Ahmed Rashid- The C-Span Interview

C-Span Host: Brian Lamb

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BRIAN LAMB, HOST, C-SPAN: Ahmed Rashid, author of "Taliban" and other books about Pakistan and Afghanistan, what would you sum as what you see the situation today?

AHMED RASHID, AUTHOR, "TALIBAN": Very complicated, very complex, huge dangers involved because of the resurgence of the Taliban, the fact that the Taliban have now become a regional model. We have Taliban and Pakistan in central Asia. The continued presence of Al Qaeda, the big fear about you know that they could do another major attack in Europe or the united states and now we are entering a kind of end game with the U.S. possibly withdrawing, NATO certainly withdrawing, and what are you going to leave behind and that's what is kind of crafting me in my world, that I don't want to see another about of chaos following an American withdraw. Or such a shaky theories of you know political arrangements if they fall apart the moment the Americans leave. It's going to be very complex to get this region stable without a U.S. military presence there.

LAMB: How would you – if you saw a member of the Taliban walking down the street of Kabul or one of the villages, is there any way to recognize him?

RASHID: Well, yes. I mean they have their trademark black turban, a lot of them tend to wear black clothes but they – you know they do stand out, they have a certain mannerism which perhaps would be difficult for an American to recognize but compared to the normal Pashtun religion, Pashtun being the ethnic group from which they come from, I mean there's a mannerism. I wouldn't be able to put my – describe it to you, but I would be able to – you know for example I mean when I go to – in Pakistan when you go to Quetta or Peshawar, these are border cities on the border with Afghanistan. A lot of Afghan, Taliban and Pakistani Taliban today, when you're walking down in the streets, you can certainly see who are Taliban and who are not.

LAMB: If you go to Afghanistan now and we're walking around, are they among the people now?

RASHID: Not in the major cities and not in the major areas where you know major American troops are. They appear there at night a lot, but in the rural areas, yes, I mean there are a lot of Taliban and a lot of people wouldn't venture out. I mean even Kabul, I mean 10 miles outside Kabul you've got Taliban and journalists for example, you know civilians, NGLs, aid workers. They wouldn't venture out there. the same goes for Kandahar, the second largest city, which is to be the target of major U.S. offenses in the months to come, right outside the city there're Taliban and very visible in the villages, not frightened at all, not hiding during the day, quite visible.

LAMB: This book, "Taliban," I've got in my hand, when did – I know in the introduction and then you've got an introduction and a second introduction, when did you start writing this book?

RASHID: I started it in 1999. It was published in 2000 and at that time, I couldn't find a publisher to publish it. several publishers agreed and then let me down and I finally found the publisher who stripped many of my rights because he was kind of doing me a favor and this is a publisher in London and anyway, I was very grateful to him that he published it. and he then sold it to Yale University Press where – so that it could be published in the U.S. and I was very surprised, you know because I expected to have bum time trying to sell this book and actually in America it really took off in hardback, I remember it sold about 20,000 or 30,000 copies. This is before

9/11. And because people here were suddenly waking up to the fact, the Clinton administration, because you'd had Al Qaeda hit you know on the embassies in Africa, you'd had the hit on the U.S. warship Cole and people were waking up in Washington and you know in the sort of analysis, the military to – what is this Taliban.

So it did well and the week of 9/11 it has just come out in paperback form and then it kind of took off from there.

LAMB: Where were you on 9/11, when it happened?

RASHID: I was at home in Mahal, Pakistan, watching it. And the moment you know I called my wife in and I said this is Al Qaeda and the Americans are going to invade our country and you know very soon after that I was asked to come to Washington and to meet these people here and I was trying to prepare for the war and what to do.

A lot of people wrote to me asking me – a lot of Europeans, governments, all sorts of people wrote – nobody had a clue what the Taliban were and what this all mean, you know.

LAMB: What – you know I mean, when you get into the book it's so complicated. I mean this whole business – there are a lot of simple questions I want to ask you. can you be a member of Al Qaeda and a member of the Taliban?

RASHID: Well, you can but 99.9% of Taliban are not members of Al Qaeda. You've got Pakistani groups, militant groups, you've got central Asian militant groups and other militant groups from the middle east, from north Africa who have their own militant groups and are members of Al Qaeda.

But you know the Afghan Taliban, you know they never took part in 9/11. The majority of them probably didn't even know that Osama was planning 9/11. They haven't taken part in any kind of international terrorism since them. Yes, they've killed American soldiers in large numbers in Afghanistan, but they haven't taken part in any of these kinds of bombing, you know the London bombings, the Spain bombings, et cetera. Other groups have, but the Taliban have remained very Afghan and as they see it now – you know as they have said this is a jihad against foreign occupation so we're not talking about a global jihad or attacking Americans everywhere, we're only talking about you know getting rid of what they call the foreign occupation.

LAMB: When was there was first time there was such a person that was a member of the Taliban. And what's the right way to pronounce it?

RASHID: Taliban is the right way to pronounce it. Well, you know one of the Taliban allies for example is called Jillah Hudine Arcani or the Arcani network. He operates from Pakistan in eastern Afghanistan. He's an ally of the Taliban, rather but he's very extreme. He's very close to Al Qaeda. Now, again, he's carried, I think – his people have carried out a lot of – helped Al Qaeda carry out attack, he benefited from Al Qaeda training and probably Al Qaeda money and Al Qaeda direction, but exactly though, well I mean I wouldn't still call him Al Qaeda, I would still call him an Afghan extremist group with close links to the Taliban but possibly even closer links to Al Qaeda. I still wouldn't call him necessarily Al Qaeda. But there are several groups in Pakistan who are linked to Al Qaeda who I would call Al Qaeda.

