

## ARGO and CISCI Seminar

Under the new administration, how will US Foreign Policy change in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other countries of the region?

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### **Speech by Ahmed Rashid** *(transcript)*

Let me just very briefly deal with the Mumbai event. I just want to make a guess as to the strategy, as to why this attack took place. I think this attack has taken place for several reasons, but the most important reason is to create a major state of tension between India and Pakistan. I think certainly this Indian-Muslim group was probably trained by elements in al Qaida or even by Pakistani groups who are close to al Qaida and who are presently fighting the Pakistan army in the tribal area. It is likely there is a Pakistani link, not a state link, but a link with these groups in the tribal areas. But if you remember the 2001 attack on the Indian parliament, there was a year of tension between India and Pakistan, and Pakistan, which had moved troops to the Afghan border to stop the escape of al Qaida, was prevented from doing that, and it had to move its troops all the way back to the Indian border. I think the pressure right now of the Pakistan army on the Pakistani militants and the Afghan militants in the tribal area, the pressure especially over the last three months, has created a lot of panic perhaps in al Qaida and these groups. So they obviously have analyzed that if they can create a major crisis between India and Pakistan, Pakistani troops will move back to the Indian border and they will leave a space to al Qaida to continue their operations. So I think strategically this is one of the major aims. They were successful in 2002, because, don't forget that was the time when all of the al Qaida and Taliban leadership came to Pakistan and started living in Pakistan, without any kind of pressure, and the army did not go back into that area until late 2004. The other aim obviously is to try and galvanize the Indian Muslims. We already know that there are indigenous Indian Muslim militant groups in India who have carried out bombings in the past, who have killed indiscriminately, who have tried to raise the issue of Muslim rights, so probably this attack is also to try and help to galvanize them.

I think we are entering a very strategic moment and the next four to five months are going to be extremely bloody in the region, and very disturbing internationally. Why do I say that? Well the first reason is that the Americans have said they will send 20,000 more troops to Afghanistan. It will take at least another four to five months before these troops can come to Afghanistan. It will take another four to five months before the Obama administration gets its policy act together, is able to talk to its allies in NATO, etc. And I think these four to five months are going to be used very determinedly by the Pakistani Taliban and the Afghan Taliban to try and create as much chaos in the region as possible, to demoralize the governments of the region, to take as much territory as they can, to harass the local populations and to win more of the local populations on their side. So I think the next few months we are going to see a winter offensive both by the Pakistani Taliban, the

Afghan Taliban and Central Asian Taliban. And this offensive will not just take place in the Pakistan and Afghanistan regions, but it will take place outside as well.

Now having said that, let me get back to my main thesis. Let me just spend 5 minutes on the situation in Afghanistan. The situation in Afghanistan is very grim. There's no question. In 2005-2006 when the Italian troops went out to Herat, you did not have a Taliban presence in Herat. Today you do have a Taliban presence in Herat. When the Germans went to Mazar-i-Sharif in the north, they did not have Taliban. Today they do have Taliban. So what we are seeing is that even in areas of the west and the north where Taliban activity was minimal, today there is quite considerable Taliban activity. There is also a lot of Taliban activity around Kabul. The major provinces, the roads around Kabul are now unsafe. The development activities, a lot of it has come to a standstill because of the security situation. The Taliban and al Qaida have been able to launch terrorist attacks inside Kabul – the bombing of the Serena hotel, the assassination attempt against President Karzai. So the situation even inside the city is very bad. And naturally, the aim of the Taliban is simply I think two or three fold; the first is to try and take as much territory in the south and the east as possible, to terrorize the local population, to win the local population, to isolate the military garrisons that are in these southern and eastern provinces, to spread their terror to areas outside the south and the east. And secondly, I think it is to also demoralize NATO countries, try to demoralize especially some of those NATO countries where there is a lot of public opposition to the deployment of troops in Afghanistan, the smaller countries like the Scandinavians and the Danish and the Dutch who have a very limited, small numbers of maybe 200 troops in Afghanistan, to try and create a state of demoralization before the Obama team take over in Washington.

