



*Pilar Requena*

*Associate Professor of International Relations at the Complutense University of Madrid and journalist at TVE*

## AHMED RASHID BOOK REVIEW. PAKISTAN ON THE BRINK: THE FUTURE OF PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN AND THE WEST.

**Author: Ahmed Rashid**

**Pages: 302**

**ISBN: 978-84-9942-254-1**

**Publisher in Spain: Península**

**A**s the writer points out in the preface to the book, this is his third book on “the wars in Afghanistan, and on political developments in Pakistan and Central Asia, framed by the U.S. administrations that have tried to tackle these issues”. While living in the Pakistani city of Lahore, Ahmed Rashid witnessed the wars and political events in the region, and in Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular, for three decades.

“Pakistan on the Brink” is part of a trilogy that began with “Taliban”, which became a bestseller after the September 11 attacks and was one of the only books on the movement at the time; it recounts events as seen through the eyes of this on-the-ground reporter. We believe we are not mistaken in saying that Rashid’s first book is a truly analytical account of events and that this is perhaps also true of his most recent book and earlier one, “Descent into Chaos”. The chapters of the book can be read at random or in order and, while it is not essential, it is recommended you read the author’s previous works in order to familiarise yourself with the present situation and gain a more in-depth understanding of a part of the world, the birthplace of Al

Qaeda, which, to use the words of Rashid, “remains beset by extremist groups and nuclear weapons”.

In Rashid’s two previous books, he made it crystal clear that the all-powerful Pakistani intelligence agency, ISI, had allowed the Afghan Taliban to reside in Pakistan-based sanctuaries after they were defeated and driven out of Afghanistan in 2001. Here they managed to regroup and prepare for their comeback in 2003. Despite the title, “Pakistan on the Brink”, this country is not the only focus of the third book in the trilogy; indeed, it would be impossible to analyse the current situation in Afghanistan without also looking at the history of Pakistan and vice versa. Nevertheless, it does include an in-depth analysis of everything he believes is not working in Pakistan, and he exposes and adds to the list of incompetencies he attributed to the United States in his earlier book, “Descent into Chaos”.

In addition, he makes it clear that the Obama administration has been just as incompetent in dealing with the Afghanistan situation as the two previous Bush administrations. And the feeling that underlies his analysis of the situation in the country is one of absolute desolation. The support given by the ISI to the Afghan Taliban and their allies has not only worsened relations with the United States (which reached a point of maximum tension with the death of Bin Laden - the event that opens the book), it has also led to the Pakistani Taliban, even more extremist and jihad than their Afghan counterparts, getting out of control. Their aim is to overthrow the Pakistani government, and they are at war with the army and the ISI, pushing Pakistan to the edge of an abyss. Rashid recalls the frustration of a number of historic Afghan Taliban leaders at Pakistan’s determination to hamper talks between Afghanistan and the United States.

The author also points out that, apart from the Afghan dimension, there are other internal problems facing Pakistan. Rashid explains how the country’s erroneous political strategy, based on its military doctrine, has given rise to the disastrous situation of the country today and blames senior army officers for this.

In short, the book aims to get to the root of the problems facing these two countries, captives of religious fanaticism: politics, senseless violence and, above all, large-scale corruption.

As a warning to those who believe that the withdrawal of international troops will not lead to greater insecurity or instability, or chaos or civil war, the author points out that we are taking a huge risk if we ignore the efforts aimed at establishing peace and stability in the two countries, and reminds readers that Afghanistan and Pakistan “have a greater impact on global stability than anywhere else”. In the last chapter, Rashid outlines the attitudes and policies that the different stakeholders need to change if the region is to be saved from further disaster. However, the preceding pages of this book and his earlier works suggest that the chances of these changes taking place are slim.

While Rashid finds it hard to be optimistic, he does not want to close the window of hope for peace altogether. This hope is born out of his thorough knowledge of the

region and his authoritative and influential contacts. For our part, we are inclined to suspect that it is also born out of a love for his country, which flows from every page.

In the preface, the author expresses his hope that “younger readers will one day read my trilogy as a single document that covers a terrible period of mankind’s history, from which crucial lessons were learned that made it impossible to repeat such death and destruction”. In addition, this book is a must read for all those wishing to become better acquainted with this part of the world and, above all, anyone who has the power to decide on the fate of these two countries today or in the immediate future. I will never tire of saying that it is necessary to be familiar with the past in order to understand the present and prepare for the future. And Rashid’s trilogy can assist us in this task.