

THE NEW GEOPOLITICS OF AFGHANISTAN AND THEIR IMPACT ON IRANIAN NATIONAL SECURITY

Mohammad DARKHOR

*Ph.D. (Political Geography),
Researcher at Imam Hussein University
(Tehran, Iran)*

Alireza SALEHI

*M.A. in Regional Studies, School of International Relations,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
(Tehran, Iran)*

ABSTRACT

The military intervention in Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks of al-Qa'eda terrorists provided an opportunity for U.S. politicians to materialize their long-awaited dream of the monopolar world predicted by scholars like Fukuyama after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar world. Fukuyama, among others, believed that American liberal thought would be universally accepted and this would eventually lead to U.S. global domination.

The attitude of al-Qa'eda and the Taliban, on the one hand, and Afghanistan's strategic position, on the other, were not what U.S. officials needed for this purpose. However, Afghanistan could be used as an instrument to put pressure on Russia, Iran, China, and India. The Taliban's deplorable abuse of basic human rights, women, and narcotic drugs, etc. could justify the U.S.'s presence as a defender of human rights. Although Afghanistan was invaded in 2001,

and despite primary victories, the war is still going on more than 13 years later, and intervention is still continuing despite the change in U.S. administration. As a consequence of this occupation, the new geopolitics of this region are emerging with the presence of

NATO forces, the continuing war, the incompletely suppressed Taliban forces, and the increase in insecurity for Iran and Pakistan. While at the same time, the Afghan mujahidin forces are being replaced by technocrats.

KEYWORDS: *Iran, the U.S., geopolitics, national security, the Taliban, Afghanistan, NATO.*

Introduction

Following Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s, U.S. attention was drawn to this region. The U.S. tried to turn this war-torn country into a Vietnam for the Soviet Union. To do this, the U.S. started supporting the mujahedin against the Soviet forces, providing them with financial aid, as well as sophisticated weapons.

However, after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the status of Afghanistan changed in U.S. foreign policy, losing its priority. This change, in turn, opened a venue for regional and traditional players, e.g. Iran and Pakistan, to have a more active role. After the fall of Najibullah's communist regime in 1992 and at the beginning of the mujahedin rule, Iran was the most important player in Afghanistan. However, the emergence of the Taliban, which resulted in the fall of Kabul in 1994, made Pakistan the major player in Afghanistan.

For a long time, the Taliban's brutal measures and human rights violations, especially against women and minorities, was not seriously dealt with by international community. It was only after the 9/11 incident, which endangered U.S. national security, that a serious stand was taken against this regime, resulting in the fall of the Taliban and the occupation of Afghanistan.

Although Iran played a positive role in containing the Taliban, the direct presence of the U.S. in Afghanistan and occupation of this country changed the traditional geopolitics of this region and was considered a threat to Iran's national security, especially on its eastern borders, resulting in new security concerns for the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Research Method

The method of this research is descriptive-analytic. Published books and scholarly articles in different scientific journals were used. Interviews of governmental officials were another source for gathering data in this research.

Question of the Research

What is the Impact of Afghanistan's New Geopolitics after 11 September on Iran's National Security?

Research Hypotheses

Some elements of Afghanistan's new geopolitics, such as semi-stability and the anti-Taliban movement, have led to new opportunities, other elements, such as the increase in opium production and insurgency, have led to threats, while still others, like the U.S. presence, have had an ambiguous effect on Iran's national security.

Conceptual Framework: Reviewing the National Security Concept

National security is an applied concept in political science. Since it can be misused by governments as a legitimizing tool, it has always been applied with many ambiguities. A national security concept is ambiguous by definition due to its legitimizing impact on government actions. For example, it could be confined to national threats in order to be understood by audiences more easily.¹ We can see an example of this in the U.S.'s national security doctrine when former U.S. president George W. Bush transformed it from a deterrence-based doctrine to one based on preventive/preemptive warfare. Every act in this type of preventive war deals with immediate threats, hence the national security concept was confined to national threats.

