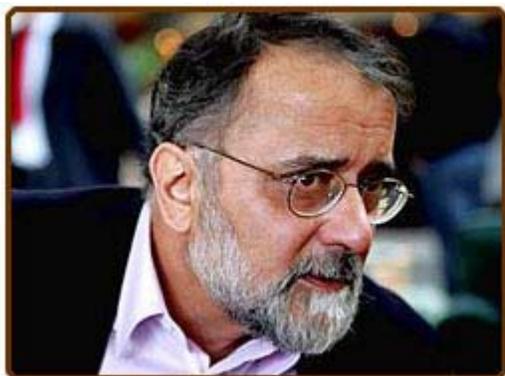




Behind the Headlines: Pakistan

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Monday, March 14, 2011



Ahmed Rashid

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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.

I am delighted today to welcome back to our Public Affairs Program my esteemed friend Ahmed Rashid.

Ever since the publication of his book, *Taliban*, in 2000, he has built a well-deserved reputation as an incisive political observer. Whenever he visits us, he brings with him not only expertise about Pakistan but also an astute analysis about current events in the region.

His extensive knowledge is of great interest as we continue to monitor events in one of the most unpredictable and dangerous corners of the world. We are fortunate to have him as our guest.

Pakistan is one of the world's most troubling nations and one of the world's most serious foreign policy challenges. It seems as if a day doesn't go by without some catastrophic event occurring there making international headlines. This leads one to conclude that its political future rests on very shaky ground.

The problems are many. For starters, Pakistan is home to an array of terrorist groups who pose threats to international security and create dangerous instability in Pakistan itself. This country possesses a nuclear arsenal that is rapidly growing. While extremism is on the rise, there are valid concerns that these weapons could fall into the hands of militants.

Then there is the question of its borders. In the northeast, Kashmir is a hotbed of uncertainty, with each side, both India and Pakistan, claiming the entire territory. In addition, the tribal areas in northwest Pakistan along the Afghan border serve as safe havens for many militants who are now battling U.S. and international troops in Afghanistan.

However, any efforts to stabilize Afghanistan ultimately rely on Pakistan's cooperation with other countries, especially with the United States. Yet not surprisingly, anti-American sentiment is rampant in Pakistan. In fact, according to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, America's favorability rating stood at 17 percent last year, the lowest of all countries surveyed.

Even more, there is a burgeoning economic crisis with rising food prices, frequent fuel shortages, and wild inflation.

Although many countries have moved away from military rule and have strengthened their democratic processes and institutions, Pakistan still struggles with a weak democratic setup.

The list could go on and on, and the answers are uncertain. I know Ahmed is competent to answer just about anything that is relevant to this region. Still, I would like to raise just a few questions to begin this discussion.

First, while the media has made us very aware about problems which need to be addressed, I wonder whether there is the political will among the Pakistani leadership and civil society to address this dire situation. If so, do they have the ability to strengthen democracy? Or will the constant struggle for power between a strong and

authoritarian army and a weak civilian government continue to determine Pakistan's political future?

Also, Ahmed, what do you think about the United States and the role we have played in trying to strengthen democracy in Pakistan? Have our efforts to stop the war on terror and our support for Pakistan's military compromised prospects for democracy?

In the 11 years that Ahmed has been visiting the Carnegie Council, our understanding of Pakistan and its environs has been enriched. Today I am confident that he will not only supplement what we have been reading in the newspapers but will take us behind the headlines so that we will learn a great deal more.

Please join me in welcoming our guest today, Ahmed Rashid.

Remarks

AHMED RASHID: It's wonderful to be back here. Joanne, thank you so much for inviting me again, even though I have no book to sell. Why you should want me back perhaps has more to do with my country rather than myself. But thank you again very much.

First of all, I was quite amazed. I came back after a year since my publishers put together this lecture tour and I presumed everybody would want to know about the exit strategy from Afghanistan. I am not giving a single talk anywhere on exit strategy in Afghanistan. I am giving a talk everywhere about Pakistan. So that really shows a difference.

Let me just tell you that anything that you have seen on your TVs about the Middle East—[Egypt](#), [Tunisia](#), [Libya](#) and other places—is a major talking point in Pakistan. We have exactly the same symptoms: We have a youth bulge, an uneducated or semi-educated youth, an economic crisis, and joblessness.

People ask me, "What will happen if there was such a movement?" I am afraid the movement would automatically and immediately be taken over by the fundamentalist parties, and they would attempt to overthrow the state and impose an Islamic state. That is the very big difference between what is happening or what could happen in Pakistan and what is happening in the Middle East right now, where clearly the fundamentalists, everyone from al Qaeda to the local Muslim Brotherhood chapter, are on the back foot. In Pakistan it's something very different.

