

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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## The Afghan Media and Their Peace-Building Potential

Media can play a vital role in Peace Building in Afghanistan. One of the key issues to be interrogated by media researchers in relation to conflicted societies is the extent to which the media serve to escalate or reduce the overall conflict situation. The argument goes that the media either escalate the conflict by accentuating disagreements, foregrounding confrontations, and lending air time to forceful voices, or, conversely, reduce the conflict by shunning extremism, giving room for alternative voices and visualizing peaceful solutions. For several reasons, the media situation in and around Afghanistan provides an interesting ground for discussing these issues. For one, the longlasting Afghan conflict has been a recurrent issue for both the local and the international media. In addition, the extraordinary situation of the growing Afghan diaspora has provoked a media engagement that in a special way treats issues of conflict through civic-driven, transnational media channels. Within this backdrop, it is the aim of the current article to discuss the role of the extended Afghan media in relation to the local conflict situation.

Within media and conflict research, a particular movement, namely "peace journalism," has received increased attention over the last few years. In short, peace journalism seeks to challenge conventional journalism by working actively for peace through the media. The movement has gained momentum as a result of criticism raised against conventional media operations in the coverage of the so-called global war on terror, a critique that echoes several decades of disappointment with the global media and their coverage of national and international conflicts. Against this backdrop, peace journalism claims to be an alternative to the traditionally conflict-oriented news paradigm.

Peace researchers generally see a great potential for improvement in the area of mass media as an instrument for change and reconciliation. Media analysts are often more skeptical. It is difficult to decide what role the Afghan media actually play in the process of conflict resolution. In practice, when the peace journalism philosophy is transferred to actual media work, small media and active audience formats are deemed most useful. When traditional news media channels are requested to engage in peace journalism, the recommendations tend to reinforce traditional journalistic standards: independence, objectivity, fairness, and the importance of fact checking. These standards correspond entirely with the values called for by journalist organizations in Afghanistan. In this area, the contribution of peace journalism does not stand out as something new. When it comes to the need for explaining the complexity of the Afghan conflict and creating understanding between the various parties, there is undoubtedly room for improvement both in the Afghan and international media.

A bulletin style news language would not suffice. One needs wider program formats and participation from diverse interests, including average citizens. The language of the media must also be the subject of persistent critical analysis. Some of the important issues are how reporters frame a conflict and who they include and exclude in the presentation. To scrutinize the media processes, one could very well be inspired by Johan Galtung and other peace researchers who are critical of the logics of the mainstream media.

However, traditional journalism actually does not appear to be hostile to improvements in these areas. To the contrary, it is part and parcel of the journalistic craft to be cognizant of the effects of word choice and media framing. To journalists covering Afghan issues, however, the appropriate approach appears to be the exercise of professional journalism rather than entering a peace mediation role.

## Iran-Afghanistan Deepen Bilateral Cooperation

By: Li Boyi, Huang Dekai &amp; Ren Mingzhe

On Oct. 12, Abdullah, chief executive of Afghanistan, met with Iran's deputy foreign minister, Samdi, in Tajikistan. The two countries said that they will comprehensively implement the "Iran-Afghanistan Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement" to strengthen cooperation in security, water and economic sectors. Then, (September), Abdullah met with his counterpart, Iran's president Hassan Rouhani, in New York, they jointly highlighted the importance of relations between the two countries, as well as the strengthening of bilateral cooperation that would make the gains of the two countries. Iran-Afghanistan's strengthening of bilateral cooperation is not only because of geopolitical proximity, profound historical and cultural factors and strategic mutual needs, but also the result of the common role of the international situation. First, geographical location. Iran-Afghanistan's strengthening of bilateral cooperation will make the present geographical location better. Afghanistan is located in the junction of South Asia, Western Asia and Central Asia, and is the place for the world's main powers. Iran is located in the Middle East with a superior geographical location, North, it is adjacent to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Iraq on the west, Pakistan and Afghanistan in the east, and to look at the sea, there are Kazakhstan and Russia, on the south, it is the Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. If Iran and Afghanistan deepen their cooperation, they will be in the heart of Eurasia. Second, the historical and cultural factors. Iran has a profound historical connection with Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Iran have a shared culture of Persian, common language and cultural constructed the spiritual links, also good political relations with each other, and there are no serious contradictions similar to those of other neighbors. Thereby, they can create a community awareness that provides the cultural platform for cooperation. Last but not least, the strategic demand. Iran has important strategic interests in Afghanistan. On the one hand, Iran sees Afghanistan as its strategic fulcrum to the development of Central Asia; therefore, Iran has strengthened its cooperation with the Central Asia region by applying for the SCO, deepening the cooperating with the Eurasian Economic Union, promoting the development of the Caspian oil and gas; On the other hand, Iran hopes for a strong and stable Afghanistan, in order to achieve its goal. Iran has been providing substantial assistance to the Afghan national reconstruction, and