Now on the other side, I think what we are dealing with is a far more complicated situation. Today the Taliban is no longer an Afghan phenomenon. The Taliban is now a regional phenomenon. There are Pakistani Taliban, there are Central Asian Taliban, there may be Indian Taliban tomorrow, you know, you may have the start of an Indian Taliban movement. The Taliban have become a kind of model for Islamic extremism, a kind of arm for al Qaida, we have seen the expansion of the Taliban, and we have seen a huge expansion in the kind of tactics and methods of warfare that they have used and that they have brought over from Iraq. We know that al Qaida has facilitated a lot of traffic between al Qaida in Iraq and al Qaida in Pakistan and Afghanistan. There has been a lot of retraining, the Taliban have been learning new methods of ambush and explosives and weapons. The battle experience from Iraq has been brought over to Afghanistan. Which is why there is a much bigger ability of the Taliban to take on large western forces and create casualties as well.

So, obviously if the Taliban are a regional phenomenon, the solution also has to be a regional solution. And I'll get back to that.

The situation in Pakistan, very briefly, is also very dire. I think Pakistan is faced with 3 major problems. The first problem is a 60 year-old problem that has existed in Pakistan and that is the existing tension between the military and civilian rule. The military has never allowed democracy to take root in Pakistan. We had 7 years, 8 years of President Musharraf. He hung on to power too long, he was backed up by the Bush administration, he spent 18 months, the last 18

months, in which he had to reinforce martial law to try to keep the hold on power. Eventually we had elections and he didn't resign even after the elections, eventually he did resign, but the issue has been and continues to be the tension between the military and the civilians. Now the military today, they control the nuclear program, they control much of foreign policy, they certainly control policy towards India and Afghanistan. President Zardari has made very strong statements of friendship with India and with President Karzai, and has struck a personal relationship with President Karzai, which is something that Musharraf never had – in fact he denigrated Karzai quite strongly. We still have the problem that the government on itself cannot make any move on either India or Afghanistan without the consensus from the military. So the tension on these critical issues of the region remains quite strong.

The second crisis is the economic crisis, which predates your global financial crisis. Partly it is a result of bad policy planning by Shaukat Aziz, the prime minister, and by Musharraf. Partly it is a result of the high price of oil and food that we experienced last year. But largely it is a result of very serious structural problems in the Pakistani economy which were never addressed properly by Musharraf. Particularly the low tax base, the lack of new export areas, et cetera. We've just had a bailout by the IMF of 7.6 billion dollars, we need about 15 billion dollars to stay afloat, and the international community seems very reluctant to give us this money and there seems to be a linkage between the government's behavior on terrorism, and combating terrorism, and perhaps receiving more money, bi-lateral money from the Americans and from some of the European countries.

The third issue is the issue of terrorism and the Pakistani Taliban. I will spend two minutes on where did these Pakistani Taliban come from. As we know Pakistan supported the Taliban regime in the 90's. If you read my Taliban book you will get all the details of that - there was considerable support going from the ISI and from the military to the Taliban. Pakistan was one of the few countries that recognized the Taliban regime, and many fighters from the Pashtun belt, particularly, and from militant groups who were fighting in Kashmir, at that time, went to fight for the Taliban – this was before 9/11. After 9/11 al Qaida and the Afghan Taliban escaped into Pakistan – and let me just say that the Americans never defeated the Afghan Taliban. They routed them, they killed a lot of them, but they never defeated them. And the leadership at least certainly survived. Much of the leadership came and settled in their original place where a lot of them had been living in – Quetta in Baluchistan province; other allies of the Taliban came to live in the tribal areas in northern Pakistan, and a lot of the al Qaida leadership came. A lot of this al Qaida was then facilitated by some of these militant groups who had been working with al Qaida over the years to escape into the Middle East and to Iraq and to other places. But there was a core of al Qaida and Taliban leadership which remained in the tribal areas and in Baluchistan. Now what happened was essentially that the Bush policy towards Pakistan was simply that you help us find al Qaida. You find the Arabs, and we are not asking you about the Taliban, we are not worrying about the Taliban. In Afghanistan this created major problems obviously because the obsession and the one track policy of finding al Qaida led to a complete neglect of reconstruction and development and state building and all the rest of it. Because the Americans were going to go into Iraq, and they knew that. So this policy directive, if you like, to Pakistan, helped the military regime because the military regime then kept the Taliban on ice. They allowed the Taliban to settle in Pakistan, they allowed the

