

U.S. Relations with Pakistan

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It's a tremendous pleasure and honor to be here tonight. Thank you all for coming. It's great to have such a great crowd, no matter if you're here for credit or if you're here because you're just interested in what I have to say. As I told Emil Nagengast, my goal is not to stand up here and just lecture on and on. I want to talk for a little while and hopefully provoke some conversation and get some questions. It's interesting but sometimes very complicated stuff.

I just had a great dinner with a few students, and it helped stimulate some of my thinking and even change a little bit about what I was going to talk about tonight. I think it will all connect. I guess the first scary thing I heard at dinner from the students was that they were in fourth grade when the September 11th attacks happened. I assume all of you were roughly in the same grade; you were young. I want to start with a question: Since September 11th, where has the United States been at war—in what countries? Where have the big wars been? Afghanistan and Iraq, right?

Actually, I would say that we have been at war in a lot more places than anyone thinks about or knows about. What has happened over the last ten years is that it has become easier and easier to do a certain type of war that looks a lot different than what you saw in Iraq and Afghanistan, or what you saw in World War II movies. The way the United States goes to war now has a lot more to do with the CIA, spies, special operations troops, drones, and private contractors—all the ways you go to war when you can't send in American troops.

One of the things that has been very interesting to me has been questions like the following. If you can't send the Marines into a country like we could in Iraq or Afghanistan, how do you go to war, and where do you go to war? I would contend a far greater part of the history of war over the last decade has taken place outside of Afghanistan and outside of Iraq. That's not measured by casualties or number of American soldiers killed. But the United States has certainly been at war in a far larger part of the globe than in just those two countries.

I decided to focus on Pakistan at first and I want to spend a fair amount of time talking about Pakistan, mainly because Pakistan has become the laboratory for this kind of warfare. I want to open up with a little anecdote that some of you may remember from a year ago, but others may not. It got a little bit overshadowed two months later when Osama bin Laden was killed. But in 2011, there was an American guy, Raymond Davis, driving down a street in Lahore in eastern Pakistan. He was driving in a

car on a crowded street when, all of a sudden, two people approached him—people he thought were trying to rob him. He took out a gun, shot through the windshield, and killed the two people he thought were robbing him. He called for help and a mysterious SUV came up to try to rescue him. In an unsuccessful rescue attempt, the SUV killed a person on the street and then screeched away. Three people were dead and the American guy was in a bind. He was by himself. He ended up getting arrested, and so there was this American who just shot two people sitting in jail in Lahore.

As it turned out, this guy was working for the CIA. The Obama administration spent about a month trying to deny this fact. They claimed that he worked for the State Department and demanded that this guy be released. He was eventually released, but only after a secret deal was cut between the U.S. and Pakistan.

What this episode confirmed was what Pakistanis suspected for quite some time: the United States has a pretty significant secret army inside Pakistan. Guys like Raymond Davis who had been in the military (but were no longer in the military) had worked for a private contractor previously known as Blackwater. Some of you may know of Blackwater; some may not. They have since changed their name to Xe Services. They were a big private security firm that sent a lot of its people to Afghanistan and Iraq to guard bases—and to go to places like Pakistan. Davis was then hired as a contractor by the CIA.

It turns out that Raymond Davis and a lot of other people like him were inside Pakistan spying, gathering information to hunt for people. Pakistanis didn't know it because all these people came into the country under different visas. They'd been admitted to the country under the pretense that they were diplomatic workers or other occupations. I've given this long explanation in part to show from this Raymond Davis episode—which in many ways has been forgotten—that the United States is very much at war inside a country that we're not at war with. The United States is not at war with Pakistan; we are an ally of Pakistan. Yet so much of what we do as a country takes place without the Pakistani government's understanding or approval, though some of it does receive Pakistan's approval.

But what happened that led up to this Raymond Davis episode was ten years of mistrust and increasingly poor relations between the United States and Pakistan, despite how important this relationship is for both countries. CIA drone strikes now happen in the mountains of western Pakistan nearly every week—sometimes every day. Just west of the city of Peshawar are the tribal areas of Pakistan, which border Afghanistan. The CIA is very much at war there and carrying out these kinds of secret operations—secret drone strikes—that are not acknowledged publicly, but that are very much how the U.S. conducts its business.

