

# Nygaard Notes

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### Another Secret Survey! This One from 2009

*A couple of issues back I re-published a 2001 story about a Gallup Poll of citizens in 37 countries around the world, which showed that “just two weeks before the United States launched its ill-fated military attack on Afghanistan, perhaps the weakest country in the world, somewhere between 70 and 90 percent of the world’s people, as near as we can figure, opposed that attack.”*

*I referred to this poll as the “secret survey,” because it went almost entirely unreported in the United States. A number of you were very interested in this secret survey,*

*so I thought you might enjoy another Nygaard Notes essay about another secret survey by the Gallup people. This essay appeared originally in November of 2009, in NN #443. It’s sort of a two-part story, and the second part talks about this other secret survey, although this time I referred to it as a “non-story.” Looking back, I should have called this one a “secret survey,” as well, as I think it sounds catchier. Oh, well, I think you’ll like it anyway. Set your time machine for November 25 2009 and get ready to read the following essay, which was entitled:*

### **“They Are Focused on Who They Think Are Threats to Them. Period.”**

I don’t claim to know what is going on in Pakistan, but it’s clear that whatever is going on, it’s substantially different than what most people in the United States seem to think is going on. I’m beginning to suspect that people who try to follow the news about Pakistan may be more confused than people who don’t follow it much at all. A couple of recent news stories—or, rather, one story and one non-story—illustrate how it is that people who follow the news often end up being confused rather than informed.

The story to which I refer appeared on the front page of the November 16<sup>th</sup> New York Times under the headline “U.S. Asks More From Pakistan In Terror War.” Here’s the lead paragraph:

*The Obama administration is stepping up pressure on Pakistan to expand and reorient its fight against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, warning that failing to do so would undercut the new strategy and troop increase for Afghanistan that President Obama is preparing to approve, American officials say.”*

Observant readers might notice that there is some dissonance between the headline, in which The World’s Only Superpower (TWOS) “asks” a small country for a favor, and the article itself, which speaks (more

accurately) of “stepping up pressure” on that country. But we’ll leave that aside for the moment.

For now I want to focus on what appeared to be the main point of the Times story, which was to discuss the idea that “Pakistan is returning to center stage in [Obama] administration planning,” despite Afghanistan getting most of the media attention here in No. America.

The Times says that “American officials have praised Pakistan’s leaders for finally launching comprehensive military attacks against Taliban forces,” and adds, “But the Americans are now trying . . . to persuade Pakistan to do more,” and “not just against the Qaeda leadership, but also against the Afghan Taliban leadership.”

The following paragraph is worth quoting in full:

*Representative Jane Harman, a California Democrat who heads the House Homeland Security subcommittee on intelligence and who visited Pakistan last week, summed up the administration’s frustrations and her own after meetings with senior Pakistani officials: ‘They are focused on who they think are threats to them. Period.’*

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Greetings,

One basic dynamic that we would do well to keep in mind when thinking about Afghanistan—or any other focus of the so-called War on Terror—is the way that power differentials affect our vision. That is, in a power hierarchy, the people below see (and experience) things differently than do those above. Things that, to the powerful, seem harmless, normal, or “just the way it is,” can often be seen by those less powerful to be harmful, disturbing, or terrifying.

And so it is with the ongoing War on Terror. Acts aimed at “terrorists” may seem righteous to those living in the Empire, but may seem to those on the receiving end to be something else entirely. For example, “Operation Enduring Freedom” was for years the official name used by the U.S. government for the Global War on Terrorism. After reading this issue of Nygaard Notes, one may imagine that the people of Pakistan have another name entirely for this endless war.

On August 29<sup>th</sup> a drone strike in Kabul killed as many as 10 civilians, including seven children. Even as reports of civilian casualties emerged, the top U.S. general had described the attack as “righteous”. Last week the Pentagon “apologized” for the strike, calling it a “tragic mistake”.

The Costs of War project at Brown University reported this month that the cost of the U.S. Global War on Terror now stands at \$8 trillion and 900,000 deaths. The decision in 2001 to launch this costly and deadly war was the real tragic mistake here, the mistake from which so many mistakes have arisen, and continue to arise. I think it’s time to stop apologizing for the Empire, and start working to end it.

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### Threats *from page 1*

The Times thus reports that leaders of TWOS are “frustrated” that a sovereign country might make their own assessment of the threats they face and how to address them. By allowing this blatant statement of the Imperial Mindset to pass without comment, the Times accepts and, perhaps inadvertently, reinforces such thinking. But that’s not the worst of it. And here’s where we come to the non-story I mentioned above.

### The Non-Story: We Are the Threat

The non-story that gives meaning to the above story came out in early August [2009]. When I say it was a non-story, I mean that it was not covered by the U.S. media. It was fairly-well covered elsewhere in the world, certainly in Pakistan. The story was the release of a Gallup Poll, conducted in Pakistan at the end of July and released to the world on August 10<sup>th</sup>. The poll was commissioned by the Al Jazeera news network (which may explain why it was ignored by the U.S. media), and it asked a number of illuminating questions. The key one in the current context is the question Gallup asked relating to “the administration’s frustrations” about the stubborn insistence of the

Pakistanis to “focus on who they think are threats to them. Period.” Here is the Gallup Question as it was asked of the Pakistani survey respondents:

*Question: Some people believe that the (Pakistani) Taliban are the greatest threat to the country, some believe India is the greatest threat, whereas some believe US is the greatest threat. Who do you think is the greatest threat for Pakistan?*

Is India seen as the greatest threat? After all, there has been endless conflict between India and Pakistan since Pakistan was born 62 years ago, including three outright wars (in 1947, 1965, and 1971). Eighteen percent of respondents do, indeed, see India as the greatest threat to Pakistan.

