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# Pakistan: Implications of the Afghanistan Drawdown

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## PAKISTAN: IMPLICATIONS OF THE AFGHANISTAN DRAWDOWN: Q&A

### Question 1:

In terms of the forthcoming elections, and you're talking about how nice it would be to have a mediator, somebody mediating the elections – what about Jimmy Carter or Kofi Annan? Is it not possible to appoint one of these two gentlemen as a mediator?

### Ahmed Rashid:

It's quite possible. The fact is, who is pushing for this at the moment? Nobody. The Americans are not pushing for this, the Europeans are not pushing for this and the Afghan leadership is not pushing for this. So it needs some kind of impetus. There is no shortage of good people who could be good mediators.

### Question 2:

Could I ask what impact you think the withdrawal of the Western forces out of Afghanistan will have upon current insurgent activity in Pakistan? Will it, as it might be expected to do, reduce it?

### Ahmed Rashid:

That is a very important question for Pakistan. It's really not answerable. I would have said six months ago that the withdrawal of Western forces will have a very positive effect in Pakistan. It will reduce the power or the influence of the Pakistani Taliban simply because their claim to legitimacy is that we are fighting the lesser jihad. We are helping our brothers the Taliban fight the Americans in Afghanistan but we are fighting the Pakistan army because they are the stooges of the Americans. So it's a kind of convoluted argument that they present to themselves. But that argument goes out of the window when the Americans leave. So the assumption here would be that the Pakistani Taliban would be much more – their ability to recruit, to propagandize, all that would be much more reduced. Who the hell are you fighting now? Why are you fighting the Pakistan army – the Americans have gone. So there's no jihads left.

But what we've seen in the last six months in Pakistan is actually a stepping up of terrorist attacks, of much more brutal nature than we have seen before.

Targeted killings against senior officials, mass killings of minorities like Christians and others. Almost as though the Taliban are trying to deliver a message to the Pakistan state: don't think we are going to be reducing ourselves because Afghanistan might turn into some hunky-dory place. We are still determined to overthrow the state in Pakistan. That is very forcefully their new mantra: every official they kill, they repeat that mantra. We are not fighting for the Afghan Taliban, we are not fighting now against the Americans, we are fighting to overthrow the Pakistan state. That worries me and it worries a lot of Pakistanis.

### **Question 3:**

What do you think the nature of the relationship is between the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban? Is one of them more influential on the other? Secondly, you just mentioned but would you elaborate – do you see the Pakistani Taliban going towards territorial demands and creating their own state in Pakistan, trying to follow that agenda once the American pullout happens?

### **Ahmed Rashid:**

The second half of your question, you know the Pakistani Taliban today – four or five years ago they were largely Pashtun tribesmen, limited to the tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan. Today they include all the Punjabi groups, the groups in Karachi, militant groups all over the country. There is a loose alliance of these groups, all basically wanting the same thing: to overthrow the state structure, defeat the Pakistan army, etc. I don't think anymore it's a question of having FATA as some kind of independent Muslim sharia state, FATA-stan or something like that. I think the demand is much – as I said in answer to that gentleman, I think the demands have increased in the last six months, which obviously means that the state has to react more forcefully than it has been doing so far. Unfortunately, what we've seen in the last six months, especially with this whole idea of talking to the Taliban and all that, we have not seen yet the promise that Nawaz Sharif made in the beginning when he came in: that there would be a proper counterterrorism strategy and a proper national security council that would lead that strategy, an NSC built on the model of the US or India, where the army and the intelligence would all sit together and chalk out a common theory.

At the moment it's a very confused political picture inside Pakistan. Terrorism is on the uptake but the political parties are still talking about talks with the

Taliban. The military is not – the military is furious with the Taliban. The military wants some political cover so that they can go in and take action. Some of their top officers have been killed in recent months. So there is not complete unity unfortunately in Pakistan's strategy at the moment.

#### **Question 4:**

I'd like to ask about the position of Mullah Omar. Is he on the side of the peaceful Taliban or the war-oriented Taliban? And about this office that the Taliban opened in Doha, whether it is doing any negotiations regarding getting the Taliban back into the diplomatic and world affairs rather than as a fighting group. How will this affect Al-Qaeda?

