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European Union and Iran's Shared Mutual Interests in Afghanistan
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Our Vision:

In the beginning all people were one nation (Holy Qur'an, 2:213)
Throughout human history, peace has always been the 'primary state' and war the 'accidental state'. Peace is beautiful, compassionate and constructive, while war is fearsome, merciless and destructive. Unfortunately, despite this, war has been one of 20th century's most major problems, and has proved to be the symbol of the beginning of the 21st century. As portrayed by the contemporary history of international relations, particularly in the Middle East and Central Asia, war is not the solution, nor is it constructive or helpful in solving problems; rather, it causes problems and is the root of the continuation of violence, instability and insecurity.

War is not the solution to the differences between governments and nations. Only with peace which is based on justice, i.e. '*Just Peace*', can we reach a stable and permanent solution to our differences. Diplomacy and constructive dialogue which take into consideration the rights of both parties, is the only path to establishing '*Just Peace*', stability and world security. Our aim is to change international relations with the active participation of nations on the basis of '*Just Peace*'.

Let there be a group among you who will invite others to good.
(Holy Qur'an, 3:104)

We, as part of the international network of intellectuals, are able to play an important and constructive role in the establishment of mutual understanding, of dialogue and in the reduction and amelioration of global problems. Our intention is to provide solutions and means for the positive and just cooperation of nations with each other, and to reach this end independent of governments, through a realistic understanding of nations and governments from each other, and through clear, truthful and constructive dialogue.

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1. Establishing justice between the countries of the South and the North.
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3. Respecting and considering the valid interests of all parties which have a vested interest in any given conflict.
4. Thinking globally and acting against extreme nationalism.
5. Realistic understanding of the realities of the world.
6. Upholding and respecting human rights and the principles of democracy.
7. Accepting and moving towards the destruction of weapons of mass destruction throughout the world/on a global scale

Our priorities in the current situation are to analyse the issues and problems of conflict-zones such as those of the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

Our tools for aiding in the establishment of world peace are:

1. Inviting and facilitating for intellectuals from different parts of the world to engage in dialogue with each other.
2. Dialogue between intellectuals and international organizations.
3. Preparing the groundwork for dialogue between on the basis of mutual respect between opposing governments.
4. Organising international scientific conferences dealing with regional and global issues.
5. Publishing scientific research work on peace studies in the form of books and journals.
6. Providing education internationally on the culture of dialogue, understanding, compromise, justice, freedom and spirituality.

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Tanks or Tractors: United States' Military Missions or Multilateral Regional Support for Economic Prosperity and Peace in Afghanistan?

Seyed G Safavi
International Peace Studies Centre- London

Abstract

Despite Obama's promises that U.S. troops will begin withdrawal from Afghanistan in July 2010, this country still remains in crisis. In spite of spending billions of dollars and the death toll of over one thousand American soldiers, NATO's military operation has been unsuccessful in Afghanistan to the point of defeat. This article attempts to adopt an objective outlook and observes the empirical realities of the ongoing crisis to present a new solution for peace and security in Afghanistan. The proposition of this paper is the formation of an army composed of forces from the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan with the support of United Nations and under the condition of withdrawal of NATO forces to help flourish Afghanistan's economy and to keep peace in this country. In short, this paper proposes the establishment of a "peace and economy army."

Keywords: Afghanistan, United States, NATO, Resistance Forces, Security and Peacekeeping, Iran, Pakistan, Peace and Economy Army.

Introduction

Nine years after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, United States and its allies under the pretext of destroying the headquarters of terrorist groups responsible for the attacks on America, waged war against Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. With cooperation of Afghan Mujahidin forces as well as the Iranian government, the Taliban regime came to end in less than three months; however, the ongoing war against Taliban insurgency has continued to this date. In recent years, the battle against the insurgency has expanded in scope; nevertheless, without much prospect for lasting peace and security in Afghanistan.