LAMB: This book, why did you write it in the first place? What was driving you to get this information out?

RASHID: Well, you know I was – I've been covering Afghanistan for 30 years and there were many – there were many stepping stones in the middle when people around me told me you must write a book now, you know this period is finished, you know.

For example, when the soviet groups left, people said write a book about the soviet occupation, you know. When the Geneva accords were done, when you know – when the communist regime in Kabul fell in '92. I mean you know there were many instances when I really should have written a

book and I kept deferring it and deferring it and finally you know I was about you know one of just a few journalists who was following the Taliban as they emerged in '93, '94 and then you know as they conquered the all of Afghanistan, Bin Laden came in and then I really – when I was – I really felt the lack of knowledge anywhere about who these people where and I thought you know now I have to write it.

So really, this book is not just about the Taliban, it's the kind of you know squeezing together all my 30 years of knowledge and experience about Afghanistan, but writing about this specific period of the Taliban and how they emerged and what happened after that. So you know a lot of it had to do with my mother, my family were urging me, my wife was urging me to write a book, write a book, when are you going to write a book. Stop all this daily journalism and 800 word pieces, write a book, you know.

So finally I realized that you know I think the impetus was the fact that everywhere I went people just didn't know what was going on an I was very – you know I'm an activist, I mean I was trying to wake up people that look that had really made a threat here.

And if you read the end of the – I mean nothing has been changed in the book from when I wrote it in '99 and I'm trying to say to the American western public, you know wake up. This is a huge threat. You know, this Al Qaeda is there, the Taliban are hosting them, you're all ignoring them. And …

LAMB: Let me go through the basics with you about your own life. Where were you born?

RASHID: I was born in Pakistan.

LAMB: Where?

RASHID: In Rawalpindi at that time, which is near the capital, Islamabad.

LAMB: And what was your family like?

RASHID: Well, my father was an engineer and for many years he had – we settled in England after the war and he was in the army, in the British Indian Army at that time fighting the Japanese and he was one of the first Indian graduates of engineering university in England. And so for some years we settled in England and then we moved back to Pakistan – he moved back to Pakistan in the '60's. So I got my education as a cross between partly in England and partly in Pakistan. And eventually I went to university in England.

LAMB: Where'd you go?

RASHID: I went to Cambridge.

LAMB: What'd you study?

RASHID: I studied – I started actually studying English literature. I fancied myself as a writer at that time. A writer of fiction, I used to like short stores, I used to write a lot of poetry, but then it was – you know I was at – I was there in '68 and it was you know the whole radical movement and anti Vietnam and of course in – by '70 in Pakistan we'd had this very traumatic experience about Bangladesh, what is then East Pakistan, the war in East Pakistan, which eventually became Bangladesh, huge atrocities committed and the division of the country, which a person of you know my generation was the – perhaps the most traumatic thing that happened in our lives, I mean that our country was just split in two.

And so that led to you know a fair amount of radicalization at the university as everyone was in those days.

LAMB: I looked up the numbers today, but if you look at India sitting there with 1.2 billion people. You have Pakistan on one side with about 170 million, correct me on any of this. On

the other side Bangladesh with about 162 million. And then above it, right above Pakistan, Afghanistan with about 28 million people. What's – when did the British influence – I know Britain got out of Afghanistan about 1919 or something like that. When did the British influence come into that part of that world?

RASHID: In – well in India proper it came in the – as early as the 16th century and early 17th century when they set up trading stations and all the rest of it. and then the trading company, the east India company ruled parts of India, especially along the coast and then slowly conquered the whole of India and it was only after the Indian mutiny, what is called the Indian mutiny and what Indians in Pakistani called the Indian war of independence. That's actually the crown, Queen Victoria at that time took over the whole sub continental part of the British empire and then India was ruled by the British government rather than by the east India company. and of course that lasted until '47 – 1947 when partition took place and that was the creation of Pakistan in two halves, one on – you know one side of India, the other on the other side of India and the British left and we've been an independent state since then.

LAMB: Was Pakistan called Pakistan when it was under that whole umbrella?

RASHID: No, no. it was British India. It was India.

LAMB: So you were actually born in British India.

RASHID: No, no. partition took place – sorry '47 and I was born …

LAMB: You were born after.

RASHID: … in '48. Yes, I was born one year later.

LAMB: So you were educated in Cambridge and did you – when did you start thinking about being a journalist?

RASHID: Well, you know I – it was part of this whole thing of becoming – wanting to become a writer. I thought at one point you know I would do a PhD on tribal society. I became very interested in tribes and tribal societies. And by fortuitous chance I was in – I was in Afghanistan in '78 when the communist took place and overthrew the republican government and I was then in Afghanistan again when the soviets invited, I was in Kandahar in fact when the soviets invaded and after that I came to London and I was at a loose end, you know I hadn't done any serious work, I'd been – my father had moved back, I was working with my father and his company and I came to London and the soviets were being very difficult about giving visas to journalists to go to Kabul and I said, oh I just came from Kabul and I had a friend who'd taken some very good pictures there, a photographer and he said, let's go and try and sell these pictures to one of the newspapers in England and we went to the Guardian, I remember and the Guardian foreign editor said he loved the pictures, he said I want a story to go with these pictures.

