INFORMAL REMARKS TO THE USMC WAR COLLEGE VISITING TEAM

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Let me welcome you to the Brookings Institution, and to the 21st Century Defense Initiative, our group that studies military and security affairs, and in my case, India and Pakistan.

I want to do three things today:

- Provide some context of the larger struggle against violent Islamic extremism;
- Conduct a very brief thought experiment—looking ahead a few years in South Asia;
- List the range of policies that we might consider regarding Pakistan, including some that we certainly should consider and promptly reject.

I: The view from 30,000 feet

Let me make two brief points regarding what some people call the "long war," others call a clash of civilizations, and still others call a holy war.

From a U.S. perspective: all the advantages are on our side. This is especially true when you compare the Cold War with the present rise of violent, militant Islam. In the Cold War, there was an immediate and existential threat to the entire United States and all of its allies, both in terms of a totalitarian ideology and also in terms of the ability to kill millions of Americans immediately and destroy the United States as a coherent society. Herman Kahn went through the scenarios better than anyone else.

That is now literally history. We got through it because of the inherent weakness of communist ideology, even in those countries where it might have had some revolutionary appeal—where there was extreme inequality and the absence of justice. Communism created what Milovan Djilas called a "new class," a privileged class, inequality continued, and there was no justice. Fortunately, North Korea still functions as a living example of what we missed. It has become the butt of jokes; not a serious threat except for its ability to incinerate a city or two - hardly a laughing matter.

This however requires us to take North Korea seriously, and points to one of the lessons of the Cold War—that nuclear weapons may not bring peace, but they certainly make war less likely, as long as people retain a shred of rationality.

This phenomenon has always been exploited by those nuclear weapons states that are unhappy with the status quo, and they pursue their interests in such a way as to avoid all-out war, but hard enough so that they pressure the other side. There were many examples of "limited war" during the Cold War, where one nuclear power or another used force of subversion to gain a tactical advantage or just to wear down an adversary, the most sensational recent event of this nature was Pakistan's calculated provocation at Kargil in 1999, which has led to much Indian theorizing about "war beneath the nuclear threshold," or in the language of the 1950s and 1960s, limited war.

Militarily, however, there is a new kind of limited war; which has been given the name of "asymmetrical" war. This is limited war by a dispersed enemy against a targeted (but weak) state. This it does not mean that the militarily weaker side *cannot* gain the advantage, because it may be the organizationally more powerful side. In a war where the population is the battlefield it is organization, not firepower, that counts. This is the lesson that McChrystal and Petraeus are trying to impart to our forces in Afghanistan.

So, to sum up: despite 9/11 and other atrocities, the new kind of war does not have the potential for destruction and catastrophe in the United States on the scale of even a tiny nuclear war, let alone an extended conventional war. However, it does have this potential in states that are themselves weak, which have been damaged badly by negative globalization, and which are corrupt and incompetent. In such places, the appeal of the Taliban or the Jihadis rings true: "We can provide justice, we can help the poor, and we will create a society in which all Muslims are truly equal." It's a latter-day Marxism or Maoism or Stalinism, but it does not appeal to non-Muslims nor to huge swaths of Muslims; their 7th century theories of the economy, let alone justice, do not bear scrutiny today. This is a movement that can appeal only to the most dysfunctional and marginal Muslim states, and to the narrow band of middle-class Islamic malcontents whose social background compares with the middle-progenitors of other totalitarian movements.

II: A brief thought experiment

Let's look down the road three or four years. There are now two wars being fought in South Asia. I exclude India's struggle against Maoist rebels - this is connected sociologically with Pakistan's and Afghanistan's problems, but not politically linked because of the Islamic factor in the latter two.

The first war is being fought by the United States and International Security Assistance Force against the Taliban in Afghanistan. This is an important war, but primarily because of its impact on the second war, that being fought by the Pakistan army against the Pakistan Taliban and, potentially, against Taliban-like movements in Punjab and elsewhere in the state.

The situation is a little complicated because Pakistan is supporting both sides in Afghanistan. It has embedded interests there, and would not like to see the Taliban vanquished unless those interests are protected. Thus, as the war continues in Afghanistan, Pakistan will try to ensure that either the Afghan Taliban or some other groups remain influential in Afghanistan to protect Pakistan's interests. This is bad news, but so is the prospect of a defeat of the Afghan Taliban, for that might revive the old Afghan-Pakistan rivalry over the creation of a Pashtunistan. Were it not for India's engagement, this would be an important but not a strategic matter, but Pakistan will continue to shape an Afghan policy that has as one of its main planks the exclusion of Indian influence to its west.

