PAKISTAN ON THE BRINK:
THE FUTURE OF AMERICA,
PAKISTAN, AND AFGHANISTAN

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GEORGE PERKOVICH: Well, good afternoon. My name’s George Perkovich; I’m a vice president for studies here at the Carnegie Endowment. And it’s my pleasure to welcome you. And it’s probably your greater pleasure for me to welcome Ahmed Rashid, who is an old friend. I – we first met – he probably doesn’t remember – we first met in 1992. And the more interesting thing is he’s still alive. It’s easier for me. But you know, times have changed. A lot of things has happened since then. And Ahmed has been one of the best chroniclers and interpreters of many of those things that have happened in the last 20 years.

The occasion of our meeting today is the release of his latest book, “Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan and Afghanistan.” But many of us have followed you from your writings in Pakistan but also in the New York Review of Books and other commentaries. Ahmed has engaged with, advised, debated with a remarkable range of U.S. and other international officials. So in a sense he has the perspective that’s highly informed from within Pakistan but also very informed of kind of the thinking and perspectives of U.S. and German and other officials, which again adds to the uniqueness of what his book offers and what he can offer.

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What we thought we’d do is ask Ahmed to begin by just in a sense framing a little bit where he thinks, you know, the progress on Afghanistan are headed and kind of the U.S. interaction with that problem and strategic questions. Then I may ask a couple questions. Then we’ll just open it up for a discussion. So without further ado, Ahmed.

AHMED RASHID: Well, thank you very much. It’s a great pleasure to be here. One of the first places I spoke at ever was at Carnegie. So it’s a very great pleasure to be here. And that was, by the way – I’m talking about 1985, ’86, a very long time ago, during the war in Afghanistan with the Soviet Union.

I – you know, I’ll try and be brief. I hope, you know, some of you manage to read the book. But essentially this book was prompted by growing despair about my own country – you know, whether my children will be able to live in Pakistan, you know, in the future, and in which direction Pakistan is going. And really what we have seen is – as you know, Pakistan is, you know, deeply problematic. There are two insurgencies; there’s an economic collapse literally; there’s an (almost ?) continued overwhelming influence in foreign and strategic policy by the military.

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And what I try and look at is, you know, what really needs to be done. And the – and the answer I’ve come up with is that Pakistan has never really come out of the – of the Cold War. The foreign policy we pursue is still essentially rooted in the Cold War syndrome. In other words, it’s a dependent foreign policy; you need a protector or a provider of money and funds because you can’t – you refuse to reform yourselves economically. You are still protecting Islamic fundamentalists and extremists to be the front arm or the right hand of your foreign policy, even though that became redundant after the end of the Cold War and
became totally redundant after 9/11. Yet it continues in the shape of the Taliban and other groups.

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And the whole – you know, instead of helping turn this geostrategic – this wonderful geostrategic location that we have into a kind of land bridge for trade and development and pipeline from Central Asia and, you know, the starving – lack of energy that South Asia suffers from – bring those pipeline, electricity, gas, oil, et cetera down, we have instead – you know, we remain the hub of literally a state of conflict on two sides.

After all, there was a war in Kargil just 10 years ago in Kashmir. And the war in Afghanistan continues with now horrendous repercussions for Pakistan with the growth of the Pakistani Taliban. And the fact that they threaten the state, in my opinion in a much more vicious way than even the Afghan Taliban – the Afghan Taliban right now would like to negotiate an end to the war. The Pakistani Taliban, on the contrary, are not interested in that. And they have – they continue to attack the army, attack civil society, et cetera, and have now linked up with a lot of these Punjabi groups who are fighting India. And they pose a very great threat.

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Now obviously on top of all this we’ve had this complete collapse of the relationship with the United States, which is unprecedented in Pakistan’s history. And it’s a result of whole years – at least 12 months of mistakes, you know, really made by both sides. But essentially it has been prompted – you know, I mean, there had been a lot of landmarks – I mean, one obviously was the killing of Osama bin Laden, where there was no accountability carried out in Pakistan by whether anyone was culpable or whether anybody was, you know, badly informed and not doing his job properly in discovering where he was.

Either way, the whole argument in Pakistan was turned around, and it was blamed on America breaking Pakistan’s sovereignty by sending the SEALs in. And then a whole new kind of wave of anti-Americanism was whipped up, most significantly in the military itself, and – which made the military high command’s position very difficult. And so there’s this – you know, this constant double dealing. I mean, we are – we are consciously whipping up, you know, anti-Westernism, anti-Americanism, even as we ask America, the World Bank and donors for more money, more aid and the – and saying that, you know, nobody understands our position and nobody accepts, you know, what we say. Everybody is buying the American line of what really happened.

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But the fact is, none of this is really going to change until we change the parameters, you know, of our foreign policy. And only the military can do that. I think right now, if you ask me, there is an enormous amount of dissatisfaction in the public because of the economic crisis with the military’s policy. That’s precisely why the military have not been able to take over in Pakistan in the last six months. I don’t think General Kayani has any
intentions of taking over. But this kind of crisis under – you know, in the past would have long ago prompted a coup.