Efforts to define the national security concept go back to the time when the nation-state concept was developed, and, since then, different definitions have been proposed. They include simple definitions, such as the view offered by John Morner, who defined security as "relative disengagement from harmful threats," and more complex ones, which include factors like determining future prosperity, independence, and cultural creativity.²

This paper intends to review the functionality of the security features affected by the new geopolitics of Afghanistan, which, in turn, affect Iran's national security at the macro-level. Therefore, common factors in all definitions of national security proposed or emphasized by scholars and experts in security issues have been extracted. In this paper, these fundamental factors have been used as the basis of future analyses. The common factors of these definitions can be divided into five categories. They will be considered in two general groups of limiting factors and threatening factors.

- A. Threatening factors include those factors that threaten the innate components of a system. Those factors are as follows:
 - (1) Factors that undermine security; they are offered in the definitions of scholars like Barry Buzan, Akbar Rahman, etc. They include:
 - Threats related to territorial integrity — separatism or aggression against part of a country.

¹ See: E. Goldman, "New Threat, New Identities and New Ways of War: The Source of Change in National Security Doctrine," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2001, pp. 43-76.

² See: A. Rabiei, *National Security Studies: Introduction of National Security Theories in Third Word*, Institute for Politics and International Studies, Tehran, 2004, pp. 11-43 (in Farsi).

—Threats related to national sovereignty — undermining or partitioning the ruling government.

—Threats related to national solidarity — undermining culture, traditions, and so on.

(2) Ideological factors are those that prevail in countries where politics are overshadowed by ideological behavior. Although these factors can be reduced to cultural factors in the non-ideological countries, in the case of countries such as Iran, ideology affects politics as much as geography does. Moreover, ideology results in creating a zero-sum game because, as many scholars, such as Richard Cooper, Frank Traeger, and Frank Simone, have pointed out in their definition of security, it is possible to bargain over interests, but it is meaningless to bargain over ideology.

B. Limiting factors are those factors that, at first glance, do not seem to threaten national security at the macro level. However, there are three characteristics that can transform limiting factors into threatening ones.

- The first characteristic is the ability to delegitimize the system, which appears to be a bigger problem for ideological regimes.
- The second characteristic is that these factors are of a multi-dimensional nature, so neglecting any of these dimensions may result in the unprecedented appearance of other factors creating a more complex problem. This can serially create a domino-type problem, showing the overall ineffectiveness of the system. For example, in a country lacking political stability or with fragile stability, its economy will be affected by instability, causing unemployment, for example, which, in turn, will result in an increase in crime, including drug trafficking. Finally, this can lead to insecurity in the country, its neighbors, the region, and even the whole world.
- The third characteristic is related to the growing trend of these factors. This may have an impact on a region in the early stages and cover the whole country in the later phases.

As illustrated before, limiting factors are those factors that affect a country's performance potential and could make the system inefficient and paralyzed. They include political, economic, and cultural factors.

Afghanistan Developments and Iranian National Security

Afghanistan is one of the very few countries that has never been under the direct colonization of other countries and this fact remains in the memory of each and every Afghani. A country that defeated the British Empire in the 19th century and the Soviet Union in the 20th century is now struggling with the U.S. Afghanistan has been called the cemetery of the superpowers.

The new geopolitics of Afghanistan is the main pillar of this paper, which tries to examine the fixed and variable parameters involved in forming this concept in the politics of Afghanistan and its effects on Iranian national security. The historical background has been considered in the review of these new geopolitics as far as the variable parameters are concerned.

Afghanistan and Delay in the Formation of a Nation-State

The delay in the formation of a nation-state in Afghanistan goes back into the history of this country and is regarded as one of the most important factors in shaping the new geopolitics of Afghanistan. Due to its geographic location, Afghanistan has always been a disputed area, the borders of which were exchanged among Iran, India, and state formations in the territory of Turkestan. Hence, it was never an independent entity.³ Except for "Herat," which was regarded as one of Iran's provinces,⁴ Afghanistan does not even identify itself as being a province of Iran, India, or Turkestan.

Ahmad Khan Abdali, an Afghan (Pashtun) commander in Nader Shah's Army (King of Iran), staged a rebellion after Nader's death, proclaimed an independent state, and captured Kabul and Kandahar. His territory only covered the Pashtun populated areas. By the time the British Empire entered Afghanistan, Herat was also annexed to those two territories, mainly to build a buffer state for colonized India against Iran and Russia.