strengthening the economic ties between Iran and Afghanistan. At the same time, Iranian factors are fully reflected in the Afghan political process, economic reconstruction, the fight against drug trafficking and the placement of refugees and opposition to the United States in Afghanistan. Peace and stability in Afghanistan will be inseparable from Iran's participation and support.

In addition, the role of external forces is further deepening bilateral cooperation. The USA-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) withdrew from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 and transferred all Afghan security responsibilities to the Afghan security forces. The continuing tensions between Iran and USA, and the special relationship between USA and Afghanistan, led Iran to a dilemma. Iran has always taken Afghanistan as an important starting point for its foreign policy. But the ambiguity of Afghan policy of Trump's government has also prompted Afghanistan to seek a broader external cooperation target, where Iran will play an important role in the evolution of the situation in Afghanistan.

Although the relations between Iran and Afghanistan have been strengthened, some practical problems remain in place impacting the process of relations between the two countries. The two countries have not only formed a political will to cooperate, but also agreed on practical issues, such as the acceptance of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees by Iran and the provision of relevant funding, education support and help to achieve labour-dispatch. Of course, we should also see that some factors still hinder the development of relations between the two countries, such as the role of Iran in Afghanistan, which is somewhat limited by the attitude of government officials and people. There are serious differences between the two countries in the development and utilization of water resources; The Afghan doubt that it is Iran's support for "agent's war" in Afghanistan, while Iran warning Afghans not to import terrorism to Iran.

In conclusion, the future development of relations between Iran and Afghanistan is deeply influenced by the multi-level factors. In view of the fact that the two countries have gradually internalized the concept of cooperation into the bilateral relations, and a number of cooperation agreements have been reached successively, and other factors, such as geographical proximity, has laid the foundation for promoting the healthy development of relations between the two countries.

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## The Khashoggi Crisis: A Blessing in Disguise for Pakistan's Imran Khan

By: James M. Dorsey

The death of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi is proving to be a blessing in disguise for cash-strapped Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan. Mr. Khan's blessing is also likely to offer Saudi Arabia geopolitical advantage.

On the principle of all good things are three, Mr. Khan struck gold on his second visit to the kingdom since coming to office in August. Mr. Khan was rewarded for attending Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's showcase investors conference in Riyadh, dubbed Davos in the Desert, that was being shunned by numerous CEOs of Western financial institutions, tech entrepreneurs and media moguls as well as senior Western government officials because of the Khashoggi affair.

In talks with King Salman and the crown prince, Saudi Arabia promised to deposit US\$3 billion in Pakistan's central bank as balance of payments support and to defer up to US\$3 billion in payments for oil imports for a year.

Saudi Arabia declined Mr. Khan's request for financial aid during his first visit to the kingdom in September but was willing to consider investing billions of dollars in a refinery in the Chinese-operated Arabian Sea port of Gwadar as well as in mining but was reluctant to acquiesce to Pakistani requests for financial relief.

Saudi Arabia's subsequent agreement to provided finance is likely to help Mr. Khan reduce the size of the US\$8-12 billion bailout he is negotiating with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Speaking in an interview before leaving for Riyadh, Mr. Khan said he was attending the conference despite the "shocking" killing of Mr. Khashoggi because "unless we get loans from friendly countries or the IMF, we actually won't have in another two or three months enough foreign exchange to service our debts or to pay for our imports. So we're desperate at the moment."

Pakistan's foreign reserves dropped this month to US\$8.1 billion, a four-year low and barely enough to cover sovereign debt payments due through the end of the year. The current account deficit has swelled to about \$18 billion.

