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|  | [***Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan***](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0143122835/ossnet-20)  ***(click for Amazon page)***by [Ahmed Rashid](http://www.amazon.com/Ahmed-Rashid/e/B001IOH5U0/ref%3Dntt_athr_dp_pel_1) (Author) [35 customer reviews](http://www.amazon.com/Pakistan-Brink-Future-America-Afghanistan/product-reviews/0143122835/ref%3Ddp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?showViewpoints=1)  **Paperback:** 256 pages $11.07 Copy in basement library **Publisher:** Penguin Books; Reprint edition (February 26, 2013)  **Language:** English  **Average Customer Review:** [4.4 out of 5 stars](http://www.amazon.com/Pakistan-Brink-Future-America-Afghanistan/product-reviews/0143122835/ref%3Ddp_db_cm_cr_acr_img?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1)   **Amazon Best Sellers Rank:** #65,375 in Books ([See Top 100 in Books](http://www.amazon.com/best-sellers-books-Amazon/zgbs/books/ref%3Dpd_dp_ts_b_1)) * #92 in [Books](http://www.amazon.com/best-sellers-books-Amazon/zgbs/books/ref%3Dpd_zg_hrsr_b_1_1) > [Politics & Social Sciences](http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/3377866011/ref%3Dpd_zg_hrsr_b_1_2) > [Politics & Government](http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/5571255011/ref%3Dpd_zg_hrsr_b_1_3) > [International & World Politics](http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/11093/ref%3Dpd_zg_hrsr_b_1_4) > [**Asian**](http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/5571267011/ref%3Dpd_zg_hrsr_b_1_5_last)
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**REF A -- 12 Years of Lessons Learned in Time for 2014**, October 13, 2013

This is an extraordinary book that required a great deal of time, not in the reading, but in the reflection. This will be a longer review than usual, even for me, because this book contains all of the insights that the US and the Coalition have refused to embrace for the past twelve years. It is never too late to learn.

The author opens with a well-known quote on the dangers of drawing a line between fighting men and thinking men, lest one end up with the fighting being done by fools and the thinking by cowards. To this I would add another group, the “deciders,” who in the absence of any familiarity with fighting or access to intelligence with integrity, end up making decisions whose true cost in blood, treasure, and spirit crosses the line dividing legitimate actions “in the national interest” from “crimes against humanity.

Positive up front: US under Obama has given more of everything and progress has been made across both military (stronger Afghan army, degraded Taliban) and socio-economic (education, health, media) domains. To that I would add elections. Afghanistan is about to experience the most extraordinary election cycle it has ever been my privilege to observe.

In contrast, the author finds that Pakistan has worsened in every possible manner, in large part because the US has not understood Pakistan, has lacked a strategy (or the intelligence with which to devise a coherent sustainable strategy), and in failing, the US has allowed Pakistan to drag itself down and Afghanistan to be a regional albatross – a cancer on all others.

The author is quite blunt in describing an incoherent even infantile US decision-making environment characterized by “contradictory policies, intense political infighting, and uncertainty.” In being inept, the US opened the way for regional players to manipulate, exploit, and exacerbate.

Chapter 1 on the Bin Laden raid is utter nonsense, this may be the price the author pays to maintain access and avoid being assassinated. See instead The Bin Laden Story 00-90 at Phi Beta Iota.

The author points out that by 2014 the Coalition engagement in Afghanistan will have been longer than WWI and WWII. In my own mind this highlights the fact that the US in particular, but the Western nations in general, have lost their integrity. They are incapable of collecting and analyzing the truth, thinking holistically, evaluating true costs over time, or devising a sustainable strategy that ultimately achieves the desired end-state: peace and prosperity. A churlish skeptic would point out that no, the West has achieved precisely what it wants, public theater at home, a massive transfer of wealth from the individual taxpayer to the military-industrial complex, and personal enrichment of most policymakers, at least in the USA. Either way, the larger publics lose at home and abroad.

Pakistan and Afghanistan matter not only to Central Asia, where other countries such as Uzbekistan are beginning to implode, but to the Middle East and India. At the very end of the book the author ponders how Afghanistan might follow the Turkish example of Islamic/secular regeneration, and I cannot help but wish that 12 years ago the Coalition had had the brain to leave the British home and make Afghanistan a collaborative effort among Muslim nations led by Turkey.

QUOTE (19) “After a decade, NATO has achieved none of its strategic aims – rebuilding the Afghan state, defeating the Taliban, stabilizing the region – so what assurances can it now plausibly give that it will do so by 2014?