And there has been no coup because – one reason for that is that the military actually is in a much weaker position than before, because it knows that, you know, at least half the public are fed up with the constant warring, tensions with neighbors, lack of business opportunities, one-third of the budget, you know, going on military-related affairs, a pittance going to education and the social services, et cetera.

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So now – so there is a debate in Pakistan, but it is really inarticulated. You know, I hope this book articulates it in a way, not just for Western audiences but most of all for Pakistani audiences; because Pakistanis need to hear a new narrative, a narrative that is not based on constant interference in India or Afghanistan or Central Asia and this whole concept of a national security state at the expense of economic and development. One of my last lines in the book says that, you know, the Pakistani elite has essentially forsaken its one – its one thing that it needed to do, which was to provide development and a good life for the people of Pakistan. And that has been consistent.

Now in this whole thing, how does the U.S. and Pakistan, you know, restore its relations? It’s been a very slow process, and there have been all sorts of bumps on the way, and there continue to be bumps. And we don’t know – I hope there will be a meeting next week in Central Asia between Ambassador Grossman and possibly President Zardari at the – and the prime minister is also going to Seoul, where President Obama will be. There’s a chance of the meeting there, although it’s bogged down at the moment with this parliamentary – the parliament still having not concluded the conditionalities of what they want the Americans to do.

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Now I think a lot – you know, a lot of this camouflage of parliament and debate and discussion – obviously the steps are really going to be decided by the military. And I think on a lot of issues there’s going to be deadlock immediately. The U.S. is going to keep firing drones. The Pakistanis will keep objecting but will be able to do nothing about it. There will be very – you know, there will be intelligence cooperation, but it will not be anywhere near the scale of what we had during Musharraf’s time earlier. So there are going to be all these issues, and there is – you know, if there’s going to be U.S. – what I call now U.S. nagging on things like Haqqani group, you know, doing something with the Taliban or this group or that group, the Pakistanis are basically going to ignore it.

So we have to find a common agenda to talk about. And I think that common agenda is the negotiations with the Taliban. That is the only thing actually which the U.S. and Pakistan share. Pakistan has been pushing for this for a long time. The U.S. in the last one year has had a dialogue with the Taliban, but the – you know, as I was saying, I mean, the problem with that is, so far, that it hasn’t really yielded anything. It hasn’t gone anywhere as yet. But I think both countries could benefit from cooperating much more on this negotiation with the Taliban.
Now two things have happened in this that have basically annoyed the Pakistanis deeply. The first thing is that – you know, there’s a whole chapter on this in my book – but if you see the process of what has happened in the last year and how the Americans went into this, the Americans essentially bypassed Pakistan and began talks with the Taliban through Germany and Qatar and other people helping.

And that of course aggrieved and upset very greatly the ISI and the army, et cetera; because the whole name of the game was that, you know, the risks that were taken by the military back in 2002, 2003, to first of all give the Taliban a safe haven and give them sanctuary, and then to help relaunch their offensive in 2003, their insurgency against the Americans – that risk was taken on the basis of a political rationale, which was that at the end of the day the Americans will leave, and we will have the Taliban to deliver to the Americans in that sense.

Now I think that whole scenario has been completely undermined because we have no relations with the Americans. There is anti-Americanism in the military and the intelligence services and widely in the government. So at the very moment that we should be best friends with the Americans and helping the Americans, if you like, talk to the Taliban and be – and offer deliverables to the – to the Americans, we have a complete deadlock in relationships. So – but you know – so we have – you know, I think that the diplomatic game on both sides is how we can restore that at a time when there’s such enormous mistrust between the two sides.

Now the other factor is that there is no doubt in my mind that the Taliban are fed up with Pakistan. That’s one of the primary reasons they want to leave. You know, they have benefited enormously from Pakistan obviously. But at the same time they – all of them, when you speak to them, the first thing – you know, they don’t abuse the Americans; they don’t abuse Karzai; they are very upset by the manipulations, by the jailings and what they have undergone in Pakistan.

And of course in a sense until they can free themselves from that umbrella and – they want to become Afghans again. They don’t want to be – as much as they say Karzai’s a stooge of the Americans, you know, the Afghans turn around and say, well, you’re the stooge of the Pakistanis. And they want to – you know, they want to get out of that umbrella and out of that accusation. And so this dialogue process hopefully will help them do that.

Now in Afghanistan I – you know, I think we are faced with – I call them three cycles of crisis. The first is there’s an international circle of crisis. The Europeans are totally
fed up with this war. They want to get out even quicker than the Americans. France is already leaving, and other countries could follow. They don’t have the money to pursue this war anymore; most of them are broke. Secondly there – a lot of the Europeans are extremely upset at the unilateralism of the Obama administration in taking decisions on Afghanistan without adequate consultation.

And there has been a series of flip-flops in U.S. policy. You know, I think the first very big mistake obviously was, you know, announcing the surge but announcing the withdrawal date at the same time. But then there was supposed to be a civilian surge, and that has kind of disappeared. Then we were told that there would be this counter, this – Petraeus’ counterinsurgency strategy which would be protecting the population, et cetera. That seems to have disappeared.