In later months of 2004, that the Taliban moved towards guerrilla warfare and insurgency and up to this date over 1000 U.S. soldiers and 307 of British soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan. Other American allies in this war suffered casualties as well. However, due to lack of official statistics, it is not clear how many Taliban fighters and other resistance groups in Afghanistan have been killed or wounded.

Right now United States and its allies are facing a wave of unrest in Afghanistan as well as parts of Pakistan. The “terrorism,” that ten years ago was thought to have lost its power base both globally and regionally, is now dispersed among terrorist networks that are still very much so active. The threat of such terrorism on the Western countries and the United States not only did not diminish but quite contrary such dangers have increased.

In Europe, during the month of October, 2010, three people were arrested on suspicion of collaborating with a group that intended to carry attacks on Germany, France and London/England. America’s intelligence services also reported that insurgents in Pakistan’s tribal

areas were planning widespread attacks against targets in Europe. According to Western media, the Eiffel Tower in Paris and Big Ben clock tower in London, as symbols of Western civilisation, were among the targets.

What is clearly apparent these days in Afghanistan is that the ongoing conflict is continuing and there seems to be no decisive time or prospect of this war ending. The war, whose promise of victory over Taliban insurgency is uncertain, continues yet to claim more victims among Afghan and NATO forces. Ten years after the overthrow of the Taliban as an extremist fundamentalist Islamic regime in Afghanistan, the main questions still remain as to how the flame of anti-Western insurgency can be put out and by what means can a national reconciliation be achieved in Afghanistan.

The Current Capacity of the Taliban

According to the statement that the Taliban issued on the tenth anniversary of America's invasion of Afghanistan, Afghan war has led to distrust and divide among the countries that are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and furthermore, the war has led to the strategic failure of United States. Public support for the Taliban is growing everyday and the Taliban believe that they are leading victory in this war; that they are the real winners of the Afghan war. Maulvi Arsala Rahmani, a former senior Taliban official who is now a member of the High Peace Council and also a member of the Afghan Senate, believes that the violent conduct of NATO forces has driven Afghan people towards Taliban and as result Taliban influence and popularity in the region has grown.

The Taliban insurgents and the Al-Qaeda networks (many of whom are Uzbek descents and Chechen fighters) not only have widespread influence in southern Afghanistan, but also have expanded their influence infiltrating into the northern regions of Afghanistan. It is likely that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda networks in the North are responsible for the bomb blasting of a mosque on Friday October 8, 2010 during which Mohammad Omar the governor of *Kunduz* and at

least nineteen others lost their lives. Following repeated armed operation of the Taliban forces and the expanded influence of these Islamic extremist groups, the current government of Afghanistan believes negotiations with the Taliban to be the only feasible solution to end this war. During a conference in late July this year, held in London-England, the international community also supported the Afghan government's plans to negotiate with the opposition groups: that is those armed groups who oppose the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan.

The Conservative Party leader David Cameron, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, announced formally on October 6, 2010 that by the year 2015 British troops will leave Afghanistan. Also, United States had previously announced that on the second half of 2011, American troops will begin withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Obama's Obstacles in Afghanistan

President Obama has been criticized from two sides of the political spectrum when it comes to the war in Afghanistan: the bloody heritage of neo-conservatives left for Obama. On one side, the liberal Democrats to the left of the spectrum are increasingly challenging the United States' intentions in Afghanistan. As such, these Democrats opposed Obama's last year decision to dispatch more troops to the region. On the other side, influential right-wing Republicans, including Obama's presidential election rival Senator John McCain, criticized Barack Obama for setting out the July 2011 date, marking the beginning of withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. The Republicans argue that the deadline set by Obama was a misguided cause, since on one hand this "act of date setting" encourages the insurgents who are awaiting American withdrawal and on the other hand, it would add to Afghans scepticism about commitment of United States to its obligations in their country. The Republicans in the mid-term November 2, 2010 elections took advantage of this very critique to challenge and question Obama's plans for Afghanistan.

