward Afghanistan to everything else. There are layers upon layers here.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Although, obviously, another sort of querulous cry from Washington is that we've given \$18 billion in aid to Pakistan since 2001 and over 60 percent of Pakistanis see us as an enemy. It's explained, as you say, in this foreign invader issue in terms of Afghanistan.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Yes. But also, we've got to be honest about what this aid is for.

Look at the Byzantines or the Romans, even sometimes actually the Americans dealing with the Red Indians, as we used to call them.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Not anymore.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Not anymore.

They gave them bribes basically, subsidies. Why? So that the tribes wouldn't attack the empire's front. Did they expect the Hussars or the Arabs or the Russians or the Germans to love the empire? No. This was a straight bribe. Did they expect them to be grateful? Well, they had to make sort of formal acknowledgements of respect for the empire. But everybody knew that if the subsidy dried up, the tribes would surge across the frontier.

So we've got to be a bit less—I don't mind the rhetoric about this, because this was a game under the Romans and the Byzantines, formal rhetoric; everybody understood the reality. The danger is if we believe this ourselves and we get sentimental about the stuff. Or that we believe—I'm sorry, this sounds very cynical—that a lot of this is truly about development of these countries, rather than simply bribing the elites to help us in key issues.

But the second thing which comes out of the history of subsidies is that the help given by the other side always has its limits. They will give a lot of help on certain issues and much less on others.

DAVID SPEEDIE: The question of the nature and the targets of assistance is really playing large in Afghanistan at this point, too. So it's a familiar theme.

I know that as U.K.-based and as a Brit, as it were, you are very much concerned about the British role. In fact, you wrote recently: "If British aid to Pakistan is to have any influence on Pakistani attitudes, it must be generous, effective, and visibly British." What exactly do you mean by that?

ANATOL LIEVEN: If you are moving outside simply bribing the elites—and I was exaggerating a little for effect; of course, one does need to try and help ordinary people as well—then it must be the kind of project which has some effect on the lives of a large number of ordinary people, if only by employing them.

I use the example which is particularly germane after the damage done by the floods, but it's the example of restoring and improving water infrastructure. That is a very good thing to do, because the benefits spread to a very large number of people, and also because it employs a huge number of people in the work concerned.

Too much American aid, for example, has just gone into the general budget and has disappeared. The mass of the population has seen nothing from it.

When I said it must be visibly British, I also meant that it must be projects which have some kind of British label on them, just as the port of [Gwadar](#) has a visibly Chinese label on it. Every Pakistani, even fairly uneducated people, knows that China built that port for Pakistan. That is an argument given why Pakistan and China need to get on and why Pakistan needs to listen to China on key issues.

But the third thing I said in that piece was that it's very important in Britain itself to build up moderate leaders of the British-Muslim and British-Pakistani communities within Britain. The biggest direct security threat to Britain today is basically from terrorism based among our own Pakistani population.

DAVID SPEEDIE: The [7/7](#) bombings.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Yes. This Pakistani population in Britain is very closely linked to Pakistan and to particular places within Pakistan. At the moment this has been generally, though somewhat unfairly, seen as a kind of negative relationship as far as Britain is concerned.

I would very much like to explore ways in which that relationship can be made more positive, for example, in using leading members of the British-Pakistani community in Britain as leaders of a much more serious development program within Pakistan.

DAVID SPEEDIE: A few minutes ago you mentioned the conundrum of strong social forces at work, providing a degree of stability in Pakistan but that also may be an impediment to broader or longer-term progress and development.

To switch to the military, which is perhaps the most important and complex element at this moment in Pakistan society, you once quoted [Voltaire](#) on [Frederick the Great of Prussia](#): "Where some states have an army, the Prussian army has a state." The obvious implication being that this is somewhat the case in Pakistan.

I take it you mean that the Pakistani military—tell me if I'm wrong—is both indispensable for the survival of the country but often quite inimical to democratic progress—it tends to overthrow governments now and then.

How do you see the role of the army and the ISI in your "hard country"?

