

Pakhtun Relevance
Address to Afghan/Pakhtun Gathering
Anti-Durand Line
Dr. Richard L. Benkin
October 27, 2017
London, England, U.K.

The past century has been a time when freedom's children have lurched from one epic struggle to another; struggles which freedom survived: against kings, nobility, and the notion of a divine right to rule; against fascism and ideas of superior and inferior peoples; against communism and the belief that the end justifies the means, any end so long as it's mine; any means so long as I am the one to use it. Today, as we battle radical Islam, we fight all three of those notions.

- Against Imams and Ayatollahs who claim that their rights to despotism come from Allah.
- Against those who consider non-Muslims *kaffirs* and infidels who have no rights, and Muslims unlike themselves as apostates and heretics.
- And against those who cower behind the idiotic notion that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter."

In that epic struggle, those here today—my Pukhtun brothers—can be the key to freedom's victory; or can be completely irrelevant. And let me explain what I mean by that.

As we look around the room today, we see allies; but that is not what the rest of the world sees. If Westerners know anything about the Pakhtun, it is that they fill the ranks of South Asia's Islamist groups. Like it or not, the perception is real; like it or not, we cannot deny that Pakhtun are over represented among the terrorists. So we can allow the radical fringe to define us, or we can *do something* about it—define ourselves and change this inaccurate perception. And we do this with aggressive outreach and education; and with action.

The outreach program requires several elements:

- Experts, good speakers and writers who will go where needed to educate.
- A coherent theme, not a dry recitation of facts, slogans, or things people already know.
- A coherent message in addition to a theme. Some of our adversaries have done well by hammering a false message wrapped in words we all support. They have co-opted the language of human rights, and we can take it back with a message worthy of the words.
- A definite audience: politicians, religious communities, schools, media.
- Being ready to respond when events trigger opportunities (e.g., a terrorist attack, the bombing of a mosque, Pashtun bravery against radicals, Pakistani duplicity).

As an American, I believe that our chances for justice depend on winning American support, which is something I know how to do; but it's not easy.

One day several years ago, I went to see a Congressman who was working with me on a human rights issue. When I entered the office, I saw his Chief of Staff with a human rights activist who was showing her videos on his laptop. The videos were heart wrenching: victimized minorities; ransacked homes; scenes that I have seen close-up. But that's not she saw. She and others on Capitol Hill see similar tragedies all the time. This was nothing she hadn't seen before. This person is not unfeeling. She's acutely aware of the plight of minorities, and has extended herself many times to help. I also know the human rights activist. He is a good man who puts himself in danger constantly to save those who are being persecuted. The things he was showing were accurate, as was the point he wanted to make. Unfortunately, he never got a chance to make that point effectively because while they were important to him, it was not clear why the Congressman should devote his limited resources to that cause over others.

Making that case is critical, and if the cause is just, which ours is, there are many ways to do it, but you need to understand the immediate priorities of the American people and how supporting you promotes them. Since 9/11, much of US foreign policy has been driven by the need to defeat radical Islam. Yet despite the initial action in Afghanistan and the ongoing conflict there; most attention on it has been in the Middle East; recently, the impending defeat

of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS); the growing alliance of Sunni Muslim nations, often working with Israel to stop Iranian expansion; and the geo-political roles played by the United States and Russia.

Increasingly, however, American policy-makers are recognizing that South Asia is the next important arena for this struggle. As I have said numerous times, though we will defeat ISIS and run it out of the Middle East, the terrorist group already has found a welcoming home in South Asia. Add to that, the rise of a friendly India, the decline of US-Pakistan relations, and China's expansion in the region; and there are further opportunities to cast the issues we face in a context that advances American interests, as well.

If you are not an American, you might well ask, "Why should I care whether or not I further US interests?"

And there is no reason in and of itself; but if you want US officials to select your cause over others and US taxpayers to spend their hard-earned dollars on it, you have a very good reason to care. So what are those interests and priorities, and how do they relate to South Asia?