Cost and Casualties of War

Two months yet remain to the end of the year 2010 and with 600 soldiers killed; this is thus far the highest annual death toll of foreign forces, making 2010 the deadliest year since the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan. The annual death toll of the international forces for the previous year was 521. Currently, there are more than 150 thousand foreign soldiers deployed in Afghanistan. Since 2001 and beginning of the presence US-led foreign troops in Afghanistan, 2170 non-Afghan soldiers have been killed. Despite this high death toll, foreign and Afghan officials continue to emphasize on military operations as the preferred strategy of destroying the command centres of insurgents. These officials insist that the increasing intensity of military operations in various regions of Afghanistan is a major contributing factor for the rising death toll of US-led forces.

Major Sunset Belinsky, spokesperson for the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan, in an interview with the BBC-Persian insists that more military action is required to destroy the insurgency:

Unfortunately this year, ISAF has suffered more casualties. In light of the fact that our troops have increased in number significantly, the insurgents are seeking safe refuge; hence we target them with more attacks. As part of the fight against insurgents we are undertaking more military operations.¹

Afghan Defence Ministry, referring to the increase in number of Afghan and foreign troops announced that this further intensifies the conflict. The increase in number of soldiers is accompanied with a surge in increasing military action and as such the armed encounters between both sides of the war will have more casualties. When asked about the extent of casualties Afghan government has suffered this year compared to last year Afghan Defence Ministry spokesperson adds: "With increasing the forces on the ground, the extent of armed conflicts as well as the areas under military operations increase and expand. Another consequential issue is the enemy's widespread use of landmine.

Landmines along roads as well as remote control landmines have inflicted many casualties upon Afghan and allied forces.”²

Recently the president of United States, Barack Obama allocated an additional 33 billion dollars for the cost of continuing war in Afghanistan, a fund that the Congress approved on July 27, 2010.³ Since the beginning of the war, the United States has spent three hundred billion dollars on military operations in Afghanistan. The enormous cost of military operations and the fact the United States remains without significant success in the arena of Afghan War gave rise to much criticism even from the American elites such as former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Samuel R. Berger, former President Clinton’s national security adviser.

According to the Independent Task Force on Pakistan and Afghanistan launched by the Council on Foreign Relations, if the current U.S. policy and strategy in the Afghan war deems to be inefficient, Obama must consider restricting the military missions. President Obama’s strategic future plans for the war in Afghanistan are to be reviewed by this Independent Task Force in December, 2010. So far, the twenty five members of this task force have concluded that “encouraging signs” are evident in Afghanistan. However, they have also noted that the current events in Afghanistan are not very motivating. The chairs of this Task Force are the former deputy secretary of state Richard L. Armitage and former national security adviser Samuel R. Berger. The ninety-eight page report of the Independent Task Force states: “The cloudy picture and high costs raise the question of whether the US should now downsize its ambitions and reduce its military presence in Afghanistan.”⁴

According to the British Ministry of Defence estimates, the war in Afghanistan will cost about £30 billion for the UK. A recent report that Liam Fox the Defence Secretary presented to the British parliament indicates that in accordance with the British government’s plans to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2015, during the next four years the anticipated cost of war is £4 billion, £3.8 billion, £3.8 billion and £3.5 billion respectively for the period between 2011 and 2015. Since the

first eight years of war in Afghanistan has cost the British government about £10 billion, the total cost of the war for the UK is estimated to be about £30 billion which is three times more than the cost of the Iraq war for this country. These estimates exclude the funds that the British government provided for certain reconstruction and development projects as well as compensation for soldiers injured or killed in Afghanistan. Around 10,000 British soldiers are currently deployed in Afghanistan most of whom are in the restive insecure Helmand province. So far, more than 340 British military forces have been killed in the war in Afghanistan.