ANATOL LIEVEN: The army is by far the strongest institution of the state. In fact, you could almost say that it is the only state institution in Pakistan which actually functions as it is meant to, and corresponds roughly to its goals. So many of the others, they function, but quite unlike their formal role. The bureaucracy acts as an agency of distributing patronage rather than good government, and so on.

The problem is precisely because the army is so strong and the other institutions are so weak, that the army repeatedly takes over.

It overthrows—I'm tempted to use the word "democracy" in Pakistan in inverted commas, because of course democracy in Pakistan—I mean just look at the main political parties—is not exactly what people think of as democracy in America. Democracy in America or Britain has its flaws as well, but still.

The curious feature is that on occasions the regimes that the army has overthrown, the politically civilian regimes, have been more repressive than the regimes that the military has then implemented.

There is another feature, which was very much brought home to me in a visit to Pakistani [Baluchistan](#) last year. I investigated this hideous case, and I actually was able to establish that it was all true, in which four girls had been buried alive by their relatives as a punishment for wanting to go to university, and for defying their fathers.

This was covered up, the investigation was frustrated, and the killings were even in some cases justified by leading local politicians and ministers from what has been sold to the West, and what is officially the progressive party in Pakistan—the [Pakistan Peoples Party](#). This is the party of Mr. [Zardari](#) and the [Bhuttos](#), which had a woman prime minister and has always claimed to stand for women's rights.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani army now has three women fighter pilots. It's a small start, but still.

But a general that I interviewed in Baluchistan has a daughter doing a Ph.D. in molecular biology in the United States.

DAVID SPEEDIE: A wee bit of a double standard at work?

ANATOL LIEVEN: You tell me which is the progressive force here. Is it the democratic political party or is it the army?

The answer is you can't see the army as a progressive force, but you certainly cannot see the Pakistani political parties as some kind of simple force for progress and development.

DAVID SPEEDIE: By the way, there is also this sort of "all for one, one for all" comradeship, democratic progress through the ranks in the army, that's sort of unusual in Pakistan society.

ANATOL LIEVEN: It is. It's relatively meritocratic.

The present chief of staff, [Kayani](#), is the son of a sergeant in the Pakistani army. The completely old-style hereditary nobility, the so-called feudals, are somewhat less important now. But it is still true that the overwhelming majority of politicians come from wealthy local families and have inherited at least the bulk of their position from their ancestors.

DAVID SPEEDIE: It's almost like elections between clans rather than political parties in a sense.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Yes.

DAVID SPEEDIE: One specific thing, Anatol—I'm again pushing the ISI a little bit here—and you may or may not be able to answer this. In terms of destabilizing possibilities in a regional context, the question of the role of drug networks involving perhaps ISI—there have been reports in Afghanistan of tons of precursor chemicals coming into Afghanistan from Pakistan and coming back out as pure heroin.

Do you have any sense of this in terms of a porous border situation? There's a high degree of instability on both sides of the border. How is that affecting the Afghan narcotics trade and what are the implications?

ANATOL LIEVEN: I have no direct evidence of that. What we do know, and what I have plenty of testimony about, is the fact that the Afghan Taliban taxes the heroin trade and opium production. Insofar as the ISI gives shelter to the Afghan Taliban leadership, therefore, obviously the ISI is giving cover at the same time to this trade. Whether they are directly involved in the trade, I'm not sure.

In the late 1980s when I was there, heroin was really beginning to penetrate the Pakistani armed forces and the establishment. But it was an interesting case. The high command became so worried that it was actually going to completely demoralize the army, that they cracked down on it very hard.

Therefore there has been in a certain way an immunization of themselves against that, because it worries them too, because they think it will rot the unity of the army. If you get generals directly involved in this trade, they are bound to start profiting from it themselves. At that stage, you get into a situation where some generals are infinitely wealthier than other generals. That's the kind of thing that destroys an army from within.

The other thing one does have to say in all fairness—and this is the answer that I got from Pakistanis that I asked—is that still today, but overwhelmingly until recently, the vast majority of the heroin trade was going out through central Asia and Turkey. And it was being to a very great extent conducted and covered by people that we, the West, put in power or brought back to power in Afghanistan after 2001, including leading members of the [Karzai](#) administration. So our ability to criticize anyone else for this is a bit limited.

