CHAPTER 25
YOUNG AMERICANS

I flew to Kabul in a blatant attempt to be relevant. If my newspaper wanted local news, I planned to deliver. I would follow the Illinois National Guard as soldiers attempted to train the Afghan police, which was suddenly seen as critically important. Everyone had realized that the Afghan police were corrupt, incompetent, and often high. And only when they and the Afghan army got their act together could anyone leave.

This was my seventh embed, my seventh time hanging out with U.S. soldiers, my seventh version of the same drill. We met for a briefing in a plywood hut in Camp Phoenix, on the outskirts of Kabul.

"So can we shoot if they have a remote control?" one soldier asked.

"If that remote control looks like a pistol aimed at you, then I would say, light 'em up," replied the first lieutenant in charge, who then listed hot spots for roadside bombs. "Pretty much the whole downtown area."

"Awesome," another soldier replied.

Light 'em up. Awesome. Let's roll. Get some. Over the years, I had learned the lingo of the U.S. military and slipped into it easily, as familiar as a Montana drawl. I had also figured out different categories of U.S. soldiers—the Idealists, the Thinkers, the Workers, the Junkies, and the Critics. This first lieutenant was an Idealist, a true believer who thought that he and America could make a difference here. In a way, I found his situation report—or "sit rep"—funny. They were talking about Kabul, a city I had driven around for years, a downtown I had walked around. I never wore body armor in Kabul. I only worried about my security in Kabul when I saw a military convoy because of suicide blasts, overeager NATO gunners, and Afghan drivers who disobeyed warnings to halt.

So this would be my first time seeing Kabul from a Humvee, my first time seeing Afghans as the other. The first lieutenant warned of a white Toyota Corolla without a license plate—a potential suicide bomber, who by the looks of repeated security warnings I had seen, had been haunting Kabul for three years. It was a running joke with longtimers—highly paid security companies fixated on a potential suicide bomber with a long beard, wearing a turban, and driving a white Toyota Corolla, which described pretty much half the men in Kabul.

Our mission was outlined: Drive through the mean streets of Kabul and north to a rural district to train the police. It seemed like a fairly obvious mission, but more than seven years into the war here, the U.S. military had only recently gotten serious about the Afghan police. And the police were a serious problem. Police chiefs were often illiterate thugs and sometimes drug lords who ran their departments like fiefdoms. Some paid big money for their posts, even $100,000, and they made their money back by being on the take. Most low-level police were paid little money and

given little training. They took bribes often because they had no other choice. But the police were crucial to any counterinsurgency. If Afghans did not trust their police, they would naturally turn toward the Taliban. The police were also increasingly on the front lines—more Afghan police had died in Taliban-led attacks than soldiers, Afghan or foreign.

Both the outgoing Bush administration and the incoming Obama one stressed that Afghan police and soldiers were essential to solving the morass here—but clearly not enough troops had yet been devoted to the task. The Illinois National Guard ran three police-mentor teams in Kabul Province with thirty soldiers altogether, responsible for about six thousand police in thirty police districts. The Afghan police faced similar numerical challenges—in the district we were going, Mir Bacha Kot, which meant "collection of boys," eighty-five police were supposed to serve about a hundred and twenty-five thousand people living in thirty-six villages.

A trainer from DynCorp tried to explain what the U.S. soldiers would see with the Afghan National Police (ANP), using an example from Paghman district, in the western part of Kabul Province.

"We talk about how things are," the trainer said. "Yesterday in Paghman we had a situation with a guy. He's a mullah by day, Taliban by night. ANP is not gonna do anything about him. Don't trust a lot of the things that you're seeing and hearing."

We climbed into our Humvees. I sat behind the driver, wearing a helmet and flak vest that made me feel somewhat ridiculous. We put on headsets so we could hear one another and barged into a traffic jam on Jalalabad Road. Through the window, I watched the panic start. The Afghan drivers did not wave or smile at the U.S. soldiers. They tried to get out of the way, fear written on their craggy faces. But sitting in a Humvee instead of out in traffic, I felt nervous for the American soldiers. They saw every Afghan, every car as a potential enemy, even though they had been here only for a few weeks and Kabul was a relatively safe city compared with the south. But little wonder: Days earlier, a bomber had attacked another U.S. military base in Kabul, injuring five soldiers from the Illinois National Guard, one of whom later died. Everyone was on edge.