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Then there was enormous resistance to talking to the Taliban by the military, by the CIA and by various other government establishments. You know, and that divided the administration very seriously. And those who wanted to talk – people of the White House, people of the State Department – were really not given the power, you know, to negotiate. And I frankly would say, even today the president has not put his stamp on these negotiations. Now what I mean by that is that, yes, there – as Hillary Clinton said, there will be a long period of talking and fighting at the same time. But in that process of talking and fighting, you have to try and build, you know, confidence between the two sides and measures between the two sides that will actually reduce the fighting.

Now, right now we’ve had a situation where the Taliban had actually suspended negotiations with the Americans. Now very pointedly there had been these three bloody incidents involving U.S. forces and Afghans. The Taliban condemned all of them but did not break negotiations in any of them, in – you know, for any of them. They had broken negotiations, not on the basis of those incidents but on the basis that the U.S. has been too slow in delivering what it had promised to deliver, which was essentially a prisoner exchange, five of them for one American. Now that prisoner exchange has still not happened.

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Now it’s very difficult to explain to the Taliban, look, you know, there’s an interagency process in Washington. (Laughter.) You know. (Chuckles.) And you know, everything has to go up – you know, every department has to be consulted, and then it has – at the end of a month it reaches the president, and then the word comes down all the way, and then we can do things. Now quite frankly, if the Americans are serious about negotiations, this is not the way they can be done. We have to have mediators who have power of authority to, you know, get through all this nitty-gritty.

Yes, certainly, big discussions should be going up to the top. But this kind of nitty-gritty at the moment has really, I think – you know, it has really upset the Taliban. Look, they have their interagency process too, you know. (Laughter.) They are sitting in Qatar. They’ve got to send a guy to Karachi or (Quetta ?) to meet with – (inaudible) – and get clearance – (laughter) – you know, basically. So look, I mean, you expect them to be a little
slow, and given the restrictions they face from Pakistan and all the rest of it. So I think you can sort of jazz up your interagency process a bit, which would be helpful, you know, so we could have some result.

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But the next stage is going to be even more difficult. And that is that there’s very limited amount that the State Department can do. The real player in this is going to be the U.S. military. Why? Because the real reduction of violence and the real testing of both sides can only happen when there are military CBMs, confidence-building measures, between the two fighting forces.

So you tell the Taliban, you know, you stop doing IEDs in this province for two months; we’ll stop doing night raids or something in so many provinces for so much time. You will need the military fully on board. And at the moment I just don’t see that. There’s really very little sign that the military is on board for those kinds of measures, which will be piecemeal, which will be small steps. We – nobody’s talking about a cease-fire or anything like that. So we need that process.

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Now – sorry, I got a bit diverted. I mean, perhaps I’ve gone on too long. But I just want to talk very briefly on Afghanistan. The three – there’s an international circle, which is I think deeply unsatisfied with this administration. I think there is a regional crisis. President Obama rightly, when he came in, said, we want a regional solution for Afghanistan. The regional countries have to stop interfering in Afghanistan. There has to be unity.

Well, at the end of three, four years, what we’ve seen is that the region is in actually total turmoil. You know, I mean, you have a complete breakdown of relations with the most important country, Pakistan. You have of course a total breakdown with Iran, another key neighbor. You have Russia and the Central Asians having their objections, the Chinese having their – frankly we haven’t moved anywhere on the regional question.

I still think there’s time. I still think there is the possibility that the U.S. can negotiate a reasonable settlement. How to deal with Iran on this issue will of course depend on the nuclear talks. If some kind of deal can be struck on the nuclear issue, then I think, you know, the Americans, NATO – perhaps not the Americans, but some European power could discuss with Iran as to how Iran could cooperate in a regional agreement not to interfere in Afghanistan.

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And the third issue – which I won’t go into detail, but is pretty obvious – is the disarray in Kabul itself. There is no consensus in Afghanistan on talks with the Taliban. The Northern Alliance is – loathes Karzai and wants nothing to do with him and is not prepared to support Karzai on talks with the Taliban. The biggest crisis in my opinion
internally is the economy. The economy will collapse when foreign troops leave, because there is no indigenous economy inside the country.

And these tens of thousands of Afghans who work for the foreign – you know, 150,000 foreign troops are all going to be rendered jobless. And this is the very class if Afghans that you have cultivated in the last 10 years. These are the Afghans who are educated, who speak English, who are pro-democracy, who are pro-Western, you know, who want a modern state. These are the very Afghans who, you know, the intervention was supposed to help create. And yet these are the very Afghans who will be rendered jobless and resentful of, you know, what the West and the Americans have done to them. So the economic crisis, the lack of consensus – you know, I don’t feel the army and the police are going to be ready to take on responsibility.

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And so finally I will say if there is one strategic thought that this administration and certainly the next administration needs to focus on, and that is how do we, America, reduce the level of violence in Afghanistan before we leave? How do we end the civil war before 2014? That should be the – and that’s a political strategy; that is not a military – that’s not something General Petraeus or General Dempsey can carry out only on their own. This is a political strategy that is needed so that when you leave Afghanistan, you do not leave a civil war between the Taliban and Karzai or between Karzai and the Northern Alliance. This is the key thing.