What happened in Kabul? So my friend said, you know you write the story. So I wrote a story for the Guardian and his pictures and after that it just kind of snowballed because people said you know I knew what was going on, I knew a lot of the figures coming to power then through the soviet, and then I just started going back to Afghanistan. I moved back to Pakistan in '82 and I – you know perhaps my – what was fortunate was that I was perhaps one of the only international journalists based in Pakistan who was able to go to both Kabul and see the whole soviet set up and report on it as well as go to Pushkar and see – and the Mujahideen and going to Afghanistan within the Mujahideen because in those days the sovereignty to say that especially to the Americans and to the British, that if you go and report on the Mujahideen, who are fighting us, we will not give you a visa to come to Kabul. So you didn't have people who were able to see both sides.

LAMB: Let me ask you about Mujahideen? Who are they? Who were they?

RASHID: Well, the Mujahideen were the Afghan patriots who fled Afghanistan after the

communists coup in – but particularly after the sovereign invasion and came – became refugees in Pakistan or in Iran and other places, 5 million came into Pakistan and if you think of the Afghan population at that time of being about 20 million – 18 or 20 million, you've almost a quarter of the population fled. And they came into Pakistan and then of course they were aided and abetted by first Pakistan to launch attacks against the soviet occupation and then of course the American got into it, the CIA got into it, the Saudi international help came to them and then they became this guerilla force.

LAMB: The name came from where? Mujahideen.

RASHID: Well the name – it's an Islamic term which means that you're fighting for the faith basically. And so the struggle in Afghanistan at that time was for trade of the jihad against foreign occupation, much like what the Taliban is saying today.

Except that jihad was of course supported by the Americans because this was a jihad at the height of the cold war and here were these Afghans actually killing soviet soldiers. I mean many people have pointed out that actually this war was the closest you know you had the CIA just across the border in Pakistan, you had American soldiers – you know Russian soldiers a few miles across the border. This was the closest that the Americans and the soviets actually got to fighting – literally fighting.

LAMB: Are you aligned now with any particular leader in Pakistan?

RASHID: No not at all. I'm very much a journalist and reporting on what's happening and not at all. I haven't taken part in any kind of politics at all.

LAMB: This book – go back to 9/11 and I assume – I read in the introduction you sold over a million and a half copies of this book, probably more than that by now.

RASHID: Well, certainly more than that because a million and a half was in America after the – after 9/11, but it came out in 26 languages so I have no account of how much it sold and how many it sold.

LAMB: Still published by Yale.

RASHID: You know it's been very pleasing, it's been in print for 10 years, which is very rare for sort of academic you know political book like this. One reason is of course because Afghanistan has been in the news and it's been in demand, but I think you know two areas for which I'm very grateful as an author, one is students. It's been – it's still on university courses, it's still a text book. So any courses on terrorism, Islam, south Asia, Afghanistan, if you do any of these courses it's still a book. I mean it's still a book to be read.

And secondly anybody who goes out to Afghanistan, for example the U.S. military its – I've been very touched some of your most famous regiments, the 82nd airborne and the 10th mountain division, you know I'm told that they buy – their officers and all who send me emails that the book is put into their rucksack at the top of every soldier who goes out for the first time to Afghanistan for sort of familiarization. And that has been – you know kept it going.

LAMB: Can you remember after 9/11 was there somebody in this country that held this book up and said you got to read this/

RASHID: Yes, I think at that time – certainly I mean – well, I remember my publishers telling me that literally 24 hours after those – after 9/11, I think President Bush was still out – you know out of Washington and they said that 300 copies for 300 books had come, orders for 300 books had come from the White House.

LAMB: Did you ever find out who was responsible.

RASHID: No, I have no idea. But I presume that you know – I mean the hardback as I said had been circulated and people in the know had – people interested in this region had read it. people who were interested and who were doing terrorism had read it, so I can presume there must have been someone who must have alerted everyone that they'd better read this book.

LAMB: Did somebody else then in this country hold it up or put you on television or start the whole process that led to a million and a half copies, plus being sold.

RASHID: Well, I think you know it came in the news then – that you know it – I mean it was reported quite widely that everybody in the White House was reading this book. Tony Blair in Britain publicly said that you know we're all reading this book in Downing Street. And so I mean that was sort of a bit of a publicity thing. and you know it was read by you know prime ministers and presidents and their staff, I mean all around Europe and there was huge kind of – you know everyone wanted me to come and visit them and all the rest of it. but here I think you know it became known certainly you know in the sort of east coast belt here of the policy wants, you'd like – you know it became known that everyone in government was reading this book. The military began to read the book. So – and as I said, I think – you know this – you know here was an incident it was literally you know 90% of Americans have absolutely no idea about Afghanistan, they had no idea who the Taliban were and they had very little idea even of Islamic fundamentalism and Al Qaeda.

You know I have a chapter in this book on Al Qaeda and Bin Laden and when the book came out it was one of the first comprehensive chapter or you know pieces of writing on him, his life, what he stands for, what his links to the Taliban were. Nobody really knew about it before then.

LAMB: Did you ever talk to George Bush about this book?

RASHID: No, no. But I may—.

LAMB: Did you ever talk to Tony Blair about it?

RASHID: Yes, I did, I did. I met Blair several times.

LAMB: Were there other American officials that said come over, we want to talk to you/

RASHID: Yes, yes, yes.