"This is nothing," the first lieutenant announced as we sat in traffic. "Traffic yesterday, we didn't move for forty-five minutes. Jackknifed fuel truck, leaking fuel. We just had to sit there and wait. But I'll take traffic with a lot of vehicles and cars over being stopped in a crowd of people. I didn't like that at all. A crowd of people can turn ugly."

The gunner agreed, mentioning one crowd that had uglified recently. "You could tell their attitudes have turned negative toward us. You're not getting the smile and a wave."

This was educational. If people in Kabul reacted this way, how did they feel in the provinces? And if U.S. soldiers felt this way, what chance did anyone have to turn this war around? Years into this, I was still hearing the same comments from U.S. soldiers, the same gripes about Afghanistan. We had learned so little. Most of these Illinois soldiers had only found out after arriving here that they would be training police. They had been told they would be doing something else, like briefings, PowerPoint presentations, and administrative work. And much of their training in the States focused not on the police, not even on Afghanistan, but on Iraq.

The soldiers continued to dissect the traffic of the capital.

“All and all, my personal favorite is the left blinker, and then they turn to the right,” the first lieutenant said. “Half the people do that.”

“Traffic rules don’t exist,” the gunner agreed. “Just like everything. No laws. I don’t care what everybody says. This place never gets old.”

The discussion then turned to me.

“So you’re normally just out there, without any protection?” the first lieutenant asked.

“Yep. In a white Toyota Corolla,” I joked.

“Aren’t you nervous?”

“I’m actually more nervous sitting in this Humvee,” I admitted.

We pushed through the traffic jam, toward Massoud circle, the ugly monument where I had covered the massive attack on a U.S. convoy more than two years earlier. The first lieutenant started to worry at the circle because the Afghan police had set up a checkpoint. He told the gunner to get his head down. “I don’t want my guys to get shot in the head,” he said, picking up the radio. “All gunners, get down.”

The gunners complied, ducking down as we passed through the circle. Someone in our Humvee put on the singer George Thorogood, music to get macho to. We drove past fruit markets and Afghans on motorcycles. One nearly fell over in its attempt to get away.

“A white Toyota station wagon with Toyota written in the windshield,” the first lieutenant said, looking out the window. “That’s nice. I feel safe.”

We drove past a donkey, past a dozen white Toyota Corollas, past Soilstone Laboratory, past the beige huts on the outskirts of Kabul, toward our destination: Collection of Boys.

“It’s like fourth world here,” said the gunner, surveying the bleak countryside. “Dirt walls, blankets for doors. That guy’s got one shoe, he’s saving up for a second shoe.”

The song “Bad to the Bone” came on. The gunner tapped his boot. Within the hour, we pulled up to the police station at Mir Bacha Kot. Two Afghan officers guarded the road into the parking lot. Neither had a weapon or gloves. One had the wrong boots. The American soldiers first took an inventory of the weapons to make sure none had been sold. They had already seen the corruption here—in another district, U.S. military discretionary money had bought a powerful generator for the police station. The district governor then took the generator to his house.

In the parking lot, basically a pile of rocks, the Americans then lined up fourteen Afghan officers. With all their equipment, the Americans looked like superheroes. The Afghans looked pathetic. Six did not have weapons because they were not qualified to have weapons. Of the other eight, only three said they had been to the main police-training center. And one was probably mistaken; he grinned wildly and raised his hand to every question.

The Afghans mimicked the Americans raising their weapons. The Americans ducked.

“They’ve had training, right?” one soldier asked. “They could have shot everyone.”

The police officers without weapons aimed their fingers and laughed hysterically. They leaned back as they pointed their guns and fingers. A U.S. soldier started going apoplectic because an Afghan soldier wouldn’t bend his knees. Another police officer stuck his rifle butt between his knees, pointed the weapon at his head, and started yanking on something inside his empty cartridge.

"Tell him, never stick his hand in his weapon," a U.S. soldier said. He turned away and muttered, "Takes every fiber of my being."

One Afghan officer jumped over razor wire, his finger on the trigger. Another, finger also on the trigger, leaned on his loaded weapon, muzzle on his boot—in years past, I knew of at least one Afghan police officer, nicknamed "Crazy Eyes" by U.S. soldiers, who had shot a hole in his foot that way. On a walk through the village, an Afghan police officer waved his gun at a baby. Another held his gun upside down with his finger in the trigger loop.

