

Afghanistan: A New Pivot in the Greater Middle East?

Interview of Peter Koenig with Russian website GEOFOR

By [Peter Koenig](#) and [GEOFOR](#)

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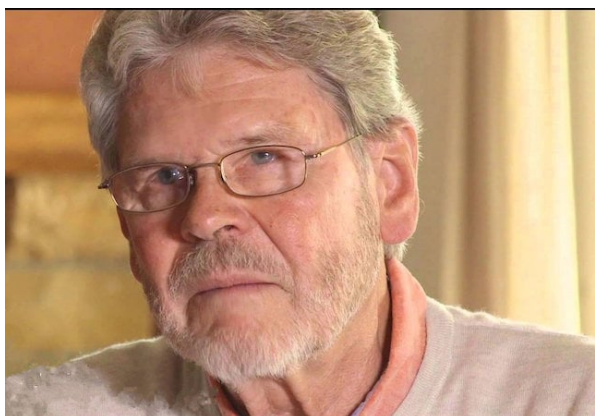
GEOFOR Interviews geopolitical analyst and World renowned economist Peter Koenig on the Biden administration’s decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan. According to Koenig, this is a smokescreen decision, it’s “not really a full departure. What these departures usually mean is purposefully creating chaos.”

GEOFOR: What are the goals of the Biden Administration, so hastily withdrawing his troops from Afghanistan? What is the reason for this? Moreover, that last year, when it became known about the agreements of the Trump Administration with the Taliban, the Democrats raised a real storm of criticism against the possible withdrawal of troops from that country. Should this departure be considered as the withdrawal of the United States from the Greater Middle East?

Peter Koenig: The withdrawal was decided long before Biden took office. Pressure for disengaging from the US longest war – about 20 years – from Congress and the public has been building up steadily, but ever increasingly since Obama’s promise early on in his second term to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan. A promise he did not respect. Mr. Biden, Obama’s Vice-President at the time, had always tended to reduce the US engagement in Afghanistan. So, this can hardly be considered a “hasty” withdrawal.

There were many “storms” the Democrats raised against President Trump, including on troops withdrawal in Afghanistan – and most of those “storms” were, in fact, anti-Trump propaganda, strongly supported by the highly government (Trump opposition) subsidized mainstream media. You could say the same about Trump’s relation with China. In his election campaign, Biden put the perspective for a better relation with China on the table –

nothing of the kind happened, so far. To the contrary, he follows the same hardline against China, as did Trump – especially in trade relations.



The US “departure” from Afghanistan is a planned “departure” – as was Syria – not really a full departure. What these departures usually mean is purposefully creating chaos in a country. We see this in Iraq in Syria and everywhere the US had either troops stationed and a war going on, or indirectly, where US had enormous influence on local politics – Egypt, Tunisia and others – when they “leave”, they leave an ongoing mess behind. Because instability is what makes a country weak, turns a country into a failed state – Lebanon is perhaps another example – and can be manipulated much easier from outside, without troops on the ground.

It is foreseeable that the same may happen in Afghanistan – or at least was planned for Afghanistan. Because Washington knows that Afghanistan offers perfect transit routes for the Chinese Belt and Road – which, as we know, the US despises.

And, therefore, no, the “departure” from Afghanistan should in no ways be considered a US withdrawal from the Middle East.

GEOFOR: Judging by how quickly the Taliban are taking control of the country’s territory and by the fact that they are already on the outskirts of Kabul, it is hardly appropriate to talk about the possibility of creating a transitional, compromise government. How do you see the situation in the region after the future regime change? Which international and regional players will fill in the vacuum that will have formed with the withdrawal of the US military and its allies?

PK: Yes, it looks like the Taliban will take over fast. That doesn’t necessarily mean that they will be in control – especially not in the long run. And especially since Afghanistan may become an important thoroughfare for China’s Belt and Road. Remember the Mujahedeens, created by the US Secret Services, to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan? Well, these Mujahedeens have become the Taliban.

The US is very much used to create and fund an opposition in a country and then “remote-control” them. That was done and is still being done in Iraq, where US troops allegedly left years ago.

What AP reported on June 25, 2021, points exactly into this direction.

“Roughly 650 U.S. troops are expected to remain in Afghanistan to provide security for diplomats after the main American military force completes its withdrawal, which is set to be largely done in the next two weeks, U.S. officials told The Associated Press on

Thursday.

In addition, several hundred additional American forces will remain at the Kabul airport, potentially until September [2021], to assist Turkish troops providing security, as a temporary move until a more formal Turkey-led security operation is in place, the officials said. Overall, officials said the U.S. expects to have American and coalition military command, its leadership and most troops out by July Fourth [2021], or shortly after that, meeting an aspirational deadline that commanders developed months ago.

The officials were not authorized to discuss details of the withdrawal and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity."