Potential Saudi investment in the Reko Diq copper and gold mine as well as a refinery in Gwadar, both close to Pakistan's border with Iran would give it a further foothold in the troubled province of Balochistan. Gwadar is a mere 70 kilometres down the coast from the Indian-backed Iranian port of Chabahar.

Pakistani militants reported last year that funds from the kingdom were flowing into the coffers of ultra-conservative anti-Shiite, anti-Iranian Sunni Muslim madrassahs or religious seminars in the region. It was unclear whether the funds originated with the Saudi government or Saudi nationals of Baloch descent and members of the two million-strong Pakistani Diaspora in the kingdom.

It was equally unclear how Saudi Arabia expected to capitalize on its rewarding of Mr. Khan in its competition with Iran for Pakistan's favours.

Ensuring that Pakistan, home to the world's largest Shiite minority,

does not snuggle up too much to Iran has become even more crucial for Saudi Arabia as it seeks in the wake of Mr. Khashoggi's death to enhance its indispensability to US President Donald J. Trump's effort to isolate and cripple Iran economically, if not to engineer a change of regime in Tehran.

Mr. Trump sees Saudi Arabia as central to his strategy aimed at forcing the Islamic republic to halt its support for proxies in Yemen and Lebanon, withdraw its forces from Syria, and permanently dismantle its nuclear and ballistic missiles programs.

Saudi financial support means that Mr. Khan may find it more difficult to shield Pakistan from being sucked into the US-Saudi effort. Insurgents last week kidnapped 14 Iranian security personnel, reportedly including Revolutionary Guards on the Iranian side of the border with Pakistan. Pakistan pledged to help liberate the abductees who are believed to have been taken across the border into Balochistan, long a militant and Baloch nationalist hotbed.

"Members of terrorist groups that are guided and supported by foreign forces carried this out through deceiving and bribing infiltrators," the Guards said in a statement that appeared to blame Saudi Arabia and the United States without mentioning them by name.

The incident is likely to heighten Chinese concerns that in a worst-case scenario, Saudi investment rather than boosting economic activity and helping Gwadar get out of the starting blocks, could ensnare it too in one of the Middle East's most debilitating conflicts.

China is further concerned that there would be a set of third-party eyes monitoring activity if and when it decides to use Gwadar not only for commercial purposes but also as a naval facility.

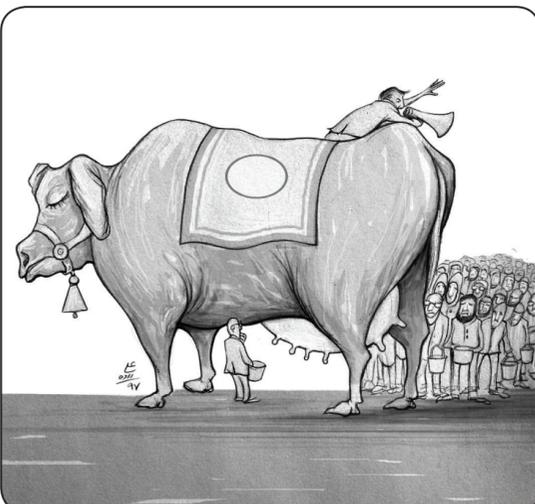
Saudi investment could further thwart potential Chinese plans to link the ports of Gwadar and Chabahar, a prospect that Pakistani and Iranian officials have in the past not excluded. With Saudi financial aid, that may no longer be an option that Mr. Khan can entertain.

Mr. Khan will have to take that into account when he travels to Beijing next week in a bid to secure Chinese financial support and convince Beijing to fast forward focusing the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a US\$45 billion plus infrastructure and energy generation-driven Belt and Road crown jewel, on issues such as job creation, manufacturing and agriculture.

Mr. Khan appeared to anticipate in his interview with Middle East Eye on the eve of his participation in the Riyadh investment conference that he would have reduced leeway by blaming the United States for increased tensions with Iran and hinting that Pakistan did not want to be drawn into conflict with the Islamic republic.

Said Mr. Khan: "The US-Iran situation is disturbing for all of us in the Muslim world... The last thing the Muslim world wants is another conflict. The worrying part is that the Trump administration is moving towards some sort of conflict with Iran."

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