Strategic Factor Contributing to NATO's Defeat in Afghanistan

Instability, insecurity and lack of implementations of security policies and propositions of NATO and the Afghan government are major contributing factor increasing military casualties in Afghanistan. The main challenge NATO forces face however, is the fatalities among civilian population. Injuries and damage inflicted upon the civilians during military operations drives ordinary people to join the insurgents. Increased corruption, lack of respect for the law, unemployment, poor economy, poverty and the increasing distance separating people from the government leads to more unrest in Afghanistan. The uninviting treatment of Afghanistan's neighbours by US-led NATO, not requesting neighbouring countries' cooperation, the conflicting national interests of the neighbouring countries with that of NATO's, and the disturbing of the status quo by neighbours interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan are some key factors bringing about NATO's failure in this endeavour.

Afghan Resistance Forces and Reconciliation

The Taliban are not the only Afghan resistance group against NATO forces. These forces are divided into several factions with independent leadership, foreign relations administration, policies and programs. The most important factions among the resistance are the Taliban, the Haqqani network, and the forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.⁵

The Forces of the Haqqani Network

The Haqqani network consists of a group of Afghan insurgents led by Sirajuddin Haqqani, son of Jalaluddin Haqqani, the former Mujahideen commander in South East Afghanistan. The Haqqani network is among those resistance groups who have faith in conciliation. It seems that Pakistan aspires to weaken the Haqqani network due to the group's willingness to compromise for reconciliation. On October 23, 2010 the forces under the command of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan issued a statement that they have killed two of the Haqqani network commander in South East Afghanistan, one the commanders was Amanullah.⁶

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar Forces

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of the Islamic Party (*Hezb-e Islami*) is one the notable Afghan Mujahideen who has also fought Soviet troops and is now opposing the occupying NATO forces. Hekmatyar is not a member of the Taliban; nevertheless, he and his group are among the main resistance movements against NATO's occupation of Afghanistan. The power bases of this resistance faction are near the Pakistan border in the Eastern provinces of *Nangarhar*, *Nuristan*, *Kapisa* and *Kunar* in Afghanistan. This group receives most of its funds through charity contributions from Saudi Arabia and other wealthy Arab individuals. The Islamic Party is more inclined towards negotiations, reconciliations and power sharing compared to the other resistance groups.

The Taliban Forces

The Taliban established its power during Soviet domination in Afghanistan with support from United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Yet today, the Taliban is the prevailing challenge to NATO forces in Afghanistan. The group's headquarters are outside Afghan borders in *Quetta*-Pakistan. The main Taliban power bases in Afghanistan, however, are located in southern regions. Currently the

Taliban receives support from the Pakistan's military intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The principle intellectual, moral, and financial source of support for the Taliban is Saudi Arabia. Leader and founder of the group Mullah Mohammad Omar ruled over Afghanistan in the period of 1996 to 2001.

In late October, 2010 NATO forces detained a Taliban affiliated commander and four of his collaborators in the *Paktika* province of Afghanistan. These NATO operations are happening in the midst of Afghan government's attempts to work towards negotiations and reconciliation with the Taliban and other resistance groups. Afghan government in order to accommodate necessary preparations for conciliation with the Taliban has put together the High Peace Council. The council has announced that in order to encourage the Taliban to come to the negotiating table, they are willing to compromise and offer certain concessions to the group. Meanwhile, NATO forces announced that if the insurgent groups do not come forward for reconciliation, they will be put under more military pressure. On October 14, 2010 General David Petraeus the commander of US and NATO coalition forces in Afghanistan announced in London-England that the senior Taliban leaders will be allowed to enter Kabul for negotiations with Afghan government officials.

