

Opening Thoughts

As we confront [future] decisions, it is well to remember what is at stake. If we fail in Afghanistan, the state will fragment; there is no power center yet standing on its feet and capable of taking our place. If Afghanistan fragments, then parts of the country will again become the natural base for those who have attacked not only us but also London and Madrid and who have planned to blow up planes over the Atlantic. And a fragmented Afghanistan will become the strategic rear and base for extremism in Pakistan, a nation of 155 million people that is armed with nuclear weapons. This will allow and facilitate support for extremist movements across the huge swath of energy-rich Central Asia, as was the case in the 1990s.

—Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann, *The Other War: Winning and Losing in Afghanistan*¹

Similarly, a setback in Afghanistan would be enormously empowering to jihadists everywhere in the world but would also inflict enormous reputational damage on the United States (as the perception of U.S. failure in Iraq in 2003–2006 did). Failure after the President recommitted the United States to succeed in Afghanistan would support the notion that America is incapable of capitalizing on its military power and advantages (including the development of an extremely capable force for conducting counterinsurgency operations). It would make dealing with potential problems in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia (to name a few) enormously harder.

—Ambassador Eric Edelman, *Understanding America's Contested Primacy*²