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## MEETING REPORT

OF THE

3<sup>RD</sup> CONSULTATION ON  
“ALTERNATIVE FUTURES FOR AFGHANISTAN  
AND  
THE STABILITY OF SOUTHWEST ASIA”

AT THE

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, BRUSSELS,  
ALTIERO SPINELLI BUILDING  
17 FEBRUARY 2010

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## ***I.Executive Summary***

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2010, the EastWest Institute convened its 3<sup>rd</sup> Consultation on “Alternative Futures for Afghanistan and the Stability of Southwest Asia”, at the European Parliament in Brussels and with the support of the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies of the National Defense University (USA).

With a view to exploring fresh national and international policy approaches towards stabilizing Afghanistan and the region, the consultation focused on issues of national consolidation and security, and their implications for cross-border security, notably the issues of transfer of “lead responsibility” for Afghan armed forces to establish security in Afghanistan and its border regions and the issue of “reconciliation and reintegration.”

Key-note speeches were delivered by Professor Ali A. Jalali of the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies of the National Defense University (USA); H.E. Lieutenant-General Mohammad Akram, First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan; and H.E. Mohammed Masoom Stanekzai, Minister Advisor on Internal Security to President Karzai (see attachments).

The consultation brought together more than 75 senior decision-makers and experts from Afghanistan, its neighbors and the international community.

### **Recommendations**

The NATO Training Mission - Afghanistan must urgently be equipped with all the necessary resources if the ambitious targets of the London Conference are to be met for the build-up and strengthening of Afghanistan’s security apparatus.

ISAF member states must use more avenues in order to adequately build capacity in the Afghan National Army. This should include more training for officers in NATO member countries in order to speed up the capacity building. They must equally respond to the pressing need for heavy equipment and armored vehicles.

Military-to-military contacts, notably between Afghanistan and Pakistan, should also be further extended.

The current donor fragmentation in the build-up of the Afghan National Police must be overcome. In the immediate future, there should be a clear focus on building a paramilitary police force that is able to ensure safety and security in local communities with specific regard to insurgency and organized crime.

If Afghan security forces and the government are to successfully “hold” territory, the district level must be the center of attention. This requires more focus on civilian development projects (including building administrative capacity) at the periphery level and proper functioning of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT’s).

Reconciliation with the Taliban leadership is a process that should be launched without any conditions. However, high-level advocacy notably in regional countries should be pursued.

Integration of “rank and file” Taliban cannot consist of simply “buying them off” but requires a holistic concept that links reintegration efforts with the overall development policies. It is important that the funds agreed upon in the London Conference are structured accordingly, including stringent modalities of allocation, benchmarking and monitoring mechanisms.

In light of the important role of remittances from the Gulf countries for the development of South and Southeast Asian countries, coordinated and structured efforts to increase the number of Afghan migrant workers (including former Taliban) should be pursued. Such efforts should include integration with donor programs for vocational training.

## *II. Thematic Report of Discussions:*

### **National Consolidation and Security in Afghanistan in Light of the London Conference Decisions**

The London Conference has reaffirmed the international community's commitment to contributing to Afghanistan's security, stability and economic development. Yet this renewed commitment is fragile in light of international dissatisfaction with the Karzai government and a fading public support for the Afghanistan engagement in member countries of the coalition forces. Tangible progress in the delivery of public goods, notably security and a sustainable roll-back of the Taliban insurgency are expected over the next eighteen months to two years to ensure further relevant international commitment to Afghanistan.

This **time pressure** (also connected to the next US Presidential elections in 2012) appears **highly problematic**. Apart from the question on whether the envisaged ambitious successes can be achieved, **there is a real danger that the coalition's commitment, renewed in the London Conference with regard to both military and development assistance, will lose the vision of an end state that embodies good governance, democratic accountability, human rights and equality in Afghanistan, just as much as security and economic development. All this, after decades of war and internal strife, requires time more than anything.**

Meaningful progress will equally depend on increased Afghan ownership of stabilization and development efforts. Development assistance to Afghanistan remains fragmented with the multitudes of donors and the continuous widespread deficits in coordination with all sectors of development assistance. For reasons of coordination, effectiveness and above all ownership, greater steps towards budget support should be undertaken.