Let me just start by saying that Pakistan desperately needs a new narrative that is not based on conspiracy theories, past history, arrogance, and the military.

What I mean by that is that there have been two moments in our recent history when we could have turned the corner.

The first was the end of the Cold War. A lot of countries in the third world realized that they could no longer benefit from being either the stooge of the Americans or the Soviet Union; they had to stand up on their own feet. Pakistan was a country in which the Cold War completely bypassed it and nobody was even aware that the Cold War was over. We still, as the ally of the Americans, expected America to bail us out all the time.

In a sense America did bail us out, because in 1992 there was an arms embargo on Pakistan, at the end of the Cold War. The Americans left Afghanistan and basically handed it to Pakistan and said: "We're out of here. You and the Saudis, you look after Afghanistan. All these Taliban types and mujahideen, we don't know what to do with them. You handle them."

We did handle them, and we messed up Afghanistan very badly. We encouraged the rise of the Taliban, and the rest is history.

The second real historical moment was 9/11. The message of 9/11 was very clear, that a state could no longer promote militant Islamic extremism as a facet of its foreign policy, which was exactly what Pakistan had been doing for the last 30 years.

Extremism was part of the military's foreign policy legal arm, both in India and in Afghanistan. Civilian governments that came to power on the back of the military were forced to do exactly the same thing, whether it was [Benazir Bhutto](#), [Nawaz Sharif](#), and now Bhutto's husband, [Asif Zardari](#). The military runs foreign policy and certainly determines policy towards Afghanistan, India, and the United States.

But that message was utterly lost. In [2002 we nearly went to war with India](#), there was almost a nuclear exchange in the summer of 2002, and the Americans and the international community, rather than focusing on Afghanistan, had to run around trying to make peace between India and Pakistan.

Then there were more terrorist attacks in India. We do not control the fundamentalists, even though some of the major extremist parties, such as [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#), were banned as early as 2002. But Lashkar-e-Taiba today is out in the street. I come from the city of Lahore. Lashkar-e-Taiba is demonstrating every single day outside the U.S. Consulate in Lahore, and we are fearful of some kind of incident. Anything can happen. Some American car can be attacked. This is in regards to the imprisonment of [Ray Davis](#) and his killing of two Pakistanis with a third Pakistani being run over by an American car.

If I can just summarize, first of all, this is a country that has lost several major historical moments because of the myopia, particularly of the military establishment, which has framed Pakistan as a national security state. Its principal *raison d'être* is to confront India. Its national security objectives do not include economic development, education, health, trade—all the other things that a normal country would include.

Its definition of national security includes confrontation with India. That means whether you confront it in Afghanistan or you confront it in central Asia or you confront it in India itself. That has been a huge hindrance to anything being allowed to develop.

To their credit, every civilian government, even though they're weak, corrupt, and generally bad-mouthed by everyone, Benazir, Nawaz Sharif, and Asif Zardari all tried in their own way to make an opening with India. They were rebuffed later by India but initially by the army itself. That has been very unfortunate.

Similarly with Afghanistan, we have not been able to make a breakthrough.

Very briefly, Joanne did a wonderful job of describing present-day Pakistan. There are multiple crises. There's a very severe economic crisis, which is 20 percent inflation, incredible joblessness, and the economy really is basically winding down. We've got a break with the IMF, so a lot of loans that were due from the World Bank, the ADB [Asian Development Bank], and others have been basically suspended.

There is a huge energy crisis. In Lahore there is no electricity for up to 16 hours a day. I can afford a generator, but 95 percent of the population can't. And wait until the summer comes and the heat.

There's no gas 12 hours a day.

This is a country of 170 million people which makes nuclear weapons, has 110 of them, and is the fifth-largest nuclear weapons state in the world. But we cannot provide electricity for the people.

There is a huge economic crisis, there's an energy crisis, and now the fundamentalists are very much on a roll, for several reasons.

First, because of the blasphemy issue, which claimed the lives of two very prominent government officials, both of whom were very good friends of mine, one especially, the governor of Punjab, [Salmaan Taseer](#).

The [blasphemy issue](#), very simply, is an outrageous law which allows anyone to say that "So-and-So committed blasphemy." You can't repeat what So-and-So said, because if you repeat it, it would be blasphemy. The police will come and arrest So-and-So and put him into jail and nobody will ever know what So-and-So said. Even when you present him into court, the judge says, "No, no, no, don't tell me what he said. I don't want to know what he said." And I, the accuser, will say, "He committed blasphemy" and the judge will say, "Right. Death"—or whatever it is. This is the law.

