

CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Re-emergence of the Taliban and the Arrival of ISIS

Public Affairs

Ahmed Rashid, Barnett Rubin, Joanne J. Myers

Transcript Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Joanne Myers, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council, I would like to welcome you to this Public Affairs program.

Without doubt, seeing so many of you here this afternoon right before the Thanksgiving holiday attests to this wonderful opportunity we have to listen to these two experts and what they have to say about the re-emergence of the Taliban and the arrival of [ISIS](#) [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/the Levant, ISIL] in Afghanistan and in Pakistan.

When anyone asks me who is the best person to speak about Afghanistan and/or Pakistan, without hesitation I always tell them Ahmed Rashid. Ahmed is one of the region's most respected and articulate analysts. As you will soon hear, his scholarly excellence, combined with astute analysis, will provide clarity to what is happening in this part of the world and in a way that you will all easily understand. Ahmed is based in Lahore and doesn't come to New York very often, so when he does, he is very much in demand. I am very grateful that he has accepted our invitation. Thank you, Ahmed, for being here.

When it comes to Afghanistan, his American counterpart is Barnett Rubin. Barney is an American veteran of all things Afghanistan. He has consistently been among the wisest, most learned, and sensible of U.S. voices about this country. He has spent decades deliberating about best practices for saving Afghanistan from its chronic tribulations.

The three of us—mainly, Barney, though, and Ahmed—will have a conversation about what is happening in this part of the world. Then we will open up the floor for discussion from you, our audience.

Discussion

JOANNE MYERS: Before we begin, Ahmed, if you would just like to say few words about what has been happening in [Paris](#) with [ISIS](#) there.

AHMED RASHID: I would like to start by talking a bit about ISIS. My views on ISIS are pretty different from what the general view is in the West. Despite the attacks in Paris and [Beirut](#) and other places—god forbid in Belgium or other places—I still believe that this is a war within Islam. ISIS has got two or three aims, which are very different from the aims of [Osama bin Laden](#) and [al-Qaeda](#).

Al-Qaeda wanted to destroy the West and topple Western capitalism. ISIS is something I think very different. ISIS wants to reconstitute the Muslim world. It wants to draw new borders. It wants to

establish the caliphate. It has a vision of the future which is a completely warped and lopsided vision, but it is a vision which I think is very different from what we have experienced before. So the first thing is they want to redraw the borders.

The second thing is the elimination of minorities, which includes not just non-Muslims, but even Shiites. This is a lethal and deadly part of their campaign, which again makes them different from al-Qaeda today or even the [Taliban](#) today, who are quite restrained as far as the minorities are concerned.

You may well ask, "Well, why are you attacking Paris and why are you attacking these other cities?" I think the issue really is that ISIS is—in a sense, these attacks are defensive measures for ISIS. ISIS is essentially sending the message to the West, "If you bomb us, we're going to bomb you back." I don't think it is any more than that. Why France? Probably the best logistical setup that they have is in Belgium and France. There might be very practical reasons as to why they have chosen those two countries. There could be other countries that they choose where they don't have the kind of logistical apparatus that they have shown. If you have seen in France these safe houses, they are full of weapons and grenades and all the rest of it.

So I think the problem simply is—the end of this analysis means that the Muslim world has to mobilize to fight ISIS, and the West's task is not to fight, necessarily, ISIS itself, but to help mobilize the Muslim world and unite the Muslim world.

Now, what is the state of affairs in the Muslim world? You have Turkey, which wants to [slam the Kurds](#) and is essentially out to get the Kurds, come what may. You have the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, which are determined to confront Iran and which consider Iran a bigger enemy than ISIS.

The Muslim world is deeply divided, especially the Arab world. I don't believe for a moment that this [coalition](#) should be led by the Americans. I think the Americans should play a critical part in the coalition, but the coalition should be led by the Muslim Arab leaders themselves. And that means bringing some kind of unity within them.

Unfortunately, the kind of pressure and leverage that the West, particularly the Americans, has in the Middle East has really not been utilized. Only now are we seeing [Kerry meeting in Vienna](#) with the Arab leaders and trying to bring the Russians and the Iranians on board and trying to get the Arabs out of [Yemen](#) and to focus on ISIS. This is five years too late. The Americans should have been doing this from year one, rather than five years down the line. And they were prompted to do this only because the Russians have [come into the game](#).

So I think it is absolutely critical that Muslim leaders see the reality of the threat that they face, which is from ISIS—it's not from Iran, it's not from the Kurds, it's not from anyone else—they unite and they actually make some kind of progress towards leading this coalition.

The coalition started with airpower from Saudi Arabia and the UAE [United Arab Emirates]. Both have pulled out. They are using their airpower in Yemen rather than against ISIS. So you have more French and more American planes having to be used in [Syria](#) and [Iraq](#).

I really think that the failure at the moment is our failure, the Muslim world's failure, and the responsibility ultimately of defeating ISIS has to be that of the Muslim world, with much greater cooperation and much greater commitment from the West than we have seen so far.

