

## South Asia Expert Sees Obama 'Redefining The War On Terror'

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Pakistani writer and analyst Ahmed Rashid has covered Afghanistan and Pakistan for the past three decades. Rashid has also recently advised Richard Holbrooke, U.S. President Barack Obama's special envoy for Pakistan and Afghanistan. He spoke with RFE/RL correspondent Abubakar Siddiqui about U.S. President Barack Obama's new strategy for Afghanistan and the region.

**RFE/RL: Is deploying more troops the right answer to Afghanistan's complex security challenge?**

Ahmed Rashid: What we are going to see is a surge that is going to be including a lot more troops, but also a lot more aid, reconstruction, development, [and] building capacity of the government, speeding up the building of the army and the police and the bureaucracy. So I think, taken together, we are not just talking about a surge in troops; we are talking about a much more comprehensive strategy that will really be rectifying the kind of mistakes and what was missing from the [George W.] Bush administration's agenda.

**RFE/RL: Does the unveiling of this strategy mean a paradigm shift in what was called the global war on terrorism to what some in Washington are already calling the Overseas Contingency Operations Strategy?**

Rashid: Yes, what we are going to see is a redefinition of the war on terror. I don't think we are going to see this blanket terminology applied to all groups -- nationalists, extremist Islamic, left wing -- everybody who comes in gets a label. I don't think we are going to see that.

We are going to see a much more sophisticated approach wherein Al-Qaeda is going to be targeted and isolated. And I think that is the correct way to go. And that of course, will allow people in the U.S. government to talk to other [militant] groups -- for example, the Kashmiris, the Taliban, [and] Hamas. And these groups should be talked to.

**Prospect Of Talks?**

**RFE/RL: How do you see the practical implementation of the idea to talk to the Taliban or a strategy to reconcile some of them?**

Rashid: I think a lot of Taliban who are not necessarily fighting for ideological reasons -- who are not fighting to put bombs in New York, who are not fighting because they are loyal to Bin Laden -- they are fighting for very mundane issues, [essentially] local issues. Their brother was killed, their house was attacked by American soldiers -- local grievances. They are disappointed and disillusioned with the government.

In the light of all this, it is quite easy to understand why a lot of Afghans have taken up arms against the government and against the Americans. But I think they can be brought back and incentives [and] pressures can be used to bring them back.

**RFE/RL: How does this strategy address the alleged corruption of a lot of figures in the Afghan government that has tarnished the presidency of Hamid Karzai?**

Rashid: Well, I think that really needs to be addressed -- not just corruption, but those involved in drug trafficking, and they could be members of his own family. He will need to address that before the next election because, I think, these are the kinds of allegations, which will be made by the opposition candidates, which will carry a lot of weight as far as the people are concerned. And he needs to do something about it.

**Pakistan And The Region**

**RFE/RL: Do you think the new strategy can effectively address the competition between regional powers,**

particularly India and Pakistan, which contributes to instability in Afghanistan?

Rashid: I think the international community has to address that. And they have to be prompt about it and they have to get on to the backs of, hopefully, the more improved situation in Afghanistan to convince the local people that they need the support of the neighboring countries.

**RFE/RL: Do you think the new strategy can prevail on the various power centers in Pakistan and rally them behind with the clear goal of defeating extremism in Pakistan and ensuring that it is not a threat to Afghanistan?**

Rashid: Frankly, I don't. I think the Pakistani leadership right now is very, very fragmented. It is uninspired by the real issues which affect Pakistanis -- in other words, terrorism, extremism, the lack of security, and the lack of jobs. We have not seen the Pakistani leadership come together to offer leadership or a vision for the future or a path to the future.

And we have also seen a very demoralized [Pakistani] military. The military is not offering any kind of leadership role either here.

We have an elite, frankly, a ruling elite that is virtually in the state of collapse, and is not willing to take the kind of leadership role and the kind of risks involved in standing up to the Taliban. And that puts the country in a very poor position.

**RFE/RL: While the United States is likely to increase civilian aid to Pakistan, it is expected to tie military aid to the army's performance against Taliban and Al-Qaeda, do you think it risks alienating Pakistan's powerful military establishment?**

Rashid: Certainly, conditions on that aid will anger the army. But at the same time, I hope, there will be sufficient aid for the civilian sector. I think if the civilian sector can be faced with additional aid, money, support for everything that has gone missing -- I think the civilians will be able to convince the military that if there is a loss of aid for the military, at least, it is being made up on the civilian side.

But clearly, there is a lot of anti-Americanism in the army. There is a lot of sympathy for the Taliban. All this has to be balanced out by the army chief. And obviously, American aid is going to play a critical role in that.

**RFE/RL: In the past, you have recommended the integration of Pakistan's Pashtun border region, particularly the restive Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), into the country's political and economic mainstream, to undermine militancy and extremism. Do you see it happening soon?**

Rashid: One of the greatest failures of the Pakistani civilian leadership has been its refusal, despite many appeals by the public, by the Pashtuns, and, of course, by the former assassinated Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, to set out a vision of the future for FATA; to at least announce the desire of the political elite to bring FATA into the mainstream, to bring it within the constitution of Pakistan, and to stop making it this irrelevant sort of border post which has no laws and which is ruled by the gun. We have had this [Pakistan] People's Party government in power for a year, and they have still not offered any kind of future for the people of FATA. And it think that is incredibly tragic. Now, it's not entirely their fault because it seems very clearly that the military is against this.

**RFE/RL: While the United States has a military and diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, how challenging will it be to implement these new plans on the ground in Pakistan?**

Rashid: Pakistan is a very, very fragmented society right now. And it's not a place where American opinion is taken very seriously. Unfortunately, Pakistan and the people are likely to respond quite negatively to the Obama proposals because of the conditionalities that are being set up. We are dealing here with a very serious crisis in Pakistan. And only time will tell how this is going to be resolved.