DAVID SPEEDIE: We are on shaky moral ground when it comes to preaching good behavior on the narcotics trade. Absolutely.

Let me turn, if I may, to India-Pakistan. This is the 800-pound behemoth in the room in any and all matters. It's the dangerous dyad of two neighbors with nuclear weapons. As we know, there's Kashmir.

Since you've been in Afghanistan, something that may not be quite as familiar as the question of India-Pakistan is to some extent rivalry over Afghanistan. I gather India is opening consulates throughout Afghanistan. The Pakistanis, of course, are asking, "Why and what does this mean?"

How do you see India's interest in Afghanistan and its impact on India-Pakistan relations?

ANATOL LIEVEN: India's influence in Afghanistan so far is still a great deal less than the Pakistanis fear that it is. There are, the last I heard, six Indian consulates in Afghanistan. The Pakistanis genuinely believe that there are 30 or more. There is a considerable degree of paranoia and myth-making.

India—I have it on Western authority, not just Pakistani—is supporting the Baluch rebels within Pakistan, the people fighting for an independent Baluchistan. To judge by my travels in Baluchistan, their support has so far been very limited. This has not been a serious military threat yet.

It has been quite enough to get the Pakistanis very worried, because they are terrified of this idea of being encircled by India. They are very frightened by the idea that the West will leave Afghanistan and that India will take over as the sponsors of the Afghan regime.

Certainly, if there is to be any possibility, there are two things that we need to say. One is any political settlement within Afghanistan is going to depend on, equally, a degree of regional agreement or consensus, if only to the level of certain countries drawing certain limits of their ambitions within Afghanistan.

That, in turn, will certainly require, if not a full-scale Indian-Pakistani agreement, which Kashmir may make impossible, at the very least an element, shall we say, of formalized détente and agreement about the limits of their respective ambitions in Afghanistan.

My own experiences and discussions with Indians and Pakistanis suggest that even that more limited objective will be very hard to achieve.

DAVID SPEEDIE: It just seems that first thinking would suggest that India is hardly likely to be in a position of listening to the West say of Afghanistan, "We broke it, now it's yours." Some sort of regional approach to long-term stability in Afghanistan is one thing, but I can't imagine India wanting to inherit the Afghan problem or the Afghan situation.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Nobody—not the Indians, not the Chinese, not the Russians—wants to put troops into Afghanistan to replace our troops. Everybody is absolutely categorical on that.

But one has to remember that in the years before 9/11 the only reason why there were allies on hand against the Taliban, who still controlled some parts of the country, was because the Russians and the Iranians had been backing them.

Undoubtedly, in the future, if a civil war continues or intensifies after the U.S. withdrawal, the Indians would give aid of various kinds to the anti-Taliban opposition, as would the Russians.

The Chinese position would be extremely interesting there. On the one hand, the Chinese are very close to the Pakistanis and use them to balance against India. On the other hand, the Chinese also greatly fear the Taliban, because of their possible destabilizing role in central Asia and through central Asia in [Xinjiang](#). The Chinese play a possible bridging role there.

The Russians, interestingly enough, have also been reaching out to the Pakistanis recently.

It is all very tentative so far, but you can see that all the major states of the region are beginning to think seriously about what Afghanistan will look like after the United States withdraws and how they can best secure their own interests. The Russians reaching out to Pakistan suggests, that in some cases they are perhaps beginning to think of how they can talk to past rivals or enemies, in the hope of reaching possibly some kind of deal.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Even Russia-India is quite warm at this point in time.

ANATOL LIEVEN: For that reason, Russia is close to India, China is close to Pakistan. But this would require some very imaginative diplomacy, and I wonder whether any of these countries are actually capable of that at the present.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Speaking of imaginative diplomacy, even inchoate sort of pan-regional approaches—Russia-Pakistan, China-Pakistan—there is some sort of extended regional awareness of what may have to be done in the future.

Is the United States part of this at all in any quasi-formal or informal way? Are we looking at this in terms of opportunity or regional response? Or are we simply not at the table?

ANATOL LIEVEN: There is a lot of talk of this now. There have been essays written about this and there has been discussion of this. There is the Afghan contact group which unites the region. But there are two problems, one general and one specific.