All that was being demanded was that this law be amended so that there would be some legal justification and that you could not be condemned to prison or death for nothing. The government has totally backtracked on that, after the death of these two people.

There was a committee set up to look at this law. That committee has been disbanded. The prime minister has made three statements in parliament saying that parliament will under no condition amend this law, consider amending this law, or even look at this law.

But even after those statements, the second government figure was assassinated, the [Christian minister for minorities](#).

The second issue of the fundamentalist arm is the Ray Davis case. I won't go into enormous detail about that, but in my opinion it has been a huge mess-up both from the American and the Pakistani side. This should have been resolved in the first 48 hours and the guy should have just been sent home. But there was a mess-up, then both sides dug in their heels, and now there is a confrontation.

More than that, this confrontation has played into a much more vicious under-the-table confrontation that is going on between the [ISI](#) [Inter-Services Intelligence] and the CIA, principally over Afghanistan and the role of extremist groups in Pakistan.

That has taken many shapes. The CIA's station chief in Islamabad was ousted by the Pakistanis; he was forced to leave the country. The ISI chief has been charged in a New York court with perpetrating the [Mumbai massacre in 2008](#). That has upset him. So there's this tit-for-tat sort of thing going on. On top of that, there is now the Ray Davis case.

The bulk of all this is about Afghanistan. As we approach the end-game in Afghanistan, as far as any American dialogue with the Taliban would happen, Pakistan wants to be in the driving seat. The Taliban are all sitting in Pakistan. This is opposed by a lot of Afghans and by all the regional countries, including India.

There are all sorts of conspiracy theories about what is actually happening. Many people in Pakistan believe that the Americans are going to hand over Afghanistan to India, Pakistan will be left out, and in fact America will do exactly what it did in 1992 with Pakistan, but it will be doing it this time with India. It's absurd to think that, because the Afghans are not going to allow themselves to be controlled by a third country. They've been through that in the civil war in the 1990s and they certainly don't want it again.

We have the blasphemy issue, we have the Ray Davis issue, and we have an economic crisis, which actually the fundamentalists are really using to the hilt. So they are very much on a roll.

There have been huge demonstrations. The government and the army have been totally ineffective in being able to roll any of this back or to present any kind of state power in order to at least curb the banned groups. What are banned groups doing wandering around and addressing the congregation at Friday prayers?

It has terrified the government and the very weak civil society.

Civil society did respond quite strongly to the murder of Salmaan Taseer. Civil society includes sections of the urban middle class who are active. There is a large section of the middle class which is very dormant, but there is an active section—NGOs, human rights groups, women, the media, lawyers, and minorities.

Since the second murder, they have basically been cowed. People are very scared. What they are seeing is a complete lack of leadership from the government and the military. Nobody is preparing to lead the country.

We are seeing huge repercussions now with the Pakistani Taliban. There has been a spate of attacks in the last month. The Pakistani Taliban are essentially taking back a lot of the territory that they lost after the army offensive last year. That is all happening in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. The extent of bomb blasts now in Punjab, in the major cities, in the northwest again in the major cities, the whole idea is to basically terrorize the state. It's a very dangerous situation.

There has been a crying demand, at least in the liberal media, that "We want political leadership from the president and the prime minister, and what is needed is some kind of crackdown, which should be aided by the military, on these extremist groups." A lot of these extremist groups were formed originally by the military and have been sustained by them. They're the only ones who will be able to control the situation.

All of this is going on in the midst of what is the real national security concern—and here I would say that the military is obsessed—with this issue of the Western exit from Afghanistan.

It's a long way away. The West wants to complete the exit in 2014. We're talking about three to four years. In the meantime there will be a transition to the Afghan authorities and army.

There's a big debate on whether this is going to work or not. Frankly, if you want my opinion, the transition cannot work in the midst of this very vicious civil war that we have in Afghanistan, unless this violence is brought down and this war comes to an end. Transition doesn't mean that you hand over power to a revamped Afghan army; it means you've got to have a functioning government, ministries, bureaucracy, justice system—a minimal state structure.

It's a dirty word both in the [Bush](#) Administration and in the [Obama](#) Administration, but you need elements of nation-building. No American will ever use that word, but that's what you need—because you can't hand over power to a vacuum; you can't hand over to someone or something which doesn't exist. There needs to be state structures in place.

My whole argument is that this transition is not possible until you bring the war, fighting, and violence level down.

That means that you've got to talk to the Taliban. The Americans are talking to the Taliban but there has to be a policy by the president that is much more public, and has to be debated very hotly. Domestic and international reasons have to be given for talking to the Taliban.

If the president were to announce that the fighting will not stop but the dialogue with the Taliban will continue, then there would be immediate support from Europe and NATO. All of those countries are dying for the Americans to do this right now.