And if you fail to do this, and then you’re expecting, well, you know, the Afghan army will stand up and will replace us and they will be on the front line, well, then we’re talking about the collapse of Afghanistan within the year, frankly, you know. So you have an opportunity of reducing the violence and of bringing about a peaceful settlement. I think that opportunity should be galvanized. Much more needs to be done to speed up the process, which anyway, given the Afghan, you know, system of negotiating, is going to be a very, very slow process. Thank you very much.

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MR. PERKOVICH: Thanks, Ahmed. I want to move right out to take questions. So raise your hand, as some people are doing. Then when I call on you, the microphone will magically appear, and please say who you are. Why don’t we start right there, Amber? And then we’ll work our way up to this lady here, and then – thank you.

[00:33:23]

Q: Hi, there. My name is John Glenn. I’m with U.S. Global Leadership Coalition. You surely know a lot of the debates here have been about what we do regarding foreign aid to Pakistan. And there have been debates on both sides about the costs of disengagement and about the need to use our leverage. What’s your views on where we should stand on that?
MR. RASHID: Well, you know, I hope that there’s a reconciliation between the two countries, but I – you know, I also hope that you will focus more on, as I say, not on the nitty-gritty day-to-day military, you know, things you want the Pakistan army to do, but you will actually focus on how can you help Pakistan change the – this foreign policy, this strategic nightmare that we are stuck in as a relic of the Cold War, you know, how can you help that.

And key to that obviously is going be economic development – you know, how can you help long-term economic development? You know, I mean, can you finally, you know, do something really significant such as reducing textile tariffs in the U.S.? Sixty percent of our exports are textile. Can you – you know, we have not developed a single new industry since the ‘50s: Can you help us develop a new industry, which is export-orientated, labor intensive, which will provide jobs, et cetera? You know, textiles were 60 percent of our exports since in the ‘50s. They’re still 60 percent of our – I mean, we have – we have not developed a single new industry, you know.

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So there are these long-term things. But I think the key thing would be how can you help us shift this foreign policy that we are lumbered with, you know – and that, you know, this doesn’t become a dialogue of confrontation between the U.S. saying do this now Lashkar-e-Taiba has to be, you know, destroyed ,et cetera, et cetera. What – you know, you have to slowly and painstakingly enter into a strategic dialogue with the political and military elite in Pakistan about – I think there’s a – there is a realization, but people don’t have the will, they don’t have the means to do it. They’re scared of the consequences. You know, if we give up these groups, you know, tomorrow India marches in or something, what do we do? So I mean, there have to – there has to be an all-around – an all-around policy between the two states, of which economic aid is very important.

MR. PERKOVICH: This lady right here.

Q: Yes –

MR. PERKOVICH: (Off mic.)

Q: -- (inaudible) – and your former student. Sir, if you were to be a teacher next year at the National Intelligence University and a first – and a first-year student of intelligence asked you: Can you define Taliban, sir? What is Taliban? Could you define it in a few words?

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MR. RASHID: Look, I’ve written books about this. I mean – (laughter) – it’s very difficult. But I – you know, I think the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban are very different. The Afghan Taliban, I think, are exhausted and tired by the war – they’ve been fighting for 30 years – by the losses they’ve suffered with – under the Americans. And they want to go home and be Afghans again. They don’t want to be refugees under the tutelage of Pakistan. And they – they’re – if you see their rhetoric, it has moved from this jihadist
rhetoric to a much more Afghan nationalist rhetoric. You know, they feel they represent Afghan nationalism who’ve – you know, the nationalists who fought the occupiers, et cetera. And they liken themselves now not to jihadists and all, but to the Afghan chiefs who defeated the British in 1842, you know.

So I think all that is very significant. The Pakistani Taliban still remain – you know, the Afghan Taliban has stopped burning girls’ schools. They have – they allow now all girls education. The Pakistani Taliban are burning girls’ schools. They disallow all education. They’re burning schools outside Peshawar, you know, the main city in the northwest. And they’re assassinating teachers, they’re kidnapping professors. And journalists, of course, are under enormous threat. They’re very – they are – they want to topple the government and still impose their (Shariah ?) regime. But I do believe that a peace in Afghanistan will also have very positive spin-off effects in Pakistan, especially regarding the Pakistani Taliban.

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MR. PERKOVICH: OK. Ambassador Kux and then Ambassador Schaffer, and then we’ll go back again and come up. Just –

Q: Hi. Dennis Kux, Wilson Center. Two questions – one, why should we be negotiating with the Taliban? Shouldn’t it be the Taliban negotiating with the Afghan government, and perhaps – not perhaps – but with us in the background, with the Afghans – and Pakistan in the background – with the Taliban? Second question, what do you think of Imran Khan and his chances?

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MR. RASHID: Oh, God. (Chuckles.) It’s a very, very sensitive question. Look, you are the occupying force in Afghanistan. And you are the ones with the military force; you are the ones who’ve basically been fighting the Taliban. And you know, the – you know, the first issue on the table is the American withdrawal, as far as the Taliban is concerned. The second issue is the question of sharing power and all that. I’m pretty sure that the Afghan government will come in very soon. And certainly the negotiations that are beyond the military realm, the negotiations on political power sharing, which I hope will take place, will obviously not include you and have to be between the two Afghan parties, you know.