Regarding security proper, success will be determined by the Afghan government's ability to control territory, prevent infiltration of destabilizing forces from abroad, and most importantly, win the trust of the people via good governance once a territory is regained.

**There is a clear and vital nexus between sustainable progress towards the goals set in the London Conference and earlier conferences, and the regained legitimacy of the Afghan government based on effective delivery of public goods and credible institutions.** Verbal commitments to reconciliation and reintegration of insurgents are meaningless unless institutional legitimacy and government efficiency are established, including the mobilization of traditional institutions. In that regard, the London Conference's lack of attention to institution-building constitutes a serious flaw.

The role of **civil society and local communities** must not be overlooked in that context. Currently, civil society is dangerously excluded from efforts to stabilize the country. Local communities have traditionally complemented efforts by the Afghan government to enhance security. Such collaboration is only possible when local communities do not question the

legitimacy of the central government. There is a need to fine-tune the balance of power between the center and the district, and **the basic territorial unit for reconstruction and development efforts should be the district.**

### **Ownership in security – transfer of lead responsibility to Afghan defense forces: challenges, conditions, priorities and concepts**

**A great discrepancy exists between the ambition of the London Conference and the ground realities with regard to the targets for Afghanistan’s national security apparatus.** The foreseen increase of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) personnel at the London Conference shows an **obsession with numbers.** Moreover, the target numbers appear unrealistic against an overwhelming background of wide-spread illiteracy, poor professional leadership and drug abuse in all layers of the security apparatus.

There are **overpowering needs for training and capacity building** to satisfy minimal requirements of effectiveness. In the London Conference, the need for a quality build-up of the Afghan security forces has been sacrificed to benchmarking via numbers that could serve as an easy excuse for the coalition to step back from genuine commitment to sustainable conditions for security in the country. **The fact that the NATO Training Mission - Afghanistan has still only half of its envisaged resources is indicative in that regard.**

The London commitment to building an effective Afghan National Police is, in principle, highly recommendable. However, it requires rapid and substantial steps to overcome donor fragmentation and needs to considerably increase capacity building measures. More focus on training the Afghan police to sufficient standards of professionalism and discipline is of particular relevance; given its current poor state of professional standards and the high attrition rate.

**Establishing a paramilitary police force should be an area of priority for donor attention.** It should be responsible for the “holding” of cleared areas and other heavy-duty police tasks. Assistance with equipment and capacity building must reflect this priority. Enabling the police to effectively perform “traditional” police work to uphold the rule of law and protect the population against crime must for the immediate future play a complementary role.

While there is good reason to question the ambitious targets for the Afghan security build-up set at the London Conference, **there have been certain positive developments that are worth mentioning:**

- Following better training, ANA casualties have been reduced by 16 per cent in 2009;
- The recruitment process has been relatively smooth over past months despite major obstacles;
- There is a clear and right focus on infantry build-up;
- Cooperation between ANA and ISAF on both tactical and strategic level has much improved;

- Above all, the new US approach to counterinsurgency will in a major way improve the overall environment to tackle the insurgency and is of great relevance for ANA operations at the strategic and tactical level;
- Challenges such as serious lack of heavy equipment and armored vehicles can be overcome just as the lack of trained officers (including senior officers). With regard to the latter coalition forces should make better use of training ANA officers in coalition countries.

**The vital element of success will be ANA's capability to have access to, control and hold effectively all of Afghanistan's territory.** There must be no pockets of territorial control by the Taliban remaining. A speedy build-up of effective presence of civilian government institutions in regained territory must be part of the successful transfer of lead responsibility in the area of security.

Credible and respected security forces that have proven their ability to lead effective operations can, in principle and under the aspect of nation-building, be a powerful instrument in unifying ethnically diverse Afghanistan. Pakistan constitutes a case in point for this rationale. It may be worthwhile to explore possibilities for a military-to-military dialogue between the two countries beyond the tripartite commission to share experiences and training and thus, increase chances to enhance Afghan Security Forces' overall effectiveness.