At one point I had to turn around, I was laughing so hard. The photographer was laughing.

"These guys are the best Afghanistan has to offer?" he asked.

"The Afghan police make me laugh," I admitted.

Probably not the best attitude, but it was true. I also kept a video of the Afghan army trying to do jumping jacks, which resembled a really bad dance or an incurable disease. I often showed the video to Americans who thought we could train the Afghans quickly to take care of their own security and then get out. The Illinois soldiers would visit this police station once every few weeks for a couple of hours at a time. And then, in another nine months, they would leave.

The soldiers gave the police some concertina wire—apparently, they had done a good job—before heading back to Kabul, listening to Metallica's "Ride the Lightning." At a debriefing back at Camp Phoenix, some of the Illinois soldiers were frustrated. Training was inconsistent; none of the fifteen rolls of razor wire donated the last trip had been used; new AK-47s were still in boxes; all the police demanded flashlights. The police officers had to share the district's only pen, that is, the ones who could write.

"What struck me is how these guys are supposed to be trained," one soldier said. "Are you kidding me? These motherfuckers can't even pivot. Don't they all have jobs to do? I know at the last police department, we asked them, 'Do you ever arrest anybody?' 'No.' 'What do you do?' They're like, 'Eating, sleeping, nothing.' I mean, what are they policing? This is another brick wall we're running into. They aren't doing anything."

Everyone griped. Then the first lieutenant made a proposal.

"I was able to talk to the chief. He wanted to take one kilometer of wire up to the cell-phone tower. Then they can have twenty-four-hour electricity."

Everyone looked at him, silent.

"You can't do that," the DynCorp guy finally said. "We're trying to teach them about corruption. You can't help them steal power."

The first lieutenant was unrepentant. "It makes sense. It's an easy thing we can do that will really help them."

"You can't be serious," the DynCorp guy said.

He was. Quick fixes, fast turnarounds, an easy bang for the buck. That pretty much typified the international approach. But the only thing that would make a difference with the Afghan police was a whole lot of training, for a whole lot of years, with a whole lot of money. This was a largely illiterate country wracked by thirty years of war, a place where young men from the provinces didn't know how to lace their boots because they'd never had boots. It's not like Afghans couldn't fight—of course they could. But the only recruits willing to earn so little money to be cannon fodder were not the best and the brightest. Mostly, they were the no-hopes.

While on this embed, I wrote at least one good story for the *Tribune* about local soldiers helping in a foreign land. But I also wrote a few embarrassing clunkers to appeal to my new bosses, including one about the delivery of Chicago-style pizza to the soldiers, just in time for Super Bowl Sunday. The last time I had written anything that so reeked of jingoism and free advertising, I had just entered puberty. Even so, I got mocked by colleagues at the Associated Press and was sent a piece of hate mail because I quoted a soldier who criticized the pizza. I could not win.

Starved for the relative normalcy of Kabul, I soon left the soldiers. A friend who worked as a UN adviser to the Afghan-run Independent Electoral Commission came to town. Over lunch, he described the election fraud he had witnessed in the southeast. Already Afghans were registering to vote for the upcoming presidential election. But my friend had caught Afghan election workers creating thousands of fake registration cards. Women had also registered in unprecedented numbers in the conservative southeast—numbers that were likely inflated. In one province, when asked about registration, a top election official bragged that his province not only was registering a lot of women but was also registering children. My friend reported the suspected fraud; his UN superiors said they would send a committee to investigate but never did. I was not entirely surprised. The previous fall, Karzai had named loyalists to run three ministries—Interior, Education, and Tribal Affairs. Interior ran the police. Education ran the teachers. Both ministries had people everywhere. Tribal Affairs worked with the tribes, crucial to any election. By that point, the fix was in. UN officials and Western diplomats started distancing themselves from the election, referring to it as "an Afghan process" and "Afghan-led." It wasn't too difficult to decipher their meaning—they were absolving themselves of any responsibility, even as the UN put its hat out to raise more than $300 million to foot the bill.