But I think initially there will – you know, the Taliban certainly will need to know what are your plans, you know, and what you intend to do. Are you going to leave 40,000 troops and special forces for the next five years? Well, we don’t accept that, you know. And they will want to be able to negotiate that.

I think one – and the other part is, I mean, why not include Karzai now? Well, you know, it’s a bit of an ego problem also, you know. We are the – you know, we are the ones who sacrificed for Afghanistan. What has he done? And you know, we’re the ones who suffered and fought the Americans and all the rest of it. So I think, you know – but I think – I think for – quite quickly, there’s – there is a lot of pressure, I know, right now
internationally from all sorts of quarters on the Taliban to include Karzai as quickly as possible, even though they are discussing CBMs with the Americans.

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Imran is, you know – look, I’m not going to (say it ?), but Imran is untested until this election comes. You know, what will his policies be? You know, at the moment he’s promising the earth – you know, we will do this, we will do – we have corruption – will be eliminated in 90 days and the economy will be turned around in 30 days and, you know, all this kind of thing. I mean, Imran will be tested when the elections come. Does he really have that support on the ground? Or is it just a bunch of kids who are following him around because he’s good looking and, you know, he’s a cricket star? Are there – is – are there – are these politicians who’ve joined him, are they capable of winning? Are they serious politicians?

But the other question on the other side is also very important. Does he have very close links to the military? Because frankly he has not criticized any aspect of the present foreign policy, which most – many Pakistanis think is completely wrong. He – and secondly, does he have very close links with the extremists? He’s very sympathetic to the Taliban. He’s very sympathetic to – (name inaudible). He’s trying to excuse the Pakistani Taliban for all sorts of, you know, misdemeanors. He doesn’t condemn them when they burn girls’ schools and they carry out suicide bombings. So all these questions have to come up, but the test will be the elections.

MR. PERKOVICH: Mr. Schaffer:

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MR. RASHID: Thank you.

MR. PERKOVICH: You need a microphone.

Q: You mentioned U.S.-Pakistan cooperation towards a settlement in Afghanistan. My question to you – and I’ve got a couple of questions – the first one is on what basis can we cooperate with Pakistan, since there’s such a strategic disconnect as to what our two sides want to see happen in a post-war Afghanistan? Pakistan is terribly concerned about limiting Indian influence – oh, we want a stable, peaceful Afghanistan. So on what basis can the two sides come together to work towards a settlement?

Second question. It seems to me that the Pakistanis would not mind to see the Taliban return, but it also occurs to me that in the past, with a very few exceptions, Afghans have not been at all happy about accepting dictation or any kind of leadership from the Pakistanis. Do the Pakistanis really think of that in a post-war arrangement this is going to change?

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MR. RASHID: Look, first of all, I don’t think the Pakistanis want the Taliban back, as you say, as in government, you know, solely. I don’t think the Taliban want to be back in government solely. They would like some kind of power-sharing deal, and so would the Pakistanis. They would like some deal in which they get some control in the south and the east, their traditional areas.

But you know, I still think the Taliban are very conscious of the fact that they know perfectly well that if we were to take Kabul tomorrow with the backing of the Pakistan military, there would be – you know, the international community would walk out and the Afghans would be left completely alone. And our government in six months would be on the ropes. We would have no money, no aid, no nothing. And this time, there’s no Osama bin Laden to help fund us. And there’s no ISI to help fund because Pakistan is bankrupt, too. So who are we going to depend on?

So I think the Taliban are very practical people. And they appreciate the fact that, look, we still need someone like Karzai, we need somebody who’s going to be an interlocutor for the international community and who can deal with the northern – the non-Pashtuns in the north. So I think the idea of power sharing is quite important for them, and I think the Pakistanis accept that. I don’t think the Pakistanis want a Taliban government, because a Taliban government will also be stridently – given what I’ve been talking about, it’s quite possible it will be stridently anti-Pakistan. And you know, it could help fuel the Pakistani Taliban who are still remaining in Pakistan.

Now on the – on the basis, you know, I agree with you. I don’t think there’s very much in the short term – there’s not very much agreement between the U.S. and Pakistan. Pakistan will say, you know, reduce the CIA, no more contractors, you know, no more – and some of these things the U.S. will have to comply with, because, you know, we’re not going to give visas to 1,000 contractors and, you know, 1,000 CIA people and all the rest of it. So there’ll be toughness on that part. There’ll be toughness on the border between the kind of – the levels of cooperation. If there were any, you know, in before, there’ll be even less now, you know.

But as I said, the real cooperation has to be in a strategic dialogue with Pakistan, which would start slowly, on what – where does it want to go with its foreign policy and what the U.S. and other NATO members can help in dealing with that – but, more immediately, in helping this process of talking to the Taliban.