The author defines Afghanistan today (2012) as a corrupt and incompetent government, a dysfunctional bureaucracy and inoperable justice system, high on drugs and illiteracy, with a police force that has the highest desertion rate in the world.

The sucking chest wound: no indigenous economy. Bush specifically refused to invest in roads, dams, water, and power. Karzai has been a complete failure [the author gives Karzai credit and cause across the book, outlining the many ways in which the US failed to develop a relationship of trust with him.]

Pakistani military is out of control and the deal breaker. Nothing the US or other can do will overcome an arrogant ignorant Pakistani military continuing to support extremists and their violence within Afghanistan.

QUOTE (22): “If the west is to depart Afghanistan by 2014 and leave behind relatively stable regimes in Kabul and Islamabad, it will need a multidimensional political, diplomatic, economic, and military strategy.”

Answering this challenge is the purpose of the book.

My nine page detailed summary for professionals coping with Afghanistan and not having the time to read this excellent work, is posted at Phi Beta Iota the Public Intelligence Blog.

Books Cited by the Author:

[Cables from Kabul: The Inside Story of the West's Afghanistan Campaign](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/000743202X/ref%3Dcm_cr_asin_lnk)
[Power Struggle Over Afghanistan: An Inside Look at What Went Wrong--and What We Can Do to Repair the Damage](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1616084642/ref%3Dcm_cr_asin_lnk)

Books I Have Reviewed Circling AF-PK-Islam:
[Lines of Fire: A Renegade Writes on Strategy, Intelligence, and Security](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008SM4EC2/ref%3Dcm_cr_asin_lnk)
[Surrender to Kindness: One Man's Epic Journey for Love and Peace](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0976422891/ref%3Dcm_cr_asin_lnk)
[Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy, and the West](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0061567590/ref%3Dcm_cr_asin_lnk)
[Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0801475783/ref%3Dcm_cr_asin_lnk)
[Uncomfortable Wars Revisited (International and Security Affairs)](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0806139889/ref%3Dcm_cr_asin_lnk)
[Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0143034669/ref%3Dcm_cr_asin_lnk)
[The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0815723784/ref%3Dcm_cr_asin_lnk)

Also Recommended:
[Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America, and the Future of the Global Jihad](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0815722745/ref%3Dcm_cr_asin_lnk)

Best wishes to all,
Robert David STEELE Vivas
INTELLIGENCE for EARTH: Clarity, Diversity, Integrity, & Sustainability

- - - - - LONG REVIEW (SUMMARY) - - - - -

Chapter 2 focuses on Pakistan, which is now fearing the worst: international isolation, anarchy, civil war, perhaps even a coup of Islamic militants. Pakistan lacks a national identity, the military consumes 25% of the national budget and is obsessed with India, and its Islamic military are a thorn in everyone’s side (at the end of the book, the author makes it clear that China is now angry with Pakistan, and no longer tolerate of its military-extremist nexus). History has passed Pakistan by – the economic boom in India could have lifted Pakistan as well, but for the idiocy of the Pakistani military and the corruption and ineptitude of the Pakistani civil government. Musharraf lost Pakistan, USA lost Central Asia.

The CIA is given credit for having turned the Pakistani military into a multi-billion dollar out of control monster, with the Pakistani military losing control of the Pashtun Taliban when it turned control of training camps over to Al Qaeda. The CIA drone program lost FATA and cost the Pakistani government any prospect of reintegrating that area and its inhabitants into a national construct.

QUOTE (55): “Both sides [US and Pakistan] are trapped in their own double-dealing.”

I emphasize this quote as it is central to my own life’s work (“the truth at any cost lowers all other costs”) and the author also brings this up again across the book – it is not possible to create sustainable strategy on a foundation of lies and double-dealing such as the the CIA, the US military, and the various other elements of the US government (diplomatic, commercial) created.

I am fascinated to learn how the attack on Mumbai sponsored by Pakistan was intended to relieve pressure on the army in FATA, and on how INDIA, not Pakistan, destroyed the effort of Ambassador Holbrook to negotiate a regional peace. As Milt Bearden points out often, the US seems to have lost sight of the reality that Pakistan has supported the US consistently, while India has, with equal consistency, opposed and denigrated the USA while milking it for every commercial advantage.