Secondly, it would change the whole regional balance in my part of the world. The situation in the region right now is very dire. Afghanistan is a landlocked country with seven neighbors, and you need some cohesion between all seven neighbors so that they can agree on a noninterference pact inside Afghanistan, because they were the ones, all of them, who fueled the civil war in the 1990s.

In this, we have the Pakistan military essentially wanting to play a major role, saying, "We have the longest border with Afghanistan, we have the most importance" —which is all very true—"we are the trade conduit through Karachi, and we have the largest ethnic group which crosses both sides, 15 million Pashtuns in Afghanistan and about 40 million in Pakistan." Naturally, Pakistan has a right to say, "We have the greatest interest in Afghanistan."

But at the same time, none of the other neighbors (Iran, China, the Central Asian states) and the near neighbors, which are even more powerful (India, Russia, Saudi Arabia), are going to allow another rehash like the 1990s where Pakistanis dominated Afghanistan. That is what the whole tussle is about.

If the Americans were to publicly support a dialogue, it would change the whole regional balance, because at the moment you've got some countries acting as spoilers, some countries wanting to dominate the whole show, and everybody is at loggerheads with everybody else. There is no real international forum for bringing these countries together.

As a result, you get these explosions between the ISI and the CIA, between what Pakistan would like to push the Americans to do and what Pakistan fears the Americans really are doing—in other words, "You're in bed with India rather than with Pakistan."

If the Americans were to do the right thing and announce some kind of public policy, it would really put all the neighboring countries and the regional powers onto one track, because everybody would have to jump onto the American bandwagon. Everybody would realize that there is a serious exit strategy now and everybody is leaving, and either we become part of this exit—and we appear helpful in this exit and we win kudos internationally, with the Americans, and with NATO—or we act as some kind of saboteur. All of these neighboring countries will then be forced to adopt a more conciliatory approach towards Afghanistan and a future peace in Afghanistan.

But, unfortunately, at the moment what we have are really the worst kinds of conspiracy theories. The Pakistanis are convinced that the Americans have done this secret deal with India, which goes back to the [Bush nuclear deal with India](#), and now there are all sorts of geostrategic deals, that India will be used as the gendarmes for the United States in containing Pakistan and China, et cetera.

Using the fundamentalists as a counterweight to this India issue becomes even more important, even though many of these fundamentalist groups, like the Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba, have in a sense now become international groups. They are now training at least, and funding and arming, attempts to carry out bomb blasts in America, Europe, and other places.

The real fear is that if you allow this to continue, you are setting up several al Qaedas; in other words, several groups whose justification for terrorism is not necessarily going to be global jihad, it's going to be anti-India or in defense of this Indo-Jewish-American conspiracy. Nevertheless, the outcome of this will be Pakistani groups, as has been the case already, training foreigners to carry out attacks around the world. That is obviously going to be devastating.

So far we've been very lucky. There have been bomb blasts; you had a [bomb attempt in Times Square](#), but nothing has worked. But God forbid if something worked and people died because of this in large numbers. We have had attacks in Europe, in Britain especially, and in Scandinavia and Germany, and a lot of these attacks are traced back to groups in Pakistan.

We need a government, an army, and a civil society that is actually in control of its own country. We need that to be strengthened, we need the economy to be strengthened, and we need in my opinion an end-game in Afghanistan to start now so that you can convince the Pakistanis that there are no conspiracy theories here; we're not handing it all over to India; and you are very important in this; and either now you play the game and you help us, and you get benefits from that and some influence in Afghanistan; or you still allow all these groups to

operate and train young guys from America and from Europe, which really is endless and which will eventually put you in the dock.

We are faced with this huge dilemma. At the moment, unfortunately, we are in a state of—I wouldn't say war, but I would say virtual war with the United States. It's an intelligence war that is going on. It's extremely dangerous because the tendency—even if the intelligence agencies do not say this—will be for these fundamentalists to say, "Finally the ISI is slamming it to the CIA, so this is a moment we should have another bomb blast in Delhi or have another bomb blast in Kabul."

What would that lead to? It could be catastrophic for the region, as the Mumbai attack nearly was, except for [Manmohan Singh](#) and the kind of patience that he showed at that time. The Afghans have been very patient too, because a lot of the bombings of the Indian embassy in Kabul have also been carried out from people who have been tracked back to Pakistan.

An escalation in the region is very possible at any time. It is very important that the United States have a more coherent policy on Afghanistan than what we have seen so far.

Thank you very much indeed.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: Warren Hoge.

Ahmed, that's a pretty grim picture you just painted, and I'm going to ask you a question which may make it even grimmer, and that's about nuclear weapons. I've got two very closely related questions.