The northern border of present Afghanistan was a consequence of the Great Game played by Britain and Russia, a term usually attributed to Arthur Conolly (1807-1842), an intelligence officer of the British East India Company's Sixth Bengal Light Cavalry. It was introduced into mainstream consciousness by British novelist Rudyard Kipling in his book *Kim* in relation to British-Russian relations. The Afghans did not have much of a role in shaping what is called Afghanistan today. The country was shaped within a short span of time of about fifty years mainly due to the weakness of Iran's rulers and the games played by outsiders. So it can be said that its identity has not been shaped yet. Three different races and ethnicities of Uzbeks, Farses, and Pashtuns began living in a country where none of them had a common history or identity. Even now after 250 years, these people live separately in different cities or different colonies within the cities.

Religion can be regarded as the next factor causing the delay in the formation of a nation-state. Located on the eastern frontier of the Islamic world, religion has always been a prominent factor in shaping Afghanistan's identity. While many ethnic groups are Shi'ites, many more are Sunnis, and the difference in religion is supported by the difference in ethnicity. This difference between religion and ethnicity has prompted riots. An example of this was observed when the Taliban entered Mazar-e-Sharif, where more than 6,000 were slaughtered and 15,000 went missing.

A: Non-State Building and its Implications for Iran's National Security

"The lack of security in Afghanistan has prevented any investment for production and it has resulted in huge unemployment. This in turn has caused new immigration of Afghans to Iran and the unwillingness of 1.7 million Afghans living in Iran to return home."⁵ Further, the government's measures to send these Afghans back home have come up against three obstacles.

³ See: P. Mojtahedzadeh, "Geography and Politics in Real World," *Political & Economic Ettelaat* (Tehran), No. 11-12, 1997, pp. 34-45 (in Farsi).

⁴ See: A. Partov, "Paris Pact: The Tragic Story of Afghanistan Separation from Iran," *Political & Economic Ettelaat* (Tehran), No. 1-2, 2009, pp. 14-23 (in Farsi).

⁵ F. Adelkhah, O. Zuzanna, "The Iranian Afghan," *The International Society for Iranian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2007, p. 142.

- First, due to the poorly guarded borders, Afghans deported across the Afghanistan border will return to Iran. The cost of keeping them away from Iran is much higher than what the government budget allocates for this purpose or the aid granted by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- Second, the ad hoc plans to return these immigrants to their homes are usually postponed a few weeks after their inception due to the intervention of the Afghanistan government. Hamid Karzai's intervention suspended such a plan in 2008.
- Third, there is a popular belief that there are no borders in the Islamic world. There are some who believe that being a Muslim alone gives one the right to live in Islamic countries and that Muslims have no need for a visa to live in Iran. Although this belief does not have many supporters now owing to the public's willingness to deport illegal foreign nationals, it prevailed in the first decade after the victory of the Islamic revolution in 1979, concurrent with the Soviet attack on Afghanistan.

Iran itself suffers from a high unemployment rate, which was registered as 12.5% in 2009.⁶ According to a study conducted in 2004, "more than 3 million Afghans have been living in Iran."⁷ Recent statistics show that 1.5 to 2 million Afghans live in Iran at present, whereby about 50 percent of them can be considered able-bodied.

Since the average job creation capacity in Iran is 350 thousand jobs per year, this large population has caused many problems in dealing with unemployment. Since most of these Afghans work for minimum wages, the wage level has been kept low. However, Afghans do not have utility and other municipal expenses, nor do they pay taxes, so Iranians who work in the same jobs for such low wages suffer a lot. This process has increased the number of people who live below the poverty line in Iran.⁸ But as the poverty line in Afghanistan covers more than 53 percent of the population, Afghans think that Iran has much better working conditions than Afghanistan.⁹

These illegal migrants are also creating a security problem. The different culture, as well as their inability to establish an identity in the host country, has created a new dimension to this problem, "the involvement of some Afghan nationals in social crimes."¹⁰

B: Implications for Iran's Social Status

Yet another dimension to the immigration problem is marriages—even illegal ones. "Statistics offer a different number for Afghan marriages registered in Iran, which varies from 300-500 thousand."¹¹ "The average population growth rate among Afghan families is as high as 4.7%,"¹² and most of those families demand Iranian birth certificate for their children. This is how Afghans residing in Iran believe they can guarantee their stay in Iran. Although the government has notified the

⁶ [www.indexmundi.com/iran/unemplimentrate], 11 February, 2011.