Among the tid-bits:

+ 70,000 people work in the Pakistani nuclear industry, many of them susceptible to extremist intimidation if not recruitment

+ AQ Khan was not the bad guy – he took the fall for the Pakistani military that actually owns and operates the global Pakistani nuclear network

+ Suicide bombing had not existed in Central Asia before 1990, in part because Islam forbids suicide. Suicide bombers became live PROSTITUTES, bought and sold as a “good” at very early ages [recently there has been media reporting on how the child suicide bombing trainees are also drugged and sodomized by the Taliban]

+ Invasion of Iraq sucked the air out of the Afghan campaign

+ Obama never met with his AF-PK advisors, traveled secretly, generally isolated from reality

+ US, not Karzai, postponed the 2009 presidential elections to allow time for the surge to settle the country so elections could occur

+ US is obsessed with the military tool to the exclusion of all other elements of government. [Personally I seem some truly extraordinary work by AID in particular, but the coherence is simply not there, no doubt because the US Department of State has no idea how to manage inter-agency endeavors.]

+ US is missing the lessons learned from 2009, and appears particularly oblivious to the divide between the non-Pashtuns (Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazara, et al) who want a parliamentary system and decentralized government, and the Pashtuns, who can [this is my bit] easily be seen as Karzai’s legacy of failure – nothing he has done has stabilized the Pashtuns or nurtured self-healing among them.

Chapter 5 focuses on Afghanistan’s political and military fault lines and lists the failure to engage Pakistan over harboring the Taliban, the failure to build an indigenous economy (97% of the economy is a Coalition presence bubble), the failure to engage the Taliban in talks, the failure to get Karzai to reduce corruption, and the failure to address illiteracy.

+ I learn that the US military has spent tens of millions building bases for troops that did not exists, assuming a surge in the future.

+ Holbrooke could not get a one on one with Obama at the same time that the author label’s Obama’s “team” to be dysfunctional with McCrystal and Petraeus not speaking to each other, and neither of the US Ambassadors to Pakistan and Afghanistan speaking to Holbrook. This “lack of presidential control and the open infighting” demoralized allies, who have every right to be scornful of US ineptitude.

+ Karzai considers the US and the Taliban to be equal threats (the US for its airstrikes and kicking in doors in the middle of the night); the author blames the US for wasting 12 years and failing to cultivate its own unleashed puppet [shades of Diem and Madame Nhi in Viet-Nam -- I would add my perception that Karzai, while put in power by the US, is in no way a US puppet, he has out-maneuvered the US at every turn because of the US propensity to cycle everyone around, fighting the wrong war the wrong way twelve times, repeating the same mistakes year after year.

The author assigns blame equally to Karzai (corruption, refusal to govern to develop capability) and the US (failure to fund socio-economic projects) for Afghanistan’s being a toxic dust-bowl right now.

QUOTE (97): “Karzai considered the Americans hopelessly fickle, with multiple military and civilian envoys carrying contradictory messages, working at cross-purposes, and waging Washington turf battles in his drawing room.” [Déjà vu from every country I have ever served in, particularly El Salvador and Panama]

Karl Eikenberry, General and then Ambassador, gets good marks in this book, and is also well thought of by Milt Bearden, among others. The author salutes Eikenberry for insisting that no counter-insurgency strategy based only on an infusion of military manpower would work, and laments that Eikenberry was shoved into the background. The author cites the official UN conclusion that the US emphasis on security over social and developmental issue would doom any efforts to stabilize the country.

+ 200 Taliban in Marjah were enough to intimidate the population, among whom 26,000 fled.

+ Commander’s Emergency Fund grew to one billion dollars, and was spent, according to the author, by military personnel without professional experiences or knowledge.

+ Taliban quickly figured out that COIN could be defeated by popping up elsewhere.

+ Helmand was a waste of blood, treasure, and spirit – the center of gravity for the stabilization of Afghanistan is the east and the border with Pakistan. [On this note, I find it quite fascinating that the Pakistanis believe Afghanistan can provide “strategic” depth against India, when Pakistan borders India and Afghanistan does not.]

+ 2011 A desertion rate of 24% among the Afghan security forces.

+ Key question for Afghanistan going into 2014 is not the Taliban, but whether the state can gain coherence sufficient to govern the country. [I continue to marvel at the wealth of Afghanistan that is so mis-managed, from minerals to water to strategic lines of communication that are priceless to China and others.]

PAGE 112: The author suggests that the sooner the US engaged the Taliban with the explicit purpose of negotiating a rapid and complete exist, the better. Milt Bearden speaks to the Taliban asking only for
“honorable intent” and a prompt departure. The “we lost” can be left silent. [Every time General Allen goes on TV with his “this is what winning looks like” mantra, a car bomb goes off in Kabul a few days later. Someone needs to silence the General.] The author is quite explicit in his view that the US has wasted years and tens of billions in its refusal to negotiate with the Taliban. [Separately UK generals have said the same thing in print.]