LAMB: At what level?

RASHID: I mean people like Wolfowitz and you know Rumsfeld and Andrew Natsios at AID and head of the state department. Yes, I mean, you know that was – a lot of people I think you know initially in the Bush administration were very interested. I became very frustrated by the Bush administration later on because very quickly you know I – I mean I realized that they were going to go into Iraq and everybody then started saying well once they go – once they start preparing for Iraq, you know the eyes are off Afghanistan completely and that's what happened. And then I mean, you know I still used to come to Washington to lecture or to attend conferences and things like that and once used to see officials. And they would call you in pro forma but they weren't really listening because they're – their whole – I mean they weren't going to carry out any of your suggestions because you knew that the whole focus, the funding, the resources, the troops, the money, everything was for Iraq.

LAMB: The best analysis that I've been able to read is that we have spend as a country $1 trillion so far, $300 billion of that in Afghanistan. Have we gotten our money's worth?

RASHID: No. sorry, a billion and a half in Afghanistan?

LAMB: No, no, $300 billion.

RASHID: Right. no, not at all because you know it's – I think it's – if there had been a concentration on Afghanistan. I mean I remember two or three of sort of experts or friends of mine here in the states, I mean we – on the back of an envelope that what the U.S. needs to do is give about 5 billion a year for five years for the development of the country and about 5 billion for building up the security processes of the country. Which came to 10 billion, which if you shared with Europe was chicken feed.

Now if that had happened in the first five years, you know Afghanistan wouldn't be in the mess it is today, the Taliban would not have been able to come back and stage their resurgence in 2003 and 2004.

What happened was that even that paltry sum was not spent. And you know if money did go, it was not spent properly because there was just a lack of focus, a lack of attention, lack of expertise. I mean the kinds of things you see now General McChrystal doing in Afghanistan you know where these military officers are learning the languages and they know all the tribes and then they're investigating tribal history and who's who and what's what, nobody did this for years and years. So there was just so much wasted. Unfortunately wasted in lives, wasted in resources and money, American resources and money and its really only the last two or three years that I think our country has got serious about trying to do something about our country.

LAMB: Lets' just for hypothetical – go ahead in 2013 or '14, or '15, I don't care what year it is. Based on what you know now, when we're going to pull out and all that stuff, what will be the situation over there in your opinion?

RASHID: Well, I think again, I'm on a sort of mission basically, which is to say I mean it's very clear the Americans want to withdraw and certainly before your 2012 elections I'm sure President Obama will want to show the American people that he's moved the bulk of forces out of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Now if that is the case we've got very short time left. He didn't give them the date of July 2011, whereby he wants to start the withdrawal of American forces.

Now the moment you start withdrawing, NATO will run for the exit. So we're talking about a very serious depletion of military – western military forces in Afghanistan.

LAMB: What's the numbers – total troops, NATO and American right now?

RASHID: Well, it's about 140,000.

LAMB: How many of those …

RASHID: By the end of it – by the end of this year there'll be about 100,000 America troops.

LAMB: And the rest will be NATO?

RASHID: And the rest will be NATO.

LAMB: How many countries are left participating?

RASHID: There are – there's about 47 countries.

LAMB: And there have been some …

RASHID: But many of these countries have like 10 troops there, you know.

LAMB: And then some of them now started getting out.

RASHID: Some of them have already announced, the Canadians have said we're leaving in 2011,

come what may. Whatever – you know the Americans, whatever. The Dutch are probably going to leave also. There's a huge controversy in Germany going on right now. The German chancellor Angela Merkel may be forced to announce some kind of withdraw. And so what – I meant he point is – and on top of that, General McChrystal and General Petraeus have said very clearly that we can – we America cannot win this war from the ground. There has to be a political settlement.

Now, I think there – the real task before the Obama administration now is you have to look at the political settlement. That is a settlement between Karzai – President Karzai and the government and the Taliban.

Now what – you know how that will shape out depends a lot on the America. At the moment, Obama has said that he will not support talks with the Taliban leadership, although Karzai is doing that.

What I think is vital now is that the Americans agree to talk to the Taliban leadership and we really now work in the next 10 months for a serious political settlement which involves not of course just the Taliban and Karzai, it also involves the whole region because Pakistan is involved in this war, Afghanistan has six neighbors, they are all involved in this war. And you know they had proxies, they have influence, they have strategic interests in Afghanistan. They all want a piece of the pie and if there's going to be a settlement; they all want a piece of the pie even more.

LAMB: What do you understand our mission to be there? why are we there?

RASHID: Well, I think the mission has changed a great deal. If we look at – you know I mean initially it was there to take revenge on the attacks on New York and Washington and to get rid of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, except the leadership of Taliban and Al Qaeda all escaped, you didn't commit troops even during the war in 2001, such in sufficient numbers which would have trapped Al Qaeda and the Taliban. They escaped to Pakistan and they came back in again.

I think the other mission was to rebuild the country, which again didn't happen.

LAMB: Why would we want to rebuild that country?

RASHID: Well, I think there's no doubt that to level Afghanistan in a failed state with the kind of conditions that it was in 2001 would just be an invitation for all these extremists to came back again. and you'd have to repeat the whole performance all over again.

LAMB: Aren't there other countries of the world though they could just move to if this country had been restored to some semblance of democracy, or did it every have a democracy in Afghanistan?