### **The Role of "Operation Moshtarak"**

The joint Afghan – ISAF **"Operation Moshtarak"** in the Marjah Community in Helmand **will be considered a test case of the ability of its government to regain territory from the insurgency and reestablish a presence to bring security, rule of law, good governance and development. The success of that operation will have consequences beyond strictly military aspects.** A successful "Operation Moshtarak" could undermine the appeal and support for the Taliban among the population. It can demonstrate that the government and the international community are able to deliver on promises made during the London Conference and notably on two elements crucial to rolling back the insurgency:

- Regaining and maintaining effective territorial control; and
- Effective execution of Afghan leadership and institutional capacities in combat operations and their planning as well as the delivery of good governance after territory is regained.

Successful reconciliation and reintegration will only be possible if these conditions are met and a relative dominance of the government is being established with realistic chances of being sustainable. The Marjah operation should be seen as a trust-building exercise as much as a military operation. Being an Afghan-led initiative, "Operation Moshtarak" carries exemplary value towards rebuilding trust and ownership of stabilizing Afghanistan.

If successful, Operation Moshtarak can dismiss criticism on why 25 per cent of the coalition forces and another 25 per cent of the Afghan soldiers are now squarely focused on regaining control over an area where only 5 per cent of the population lives. Equally, it will dismiss the impression of many actors (both inside and outside Afghanistan) who believe security operations are not carried out on the base of sound strategic planning but rather reflect a quick fix and tactical approach.

## **The Regional Issue**

Stabilization of Afghanistan will not occur through a strictly national focus; interests of regional countries are of paramount importance. Approaches to more security and stability in Afghanistan from regional players will equally require support of major outside powers (NATO, U.S, etc.) that are engaged in Afghanistan.

**The following aspects are critical to understanding regional implications in the issue of stabilizing Afghanistan:**

- Afghanistan and neighboring countries should not be looked at as one region. Rather, Afghanistan and its neighboring countries should be looked at as several sub-regions with some commonalities, yet many, distinct differences and different interests. **Bilateral relations between Afghanistan and neighboring countries must be looked at as the starting point for conflict prevention and increased stability both in Afghanistan and beyond.**
- **There is little chance to establish more stability at a regional (or subregional level) unless bilateral solutions are developed first.** Progress on overall [sub] regional security will depend on the progress on bilateral tracks between Afghanistan and neighboring countries. The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, notably the issue of sanctuaries, remains of particular relevance. More joint efforts of both countries to tackle extremism, both militarily and ideologically, appear advisable. The very considerable military measures, undertaken by Pakistan against militants in Swat and Waziristan, have to be recognized as important steps to a new quality in this bilateral relationship that is vital for overall stability in the region.
- **Interference and intervention of regional countries in Afghanistan will continue as long as the country remains unstable.** There is a clear nexus between Afghanistan being the “object” of regional countries’ interests and interference. **Only a more stable, developed and stronger Afghanistan will be an equal partner as foreseen in the Kabul Declaration of 2002.**
- In light of the above, and unless bilateral solutions between Afghanistan and its neighbors are developed first, **there is little chance of regional organizations gaining genuine relevance for policy formulation and implementation in the near future.**
- Yet, an obvious role for regional organizations and progress on certain issues can be envisaged quickly. **The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) could play a very relevant role in cooperating with Afghan authorities on fighting illegal narcotics and promoting cross-border cooperation.**

While largely due to its instability, Afghanistan has been an object of interference by its neighbors. Nevertheless, better relations at the top level of the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan have developed since a democratically elected government was formed in **Pakistan**. Pakistan could play an even more constructive role should its current relations with India improve.

**Iran** can play a very productive role as well. The positive role it played, in cooperation with Russia, in bringing the warring parties together in Tajikistan’s civil war in the nineties, should be remembered.