#### **Ahmed Rashid:**

Mullah Omar has made no statement but generally what is believed by all the major interlocutors – the Afghans, the Americans, the UN – is that Mullah Omar is backing the peace lobby. He certainly was when the Doha process was taking place. Remember the Doha process has collapsed. The office never opened. Negotiations have been at a standstill since halfway through last summer. So we haven't seen any negotiations at all, for the time being. So whether Mullah Omar is still with the peace lobby, whether he's given up now with the Americans and the Pakistanis and the Qataris and everyone else, I don't know. But certainly the initiative that was taken two years ago, in which the Taliban opened talks with the Americans and met with them directly, was supported by Mullah Omar.

I think Al-Qaeda is definitely going to be a spoiler in the long term of all this. Peace negotiations between Kabul and the Taliban, if there is going to be a peace settlement in Pakistan – Al-Qaeda is without a doubt going to be a spoiler. Some of the major assassinations that have taken place in Afghanistan have been carried out by Al-Qaeda-type groups rather than mainstream Taliban. They've done it purely to paralyze the whole process.

#### **Question 5:**

Two short questions, if I may. How would you see the post-Afghanistan drawdown playing into the whole relationship between Pakistan and India? That's surely important not just for the three countries but also for the whole region. Secondly, you said at the beginning that the West had made many

mistakes in Afghanistan. As you look back now after more than a decade of intervention, which do you think has been the biggest?

**Ahmed Rashid:**

It's a very complicated situation right now. Karzai is definitely trying to draw the Indians into Afghanistan. He is trying to get the Indians to give him tanks and heavy artillery and weaponry and all the rest of it, knowing fully well that to do so would absolutely annoy the Pakistanis. The Indians are being very sensible and very cautious by not falling into that Karzai trap. They're being very careful as to what they give. I think a lot of what they're giving has been – not coordinated, but Pakistan has been kept well informed as to what is being given. So I think both Pakistan and India are playing it quite sensibly at the moment. But as I say, if there's a meltdown, both sides stand on opposite sides of the pitch. India continues to back the non-Pashtuns essentially – I'm being very broad here, and I've been criticized a lot for talking like this, but you know what I mean. India essentially backs the Tajiks and the Uzbeks and the Hazaras, although it has made a lot of ground up in the Pashtun areas too. But if there's a meltdown it's very difficult to know how the India-Pakistan thing will play out.

The other factor is the role of Lashkar-e-Taiba. That has now become a very important factor. The real question is: is Pakistan controlling Lashkar or not? Lashkar is involved with the Taliban, with the Afghan Taliban. It's involved with the Pakistani Taliban. It's involved with all the Central Asian groups who are trying now to make their way into Central Asia, post-American withdrawal. What is Pakistan going to do about Lashkar-e-Taiba? Because I see Lashkar becoming the real noose around our necks at the moment, because Lashkar – as we saw with Mumbai – is in a position to ultimately blackmail you, blackmail the Pakistan state. In other words, they can create a war crisis with India or even a war crisis with Afghanistan. God forbid, a major attack carried out by Al-Qaeda, Lashkar, whatever, in Afghanistan can just plummet relations between the two countries. Of course the same goes for India.

So this whole withdrawal thing and the whole range of issues that the region confronts is really walking on feathers at the moment. That's why this election, as I say, is so critically important. If this election goes off well, everybody can take a step back and reconsider and reconfigure how to deal with the post-election scenario.

**Bridget Kendall:**

And the biggest mistake?

**Ahmed Rashid:**

I think the biggest mistake was to go into Iraq when they did, the Americans, and abandoning Afghanistan for about five years essentially. Until 2007 you had 25,000 American troops there and you had very little money for army-building, state-building, nation-building, all the promises that were made to the Afghans. That period in the beginning when you went into Iraq, 2003–04, remember that was a period when there was not that much of a Taliban threat. You could wander around the whole country, you could do all sorts of things in the country. That whole period was just wasted and lost.

I think possibly the second issue would be drugs, the failure to have a drugs policy. We haven't talked about drugs but Afghanistan produces 90 per cent of world heroin. This is, by the way, the single monetary factor that can keep all these groups alive, is their involvement in the drugs trade. If you've read the latest UN report, the drugs – 50 per cent they've gone up in the last one year, production. Obviously everyone is seeing a loss of income from other sources like aid and things. So perhaps drugs.

**Question 6:**

Could you perhaps just say a little more about how you think the Pakistan army is going to respond to this? You implied that they were itching to attack the Taliban.

**Ahmed Rashid:**

I think the army has become very frustrated at the Pakistani Taliban now. They would like to take out some of these groups, not necessarily those groups who are – there are Pakistani groups who are not fighting the Pakistan army but are fighting the Americans and the Afghan army. The Pakistanis would, again, defer and not take out those groups, but they would want to take out the groups that are fighting the Pakistan army.

