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## Afghans are not easily bought

By Eric S Margolis

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The US and its Nato allies are finally facing the truth: they are losing the nine-year old war in Afghanistan.

Accordingly, Washington and London, both in dire financial straits, say they are now ready to deal with some members of Taliban or even, it is hinted, make a face-saving peace deal with the Taliban and its nationalist allies.

If you can't bomb them into submission, buy them off.

A conference was held in London last Thursday to raise tens of millions of dollars to try to bribe lower-level Taliban to co-operate with the Western occupation and/or lay down its arms.

Bribery is a time-honoured tool of war. But it's not the answer in Afghanistan. The bloody Afghan conflict can only be ended by genuine peace negotiations and withdrawal of all foreign troops.

US commanders in Afghanistan admit they have lost the military initiative. The resistance is steadily gaining ground. Increasing US and allied troops to 150,000 won't be enough to defeat Taliban. By year end, US and Nato forces will only equal the number of Soviet forces committed to Afghanistan in the 1980's.

Meanwhile, Pakistan, without whose co-operation the US cannot wage war in Afghanistan, is in turmoil. The US is infiltrating Xe (formerly Blackwater) and DynCorp mercenaries into Pakistan to protect US military supply routes north from Karachi to Afghanistan, and to operate or defend US air bases in Pakistan.

US mercenaries are being used to assassinate militants and enemies of Pakistan's US-installed government, and to target Pakistan's nuclear installations for future US attacks. This, and increasing attacks by US killer drones, have sparked outrage across Pakistan and brought warnings of creeping US occupation.

US and Nato forces in Afghanistan are like a man trying to fix a chimney on the roof of a burning house.

As Pakistan burns, so will Afghanistan.

Washington lacks the men, money, and understanding to deal with chaotic Pakistan - never mind chaotic Afghanistan.

Washington, London, Ottawa, Berlin and Paris all share the same problem: their war propaganda has so demonised Taliban as terrorists and woman abusers that Western politicians are petrified to deal with the tribal movement, and risk being accused of sending soldiers to their deaths in a futile war. The far right will howl "appeasement", "giving in to terrorism", and "betraying our boys".

These advocates of permanent war and torture must be ignored. Afghans have suffered over 3mn deaths in three years of wars. They desperately need peace, political stability, and rebuilding, not the current Western-installed puppet regime of thieving war lords, drug mafias, and thugs of the old Afghan Communist Party.

Today, Afghanistan is even worse off than when the US invaded in 2001. The West is busy rushing food and aid to ravaged Haiti, but turns a blind eye to the suffering and starvation in Afghanistan and Gaza.

The West can't "win" in Afghanistan. In fact, Washington cannot even define what victory means. The intelligent, straight-talking American ambassador to Kabul, former general Karl Eikenberry, as well as VP Joe Biden, insist it's time to start peace talks. We should heed their sensible advice.

Real peace talks are the answer. Not the ruse long proposed by US Gen Stanley McChrystal to try to bribe away low-ranking Taliban and so split the Afghan resistance. This stratagem worked to a degree with Sunni tribesmen in Iraq, but is unlikely to succeed with the proud Pashtun tribes who value honour more than money. There is an antique concept most Westerners cannot understand.

Taliban, an anti-Communist religious movement, knew nothing about Al Qaeda's plans to attack the United States. That plot was hatched in Europe, not Afghanistan. Many members of the anti-

Communist Taliban and its allies were former allies of the West and were hailed by President Ronald Reagan as “freedom fighters”.

After 9/11, Taliban refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden to the enraged United States without proper evidence of his guilt because he was an honoured guest and hero of the anti-Soviet jihad.

Taliban chose war with the US before betraying a guest. Such men are not to be easily bought.