A few weeks later, I flew to southern Helmand Province to watch Illinois soldiers posted there help eradicate poppies. This was part of NATO's new approach to drugs, the first time that any foreign troops had been involved in eradication, even if they only guarded the Afghan police riding tractors that ripped up the poppies. The soldiers' surroundings were stark, and they certainly didn't get any Super Bowl Sunday pizza. Instead, they were attacked almost every time they left the base—by the Taliban, the farmers, the villagers. Outside the base, fields of newly planted poppies stretched forever, beautiful carpets of green. People in Washington sometimes tried to portray poppy farmers as small guys, eking a living from the land. In Helmand, at least, these were corporate drug farms.

The Afghans and their international guards made a show of clearing a patch of poppies right outside the base gate—a patch they had been saving to show off for the media and top Kabul luminaries, a patch with limited risk of attack. A man from the U.S. embassy, thrilled to be outside, wore a patch on his flak vest: AMERICA, FUCK YEAH, it said, quoting the movie *Team America*. Was there a better description for what we were trying to do here? If so, I had yet to hear it.

CHAPTER 26

WHEN THE MAN COMES AROUND

In some ways, I hoped Obama would be the savior. After he switched the war's focus from Iraq to this region, I thought that maybe everything would turn around, that Afghanistan and Pakistan would suddenly reverse course and miraculously start improving. Selfishly, I figured my job was safe. After all, Obama was from Chicago, as was my newspaper, and if this region was seen as the most important foreign story in the world in the coming years, surely the *Tribune* would need its own correspondent. So I launched my own tactical surge in preparation for the upcoming U.S. surge. I knew the United States could do only so much inside stubbornly sovereign Pakistan; I planned to spend as much time as possible following the Americans in Afghanistan. But I needed to cut my costs. I decided to move from my giant house in Islamabad to a friend's house and use the savings to rent a room in Kabul. I decided to cut my fixer costs, and offer Farouq a take-it-or-leave-it deal of $1,600 a month, regardless of whether I was in Afghanistan. For most Afghans, this was a fine salary. But not for Farouq.

He was already upset with me for a variety of reasons. Given my stress, I had been short with him, not treating him like before. I was treating him like my employee—not like my friend. I was tired of worrying about money and scrimping like a freelancer. I was tired of stacking all my interviews over a few days, so I could pay Farouq for only a few days' work, which meant he was always on call, unable to work for anyone else. I was tired of his occasional macho rants. Given the boom in interest in Afghanistan, Farouq could make much more money anywhere else. Both of us were frustrated.

"You can think about it," I said, after making my offer.

"No, Kim. I can tell you what I think right now. I can't work for that amount of money. I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too," I said.

We pledged to stay friends, but I knew we wouldn't talk for a while. We were both raw, mainly over the irony that when the world finally realized that Afghanistan was circling the drain, so were both of our jobs. In slight shock over my bold move, I hired someone else.

I flew back to Pakistan, where Nawaz Sharif again made noise about restoring the judges fired sixteen months earlier by Musharraf. That old story—he was like Musharraf with the miscreants. But President Zardari had just punched himself in the eye by removing Sharif's brother as the head of the Punjab government. A planned march by the long-suffering lawyers—who by this point had been in a monotonous state of protest for almost two years, occasionally staging symbolic three-hour hunger strikes—suddenly had momentum. The Sharifs threw all their significant political weight behind the lawyers. I sent a text message to Sharif, asking

him to call.

"I haven't seen you for a long time," he said when he called that Friday evening. "Where have you been?"

"Afghanistan," I replied. It was easier that way.

Nothing was mentioned about the iPhone, or our past meeting, or his offer.

Then Zardari banned the march and put Sharif and various opponents under house arrest—moves that only drew attention to the march and guaranteed its significance. Zardari acted like Musharraf, but he forgot one thing—he didn't have the army behind him. The Sharifs and their key aides plowed out of house arrest in SUVs. The police were not about to stop them. Their convoy moved out of Lahore, paralyzing the country and forcing Zardari's hand. Diplomats like Hillary Clinton twisted various arms.

And suddenly, surprisingly, stunningly, after midnight we heard that the country's prime minister would soon restore the judges. Unlike many rumors, this one seemed true. I rushed over to the former chief justice's house, where I encountered one of the few true magical unscripted moments I had ever experienced in Pakistan —actual joy, a sense of disbelief, that finally, after so long, the lawyers' movement actually might win. For the past two years, I had been with these lawyers when they were beat up, gassed, arrested, and ignored by the United States, Musharraf, and Zardari. A lawyer friend pulled me inside the former chief justice's house. Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry sat in an armchair in a corner of his living room, greeting an endless line of well-wishers. In another room, lawyers crowded around a TV, waiting for the prime minister's speech. I walked outside. People shouted, "Go, Zardari, go!" Small groups of lawyers, in their uniforms of black suits and white shirts, danced and sang.