Therefore, it's not sure at all that the US will actually leave behind a vacuum. To the contrary, they will be less visible and will be able to direct the – maybe – emerging chaos from behind the scene. This is the usual “eternal war” practice of the Pentagon and its NATO sub-organization.

GEOFOR: Can the events in Afghanistan have a negative impact on the situation in neighboring countries? In this regard, we would like to note the recent speech of the representative of the Pakistani military in the Parliament, who warned lawmakers about the possibility of an increase in terrorist activity and outbreaks of separatism (in particular in Pakistani Baluchistan). Moreover, these negative phenomena were directly related to the achievements of the Taliban.

PK: At this point it is difficult to predict what impact US / NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan will have on the Region. The fear of the Pakistani military expressed in Parliament, that the Taliban will create unrest in Baluchistan, is, in my opinion, unfounded. There is no evidence that the Taliban were the initiators of terrorism and separatism in Pakistani Baluchistan.

Throughout this 20-year Washington-initiated war, the Taliban have never shown an expansionist ambition. This is true also for the Mujahideen war with the Soviets. Expansionism does not appear to be in the “genes” of the Afghan people. They would finally like to live in peace, an elusive peace that the west has, so far denied them.

To recall a bit of history, modern Afghanistan exists since 1919, when the country became “fully” independent of British rule. Actually, Afghanistan was never fully independent. Even though, they were officially no longer under British rule, the Brits were still very influential.

In 1973, the pro-Soviet Gen. Mohammed Daoud Khan overthrew the last king, Mohammed Zahir Shah, in a military coup. Although Khan modernized Afghanistan into a communist state, he was killed in 1978 in a so-called “communist coup”. The veracity of the true killers is still debatable.

In any case, Nur Mohammad Taraki, one of the founding members of the Afghan Communist Party, took control of the country as president, and signs a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, which, of course goes against the grains of the Brits and the United States. In foresight and to prevent an emerging communist state in this pivotal piece of land in the Middle East, the US created the Mujahadeen guerilla movement that eventually fought the Soviet Union after their invasion in 1979 to defend Afghans right to self-determination.

GEOFOR: Recently, at a meeting with representatives of the Russian Foreign Ministry in Moscow, a delegation of the political wing of the Taliban, which is located in Qatar, tried in

every possible way to convince their Russian counterparts that the Taliban has no intention to move beyond Afghanistan's northern border, and does not represent a threat to the Central Asian republics. To what extent, in your opinion, this political wing is capable of controlling the actions of field commanders?

PK: Indeed, it is very plausible that the Taliban have no intentions to move beyond their borders, not in the north, nor anywhere else. As mentioned before, the Taliban – or the Afghan people – have never sought expansion into other countries' territories.

What a modern, post-NATO Afghanistan needs is a coalition government of the different political factions within the Afghan people. They need a new Constitution that respects basic human rights, like giving equal rights to women, in education, politics and the workplace, as they once had under Soviet influence. That may make Afghanistan over time a truly independent and sovereign nation. That's what the Afghan people deserve.

The Taliban may not want to give up on an Islamic state and convert into a western style "democracy", as the recently failed negotiations in Doha indicated. But being an Islamic state does not prevent them from respecting human rights and gender equality, as was proven under Saddam Hussein in Iraq and now under Syria's Bashar Hafez al-Assad.

Is the creation of a new sovereign and independent Afghanistan possible under the surveillance of the remnant US / NATO troops – and influence? – The UN, especially the Human Rights Commission, may have a special role to play in helping with a new Afghan coalition government and with drafting a new, Human Rights based Constitution that puts emphasis on gender equality.

It is possible and very likely and would geopolitically and economically be very beneficial that the new Afghanistan may join regional associations, for example, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a strong Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance, created in Shanghai, China, in June 2001.

SCO's current membership is impressive, including China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and more recently also India and Pakistan, two neighboring countries; with Iran, Malaysia and Mongolia in an SCO special status situation. The SCO has almost 50% of the world's population and controls about 30% of the world's GDP. Afghanistan would do well aspiring becoming a member of and being embraced by this powerful organization.

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Peter Koenig is a geopolitical analyst and a former Senior Economist at the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO), where he has worked for over 30 years on water and

environment around the world. He lectures at universities in the US, Europe and South America. He writes regularly for online journals and is the author of [*Implosion – An Economic Thriller about War, Environmental Destruction and Corporate Greed*](#); and co-author of Cynthia McKinney's book "When China Sneezes: From the Coronavirus Lockdown to the Global Politico-Economic Crisis" (Clarity Press – November 1, 2020)

He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization; he is also a non-resident Sr. Fellow of the Chongyang Institute of Renmin University, Beijing.

Featured image: U.S. Army Sgt. Christian Cisineros takes a moment to speak with his interpreter March 17, 2009, while on a dismount patrol mission near Forward Operating Base Baylough in the Zabul Province of Afghanistan. Cisineros is assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, U.S. Army Europe. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Adam Mancini/Released)

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