⁷ "Analysis of Afghanistan's Geopolitical Role in Iranian National Security," *Strategic Defense Studies Quarterly*, No. 19, 2004, p. 104 (in Farsi).

⁸ [www.indexmundi.com/iran/unemplimentrate], 21 March, 2011.

⁹ [www.hous.gov/internationalrelation\105th\ap\wsap212982.htmwww.indexmundi.com/afghanistan/populationbelowpovertyline], 12 May, 2011.

¹⁰ "Analysis of Afghanistan's Geopolitical Role in Iranian National Security," p. 140.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 23.

¹² F. Adelpkhan, O. Zuzanna, op. cit., p.143.

registration offices about the difficulties created by registering these marriages, the problem still continues. One consequence of these marriages, which are mostly unregistered, is that when those married Afghans are deported, they leave their families in Iran. Thus children born in Iran are not entitled to an Iranian birth certificate or Iranian nationality, which means they are not allowed to study in Iranian schools. At best, they will be able to register at Afghan schools, which is extremely expensive. Since they do not have Iranian birth certificates and are considered illegal immigrants, they mostly do not attend any school.

This is a complex problem at the macro level because those children who consider themselves to be Iranian are unable to study at any school. They will be illiterate, nor do they have any form of ID. However, they have grown up in Iranian society and do not want to go and live in Afghanistan. They are very good target for the drug traffickers, mafia, and criminal groups active in the region.

This problem is further complicated by the fact that these families need support. Even if an Iranian woman is married to an illegal foreign national, she is still an Iranian national and entitled to have her rights as a citizen. This problem has also affected the international private laws practiced in Iran. Iran has been forced to add an exclusion clause concerning Afghan migrants to the law on blood and soil that is practiced there for obtaining citizenship.

Although free education for Afghans could potentially pave the way for the continuation of these marriages, the Iranian government wants these children (under certain conditions) to study in Iran and become familiar with this country's society and culture so that when they return to Afghanistan they can play a positive role and upgrade their culture as well.

The Role of the Central Asian States (CAS) in the New Geopolitics of Afghanistan

With the fall of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, became independent. Iran was among the first countries to recognize their independence and, since these countries are located on Iran's geopolitical borders, building close cultural, political, and economic relations with them became a priority of Iran's foreign policy. Although these countries have a virgin and ready market for investment, the difference in technological level between them and Iran has limited Iran's maneuvering power in the economic sphere.¹³ Some experts believe that the ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) is a useless organization. Afghanistan does not have close relations with those countries and lacks the potential to build strong economic relations.

The appearance of these five new countries in the north of Afghanistan can be considered an important issue for Iran with respect to its national security, as well as its ideology. In terms of national security, issues related to the Central Asian States can be divided into both limiting and threatening factors. There are two important issues about this new paradigm for Iran. The first one is re-

¹³ See: M. Haghghi, "Obstacles to Integration in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)," *Middle East Quarterly* (Tehran), No. 7, 1995, pp. 140-142 (in Farsi).

lated to the U.S.'s presence in these countries, which Iran considers a threatening factor for its national security, while the second factor relates to the oil and gas resources in CA, which can be regarded as either a limiting or a threatening factor, or both.

A: The Presence of U.S. and NATO Troops in the CAS

The Near East is defined as a region constituting the Arab world, Israel, Turkey, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. This region has the largest sources of fossil fuel, which makes it so attractive to the global powers. This is a region where the U.S. has key allies and important interests.