So how did we get there? How did we get to this way of the U.S. conducting its business? How did we get to a CIA guy driving around Lahore posing as a diplomat, carrying a gun, and spying on a country that the U.S. is allegedly allies with? Well, it's a lot longer story than I can tell in this period of

time, but suffice it to say that the short answer is basically because we stopped trusting Pakistan and Pakistan stopped trusting us. The war in Afghanistan began a month after the September 11th attacks. So the war began and we knew that Osama bin Laden and the Taliban were in Afghanistan. But as soon as the United States entered Afghanistan in war, the U.S. was pretty sure bin Laden and the Taliban were going to go east into Pakistan. The question was, how do we find these people? The easy answer was, we should work with the Pakistanis, their military, and their spy service to pick these people up. For several years there were good relations between their spies and our spies. They worked in the tribal areas and picked up some of Osama bin Laden's people—al Qaeda operatives—in large part because it was in their interest to do so. Pakistan did not have a love of al Qaeda; in fact, they were worried about them. It was in their own interest to pick these people up.

Things got really complicated with all these other groups in the west that Pakistan wasn't really sure about. Pakistan is a lot closer to these groups than they are to al Qaeda. These are groups that historically Pakistan has relied on for their defense. They are groups like the Taliban—many different groups—and for years and years Pakistan has relied on these militant groups as basically their security in the west. Pakistan didn't want to put troops there—primarily because it wanted to put all of its troops on the border with India—so it paid off these groups to provide security. For years and years, and still so today, pretty much all Pakistan cares about is India. They both have nuclear weapons, there's a long history of rivalry, they've both gone to war a couple of times, and they've both been very close to using nuclear weapons against each other at couple of times. Basically, Pakistan wants to put all of its troops in the east and not worry about the west.

So what the Pakistani government did was effectively pay off these militant groups not to attack them. However, if the government ever needed their help in a pinch, it could then rely on them. The problem was that all these groups then became aligned with al Qaeda. As all of the al Qaeda guys and Taliban guys moved east from Afghanistan after the war started, they all began mixing in the mountains. All of a sudden you had groups that Pakistan's intelligence services historically supported mixing with al Qaeda (which is the reason the United States got involved in Afghanistan in the first place). Then the question was, what do we do about these guys? Well, Pakistan said, "Some of these guys we need, but others we don't. But how do you distinguish them?" Over time, this sort of very complicated relationship poisoned the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan. The U.S. stopped trusting Pakistan. Despite the earlier period when the CIA and Pakistani spy service worked together, over time the U.S. became convinced that Pakistan was tipping off the militants. For example, when the U.S. wanted to do a raid, all these guys would mysteriously disappear right before the raid happened.

In 2008, the United States decided that we're going to do this on our own. We're going to carry out a unilateral war inside of Pakistan. We're going to launch a series of drone strikes. These are drones

that are piloted. The pilots work outside of Las Vegas, Nevada, and they pilot the planes that are being flown over Pakistan. Technology was developed in 1999, 2000, and 2001 that allowed this kind of new warfare to explode. So, in 2008 the U.S. said, “We’re going to do this and not tell anyone.” Since then, under President Bush and President Obama, there have been hundreds of drone strikes in a relatively small part of Pakistan. But these strikes have been very, very intense.

This leaves a host of unanswered questions. What happens? Who gets killed? Who doesn’t get killed? Are the strikes successful or not? The problem is that we don’t know. In this kind of war we’re now waging, it’s nearly impossible to tell who’s winning, who’s losing, who’s getting killed, and who’s not getting killed. It’s done in secret with each strike; it’s not acknowledged by the U.S. government. It’s very hard for reporters to get in and figure out what’s going on. So, after each individual strike, we’ll never know whether some civilians were killed or not. This is kind of where we are right now. What led to the Raymond Davis arrest was this mistrust and the decision by the U.S. to wage a war unilaterally.

Let’s go back to Raymond Davis for a second. Raymond Davis was released in March of 2011. He had spent about two months in jail. The CIA was furious about their guy getting imprisoned, and they authorized a very significant drone strike to take place the day after his release. Now, this is not to say that they did it out of revenge; we don’t know. But there are a lot of people in the U.S. government who think that it was revenge. By any measure, it was a massive drone strike that killed many people. What is particularly controversial about this is that even inside the U.S. government, there’s a belief that significant numbers of civilians were killed. There is also some degree of suspicion that the CIA was reckless in carrying out this strike, in part because they were so angry that their guy had spent two months in prison. That’s certainly the suspicion of some people I’ve spoken to.