RASHID: Well, you know I mean Afghanistan has six neighbors 1990. What fueled the Taliban appearance in '93 was a civil war and that civil war was fueled by all the neighbors. Pakistan was backing the Taliban, India, Iran, central Asia, the five republics of central Asia were all backing what was then called the northern alliance.

LAMB: You're talking about Turkmenistan and Tajikistan …

RASHID: Yes, yes, yes. So you had – you had all the neighbors interfering pumping you know the warlords with money, with weapons, with you know to carry on fighting because they wanted you know influence and interest in Afghanistan.

LAMB: Why though? Why did they want to be in Afghanistan?

RASHID: Because Afghanistan is so strategic. Afghanistan is a land locked country surrounded by six countries. Now all the ethnic groups of Afghanistan spill over into the neighboring countries.So that's the first reason.

For example the, Pashtuns of Afghanistan they spill over into Pakistan. The Baluch of Afghanistan spill over into Iran. Et cetera. The Tajiks and the Uzbeks, all these ethnic groups, they spill over into central Asia.

So everybody has you know strategic interests, ethic interests, political interests. Afghanistan could also be a corridor for oil and gas from central Asia to the Gulf if there was ever going to be peace there.

Now, what I'm trying to say is that you know we need a political settlement that is not just within Afghanistan but also includes the region and these same countries that fueled the war in the 90's cannot be allowed to do that again because it would be devastating, because that would create another civil war in Afghanistan which would invite back probably Al Qaeda.

LAMB: I've got a profile here on Afghanistan, just read some of this and tell me what's right and what's wrong. Ninety nine percent are Muslim, Afghanistan.

RASHID: Yes.

LAMB: Eighty percent, Sunni, 90 percent – I mean 19 Shiite.

RASHID: Right.

LAMB: Two thirds live on fewer than $2 a day.

RASHID: Yes.

LAMB: Three point three – 3.3 million Afghans are involved in producing opium?

RASHID: Yes.

LAMB: Out of 28 million.

RASHID: Yes.

LAMB: One third of the gross domestic product is drugs?

RASHID: Right.

LAMB: Television under the Taliban was wiped out in 1996. There is no television.

RASHID: Or media.

LAMB: All media.

Literacy 34%?

RASHID: Probably lower than that.

LAMB: Highest infant mortality rate in the world, 257 deaths per 1,000 births.

RASHID: Right. some of these things have improved, let me tell you. I mean today – you know under the Taliban there were about 100,000 students in school. Today there are 7 million. So probably the literacy rates have probably gone up.

Health has improved enormously. There've been a lot of investments in health by the Europeans, by the Americans, et cetera. Health rates and – especially health related to women has probably improved. So some of these figures, you know – but the economy is way down, the drugs thing,

you're absolutely right, it is a huge proportion of the GDP. So there has been – there have been some very good things on the social side, you know health education, but it's been – they've been very late building of the economic infrastructure of an indigenous economy which would provide jobs, which would actually lift people's living standards.

LAMB: In the back of your book you have some appendices – appendix one, a sample of Taliban decrees relating to women and other cultural issues after the capture of Kabul in 1996. I just want to read some of this, I want you to explain.

First of all, Taliban are Muslims and is it all based on religion by the way?

RASHID: No, it's not because I mean when I write in this book – even at that time I wrote that the Taliban were a mixture of two or three things, a very orthodox sect of Sunni Islam, which was very conservative and very reactionary even within the mainframe of Islam. It culled of the Pashtun tribes, to which they belong and this – because they came from very backwards areas of Afghanistan they adhered to.

And thirdly was the influence of Madressa education, religious school education in Pakistan which talked a great deal about extremists and this whole extremist philosophy.

LAMB: What does it mean to be a Pashtun? And how much of Afghanistan are Pashtun?

RASHID: Well, you know the Pashtuns are the largest, they're not the majority, they're about 40%. They're the largest ethnic group in the country. traditionally they have ruled Afghanistan for the last 350 years. Pashtun kings have been – always been kings of afghan. And until the soviets arrived, basically they predominantly subjugated the minority who were the Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazara, all sorts of you know a dozen minority ethnic groups. So the ethnic question in Afghanistan has always been terribly important.

The Karzai is a Pashtun, he came to the – so the ruling elite today is a Pashtun. The Taliban are also Pashtun. So the main – so in many ways this is a battle between two tribal groups of Pashtun. The Pashtuns are a tribal society, they live under a tribal code and under a tribal hierarchy and it – one of the tests you know has been how to move this tribal hierarchy into a modern state structure, because the old kings of Afghanistan ruled by basically buying off the tribes, you know doing favors to one tribe, buying another tribe, bribing another one, whatever. And obviously you can't do this in a modern state structure if you want education and economy and all the rest of it. so this has been one of the challenges.

LAMB: Let me just read some of the decrees.

RASHID: Yes.

LAMB: If women are going to – outside with fashionable, ornamental, tight and charming clothes to show themselves they will be cursed by the Islamic Sharia and should never expect to go to heaven.

RASHID: Yes, yes. Well, this was the Taliban in the 90's when they were ruling the country.

LAMB: Do they still expect this of women?

RASHID: Well, there have been suggestions that not, but first of all, let me tell you that during this war they have burnt down hundreds of girls' schools, and boy's schools. Now, – and they say that these schools are used by the Americans and by the CIA et cetera.