JOANNE MYERS: You are like most of the people in the media, who tend to only focus on what is happening with ISIS in the Middle East. Yet you have written in many articles and op-eds that we would be negligent if we pivot away from what is happening in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As you said,

they could easily become failed states and may become even more dangerous than what we are witnessing in the Middle East. What did you mean by this? Is Afghanistan backsliding? Is the Taliban really re-emerging? Is ISIL a threat? What about al-Qaeda? And why?

AHMED RASHID: I think the situation in Afghanistan is really critical. Within the 12 months of the American [withdrawal](#), the kind of [deterioration](#) we have seen in Afghanistan we haven't seen anywhere else. I think there are three major problems that Afghanistan faces.

One is a resurgent Taliban, which has seen the American withdrawal as a means to come back into the military game and to take as much territory as possible, which they are doing. If we see next year the kind of summer fighting that we saw this year, I think it is going to be even more disastrous.

I think the second is really the total ineptitude of the present government in Kabul and its failure to actually establish itself. We still don't have a full cabinet. There were many tasks that this government was faced with to carry out immediately after coming into power—holding parliamentary elections, holding a constitutional law [jirga](#), dealing, of course, with the Taliban, and uniting the nation. In fact, we have seen more divisions and splits and fragmentation within this government than before.

The third issue is, of course, the neighbors, wooing the neighbors. President [Ghani](#) did a very good thing right at the beginning. He wooed Pakistan methodically to try to get Pakistan to persuade the Taliban to come to the table. That happened. There was one round between the Taliban and the government in Kabul. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the second round has not yet taken place, and those talks collapsed under the weight of the military offensives of the Taliban.

The neighbors are still a problem, but I think the neighbors are all now willing to see a peaceful Afghanistan. But they want to see a government that is genuinely in power and is genuinely being able to unite the people. Unfortunately, this government is not being able to do so.

JOANNE MYERS: But ISIS is claiming to take territory, to seduce recruits, and is growing. Do you think their claims are false, or how much of a problem are they?

AHMED RASHID: Again, I have an irregular view of ISIS in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The fact is that both these countries have been plagued by Islamic fundamentalism since the 1970s, and certainly since the Soviets [occupied](#) Afghanistan in the 1980s. We have been facing up to this problem for the last 40 years. Afghanistan and Pakistan both have multiple extremist groups in their countries. I don't think any of these extremist groups are going to give space to ISIS to establish itself. First of all, the military in Pakistan is going after the [Pakistani Taliban](#) (TTP), which is sending a very negative signal to all the extremist groups, but particularly to ISIS.

The fact is that the Punjabi groups which are faced off against India, which are based in Pakistani Punjab, the Pakistani Taliban, or what is left of them, and the Afghan Taliban, are extremely well entrenched inside the country. Their leaders are not going to give way to a bunch of Arab leaders coming from a few thousand miles away. Even what little presence there has been of ISIS—and we have seen it only in about three provinces in Afghanistan—they have been turncoat Taliban—in other words, Taliban who have become disillusioned with their leadership and have said, "We have become ISIS," and they raised the black flag.

Remember that there is a lot of competition to become ISIS. If you get nominated as the ISIS rep in wherever, presumably with that comes a lot of the money that ISIS has. So there is an element of greed here also, where some of these Afghans and some of these Pakistanis are looking at the money that ISIS may bring.

If you compare Pakistan-Afghanistan, unfortunately, to the Arab world, remember, the Arab world was

under complete dictatorship of one kind or another for 40 years, the same 40 years that Pakistan and Afghanistan have spent facing off against extremist groups. We have had [Saddam Hussein](#). We have had [Assad](#). We have had the kings and princes of the Gulf States. Fundamentalist movements have been basically crushed. Democratic movements have been crushed. So the Arab world is just experiencing this for the first time. They are experiencing extremism and fundamentalism of the kind that ISIS has brought about literally for the first time. We have been living it for the last two generations.

JOANNE MYERS: I want to turn to Barney for a minute and ask, how should the United States analyze and respond to this new environment?

BARNETT RUBIN: By the new environment, you mean—

JOANNE MYERS: What is happening in Afghanistan.

BARNETT RUBIN: I don't think there is a uniform new environment. In fact, one of the mistakes we may make is to over-generalize and conclude that ISIL is the problem everywhere. In some of the analyses that I see of Afghanistan and Pakistan, I see a kind of alarmism about ISIL, where it does exist, but it is really not the problem. To think that it is the problem or will become the problem—the problems are something different in that region.

The one thing in common between South Asia and the eastern Arab world of the Levant is that the state systems have been breaking down. It has been kind of slow-motion in Afghanistan in particular. It happened very rapidly, in the last decade or so, within the Arab world. I don't know if they will be reconfigured or not, but it is this type of process which is not new in history, unfortunately, which we have seen quite a lot of.

