



Vol. 3 • No: 3 • Autumn 2013

**Afghanistan's Security in 2014:
Domestic, Regional and International Dimensions**



CAUCASUS INTERNATIONAL

Vol. 3 • No: 3 • Autumn 2013

Afghanistan's Security in 2014: Domestic, Regional and International Dimensions



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Baskı Organizasyon: Moda Ofset Basım Yayın San. Tic. Ltd. Şti.
Cihangir Mah. Guvercin Cad. Baha İş Merkezi A Blok No.3/1,
Haramidere-Avcılar-İstanbul www.modaofset.com.tr

Caucasus International is a Baku & Ankara-based academic journal that discusses policymaking in and on the Caucasus as well as the region's role in the global context. Each issue of the journal will focus on a global or regional theme and includes perspectives from authors from different countries and backgrounds. The journal focuses largely on the Caucasus neighborhood, but does so with a global outlook.



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Caucasus International is published by the Ankara-based Eurasian Association of Scientists in collaboration with the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) in Baku. Since 2007, CSS has provided an impartial forum for discussion and debate on current international issues. CSS is a government-funded non-profit think tank and is academically independent.



Publishing House

Moda Ofset Basım Yayın San. Tic. Ltd. Şti.
Cihangir Mah. Güvercin Cad. Baha İş Merkezi A Blok
No.3/1 Haramidere-Avcılar-İstanbul
www.modaofset.com.tr



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE	8
THOMAS BARFIELD <i>Afghanistan in 2014: Prospects for Security and the Political Transition</i>	13
ROGER KANGAS <i>Post-ISAF Afghanistan: The Security Challenges for Central Asia After 2014</i>	23
RICCARDO REDAELLI <i>ISAF, Afghanistan and the Pakistan Dimension: Towards an Acceptable Transition</i>	37
KRZYSZTOF STRACHOTA <i>The Myth of the Afghan Threat and a New Reality in Central Asia on the Threshold of 2014</i>	49
AZAD GARIBOV <i>Central Asia-Afghanistan Security Nexus: Post-2014 Perspectives</i>	61
SALIH DOĞAN <i>International Aid to Afghanistan and Its Importance in the Post-2014 Era</i>	71
GÜLAY MUTLU <i>How Can Afghanistan Cope with the Challenges Facing Its State and Society After 2014?</i>	83

JANARA BORKOEVA	93
<i>ISAF's Security Transition in Afghanistan and the CSTO's Search for a New Role in Central Asia</i>	
BEISHENBEK TOKTOGULOV	105
<i>NATO-Russia Council and Its Relevance to Afghanistan's Security Before and After 2014</i>	
GULSAH GURES	117
<i>Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Afghanistan</i>	
M. ZEKI GÜNAY	135
<i>The United Nations Security Council and Post-2014 Afghanistan</i>	
OKTAY F. TANRISEVER	151
<i>Afghanistan's Borderlands and the Politics of Center-periphery Relations Before and After 2014: A Case for Cautious Optimism</i>	
COMMENTARIES	165
<i>Afghanistan and Its Future</i>	166
Hikmet Çetin	
<i>Iran's Afghanistan Policy: Security Parameters</i>	170
Eyüp Ersoy	
NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS	174
CALLS FOR SUBMISSION	175

Editor's Note

This issue of *Caucasus International* is devoted to Afghanistan's security situation before and after the critical year of 2014, when the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will hand over security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

Next year promises to be a very challenging year for all those involved in maintaining Afghanistan's security and supporting its capacity building processes. In particular, Afghanistan and its neighbors will face significant security, diplomacy, political and socio-economic hurdles; the international community will also need to play a strong supporting role in regard to these challenges. The ISAF will continue its efforts to train and support ANSF, even as the future of the NATO mission remains uncertain.

One central question, as recently put forth by ISAF Commander U.S. Marine Corps General Joe Dunford, is whether Afghanistan is fully capable of operating effectively on its own.¹ The other key point is that following the closure of the ISAF mission, ANSF's future capacity building will remain largely dependent on whatever role the NATO forces will play in Afghanistan. This in turn depends

on the U.S. and Afghan governments reaching a formal Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that would legally allow foreign troops to operate in Afghanistan. At the time of writing this deal has not been reached.

Beyond its importance to NATO and the U.S., the Afghan security transition holds significant implications for the Caucasus region. One of the key routes of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) passes through the Caucasus. To different levels, regional countries have consolidated their strategic value by participating in the ISAF mission. For both Azerbaijan and Georgia, taking part in NDN was significant in terms of building up their foreign policy profiles. The future of the NDN will be determined by the developments in and around Afghanistan in the post-2014 period. In addition, the South Caucasian countries, which have already made significant contributions to Afghanistan's security, will need to decide on their future contributions to this. NATO's future in Afghanistan will be decisive for these countries, who also see Afghanistan as an opportunity for integration with NATO, to varying levels. The future stability of Afghanistan also depends on the foreign policies pursued by the countries around the Caucasus region. In this context, any decisions about in-

¹"ISAF working to improve ANSF amid uncertain future", *IHS Jane's International Defence Review*, Vol.46, November 2013, p. 5.

vestment in Afghanistan should be taken after analyzing the scope and nature of the security challenges in and around Afghanistan.

The articles in this issue focus on Afghanistan from the perspectives of the U.S., Europe, the South Caucasus, Central Asia as well as Afghanistan. The authors participating in the debate on Afghanistan's security represent a range of countries, including Afghanistan itself, the U.S., Italy, Poland, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan. In addition to academics, the authors include opinion-makers, thinkers, and diplomats. Most of these contributors are sharing their first-hand observations of the security situation in Afghanistan and its neighboring states. This issue focuses on the strategic significance of the Afghan security as well as the security of its neighborhood, the security policies of international security organizations, and the domestic security challenges in Afghanistan.

The first two contributions focus on the strategic and historical significance of the impending security transition. Professor Thomas Barfield's contribution highlights the strategic importance of the Afghan security structure by exploring its historical context and the attendant political dynamics. Professor Roger Kangas,

a leading expert on Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Middle East, discusses the Afghan security transition from the perspective of Central Asian states.

Contributions on the security in Afghanistan's neighborhood come from Professor Riccardo Redaelli, Krzysztof Strachota and Azad Garibov. For his part, Professor Redaelli discusses domestic and regional implications of the ISAF withdrawal, and suggests that the current political scenario in Kabul is not very promising: personal rivalries, tribal feuds, ethno-tribal sectarianism, reluctance to comply with international requests for transparency and clear voting mechanisms. In this sense, Redaelli comes to the conclusion that building a united and stable country does not seem to be the top priority for the Afghan political elites.

In terms of the regional implications, Krzysztof Strachota and Azad Garibov both assess the Central Asian perspective. Despite their similar starting points, they offer divergent and fresh perspectives as representatives of two countries in Central Asia.

Taking a broader view of the situation, Salih Dogan analyzes the role of international aid in Afghanistan. Drawing on his personal experience of the

country, having visited several times and witnessed key developments, Dogan presents recommendations for action by the international community after 2014, and on the efficient deployment of international aid. Gülay Mutlu provides a useful summary of Afghanistan's political history, followed by statistical and narrative analysis of the economic opportunities within the country; Mutlu seeks to answer the ever-pressing question "how can Afghanistan cope with the challenges facing its state and society after 2014?"

NATO has played a central security role in Afghanistan's future – but what is Russia's position, and how has the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a regional military organization been responding to these developments? Janara Borkoeva discusses the response of the CSTO to the possible destabilization of Afghanistan, in the context of current and future Russian policy in Central Asia. In his contribution, Beishenbek Toktogulov looks at the efforts of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), a mechanism for cooperation between NATO and Russia in fighting terrorism and insurgency in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014. Toktogulov provides a comprehensive assessment of Russia's position in relation to post-NATO Afghanistan. The role of the UN role in Afghanistan remains of central interest to the international community, and M. Zeki Günay explores the ways in which Afghanistan

has been discussed by the permanent members at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), based on an analysis of statements and speeches by each permanent member's representative during Security Council meetings between 2011 and 2013.