Taliban to recruit, reorganize the offensive, get material and weapons and support. And the Taliban had support from several elements. They had support from the intelligence services, from the ISI, they had support from the Islamic parties which were ruling the frontier province, the Baluchistan province, they had come to power in 2002 as a result of the rigged elections, and they of course were getting support from military groups all over Pakistan who had either been fighting in Kashmir or had been fighting with the Taliban. But in particular the process that happened in FATA, was that when these groups came across, brought over by Pakistani Pashtun tribesmen, these Pakistani Pashtun tribesmen became very rich, extremely confident, and extremely ideologized, and you have a steady progression from 2002 up to 2006-2007 when they became rich, they exchanged their horses and their donkeys to pickup trucks, they exchanged a few body guards from their family to a militia, what we call a *lashkar*, they became commanders and they were able to give sanctuary to the al Qaida and Taliban. So the growth of the Pakistani Taliban has paralleled the growth and security that al Qaida and the Afghan Taliban have had in the tribal areas. As long as they have had security the Pakistani Taliban have grown along with them.

Now about 18 months ago, the Pakistani Taliban, which for 6 years had been an appendage of the Afghan Taliban and al Qaida – they were the bodyguards for al Qaida if you like – have developed their own agenda. And this has been a new phenomenon in Pakistan, that the Pakistani Taliban now have their own agenda, which is to Talibanize Pakistan. And if not Pakistan, certainly northern Pakistan, and if necessary to split away part of the northern Pakistan, the tribal areas, the Pashtun belt, and to create what they call a Sharia state. In other words they want the division of Pakistan if they cannot achieve full Talibanization. And obviously this is a very serious threat to Pakistan, and unfortunately it was not really recognized by the military for a very long time because the military was continuing to back the Afghan Taliban, they were not willing to recognize the threat that the Pakistani Taliban posed to them. Only in the last 6 months or so we have seen much more concerted action by the military, which have been fighting now for three months in the tribal agency of Bajaur. As you know this Pakistani Taliban and these other groups have been able to launch attacks in Islamabad, in Lahore, they have been able to target civilian leadership, to target the military leadership, killing generals, killing politicians, et cetera. So we now have a very dire problem of local indigenous Pakistani Taliban which have been fueled by al Qaida, and by the Afghans, but they have their own agenda, which is to seize power in Pakistan.

Let me just come to the American side. I'm not going into the reasons as to why Bush has failed in Afghanistan and Pakistan, because if you read the book you'll see all that. But essentially, Iraq was obviously a major diversion from Afghanistan, the arming of the warlords in Afghanistan, the unwillingness to provide more troops, more security, more money, more development, by the Americans earlier on when there was this window of opportunity when Afghans were welcoming western support and wanted the reconstruction of the country, unfortunately was not there. Now I think Obama is coming from a different position. I think the positive factors are the following. The first is that he has made Afghanistan/Pakistan the central part of his foreign policy. Iraq is not the central part, and of course we know there are many pressing issues, Iran, Russia, et cetera but this is the central part. Secondly, he has called for a surge in troops. 20,000 troops by April. He is supporting the Afghan elections, which I think is critical, by October, and he wants the surge of

troops to be there in place by October, before the elections, so that these elections can take place in the best possible way and that security can be provided. But more than that, initially I have been in touch with the Obama people, and what I have come to understand is that they are also deeply aware that a surge of troops is insufficient in Afghanistan, you need a comprehensive surge, you first of all need a surge in aid and development. And a lot of the aid and development, if you read my book there's a long critique of the western aid and development in Afghanistan that has been wasted. Not out of corruption necessarily but just the methodology of the way you give it is out of date now. Whether it's Americans or Europeans or the European Union, a lot of this methodology is out of date. There's been a lack of coordination between countries, the same project has been repeated several times, there's been wastage, there's been competitions with the Americans, there's no proper coordination of what is a priority and what is not a priority, the Americans have been setting their own aid agenda, et cetera. And so part of this comprehensive surge is to improve the aid coordination and result, which could probably best be carried out by the United Nations, rather than by the Americans or by an individual country.

The third part of this is obviously the training of the Afghan police and the army – speeding up this process, getting the Europeans more involved in training the police, which they are doing but they are doing very slowly.