I think that in South Asia—at least this part of it, Pakistan and Afghanistan—there actually are some very specific things that the United States can do. That is in part because the atmosphere is changing in other ways that we haven't mentioned. For instance, the economies of China and India have grown tremendously. China is now looking to expand its economy in a westward direction, and therefore has elaborated a plan, which they call "[One Belt, One Road](#)," for large-scale infrastructure investments through Central Asia, through Pakistan and also around the Indian Ocean. This means that for the first time in several decades, there is now conceivably an economic incentive to resolving some of these conflicts, because, for instance, China has said it will invest \$46 billion in Pakistan over the next decade in infrastructure and so on, what they call the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. If Pakistan does not establish a secure environment and if it also doesn't help Afghanistan establish a secure environment in Afghanistan, that investment is not going to be coming.

A quite different situation in the Middle East, where you have the Arab money. And I will just say that I think there is no way to resolve the conflicts in Iraq and Syria as long as Saudi Arabia and Iran have the degree of hostility and lack of understanding or respect for each other that they do now. Ahmed referred to this as the Arab states thinking that Iran is a worse enemy than ISIL. One of the virtues of this process that they are trying to work on now in Vienna is that it is trying to use opposition to ISIL as a basis for bringing Saudi Arabia and Iran into the same room, together with Russia and the United States. Of course, [Lakhdar Brahimi](#), who was the UN envoy, tried to do that earlier, but he was not able to because the United States at that time wouldn't sit with Iran and Saudi Arabia also wouldn't sit with Iran.

So I won't say I am optimistic, but it is a slightly new dynamic.

AHMED RASHID: I will just be a little blunt and say that, quite frankly, since [Richard Holbrooke's](#) unfortunate death, I think the United States has just taken its eye off the ball as far as Afghanistan is

concerned. President [Obama](#) has been obsessed with this withdrawal. He wants this legacy before he steps down to have removed all U.S. troops from the Middle East and Afghanistan. Of course, the circumstances of what is going on in the world today are not going to allow that to happen.

I think, first of all, the lack of military involvement is one thing. We have an Afghan army now trying to fight the Taliban without any airpower or with very minimal airpower. The United States only provides airpower when its own troops or special forces are on the ground. That is an insult to the Afghans, after you have trained this whole army, 350,000 men and soldiers and all the rest of it, and then you leave them without any airpower to meet with the Taliban. I think that is totally disgraceful and very humiliating for the army itself.

The other part of this is that the whole diplomatic initiative to encourage Pakistan to get talks moving between the Afghan Taliban and the Kabul government, to help stabilize the Afghan government—a lot of that has been left at a very low level within the American establishment. We have not seen the kind of diplomatic pressure really being put on the Afghan government to get its act together, to get the talks going, etc.

I just hope that there is going to be a sort of rebound, given the situation in the world, that President Obama will be taking in the next few months some greater interest. Now that the Americans have committed 5,000 troops and they know that this coming summer is critical—because if real cities and towns and territories are lost to the Taliban, then Afghanistan is lost, quite frankly. So I think it is absolutely critical that the [Obama administration](#) take greater interest in Afghanistan than they have done.

JOANNE MYERS: Barney, do you think that they will? And what would be an optimal policy from your point of view?

BARNETT RUBIN: I think they are, rightly, putting emphasis on an attempt to bring at least part of the Taliban into the fold through a peace process or a process of political settlement.

Of course, everything Ahmed says would be desirable. I could tell you all the reasons that they haven't given airpower to the Afghan army. Among them are the things that you mentioned about the government, which is that the government is not functioning, really, at the moment, unfortunately. There has just been a very blistering report about the management of the security forces written by some of the regime's own loyalists.

Afghanistan just has certain structural problems that can't be solved by pressure. That is to say, it doesn't have the resources to pay for the state by itself, and the international community—and I suppose we agree on this—has had a very narrow interest in Afghanistan, a kind of narrow definition of counterterrorism, and has demanded things of the Afghan government that no Afghan government could possibly supply, given just the nature of the country.

I think, actually, a bigger threat than the Taliban is—there are some donor conferences coming up. I was just talking to [Warren Hoge](#) about it earlier. If countries are so dissatisfied with the—and this is not just the United States, but the United States, European countries, and so on—if they are so dissatisfied with the performance of the Afghan government—it is extremely easy to be dissatisfied with the performance of the Afghan government, and everyone in Afghanistan is (that is why there are ten thousands of people trying to get out of the country)—then they may decide to decrease seriously the amount of money that they are giving, which, of course, creates what is called negative feedback in systems theory—that is, which will make the situation worse.

I think that that is shortsighted, but given the nature of the way the system works, it is probably inevitable. That is why I think it is important to put—we have reached the limit—I think we agreed on

this before, in 2008, before we wrote that article together in *Foreign Affairs* called "[From Great Game to Grand Bargain](#)"—I think we have reached the limit of what we can accomplish with more money and more troops. Unfortunately, we neglected the political aspect. I was working for Richard Holbrooke, of course, and we tried to make that more prominent. I think that is necessary more than ever, because more money, more troops are not going to solve the problems.

JOANNE MYERS: And how do you find the political solution or the political means and ways to arrive at something more sustainable in Afghanistan? Is it a different president, different leadership? What do you think it will take?

BARNETT RUBIN: Not only do I not know, but even if I thought I knew, I would be wrong, and I would be wrong to say it. I will say, Afghans have a lot of institutional history. They need the help and support of their neighbors in doing this as well, and of the international community, which has invested so much.