The fact is – look, the U.S. having snubbed Pakistan in opening this dialogue in Qatar – now needs to come back and say, look, Pakistan, you know, we need your help; we need your support; you are part of the team. You are not necessarily on the table, because the Taliban won’t like that at all, and nor will the Americans. But you know, behind the scenes you – you know, you will be consulted, brought in, you know, whatever. And I think
there will be an incentive, once that process starts, for Pakistan to respond. But that’s it. I mean, for a long time we are going to have a fairly cold relationship.

MR. PERKOVICH: There’s a gentlemen with a long arm with a blue garment over it – right there, there you go. Yeah, yeah. Right, right – no, no, behind – we’ll come to that person, but the guy – yeah, that long arm there.

[00:46:05]

Q: Thank you, thank you. (Laughter.) My name is James Byrne (sp). I’m a journalist here. And a week ago in this very room, a former National Security Council staffer told me that, for the first time at high levels of the U.S. government, they’re planning scenarios for the collapse of Pakistan, and it’s expected. And I’m wondering what your reaction to that is.

MR. RASHID: Well, I mean, quite frankly that’s what this book is about, too. You know, and – (laughter) – but it’s not just negatively saying that. It is also trying to give some solutions as to how that could be prevented. You know, my book is called “Pakistan on the Brink.” And I mean, we are on the brink, you know. I wouldn’t say we’re a failed state yet or not that – or that we would collapse. But for example, the economic crisis in Pakistan is – is of a desperate, desperate nature now. And that could really sink the country into mayhem.

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You know, I mean, just yesterday I was reading electricity has now been restricted. When I left it was 12 hours a day we had no electricity. Now it’s 18 hours a day. Now people – now you count how many hours you have electricity. So we say we have six hours of electricity. And in Lahore, where I live, for six months we’ve had no gas. So we been cooking on coal, which is like going back to the Middle Ages, you know, basically – wood and coal. And it’s a – it’s a chronic situation. So I’m not – you know, I’m not necessarily disagreeing with what you say. I hope, you know, my book has some (resolve in its ?) impacts.

MR. PERKOVICH: The gentleman – the – right there by you, Maddy (sp). Yeah, there you go. And then we’ll work our way –

Q: Henry Hatger (sp), researcher at NARA. Do you recommend compensation be paid to survivors and relatives of the 16 civilians who were very recently massacred by a U.S. soldier?

MR. RASHID: Yes, definitely. I mean, that is, you know, very – I mean, you know, for – that is part of the Muslim tradition, part of the Afghan tradition. Substantial – you know, what’s called blood money – needs to be paid. Yeah.

MR. PERKOVICH: Well, if it was good enough for Raymond Davis. Judith (sp), yeah, right there. Right. And – (inaudible) – yeah.
Q: Judith Kipper (sp). Welcome. Ahmed, you talk about a chronic condition. And you know, the fact that Pakistan is not – has only textile exports since the ’50s has nothing to do with the United States. It has to do with poor governance and bad management inside Pakistan. The U.S. is not good at nation-building. We don’t know how to fix it. We can’t even fix our own economy right now. What is the potential – I mean, everybody who comes back from Pakistan – Pakistanis and Americans who know it in government and nongovernment say there’s no fix for Afghanistan without Pakistan. You’re suggesting the opposite, that if we can do a deal with the Taliban, then the Pakistani Taliban, and that things will cool off there.

What is – my question and frustration, and I’m sure you share it, is what is the potential inside Pakistan – with the feudals, with the corruption, with the lack of accountability, with blaming everybody else, the Cold War policy, all the things that you’ve talked about – for some kind of force or individual leadership to emerge that’s going to say – you know, beat people over the head, and you know, educate youth to read and organize the country? Pakistan’s economic potential is vast, if only in agribusiness.

MR. RASHID: Judy (sp), I – you know, I agree with you completely. And you know, part – a lot of this I try and answer in the book. I mean, this state of denial that we’re in constantly about everything, the blaming of the outsiders rather than blaming ourselves.

Of course economic development depends on internal factors. You see, I mean, most countries have a foreign policy that reflect domestic issues of development and advancement and building bridges in the neighborhood and, you know, trade and all that. We have exactly the opposite. Our foreign policy has destroyed our country. We’ve had a foreign policy that has been totally destructive and negative. And the domestic policies of growth and trade and business and education is held hostage by this ruinous foreign policy.

So what I’m trying to say in this book is that, you know, until – and who runs foreign policy? It’s not the civilians. That’s the problem; it’s the military. Now, you know, one of the solution to that – I – you know, I can only – I only posit at the end that greater democracy – I hope that there will not be a military intervention, that this government will be voted out of office. There will be another government which will be voted out of office. And hopefully slowly, one by one we can improve – our governments have been hopeless also, corrupt, inept and unwilling to reform themselves – backed by a bunch of feudals, as you say.

I mean, in Sindh province, where President Asif Zardari comes from, only 40 percent of the – of the – of the landlords pay their electricity bills, because the rest, you know, are loyal to Zardari so they don’t have to pay their – now you can’t – you can’t run a country on this basis. You could in the 14th century. You can’t do it in the 21st century. So I mean, I’m not saying that, you know – the military needs to change, the ruling elite needs to change, and this can only happen through – personally I think through a political process
of constant democracy where there’s a free media, where there’s a questioning of policies and all the rest of it.