As U.S. national security strategists emphasize, the CA region is a part of the Greater Near East where the U.S. has many interests. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. tried to prevent Russia becoming a world power, so its presence in the former Soviet republics, and even encouraging its allies to do the same thing, was an important agenda to pursue. As a consequence of this agenda, the U.S. had a military base called Manas in Kyrgyzstan (now it is the Transit Center), forces from Germany acting under NATO cover were stationed at an air base located in Termez (Uzbekistan), and until 2002, there were French troops at a logistic center located in Tajikistan. Even the Netherlands have tried to obtain permission to deploy their F-16 jets in the Bishkek airport (Kyrgyzstan).¹⁴

Iran considers the presence of these troops as a limiting factor for its national security because although Iran hoped and expected to have a wide range of economic, political, and cultural relations with these countries soon after their independence, unfortunately this did not happen. Iran's eagerness to have a cultural impact on these countries could not match Russia's political dominance over them. Moreover, the political influence that Iran hoped to have through inviting them to become members in the ECO was not effective because these countries had other foreign policy priorities. For example, at a summit meeting of the Economic Cooperation Organization in 1996, Uzbekistan threatened to leave the ECO if Iran continued to politicize this organization.

Meanwhile, the U.S.'s presence in CA minimized Iran's chances of exploiting the potential that emerged in the region after the fall of the Soviet Union. Now the Americans are able to move easily between their bases in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Before the September 9/11 attacks, U.S. troops could only reach this region through air routes, but now they have widened their influence in the region to the extent that they can move on the ground as well. The U.S. is now a big economic partner of these countries. The extreme economic weakness of these states, as well as the broad financial capacity of the U.S. and its western allies can undoubtedly intensify western influence in this region. For example, Tajikistan, which shares a common language, culture, and civilization with Iran and logically should be Iran's biggest economic partner, enjoys this partnership with Austria, France, and the U.S. in terms of import and with Sweden, Norway, and Austria in export.¹⁵ In general, Iran feels that the U.S.'s military presence in this region has weakened its bargaining power in regional policy.

Iran is trying to overcome its isolation in foreign policy, mainly created by the tension in relations with the U.S., by stressing regional convergence or regionalism. Despite Shahram Chubin's view¹⁶ (he says U.S.-Iran relations are facing a paradoxical stage with both sides choosing between

¹⁴ See: I.I. Pop, "Russia, EU, NATO, and the Strengthening of the CSTO in Central Asia," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, 2009, p. 285.

¹⁵ See: M. Haghighi, op. cit., p. 1024.

¹⁶ Cm.: Sh. Chubin, "The Iranian Nuclear Riddle after June 12," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2010, p. 163.

bad and worse), it can be said that there is no paradox in U.S.-Iran relations. Iran has shown its eagerness to play an active role in solving regional problems, despite its differences with the U.S. Iran has shown that stabilization in Afghanistan and the region is important and has played an active role as far as this region is concerned.

Iran's isolation has confined its ability to play a more active role in the region. Iran could use its good offices due to the existence of a common culture, but its maneuverability has been limited by this isolation factor, which can be considered a limiting factor of its national security.

The next problem faced by Iran as a result of the U.S.'s presence and its easy access to the region through Afghanistan is the activities of Washington's allies, especially Israel. Israel's presence on the Iranian borders is considered a threat to its national security. The Saudis too are supporting the extremist Wahhabis, which is considered a threat to Iran's national security.¹⁷ Saudi Arabia encourages this religious movement through financial support, although in our opinion, this support will only create violence and hatred in this region and increase the differences between the Shi'ites and Wahhabis. The rise of Wahhabism in CA could also jeopardize any Iranian investment activities, officially or unofficially.

B: Energy Pipeline Passing through Afghanistan

Emphasizing the importance of energy in this region in its 2005 report, the International Energy Agency (IEA) indicated several factors. Those factors include:

- Growth in the global economy and population during the next 30 years will be the primary cause of the increasing demand for energy.
- It is estimated that world energy requirements will increase by 66 percent over the next 30 years.
- During this period, fossil fuels will continue to be the most important source of energy.
- Today, the security of energy supply is the top priority and a matter of concern for energy policymakers.¹⁸

This region is estimated to possess approximately 60 billion barrels of oil reserves equivalent to 11 years' consumption of the whole Europe. According to other estimates, total reserves amount to about 200 billion barrels of oil.¹⁹ Tables 1 and 2 below show the total oil and gas production of the region in 2009.