There are various ways they could go about it. There are different groups in Kabul now who are now talking about different kinds of political processes. But the most important thing is that it should stay within the framework of the constitution and the law, which so far all the major elites, surprisingly enough, seem to agree on.

But I think we know that if we get out too much in the lead and try to impose a solution, we will make the situation worse.

JOANNE MYERS: Do you agree?

AHMED RASHID: I think the long-term problem here—the United States and Europe should be looking much more at the long-term problem—the West managed to do regime change in [Afghanistan](#) and in [Iraq](#), but they absolutely failed to bring about a new regime and a new system of governance and all the rest of it. I don't have to repeat myself.

With this effort going on now that the United States is leading, the diplomatic effort in Syria and in Iraq, what we don't want to see again is a failure of nation-building and a failure of state-building. You have done it badly twice, in two different sets of countries. You don't want to do it again a third and fourth time.

So I think in the long term we have to look at the failures in Afghanistan and the failures in Iraq. Unfortunately, in Afghanistan I think all the stars are very black at the moment. Because of the crisis in the Middle East, I think it is going to be very difficult to get that kind of financial commitment for Afghanistan. Much of the donor money that was pledged earlier, two years ago, is going to be running out by 2017, and donors will have to come up with fresh money. That money may not be available. It may be going to the [Syrian refugees](#) in Europe.

The second aspect is, if you see these [migrants](#), the Afghans are the second-largest category of migrants fleeing into Europe. Eighty thousand Afghans have come to Europe, according to the UNHCR [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees], in the last 10 months. That is a horrendous kind of signal as to what has gone wrong in Afghanistan. A lot of the people who are coming into Germany, escaping into Europe, are the middle-class Afghans who held jobs. They lost their jobs once the coalition left. There was no independent economy that was really feasible. NATO had not built an independent economy. Most of these middle-class people have now fled, and they are not going to go back. It is going to be very difficult to get them to go back to help rebuild their country, much as what we have seen similarly with the Syrians.

JOANNE MYERS: Before we open it up for a discussion, there is just one other thing I want to ask you

about, going back to the idea of the militants. I have read that there are a large number of [militants from the Caucasus](#) on the north border of Afghanistan. How threatening are these militants to the stabilization of Afghanistan, of Russia, the former Soviet Union, the Caucasus?

AHMED RASHID: It is pretty serious. A lot of these Central Asian groups have been in Pakistan for the last 10, 12 years, since [9/11](#). They have grown in size. Because of the lack of military action before, they have been able to expand and grow in size. There are also Chinese Muslims who are involved both in Pakistan and in Afghanistan. What we have seen is that since the military action in Pakistan started at the beginning of this year, most of these guys have been killed, but a lot of them escaped into Afghanistan.

JOANNE MYERS: Have they joined the Taliban? Are they joining ISIS? Are they a new group unto themselves?

AHMED RASHID: Certainly in the bitter fighting we saw in [Kunduz](#), in the north, when they took this important city right on the border of Central Asia, these Central Asian groups were fighting with the Taliban. Some of them have recognized ISIS, but they know that their gravy lies with the Taliban because the Taliban are their hosts. This is Afghanistan; this is their country. So they can't desert the Taliban.

But they are very anxious to get back into Central Asia and to create unrest and uprisings in Central Asia. This is something that personally I have been following very closely for many, many years. I am very perturbed. At the moment, the best of all opportunities has come there. The government of Afghanistan is weak. The Western coalition is no longer present. The governments of Central Asia are corrupt and disliked and economically a disaster. All the stars are in their favor right now. The danger of them crossing into Central Asia is very much there.

Questions

QUESTION: Warren Hoge, International Peace Institute.

I want to ask you about something you haven't talked about and that is the government in Pakistan. What I am thinking about is that the last time I was paying close attention, it was General [Musharraf](#) and it was the [ISI](#) [Inter-Services Intelligence]. I just wanted to ask you, update us on the Pakistani military, how it is performing and acting within the government.

Also, is [Imran Khan](#) really gaining traction?

AHMED RASHID: There is always a question about Imran Khan.

That can be very simply put: I think Imran Khan has lost a lot of traction in the last six months. He certainly was very high at the beginning of the year. His [party](#), of course, is ruling the North-West Province, what is called KP Province now, which is the border with Afghanistan. It has been very ineffective in governance, unfortunately. His party has not really been able to organize itself. Imran tends to become a sort of one-man band rather than having a structured party and organization. He has some very good people within the party, some very educated people and technocrats and all the rest of it, but he hasn't really been effectively using them.

The latest account is—we just had local body elections in Punjab. These are local council elections. Something like 2,000 seats were up for election, and he won about 200. That is the nearest indicator we have of how badly he is doing.

I think the military has come to what I would call a strategic decision. The presence of Afghan Taliban

has led to the creation of Pakistani Taliban, has led to all the terrorism that we have seen in Pakistan itself. As Barney was saying about these economic incentives from China and from other places, essentially we did not deal with the Taliban, both Pakistani and Afghan Taliban. The military could at some point be overwhelmed. Remember, under Musharraf, there was a lot of terrorism taking place from within the military. There were military soldiers and all who were carrying out acts of terrorism, trying to murder Musharraf and all the rest of it.