Now clearly this is going to be one of the most contentious issues in any dialogue with the Taliban, the treatment of women because there've been huge advances in Afghanistan, right you know over the last seven years. Education, women are working you know and women are very wary naturally of what talking to the Taliban means. Does it mean that our rights disappear

again? We go behind the burka and you know we go back to the 90's again? this is going to be one of the most difficult and sensitive areas.

LAMB: Here's one. "To prevent music to be broadcasted by the public information resources in shops, hotels, vehicles and rickshaws, cassettes and music are prohibited. This matter should be monitored within in five days. If any music cassette found in a shop the shop keeper should be imprisoned and the shop locked. If five people guarantee the shop should be opened and the criminal released later. If cassette found in the vehicle, the vehicle and the driver will be imprisoned. If five people guarantee the vehicle will be released and the criminal released later." What's that about? RASHID: Well, they shut down all the media, they shut down music, you know. And what is of course very ironic is that today the Taliban are media specialists. The way they use the internet the – you know they get out news faster than the Americans and NATO does. You know when there's an ambush or an attack, they claimed responsibility literally within minutes, you know and – and American headquarters in Kabul have not even put out a statement, they haven't acknowledged that these soldiers have died. So what has happened is that the Taliban, I think you know they suppressed the media terribly, print, radio, TV, everything – and music of course, they banned music at that time. Now we see the Taliban using the media more effectively actually than the government.

LAMB: "Some of this other stuff, just to put it on the table. To prevent keeping pigeons and playing with birds. To prevent kite flying the kite shops in the city should be abolished."

"To prevent the British and American hairstyle. People with long hair should be arrested and taken to the religious police department to shave their hair. The criminal has to pay the barber."

What is this business about religious police? The Muncrat?

RASHID: The religious police was something they adopted from Saudi Arabia there is religious police who go around the bazaar so that everybody goes to prayers at the right time. The shops are closed and all this. They'd be much reduced in size, but the Taliban religious police are brutal. They – five times a day you know Muslims say their prayers and they would close down the bazaar five times a day and you know this had never happened before in Afghanistan or in any other south Asian Muslim country. I mean you know if you wanted to say your prayers you went, you weren't forced to say your prayers. The Taliban insisted that everybody went to say their prayers and they used the religious police who were basically young kids you know who had no education, no training, they would carry long sticks and some of them would carry guns and they would enforce this.

The British and American haircut is very amusing. If you remember at that time the film Titanic came out and Leonardo DiCaprio had this haircut which was followed – meant – there was a huge – you know they had banned TV and video but video – pirated video films were all the rage in Kabul at that time and even the Taliban used to watch it, even though you know its banned. And the Titanic was the best – you know biggest seller ever because it's a love story or whatever. And his haircut was the favorite haircut of the young people in Kabul and the Taliban realized that this was a sign of dissent and sort of you know a bit like Iran what's happening now where women sort of slightly take off their hijab you know? And so the Taliban had to ban – it was called the Titanic haircut and the Taliban were thinking that this was a sign of revolt, you know and we have to ban it.

LAMB: It's a requirement, if I understand it correctly, the constitution of Afghanistan today that 25% of the members of the parliament have to be women.

RASHID: Right.

LAMB: Where did that come from?

RASHID: Well, I think it came largely from the west, but it also was a you know a very strong demand amongst women actually, Afghan women who – you know Afghan women who had

struggled through the Taliban era. Whose school – who were not allowed to school. Who were not allowed to be educated. Who had been working before, even during the civil war but were then banned by the Taliban …

LAMB: The reason I asked, I wondered if that was a demand on the part of the American government that they have 25% and that.

RASHID: I think it was a – it was certainly – no it was not a direct demand like that, I think, you know I think what the Americans said was that we would like to see more women in Parliament and please find a way to do it.

LAMB: But they did the same thing in Iraq where they have a 25% commitment. I guess I ask if there's no American federal legislation here that has 25% women in it.

RASHID: Of course, of course. But you know both in Iraq and well particularly in Afghanistan the united nations helped form the constitution and I think the U.N. took in a lot of the demands, requires made by European power. I think this was probably a request coming in more from some of the Europeans, Scandinavians for example and countries like that. But as I said, there was also a very strong women revival in Afghanistan after the defeat of the Taliban and they were insisting on a proper share.

You know and they certainly have got more than any other Muslim country. probably than any other western country also.

LAMB: Now this is – sounds like its off the wall and I'm going to change subjects completely. I'm going to ask you about a guy named A.Q. Kahn. Do you know him?

RASHID: No, no, I don't know him personally. I've met him but I don't know him personally.

LAMB: Do you know where he is today?

RASHID: Yes, he's in Pakistan. He's living at home. He's very much under guard, and – he's free to move around, but he's kind of kept under control as it were.

LAMB: Tell me in 25 words or less what did he do? What …

RASHID: Well, he was one of Pakistan's leading nuclear scientists who proliferated the nuclear technology to various countries.

LAMB: Iran, North Korea …

RASHID: Yes.

LAMB: Places like that.

RASHID: And but the whole argument is whether he did this on his own or with a team of people or whether he did it with permission of the military and the state structure of Pakistan, because the nuclear program in Pakistan is not run by A.Q. Kahn, its run by the army and the whole question which has never been answered adequately, is whether when A.Q. Kahn is doing all this proliferation, whether he was doing it on behalf of the state, on behalf o the military.

LAMB: And I assume the U.S. didn't like it when they found this out.