## **Talking With the Taliban? – Issues of “Reconciliation and Reintegration”**

Any debate on reconciliation and reintegration must take into account that **a monolithic vision on the insurgency would be erroneous**. One must differentiate between several groups notably:

- Taliban;
- Hizb e Islami;
- The Haqqani Network;
- Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan; and
- Al Qaeda Afghanistan.

Reconciliation can only be envisaged with the first three of these groups. While the official numbers are fluctuating, one can assume that Taliban proper ‘rank and file’ amounts to some 25.000 foot soldiers to which around eight hundred mid-level leadership and several dozen senior leaders have to be added.

**Reconciliation and reintegration needs to be Afghan-led and must avoid a quick fix approach from outside parties. In addition:**

- **There can be no conditions to start the process, nor would it be wise to have a tight time-frame;**
- **A facilitator role should be foreseen for credible third parties such as Saudi Arabia or the UAE. Important stakeholders like Iran and India should also be engaged.**

Several requirements are equally crucial for the success of any reconciliation and reintegration efforts, notably the fact that such efforts have to involve both leading and ‘rank and file’ insurgents. However, **for both groups, a different focus is required:**

**For leading figures**, personal security and possible integration in the political set-up of Afghanistan, (i.e. via parliamentary representation), are issues to be addressed. This raises the question of an **amnesty and security guaranties** by the coalition forces and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

At the same time, reconciliation, if it would envisage some form of political representation, will require **careful consideration of constitutional “red lines” with specific regard to human rights and the role of women**. These should be issues for the international community to consider while taking into account the end-state envisaged for Afghanistan in Bonn and the subsequent conferences that built the rationale for the international community’s engagement: a democratic state, built on international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law.

**Reconciliation, understood as “targeting” the Taliban leadership, requires Afghan ownership and legitimacy more than anything else**. To achieve this, a **transparent and open domestic dialogue with the Afghan population** appears vital. However, equally and given legitimate concerns in many regional countries, **high level advocacy by the Afghan leadership with regional countries is advisable**.

**For ‘rank and file’ insurgents, economic incentives are of major relevance**. However, **“buying off” foot soldiers will not suffice**. Reintegration must be Afghan-led and will require the international donor community to ensure a **holistic approach with overall development strategies**.

**The \$140 million Trust Fund in support of peace and reintegration, agreed upon between the Afghan government and the donor community in London, will be a vital tool to link overall development policies to Afghanistan's reintegration efforts.** Five key areas to utilize the funds resources have been identified:

- Operational outreach to the local level
- Investment in the water sector and agriculture;
- Reforestation;
- Public sector job creation; and
- Vocational Training

**Policies to be supported by the fund, as well as other elements of reintegration, should be tailored in a way that renders the peace process self-supporting soon.** This urgently requires the development of modalities of administration of the fund, criteria for distribution of its resources, an effective monitoring structure with agreed benchmarks etc... The major contradiction between the time necessary to achieve sustainable peace, and the tight schedule for tangible results has to be borne in mind. However, it is noteworthy, with regard to the trust fund, that money has only been pledged and payments have not yet been received.

**It might be worthwhile to consult with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries on migrant labor programs for Afghan workers.** Experiences with many developing countries have shown that remittances by migrant workers contribute considerably to the economic development of their home countries. Such an approach that would also target former rank and file Taliban should be developed, in coordination with donor countries' policies, for education and vocational training. **Given the considerable Pakistani economic interests in sending its own nationals to Gulf countries, this approach should be equally developed in a consultative manner with Pakistan.**

The January 2010 London Conference and the upcoming Kabul Conference, planned for the spring, can be legitimately regarded as an opening of a new chapter. There is a new chance for successful international engagement and the establishment of a more democratic and stable Afghanistan. At the same time, in light of past experiences with major conferences dealing with Afghanistan over the past eight years, great skepticism remains, notably in the region, regarding the seriousness by which decisions will be implemented.

The key component of success will be the ability of the government to provide, after many years of dismal performance, good governance and effective services to the people of Afghanistan sooner rather than later, and for the international community to honor its commitments from the London Conference by supplying the necessary resources and better coordination.