The fourth part of this is getting the Afghan government to be more effective. And I think Bush has miserably failed to get the Afghan government to be more effective and now there is enormous disillusionment with President Karzai, with the Afghan government, which has been called both internationally and by many Afghans as corrupt, inefficient, incompetent, failing to do jobs properly, and not giving the kind of support and the kind of leadership and initiative that is needed. We should remember that Afghanistan is not an occupied country, Afghanistan was never Iraq, there was never an American governor general in Afghanistan, Afghanistan has a legitimate government through a legitimate political process, the Bonn process, that has been acknowledged by the whole world and by all Afghans, except the Taliban. And it's very important that this political process continues. So a comprehensive surge by Obama, understanding that this is going to take time, we're maybe talking about next summer, and obviously you need a dialogue with the Europeans and how the Europeans are going to contribute to this.

Now let me just touch very briefly on the question of the Europeans. Some of my statements have been taken out of context especially regarding Italy. I've always maintained that the caveats and restrictions that many of the Europeans have been operating under since 2005 or 2006, when they went to Afghanistan in the first place, were false. And this was not of great help either to NATO or to the Afghan government, or to themselves, really. And that many of these caveats and restrictions should be lifted. When they went in, most of these Europeans were not facing a threat. So in a sense they got away with it, because they were not being attacked on a daily basis by Taliban; casualties were not coming back home. I understand obviously that many of these European countries – Italy, Spain, Germany, the Scandinavians – are faced with very strong domestic opposition to sending more troops to Afghanistan. But I think there are two or three things that these European governments have collectively failed to do. First of all, they have collectively failed to explain the mission to the public. You know the Spanish public, or the Italian public, this is

not an uneducated public, this is an educated public. I think you should be honest and truthful and transparent and explain what the mission is. This was not a post-conflict mission, where Italian troops or Spanish troops were going in to do post-conflict reconstruction – this was a conflict zone. It was not a conflict zone in 2005, but it has become a conflict zone in 2008, in Mazar-i-Sharif, or Herat, or wherever you may be. So naturally your position of what you were saying in 2005 has to change to what you are saying today. It has to be more transparent, it has to be more explanatory, and it has to win the hearts and minds of your domestic audience who are opposed to sending these troops. So I think that is the first important point to understand. I think the other point is that there has to be a much more self critical appraisal by the European governments and by the European Union as to what went wrong. Europe has given a lot of money to Afghanistan. Where has that money gone, what has happened, why was the strategy wrong, where did we go wrong, where did the Americans go wrong, where did the Afghans go wrong? We are not seeing this critical investigative attitude by the governments in Europe, and I think that is needed because the people of your countries need that. They need to understand what went wrong. Everybody knows that Afghanistan is very bad, but *why* is it very bad. You can't blame everything on Bush, you have to look at yourself and also see what we did wrong.

The third most important factor is that – I hope – Obama will come in and get rid of Guantanamo for example, he's going to get rid of some of these laws that Bush enacted which were completely against the American constitution regarding torture and prisoners, I mean that will send very positive signals to the outside world as to the American intention.

And lastly, let me just talk about the need for a regional solution. If the Taliban are a regional phenomenon we need a regional solution. Pakistan is giving sanctuary to the Afghan Taliban leadership, even today. The Afghan Taliban leadership is almost entirely in Quetta, in Baluchistan. They have not been thrown out, they have not been arrested by the Pakistani authorities, they are still operating from Quetta, recruits are there, the main pool of suicide bombers is in Quetta, which is being used inside of Afghanistan. Now, for six months the Americans have tried everything. They've tried beating Pakistan over the head, they've tried sending missiles into Pakistan, they've tried bribing Pakistan with more money. And you have domestic tensions now in Pakistan between the army and the civilian government. What is the solution? The solution is not just Pakistan related. What is the main threat that Pakistan feels? Why is the army behaving like it does? The army behaves like it does because it considers India as the major threat to Pakistan's national security. Today many Pakistanis would disagree with that, many Pakistanis would say the threat to national security is the Taliban, is lack of education, economy, and has nothing to do with India whatsoever. And the army is living in the past, so army wake up, you know, and get on and understand what the national security crisis is in Pakistan today. But that is the army's thinking, now you are not going to get rid of that thinking either domestically or internationally by beating the army over the head. So we need a regional solution, we need peace with India, we need a comprehensive solution, we need a dialogue on Kashmir we have numerous disputes with India as you know which is not just Kashmir but water and boundaries and Siachen, and all sorts of other things, we need cooperation with India. Now there has been a cease-fire in Kashmir as you know since 2004, there hasn't been any activity since then. The Indians have been incredibly slow in