The problem here is that they feel there is no political ownership if there was to be a fight. Remember the last big offensive that took place was in Swat, four or five years ago, when the Taliban took over Swat and there was a huge uproar – the Americans, everybody. Then finally the political government

gave coverage to the army and passed resolutions and urged the army to go in and backed the army, etc., to get the Taliban out of Swat. But we haven't seen that kind of coverage being given by the political parties since then. It's tragic but I think Nawaz Sharif has the right idea. He wants to do the right thing. But he's been hampered a lot because he can't go out on a limb and order an offensive against the Taliban, even though he's prime minister. Now, many liberal Pakistanis will say he's the damn prime minister, he was elected to do this. He should order the army, it doesn't matter if other political parties want to procrastinate about this – he has the authority and the right to go in against these Taliban. He should tell the army to do so. But he's very hesitant because of all sorts of domestic factors.

### **Question 7:**

We discussed most of the problems existing in Afghanistan and Pakistan but you did mention that a lot of the funding coming to the Taliban is from Saudi Arabia. Over the last few months – six months perhaps, as you were saying – with rapprochement between the Americans and Iranians, the Saudis have been feeling a little bit not very happy and they are going for broke, kind of, in Syria, in Iraq, in Lebanon, in Russia. How do you see that playing, and the evolution in Saudi Arabia, for the situation in Afghanistan?

### **Question 8:**

Just a question about efforts in counter-extremism and counter-radicalization, how you assess that those have been in the last few years – by the UK, the US, Pakistan – to reach young people, to work on madrasas, to use communications media. Work with young people and encourage moderate voices. How have the counter-radicalization efforts been, do you think?

### **Ahmed Rashid:**

Let me make it clear: it's certainly well acknowledged for many years now that the Saudi government and the Gulf state governments are not funding. But there are various, very rich sheikhs who are funding and who either have links to Al-Qaeda or they have links to particular Afghan commanders – like Haqqani, for example. Haqqani has got a whole network in the Arabian Gulf which for the last 30 years have been funding him, so that network is not going to disappear overnight. Unfortunately the governments of the Gulf

states have not clamped down on these networks either. So that kind of money is going to continue to flow. The Saudis could do far more in this.

I think the Saudis are being very careful. Pakistan has been pleading – the Pakistanis do not like the Qataris, for whatever reason. The Pakistanis and even Karzai have been pleading with the Saudis: please play a reconciliation role with the Taliban. Help us. And the Saudis have said: I'm sorry, we did this in the 1980s, we did this in the 1990s and we were attacked every time. We were used. The Saudis are not really keen to play any kind of mediating role in there. Secondly, they are bogged down with Syria and Iraq and all the rest of it.

So it's possible that the Saudis may be persuaded after the elections, by the Pakistanis or by the next president of Afghanistan, to play a more meaningful role. But I think in their heart of hearts, they really are fed up with the Afghans, and they are particularly fed up with the Taliban – and of course with Al-Qaeda and all that. So all those linkages that the Saudi state had before, ten years ago, I don't think exist anymore.

**Bridget Kendall:**

The madrasa question, counter-radicalization?

**Ahmed Rashid:**

The simple answer to your question is, I think many countries have been doing a lot of very good things, but unless the Pakistan state gets involved – I think the real frustration among Western donors is that the state is not involved. You can't start a deradicalization programme in Pakistan. The Pakistani state has to start one. What progress has been made – there is progress that has been made but it's been minuscule. The problem is there are tens of thousands of young people who need to be deradicalized. The problem is huge and vast. You need a national effort to do this, a national effort to rebuild your educational system so that instead of turning out people who are basically illiterate you turn out people who have actually learned something.

I think the state really has to – it's not a question of money only, it's a question of will. People like myself have been saying for years that we have to show the will to do this. Unfortunately, the military under Musharraf did not. At the moment it seems, although this government is still very new, I think



again they have good intentions but they are bogged down with all sorts of other issues.

**Question 9:**

While the political outcome may be the most important, in terms of the military, the performance of the Afghan forces and police will be important. Do you believe they are fit for purpose, for what they will have to do? While much improved professionally, you do still hear from the ground that there are conflicts in loyalty between the government, the state, and the warlords and tribal forces.