Last but not least, this issue includes several articles on the domestic security challenges in Afghanistan. These articles include the contributions of Gulsah Gures and Dr. Oktay F. Tanrisever. Gures has provided a unique insight into gender inequality and the role of women in Afghan political life, supported by statistical analyses and her own field work. She closely examines issues of gender inequality and women's human rights in Afghanistan by looking at the developments in the fields of education, political participation and economics over the past twelve years.

Oktay Tanrisever discusses the politics of center-periphery relations in Afghanistan and the impact on Afghanistan's borderlands before and after the critical year of 2014. The author argues that there are grounds for cautious optimism concerning the capacity of Afghanistan's central government to strengthen its political authority following the security transition, *if* Afghanistan's borderlands are more closely integrated into the post-2001 process of state building, and if Afghanistan's borders are adequately secured.

In addition, there are two short pieces, one from Hikmet Çetin, the former Turkish Foreign Minister and the former NATO senior civilian representative in Afghanistan. He examines the current situation from a historical perspective, along with the likely future impact of Afghanistan's stability for the future of its neighborhood. As we have mentioned, Afghanistan's neighbors could threaten its security: Iran's role will be especially significant, in light of the recent nuclear deal between Tehran and six world powers. Tehran may be able to play a constructive role. In this dimension, Eyüp Ersoy, a researcher in the Security Studies department at the Ankara-based International Strategic Research Organization, explores this issue. These two short commentaries were first published in the November 2013 issue of *Analist* journal (www.usakanalist.com) in Turkish, and then translated by *Caucasus International*. We would like to thank the editorial board at *Analist* for their reprinting permission.

The *Caucasus International* team would like to express their gratitude to Dr. Oktay Tanrisever, who with the support of NATO's Public Divisions arranged a conference on the future of Afghanistan. Through his constructive engagements with our contributing authors, he played a key role in producing of this issue. I would also like to acknowledge the special role played Celia Davies, associate editor of CI, whose hard work, suggestions

and support made the timely publication of this issue possible.

We hope that as Afghanistan's future becomes a central topic for discussion across the entire Eurasian region, this edition will be useful to readers in following current developments and the possible trajectory of future security dynamics.

As always, I am very grateful to all the members of the *Caucasus International* team for their work on this issue, and I take responsibility for any errors. I would also like to mention that you can reach our Editors via email; all contacts on the journal's website, www.cijournal.org, where readers can find all the latest news about *CI*.

Finally, on behalf of the *CI* team, we hope this issue provides food for thought and for discussion!

Zaur Shiriyev,
Editor-in-Chief,
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Afghanistan in 2014:

*Prospects for Security and
the Political Transition*

**Thomas
Barfield***

Abstract

The article examines the key transitions Afghanistan will experience in 2014, namely security and political transitions. In the scope of the changes in security structures, the paper underlines that NATO withdrawal generates concerns and fears among the local Afghan people about the return of the destructive instability, previously kept under control by NATO forces. Even those who are uncomfortable about the presence of foreign troops in their country are ambivalent about seeing the troops depart, fearing a return to civil war. The international community's plans for meeting Afghanistan's security needs in the post-2014 period focus only on building a larger army and police force; however the insurgent groups are still strong enough to challenge the central authority, and the central government might face a legitimacy crisis in the absence of an international presence, and as such the worries of the Afghan people hold true. On the political side, as the paper suggests, there is a concern about whether Hamid Karzai will actually leave office in 2014 and if he does, whether the election process will provide enough legitimacy for a new leader to govern effectively. This is because the history of Afghanistan suggests that the government in Kabul needs a stronger style of leadership and a more competent administrative structure than the one currently in place.

The article concludes by arguing that it is unfortunate that these two critical changes will occur in the same year, as each on its own generates uncertainties that will challenge the stability of the Afghan state. Together they create a risk so great that the government - at least in its current form- may not be able survive.

* Dr. Thomas Barfield is the professor at Boston University. He is author of *The Central Asian Arabs of Afghanistan* (1981), *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (1989), and *The Nomadic Alternative* (1993), co-author of *Afghanistan: An Atlas of Indigenous Domestic Architecture* (1991), and editor of Blackwell's *Dictionary of Anthropology* (1997). Barfield received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2006 that led to the publication of his latest book, *Afghanistan: A Political and Cultural History* (2010).

2014 will see two major transitions in Afghanistan. The first and most widely discussed is the transfer of all security responsibility to the Afghan state, when the international military forces end their combat role and withdraw. The second is the presidential election, now scheduled for April, which will determine a replacement for President Hamid Karzai. Under the terms of the Afghan constitution, he cannot seek a third term. It is unfortunate that both these critical changes will occur in the same year, because each on its own creates uncertainties that will challenge the stability of the current Afghan state. Together, they create a risk so great that the government—at least in its current form—may not be able survive. On the security side, many Afghans fear a return of the destructive decade of isolation and civil war that was ended by the American intervention in 2001. On the political side, there is a concern about whether Karzai will actually leave office in 2014, and if he does, whether the election process will provide enough legitimacy for a new leader to govern effectively.

The security question is easier to address because Afghanistan has experienced three very similar transitions in the wake of previous withdrawals by foreign armies—by the British in 1842 and 1880, and by the Soviets in 1989. While a possible civil war or the break-up of the country cannot be ruled out, these earlier military transitions proved that stability could be maintained when the right mixture of

Afghanistan has experienced three very similar transitions in the wake of previous withdrawals by foreign armies—by the British in 1842 and 1880, and by the Soviets in 1989.

specific internal and external conditions prevailed, even when governments faced violent opposition. The domestic political transition of supreme executive power through an election, by contrast, has no historical parallel. No Afghan ruler has ever ceded power voluntarily or departed as part of a peaceful process. Even worse, every Afghan ruler since 1901 (thirteen in all) has either been killed or driven from office and into exile by military force. If the 2014 election happens, and produces a new leader who can hold the country together, it will be very positive milestone.

Security in Transition

The Taliban insurgency against the Afghan government has been ongoing for many years. Despite the existence of a large government army and police force, some international observers as well as Afghans have predicted that the Taliban will immediately sweep into Kabul and take power when American and NATO forces withdraw. This is certainly the impression that the Taliban would like to give, if only to hold together their disparate factions. However, the same belief was widely held in

the winter of 1989 when the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, and ultimately the political dynamics worked out quite differently. At that time, Pakistan convinced U.S. policy-makers to avoid engaging in serious negotiations with the Soviet Union on a peaceful transfer of power to an acceptable coalition government. It was taken as a given that the faction-ridden Kabul regime led by Najibullah could not possibly survive in the absence of Soviet troops and air support. Why negotiate when the Pakistani based *mujahideen* insurgents would surely take power within months of the Soviet pullout? However, when the *mujahideen* attempted to bring about this change by mounting a conventional military assault on the eastern city of Jalalabad in March, government troops won the battle decisively, and these optimistic expectations wilted. Far from bringing Najibullah's government down, the failed attack buoyed the confidence of his supporters and consolidated his regime. Quite the opposite: the number of *mujahideen* casualties was so high that local insurgent commanders ignored demands by their political leadership in Pakistan to organize new conventional attacks on regime defenses. Although the *mujahideen* insurgents expanded their control in the countryside, they never again seriously threatened Afghanistan's major cities. Indeed, a large number of insurgent leaders began to make their own settlements with the regime, often in return for economic aid and

Pakistan and the Taliban both appear to be convinced that the current faction-ridden Kabul government cannot survive an American and NATO withdrawal.

weapons, which the regime was still receiving in bulk from the Soviet Union. Najibullah continued to rule over Afghanistan until April 1992, falling only after the flow of military and economic aid that was bedrock of his political stability ceased, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

The security situation today bears strong resemblance to that of 1989. Pakistan and the Taliban both appear to be convinced that the current faction-ridden Kabul government cannot survive an American and NATO withdrawal. They see no need to negotiate a political settlement if control of Afghanistan can be won on the battlefield after international troops depart. As demonstrated above, however, this assumption completely ignores the lesson of 1989, which revealed the capacity of a Kabul government to survive as long as it continued to receive military and economic aid from an international patron. This was true not only for Najibullah's regime (which was far more unpopular than the current Afghan government), but for the British-backed Afghan governments of the 19th century. Foreign boots on the ground have always proved less decisive (and even counterproductive) than inflows of foreign

aid that governments in Kabul could use to reinforce their power against poorly resourced insurgents. In addition, while insurgencies have been effective at getting foreign troops to leave Afghanistan by wearing out the patience of the governments that sent them, their leaders have found it much more difficult oust existing governments after they left. There were two main reasons for this. First, insurgents who effectively mobilized local factions in support of fighting against outsiders began to disintegrate in the absence of that common enemy. Second, successes in irregular warfare did not lay the necessary basis for the conventional military capacity needed to topple a government. Similarly, few Afghan insurgent faction leaders proved able to transform themselves into legitimate contenders for national leadership, making it hard to establish a new government.