+ The Taliban consider themselves Afghan nationalists, not global jihadists. Shades of Ho Chi Minh!

+ The Taliban has matured and moderated. The Afghan Taliban wants to break from the Pakistani ISI. The author also says that the Afghan Taliban is NOT interested in joining the government or sharing power, they want the whole enchilada.

+ Not until 17 June 2011 did the US National Security Council separate Al Qaeda from the Taliban. This is right up there on the idiocy scale with Cheney and Tenet not knowing that Iraq was a Sunni minority oppressing a Shi’ite minority.

+ The 2009 reintegration campaign was based on the false premise that there were moderate versus extremist Taliban and that one could peel the onion. According to the author the Taliban want just two things: foreign forces out, Shura state in.

+ 2010 decision by Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazara (Northern Alliance) to not talk to the Taliban has been costly.

+ 2014 departure date established at Lisbon Summit set off a battle by all the regional powers for influence in Afghanistan, and most dangerously, escalated the proxy war between Pakistan and India. Put simply, the US and the Coalition created a vacuum more dangerous than any alternative.

+ CIA/PK arrest of Baradar shut down ongoing talks and Pakistan began its posture of claiming ownership of talks and the right to veto all overtures for talks.

+ India consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad the equivalent (my term) of poking a stick in Pakistan’s eyes. My judgment: an extremely poor decision on the part of Afghanistan – pending real peace India should be barred from all intelligence, military, and law enforcement activities in Afghanistan – commercial only, and bring in the Turks across the board on the hard and soft side.

+ Reason Iran, India, and Russia did not favor talks with Taliban was because of Pakistan’s posture of control over the talks, and fears about Pakistan’s dangerous (and mis-guided) influence.

BIG BIG POINT: US drone attacks have killed the more balanced elders across the Taliban, and empowered a younger generation that lacks the maturity and experience to know when to deal. Petraeus (and CIA) never understood this.

+ Taliban assassination of Rabbini outraged the Tajiks and other minorities, shamed Karzai (who has never been abler to control or even influence his own ethnic group writ larger (tribes are not the same as ethnic groups, they are sub-sets), and widened the ethnic divide.

+ Pakistan Taliban numbering 3000 drove 12,000 troops out of SWAT, blew up 100 girls’ schools and caused exodus of one third of 2 million people. [At the time] SWAT was out of range of US drones. The second time 30,000 troops succeeded.

+ There are thirteen sectors across which US and Pakistan must negotiate and collaborate, that is not happening, in part because the ISA owns (or intimidates) the Pakistani media and constantly interferes with – blocks – progress on all fronts.

+ Pakistani military is helpless against suicide attacks – it is totally penetrated across all services and locations, by insiders who will provide information, access, and arms to would-be suicide attackers.

+ Suicide bombers sell for as little as $4,000.

+ Pakistani Taliban is at war at home AND part of the global jihad – the same is not true of the Afghan Taliban, they are nationalists focused only on Afghanistan (training camps for Syrian rebels and others are foreign affairs, more could be done to shut down all forms of foreign extremism and militarism).

+ Wikileaks stabbed the Pakistani military in the heart, revealing complicity and duplicity beyond most people’s ability to imagine.

QUOTE (162): “At times, both sides [Pakistan and US] seem to have an underlying death wish.”

Author returns often to the core theme on the US, that it lacks strategic vision and does not calculate the true costs and repercussions of what it does and does not do [This has been one of my central themes at Phi Beta Iota for the past decade.]

QUOTE (162): “A particularly troubling sign is the escalating intolerance of non-Muslim military – an index of the rapid deterioration in the very idea of Pakistan.”

Author notes that the white stripe in Pakistan’s flag represents minorities to be protected as equal citizens. Today every Christian who can afford to leave Pakistan is doing so.

Baluchistan is both secular and separatist, and India has been supporting in the past, probably supporting now.

KARACHI IS A TIME BOMB. 80% of NATO’s stuff goes in (and now out) of there, Karachi is 70% of the government’s revenue and 30% of the GDP. Within Karachi the ethnic ghettos are so fortified and hostile and emergency responders must be hand-picked from the group being served or they will be killed.

CIA DESTROYED RELATIONS in 2009-2010 when it tried to create its own Pakistani intelligence agency without the ISA. Over 300+ Pakistanis employed and overseen by over 350 CIA and 120 SOF, most of whom were expelled (the foreigners) from Pakistan in April 2011.

Today we see a growing (ignorant) belligerence within the Pakistani military, and a growing (ignorant) collapse in US confidence in Pakistan leaning toward containment rather than engagement.