responding to the overtures that were made, to its credit, by President Musharraf. Musharraf made many overtures to India which were completely out of the box of normal Pakistani diplomacy. And many Pakistanis were very angry at Musharraf, accusing him of yielding too much of Pakistan's traditional stance on Kashmir, of giving away the whole Kashmir baby. Kashmiris were very angry with Musharraf. There has been no response from India whatsoever. The Indians have failed to recognize that the growth of Taliban and extremism in their country is linked to the crisis that is happening in Pakistan. They need to help Pakistan, and they need to help Pakistan by resolving some of these disputes. So that this army can move from the Indian border, and feel secure in moving across the Indian border, be retrained in counterinsurgency and moved to the Afghan border. The Americans have spent the last six months, Petraeus and Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have spent the last six months trying and persuade the Pakistan military to move from the Indian border to the Afghan border. We haven't done it. We said no, the Indian threat is too serious. They've tried to persuade us to retrain the army in counterinsurgency, we said no, we are not going to retrain the army in counterinsurgency because the army is used for conventional war against India. So you can take the Frontier Corp, which is the paramilitary force, and you can retrain them, which is useless in my opinion, for a variety of reasons. I think the whole question is we need a regional solution. And what is that regional solution? We need a dialogue between India and Pakistan which has to be backed by the International community, which must speed up the process of resolving the insecurity that is felt by Pakistan vis-à-vis the Indians. We need a dialogue between Iran and the Americans on stabilizing Afghanistan. You cannot stabilize Afghanistan without Iran, which shares the longest border with Afghanistan, where drugs are going, who share the same language, the same culture, et cetera. Iran and China, unfortunately, have been completely kept out of these western forums of economic aid and support to Afghanistan. I think that's been a huge, huge mistake, and this has been a mistake of the Bush administration. You cannot keep out neighboring countries from helping Afghanistan develop. So you need a dialogue between Iran and the Americans, you need a dialogue between Iran and the Afghans. You need a dialogue between the Pakistanis and the Afghans. You need to settle the issues that lie between Afghanistan and Pakistan of which the Durand line, which is the border between the two countries, is not recognized by the Afghans. I think if there was this kind of comprehensive peace package, where the Afghan Taliban would be surrendered, where Pakistan and India would resolve their differences, then maybe you could persuade the Afghans as a part of a larger peace package that the Durand line, this border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, needs to be recognized. Pakistan needs to take FATA into the constitution of Pakistan. We need a political strategy for FATA. Unfortunately even today, with all this military activity neither the government nor the military have any political strategy for FATA. And until we have a political strategy for FATA, which must bring it into the constitution, make it part of the country, then use development and other things to develop FATA, we are not going to get rid of this Taliban problem.

On a broader scale, we need China – China potentially is the largest investor in Afghanistan because it needs raw materials from Afghanistan, it shares a border with Afghanistan, it wants to build roads, it wants to connect China with Afghanistan, and that would be great. We also have to assuage Central Asia and Russia. They hate the Taliban, but they are very nervous about American intentions, particularly Bush intentions, in Afghanistan. Do the Americans want to set up a

permanent base in Afghanistan? Are they threatening the oil and gas of Central Asia? Are they threatening us and do they want to divert oil and gas through Azerbaijan through the Caucuses to Europe? I think there has to be some dialogue between Russia, Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Americans to get Russia on our side. Because if we don't do this we are going to recreate the 90's, and I think the 90's is being recreated. What happened in the 90's was that all the neighboring countries were backing different elements in the civil war in Afghanistan; Pakistan was backing the Taliban, Iran, Russia, and India were backing the Northern Alliance. That is not what we want to see. And this kind of situation would worsen only, it would destabilize Afghanistan and destabilize the whole region as we are seeing today.

I'm hopeful, and I know this is a very ambitious idea, but a regional solution is now the only way forward. Obviously we need solutions for Afghanistan but we need a regional solution to go along with it. What I suggested with Barnett Rubin in an article on Foreign Affairs is that we should go back to the UN Security Council, which should make a very high level contact group, backed by the US and the EU. We need this multi-prong approach to conduct simultaneous diplomacy with the neighbors of Afghanistan to get them on board.