Exceptions to this pattern (which Pakistan and the Taliban appear to assume is the norm) appeared only when Afghan rulers could not engage the support of powerful international patrons. The Taliban's 1995 seizure of Kabul for Mullah Omar was a replay of Habibullah Kalakani's 1929 ouster of the reforming King Amanullah. Both Omar and Habibullah successfully led reactionary factions against weak national governments that lacked access to the international resources and a powerful foreign patron. While the British had earlier undermined Amanullah's

government by denying it money and weapons, their refusal even to recognize Kalakani's government led to his downfall after only nine months. He was replaced by Nadir Shah, who did receive British backing, and founded a dynasty that would rule a peaceful Afghanistan for the next fifty years. Mullah Omar found the absence of international diplomatic recognition and low volumes of economic aid to be no bar to beating his weaker civil war rivals, but he was undone when in the wake of 9/11 attacks on the United States, these very same factions obtained American military and economic support. In less than ten weeks they drove the Taliban from power and hammered out an agreement in Bonn, Germany to make Hamid Karzai the leader of Afghanistan. The Karzai administration was the beneficiary of both military and economic aid far higher than what the domestic economy could generate.

History suggests that the Taliban's expectations of taking Kabul by force and returning to rule over Afghanistan are unlikely to be realized as long as the international community chooses to support the existing Afghan government through weapons and economic aid. And while the Soviets withdrew their entire military force, including advisers and air support for Afghan troops, American plans for a draw down appear less drastic. Ongoing negotiations between the Afghan government and the United States appear likely to produce an agreement that will leave some inter-

History suggests that the Taliban's expectations of taking Kabul by force and returning to rule over Afghanistan are unlikely to be realized as long as the international community chooses to support the existing Afghan government through weapons and economic aid.

national forces in place. This would allow the continuation of logistical support and training of Afghan government troops. Even a residual international force would make it very difficult for the Taliban to mount an effective conventional attack on the Afghan state—particularly if the U.S. chose to employ air power against it.

None of this precludes the possibility of a collapse of the central government due to its own internal weaknesses or because the Karzai government attempts to broker an unacceptable peace deal with the Taliban that alienates the non-Pashtun parts of the country. Should a civil war break out in the wake of any such collapse, however, the Taliban's success against other regional militias - as they enjoyed in the 1990s - is unlikely to be repeated. During the 1990s, Pakistani support alone was sufficient to enable the Taliban defeat their rivals, but in any new war the odds would change. The former Northern Alliance factions would find it much easier to gain international support that would dwarf what

Pakistan could offer. Moreover, Afghan history has displayed a striking pattern of deal-making in civil war situations. Regional or ethnic factions prefer to seek political settlements with one another rather than engage in prolonged fighting. For this stability scenario to be feasible, however, historical experience also suggests that the government in Kabul needs a stronger style of leadership and a more competent administrative structure than the one currently in place. It is not clear that process of electoral politics is sufficiently well equipped to manage this transition.

During the 1990s, Pakistani support alone was sufficient to enable the Taliban defeat their rivals, but in any new war the odds would change.

Politics at Play

If insurgent groups have historically been unable to displace established Kabul governments, it is also true that no Afghan ruler brought to power by a foreign army has ever succeeded in keeping his job once that force withdrew. However, such leaders only rarely fell victim to their domestic opponents; instead they were replaced by their frustrated foreign sponsors once they lost confidence in their nominee's ability to maintain stability. On the other hand, those Afghan leaders put into power by withdrawing foreign armies succeeded admirably in consolidating power.

They became some of Afghanistan's most effective and respected leaders, while their predecessors were caricatured as traitors or foreign puppets. In one sense this is a paradox, since both sets of rulers obtained their positions through agreements made with the same foreign governments that had invaded Afghanistan. In another sense, it was not paradoxical at all: foreign forces entering Afghanistan had one set of expectations for the leaders they wished to support, while foreign forces leaving Afghanistan had a decidedly different set of expectations, and made their decisions accordingly. In essence they preferred weak personalities who would not interfere when they entered Afghanistan, and preferred strong personalities who could act on their own when they left.

The classic case of a failed ruler imposed on Afghanistan by outsiders was Shah Shuja, who the British restored to the throne during the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-42) by ousting his rival, Amir Dost Muhammad. While Shuja was accepted as a legitimate king, his autocratic and erratic style of administration soon alienated both his British backers and the Afghan people. After surviving the destruction of the British Kabul garrison in the winter of 1842, Shuja was assassinated when he left the safety of his heavily fortified palace, and the British agreed to restore Dost Mohammad to the throne. He reigned for the next twenty years—eventually signing a treaty with the British

that brought him arms and money—and unified all of Afghanistan under his rule before dying peacefully. This pattern was repeated in 1880 during the Second Anglo-Afghan War when the British dumped the ruler they had first appointed, and replaced him with Amir Abdur Rahman. Later known as the “Iron Amir,” Abdur Rahman used British arms and subsidies to create the strongest government the Afghans had ever experienced by his death in 1901. The Soviet Union employed the same strategy a century later. After first installing the feckless Babrak Karmal as ruler when they invaded Afghanistan in 1979, they dumped him for the stronger Najibullah after Mikhail Gorbachev began negotiations to withdraw Soviet troops in 1985. As noted earlier, Najibullah successfully maintained himself in power after Soviet troops departed and his regime collapsed only in 1992, when the dissolution of the Soviet Union ended his supply of money, food and weapons.

Although Hamid Karzai initially proved a far more popular choice than his predecessors—and one who won domestic approval through a series of consultative assemblies and elections—he has displayed characteristics similar to other structurally weak Afghan rulers who came to power with the aid of foreign forces. On a personal level, his leadership is indecisive and he has avoided making hard decisions unless forced by necessity. He has been easily influenced by those around him and responded

Hamid Karzai initially proved a far more popular choice than his predecessors—and one who won domestic approval through a series of consultative assemblies and elections—he has displayed characteristics similar to other structurally weak Afghan rulers who came to power with the aid of foreign forces.

poorly to criticism, dismissing ministers who appeared too independent. While the constitution gave him strong executive powers, he refused to take steps to curb the massive corruption and mismanagement that was undermining the Afghan state and its legitimacy. His genuinely popular victory in the first Afghan presidential election of 2004 was overshadowed by the massive fraud that accompanied his reelection in 2009. Because his government was protected by international forces, Karzai saw little need to compromise politically, share authority or face unpleasant realities even when it would have been in his own best interests in the long term. Moreover, he had a habit of burnishing his nationalist credentials by periodically attacking the very alliance that protected his government. This only irritated his international backers without improving his reputation among the Afghan people.

Whatever his weaknesses, however, President Karzai's ability to keep his government intact for ten years has been no mean feat. But he has done so in a political environment where foreign aid was unlimited and international forces protected his government from insurgents. Had this continued there is little reason to believe that he could not have ruled indefinitely, or used the security shield to name a successor of his own choice without having to reform the structure of his government. However, after Karzai's flawed reelection to the presidency in 2009, the willingness of his government's international backers to maintain this open-ended military and financial commitment waned. While no one in the international community wanted to see the Taliban return, the option of continued unlimited assistance for Afghanistan grew increasingly difficult to sell to domestic electorates in the European Union, Canada and the United States, prompting a 2014 deadline for the withdrawal of combat troops. While this plan was not unwelcome to the many Afghans who had grown increasingly unhappy about the presence of foreign forces in their country, even they were ambivalent about seeing the troops depart, fearing a return to civil war.