The general problem is that the instinct in Washington is still that the United States must lead on everything. You

could interpret that as saying that the United States must lead and coordinate the region in order to reach a settlement. But the ultimate implication is that the United States must withdraw and leave it to the region.

That is something which psychologically American officials and politicians find very hard to get their minds around. Yet it is essential, if only because the Taliban have made absolutely clear that as long as there are any American soldiers in Afghanistan they will go on fighting. Complete American withdrawal at some stage has to be a key part of the deal.

The other specific question is Iran. Iran is going to have to be a major part of any settlement. Iran played a key part in the fight against the Taliban before 9/11. But as long as the whole Iranian nuclear issue remains unsolved and the possibility of an Israeli or an American attack on Iran remains on the table, it is going to be very difficult to open any kind of positive negotiations with Iran on Afghanistan, even though on Afghanistan our relations are, in fact, congruent.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Completely in synch.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Absolutely.

DAVID SPEEDIE: And speaks to the need for a broader dialogue than getting beyond just the nuclear issue.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Absolutely.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Kashmir, very briefly. There is an all-party delegation from India there, I think, even as we speak. It has been dismissed by the local Pakistani Kashmir leaders as a PR exercise until serious demilitarization of the 500,000 Indian troops, and the suspending of emergency measures.

Is Kashmir just the ultimate zero-sum game? Is there any progress there at all?

ANATOL LIEVEN: Not really, I'm afraid.

The sad thing that first [Musharraf](#) and then Zardari in Pakistan did—not formally of course, but informally and publicly—was hint at the possibility of a solution along the lines of Northern Ireland: You leave the existing borders in place but soften them and create some kind of cross-border institutions and free communication between the two sides.

The problem is that there is an Israeli-Palestinian aspect to this. The two countries are always out of synch.

By the time Musharraf made that tentative offer, the Indians then waited and waited and waited to respond. By the time they were thinking of responding, Musharraf was too weak to deliver.

The Indian political system is very difficult. Either the government in power doesn't want to negotiate, or it is scared of the opposition and therefore it doesn't negotiate.

But the Indians also have a point, which is that—once again, it's sort of the chicken-and-egg business—some kind of recognition of Kashmiri unity in practical terms, free transport and so forth, is absolutely essential to any settlement.

Equally, of course, the Indians have a point, that they can't allow that as long as they are afraid of terrorists flooding across from Pakistan into India. So it goes on.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Finally, on South Asia, Anatol, I know that you have written and you have interest in insurrectionist groups.

ANATOL LIEVEN: I have an interest in studying them. I have an academic interest. I don't have a political interest.

DAVID SPEEDIE: You are particularly interested in the Maoist insurgencies in India. Give us a little overview about that interest, the sort of not-at-the-front-page-above-the-fold news that you feel is still potentially highly destabilizing for the region.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Last year the prime minister and interior minister of India described this Maoist threat, the so-called [Naxalites](#), as the biggest security threat that India now faces—more than terrorism, more than Kashmir.

If you look at the statistics, that is obvious. They now have a presence in two-fifths of Indian districts. They actually control, de facto, a very large number of Indian rural districts.

If they haven't really come much to the attention of the West, that is probably because they are following a formal Maoist strategy of building up their power in the countryside before they attack the cities. If they do move into attacking the cities, or if they move into direct attacks on Western business or big business in India, we are going to hear about it.

This is one of these issues, like so many in the world, where we really need to get away from the headlines. We need to study these societies on the ground. We need to study, amongst other things, the effects of globalization and free-market capitalism on the Indian countryside, and in what ways economic changes generally seen in the West as positive may in fact be having a very negative impact on many ordinary people there.

In the context of what we were saying about India and Pakistan, it would be worth reminding the Indians that the Pakistanis always use as an excuse that they have to keep troops on the Indian border and they can't deploy them against the Taliban, the Islamist rebels in Pakistan.

In the case of India, it's not an excuse, it's a reality. The Indians have so many troops on the Pakistani border that so far they haven't wanted to deploy their regular army troops against the Naxalites. If they ever did, they would have real problems in doing so as long as they maintain this posture against Pakistan. That just could in the future be perhaps the beginnings of the basis for an Indo-Pakistani settlement.