And secondly, I’m talking about this enormous public unrest that there is. It’s not articulated – and Imran does not articulate it. Imran articulates frustration of the youth. But he does not articulate real policy changes that ordinary people are discussing. People are asking why is the military getting one-third of the budget? Why isn’t the budget coming to our schools and to the roads and to the, you know, electricity and all the rest of it? You know, why are we fighting all these wars, for god’s sake? You know, why did we go and help the Americans in Afghanistan? Why did we keep the Taliban? People are asking these questions.

[00:52:50]

Now no politician in the country is prepared to answer these questions. That’s the tragedy at the moment. They are cowered (sic; cowed) by the military. They are cowered (sic; cowed) by their own corruption and lack of will. But this is not going to last forever, because things will get worse, I’m sure, in Pakistan. And I think there will be a lot of public unrest. But other than that, I hope that there will be leaders who will emerge who will talk about, you know, the real issues.

MR. PERKOVICH: This lady here. We’re adding to it, but I’m going to start – you go ahead, and then we’ll take two at a time because we’re going to run out of time.

Q: Sure. Abigail Friedman; I’m with the Asia Foundation. You’ve talked about Pakistan and the Cold War logic that it is locked in, and “Pakistan on the Brink.” I wonder if you could talk about China’s role in Pakistan today and what your vision would be of China’s role.

[00:53:46]

MR. RASHID: Well, as you know, China has been Pakistan’s longstanding friend. It helped to develop nuclear weapons, nuclear missiles. It’s developed – provided weapons to the military. But China has proved, you know, two or three things. First of all, the Chinese have never given aid to Pakistan. It does not give humanitarian aid. It does not give loans. It gave one loan 20 years ago for 500 million (dollars), and we’ve never been forgotten – I mean, we’ve been – you know, we’re never able to forget that. But China does not give budgetary support. It does not give development project aid. It gives aid only to military projects which suit its own national interest. You know, and I think Pakistanis are waking up to this, number one.

Number two, the Chinese have been very upset by the constant reappearance of radicals among Chinese Muslims, or the Uigur population in Xinjiang. There have been two statements, very rare statements – as you know, the Chinese officials never say anything. And Chinese officials have issued two quite blistering statements against the Uigurs that they have caught who allegedly have fought and trained in Pakistan and in Afghanistan.
And since their own crackdown in Xinjiang over the last couple of years, more and more Chinese have been coming down to Pakistan to escape the crackdown. And they have been enlisted in madrassas, with the political parties like the Jamaat – the Jamaat-e-Islami and Laskhkar-e-Taiba, and with the Taliban. And they’ve been getting training and battle experience. And some of them may or may not go back to China. And there’s been a lot of pressure on the Pakistan military to deal with that situation. The second – and this has caused enormous ripples in Pakistan. For the first time, the Chinese have actually criticized Pakistan for harboring extremists.

And the second issue was that there was this Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, which you know is very – which we desperately need, which the Americans do not want us to build, which the Chinese were funding 1.2 billion. And they walked away from that. Their bank – they had put together a consortium of companies and banks, and they have refused to fund that pipeline. So that is – I mean, nobody else is right now going to be crazy enough to come and fund a pipeline (cutting ?) out of Iran. And the Chinese were the last hope, and they’ve walked away from that. So I mean, that too is very significant.

[00:56:21]

So, you know, I mean, I think – I think the message from China is very clear. It’s asking Pakistan to grow up, you know, and to, you know, stop, you know, destroying, undermining its own economy. The last thing China wants is a basket-case economy – economic situation in Pakistan. I mean, you know, they don’t want massive instability and economic mayhem in Pakistan which then fuels radicalism and pushes that radicalism north into Xinjiang.

MR. PERKOVICH: Let’s – we have about five minutes, so let’s take three. I – Seema (ph) back there and Romnick (ph) on the aisle, and then we’ll come – this gentleman here and this gentleman here. We’ll have to be brief because we have about five minutes for Q and A.

Q: Seema Siroui (ph); I’m a journalist from India. I was wondering how do you read the state of –

MR. RASHID: I can’t hear you, sorry?

Q: How do you read the state of relations with India currently, given the fact that all this new grouping that has come together (before ?) Pakistan, where a bunch of really radical extremists are talking openly about jihad against India and – but government-to-government relations seem to be improving. So just wanted to get your read on that.

[00:57:37]

MR. PERKOVICH: OK, well, don’t answer yet because we’re going to take – so this – don’t answer yet, we’re going to take all three and then we’re going to – OK.

MR. RASHID: Well – yeah, OK.
Q: Yes, I’m David Abramson; I’m an analyst at the State Department. I just wanted to ask a question about Central Asia. The governments there are very concerned about a post-U.S.-NATO withdrawal, or drawdown, in Afghanistan. And what is the future of the IMU, IJU in a post-withdrawal or drawdown Afghanistan?

MR. PERKOVICH: OK, so India, Uzbekistan – yes.

Q: Yeah. My name is Kami Bartan (ph) with the Pakistani Spectator. I just wondered at how come you don’t see any connection between the Pakistani Taliban troublemaker who take refuge in Afghanistan. And how don’t you see any relationship between – (inaudible) – organization, and how don’t you see the hearing on the Hill about Baluchistan?