RASHID: Yes, very much so, and I'm of course they put enormous pressure on the sheriff and then he was exposed when the CIA caught this shipload of nuclear parts that was going to Libya. And he'd done a deal with Colonel Gaddafi to build a nuclear weapon in Libya and these parts were caught by the Americans and the British and then it became – you know you – General Musharraf who was then president of Pakistan was forced to arrest A.Q. Kahn.

LAMB: The reason – he's writing for a living. I mean he's – I found a – the day we're recording this he had a column in the news international. I want to read you what he said just to put some perspective.

Talking about Pakistan. He says, "We realized that this poor country has not only been looted 100 times, it has been robbed continuously for the past 60 years, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. democratic governments prove to be no different from military dictators. The good times lasted only for the five years of our independence. Leaders at that time were so honest that when," – I don't know these names, I'm sure you do, "Maulana Maudoodi taunted Liaquat Ali Khan about his new suit, the prime minister showed the receipt in the next gathering, pointing out that he still had to pay the tailor."

He jumps down a little bit more. "What a contrast now. Our rulers and leaders own luxurious villas, extremely expensive cars, foreign properties and foreign currency accounts. Their luxurious way of living would put many Nawab and Rajas to shame. Their motorcades bring city traffic to halt, causing untold miseries to the public. The emperors and the kings in our history were kind and caring and conscious of the needs and comfort of the people." I can go on with this. But he's painting a picture of Pakistan of being – that it doesn't matter whether it's military dictators or whether it's a democracy. What do you say about this? Because we were seeing this in our own country.

RASHID: Well, I mean you know that's a very popular – I mean he's kind of you know reflecting a very popular view. but at the same time he's become very much an Islamist. And as I said, he's become very deeply conservative, holds extremely reactionary views on almost everything and essentially I mean you know what his argument, what it boiled down to that we are not following the precepts of Islam.

So think what is – but at the same time you know this is – this is – this is populist. You know a lot of young Pakistanis believe this and it's true. Our ruling elite have failed us in many, many ways. Politically of course they've failed us because we've filled their government stable political system, we interact between military rule and corrupt and incompetent civilian rule and the political literature includes the military and both civilian and military and you know have failed to unite the nation, have failed to develop the nation. Our economic indicators are all so terrible, not as bad as Afghanistan, but they're pretty bad and countries like – you know we make enemies around ourselves, we don't take responsibility for anything.

For example the extremism now in Pakistan, we pretend this is all a creation of you know the Americans, or because the Americans told us to fight the jihad against the soviets in the 80's, this is all a fault of the Americans or it's a fault of conspiracies by India or Israel. I think the biggest thing we need to do is to take responsibilities for our own actions and we don't do that.

LAMB: What do the Pakistanis that you know behind the scenes say about America and all the money we've sent to Pakistan?

RASHID: Well, there's a very ambivalent attitude. There's a lot of anti Americanism in Pakistan, even amongst the ruling elite, who benefited most from American largesse, whether it's the military elite because they've got arms and weapons and all the rest of it or whether it's a civilian elite.

Now you know I think a lot of this anti Americanism unfortunately is being fueled as an excuse by the elite not to recognize the fact that you know the mistakes that have been made in Pakistan have been made by us primary.

Yes, the Americans have had some very wrong policy, you know going into Iraq, failing to resolve the middle east and the Palestinian Israel problem. You know I mean American foreign policy is full of holes and lacuna and things that should have not happened. But at the same time, I mean I think we have to recognize what we are responsible for ourselves.

LAMB: Let me go back to what I asked you earlier, 4 or 5 years from now, what is it going to look like, in your opinion, Afghanistan or for that matter, with Al Qaeda or with Taliban?

RASHID: Well, I hope that in the next 12 months to 18 months before a serious American withdraw starts from Afghanistan that there is a political settlement that is endorsed by the west and by the U.S. that is – and is backed up by a case continuing money for aid and development. That there is kind of cease fire that holds and that there is a regional agreement amongst the neighboring country that holds.

Now all this is a very big and complex game. You have to do an internal settlement, you have to do an external settlement, you have to guarantee the continuation of building up the Afghan state …

LAMB: But Al Qaeda is going to be left after all this.

RASHID: Al Qaeda is going to be left. But you know I mean everybody acknowledges the sort of the heart of Al Qaeda are perhaps a few hundred people, mostly in Pakistan and you don't need armies to go after these people. You need good intelligence, you need economic developments to get people won over to your side rather than you know run over to the Al Qaeda side. You need special forces, you need a war of intelligence, rather than a war of you know hundreds of thousands of troops.

LAMB: So we're going to be spending a lot more money in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

RASHID: Well, not just you. I hope that there will be a lot of burden sharing you know with western Europe, with Japan, with countries who are contributing now to Afghanistan in a meaningful way will continue to do so.

LAMB: On the day we're recording this, April the 15th when you were in the town, in Washington, there was a front page story on the – in the Washington Post and the headline was U.S. retreat from Afghan valley marks recognition of blunder and it's the – is it – pronounce the valley its Korengal?

RASHID: Korengal, yes.