Thus, whether the Taliban win or lose, the India-Pakistan rivalry will persist, and will shape Pakistani policy. Islamabad could attempt to dominate Afghanistan through the Taliban, if we let it, or conversely, if the Taliban are comprehensively defeated, Pakistan will still be faced with India pressure on both of its borders, while attempting to quell a home-grown Islamist movement in at least two of its provinces.

Finally, there's a "long war" being waged between India and Pakistan. It has involved several hot wars, many crises, and is now totally nuclearized, in that calculations during the next crisis will factor in the possibility of escalation to nuclear war. This plays into the hands of the Jihadis, who would like nothing more than to trigger a new India-Pakistan war--they hate both countries equally. Thus, wishful thinking about the success of a new "peace process" is exactly that - it will be very difficult for the leadership on both sides to simultaneously agree on any significant outstanding issues, and it will be very easy for the disrupters on both sides to ensure that any such agreement is blasted up by a new terrorist outrage.

In short, all of the options are bad. This brings me to my third theme, finding a policy regarding Pakistan.

III: Option, Option, Who's Got the Option?

Right now "Option A" regarding Pakistan is to look the other way, even if Islamabad has "friendly" relations with the Afghan Taliban. The working assumption seems to be that Pakistan's role is not determinative to the conflict in Afghanistan. Option A also involves considerable support for Pakistan against its own Taliban, and massive and unprecedented economic aid in the form of the much-reviled-in-Pakistan Kerry-Lugar bill (frankly, if they don't want it they don't have to take it). The assumption of Kerry-Lugar is that a failed Pakistan would be calamitous for the United States, given its size, its location, and above all, its nuclear weapons. This is Pakistan as another North Korea: too nuclear to fail. The third component of Option A is a dollop of hope, but hope is no more a policy than are good intentions.

But there may be other policy options. Let me list a few, including some that would be catastrophic, because we may yet stumble into one or more of them:

Option B would be to bring in the Indians to "balance" Pakistan by providing an alternative land route to Afghanistan, and to demonstrate that Pakistani threats to cut off the supply lines there can be circumvented. I won't go into details, but this is what many Pakistani strategists believe we are doing anyway after the U.S.-India nuclear agreement. We aren't, but it is still worth thinking through.

Option C would be more dramatic, and assumes the worst case scenario in Pakistan. It would be a policy of containment. After we discover that our aid package will not have much of an impact, and that Pakistani nationalism trumps Pakistani national interest, and the United States remains the most hated country in Pakistan, should we then treat it like an enemy and contain it, bringing in the Indians - although no one has asked the Indians whether they want the job?

Option D is truly crazy: it is the Ralph Peters option, which is to break up Pakistan. I'll just ask one obvious question: who would gain custody of the (nuclear) children? The idea that Pakistan will either give up their 100-plus weapons, or that we can strip Pakistan of them, is bizarre.

Option E tackles Pakistan's core security concerns, and finally offers to Islamabad what Pakistanis have been asking for forty years: a full-scope security guarantee that would cover the threat to India. This would make perfect sense if Pakistan were a status quo power vis à vis India: the nuclear weapons in the hands of both countries ensure (I hope) that there will be no major war between them, but it would also require Pakistan to cease its irredentist ambitions regarding Kashmir.

Option F would be a comprehensive policy that would place India at the center of South Asia, with the United States working in partnership with New Delhi to "fix" Afghanistan and Pakistan, once and for all. It is simple and it puts the United States on the side of a rising power, but has anyone asked the Indians whether they want this role?

Finally, Option G is, offshore balancing, or cut and run. We have no real interests in South Asia, an advocate might argue, the region has a billion people - Tom Friedman says that these regions eventually work out their difficulties without American intervention. Others point to scarce resources, and argue that the South Asian states can manage their affairs reasonably well. All we need to do is to tilt one way or another from time to time to maintain the regional balance and to step in to prevent a nuclear war every four or five years.

So, it's back to option A, perhaps the least worst of all bad choices. However, I don't think it is adequate, and might benefit from some of the ideas presented here. Politics is an experimental, not a theoretical science. Let's see how this experiment plays out over the next two years, but let's also be prepared to think of a policy change that better protects and advances American interests.

I await your questions and comments.