This is the first time that a senior US military official in Afghanistan, acknowledges and announces that senior Taliban leaders can enter Kabul for negotiations. Although, the Taliban officially have rejected any offer of negotiation pending foreign troops leaving the country; nevertheless, the former Taliban Foreign Minister, Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil and the former Taliban ambassador in Islamabad Mullah Zaeef (who are currently residing in Kabul) have asked repeatedly whether particular individual officials or organizations guarantee the security of the Taliban negotiators. Previously too, NATO and coalition officials approved and supported the Afghan government's plan to negotiate with the Taliban, emphasizing on the condition that those talks only be conducted with the Taliban individuals who have put down arms and are not fighting anymore.

Afghan government officials prior to the formation of the High Peace Council stressed that they are attempting to gain back through negotiations the support of those groups and individual who have joined the Taliban out of dissatisfaction with the status quo: individuals whose number reaches up to hundreds. The status quo, however, has changed drastically and General Petraeus now declares officially that senior Taliban leaders are welcome for talks in Kabul. General Petraeus's remarks indicate that apparently the plan to negotiate with the Taliban has moved beyond the initial attempts of the Afghan government to a point of facilitating these talks with US blessing. Nevertheless, the Taliban still insists on its previous stance of not negotiating with the Afghan government.

The Formation of the High Peace Council in Afghanistan

The United States and its allies attacked Afghanistan on October 7, 2001 to overthrow the Taliban regime. Nine years later, in October 2010, according to a proposal by the National Consultative Peace *Jirga* and Hamid Karzai's support the High Peace Council was established to pursue reconciliation with the Taliban. Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president, recently introduced the members of this council. The Washington Post wrote in the October 6 issue that talks with senior Afghan Taliban leaders has reached a serious stage. In this regard, the Afghan officials emphasized that the High Peace Council deals with all matters pertaining to negotiations and dialogue with the Taliban.

The High Peace Council consists of 68-members the majority of whom are former *jihadi* commanders, influential ethnic figures and former members of the Taliban. In addition, eight women and some civil society representatives have membership in the council. In the preceding time, some concerns about women's rights were raised during talks with the Taliban. During Taliban rule women's education and work outside the sphere of their homes was banned.

Sibghatullah Mojaddedi the former Afghan President, Ayatollah Seyyed Ahmad Gailani, Sheikh Muhammad Asif Muhsini, Mohammad Mohaghegh and a number of other *jihadi* leaders are the other members

of the council. A number of former Taliban officials including Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, the former foreign minister of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (i.e. Taliban); Maulvi Arsala Rahmani the former Islamic Affairs minister under the Taliban and the current member of the Afghan Senate; Musa Hotak, the former Taliban commander and a current member of parliament, Abdul Hakim Mujahid and Habibullah Fawzi will be among the members of the High Peace Council.

The Taliban thus far have not shown any willingness to compromise and reconcile with the current government of Afghanistan and they have conditioned peace dialogues subject to the withdrawal of foreign troops from the country. For the first time in the past nine years former Taliban officials now affiliated with the current government are given the opportunity to take part in the peace process and possible negotiations with the armed opposition groups. These former Taliban officials, who now mostly reside in Kabul, previously were under the impression that the Afghan government is not very serious in its attempts of initiating dialogue with armed oppositions. However, it seems that now that Hamid Karzai has deployed these former Taliban officials in the membership of the High Peace Council, they are considering reconciliation endeavours seriously. When compared to the Karzai's policies of the past nine year, the current membership make-up of the High Peace Council which includes prominent *jihadi* leaders, various political players, and diversity of ethnic groups is indicative of these groups' recent support for Karzai's peace proposal. Some of these leaders have not had good relations with the Taliban in the past; including group leaders known as the Northern Alliance that even fought the Taliban forces before the collapse of their regime.

In October 2010, former Afghan president Borhanuddin Rabbani who is now a member of the Afghan parliament was chosen as head of the High Peace Council. Rabbani was also the President of Kabul Peace Conference (the Kabul Consultative Peace *Jirga*). The establishment of the High Peace Council was one the main recommendations of Kabul Consultative Peace Jirga to the current Afghan government. Rabbani is a former *jihadi* anti-Taliban commander who in the past used to fight against the Taliban. In recent years however, Rabbani has constantly

supported Afghan's government proposal of negotiations with the Taliban in order to find a peaceful solution to end the unrests and conflicts in this country.