**Question 10:**

I was wondering if you could elaborate on Al-Qaeda and the Pakistani government's response to it. If we're talking that there's going to be potentially ungoverned space for Taliban in Afghanistan to move into, in the east and south, that ungoverned space is going to be there for Al-Qaeda. If their presence increases in the future, for the core, that there are already in the FATA, what is the Pakistani response to this, if at all?

**Ahmed Rashid:**

Sorry, what is the Pakistani response?

**Bridget Kendall:**

You're talking about in Afghanistan, right?

**Question 10:**

I'm talking about the move into Afghanistan, yes.

**Bridget Kendall:**

If Al-Qaeda move into ungoverned spaces in southern and eastern Afghanistan, how would Pakistan respond?

**Ahmed Rashid:**

As far as the army is concerned, we all know the problems with the Afghan army: illiteracy, drugs, 20 per cent desertion rate, lack of effective training, an ethnic imbalance within the officer corps in particular. A very important question that you raise and I constantly raise is: who is the Afghan army ultimately loyal to? Is there a political system that it's loyal to? Absolutely not, there is no political system which is considered by all Afghans as being legitimate and right. Are they loyal to the president personally? Well, the president has taken no interest in the army, or very little interest in the army. Are they loyal then to their warlords and to their clans and their particular ethnic group? Yes, basically, that would be the answer. So it's quite a dangerous situation.

But I believe that if we can get talks going with the Taliban and Kabul, if this army is asked to do what most Afghan armies were asked to do – guard duty, simply – maintain law and order and do guard duty, but not go on the offensive against the Taliban – then this army will do that job. They can do that. But to expect the army to suddenly turn around and do what the Americans were doing – start killing Taliban and going on the offensive and acting like a Marine or something – is totally pie in the sky, in my opinion.

So what is going to happen immediately after the Americans leave? Certainly a lot of southern Afghanistan, including Helmand, is going to fall very quickly back into the arms of the Taliban. The Afghan army is not going to go on the offensive to try and drive them back or drive them out of there. So where the Taliban have a natural propensity to live or they've got sympathizers, they've been there for donkey's years, they come from there, etc. – the Taliban will move back in there again. Other areas will be contested, not necessarily by the army but by local militias and warlords and ethnic groups and other people. That's why it is so absolutely vital that we get a peace settlement going as soon as possible, because if you're going to depend on this Afghan army to keep this political system in Kabul functioning over the next two to three years, I think we are asking for a step too far.

**Bridget Kendall:**

And the re-emergence of Al-Qaeda in this area?

### **Ahmed Rashid:**

There's no question Al-Qaeda has taken a blow. A lot of the Arab component of Al-Qaeda has been killed or they've left or gone. But what people always forget is that – and to my mind, what is equally dangerous is – many of the Pakistani groups today (not the Afghan groups, the Pakistani groups) have replaced Al-Qaeda. They have become global jihadists. Look at the recent incidents in the US, they were people who were trained not by Arabs – they were trained by Pakistani Taliban. The guy who killed those six CIA agents in Khost, the Pakistani who tried to do the bombing in Times Square in New York – all these guys were connected somehow not to Ayman al-Zawahiri, not to some Arab sheikh or something. This is a very big change that is happening. I don't think, unfortunately, we are fully aware of the extent and the danger of how some of these Pakistani groups are now replicating Al-Qaeda and playing the role. You don't need Arabs there now. The Pakistanis are willing to train global jihadists, people from Europe, from Britain, from Germany, from all over the place. Why would you need Ayman al-Zawahiri? Why should he waste his Arabs sitting there? They're doing a better job in Syria or Iraq.

That, for me, is a really big fear. This danger that the Pakistani Taliban, if allowed to continue along the present trajectory that they have, they can become much more virulently global jihadists.

### **Question 11:**

I wonder what should be the priorities for the British and US military forces that are left, the very small numbers when the main body of the forces pull out this year. Can they do anything? Can they do anything useful?

### **Question 12:**

One organization that won't be leaving is the United Nations, which you only mentioned once in a throwaway. But the members of the Security Council, who are pulling out, will undoubtedly try to give it as maximalist a mandate as possible to be responsible for what follows their pullout. What would your advice be on a realistic United Nations role? Should it focus on the politics and stop trying to run a large operation? How should it protect itself from being blamed for the inevitable failure?

### Question 13:

My question to Mr Rashid is: is democracy possible within the context of colonial geopolitical structure of Pakistan? Because if you look at the history of Pakistan, it has always been inherently inhumane and undemocratic.