- **First, to prevent Afghanistan and South Asia from again becoming terror havens our enemies can plan attacks on the United States.** Not doing this risks a return to pre-9/11 Afghanistan, home to the Taliban and Al Qaeda; to Mullah Mohammad Umar and Osama bin Laden. Americans have not forgotten that the attack on them was planned and prepared in Afghanistan, and its mastermind and terrorist leader was sheltered for years after the attack in Pakistan. There has not been any significant military action on the US homeland since the US Civil War in the mid-nineteenth century, and Americans want to keep it that way. Threats against the US posed by radical Islamists are unacceptable to Americans, and eliminating them is the number one priority in our foreign policy. Show how you can further that and you will get a serious hearing.

- **Second, to defeat radical Islam; the open and active terrorists, and those who give them shelter, support, or ideological cover.** This is *not* a battle against Islam, which is a religion that goes back 14 centuries. It is a war to defeat *radical* Islam, which is a political philosophy dating back less than two. Being able to tell who represents one vs. the other is a critical component that victory. Muslim allies represent the best in that quest to Americans, and we are getting better at not letting false “moderates” fool us into thinking they are our friends. The need to distinguish those who wish us ill from those who do not is the essence of my book *What is Moderate Islam*. How can you help us in that?
- **Third, to maintain some level of US influence in South Asia even after the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan.** US influence is waning in Pakistan; growing in India. What about Afghanistan and the various peoples struggling to break free from Pakistani occupation? Can Pakhtun, Baloch, and Sindhi unite? That’s also something I’m working on this week.
- **Fourth, to stop Chinese expansion in the region, which has been proceeding slowly but consistently during the years of a less aggressive US foreign policy.** Examples of Chinese expansionism in the region are: the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); Chinese troops occupying parts of Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh in India; Chinese control over major sources of Afghan mineral wealth; and the Chinese workers (as opposed to local ones) that are flooding into areas of CPEC activity.
- **Fifth, to stop Iranian expansion in the region.** Iran is an open exporter of terror whose leaders have articulated a foreign policy that seeks the destruction of the United States of America, and its most critical ally, Israel. Iran has meddled in internal Afghan matters in an attempt to exploit Sunni-Shia divides, and Taliban terrorists fall right into their trap with attacks on Hazara and other Shiites. CPEC will make Pakistan a Chinese proxy, and its successful completion threatens to bring about an alliance between Iran and China.

Gaining US aid and support requires that requests be cast in a compelling argument that shows how it will further one or more of the above priorities.

Let's take for example, several predominantly Muslim nationalities struggling for their rights—Pashtun, Baloch, and Sindhi. Umar Duad Khattak is a Pashtun activist from Khyber Pashtunkhwa. When he was eight years old, his father—a Taliban supporter—enrolled him in a madrassa where he spent ten years. In my book, *What is Moderate Islam*, he writes that radical Islam's "current target... is to defeat nationalism among the Muslims who do not want to be merged into a global Islamic Caliphate." Muslims like others have multiple elements to their identity—country, ethnic group, *and* religion among others. Radical Islam wants everything but Islam to be incidental in a Muslim's identity; for Muslims to see themselves first to last as Muslim. Our efforts on behalf of Pashtun directly threaten what radicals want to impose on everyone else. Empowering these people and supporting them in their struggle is one of the most effective ways to defeat radical Islamists and their ideology of a supreme Muslim *ummah*; and presenting potential supporters with a plan that does so is likely to get a fair hearing. Do you see how that works?

President Donald Trump has said that he wants to work with others to defeat our common enemies; to defend American interests without US troops or misguided attempts at nation-building. We are "not nation-building again," he said. "We are killing terrorists." He also has clarified tighter and better defined US expectations of the Afghan and Pakistani governments. The speech and recent US actions emphasized our priorities; and supporting a detailed plan for minority empowerment in both countries will further the aims of current US foreign policy.

Americans have no desire to determine how South Asians rule themselves. We are not looking to do what European colonizers previously did in creating nations according to their interests. When the terrorists are defeated—and they will be so don't be on the wrong side of a fight—and artificial states like Pakistan are re-constituted so justice applies equally to all peoples living

there; what will this part of the world look like? What sort of political and geo-political structures will replace those currently in place? That is up to the peoples of South Asia, not the Europeans who threw together the current countries and drew maps that satisfied their interests.

Thank you.