Hamid Karzai, in the meetings of the High Peace Council, at the presidential palace, announced that the council is totally independence in its decision making and if necessary the government will cooperate with the council. Despite all this, many critics and observers believe that considering Borhanuddin Rabbani's hostile background towards the Taliban, satisfying the Taliban to cooperate is the main challenge the High Peace Council faces before any peace talks begin to take place. The Afghan government has formed the High Peace Council under very difficult circumstances. The resistance groups whom the council hopes to engage with have a diversity of opinions about the conditions of any possible reconciliation on their part; for example, as mentioned earlier the Taliban are willing to talk subject to the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan.

The Role of Afghanistan's Neighbouring Countries

The neighbouring countries play a significant role in construction of a practical solution to end the war and the crisis in Afghanistan. Without the participation of *these countries the prospect of creating lasting peace and security in Afghanistan is not feasible*. Iran, Pakistan, China, India and even Saudi Arabia along with the allied countries of the NATO are all different key players with various values, distinctive roles and scenarios in the arena of Afghanistan politics. ISI of Pakistan military intelligence services and Saudi Arabia are major supporters of the Taliban. Saudi Arabia greatly contributes to the moral, spiritual, and intellectual stances of the Taliban. Hundreds of *Salafi* seminaries and schools throughout Pakistan are training intellectual forces and fruits of thought for the Taliban. China to secure economic privileges for mining projects in Afghanistan pays large amount of bribe money to pro-Taliban tribal chiefs. India is interested in expanding her presence on Afghan soil where it can influence politics of the rival country, Pakistan, from just outside the Afghan-Pakistan border.

Iran's strategy is complex and multifaceted. Iran does not prefer any of the rival parties (the Taliban or the United States) victorious in the current crisis in Afghanistan. Victory of the extremist, anti-Shiite Taliban makes Iran-Afghan borders unsafe. Also, the military victory of NATO forces would cause further troubles for Iran in a number of manners. NATO's victory in Afghanistan could potentially be used in the time to come as a successful model by the allied forces against Iran or Syria. Further, if NATO succeeds in this war, this would only expand the US-led allied countries' influence in Central Asia as well as the Iranian borders. If the Taliban were to gain more power, the security and order of current state of Pakistan will be disrupted farther threatening Pakistan's government. In addition, the growing of Talibanism in the region is a threat to China, expanding extremism in China's Muslim regions (East Turkestan) and among India's Muslim population.

On June 19, 2010, Former United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in an International Security Conference in Geneva argued that preventing the victory of the Taliban as well as the reorganization of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan ultimately benefits Pakistan, Iran, China and India. Kissinger believes in the long run the unilateral role of United States in Afghanistan is not an achievable process resolving the crisis in this country.⁷

Thus, in the current situation the NATO forces encouragement of neighbouring countries' participation, especially Iran which plays a key role, could give rise to a new approach and organise a new coalition for peace and security in Afghanistan.

Exit Strategy out of the Crisis: the Muslim Peace and Economy Army

Like we analyzed in the previous sections of this article, NATO's military strategy in Afghanistan has failed. Based on the available facts and empirical evidences, the solution to the current problems of Afghanistan is not a mere military operation. Afghanistan suffers from economic, cultural and security shortcomings. It is not possible to

challenge the security problems in Afghanistan, to limit the Taliban's infiltration among civilian population, to cut down on cultivation, production and export of hashish, opium, narcotics and other substances of abuse, without investing in economic development, construction of economic infrastructure such as roads, dams, electricity networks, improvement of water resources, water supply systems, schools, conservatories, workshops, factories and new employment opportunities for the Afghan people. On the other, all the above infrastructures will not last long without lasting security and achieving sustainable security through NATO's military operations has failed up to this date.