The tables show that the countries of this region have a high capacity for generating energy, especially in the gas industry. Accessing these resources has been the primary target of Western countries and oil companies. One of the major projects belonged to UNOCAL, which began negotiations with the Taliban on constructing a pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan through Afghanistan.²⁰ This research does not review the motives behind the U.S attack on Afghanistan, or the extent to which it might be energy-oriented. However, the reemergence of construction of the Turkmenistan-

¹⁷ See: M. Haghighi, op. cit., p. 1052.

¹⁸ See: B. Amirahmadian, "Rising of Strategic Euro-Asian Territory," *Hamshahri Diplomatic*, No. 84, 2006, p. 73 (in Farsi).

¹⁹ [www.hous.gov/internationalrelation/105th/ap/wsap212982.htm], 2 May, 2011.

²⁰ See: A. Cohen, C. Lisa, G. Owen, "The Proposed Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline: An Unacceptable Risk to Regional Security," *Heritage Foundation*, 2008, pp. 2-6.

Table 1

**Production Volumes of Gas
in the Central Asian Countries (cubic meters)**

Country	Natural Gas	Year of Estimate
Uzbekistan	59,100,000,000	2010
Turkmenistan	42,400,000,000	2010
Kazakhstan	20,200,000,000	2011
Tajikistan	38,000,000	2009
Kyrgyzstan	15,400,000	2009

Source: [www.indexmundi.com].

Table 2

**Production Volumes of Oil
in the Central Asian Countries (bbl/day)**

Country	Oil	Year of Estimate
Kazakhstan	1,608,000	2011
Turkmenistan	216,000	2010
Uzbekistan	87,000	2010
Kyrgyzstan	946	2010
Tajikistan	220	2010

Source: [www.indexmundi.com].

Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline under another project called TAPI was a matter of concern for Iran in a different way. First, if this project becomes operational, Iran would lose its transit revenues, while Pakistan would earn \$14 billion during a 30-year period, which, in turn, would be a limiting factor for Iran's national security.

The second effect of any such pipeline is that it would omit Iran from the regional equations in the energy sphere. If the gas of this region passes through Iran, it could connect world energy security with Iran's security.

The U.S. and the Presence of NATO Troops in Afghanistan

Although U.S. strategists like Henry Kissinger believe that the U.S.'s presence in this region was necessary prior to 9/11, this incident paved the way for the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was occupied by U.S. and NATO troops in a short time. Many reasons have been listed for the start of the war, from a way to stabilize U.S. hegemony to a war for energy. Many experts

suggest that the war was an effort by the Bush administration to please oil companies and guarantee the security of energy flows.²¹ Other reasons were also given, such as fighting the terrorism hubs, or a war to promote democracy and human rights.

In the new geopolitics of Afghanistan, the U.S. and NATO presence has had considerable effects on Iranian national security based on threatening and limiting factors.

Before the 9/11 incident, Iran and Pakistan were considered two of the most important players in the geopolitics of Afghanistan, and the internal players on the political arena in Afghanistan mostly advocated for them. Then personalities such as Ismail-khan, Rabbani, Khalili, and Masoud were among the supporters of Iran policy, and Pakistan tried to play the Pashtun's cards. However, before the U.S. attack on Afghanistan, the most powerful political character of Afghanistan, i.e. Ahmad Shah Masoud, was killed during a suicidal operation by al-Qa'eda. Rabbani, despite his sympathies with Karzai's new government, was removed from power. Ismail-khan, a close ally of the new government, was called a warlord and unfit for the democratic process (although he was eventually appointed to head one ministry).

The new government formed in Afghanistan is built of two layers. The first layer is composed of those Afghans who lived in the United States, which includes Karzai as the best known one. The second layer includes those Afghans who do not have any direct connection with the U.S. but have had relations with U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan. Provincial and second-rank officials like General Dostum or General Fahim, whose orientation toward the United States has emerged gradually, are included in this group.

During Afghanistan's 2009 presidential election, which concurred with the first year of Obama's presidency, Abdullah Abdullah was considered Obama's intellectual representative, but Karzai kept his place as president. We can conclude that Iran has always had a representative in the Afghanistan's political environment, even before 9/11, but now it is somehow isolated in the new geopolitics of Afghanistan.