At daybreak the prime minister finally announced that the judges would be restored. Within days they were, setting up an inevitable showdown between the bench and Zardari. I had a feeling that Zardari's former criminal charges, ranging from corruption to murder, would eventually come back to haunt him. I also had a feeling, lingering in the back of my head, that Chaudhry's megalomania could eventually approach that of Musharraf. But I shook it off. Must have been the lack of sleep.

My request for an actual vacation that month had been ignored, and back in Chicago, it seemed like everything was being ignored. Conference calls were scheduled; rumors flew that would put Pakistan to shame. We received new directions every day. New story formats were developed—we were supposed to file information for "charticles," we were supposed to write new "brights" for the front page. The man in charge of innovation for the company sent subversive "think pieces," stream-of-consciousness rants with random capital letters, confessions like "I've been on a continual road trip" and misspellings like "NOTOCABLE," "INSINCERETY," and "VISABLE." One example of a "think piece": "Check these out. They reflect exactly the kind of POWER that subtle and cerebral can deliver … It oozes timeless, all demographic QUALITY." I said yes to everything, happy to be of service, sifting through management "think pieces," trying to find the hidden messages in the capital letters, to figure out why on earth people who flaunted their inability to spell, capitalize, and punctuate would want to run a media company.

Finally, on a Monday night, my boss called just as I walked in the front door.

"Kim, they made a decision, and some tough decisions had to be made," he told

me. “And as part of those decisions, they would like you to come home and work for the metro desk.”

Ultimate Fight Challenge was done. I hung up the phone and burst into tears. The next day, during the requisite conference call, the paper’s editor informed me that the company was unifying the foreign reporting team to serve everybody, which meant “more strategic company-wide use of our expertise.” He used words like “partnership” and phrases like “a big chessboard.” I felt like we were breaking up. All told, thirteen—or maybe sixteen—correspondents survived from both newspapers, including only two from the *Tribune*, which had once had eleven. (The numbers were unclear, because the company also kept a few *Los Angeles Times* correspondents on contract.)

“There’s no right or wrong choice,” said the big boss, adding that he thought I could use my expertise covering the war on terror in Chicago. The gangs must have really stepped up their game.

I could hardly blame the company—it was, after all, bankrupt, and foreign news cost a lot of money. My bureau cost about $120,000 a year in expenses alone. The *Tribune* foreign desk was essentially eliminated, almost quietly, just as the newsroom loudly promoted a class for “Advanced Twitter.” The *Los Angeles Times* would run the company-wide foreign desk, and the new foreign editor would be the same man who had written the competing *Los Angeles Times* story on *Afghan Star*, the one that had run the same day as mine and put me squarely in Sam Zell’s crosshairs. Curses—my nemesis. I felt sad and numb and rejected, almost like a spurned lover, but this rejection felt even more personal. I loved this job, I was this job. If I didn’t have this, what would I be?

I was given time to think about the metro offer, and I did think. I knew everything in Afghanistan was increasingly messed up. “America, Fuck Yeah” was the future. Many talented Afghans were leaving, including Farouq, whom I thought had abandoned his dreams of ever studying outside Afghanistan. He sent me an e-mail when he won a prestigious scholarship to a university in the West—to study communications, not medicine. I was not surprised—if Afghanistan ever got rid of the mullahs and warlords, that guy could run it. (Once, Farouq had told me how he would police a traffic roundabout with a hammer, breaking the windows of traffic offenders. “Believe me, people will enjoy my roundabout,” he had opined. That was his philosophy of governance in Afghanistan, the necessity of a strong hand.) Back in Pakistan, Samad continued building his life in his mother’s tiny apartment, washing his car fifty times a day. His wife was now pregnant, even though he barely had any money. Yet if all Samad ever had in his life was his family and his car, I knew he would be happy.

Afghanistan and Pakistan continued to dominate the news. The day after I was deemed irrelevant, news leaked that the term “war on terror” also was. The Obama administration preferred “Overseas Contingency Operation.” Days after that, Obama announced his much anticipated new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. After more than seven years, the region had finally become a situation.