International plans to meet Afghanistan's security needs post-2014 are currently focused on building a larger army and police force. There has been no similar attention reforming its civil administration, the unad-

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dressed half of the security situation, the defects of which the Taliban have long exploited. In any event, few Afghans (friends or foes) believe Karzai is the kind of leader who can manage the risks of this new transition stage successfully. While the British and the Soviets did not hesitate to sack one leader and install another better prepared to run Afghanistan on his own, the democratic system put in place by the international community now appears to forestall that option. But not entirely: the 2004 Constitution limits an Afghan president to two terms and Karzai's second will expire in 2014, coinciding with the transfer of security to the Afghan government from international forces. Afghans are therefore asking themselves if the United States and its allies will encourage the use of this democratic avenue to press for a change in leadership of the Kabul government to coincide with their troop withdrawals. Karzai himself has many times proclaimed that he will respect the constitution and will not seek an ex-

ension of his term. Still, because no Afghan ruler has ever relinquished power voluntarily, Kabul remains rife with speculation that Karzai intends to stay on regardless of the constitutional prohibition. Even if he fully intends to step down, he will undoubtedly come under pressure from his allies to stay on "for the good of the country" since they benefit so much from the current system. This option may be even more appealing if Karzai comes to believe a political rival may succeed him. Because the Afghan constitution has created such a highly centralized government with a presidency (who resembles a monarch more than a public servant) any change of leadership promises to destroy the fragile structure of political alliances and patronage Karzai has built up over the past decade. And yet if Afghanistan is to survive as a unified and stable state, it desperately needs a strong leader who recognizes the necessity of change and has the capacity to produce it. Such a leader must also be perceived as legitimate leader in the eyes of the Afghan people, and able to secure the confidence of the international community, whose willingness to finance the Afghan state underpins its stability—a difficult combination to achieve in the best of circumstances.

For this reason, the upcoming presidential elections present both promise and peril. If Karzai attempts to annul them by ignoring the constitution and holding a *loya jirga* to confirm him in a third term, he would

And yet if Afghanistan is to survive as a unified and stable state, it desperately needs a strong leader who recognizes the necessity of change and has the capacity to produce it.

lose the international support that he needs to maintain his regime and the legitimacy of such an action (whatever its rationale) is unlikely to be accepted domestically. But even if the election proceeds, any winner who cannot meet the dual criteria of domestic and international legitimacy will find his ability to govern fatally compromised. This presents a dilemma for all the stakeholders, Afghan and international alike. Those potential candidates (mostly technocrats) who are held in high esteem by the international community, but have weak or non-existent domestic political support, may find it difficult to achieve an electoral mandate. Those potential candidates (mostly old *mujahideen* faction leaders) who have strong, though often narrow, domestic political support have past histories of violence, perceived ethnic biases or reactionary political perspectives that would make them unacceptable to the nations paying the government's bills. A third electoral possibility—of Karzai anointing a successor in a backroom deal and rigging the balloting to confirm him—might create an even worse situation, by producing a leader whose government would lack credibility in the

eyes of both Afghans and foreigners. Thus, rather than focus on the electoral process itself, greater attention should be paid to the type of leader it is likely to produce, and the consequences of that choice.



Turkey's Neighborhood: A New Strategic Landscape?

Interview with Irakli Alasania: The Defense of Georgia

Building Bridges for Security and Peace
Frans Timmermans

Eastern Mediterranean Gas: Potential for Breakthroughs?
Matthew J. Bryza

The Game-Changers in World Energy
Mehmet Ögütçü

The Turkish Model in the Arab World
Jean-Loup Samaan

France and Turkey: Democracy and Secularism
Caroline Fourest

What Turkey Can Learn from India's Central Asia Policy
Micha'el M. Tanchum

Friends and Foes of a U.S.-Iran Nuclear Agreement
Riccardo Alcaro

Problems of the Assad-Opposition Dichotomy
Philip Gamaghelyan

The Nature of Turkey-Iran Relations
Şafak Baş

Can Turkey De-Isolate Abkhazia?
Eric R. Eissler

FES Project Overview: Post-2014 Afghanistan

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Post-ISAF Afghanistan:

*The Security Challenges for
Central Asia After 2014*

**Roger
Kangas***

Abstract

This paper is a critical engagement with the competing narratives of the great game politics taking place in Central Asia among China, Russia, and United States. It argues that the region has changed over the past twenty years, and this must be taken into account when examining the regional influence of outside countries. At this juncture, the author suggests that Central Asian countries are increasingly looking at the world not in terms of Russia-versus-the-West, but rather based on a 360-degree view, which means that they are looking to a wider range of nations with which to trade and develop relations. Therefore, they are resorting to the understanding that their future lies not in being dominated by one country or alliance, but rather in establishing “multi-vectored foreign and security policies”. However, this does not imply that countries in the region have unilaterally ended external intervention attempts or coercion. It is rather a consequence of the strengthening of independent political will of Central Asian states, along with the diminishing attraction of the region in global oil and gas markets. Within this general framework, the paper attempts to answer the following questions: Will the security problems of Afghanistan seep into Central Asia after the NATO mission ends in the country, or will it adversely affect the ability of the respective regimes to instill a sense of security within their own territorial boundaries? A further question is whether diminished energy interests and the absence of a major security concern will cause United States to view Central Asia as “unimportant?” If the answer to this question is yes, should we assume that Russia and China are now de facto dominating Central Asia?

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The future of Central Asia recently has been dominated by discussions of the increasing role of China, Russia's strained efforts to remain engaged, and the declining interest of the United States in the region, especially after the drawdown of U.S. troops in Afghanistan and the changing security mission for NATO-ISAF. All of these issues are inextricably linked, and yet not necessarily dependent on one another. At the end of the day, though, each major external actor will carry out programs and policies toward the region in light of their own national security interests. These competing narratives of great game politics are more the domain of pundits and analysts.

The region itself has changed over the past twenty years, and this must be taken into account when examining the capacity of outside countries to influence the regional dynamics. Kazakhstan, for example, is a more confident player in the region and has asserted itself in international organizations such as the OSCE and the OIC, holding the leadership roles of these structures in 2010 and 2011 respectively. The foreign ministry, now headed by Erlan Idrissof, is attempting to gain a stronger presence in countries around the world. Energy firms are dealing with a more competent base of Kazakh talent, and it is clear that the country is increasingly capable of managing its own resources, paralleling the experience of the energy-producing states in the Middle East.

Turkmenistan remains the perennial underachiever of Central Asia. The continued discoveries of gas fields in the country and recurrent symposia of energy experts and companies underscore the fact that the country has great potential. That said, this "potential" remains only partially realized due to the opaque nature of decision-making as well as the limited access outsiders have to government offices and state-run energy firms. Mistrust of these outside actors and a desire to reinforce the policy of "positive neutrality" has limited opportunities for foreign direct investment and indeed understanding of the country itself.

Uzbekistan continues to perfect its autarkic approach to economic and energy development, maximizing its capacity to be self-sustained. Increasingly, it has begun to engage in regional energy and trade networks, ranging from regional energy pipeline routes to the "northern distribution network" designed to supply NATO forces in Afghanistan. Perhaps success in these specific instances as a transit state will lead to a more cooperative and open approach to regional development. Perpetual tensions with its neighbors, especially Tajikistan over the construction of the Rogun Dam and Kyrgyzstan over the plight of ethnic Uzbeks in that country (as highlighted by the 2010 events in Osh and Jalalabad) continue to stymie true regional cooperation.

Finally, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan face problems of resource scarcity.