One is: Whatever happened to [A.Q. \[Abdul Qadeer\] Khan](#), the world's leading nuclear proliferator? Does Pakistan make him available to investigators? Is his information, information that the West can operate with?

Secondly and lastly, what about the security of those weapons? What can you say about that? How secure or insecure are they?

AHMED RASHID: In short, no, there has been no accountability for A.Q. Khan. When I started saying we need a new narrative, certainly part of that has to be on coming clean on what actually we did or didn't do, what we gave to Iran or Libya. The proliferation happened.

The degree of accountability—enough water has now gone under the bridge. There would be a much greater degree of forgiveness by the international community, given that none of those players who did all that are around anymore.

This is the time when the Pakistanis should see this maturely and accept the fact that there can be standards set down, but essentially we need an accountability, not just for the international community, but for the Pakistani people also. What happened with all this money that A.Q. Khan was supposed to have? Where did it go? Did somebody get rich, did it go to the budget, or did it go to the state program? That is a very important question.

He is a hero and he's considered untouchable. It would be very difficult but very important to educate the public about the fact that maybe selling nuclear weapons is not such a great heroic deed to do. That's the first thing.

We have an army that is in control of the nuclear weapons. This army is very much solid, it's hierarchical, and it's disciplined. There are no cracks in the army at the moment. Bits and pieces of the nuclear weapons are distributed all over the country; it's not that they're all sitting in one place. There's no danger of anyone getting ahold of a nuclear weapon. Somebody could get ahold of some parts of a nuclear weapon, or some fuel, but nobody can get ahold of an entire nuclear weapon.

Clearly, the Bush Administration after 9/11 did spend \$100 million providing failsafe mechanisms.

But there are huge questions. With this threat of fundamentalism, the fact that the governor of Punjab was killed by his own bodyguard, a member of the special forces, and that was welcomed by the police and by other people—how much of that kind of sympathy is latent in the nuclear establishment amongst the scientists and guards? We don't know. But I have heard that after the killing of Salmaan Taseer there was a revamped screening of all personnel.

But when you have such a huge industry, which employs anything between 70,000 to 100,000 people, it's probably going to be very difficult to screen everyone totally effectively.

The other point is that the military, I just saw last night, has reacted very angrily. A lot of liberals have been saying, "What the hell are we spending 30 percent of the budget on nuclear weapons for when we're all starving, we have no electricity, we have no gas—where's our priorities?"

The military yesterday issued a very tough, threatening statement, saying, "Anybody who makes that statement is a traitor and will be considered as a traitor by the military." In other words, if you make a statement saying, "You're spending too much on the military and nuclear weapons," you'll be considered a traitor.

That's a disturbing side. Alternative views are not being taken on board. So where do we go?

QUESTION: Lansing Lamont.

One of the contributing forces to a nonviolent overthrow of [Mubarak](#) was the close relationship between the highest ranks of the Egyptian military and our own military generals. They provided a very good conduit of information in that crisis.

My question is: Is there not a similar relationship between our top people in the military and the Pakistan military?

AHMED RASHID: There is. Admiral [Mullen](#) talks often of having visited Pakistan 20 times in the last two years. But the differences are not reduced. The fact that we are in this kind of clandestine war between the CIA and the ISI means that the differences are still very much there. The Americans have wanted us to go into certain areas in Pakistan to drive out the Afghan Taliban, and we have refused to do that.

There might be cooperation at other levels on other things, but as far as the war in Afghanistan is concerned, we're not doing anything particularly to help you guys. The Taliban is still based in Pakistan, they're still using Pakistan as a recruitment place, updating their logistics, resting up and meeting their families, and then going back to fight.

The big issue right now is the Kandahar offensive to clear out southern Afghanistan with these 30,000 marines—and a lot of the Taliban have left these areas and have gone back to Pakistan. The question is: in the spring, come this month or April, are these Taliban going to come back in a big way and is there going to be very bloody fighting in the early summer in these provinces in Afghanistan?

Keeping the Taliban there is a card that we have to play against the Americans when the time comes. The situation domestically is getting so fragile that the question is: When are we going to play that card?

Your military is probably quite frustrated at Pakistan's refusal to do certain things. Our military is quite frustrated at your refusal to go by what our army chief is telling you. At the moment this relationship is there but it doesn't seem to be going anywhere.

Let me just say one thing about Egypt. There was a mass movement. The army was faced with the objective of either shooting its own people in large numbers in the square or accepting what happened. If the Pakistani army is faced with a mass movement led by fundamentalists in Punjab, which is the recruiting ground both for the fundamentalists and for the army—70 percent of the army comes from Punjab—the army will not open fire on the fundamentalists.