“The situation is increasingly perilous,” Obama warned.

An editor e-mailed me that night, asking if I had anything I’d like to add to a story on Obama’s speech. I said I was sick, and I kind of was. Within a month, that editor was laid off.

I still didn’t know what I would do, but I had to leave Pakistan and Afghanistan

for now if I wanted to hold on to my salary. I also knew I had to get out of here if I wanted to get any perspective. Samad, ever the wounded puppy, started to cry when I told him and called me his sister. Large tears pooled in his large brown eyes.

"Stop it," I said. "You're killing me."

Friends in Islamabad decided to throw me a going-away party at the house where I was staying. But that night, as I drew on eyeliner, I heard a distant thud outside. I chose to ignore it and went back to my eyeliner. Samad soon ran inside the house, knocking on my bedroom door.

"Boss, big bomb, maybe Jinnah," he announced, agitated.

"No. No way. Not tonight." I had moved on to mascara.

"Yes, boss. Tonight." He smiled.

Samad still didn't understand my syntax all that well. Jinnah was the giant supermarket closest to this neighborhood, where foreigners always shopped.

"I can't fucking believe this."

Samad looked at me. "Yes, boss?"

"Can you go check it out?" I asked.

"Yes, boss."

He ran off.

A Swiss friend called, panicked. She was hiding with her boyfriend in a closet, the Swiss version of a safe room. She heard shots in all directions.

"I don't think I can make it to your party," she said.

I called Samad, now curious. Maybe I needed just one bomb for the road.

"Come pick me up."

He really didn't need to drive. We could have walked to the bombing, which was not at a supermarket but in a grassy median a couple of blocks away. A man had blown himself up near a tent filled with Pakistani security forces. Eight had died.

More than a hundred journalists were there, scribbling on notebooks, jostling for position. It was like old home week. A friend and I walked near an ambulance. Shots rang out. We dropped to the ground. Pakistani men in cream-colored salwar kameezes threw themselves on top of us and fondled us back across the street, over to the other journalists. I started laughing. This was the perfect going-away party for Pakistan. A senior police officer insisted that the situation was under control, even as shots ricocheted through the neighborhood, an alleged second bomber ran loose, and a group of elite armed soldiers darted in front of the house where the party was supposed to be.

"Should we still have the party?" I asked a friend from the Associated Press.

"Oh yeah," she said. "Otherwise, the terrorists win."

I certainly didn't want that. So we threw the party, and most people came, filled with that need for alcohol and numbness that by now I knew accompanied any terrorist attack. (Tammy stayed home—she was too depressed about Pakistan.) At the end of the night, fueled by booze, socks, and a treacherous marble staircase, I fell. The next morning, I woke up with a knot the size of a golf ball on my forehead. I left Pakistan a few days later with a concussion and slight double vision, and without telling my bosses. And that, I later realized, was how Pakistan should always be left. With a head injury.

Pondering my options on the flight home, I realized I would rather scoop out my eyeballs with a rusty spoon than go back to my life from seven years earlier. This came as a shock. The newspaper industry was hemorrhaging jobs left and right—by

the end of that year, more than forty thousand jobs would be cut. I should count myself lucky to hold on to any job at any major newspaper. But after covering these countries, after writing about life and death and chaos and war, I knew I couldn't just write about frenzied families and carefree couples in Chicago, the paper's new target demographic. I couldn't move backward. My heart wouldn't be in it because my heart would still be somewhere halfway around the world, wearing a flak vest.

I decided to do something I had never done before. Quit. And, in a move that many deemed insane, I decided to go back to Afghanistan to have a quiet place to figure out what I wanted to do next. Maybe it was the story, which had burrowed into my bloodstream, or the concussion. And maybe it was the newspaper industry, and the fact that no one was willing to pay for the news anymore. Only a few weeks after I quit, the bare-bones *Tribune* newsroom would be forced to lay off more than fifty people. The same day, the company's bosses would ask the U.S. Bankruptcy Court to pay more than $13 million in bonuses to almost seven hundred people deemed essential to the future of the company. Still, Sam Zell couldn't stop talking about Afghanistan. That same night, he would tell a group of college students: "I'm not going to the *Chicago Tribune* for news about Afghanistan." Of that, I was absolutely certain.