As the Times reports, the Obama administration is pressuring the Pakistanis to “expand and reorient its fight” against what the U.S. apparently considers to be the greatest threat to itself, and that is the threat posed by the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Are these also seen by Pakistanis as the greatest threats to Pakistan? No, only eleven percent of Pakistanis identified the Taliban as the greatest threat. (Al-Qaeda wasn’t even mentioned.)

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→→ What, then, do Pakistanis consider to be the greatest threat to Pakistan? 59 percent of Pakistani poll respondents said it is . . . The United States of America.

While this is important information in itself, it's even more important when considered in light of the "frustrations" expressed by U.S. leaders about Pakistani officials who are "focused on who they think are threats to them." Bizarre, no?

Here's another comment in the Times story that inadvertently sheds light on the bizarreness:

*Every time Mr. Obama declares that the United States will not have an 'open-ended' military commitment in Afghanistan, he fuels a second concern of the powerful Pakistani military and intelligence establishment, which believes the United States commitment is fleeting.*

Note that the people who are "concerned" with the idea of the U.S. leaving Pakistan are not the average people who responded to the poll. Those people—who consider the U.S. to be a grave threat—most likely would be happy to see the U.S. military "commitment" to their country come to an end. No, the people who are "concerned" are members of "the powerful Pakistani military and intelligence establishment."

People in this country who follow the news from Pakistan see the world through an Imperial lens.

Through this lens the idea that The World's Only Superpower has the right to "pressure" a small country to do its bidding may seem reasonable, even a "duty" of the democracy-loving people who manage foreign affairs.

Seen from within the Empire, Pakistan is a "remote place where nothing important really happens," in the words of Edward Luttwak, quoted elsewhere in this issue [#443]. So the only things that merit reporting are things that come from "credible" sources, which are defined as powerful people who are influential within the Empire. That's why we hear what the Obama administration says they want from Pakistan—those are powerful people. But the people of Pakistan have no power, so it merits no mention that they don't want to serve the interests of the United States—let alone that they consider the interests of the United States to be a grave threat to them!

And so it is that most of the best-informed and politically-active people within the United States are allowed to go on believing that the interests of the United States are the only interests that count in the world. And President Obama can say, as he did on November 24<sup>th</sup>, that "it is my intention to finish the job" in South Asia. The job, unfortunately, is the maintenance of an Empire, and that job will ultimately only bring massive instability, disorder, and war. ♦

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## "Quote" of the Week: Why the U.S. "Had to Leave Afghanistan"

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) made the following comment in an August 21<sup>st</sup> interview with the Afghan Women's Mission (a somewhat poor translation, sorry):

*We believe the US left Afghanistan out of its own weaknesses not defeated by its creatures (Taliban). There are two significant reasons for this withdrawal.*

*The main reason is the multifold internal crisis in the US. The signs of the US system decline was seen in the weak response to Covid-19 pandemic, attack on Capitol Hill and the great protests of the US public in the past few years. The policy-makers were forced to withdraw troops to focus on internal burning issues.*

*The second reason is that the Afghan war was an exceptionally expensive war whose cost has gone into trillions, all taken from taxpayer money. This put such a heavy dent on the US financially that it had to leave Afghanistan.*

It would be well worth your time to read the entire interview, which can be found here:  
[www.rawa.org/rawa/2021/08/21/rawa-responds-to-the-taliban-takeover.html](http://www.rawa.org/rawa/2021/08/21/rawa-responds-to-the-taliban-takeover.html)

## Useful Mythology Never Dies

The above essay focuses on a secret survey conducted in 2009. But the Wall of Myth surrounding the occupation of Afghanistan is built of many bricks, one brick of which is a powerful misconception born in 2001 that lives on today, as this brief update illustrates.

The decades-old misconception to which I refer was that the U.S. decision to attack Afghanistan, supposedly in response to the terror attacks in the U.S. in 2001, had broad support around the world. I reported at the time that a major international Gallup Poll gave the lie to that claim, showing, as it did, that large majorities in many countries opposed the U.S. attack.

That was 20 years ago, so why even bother to bring it up? Well, here is a comment that appeared in the New York Times book review published this month, on September 5, 2021. Reviewing a pair of books about Afghanistan, the Times' reviewer made this remark:

*At the start, in early October 2001, the United States rode a wave of international support following the 9/11 attacks to launch a sustained aerial campaign against Al Qaeda and the ruling Taliban and dispatched Special Operations forces to assist a resistance organization in northern Afghanistan.*

Those who were reading Nygaard Notes back in 2001 know that, whatever the “United States” was “riding,” it wasn’t “a wave of international support.” But the lifespan of useful mythology can be long, so don’t be surprised if you continue to hear this myth repeated over and over in public discussions of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, and the Global War on Terror of which it was a part.

Or perhaps I should say, “of which it IS a part.”

In the mid-afternoon of August 31<sup>st</sup>, in a formal address to the nation from the State Dining Room of the White House, President Biden delivered a 3,200-word address to the nation. About two-thirds of the way through, he uttered these twelve words: “We will maintain the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and other countries.” And yet, the official title of his address was “Remarks by President Biden on the End of the War in Afghanistan.”

What does it mean that the President of a fading—but still immensely powerful—Empire can state that “the fight” will continue in a speech supposedly about “the end of the war”? The answer lies Over the Horizon, in the next Nygaard Notes. ♦

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