I think there is a strategic decision. The problem is that the civilian government is not perhaps adequately involved in this process of making the strategic shift. But that is partly the fault of the civilian government, because it has been very inept and very poor at governance. For example, when the military wanted to go after the Pakistani Taliban, [Nawaz Sharif](#), the prime minister, wanted to have talks with the Taliban. Everybody was telling him, "These guys don't want to talk to you. It's a waste of time. Why are you talking to them?" So six months were wasted, with the military having one policy and the government having another.

I hope that there will be a better performance by the civilian government, but I also hope that the military is not going to extend its intervention, beyond security and counterterrorism and all the rest of it, into the civil democratic setup. The danger of that happening is very great. Either the civilian government performs and runs the economy and runs the bureaucracy and runs all the state infrastructure properly, according to some degree of satisfaction—which it is not doing at the moment—or we are faced with increasing military taking-over of aspects of civilian government.

It is a complicated situation right now in Pakistan. The army has said very clearly they have no intentions of taking over. But, willy-nilly, what is happening is that if the government is failing in one task or the other, the army is being forced to step in, because the dangers of terrorism coming back are very strong.

QUESTION: My name is Ovme Copper [phonetic]. I represent [Lyndon LaRouche](#), the American statesman.

In the wake of today's [tragedy or the incident](#) on the Turkey-Syria border, what LaRouche and a lot of other qualified American figures emphasize is that this is something that Turkey wouldn't have done without Obama and NATO knowing first. This is probably predetermined.

If you look at what Obama has done, his actions, the [drone campaigns in Pakistan](#) and around the world, the regime-change policies in [Libya](#), [Ukraine](#), Syria now, and the hard-line stance that Assad must go, which Obama again reiterated today, despite many other people around the world, especially since the Paris attacks, saying that is not a precondition for peace in Syria, like former UK defense chief Sir [David Richards](#), [Merkel](#), [Hollande](#) even—you have a war provocation coming from the United States, especially the White House, which can escalate very quickly.

If you contrast this with what [Putin](#) and, like you said, China's policy is and what Putin has done, which is asking the United States to join the coalition, which he said at the United Nations two months ago, this is a very stark contrast. Both of you can comment on this.

BARNETT RUBIN: I have worked in the United States government. The idea that the White House could plan an incident like this on the Turkey-Syria border just boggles the imagination. If you want to believe that, go ahead, but it is impossible.

Both [Russian](#) and [American](#) policies in Syria have had plenty of shortcomings. Russia has not done anything to try to lower the level of violence in Syria, where 200,000 civilians have been killed. The United States has had nothing but bad experiences with regime change, which seems to indicate that it is probably not a good idea. Putin took a huge risk by putting his forces on the ground there,

including a risk of this type of thing happening, since his pilots, of course, are not that familiar with that area. But he did that only because, I believe, he estimated that Assad was about to fall.

It is very important that we step back and try to reach a sufficient political consensus among the main actors, as is happening now in Vienna, so that they can concentrate on the threat of ISIL. That means finding some kind of a political solution in Syria.

There are some lessons from Afghanistan, just to come back to that at the end. In 1992, after the Soviet Union had withdrawn its troops and as the Soviet Union was [breaking up](#), there was very active negotiation between the United States and the Soviet Union, with the help of the United Nations, about a political transition in Afghanistan. One of the issues was, should [Najibullah](#) leave power as a precondition for a political settlement or should he leave power as a result of the process of political settlement? In the event—they finally compromised, but it didn't work—he announced his intention to leave power, and that was sufficiently destabilizing that they never got to the part of having the political settlement.

I think the problem we face with a regime like Syria is that it is such a personalized and increasingly [family-based](#) and clan-based dictatorship that it is hard to maintain the integrity of the state while you change the government. Yet without changing the government, you won't get the consent of the majority of the people. That is the conundrum.

AHMED RASHID: I don't think you can say anything categorical about what is going on right now, because things are moving so fast. Whatever Putin's intentions, bad or good, might have been in the beginning when he intervened, the [downing of the Russian airplane](#) and the death of 250 passengers has completely changed the equation. Putin was not bombing ISIS at that time because of a variety of reasons. He is today. Putin is as threatened by ISIS and what is going on in the Middle East as the Americans and anybody else. I think that is dawning on the Russians.

So I don't think we can make categorical statements. The situation is very, very fluid.

QUESTION: Sondra Stein. I have two questions.

First, in Pakistan, is there any improvement in economic development and in education in the country?

The second point you just brought up—it seems like ISIS is very clever in what they do. I can't understand why they shot down the Russian plane. Why would they want to bring Russia to the West in any way? It seems so counter to all their other plotting.

AHMED RASHID: Was it planned at the sort of highest level of ISIS or was it was just an opportunity by some people on the ground who put the bomb in the plane? We really don't know the answer to that. Why Paris necessarily? Why not London or Washington? There may be very mundane reasons as to why these decisions are made. All these decisions might not necessarily be made at the top.