These are similar armies, these are colonial armies, and they were willing to shoot. It was very difficult to get them to shoot on their own people even during the colonial period, and they are certainly not going to do it now and cause death to large numbers of people.

The danger in Pakistan is that if there is a movement led by the fundamentalists, it will not be blocked, if it is of the humongous nature and largeness of the Egyptian movement.

QUESTION: Sondra Stein.

I'd like to ask you some clarification questions on the Taliban.

From what I understand, the Afghan and the Pakistan Taliban are two different groups, but I may be wrong. On the Afghan Taliban, how much control does Pakistan have and how much room is there to negotiate? How uniform are they? Where could they go in those discussions if you look at an end-game? What's the relationship between the Afghan and the Pakistan Taliban?

AHMED RASHID: The Afghan Taliban are led still by the group that ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s. There have been some additions of younger people, but mostly the leadership which is based in Pakistan—it is called the

[Quetta Shura](#) because it was at one time based in Quetta; it's not in Quetta now, it's in Karachi—it's about 20 people. We're not quite sure of the makeup, but we know about 12 or 14 of them belong to these early guys whom I write about in my first book, *Taliban*.

They are very anxious to actually start a dialogue with [Karzai](#) and with the Americans—but outside of Pakistan. They are very frustrated at the manipulation that they feel they are facing in Pakistan by the intelligence.

One of their key demands has been to set up an office. They want the international community to let them to set up some office in the Gulf, Turkey, or in some neutral country where they could talk freely to whoever it is they wanted to talk to. This is under consideration.

The other thing is that they are very wedded. There are still up to 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. That provides an enormous recruiting pool for the Taliban movement. When they come across the border for rest in Pakistan, they can go back in with new fresh young men to fight. A lot of Pakistanis are going with them too, especially the religious students. So that's the first thing.

The second thing is that a lot of the leadership is living in Pakistan, and they have been living there for ten years now, since 9/11. They have their families there, their kids go to school there, they've got businesses. They have a lot at stake. But at the same time they are Afghans and they are very keen now to go back.

They have a dialogue going already with Karzai, which has been going on for two years and has used various channels. Now it seems that there are several Western channels open to them. We're not yet at the stage of negotiation, but getting-to-know-you talks are going on.

The relationship with the Pakistani Taliban is very careful.

First of all, the Pakistani Taliban are hosting a lot of the Afghani Taliban. These are tribal brothers and cousins. The Pakistanis whose territory it is are hosting the Afghan Pashtuns.

But the Afghan Pashtuns are not taking part in the war inside Pakistan. You will never hear of an Afghan carrying out a suicide bombing in Pakistan against a civilian target. They are very careful about that.

In fact, they have gone out of their way to try and persuade the Pakistani Taliban to stop attacking the Pakistan army. In the early years, while [Musharraf](#) was still around, in 2005-2007, this worked because the Afghan Taliban said to the Pakistanis, "Stop attacking the Pakistanis. Come in and let's go together and attack the Americans inside Afghanistan." That's what happened. You had these joint groups of Pakistani Pashtuns and Afghan Pashtuns attacking the Americans.

But then the ideology of the Pakistani Taliban changed and became anti-state, and they now want to topple the government in Islamabad. The Afghan Taliban have lost a lot of influence over them.

They are two completely different entities, of which the Pakistani Taliban are more radical and more dangerous, and they're more closely involved with external training, like al Qaeda, and training foreigners.

The Afghans don't do that. If you notice, in all these years you haven't heard of Afghan Taliban training Americans or Brits.

QUESTION: Jean Ergas. Thank you for an excellent conference.

You refer to the "fundamentalists" in Pakistan. To what extent are these fundamentalists a united bloc? When you talk about confrontations where the army will not shoot on the fundamentalists, are the fundamentalists not themselves segmented into different groups? And how extreme are they? Are all the fundamentalists, for example, fundamentally, not to make a pun, backing the Taliban, or are there differences of opinion there? To what extent could a democratic or a more democratic-leaning government actually try to exploit differences in what is the opposing camp?

AHMED RASHID: You're absolutely right. If we had a strong civilian leadership, differences among fundamentalists could be exploited very easily, because they are deeply divided. The joke is that no two mullahs can ever sit together at a table because they would start attacking each other immediately.

At the moment, there are about 24 religious parties and militant groups who are united in this movement.

There is a common agenda right now, which is very easy to unite on: blasphemy, anti-Americanism, the economy, joblessness, et cetera.

Once you get past this, to talk about can there be an electoral alliance, what are their views on elections—some of them don't believe in elections; some of them do believe in elections.

You could certainly envisage a breaking up of this alliance if tomorrow the Ray Davis issues were resolved and somehow they were satisfied over the blasphemy issue.