The Drug Mafia and Regional Security

Opium poppy production has historically been a problem in Afghanistan, which, in turn, has caused many problems for Iran. After the U.S. appeared in Afghanistan, it was expected that this problem would be solved. However, opium poppy production was not stopped, rather it has increased several times. According to U.S. figures, in 1997 and during the Taliban rule, 1,700 metric tons or, according to the United Nations, 4,600 metric tons of narcotics were produced in Afghanistan²²; "while the figures show that during Karzai's rule in 2005 more than 6,100 metric tons of narcotics were produced."²³ The areas under opium poppy cultivation also have grown considerably. It can be shown that the U.S.'s presence in the new geopolitics of Afghanistan has increased drug production. This growth is even higher than in 1990 (when Afghanistan was not under occupation). According to the statistics published by the United Nations, in 1990 the aver-

²¹ See, for example: A.H. Sadri, "Geopolitics of Oil & Energy in CA," *The International Studies Association 50th Annual Conference*, New York, 2009, pp. 15-18.

²² See: GAO/ois-00-12r, *Southwest Asia Heroine Production*, 21 June, 2000, p. 12.

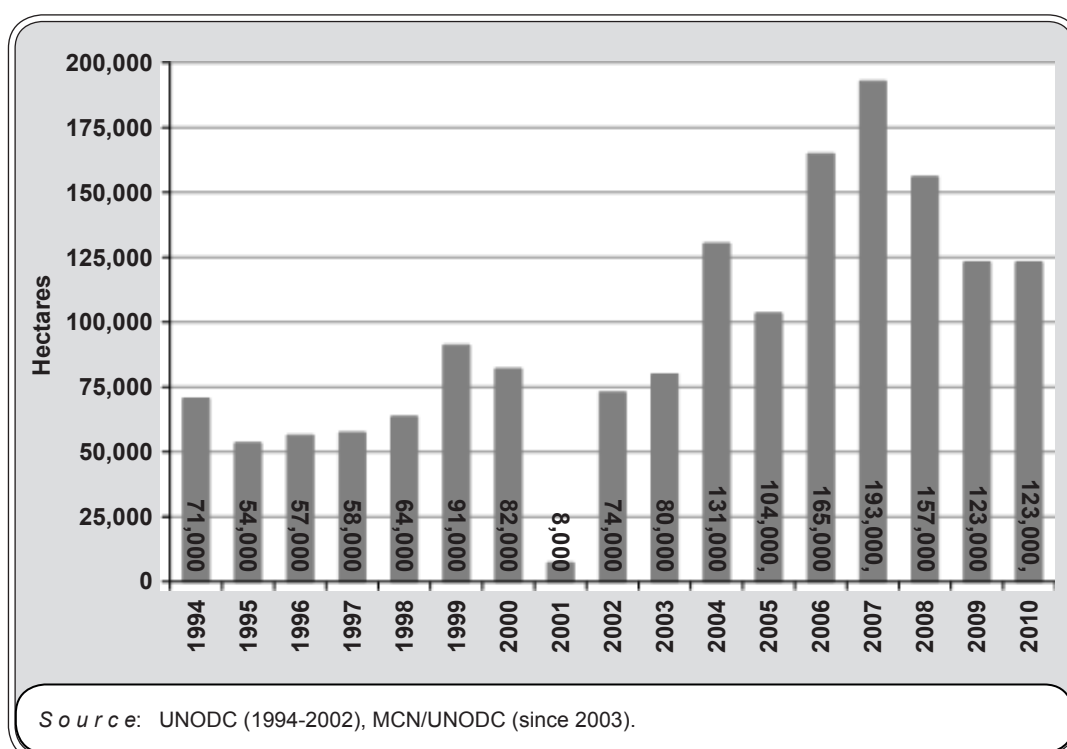
²³ H. Krueztmann, "Afghanistan and the Opium World Market: Poppy Production and Trade," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 5, 2007, p. 615.

age areas under opium poppy cultivation were estimated to be 60,000 hectares, but this increased to 123,000 hectares in 2010. Only in 2001 did the areas under opium poppy cultivation decrease to 8,000 hectares compared to 82,000 hectares the previous year as a result of the Taliban declaring its production illegal. Since the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2002, the areas under opium poppy cultivation have risen considerably to the extent that they reached 123,000 hectares in 2010.²⁴

This problem can cause much insecurity in Iran and is regarded as a threatening factor for Iran's national security. Figure 1 shows the areas under opium cultivation in Afghanistan from 1994 to 2010.