### Ahmed Rashid:

I think it was a huge disappointment when the UN started reducing its presence in Afghanistan two years ago. The UN did so at the request and behest and pressure of Karzai and the international community went along with it. I thought that was a most shameful thing that the Security Council and the international community did. The UN had offices in every province almost. They were doing all sorts of local reconciliation, mediation, economic development. They were really functioning, I think, in these provinces. The international community went along with Karzai's – Karzai didn't want the UN there interfering in the election. He didn't want UN monitors there telling him that this election is going to be rigged, which is what happened last time. So the Americans, the Brits – in particular the Brits – went along with this and said, send the UN home.

Essentially that's what we have. We have a much reduced UN that has really no clout, very little of a mandate. It's not backed by any of the major powers as to what it's supposed to be doing. For someone like myself who for 30 years has been very deeply involved with the UN in Afghanistan as a peacemaking force, and a force which only – it's the only force which the Afghans respect. In my opinion, the UN and the Red Cross are the two organizations that have some credibility amongst all Afghans, the most extreme to the most liberal and moderate. And here we are, you're about to withdraw from Afghanistan and you wilfully destroy your own creation and your own support base which would be playing a vital role now.

So unfortunately until there is going to be backing by the big powers and the Security Council for the UN to have a role, I don't see the UN having much of a role. It should be given this role now of mediation. It's always been – I've always considered very stupid that the Americans are negotiating with the Taliban but they are one of the culprits. Here you have one of the, if you like, guilty parties, or one of the parties actually negotiating a settlement for itself. That's very difficult to do. You need a neutral figure.

What the US and 6,000 American troops – half of them would be on guard duty, to guard the perimeter of the camps and the embassies. What the rest of them would be doing – firing off a few Scuds here and there? Drones to

prevent Al-Qaeda coming back? Possibly training but nowadays for Americans or Brits to go out and train Afghans means you've got to have like 200 men with you to guard you. I really don't quite understand what the role of this is.

If this role was coupled – if this military role had been coupled earlier on with Obama and Cameron and everyone talking promptly that we are going to promote a political settlement in Afghanistan, and this military presence is part of that reassurance to the Afghans for a political settlement, we would be on a different wicket, I think, with the Afghans. But nobody ever said that. Nobody ever said we want a political settlement. And our troops are good boys, they're not going to go fighting and killing Afghans, they're going to be there to foster and help a political settlement. If you ask anyone, I'm sure, in the British army and if you ask anyone in the American army, what the hell these guys are going to be doing out there, I don't think anyone will give you a clear answer at all. It's very sad. Somehow this has become now a question of egos, Obama vs Karzai – will he sign, will he not sign. But for what? What is the ultimate purpose of this? You asked the right question, and unfortunately I don't have the answer.

I think the prospects for democracy are very strong in Pakistan. I think there are huge problems in Pakistan, of which one no doubt is the fact that we have been unable to forge a national identity for ourselves. There is still huge discrepancy between the provinces, and ethnicity. These are problems that are very similar to what Afghanistan has, and what parts of India have also, by the way. But I think economic development, greater democracy – our democracy has been interrupted. Every ten years it's interrupted by ten years of military rule. Until we get rid of this spectre and until we can encourage young people and a whole new generation of people to come in to be in government – it's tragic when you look at this government today, the Nawaz Sharif government. The same was true of Asif Zardari, the Peoples Party government. There was not a single new character who had emerged as a minister or any significance in either group. Both parties were depending on their advisers who go back 30 years. No young people have come into politics, in other words, into senior positions – educated technocrats. A lot of young people have gone back wanting to play a role but they've been not given the chance. I think eventually we are going to get leaders who are going to see the benefit of this.

**Question 14:**

You recall this sort of colourful incident three or four months ago when Afghan intelligence was caught drawing one of the Pakistani Taliban leaders across to Kabul, which seemed to signal sort of a new shift in this rather complicated paradigm along the border. As things change now, do you see Afghan intelligence – if you like, in crude terms – engaging in payback, interfering in Pakistan in the way that perhaps Pakistani intelligence interfered in Afghanistan for so long?

**Question 15:**

After the troop surge which the Obama administration sanctioned when he was first elected, there was a huge drive toward the peace process, especially by the Afghan government. One of the reasons it didn't come to any fruition was because of the negative role the Pakistani state had played – for instance, they arrested Mullah Baradar and they were not very cooperative. Now with this new administration we are hearing that they are being honest in their approach toward the peace process and they encourage it. But then on the other hand, what we hear – all these drone attacks that take place in FATA, what we hear is that it's all based on the intelligence provided. My question is, is the new administration really honest with the peace process or are they still playing that old game that they have played from the beginning?