All five countries of Central Asia are increasingly looking at the world not in terms of Russia-versus-the-West, but from a more panoramic perspective.

ty, energy dependency, and concerns about being marginalized if large-scale transit routes circumvent their territories. Tajikistan has the added stress of a border with Afghanistan, placing it on the transit route for the narcotics trade originating in Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan shares the challenges of being a transit state, in addition to managing its internal political and ethnic tensions, which have resulted in periodic outbreaks of violence over the past decade.

In spite of these challenges, all five countries of Central Asia are increasingly looking at the world not in terms of Russia-versus-the-West, but from a more panoramic perspective. Each country's official foreign and security documents look to a wider range of nations with which to trade and develop relations. Moreover, there is a greater understanding that their future lies not in being dominated by one country or alliance, but rather in establishing "multi-vectored foreign and security policies."

A further limitation is that with the passing of time, the attraction of engaging in Central Asia has diminished for external actors. It is no longer seen as a "new region of development" or the object of a "new great game." This

was the rhetoric of the 1990s, when numerous conferences and writings focused on the lure of Central Asian natural resources. This has now been replaced by a more sober and selective approach to the region. This is especially telling with respect to energy. In the 1990s, the focus was on "where would the main export pipeline be?" This "either-or" approach has been replaced by an "and-and" view of potential pipelines. As the global energy market has changed, especially with the introduction of shale gas and shale oil, in addition to new discoveries in different parts of the world, the global appeal of the broader Caspian region has diminished. Regardless of trends in other parts of the world, the Caspian basin could remain critical for its *immediate* neighbors, but it now has to compete for attention and investment to bring in outside interest.

Having raised these initial points, what are the challenges presently facing the Central Asian countries? The business and policy climate of Central Asia will be dependent on a number of issues, in the short term, looking ahead to 2014 and 2015, but also on longer-term projections, toward 2035 or 2050.

1. What is the state of the respective legal regimes in the countries of Central Asia? Can they ever be strong enough to manage and maintain cross-border traffic and commerce?
2. What is the investment and finance climate in each of the countries? At

what point will foreign direct investment go beyond energy and engage with other sectors?

3. To what extent does corruption remain a fundamental challenge to the region? According to international NGOs like Transparency International and Freedom House, corruption continues to plague economic development in Central Asia. More to the point, it erodes the ability of the respective regimes to maintain legitimacy among the populations.

4. Can the infrastructures of the Central Asian countries allow for greater local usage and engagement? With all the discussion of “modern Silk Roads” and “new Silk Roads,” is the local capacity sufficient to render these sustainable? The *physical* conditions of the regional transit routes are of varying quality, and to ensure effective cross-border trade, these must be brought to a level to make it possible to trade.

5. How critical is environmental degradation to the economic stability of the region? Non-governmental organizations such as Crude Accountability highlight this in their own research. Even the research offices of the Peoples’ Liberation Army (PLA) of China have focused efforts on the impact of environmental degradation on regional security. Such topics are now higher up on the agenda, underscoring the connection between environment and societal stability.

6. On the issue of stability and security,

Actual insurgent groups based in Afghanistan can cross over into Central Asia and create problems within the countries. This is a concern in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and to a lesser extent in Kyrgyzstan.

the paramount concern for the Central Asian countries is without doubt the situation in Afghanistan. Will the security problems of that country seep into the region of Central Asia, and specifically, will it damage the ability of the respective regimes to instill a sense of security within their own territorial boundaries? Central Asian security is at risk in three key ways:

1. Actual insurgent groups based in Afghanistan can cross over into Central Asia and create problems within the countries. This is a concern in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and to a lesser extent in Kyrgyzstan.
2. The instability in Afghanistan will perpetuate a power vacuum in the region, allowing for transnational threats to cross over: not just specific terrorist actors noted above, but drug traffickers and other illegal groups that will adversely affect the local social and economic conditions in Central Asia.
3. Instability in Afghanistan will thwart any regional plans –

to include pipelines such as TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) or the so-called “Modern Silk Road” efforts advocated by the United States and other outside powers.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but it demonstrates the range of problems that must be concurrently addressed. Moreover, for the countries of Central Asia to tackle all of these issues, it is evident that external engagement is required, and that the region needs to focus on its interests abroad. External powers could provide funding, expertise, and perhaps a leadership role in some of the more complex cross-border concerns. In an ideal world, such a power would not then be an “elder brother” to the Central Asian states, but a partner.

The reality is that outside states have looked at their policies toward Central Asia in a strategic manner and have, on occasion, acted as “elder brothers” to it. The United States, for example, has often looked at Central Asia in light of other, more pressing security and foreign policy interests. A full analysis of U.S. policy towards Central Asia is not the emphasis of this paper, but one can make a few observations. The reality is that U.S. policy has been fairly transparent for the past 22 years. Official documents and presentations over this time-frame outline the sorts of objectives expressed by the U.S. government. Consistent themes include:

External powers could provide funding, expertise, and perhaps a leadership role in some of the more complex cross-border concerns. In an ideal world, such a power would not then be an “elder brother” to the Central Asian states, but a partner.

1. Political development and democratization.
2. Economic development and the creation of free-market economies.
3. Human rights and social stability in the region.
4. Energy development and the diversification of routes and markets.
5. Regional security

For all who followed these trends – or have actually been part of the process – this outline represents nothing new. Of course, the relative importance of each of these specific policy directions has changed over time. In the early 1990s, the focus was on political, economic, and human rights development – at least in rhetorical terms. However, it is important to note that during these early years, the U.S. pursued what one could call a “Russia-First” policy. American and Western European attention was focused on the problems in Bosnia and the broader Balkan region, as well as out-of-theater concerns such as Somalia and Rwanda. A limited num-

ber of policy officials and academics monitored the civil war in Afghanistan, and to an even lesser extent the burgeoning civil war in Tajikistan, but these remained outside the scope of mainstream discussions. To say these were “Russia’s problems” is perhaps overstating it, but it was clear that Russian security interests trumped others when it came to Cen-

When U.S.-Russia relations began to fall apart in the mid-1990s, however, interest in the Central Asian (and Caspian) region increased.

tral Asia. Arguments ranging from national interests to the personal ties between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin have been used to illustrate this reality. When U.S.-Russia relations began to fall apart in the mid-1990s, however, interest in the Central Asian (and Caspian) region increased. For the remainder of the decade, one saw a proliferation of “energy studies” efforts in the United States. From PhDs to think-tank programs, Caspian Energy became a useful catchphrase and the topic of countless conferences and programs. This was the “new Great Game” as some readily claimed – thinking that Central Asian energy resources would only go in one direction, as opposed to the multi-directional reality of today.

When Afghanistan became a security concern – after September 11th and the subsequent U.S.-led campaign in Af-

ghanistan, security became a top priority and Central Asia was once again viewed through the prism of another national interest. American concerns about the viability of supporting the campaign in Afghanistan became the core reason to request – and receive – basing and fly-over rights from the Central Asian countries. Bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan were the nodes of engagement, but the broader regional interest in making sure that military operations within the Afghan theater of engagement dominated any bilateral negotiations. One should be mindful that even if a particular trend dominated U.S. policy discussions, it did not mean that the others vanished. The “human rights *or* security” dichotomy one saw in academic writings at the time was a bit simplistic and misrepresentative of the efforts made by U.S. government officials in the State Department, the Defense Department, and other offices to continue the lines of policy interest as noted earlier. However, these security efforts were duly noted and understood by the countries in the region and awakened a sense of competition once again. In spite of constant refrains of “no great games or competitions for influence,” the sad reality was that major powers did consider what others were doing and the comparative advantages that each had.

Without question, the fundamental limitations on U.S. engagement will center on the changing nature of the NATO-ISAF mission in Afghanistan

beginning on January 1, 2015. Specifically, on December 31, 2014, the NATO-ISAF mission will cease to exist in its current form. Presumably, the security responsibilities in the country will be taken over by the ANSF and the government of Afghanistan. The U.S. role will be limited to training and some counter-insurgency efforts that have yet to be defined. Troop levels, originally thought to be in the range of 20,000-25,000 are now most likely to be 2,500-8,000, with a distinct possibility that the number will be zero.