LAMB: Is that the way you pronounce it. Korengal Valley and they talked to – written by Greg Jaffe a Washington Post reporter, Captain Mark Moretti, he's a 28 years old commander and this is in a valley where 40 U.S. troops have been killed and they're pulling out. But here's what it says in the middle of the article. For U.S. commanders, the Korengal Valley offers a hard lesson in the limits of American power and good will in Afghanistan. The valley's extreme isolation, its axel breaking terrain and its inhabitant's suspicion of outsiders make it a perfect spot to wage an insurgency against the western army. And he goes on, we've been there since 2005 and the troops there were in essence – as this article says by Greg Jaffe, bullet magnets. The withdrawal could offer proof to other Afghans that U.S. troops can be forced out. There are pictures in there of Mr. – Captain Moretti that they watched him post took and show him on the screen. Again, you read this and you go is all this worth it? look at – you can see that our – our captain is sitting there holding hand, explain that, with the local tribal leader. How do we do this? How do we keep doing this and what's the good of all this?

RASHID: Well, let me just say that the Korengal Valley is a – is a particular area with a very long history of opposition to all outsiders and it's very rugged, it was an area that the soviets never occupied because it was too impossible to occupy in the 80's. perhaps we should never have gone there. the first American troops went there about four years ago because President Karzai insisted on it. it was not part of the American military sort of doctrine to occupy every nook and cranny in Afghanistan. You also find areas where you can rule the population, win the population away. You can do some good work and where you could resist the Taliban. And this was a bit of – this was really off the beaten track and there was a history there – this was the center of the Majahudin resistance to the soviets. And of course it was – it had become a Taliban central also.

So you know I think – first of all this is a bit of a rarity, but I think you know what in broadly speaking what this shows is that for too many years the military, the civilians, the American civilians in Afghanistan, they pursued wrong policy. You know I think now finally, the new counter intelligent doctrine by Petraeus and McChrystal which is focusing on population centers, on clearing out the Taliban and then bringing in aid and development, et cetera. This – if this had happened right from the beginning – gain, I'd say I don't think we should have had the Taliban resurgence in 2003.

The fact was that America refused to deploy troops in 2002, 2003, and '04. And what happened was that there was a vacuum and it was filled first by the warlords who were rapacious and horrible against the local population and this vacuum was then filled by the Taliban. And if you had filled important areas where populations are concentrated earlier on and had an economic plan to minimally develop the country, I'm not saying turn it into a Switzerland, but just give them a basic kind of you know economy which the Afghans had in the 70's and the 60's, you know I think we – the whole story would have been different.

LAMB: So, when you're talking to Americans and there's no camera there and you're not reporting, what do they tell you about. Do they – do most Americans you come in contact with care about Afghanistan and our role there?

RASHID: Well, I think certainly it's now the number one foreign policy agenda for this administration?

LAMB: But do they care?

RASHID: Yes, I do. Because I think they – I think people in government care because they still see it as a potential threat, the fact that Al Qaeda is still out there. but I think now in this administration for the first time, perhaps you've got people who really do care about Afghanistan. They serve there, they've learned about Afghanistan. If you're looking at the military, if you're looking at people in state department, you're looking at NGOs and aid workers, you know people who go there, I mean like me – you know I mean why have I stuck with Afghanistan for so long? Because this is – it's not just a fascinating country, the people just draw you in, the country sucks you in. you – you know if you go in for the first time you will be forever involved and interested in Afghanistan. It has a very magnetic appeal.

LAMB: What, give us some examples?

RASHID: I don't know, I mean you know the Afghan are very special kind of people. I think one of the first things is that you know this is a people who were never colonized. And the Afghan were the only Asian people who were never colonized by the British or the French or by anyone else, or the Americans or by anyone else. So they've retained a kind of grandeur and sort of independence and but enormous warmth and hospitality and friendship, the country is an amazing looking country, it's got everything there, desert, mountains, there's the highest mountains in the world, the lowest – you know. I mean the landscape the people, it's all very odd. You know what many Afghans joke that what you know – four sisters of Afghanistan is uninhabited because it's you know it's either too high the mountains or the you know the deserts are too large. And the Afghans joke that when god made the world in seven days, the made the rest of the world in six days and then somebody said only there's a hole – there's a gap in the middle there, so he collected all the bits and pieces that were left over, you know the spare parts that he had left over from making all the other countries and he threw them all down and said this is Afghanistan.

So that's why Afghanistan has a bit of everything you know? It has areas which look like Switzerland and its got areas that look like the Sahara Desert and its people reflect the same, you've got people who are completely white with blue eyes who are supposed to be the descendants of Alexander the Great. You've got Mongols from Mongolia and China. You've got people from central Asia, you've got people from south Asia and you can see it in their faces. I mean you know it's got languages from all over the world. I mean literally it's got dozens of languages. So this is a – it's a very special place.

LAMB: So what are the chances that Pakistan will ever get back to normality?

RASHID: Well, I hope that we will – you know as long as democracy continues, as long as the military does not intervene again. We've got a very bad democracy, a poor democracy. If this democracy was given time, there was another election without military interference, a new kind of new generation of leaders come in and get attracted, come into politics, come into public service you know I think you know things will slowly change. The problem is that you know our whole democratic experience has been interrupted by the military every 10 years and so be go back – you know we reinvent the wheel every 10 years and it's a terrible situation to be in.

LAMB: So do you have another book? I know you just put one out in 2008

RASHID: Well, Descent into Chaos covers most of this post 9/11 period in Pakistan, Afghanistan and central Asia and brings you up to 2009.

No, at the moment I'm not working on any other book. I think things are too much in flux at the moment. Perhaps you know I might like to write a novel and move away from some of this factual stuff.

LAMB: Ahmed Rashid has been our guest and we've been talking about his book Taliban, which is available in paperback and has been for the last 10 years and we thank you very much for coming.

RASHID: Thank you very much, Brian.

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