Remember, ISIS now has expanded hugely. They have 20,000 to 30,000 foreigners fighting with them from 100 different countries. I am sure that ISIS is not in full control of all these foreign fighters—when they are going home, when they are coming, what plans they have, etc.

Obviously, the Paris attack seems to have been centralized in some form or the other, but other attacks may not be.

I think on Pakistan, the answer is no, we're not. And it is very unfortunate. The education budget is still minimal. There is not enough money being put into health and education. The government is making efforts, I will say that, but frankly without a rejigging of the economy whereby less money is spent on defense, which, of course, means that you have to have an improved relationship with Afghanistan, an

improved relationship with India, etc.—unless we reduce defense spending and are willing to spend more on social services, we are not going to see a real, major improvement.

The government on education—it can tinker at the edges of the problem, but it can't really deal with issues such as math literacy, which is what we need.

BARNETT RUBIN: Just a word on Russia. I think the incident with the Russian airplane in Sinai is very consistent with what Ahmed said earlier about ISIL's mode of operation. Putin sent the air force into Syria and started bombing various people, maybe not primarily ISIL, and they announced that they were going to retaliate. They did not have the capacity to retaliate in Russia, because they don't have the networks there. They found the place where they had the capacity to retaliate was in Sinai, where they have people on the ground and there were Russian vacationers. They might have been able to do it in Turkey as well where there is a similar configuration.

QUESTIONER: Just to make a last point, Russia wasn't bombing ISIS, but the rebels that were fighting Assad.

BARNETT RUBIN: I know that those charges have been made. I think it wasn't bombing only ISIS, but it was also bombing ISIS.

QUESTION: Most of the oil that ISIS sells passes across the Turkish border in trucks. Most of the antiquities and art objects, I believe, pass across that border. A large portion of the recruits into ISIS come across that Turkish border. If that border could be effectively closed by the Turkish government, how important would that be in our desires to degrade and destroy ISIS? Secondly, would that be at all feasible, closing the border?

AHMED RASHID: The Turks are, as I said, obsessed with the Kurds. The fact is that the Kurds are operating on both sides of the border, the Turkish Kurds. They are linking up with the Iraqi Kurds and others. There is deep suspicion about the role that Turkey was playing before, by allowing all these foreigners to come through Turkey and go into Syria and join ISIS. It seems now that the Turks have suddenly realized that this is a grave threat to Turkey itself. We saw this terrible [bomb blast in Ankara](#) a couple of weeks ago, 100 people killed, just before the Turkish [election](#).

I think now that you have a Turkish government which has got a majority in parliament, etc., they will do much more to stop this flow of people joining ISIS, because they are hurting themselves.

Yes, I think closing the border will be of huge benefit. But the real problem is, what are they going to do with the Kurds? Are they going to start killing them once again? Are they going to send their own special forces into Syria to deal with the Kurds? The Kurds are allies of the Americans. Turkey is also an ally of the Americans. But Turkey does not want American support for the Kurds. The reality is that the only troops on the ground fighting ISIS are the Kurds. This is the problem.

BARNETT RUBIN: Politically, I think the problem is that nobody wants the border closed. Everybody wants the border open to their side. Nobody wants the border completely closed.

QUESTION: Thank you so much for this. Ajay Anand with Systmapp. It's a software company working with the United Nations.

I spent a lot of time in Urfa and Antep over the past three years, which is very close to the Syrian border. My sense is that it is very much open and it is very much Turkey that is complicit. I don't know if that has changed.

My question is regarding ISI, back to Pakistan. Does the ISI, in your estimation, today have a coherent view—first question—with regards to militancy in [Punjab](#), [Kashmir](#), Afghanistan? Second, have

they—allow me to paraphrase here—learned their lesson with regards to fomenting these groups and using them for their own purposes? Second, if they have learned the lessons, what are the actions that you have seen or know about or speculate on that they are taking to address them?

AHMED RASHID: I said earlier that strategically I think the military high command has made a decision about extremism. But, tactically, I think obviously there are going to be divisions of opinion. There are very longstanding officers who have been involved in supporting extremism for their whole careers. You are telling them now that everything they did is now going to be turned around completely. There have been mistakes made, with Afghanistan, the [death of Mullah Omar](#) and the failure to really deal with that earlier than expected.

So I think, tactically, obviously there are going to be differences. There are differences between the government and the military. There are differences within the government. There are differences within the military.

Pakistan's army is a very hierarchical setup. When the [chief](#) makes a decision, it is supposed to be implemented down below. But we have seen before that often you get midlevel officers, etc., not listening to what is being told to them and doing the opposite or turning a blind eye.

So I think it is going to take some time before we settle this issue.

BARNETT RUBIN: There are three different categories:

- There are extremist groups that attack the Pakistani state that are now pretty unambiguously attacking them.
- Groups that attack the Afghan state. They are now working to try to get them into a political process in the hope of getting an Afghan state that is more to their liking and will keep India at bay there.
- Those of them that don't join the process perhaps they will deal with like they are dealing with the TTP.