Equally important is the domestic situation in the U.S., namely that of budget austerity measures. At present, the U.S. government is wrestling with a mounting national debt and deficit and there is a fundamental shift in how policy is being framed. Indeed, it appears that national security is increasingly based on budgetary grounds (*what can we afford?*), as opposed to national interests (*what should we do?*). Oddly, it is important to stress the budgetary challenges facing any set of programs and potential policies towards Central Asia. This is not going to change because of the political climate in the United States against increasing support for “foreign engagement” with the exception of a limited number of special cases. Moreover, the national debt and deficit crises that have plagued the United States since 2008 continue to affect funding options among government agencies. Whether it is “sequestration” or simple percentage reductions

Barring a unique interest on the part of a particular Congressman or Senator, it is unlikely to see the political and economic value of Central Asia ever return to the level of the 1990s.

in programs (“do more with less”), the past decade of increased money for international engagement will come to an end. And, perhaps the Afghan conflict will fade from the U.S. collective memory in the same swift manner that the Iraq campaign did, and thereby the “value” of Central Asia will drop precipitously, as previously noted. Barring a unique interest on the part of a particular Congressman or Senator, it is unlikely to see the political and economic value of Central Asia ever return to the level of the 1990s.

With the decrease in energy interests and an absence of a major security concern, will it now be the case that the United States views Central Asia as “unimportant?” Given the trajectory of past policies, it would seem that such a conclusion at least merits an honest discussion and debate. Such a discussion must acknowledge the challenges of imagination in relation to how the U.S. views the region. To assume that the states ought to only look westward and maintain ties with NATO, the EU or “Europe and Eurasia” is to ignore the reality on the ground.

Even the curious turn of a phrase “pivot to Asia” that one hears today is vague about whether Central Asia is deemed part of Asia. Suffice it to say, the concern is that this will result in a U.S. move away from Central Asia, to include a lessening of resources, expertise, and attention.

Reviewing the challenges of U.S. policy toward Central Asia leads us to confront a critical reality on the ground: any outside power cannot assume that it is working in a static environment. Indeed, as outside actors’ policies have changed because of their own geopolitical circumstances, the same could be said for the countries in the region.

They are independent states with their own views of national security, national interest, and international relations. One just has to look at the evolution of the Kazakhstan National Security documents from the 1990s to the present. As researched by Roger McDermott, Cold War ideas of state-on-state conflict, global conflicts, and Soviet-era language have been replaced by serious discussions of transnational threats, cooperative security, and engagement in peace support operations so that Kazakhstan can be a security provider in the region, and beyond. Other states in Central Asia have also shifted their views on security to match the current trends.

Central Asian governments have engaged with other states that are equally concerned about remaining

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involved in the region – so bargains are constantly being made. In terms of economic development and assistance, one sees trade coming from a much broader range of countries. In the 1990s, assumptions were made that economic links would remain within the post-Soviet space, with outside engagement limited to European countries and perhaps the United States. Today, there is a diversity of outside actors, including states in the Middle East/Gulf, South and Southeast Asia, and beyond. The same can be said for security cooperation. Military links, including professional military education, exercises, and weapons purchases are now much more diverse than 10 or 15 years ago.

Media and the news – and how to interpret events – are still subject to filters that the West might not appreciate or understand. Whether one is looking at the coverage of the 2003 U.S. war in Iraq, the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia, or the current events in Syria or the international stand-off with Iran, media coverage does tend to maintain some of the older frameworks, especially paralleling those from Russia. Not surprisingly, this colors how citizens of the respective countries view outside nations.

Central Asian governments have engaged with other states that are equally concerned about remaining involved in the region – so bargains are constantly being made.

The U.S. standing in the world has changed from the perspective of Central Asian governments. Whether this is based on a perception that the U.S. was supportive of the so-called “colored revolutions” or the reality of the U.S. fiscal crisis since 2008, the countries of Central Asia are more open to discussing the viability of engaging with other countries around the world. It is not that the United States has vanished from their purview, but rather that it now belongs to a mix of other countries. The truth of the matter is that while the “idea” of the United States has faded a bit, it is not irrelevant to the region as a political actor. That said, one cannot expect to return to the 1990s, at which time the attitudes toward the U.S. were overwhelmingly positive. Nor can one take for granted the “American model of development” that was so enthusiastically embraced years ago.

Does this mean that the United States will fade into irrelevance as far as the Central Asian region is concerned? That risk does exist, especially if the limiting factors noted above are amplified. In addition, as priorities develop in other parts of the world, it is clear that the U.S. will be unable to project

power so readily, and may have to direct its engagement on a more selective basis. If this is the case, would a crisis in Central Asia trump one in the Middle East? East Asia? Latin America? At the same time, should one readily assume that Russia and China are now de facto dominating Central Asia? One must not ignore the fact that both of these countries face their own limitations, and could well experience crises that would further challenge power projection in the classic definition of the term. Russia itself has to focus on other border regions, such as the South Caucasus and Europe, and is limited in terms of what it can militarily provide/support. For Russia, the early 1990s saw a period wherein Central Asia was considered

The U.S. standing in the world has changed from the perspective of Central Asian governments.

as the so-called “Near Abroad” and the general assumption was that these states would play a subordinate role to Russia for the foreseeable future. As ties frayed, and other countries engaged more effectively in the region, most of the Central Asian countries saw their levels of cooperation with Russia decrease. The past decade has seen the level of Kazakh-Chinese, Kyrgyz-Chinese, and Tajik-Chinese trade increase so much that the neighbor to the east is now the dominant economic actor.

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While discussions of China's inevitable domination of energy resources and minerals in the region are ongoing, Beijing's ability to effectively project power – economic and security – is still a “work in progress.” Debates about how to manage China's increasing presence in the world continue within the country's leadership, and a clear direction for future action has yet to be determined. Equally important, internal challenges may arise that will require the government to devote greater attention to the economy, the environment, social stability, and so on.

Indeed, for these major countries, as well as for other, less-involved states, the appeal and usefulness of Central Asia could be limited. This is in terms of energy development, economic trade and exploitation, and even security. It is the “security” emphasis that has been most regularly placed on Central Asia with respect to outside powers. An illustrative example is the status of the Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan operated by the United States. Over the past eight years, regular conversations and speculations about the imminent closure of the facility have

swirled around policy communities in Washington, Bishkek, Moscow, Beijing, and Kabul, to name a few. At its basic level, the transit center is an essential component of the military operations taking place in Afghanistan. It provides opportunities for refueling of close air support, reconnaissance, and transportation missions of the U.S. air force. It has also become the de facto transit point for the majority of U.S. military personnel going into and out of Afghanistan. When troop levels were at their peak, roughly 30,000 personnel transited through the center in any given month. Once the total commitment of U.S. personnel in Afghanistan drops from nearly 100,000 to 8,000 by 2015, there is no question that the utility of Manas will decrease. If air missions can be conducted from other bases, the Manas transit center could actually be closed down without damaging the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. There will come a point that the service fees for using Manas are simply not economically viable for the U.S. government.

Assessments of other outside powers lead to similar conclusions. Dispensing with a Cold War framework, it is possible to evaluate the interests of other countries in Central Asia. As has been noted in other writings, the economic interests of countries such as Russia and China are fairly obvious – control of raw materials, hydrocarbon reserves, and potential trade and commercial routes. It is when these interests converge that opportunities for cooperation arise. This

is most evident in the regular discussions on the security challenges presented by “Afghanistan post-2014.” The worst-case scenario presented by Russian analysts entails Afghanistan imploding or taken over by Taliban-like forces. Civil war ensues, and transnational extremist groups, drug traffickers and the like are free to base out of the country and adversely affect neighboring states, including those in Central Asia. While this would never pose an existential threat to Russia itself, it would require the country to expend more resources and attention on defending its southern borders, to invest more heavily in the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and potentially to base additional military units in the Central Asian region. Maintaining stability in Central Asia – and managing chaos in Afghanistan – would become a policy without any real end and Russia has no true capability to genuinely resolve those problems. Moreover, it would draw resources and attention away from either the European or East Asian regions, where greater national interests exist. In short, a chaotic Afghanistan post-2014 would impose a “tax” on Russia’s security forces and the economy in general.