Figure 1

Opium Cultivation in Afghanistan,
1994-2010, ha



According to U.N. statistics, this huge amount has resulted in an inflow of \$1.3 billion to Afghanistan, which is equivalent to half of the country's GDP value for 2000.²⁵ Given the lateral consequences, the total amount is much more than the calculated one. The costs include transfer, security, as well as hygienic issues. The amount of smuggled weapons and armaments revealed discloses the extent of the security threats to Iran's national security.²⁶

The Presence of Foreign Powers in Afghanistan and Iranian National Security

As some experts suggest, the costs and consequences of direct and overt action against Iran are so high for the U.S. that this option is not seriously considered by Iranian strategists. However, the U.S.'s presence in Afghanistan and the new geopolitics created by it have increased the possibility of U.S. involvement in provoking anti-Iran groups in the region and create instability in Iran's eastern regions. The U.S.'s hostile policies against Iran within the new geopolitics of Afghanistan are considered a threatening factor for Iran.

In 2010 and during the U.S.'s presence in Afghanistan, Abdolmalek Rigi, a terrorist implicated in many bombings and operations against innocent people, as well as the police force in two of Iran's provinces, Sistan & Baluchistan and the Kerman provinces, was captured. The evidence offered and the statements by Iran's minister of intelligence showed that Rigi had close connections with the Americans. He confessed in his interrogations that the U.S. even gave him a passport and promised to protect him in Afghanistan.

Failure to Defeat the Taliban

Another element within the new geopolitics of Afghanistan is the continuation of the Taliban's presence and their power to change the political scene there. During Karzai's visit to Pakistan in 2009, he directly requested negotiations with them. The continuity of the Taliban's presence in Afghanistan proved that the war, whose aim was to wipe out terrorism and later extended to Iraq, is not over. Today, the Taliban group has not only not weakened, it has retained its potential. Although the Taliban seems to have lost sovereignty in Afghanistan, it retains its influence in the regions located on Afghanistan's border with Pakistan (mainly among the Pashtuns).

The U.S.'s new strategy declared by the Obama administration has divided the foreign wars into two categories: the Bad War (the war in Iraq) and the Good War (in Afghanistan). This strategy demands the commencement of negotiations with the Taliban. This in turn reflects a weakness and the failure to reach a favorable result in Afghanistan.

The U.S.'s failure to suppress the Taliban group and the continuity of its presence on Afghanistan's political arena, as well as the emphasis placed on talks with the moderate Taliban, who are able to provoke a struggle against Iran, have all had consequences for Iran's national security, including the expansion of Wahhabism and provocation of anti-Shi'ite sentiments.

At present, thousands of religious schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan are training extremists who treat the West, especially the U.S., as their main enemy. Their other targets include Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. As a result of U.S. policies toward these groups and its tendency to use them as leverage against Iran, the future of security in the region, as well as world peace is considered doomed.

Conclusion

The new geopolitics of Afghanistan have been mostly affected by the U.S.'s presence. This has created limitations for Iran's national security. The U.S.'s hostile policy toward Iran has decreased Iran's ability to have an influence and play a positive role in the region. The emergence of new players

in Afghanistan and the decreasing influence of two traditional players, Iran and Pakistan, have affected Iran's national security. These effects have been shown in terms of both threatening and limiting factors. At the same time, the new geopolitics of Afghanistan have also created some opportunities for Iran's national security, such as removing al-Qa'eda and the Taliban from power in Kabul.

Iran's traditional tools and leverages on Afghanistan policy have been dramatically reduced in the new geopolitics in Afghanistan to the extent that they are no longer considered determining factors in Afghanistan politics. The new geopolitics have provided Iran with good opportunities in the economic sphere, and Iran can be a bridge for international aid to Afghanistan. The role of Shi'ite groups, which traditionally favor Iran, has become more prominent in Afghanistan's new geopolitics, while the chances of their rival to repress them have been diminished.
