

But while I endorse fully the value of negotiating rather than fighting, I emphasize my belief in the continued need for well-trained and well-equipped armed forces in Canada, ready to act as an instrument of the nation's will, either to deter, to defend, to protect, or in the fulfillment of our national obligations to our allies. Not a part of this presentation, but since you may wonder, I fully support the military role we are playing today in Afghanistan. I believe it is the right role, in the right place, at the right time, for the right reasons and with the right authorization. And if the assurance of continued effective allied military effort in that theatre is sufficient to bring to the negotiating table those who would now impose themselves there against the will of the majority of Afghans, then so much the better. In that circumstance "jaw jaw" would certainly be better than a continuation of the war there. And I see no reason why talks with the Taliban should not be going on now, even as NATO continues to oppose them in the absence of an agreement. In fact, an *Asia Online* article in August last year reported that "high level talks between Taliban commanders and coalition forces ... had taken place in an attempt to find a broader political settlement."¹

Now I turn to my experience in Northern Ireland. It was against the background of the end of the Cold War, and with names like Srebrenica and Rwanda reverberating around the world, that I was invited in the Fall of 1995, shortly before I was due to retire as CDS, to play what was expected to be a brief role in the Northern Ireland peace process. The invitation from Dublin and London to US Senator George Mitchell, former Finnish Prime Minister Harri Holkeri, and me was to form an International Body to carry out a two-month study on the decommissioning of paramilitary arms in Northern Ireland. It followed ceasefires called a year previously by paramilitary groups on both sides, who sought to establish whether talks could find a solution to problems that nearly thirty years of armed conflict had failed to do.

The 1994 ceasefires were declared in August by the IRA and in October by the Loyalist paramilitary groups – the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). This initiative followed years of secret back-channel talks between British officials and the IRA to explore the possibility of addressing republican aims – that is, achieving equal rights for Catholics in the north and the establishment of

¹ "Talks With the Taliban Gain Ground", Syed Saleem Shahzad, © 2007 Asia Times Online Ltd.