The same could be said for China, a country that is investing billions of dollars in Afghanistan and Central Asia, particularly in the areas of transportation and resource extraction. While the Central Asian operations would not necessarily be hindered, increased security requirements would

The worst-case scenario presented by Russian analysts entails Afghanistan imploding or taken over by Taliban-like forces.

escalate the price and risk of any business undertaking in the region. Moreover, as a country that is not used to projecting hard power outside of its borders, China would have to consider stationing troops and participating in region-based security frameworks that go beyond conversations and photo opportunities.

If the future of Afghanistan post-2014 is less hazardous, then the opportunities for Russia and China to engage with the Central Asian countries will increase, and will then be limited by their own interests and capabilities. In this instance, as noted above, they will have to balance out real interests in Central Asia with those in other regions based on their respective strategies. To this end, Central Asia will remain of secondary importance. If the situation in the region is largely stable, and if the United States is thus minimally engaged, one could expect the Russian presence to be more of a “maintaining a presence” without additional expenditures. This would free up the Russian foreign ministry to address issues in the Middle East, Iran, East Asia and Europe – traditional areas of former Russian and Soviet power projection and ones in which the current administration would like to see Russian involvement. For China, a stable Afghanistan and a

resultant stable Central Asia would mean that resources could be shifted elsewhere. Equally important is the belief that such stability would allow the Chinese government to feel more confident about stability within its own borders. Xinjiang next to a stable and friendly Central Asia is less of a problem than next to an unstable and unfriendly region.

Moreover, the perceptions of these powers – just like those of the United States – need to be better understood. Over the past twenty years, Kazakhstan has been able to develop a more sophisticated approach to neighboring powers and, while recognizing the comparative geopolitical advantages held by Russia and China, its efforts to better connect with other states is an effort to balance them bureaucratically. President Karimov's administration in Uzbekistan has had a cyclical relationship with Russia in particular. The second suspension of CSTO activities is important in that it underscores the Uzbek government's concern about being part of organizations that are dominated by a single nation. To the extent that other "outside powers" engage with Central Asia, the past twenty years have shown that Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have been better able to proactively establish their own national security goals. While the same cannot necessarily be said for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the leaders of both states have at least made efforts to court other countries. President Rahmon's periodic nod to the "Persian commu-

Over the past twenty years, Kazakhstan has been able to develop a more sophisticated approach to neighboring powers and, while recognizing the comparative geopolitical advantages held by Russia and China, its efforts to better connect with other states is an effort to balance them bureaucratically.

nity" in the region – Iran, Afghanistan (Dari), and Tajikistan – is a case in point, as is his commitment to fostering better ties with India. In both instances, there has been some flirting with security relations, with the most developed being that between the Tajik and Indian militaries. President Atambayev doesn't quite have that luxury in Kyrgyzstan, although recent debates about the value of the Customs Union and the continued presence of the Manas Transit Center underscore the fact that the country is not completely beholden to either Russia or China.

The post-2014 world should also be considered in terms of two final characteristics. First of all, regardless of how stable or unstable it might be, Afghanistan will still exist in 2015 and the region will not experience a complete breakdown. Indeed, there are those who strongly support the belief that the Taliban will never regain power completely and that, at best, we will see a poor country with lim-

ited capabilities, fighting a long-simmering conflict in specific areas (most notably the eastern provinces). To this end, there will remain a Western and even international organization presence in Afghanistan. So regardless, the “worst case scenarios” ought to be understood, but not necessarily assumed as a *fait accompli*.

The second fact is that the issue of “polarity” is being played out in Central Asia in interesting ways. If it is not a bipolar, unipolar or even multipolar world, can one confidently refer to the future geopolitical space of Central Asia as non-polar? In the geostrategic understanding of central Asia, a non-polar world would suggest that no single power dominates the region, and that there are multiple different dynamics at play – in terms of politics, economics, security, and even non-traditional areas. Thereby the whole conception of the region as a single entity is less relevant. Indeed, in future years, would it be more fitting to focus specifically on bilateral dynamics and to seek to understand the sum total of these parts to explain the interests of regional and international actors? As seen elsewhere, for instance in Latin America, Africa, or Southeast Asia, the need to better understand the powers of the region is increasingly more important than just comparing the roles of outside powers. If the United States foreign policy community can nimbly adapt to this environment, it will pay dividends in the long run. The same could be said for other external powers. And,

most importantly, if this approach is understood clearly by the five Central Asian countries, chances for cooperation and constructive engagement will increase. At the same time, the dangers is that if left unchecked, new dynamics can arise to threaten stability. For the international actors who express interests in Central Asia, these ought to be the real concerns in the coming years.

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Insight Turkey is a quarterly journal
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ISAF, Afghanistan and the Pakistan Dimension:

Towards an Acceptable Transition

**Riccardo
Redaelli***

Abstract

The article explores the domestic and regional implications of the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan after 2014. In domestic politics, the withdrawal will intersect with political transition: the presidential elections. According to the author, the results of the elections will represent either the failure or success of the ambitious program of assistance and stabilization launched by the international community twelve years ago. It also represents the need to avoid the disastrous results of the 2009 presidential elections, marked by massive fraud and manipulation. However, as the paper suggests, the current political scenario in Kabul is not very promising: personal rivalries, tribal feuds, ethno-tribal sectarianism, disinclining mode vis-à-vis international requests of transparency and clear voting mechanisms. In this sense, the future of Afghanistan as a united and stable country seems to be the less important goal for the Afghan political elites. In such a fragile situation, the regional dimension of the conflict acquires even greater importance. This is because if Pakistan does not effectively deal with Taliban in both political and militaristic terms, if Iran continues to act as a “lone wolf” in the post-ISAF scenario regarding the civil war in Afghanistan, and if the Arab oil monarchies maintain their polarizing support to religious dogmatism in the area, Afghanistan will not be able to achieve sustainable and credible stability. Nonetheless, the paper concludes that in post-ISAF Afghanistan, stability will depend more on the shifts within the political scenario than the security one, in the sense that without a credible political transition, and without a non-contested electoral process in 2014, all the previous costly and bloody efforts will have been in vain. In order to secure a successful political transition, two factors will be decisive: i) a strong focus on traditional domestic patterns of policy, rather than formal democracy procedures, ii) the involvement of regional actors, especially Pakistan, in order to reach a suitable, long-term political compromise with the insurgents.

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As is widely known, two key events will coincide in 2014: firstly, the security transition with the end of ISAF (and its transformation into the mission *Resolute Support*, which should guarantee NATO's support to Afghanistan, although the Alliance rejects any reference to a possible ISAF 2.0); secondly, the political transition, with the presidential elections to replace Hamid Karzai. The results of these two transitions will represent either failure, or a new beginning for the ambitious program of assistance and stabilization launched by the international community twelve years ago.

Both events will take place in 2014. However, in the murky and confusing Afghan situation, it appears that in fact 2013 is the crucial year of transition. A NATO defeat in the current fighting season or an implosion of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will wash away any residual hope of stabilizing the security scenario, and will end up in a difficult scenario, wherein the need for peace negotiations with the Taliban will be much more pressing. At a political level, it is crucial this year to create a framework that will prevent the disastrous outcome of the 2009 presidential elections, which were marred by massive fraud and manipulation. It should also be noted that the current political scenario in Kabul is not very promising, given the personal rivalries, tribal feuds, ethno-tribal sectarianism, and the fact that President Karzai still acting in an ambiguous,

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difficult mode *vis-à-vis* international requests for transparency and clear voting mechanisms. The future of Afghanistan as a united stable country does not seem to be the priority for the Afghan political elites.

In this fragile situation, the regional dimension of the conflict will become even more important. If Afghanistan is to have any possibility of sustainable and credible stability, it must ensure the following: a significant change in Pakistan's traditional strategy towards Afghanistan; engagement with Iran to prevent Tehran from acting as a "lone wolf" in the post-ISAF scenario; and avoiding polarizing support to religious fundamentalism in the area from the Arab oil monarchies (through their networks of supported centers and *madrassah*).