Just take the blasphemy issue. This is dead now. Nobody is raising it. The prime minister has given three statements in parliament saying, "It's over, forget it; no amendments, no changes to the law." But even then, they are still killing. They killed this minister, and it is likely they will kill other people.

They know perfectly well that the blasphemy law is not about to change. But they also know that "This is the best uniting factor we've ever had in our history and this is the way to go. We've got to keep this one alive, even though the government has completely backtracked. We can fool the people half the time, but we can't fool them all the time."

Unfortunately, it's very easy to exploit the differences amongst them and to bring some of them on board and to turn some against the others, but we don't have a political leadership that is strong enough to do this.

QUESTION: Richard Valcourt, *International Journal of Intelligence*.

Unfortunately, [Richard Holbrooke](#) is no longer with us. The question here is: How can the United States really carve out a consensus policy in Afghanistan and the region when the various nations don't trust each other, and even they don't trust the United States? How can the United States enforce such an agreement if India, Iran, or even Pakistan itself should violate the resulting agreement? This isn't like the Balkans, where you have mini-states and a kind of a European culture they all belong to. These are very large countries, very distinct from what we have here in the West.

AHMED RASHID: I just wanted to make a mention. This is my first visit since Richard's passing away. I was a great friend of his for many years. It has really been a huge blow to many people around the world, not just you in America, but to us in Pakistan and people in Afghanistan, not to speak of the Balkans and everywhere else he had friends. But it has been a huge loss to all of us.

I believe in a certain logic that I have tried to spell out. It is basically that you need to talk to the Taliban. The Americans talking to the Taliban breaks enormous amounts of prejudice, ice, and preconceptions.

It's a difficult issue because you have to sell it domestically first. You have to sell it to the Republicans, Congress, women's groups, and all sorts of people.

But say you sell it and you talk to the Taliban. What is going to happen is that the region will then accept the fact that this is a major development and we have to get on board this.

What is happening at the moment is that each regional country is at loggerheads with its local enemy—so you have India versus Pakistan, Iran versus Pakistan, Russia versus everyone else. First of all, you need to bring these internal rivalries to an end.

The only thing that will bring these internal rivalries to an end—you can go down the long track, which is, "Let's resolve Kashmir and then we can talk about Afghanistan"—but that's not possible.

What is going to end these rivalries is the fact that "The Americans are talking to the Taliban, and if you want to join us, come in and join us, and we are willing to give you a seat at the table because you're a neighbor of Afghanistan, you have influence there, and we know very well you can be a big spoiler for future peace and stability in Afghanistan. So come and join us at the table."

What it's going to need is a very large diplomatic effort, something probably much greater than what happened in the Balkans.

You would have to talk to Iran. Maybe you don't talk to Iran; maybe you get one of your allies to talk to Iran. Eventually, you try to split off Afghanistan from the nuclear issue and other issues. But you need India and Pakistan on board.

All of this is possible once a dialogue with the Taliban is publicly part of U.S. policy. It's not going to be possible as long as you keep it entirely under wraps. It has to be a part of stated policy.

Talks are secret. I'm not saying you have to disclose all of that. But there has to be a willingness to show that NATO and the Americans are now talking to the enemy. That will change the whole thing, because nobody wants

to be left out of that.

What is the Pakistani military's demand right now? The Pakistani military is convinced that you have a plan, and you are already implementing that plan, towards exit and talking to the Taliban.

When I speak in Pakistan, I say, "The Americans are absolutely divided. They don't know what to do. There's Pentagon versus State versus CIA versus NSC. They don't even know what to do, whether to talk to the Taliban, and how to announce it. Don't think the Americans have a plan. They're just as messed up as you are right now," which is honestly, more than true.

But people don't want to believe that. People always believe "Americans have a full conspiracy here, and it's all run by Israel, and they must know exactly what they want to do." But they don't.

The Europeans are deeply frustrated at the Obama Administration right now. The Europeans want to talk to the Taliban, and in the Obama Administration they're divided against each other right now as to exactly whether we should or not.

The Europeans are saying, "Get on with it, for God's sake, because there's just two or three years left, and talks with the Taliban are not going to be something like a three-week job. It's going to possibly be a three-year job."

There's an enormous amount the U.S. has to do, and there will be some very positive results if it does the right thing.

QUESTION: In the press I've been reading the last couple of years, the [Haqqani network](#) appears to have risen in importance in the eyes of the United States. It hasn't looked like they're necessarily directly aligned with the Taliban.

Where does that network fit in your analysis?

AHMED RASHID: The Haqqanis have been around for a very long time. [Haqqani](#) settled in Pakistan in 1975, so that puts him 35 years in the country, and many Afghans call him a Pakistani, they don't call him an Afghan. There are two or three very disturbing things about him.