**Question 16:**

I just wondered if you could elaborate a little bit more on what the offer should be to the Taliban, to actually engage in peace talks and a meaningful political settlement. Because the picture you've painted of areas like Helmand and other areas of south Afghanistan falling very quickly to the Taliban, of a very weak army fit only for guard duty, does paint a picture of an insurgency that actually has a lot to gain by simply doing nothing and not engaging with the political process. So what can Karzai offer to the Taliban to actually make or persuade them to engage?

**Ahmed Rashid:**

First, there is a new game in town and the Afghans are playing it extremely well. The Afghans have realized that having been allowing Pakistan to keep the Taliban on Pakistani soil and sending them back into Afghanistan to

create trouble, we can play the same game – and that's what they're doing. I don't see any stoppage in that. In fact, there have been several assassinations in Quetta recently and we don't know who's been doing them. Taliban leaders have been killed in Quetta, long-term residents in Quetta. People are blaming Afghan intelligence for having carried it out. We don't know who has been doing it.

But certainly this is a game that is going to continue unless there is much greater trust. Again, Pakistan has officially released – or if you like, allowed – many of these Taliban to interact with the Kabul government, but they have not really set a process in motion. Given the lack of process in Doha and other places, again this is something I think the Pakistanis should be doing – setting a process in motion where Taliban meet with Kabul. We should be playing a bigger role in that. I think the Afghan frustration is that we're not playing a bigger role. We promised, we speak a lot. Nawaz Sharif goes off to Kabul and the army chief goes off to Kabul and says wonderful things, but nothing happens on the ground.

**Bridget Kendall:**

That's sort of the answer to your question too, isn't it?

**Ahmed Rashid:**

Yeah, I think Nawaz Sharif is genuine about looking for a settlement. I don't think Nawaz Sharif wants to destroy his own government by wanting to intervene in Afghanistan yet again. In a time when Pakistan has such a weak economy, so many internal problems, etc., he's very conscious of the fact that he needs to boost an Afghan settlement as quickly as possible. But the problem in Pakistan is that the Afghan settlement issue is held by the ISI and the military. It's not held by the political leadership, it's held by the military. The military have to be convinced to open up this fist of theirs and let some of these guys move around and start talking with each other.

**Bridget Kendall:**

The final question is the watch syndrome, isn't it? The Americans have the watches but the Taliban have the time, so why should they bother with peace talks?

**Ahmed Rashid:**

The process I'm talking about, I'm not talking about some huge offensive. The Taliban are going to do – they probably already control most of the countryside apart from a few stronghold points. It's not that they're going to walk all over into Afghanistan – they can't. But other warlords in the north are going to do exactly the same thing, by the way. Once the Americans leave and the local Afghan army is either friendly to these warlords in the north or too weak to do anything, these warlords are going to re-establish their influence in these villages and valleys, like they had in the 1980s. So you're going to have a return to a kind of natural, what Afghanistan was 20-30 years ago.

So yes, there will be Taliban hardliners who will attempt some very dramatic escalation in fighting and other things. But I don't see the Taliban trying to conquer Kabul, take major cities – Kandahar or Zabul or one of these big cities. I don't see the Taliban doing that. I see much more they will occupy the countryside, they will set up their minimal governance that they do – justice and you know – and basically control the population. But also allow aid in and allow the NGOs to function and allow the economy to function, depending on what it is. They're not going to just clamp down on everything because they know they can't do that.

**Bridget Kendall:**

And to entice them into a peace deal, the prize is what? A role in central government?

**Ahmed Rashid:**

Yeah, obviously. The peace deal has two parts to it. One is the military deal. There has to be a ceasefire and a military deal with the Americans, the Afghan government and the Taliban. The second part then is a political dialogue, a political deal as to what kind of political role will the Taliban play in a future peaceful Afghanistan.

**Bridget Kendall:**

I think we all knew when we came here that we were in for a fantastic briefing from Ahmed Rashid, on a very complex subject – going far beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan and covering the whole region and many elements



of international diplomacy. I think we probably leave well satisfied – a masterly overview of everything, and wonderful, succinct answers to questions so that we got a lot of questions in today. Let's show our thanks to Ahmed Rashid.