MARGARET WARNER: And joining me is Robert Kaplan, correspondent for the Atlantic Monthly and author of many books on foreign affairs. He traveled extensively in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the late 1980's, producing a 1990 book, Soldiers of God, about the Mujahadeen fighting the soviets. His most recent book is Warrior Politics. Welcome, Bob.

ROBERT KAPLAN: It’s my pleasure to be here, Margaret.

MARGARET WARNER: Let’s first look at terrorism which of course President Bush has vowed to stamp out everywhere. You have written that terrorism is the dark side of globalization. Explain….

ROBERT KAPLAN: That’s right.

MARGARET WARNER: Explain what globalization has to do with it.

ROBERT KAPLAN: Globalization is about development. It’s about urbanization. For decades millions of Muslims have been pouring out of the villages and leaving behind, you know, a situation where religion was just a natural outgrowth of age-old practices. And rushing into these pseudo western cities where there was bad sewage, bad plumbing, you know, electricity and water systems were decaying and where family life was under attack. And in order to keep crime rates low, to keep family life stable—which they did successfully—they had to reinvent religion in starker, more ideological austere terms. This worked. So you have these cities in the Muslim world with millions of people, poor, downtrodden yet random crime is very low, almost nonexistent because the
The intensification of religiosity has worked but it’s produced an ironic situation. There is now a fertile tree dish to call it that for the emergence of disease germs like terrorists.

MARGARET WARNER: I was curious to see in the interview with General Franks his description of his area of responsibility is almost exactly the area you’ve been traveling around for the last 15, almost 20 years chronicling essentially disorder. You once wrote a big piece about the coming anarchy. Is it that bad all over this whole region?

ROBERT KAPLAN: Well, the war on terrorism has begun at a time when many regimes in that area are extremely fragile. General Franks’ area of responsibility constitutes a shatter zone of peoples and countries and borders where, you know, where ethnic identity overlaps in a… Or doesn’t overlap with legal borders. For instance, you have a number of secular nationalist states– Egypt, Iraq, Syria– where the regimes are so weak and unconfident of themselves that they can only trust their sons to succeed them. Mubarak is being groomed in Egypt. Assad has taken over with Syria. The succession battle in Iraq is between Saddam’s two sons. These regimes are bee rift of legitimacy. They have no legitimacy left whereas in Iran you have a public that is so pro American as opposed to the regime which is anti-American that Iran is like primed perfectly for Serbian-style campaign of American… Of civil disobedience. If the U.S. applies the same tactics of supplying photocopy machines and other things to the Iranian opposition that we did so successfully in Serbia.

MARGARET WARNER: But you have written in the last four months certainly that what the U.S. Should not be trying to do in this part of the world is force democracy down its throat.

ROBERT KAPLAN: Generally, yes. During World War I, the English author Joseph Conrad wrote that it’s not for democracy specifically that we’re fighting; it’s for the advancement of freedom and, you know, and tolerance in whatever form it may take and whatever place it may take.
For instance, in Egypt you have a reactionary regime but on the other hand anything that replaces it might be worse. Same in Saudi Arabia. Tunisia has an enlightened dictatorship where they enjoy more freedoms in almost anyway that you can talk about it but with the security service as dictator. We don’t necessarily want to… you know, want to hold a gun to heads of these people and say hold elections within six months. What we want to do is just generally intensify our pressure to have these places open up more and more and more.

MARGARET WARNER: Let’s look at Afghanistan. When President Bush and General Franks had a press conference just ten days ago, and that’s the one time that President Bush said I’m going to… It’s going to be time to leave when General Franks tells me. One of President Bush’s goals, however, was he said the country will be stable and secure. How realistic a goal or what standard of stability or security could we really expect about Afghanistan?