On the other hand, it could also have a very bad effect, because you have extremists in the Pakistani security establishment who are saying, "Ah! We've always told you India is much weaker than it looks. We're just going to wait. Then, if India won't make an agreement on our terms over Kashmir, we will wait until the Naxalite situation is really bad and then we'll strike against India." That is as dangerous a scenario as one could well imagine, unfortunately.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Indeed.

We are coming to the end of our time. I want to finish by asking you to switch gears a little bit.

A few years ago, you co-authored a book with [John Hulsman](#), *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World*. This is the second of two books you wrote with what I would describe as a healthily critical view of American foreign policy.

We are halfway into the [Obama](#) Administration. The watchword for foreign policy was "reengaging the world," "restoring America's moral authority"—everything from in some way reinvigorating the Middle East peace process to the so-called "reset button" with Russia. How would you grade the progress to date as an academic?

ANATOL LIEVEN: Well, it is very varied.

On Russia, things have been very positive, although to a great extent it's because of things that were not actually the product of wise decisions in Washington but what happened on the ground. The [Georgian-Russian war in 2008](#) more or less killed off Georgian NATO membership. The Ukrainian government has now declared that it doesn't want NATO membership, so it's a bit difficult to offer them that if they don't want it. That has been critical to a certain level of détente in Russian-U.S. relations.

On the other issues, what we are seeing is unfortunately two things.

The first is in Afghanistan the malignant legacy of the [Bush](#) Administration, which left the Obama Administration with basically an insoluble dilemma.

In the Middle East, the entire configuration of the American political system, simply does not permit a significantly new U.S. approach. How can you, when you have votes by 94-2 in the U.S. Senate, which basically gave unconditional backing to whatever Israel does? At that point, the idea of the United States bringing Israel to make any serious concessions is simply ridiculous.

On China the relationship remains a pragmatic, decent one.

The general lesson has been how remarkably constrained a Democratic administration is now when it comes to improving or changing America's stance vis-à-vis the world, unfortunately. A Republican administration will be constrained, I hope, in another way, which is that it will not have the military or financial resources to do anything as radical as Bush.

Something that I kept trying to tell people in Washington when I was here and I found people appallingly indifferent to, is that most big countries care principally about their own regions. Russia cares about the former

Soviet Union. China is principally focused on Asia, East Asia and South East Asia.

America, because of its history as a global superpower over the past 60 years or so, is the only country which doesn't think that way. That is all right as long as your own region is in fact stable. But some of the news coming out of Mexico is absolutely terrifying. The collapse of state authority in the face of the rise of these drugs gangs is something which brings fundamental questions, not just about democracy, but about the modern state, and has a direct impact on the lives of masses of U.S. citizens, on the U.S. economy, on crime in the United States.

For years and years now the United States has fooled around in the Caucasus and Central Asia, places that the vast majority of U.S. senators couldn't find on a map, while ignoring its own backyard. That seems to me both strange and very dangerous to the United States.

DAVID SPEEDIE: A little bit of the old "Britannia rules the waves" syndrome, the globe being colored pink, 100 years or so ago.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Yes, but Britain was always obsessed with what was happening next door in Ireland.

DAVID SPEEDIE: That is true.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Whereas the United States in a funny kind of way just doesn't know what to do in Mexico, which is fair enough. But to a great extent it also doesn't seem to care.

If you look statistically at the votes or the hearings in the Senate, people are casting their eyes thousands and thousands of miles away, while on America's own borders, 100 yards across the Rio Grande in Ciudad Juarez, you have a situation which is beginning to look like a severe decline in modern civilization. That is dangerous.

DAVID SPEEDIE: On that somber but that persuasive note, we thank our guest, Anatol Lieven from King's College London.

Anatol, you are certainly have whetted our appetite for *Pakistan: A Hard Country*, which is coming to American publication also in early 2011.

We thank you, as always, for your candor, your clarity, and your insights into this fraught region of the world. Thank you for coming.

ANATOL LIEVEN: Thanks a lot.

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