On the Indian side, the Punjabi Taliban that Ahmed was talking about and the groups that are oriented towards Kashmir, there is no change whatsoever and no movement. That would have to be linked to a political process between India and Pakistan, which is now completely stalled.

QUESTIONER: Can you just deal with one of those two problems, meaning Afghanistan and India, separately? Do you have to have a policy on militancy and extremism or can you foment it on one side and try to stop it on the other side?

BARNETT RUBIN: It is not either/or. Of course, if you allow any extremist groups to have camps and training and publicity, then there is always the possibility that others will take advantage of it as well, even the [Uighur separatists](#) from your very best friend and ally, China.

On the other hand, I think with respect to India, they are not willing to give up what they see as a defining issue for their national identity and a tool that they still have, and especially not—at the moment, they are still protecting some of them from the judicial process, the ones who are accused in Mumbai. India is not willing to speak to them until there is progress on that.

QUESTION: Good evening. I'm Linda Senat.

I have a question about the ideology. A lot of the comments in the last couple of weeks say that we are not going to defeat ISIS militarily, that really we have to get to more of the root, which is the ideology. I

would like to hear your comments on that. Specifically, is there any hope that Saudi Arabia could be a contributor to the solution instead of the problem and back away from the extreme [Wahhabi](#) idealism and doctrine?

AHMED RASHID: The simple answer is what I said. This is not your job; this is the job of the Muslim world. The ideological battle has to be played out by Muslims against ISIS.

Unfortunately, what we are seeing is that states and rulers are not coming up to the line and giving their societies an alternative voice. States, rulers, as well as civil society, as well as the religious elite, the mullahs, etc.—we have not seen, really, any Arab state take the initiative in trying to combat this extremism and sectarianism, except perhaps Jordan, which is the smallest and, unfortunately, the least important. But certainly Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States have taken no initiatives so far in doing that. I think they need to be urged. Who is going to urge them? Given the fact that the civil society in their own countries is very minimal and barely exists—we have [bloggers](#) being [flogged](#) in Saudi Arabia today. Are bloggers the threat to Saudi or is ISIS the threat to Saudi? I think Muslims have to make this decision.

I am hopeful. I think there are a lot of things going on in the media, amongst women, and all sorts of groups. But until there is some state support for a change of outlook, we are not going to see a radical shift.

BARNETT RUBIN: Just a couple of brief comments. One, saying that there is no military solution doesn't mean that military force isn't needed. The actual phrase should be "there is no purely military solution."

Second, the supplement to a military solution is not mainly teaching them about so-called moderate Islam or something like that. These people in Paris were not killing those people because they want to flog bloggers. The Islamic State is attracting young people from throughout the Muslim world because it is about a political project of giving Muslims a powerful collective voice in world affairs that is reestablishing the caliphate. There are some differences with al-Qaeda, but that is exactly what bin Laden talked about in his first [statement](#) after 9/11, when he referred to "what happened to us 80 years ago," the [Treaty of Lausanne](#). It is what is attracting them now. They feel that the states that have existed in their part of the world have not really spoken for them, have not really stood up to the West, and haven't really given voice to them.

Just preaching to them about tolerance is not going to solve the problem.

QUESTION: My name is Denera Ragoonanan. I am from the Foreign Policy Association.

I was curious more about Kurdistan. I was wondering, we see that with ISIS and the fighting within Kurdistan, even the Iraqi War, the minority groups of Iraq and of Syria have gained more traction and more control of their own people. How would you see Kurdistan developing in the next years, with ISIS literally surrounding it, but at the same time, gaining more traction and gaining more autonomy to act in its own way, but then also having different factions, such as Syrian Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, and even the Turkish Kurdistan? [*For more on Kurdistan, check out [David Phillips' talk on "The Kurdish Spring."](#)*]

Also, just a broader question. We look at Pakistan and Afghanistan and we see the Balochs and the Hazaras. How are they factoring with the rise of extremism in the region?

AHMED RASHID: On Kurdistan, let me just say that I think the Arab states are going to have to get used to the idea of, if not autonomy, even independence for some of the Kurds. The ultimate solution in this region is—you can't put the Kurds to fight ISIS, which is what the West is basically doing now,

and pour arms and money into the Kurds and build up their military forces, and expect them to be the ground troops for the West, and then leave them hanging politically—which is, by the way, what happened many years ago. I don't think the Kurds are going to stand for it this time.

There are very difficult decisions to be made, both by the states in the region and by the Americans and the Western allies.

On the Hazaras, as you know, when the Taliban and al-Qaeda were ruling Afghanistan in the 1990s, there was a vicious campaign against the Shias and the Hazaras, who are Shias by faith. After 9/11, when the Taliban resuscitated itself, for a very long time, there was a period when the Taliban actually did not harm the Shias and Hazaras. They seemed to have learned their lessons. They wanted to appear more nationalistic and more responsible, and they didn't attack the Shias. Nor did al-Qaeda.

What we are seeing now is the reverse of that policy. We have some Taliban, who we suspect are probably trying to demonstrate their good loyalty to ISIS, who are killing Hazaras. The killing of Shias has restarted in Afghanistan, in quite a nasty way. Part of this influence may also be from Pakistan, because in Pakistan the [sectarian war](#) has continued all through the last 15 years, and a very vicious sectarian war.