ROBERT KAPLAN: Well, the standard I would use is 1933 to 1973 when Zaire Shah was in power. Afghanistan had a central government which was rather weak. I controlled very little of the countryside and the countryside was controlled by regional governors who did their own thing much as warlords do today. And there was some development — the Soviets and the U.S., you know, were in peaceful competition building development projects. But Afghanistan was by no means ruled. It had no real centralizing authority but it was a benign anarchy is the way I would put it. If we can get back to that pre-1973 state, that would constitute a real victory, I think.

MARGARET WARNER: You paint an even bleaker view of Pakistan. You say it could be another Yugoslavia but with nuclear weapons.

ROBERT KAPLAN: Yes, Pakistan’s institutional meltdown began really during Zia el Haq’s regime in the 1980s. If anything though, our response to September 11 may have reversed that process a little bit. Because it’s provided
General Musharraf with a mechanism to hunt down a lot of destabilizing elements. Remember, Musharraf may not be democratically elected but he’s the most enlightened liberal-minded ruler Pakistan has had in decades. He’s a man who, you know, who admires others. Musharraf’s speaks Turkish. His goal for Pakistan is to do for Pakistan — what Turk did for Turkey. We’re lucky we have the kind of ruler we have. We may be able to reverse this process some more but it will be very, very difficult. You’re dealing with a country which is a family-planning nightmare, where illiteracy might as well be near zero for rural women, where the government really doesn’t control key areas of the country very well. The intelligence service may know what’s going on everywhere but that doesn’t mean it has administrative control.

MARGARET WARNER: Now, you’ve written that you thought one of the answers to all of this, you said the Islamic world needs to undergo a quiet religious reformation. That was one of the most important things.

ROBERT KAPLAN: Yes. The Islamic world needs to undergo the equivalent of what Christendom went through during the protestant reformation. That’s happened in certain places.

MARGARET WARNER: Explain what you mean by that.

ROBERT KAPLAN: It needs to reinvent religion for a modern mass society where religion can co-exist without too much contradiction, with a modern mass society. And the best example of that is what has been happening in Turkey over the past few decades. You have had Islamic parties in Turkey working within Turkey’s democracy and because of that they’ve had to make deals and back… In back rooms, sleazy compromises, but that process has led to a moderation of that Islamic intensity because the very act of making these deals with secular forces, you know, leads to a change… Leads… It leads to an adaptation of Islam. You know, if there is a Protestant style reformation going on, it’s going on in Turkey. It needs to happen in more places.
MARGARET WARNER: But you’re saying that kind of essentially political process can affect the evolution of a religion?

ROBERT KAPLAN: Yes, I think ultimately political Islam must die because political Judaism, political Christianity is all bad. When religion becomes politicized it leads to militancy and a kind of, you know, a rigid self-righteousness. So the idea is to return Islam to being a great religion out of politics to the degree that it can be.

MARGARET WARNER: So if the United States is facing all of this, what should it be looking for in these countries? What kind of regimes are best able to at least create the space in which this can happen?

ROBERT KAPLAN: Well, take Syria, for example. The best-case scenario for Syria is for there to be a benign military dictatorship supported by commercial mercantile elements because the business community spans sectarian lines, whether it’s Armenians, Sunni Arabs, Shiite Arabs, or whatever. That will gradually lead to a welding together of the various sectarian groups where you can have gradual liberalization because Syria had three or four elections in the late 40s and ’50s. It broke down along sectarian so just holding elections is not the answer, Margaret.

MARGARET WARNER: We heard General Franks say that President Bush had shown great strategic patience with the war in Afghanistan. What sort of frame of mind does he need to be in when he tries to take on, I mean, this longer war, this longer struggle?

ROBERT KAPLAN: There is nothing that President Bush is facing that the great Greek and Roman philosophers have not faced before. There are parallels everywhere. The Romans hunted down a warlord and they had to hunt him down for years until they killed him in a cave somewhere in modern-day Tunisia. That means power. You project your power first and your principles can follow later. B-52 bombs liberated Afghan women. But if you don’t project power your
principles and values have no chance to follow.

MARGARET WARNER: Robert Kaplan, thanks so much.

ROBERT KAPLAN: My pleasure.