The first is that he is extremely close to the military and the ISI, and has been probably responsible for some of the attacks on the Indians in Kabul at their bidding.

Secondly, he has been always very close to al Qaeda. He was one of the first ones, in the 1980s, who hosted [Osama bin Laden](#). The bin Laden family actually built his headquarters, his ammo dumps, and his things in the caves just on the border inside Afghanistan.

As a result of that, he has been very responsible—and very happily, his sons especially—for training al Qaeda for operations like the [death of CIA operatives in Khost](#). Once al Qaeda came into Pakistan and all the drone attacks started, they literally handed over a lot of their facilities and contacts to the Haqqani group, who have carried on doing what al Qaeda was doing a few years earlier.

They are extremely dangerous. Haqqani has a very low opinion of [Mullah Omar](#) and the Taliban, and their practice is completely at odds with the Afghan Taliban, because here they are helping international terrorist groups. The Afghan Taliban don't do that. This is going to be a major problem.

The Pakistanis are very worried that Haqqani could become a major spoiler if there's a dialogue between the United States and the Taliban of which Haqqani is not part. The Americans are saying very clearly, "We want nothing to do with Haqqani." The Pakistanis are very worried that Haqqani could start assassinating some of the interlocutors on both sides of this dialogue.

Al Qaeda will be a major spoiler too. I don't think at this stage Haqqani can be included, but perhaps down the road, if there's some kind of attrition done and he's prepared to literally dump on his international contacts. There has to be major attrition done by Haqqani before he can be brought into the fold.

What is really important to understand is Haqqani does not command political influence in Afghanistan. He's from the eastern Pashtun. His clout is based on fear, terror, killing, and enormous military prowess. His suicide bombers are the best suicide bombers and he does the best attacks in Kabul. Nobody can equal him when you attack Americans in Kabul.

But it is not based on the kind of political influence—and I would use the word "legitimate"—that the Afghan Taliban have. The Afghan Taliban have an Islamic legitimacy. They are fighting a jihad against foreign occupiers

who are not even Muslim. For them to track that back to the Soviets and the British, it's quite logical what they are doing.

Haqqani doesn't have that kind of legitimacy in his fight at all. He doesn't have a thing where people can go out and say, "You're a great mujahid against these infidels." People are just scared of what he does.

QUESTION: Helena Finn, American Consul on Germany, but I'm a former U.S. diplomat who had two tours in Pakistan.

My question is a little bit different. I'm going back to the very beginning of your talk, Ahmed, when you mentioned the population surge and made some comparison with the situation in Egypt. You also referred—and this is something I observed when I was there—to the lack of investment in health and education.

Is there anything that is going to be done about the demographic situation, because even the wealthiest country in the world could not possibly sustain that rate of growth? And my real question is: What can the Europeans and the United States do? This is a long-term investment issue—can these problems be constructively dealt with? Thank you.

AHMED RASHID: That's one of the major crises that we face. We have a growth rate of around 2 percent. We have a population growth rate of around 2.3 percent. The math is very simple.

We have not had a population-control program until Benazir's program in the late 1980s-early 1990s.

Musharraf could have done so much. He had so much money and international support. There was not this degree of crisis. The economy was doing relatively well, but the issue was never raised.

There has been this abject fear of the religious right because they would raise objections and all the rest of it.

But there are very sound economic arguments for this.

The whole issue is if education, population control, health, and social services are not considered part of the absolute demands of the state apparatus and how they define national security, whereas nuclear weapons confrontation with India, buying more conventional weapons, are considered the most important thing—then I'm afraid we are going to suffer.

After the devastating floods—there is almost no flood control program. We have been told that the floods we had this year will be repeated. We need massive flood control.

Bangladesh has done it. Bangladesh has done more flood control than we have because they are very low-lying. Bangladesh, by the way, was part of Pakistan in 1970. Bangladesh has a higher literacy rate than we have. They have a higher employment rate than we have. And Bangladesh was, according to [Kissinger's](#) famous comment, a basket case. It's not a basket case anymore. It's one of the states of South Asia which is doing pretty well. It's taking advantage of the boom in India.

These issues are absolutely critical.

The biggest issue we are going to face is water. We have a chronic water deficit problem, and huge tracts of Pakistan are going to run out of water, because for years the water table has gone down. We have been taking all of this water out, and the glaciers are all melting at the wrong time, and this cycle of monsoons and glacier melt is changing very rapidly. We have no recourse. We will be 250 million people, as large as the United States in population terms, in 20 years.

JOANNE MYERS: Thank you very much. We hope next time you come back you will bring some good news.

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