BARNETT RUBIN: Actually, the Taliban's policy about this is the same, which is that they are against it. Even in some areas, the Hazaras, the Shia, have gone to the Taliban commanders to ask for protection against ISIS or some of these anti-Shia groups. But it is, so far, rather unclear, at least to me, who these people who are killing Hazaras on that stretch of road are.

As far as Kurdistan is concerned, there is one curious fact, which is that the most stable countries in that part of the world—stable and capable ones—are Iran, Turkey, Israel, and now, I would have to say, Kurdistan—in other words, the non-Arab countries. That is a problem that the Arabs will have to figure out how to solve.

QUESTION: Thank you both for your comments. My name is Derran Moss, with the United Nations.

A very quick question about the fragmentation of the Taliban, or the apparent increased fragmentation of the Taliban, in Afghanistan—at the moment, the rise of the splinter faction under Mullah [Rasul](#), the movement of more extremist elements, as you have noted, towards ISIL. The question is, what are the implications for a more fragmented, or at least an apparently more fragmented, Taliban on the prospects for peace in the future? Is this more likely to push them to the table or more likely to push them away from the table?

BARNETT RUBIN: I think the main problem is that if you reach an agreement, it will be much harder to implement it. It might be easier to reach an agreement, but it will be harder to implement it. We were discussing this before. Before the announcement of the death of Mullah Omar and the subsequent fragmentation, it was easy to identify—at least we thought so—the right people who actually represented the Taliban. Those people were not willing to come and talk to the governments, so Pakistan found some other people.

Now it is very hard to identify who those people are because of that fragmentation taking place. It may be that the best we can do now would be a much sloppier process in which, under pressure from Pakistan, portions—we hope large portions—of the Taliban would join some kind of political process. But there will still be a sizable amount that will have to be dealt with militarily in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. I would imagine that would not be decisive for a long time.

QUESTION: I am a journalist from China, based here in New York for a Chinese newspaper.

It is really interesting to hear from your side your view on One Belt, One Road. My question is, do you think the key of success with that initiative in Central Asia relies on China's attitude towards the Taliban? To me, China kind of now wants to keep the status quo. I just want to know your view. Thank you.

QUESTION: My name is Isaac Scheinfeld. I'm a high-school senior.

I am just wondering, how do you see the ethical abuses of the countries surrounding ISIS affecting our ability to ally with them in a non-hypocritical fashion?

BARNETT RUBIN: First, on the latter, please remember [World War II](#). We allied with [Stalin](#) to defeat [Hitler](#). I am not saying that it is exactly the same situation, but I haven't heard any human rights organization say we should have fought both at the same time because they were both violating human rights.

QUESTIONER: It is not a political issue.

BARNETT RUBIN: It is a political issue, but it is not a yes-or-no issue.

As far as the question about China, if I understood it correctly, China wants to develop its central and western territories, including Xinjiang, which requires the creation of infrastructure linking those areas to the world overland through Eurasia and south to the Indian Ocean, because they are very, very far from China's Pacific coast, where most of the development has taken place thus far. Of course, there is considerable [unrest](#) in Xinjiang, which, by the way, has absolutely nothing to do with anything happening in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but is entirely due to the situation in Xinjiang itself. But, of course, it could be aggravated by some groups from outside.

China does not want to put its workers, engineers, and so on in places where they are likely to get kidnapped or killed. It doesn't want to build facilities that are likely to be blown up. Therefore, its ability to implement those investments, which it sees as necessary for its domestic stability and for its domestic economy, depends on peace and security in those other areas, including Pakistan and Afghanistan.

On the other hand, China has a very strong tradition diplomatically of what China defines as non-interference. But it has recently started to change that and become somewhat more proactive. For instance, China has now a special envoy for Afghanistan and participated as an observer in the round of talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in July.

What the Chinese say—and I have been talking to the Chinese about this for about three years as part of a dialogue process—what they really don't like is people suggesting that they should take the lead in this, because they don't want to be responsible for the results. I can't blame them. Also they don't really have the experience or the capacity. In the United States, you have the experience—but largely negative, of course—of working on these issues.

But I think what both the United States and China are trying to do, somewhat gingerly because of all the other irritants in the relationship, is to find a way to coordinate their policies and even cooperate on Afghanistan and Pakistan.

JOANNE MYERS: At this time, I would like you to join me in thanking the "Dream Team," Barney and Ahmed. Please join us in continuing the conversation.

Audio

Ahmed Rashid and Barnett Rubin dissect the complicated situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan--a

region of many competing terrorist groups--and also comment on ISIS in the Middle East and Europe. ISIS is actually a war within Islam, declares Rashid, and the West's main task should be to help mobilize and unite the Muslim world to fight it.

Video Clips

Ahmed Rashid and Barnett Rubin dissect the complicated situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan--a region of many competing terrorist groups--and also comment on ISIS in the Middle East and Europe. ISIS is actually a war within Islam, declares Rashid, and the West's main task should be to help mobilize and unite the Muslim world to fight it.

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