This paper proposes that the formation of the "peace and economy army" by Afghanistan's neighbours could be an advantageous solution to the crisis in Afghanistan, especially if a pivotal role is allocated to Iran and Pakistan. This is particularly significant because Iran and Pakistan have a much better reputation among Afghan general public compared with the US-led NATO allies. Iran and Pakistan also encompass a more objective understanding of the ongoing issues in Afghanistan. Therefore, with the political and financial support of the international community, including NATO and United Nations, these countries can form a peace and economy coalitions to face the crisis in Afghanistan. The particular mission, of this particular army is to promote economic development while implementing a flexible political and defensive strategy to deal with Afghanistan's national security problems. The peace and economy army can be a positive force in bringing about economic prosperity and thus regaining the general Afghan public's lost confidence in central government which can ultimately restore condition of sustainable, stable security and peace.

The United States as the leader of NATO forces in Afghanistan should on one hand pressure the Pakistani government to end its support for Taliban, and on the other hand invite Iran for further cooperation. Pakistan, thus far has obtained billions of dollars of funds from United States, under the pretext of combating the Taliban terrorism and it has yet played a deceiving bilateral role with ISI actually supporting the Taliban to the end. Iran, on the other hand could potentially play a

much more active and effective role in Afghanistan. In order to enhance Iran's role in region, it is essential that the United States initiate negotiations with Iran. Once again, the United States could bring Iran's attention to the potentials of playing an active role in Afghanistan and to cooperate in finding suitable exist strategies out of the current crisis in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, because of NATO's sanctions and political pressure against Iran, at this time Iran's mistrust and unwillingness to cooperate with the West has increased compared to the past years.

Abolishment of United Nation and Western countries economic sanctions against Iran, removal of Iran from list of states sponsoring terrorism, increases the probability of Iran playing a more constructive role in finding an exit strategy from the current Afghan crisis. Mohsen Rezaee former Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander argues:

If the United States is to carry out the same old neo-conservative tradition in the region, this country will face much challenge in the future. Formation of a Southwest Asian independent region, by the countries of the region, can bring about security, peace, and prosperity. The current power vacuum in the region can be solved through regionalism, where Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other countries of the Persian Gulf can forms regional unions similar to the European Union. These countries together can form the Southwest Asian Union in which the participating countries pursue and provide regional security, peace and progress.⁸

Conclusion

The current crisis in Afghanistan cannot be resolved by mere military means. NATO forces in Afghanistan are facing failure and the Taliban is regaining power. Afghan resistance groups against NATO forces do not all belong to the extremist Taliban forces and al-Qaeda support networks. Formation of a "peace and economy army" with the participation of the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and the support of the international community could be an advantageous strategy. Such army can attend to economic developments in

Afghanistan and reach compromising conciliations with the more moderate forces among the resistance. Together the neighbouring countries, the moderate Afghan resistance forces, and the Afghan government can construct a coalition to find a new plan and an exist strategy that can include the safe withdrawal of NATO forces and the more active involvement of Muslim neighbouring countries in hope of establishing lasting peace and security in Afghanistan.

Endnotes

¹ This is a translation from the interview conducted in Persian and thus not a direct quote, for the full interview see http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2010/10/101025_k02-nato-casualties.shtml

² http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2010/10/101025_k02-nato-casualties.shtml

³ http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2010/07/100727_u01-congress-afghanistan.shtml

⁴ <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,6222351,00.html>

⁵ To better familiarize with the resistance groups refer to this brief article on the typology insurgent opposition groups: <http://peace-ipsc.org/fa/?p=779>.

⁶ http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/lg/afghanistan/2010/10/101023_k02-afg-haqqani-net-commanders-killed.shtml

⁷ <http://da.azadiradio.org/content/article/2154782.html>

⁸ <http://peace-ipsc.org/fa/?p=139>

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