PAGE 177: The author says that Pakistan is not serious about peace or about facilitating talks between Afghanistan and the Taliban.

PAGE 180: The US blew its chance when talking to the Haqqanis, they quickly realized the US was only interested in separating the Haqqanis from the Taliban, not in actually creating a new foundation for peace. The Haqqanis responded to this arrogant ignorance with a suicide truck bomb that killed 5 Afghans and wounded 77 US, followed by a mortar attack on the US Embassy and ISAF HQS in Kabul.

Across this section the author dispassionately, methodically, concludes that CIA is out of control and a major impediment to the US doing anything balanced and reasonable in the Pakistan-Afghanistan domain.

QUOTE (184): “No intelligence agency in the world should collect intelligence, decide which operations should be carried out, and then carry out those operations unsupervised.”

On the other hand, Pakistan is equally insane:

QUOTE (185): “The ISI continues to allow the retired military class and a handful of extremist intellectuals to publicly advocate near lunatic ideas.”

The next chapter is provocatively and importantly entitled: CHANGING THE NARRATIVE – OR PREPARING FOR THE WORST.

The author opens the chapter with a quote from Stephen Walt that captures perfectly my frustration with the corruption and ineptitude of US decision-making: its complete divorce from reality and the truth, in my words, the complete absence of ethical evidence-based decision-support or the brains and moral fortitude to respect the truth among decision-makers. Instead of truth, ideology. Instead of purpose, mere corruption.

QUOTE (188): “By both action and inactions, the United States has contributed significantly to the region’s dangerous instability.”

Of course I would put India and Saudi Arabia and Qatar up there, formenting the same lunatic extremism that confirms Pakistan’s worst fears and validates Pakistan’s worst methods.

When the author lambasts the Obama Administration, which has “failed to debate a single issue in a strategic manner,” I have to agree. As Chuck Spinney and others have noted often, the Obama Administration has been “amateur hour” going back to day one.

The author is in good form as he articulately points out that the US wants Pakistan to give it a much-needed respite for its exit in 2014, while refusing to address what it will offer Pakistan in the post-2014 era.

The author makes the case for Pakistan being much more important than Afghanistan in terms of geo-strategic catastrophic potential. Pakistan is the one with 100 Sunni nuclear bombs and 70,000 inherently unstable and malleable people working in its nuclear industry. Pakistan is the one with a huge ungovernable zone in FATA and a major revolution brewing in Baluchistan. Pakistan, not Afghanistan, is the center of gravity for ending the sanctuary that keeps the Afghan insurgency alive.

The author suggests that the ISI is as dangerous and unbalanced for Pakistan as CIA is for the USA.

India comes in for its fair share of criticism, in particular its arrogance in refusing to come to the table or consider Kashmir and Afghanistan together. In Pakistani military eyes, the author says, Kabul has become their second Kashmir. Without India at the table, Pakistan cannot, will not, come to its senses.

As the book concludes, the author takes us on a quick tour of the horizon, and explicitly rules China out as a replacement for the USA in the terms the Pakistani military have come to savor. China provides support in kind, not cash. China no longer supports Pakistan on Kashmir. China no longer considers India an enemy – it exports $60 billion a year now to India, and that is projected to go up to $360 billion a year in the next decade. Meanwhile Pakistan has missed the boat and failed to mature in socio-economic terms, failing to ride the waves that India and China and Iran have been generating.

Iran is conflicted –it does not want a pro-Pakistan Taliban prosecuting Shias, but it also does not want a Western democracy and capitalism success story (not that one is possible, witness the financial terrorism that Wall Street and the City of London are now renowned for). After this book was written, Iran and the USA and Afghanistan started working together on infrastructure and other stabilization initiatives, and that may be one of the isolated success stories to come out of the non-military side of the US Government in the last few years. In this one area, the author gives Obama and the USA high marks.

Russia and Central Asia have their own instability issues, and their own concerns about the impact of an unstable fragmented Afghanistan

After observing that Sunni-Shia sectarianism (to which I would add the outrageous Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia, a curse on the earth as great as the Zionist fascism against the Palestinians and undermining all that the US Republic stands for) the author points to Turkey as a shining example of a Muslim nation that has regenerated itself with a solid mix of secular governance and religious solidarity.

The book ends with the following specific recommendations for 2013-2014:

01 US need to get a strategy (one rooted of course in intelligence with integrity, so I am not holding my breath.

02 US must offer and honor an end to night raids and drone attacks.

03 Karzai must become transparent in transition

04 Pakistan must give up its extremists for good

05 Pakistan must put the ISA and the military back in their box and return to the concept of elections and civil governance.