All – if you connect all these dots, it’s – perpetual Pakistan paranoid that, as long as American are in Afghanistan, it’s very helpful for India to help Pakistani troublemaker. And Pakistan is falling apart because of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, and because India is getting even with Pakistan what Pakistan did in Indian-controlled Kashmir. So, I mean, your statements are kind of contradictory. On the one hand, you say that Pakistan is trying to find a scapegoat in U.S. and in India. On the other hand you are saying that these things have some connection. So can you kind of verify what is your real thought about this? Thanks.

MR. PERKOVICH: Thanks.

MR. RASHID: I think – I think most Pakistanis were quite shocked when this defense-of-Pakistan league emerged. This is a group of about 40 Islamic fundamentalist parties and groups. Many of these groups are terrorist groups that have been banned by the Pakistan government and by the U.N. and by the Americans and, you know, everyone else. And they have reappeared on the streets after a long time and are now trying to push for the resignation of the government and all this kind of thing.

Well, clearly, you know, they seem to have some clearance to be able to do this. I think what is happening is that they are trying to form – the extremist groups are trying to form a right-wing alliance to fight the elections. And they want to have influence in the border provinces of Afghanistan which they were ruling under Musharraf when he had the rigged elections in 2002. And they would like to regain some kind of control, you know, of those border regions. And that’s why, you know, they’ve been mobilized.

Well, Central Asia is – you know, is – I mean, there’s very little information coming out of there. But I would, you know, just basically say what I’ve written in the book about – the next real area of instability is going to be Central Asia. There’s no question. There’s enormous poverty, unemployment, lack of reform, corrupt leadership, you know, and very little aid and help to this region. I’m talking particularly about Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
Kazakhstan has oil and Turkmenistan has gas; they have terrible governments, but, you know, they will survive. These three states – and all three states border Afghanistan. And that is a risk that, if there’s no peace settlement if Afghanistan and these – you know, these groups are able to move into Central Asia, these states – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – are not strong enough to combat them, you know.

As far as the IMU and other groups are concerned, they are still active. I think they’re trying to get back into Central Asia. They have had support from extremist groups in Pakistan such as Lashkhar-e-Taiba and such as many of these groups who have had very close links to them for the years. I don’t think these groups at all are supported by Pakistan in any way. But they – not now at least; they were at one stage but not now. They’re using elements of al-Qaida – (inaudible) – elements of the Taliban who are based in northern Afghanistan. And they’ve got bases in northern Afghanistan, and they’re trying to penetrate into Central Asia.

But I don’t think they are that many. And many of them have been killed by the drones while they were living in Pakistan. Others have been – there have been divisions within their ranks. You know, the IMU has split into several factions. There’s leadership conflict, et cetera. So I don’t think they’ll be that effective.

As far as your question is concerned – yes – I mean, you know, I think, you know, the Indian presence in Afghanistan is certainly posing problems for Pakistan’s security. And that’s what the Pakistanis believe very strongly. And as you said at the back there, the state-to-state relations are improving. But I think what is essentially missing is a dialogue between India and Pakistan on Afghanistan.

You know, I think in recent months, you know, the military has sent several messages I think to the Indians saying that we had no objections to you staying in Afghanistan. It’s not that, you know, we – we have no objections to you staying in – but we should work out the – the modicum, you know – the sort of means of how we interact with each other in Afghanistan. In other words, there has to be some agreement between the two sides on controlling their intelligence operations and other things inside Afghanistan.

That, you know – and that is critical. And that of course is something that, you know, Obama came out with originally: that he wanted India part of the whole Af-Pak solution, and how Indian pressure in Washington all – you know, within the first days of the administration, you know, Holbrooke was taken off that beat – taken off that beat altogether.

And you’re still left with the same problem, that, you know, Pakistan – part of the negotiations between the U.S., Pakistan and Taliban are going to have to involve what kind of relationship Pakistan is going to have with India. Pakistan is not going to give away the baby – you know, the bathwater and the baby without some kind of agreement with India as
to how India is going to restrict its abilities to, if you like, threaten or undermine Pakistan from the Afghan side of the border.

But let me just say that, you know, we should also realize that this is a proxy war the two countries have fought for 65 years. You know, we supported a Sikh movement to overthrow Indira Gandhi. We supported a Kashmiri movement. The Indians supported first the Pashtun movement in the '50s and '60s. Then they supported the Sindhi movement. There have been five insurgencies in Baluchistan. They supported the – at times they have supported the (balut ?) So, this is a proxy war that can only end when there is a peace deal between the two. And – but the first aim I think should be to limit this proxy war in Afghanistan. We should not use Afghanistan as the new base for this proxy war.

[1:04:54]

MR. PERKOVICH: All right. With that I want to say that Ahmed will be in the back signing copies of his book. And having read it, I urge you to do the same. It’s both informative and interesting and pleasant to read. So that’s the next stop. But before he move and you move there, I want to thank him. I want to thank you, but I want to thank him for coming.

(Applause.)

MR. RASHID ?: Thank you very – (inaudible).

(END)