Two months later, the Osama bin Laden raid happened. The U.S. went all the way into Abbottabad and Osama bin Laden was killed there. That’s deep into central Pakistan, and that’s a lot further than any other U.S. military operation. The U.S. government suspected that some in the Pakistani government knew he was there, and that’s when things really start going downhill and have been downhill ever since. But the really bad part started with the Raymond Davis episode.

So Pakistan remains a laboratory for how we’re doing things now. For the next few minutes, I want to describe how this is now expanding. The things the United States has been doing—these types of drone strikes and intelligence operations—are now being duplicated in other parts of the world. But really, it has been tested in the past decade in Pakistan. Yemen is another place where the United States wants to go to war, but can’t send troops. Yemen is next to Saudi Arabia and it’s a really poor country next to a really, really rich country. It has some of the same problems as parts of Pakistan: the government’s not very strong, militant groups have come in, and the U.S. feels a threat.

Does anyone remember in 2009 when a guy tried to blow up an airplane with a bomb in his

underwear over Detroit? Fortunately, that plot was unsuccessful. But that guy was sent by a group in Yemen that is an affiliate of al Qaeda. In many ways the U.S. is now more concerned with this group in Yemen than with the guys who are left in Pakistan. So the sort-of-secret war is starting to shift away from Pakistan to Yemen and parts of North Africa such as Libya and Somalia. These are countries where there has not been a government to take care of its militant problem. The U.S. sees a threat and has decided to take care of this threat, whether it's with special operations or drones. This is the new model of war.

A lot of you know, of course, about the Arab Spring, which is all of these governments in the Middle East and North Africa starting to fall. These were dictatorships that had that had been in place for years and years. Well, the good thing was that these dictators were gone. The concern among some American officials was that afterwards, some of the militant groups that the dictators had suppressed came in. So that's why we now hear more about Libya and Mali, a country that few Americans had ever thought about before. Now people are saying, "What's going to happen in Mali?" Is what's going on in Pakistan going to shift to Mali? I wouldn't be surprised if it's already happening. I don't think there are drone strikes in Mali. I don't think the administration has made a decision about it, but I certainly think it could happen.

Before I take questions, let me close by discussing what this all means. Now that we go to war in secret, there are a lot of questions about accountability. How do we know what's being carried out if there's no public discussion? An interesting thing has happened to the CIA; it's in the process of transforming into a man-hunting military organization. What is the CIA *supposed* to do? The CIA is supposed to spy. It's supposed to go to other countries, collect intelligence, analyze it, and give it to the president and tell him what's going on in the world. Instead, what's happened increasingly in the last decade is that the CIA has become a tool for carrying out the secret war: drone strikes in Pakistan, drone strikes in Yemen, strikes in Somalia.

The more the CIA is doing this kind of operation, the less it's doing its traditional mission of finding out what's going on in the world. During the Arab Spring, we all seemed to be really surprised that these dictators were all falling one after another; there was Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen. One of the problems was that the CIA really didn't know what was going on either. It was as surprised as a lot of people that all these dictatorships were falling. The problem with that is that the CIA is supposed to be the one who knows in advance in order to inform the Congress and the President of what may happen. So with this secret war, there is a risk—beyond the risks that we've been talking of with drone warfare—that the Central Intelligence Agency may get too far away from its mission: intelligence. If we really need a CIA, it's to tell us what's going on in the world or to tell the President what's going on in the world. There's what's called an opportunity cost: the more you are doing of one thing, the less you are doing of another.

What you've seen is that there's a whole generation of people who graduated from college right after 9/11 who wanted to go and serve and join the government. Some joined the military; some joined the CIA. A lot of people who were in your position eleven years ago have gone through the ranks of the CIA and all they know is this type of mission. If there is a danger, it's that they don't have some of the traditional skills, which include going into a country like Russia or China and just collecting information—it's not hunting and killing. So that's another interesting element of what's happened in the last eleven years: the CIA has started to look a lot like the military. I don't think it's going to change. My suspicion is that the CIA is going to continue this model of war, at least in the near future.

So, I'm going to stop now, and I hope that this has been informative. I know there's a lot I didn't cover, but I wanted to leave a lot of time for questions and see what you have to say.