In any case, it is crucial to understand that "victory" for NATO will be defined by the political transition. Gone are the days of the 2001 Bonn conference, with all the unrealistic dreams of a global transformation for

Afghanistan; we have acquired a better knowledge of the various ethnic, tribal, clan-based and core-periphery shatter belts which divide and shape Afghan society. A focus on state stability coupled with respect for those particular features is required to help Afghanistan find credible stability (which means something more than the current ‘unstable dynamic stalemate’).

Confidence is the center of gravity?

From a pessimistic perspective, it seems very unlikely that ISAF and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will be able to defeat the Taliban in all its various forms, and stabilize the country before the 2014 transition, given that they have failed to achieve those results over the past decade. However, there is cautious optimism amongst NATO commanders, based on a number of positive signals from Afghanistan. NATO is trying to give the Afghans confidence that the transition will not entail a collapse, and that ISAF will not simply disappear (‘redeployment, not withdrawal’). ANSF shows better performance and increased confidence in their capacity; Taliban commanders on the ground appear less aggressive in their tactics, notwithstanding the “blockbuster-style” attacks in Kabul (which are mainly aimed at gaining the attention of the international community) and the local population – it is evident – will not accept a return to a pre-2001 Afghanistan. Thus even in the case of military success, the Tali-

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ban will be forced to adapt their ideology, as demonstrated by their change of attitude towards rural schools in some districts.¹

ISAF commanders are insisting on three principle: the first is that the deadline for ISAF redeployment (they refuse to call it a withdrawal) has positive implications for both NATO and

ANSF and the Afghan government need to have increased confidence in their capacity to stand up against the insurgents.

the government of Afghanistan, since it compels them to be more focused on results and to increase their commitment (it is the last chance to stabilize the country). The second concept focuses on the idea that “confidence is the center of gravity” of their action. In other words, ANSF and the Afghan government need to have increased confidence in their capacity to stand up against the insurgents. From this point of view, the current fighting season is going to be decisive: if ANSF can demonstrate its capacity on the ground; if Afghan officers increase

¹ *The Ongoing Battle for Education. Uprisings, Negotiations and Taleban Tactics, Afghanistan Analyst network Policy Briefings, 10 June 2013.*

their ability to command their men “under fire”; if the administration becomes more efficient and less corrupt, then Afghanistan might survive the redeployment. The third concept deals with the fact that victory will be defined by political transition, not by a direct military intervention, as implemented in the last decade without the anticipated success.

These goals are realistic, but the only way Afghans can avoid renewed political fragmentation and military anarchy is to have confidence in themselves. However, there is a risk that ISAF is over-estimating ANSF capacity in order to create a “public justification” for the withdrawal of the majority of its military units. This is a perception that many Afghans share: “NATO wants to leave Afghanistan, but cannot admit its failure in stabilizing it, so they have created an optimistic but unlikely narrative of the security scenario.” If this is true, it would be not only dangerous, but extremely cynical.

The political conundrum and the peculiarities of the Afghan state

In any case, it is clear that the measure of our success in Afghanistan is not linked to an impossible military victory, but to the positive evolution of the current political scenario. In 2014, Afghanistan has to choose a new president, as the incumbent, Hamid Karzai, will be ineligible. These elections represent a challenge for the country on several levels, and the

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results will determine the future possibilities for a credible long-term stabilization strategy, although there is a widespread pessimism about this.²

The primary goal of the 2014 elections is to avoid the shame and the organizational shambles of the previous presidential election in 2009, which was marred by fraud, mismanagement and manipulation on a massive scale. The second goal relies on the success of the Afghan government to create and support a credible electoral process, with independent observation missions. Apart from that, it is crucial to enlarge the political frame, focusing on the inclusion of actors who are currently excluded from or against the system, especially within the Pashtun ethnic group. The inclusion of such groups, however, should not reverse all of the social and cultural achievements of post-Taliban Afghanistan. Importantly, the Taliban do not seem prepared to launch a political party: ‘Despite recent announcements to the contrary from ex-Taliban figures and the successful entry of another armed

² ‘In the current environment, prospects for clean elections and a smooth transition are slim’ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Afghanistan: the Long, Hard Road to the 2014 Transition*, Asia Report N.236, 8 October 2012.

The current problems of governance echo the long, seemingly never-ending series of failures to establish a stable, workable government in Afghanistan – from the Muhammadzai dynasty to the Da’ud period, from the Soviet invasion to Najibullah, to the period of civil war amongst different mujaheddin to the Taliban period, to the current government.

opposition group, *Hizb-e Islami*, into mainstream politics the insurgents’ primary mode of political expression in the near future will remain fighting, not party politics’.³

It is clear that “any profound disruption in Kabul politics would leave an opening for the armed insurgency. Failure to see an understanding emerge between the Palace, parliament, political parties and civil society on remaining electoral reform issues or another veto of the reform law approved by parliament would undermine hopes for a stable transition and play even more directly into the hands of the insurgency”.⁴

In any case, we must concede that most of the analyses and considerations in the West are the result of an underestimation of the particularities

of Afghanistan as a state, and the fact that nowadays, difficulties are echoing many of the country’s traditional problems. The current problems of governance echo the long, seemingly never-ending series of failures to establish a stable, workable government in Afghanistan – from the Muhammadzai dynasty to the Da’ud period, from the Soviet invasion to Najibullah, to the period of civil war amongst different *mujaheddin* to the Taliban period, to the current government.

It scarcely needs to be pointed out just how difficult it is to discuss ethnicity, history and political dynamics. More than difficult, it is hazardous, since we always face dangers of over-simplification, if we speak in general terms. This is particularly true when we try to analyze a fragmented and plural society such as Afghanistan, which is a society with wide and deep-rooted cultural, historical and social differences amongst the different ethnic communities (e.g. between Tajiks and Pashtuns) and even within the same communities at different levels (Ghalzay-Durrani, inside each group, etc.). In this society, fragmentation is so strong that some scholars have suggested that in the Afghan context, sectarian distinctions are more important than ethnic distinctions. According to Canfield: ‘Except in the case of the smallest ethnolinguistic types [...] in which the boundaries of the type coincide with some other social unit, the real units of cooperation are normally based on other grounds of loyalty than common ethnic identity. The

³ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Afghanistan’s Parties in Transition, Policy Brief Political*, n.141, June 2013, pp.1-2.

⁴ *Idem*.

categories of ethnic ascription are not in fact the categories of sociopolitical action'.⁵ Rather, other kinds of sociopolitical units (patron-client relations, coalitions under religious authorities, etc.) are more relevant – *madhab* (sectarian affiliation) to be the prior basis of identity in Afghanistan. However, this is an interpretation which has been considered too radical by other scholars. Whatever our personal views, it is still true that we still do not know a lot about Afghan cultural categories of identity and inter-group relations, as emphasized by Anderson.⁶

These difficulties derive from the adoption of an alien concept and pattern of polity structure, namely the 'European national modern state', and the attempt to map that onto different historical and cultural realities. This is a well-known problem in many Asian and African countries: 'Autonomous forms of imagination of the community were, and continue to be, overwhelmed and swamped by the history of the post-colonial state. Here lies the root of our post-colonial misery: not in our inability to think our new forms of the modern community but in our surrender to the old forms of the modern state'.⁷

5 R.L. Canfield, *Ethnic, Regional, and Sectarian Alignments in Afghanistan*, in A. Banuazizi and M. Weiner (Eds.), *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics. Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan*, Lahore, Vanguard Books, 1987, p.76.

6 J. W. Anderson, *Introduction and overview*, in J.W. Anderson et R.F. Strand (Eds.), *Ethnic Processes and Intergroup Relations in Contemporary Afghanistan*, New York, pp.1-8.

7 P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, 1993, p.11.

Recognizing the role of factionalism, patronage-client relations and tribalism, instead of denying their value, as well as plurality, does entail accepting the disintegration of Afghanistan.

In other words, in Afghanistan – beyond the numerous, well-publicized problems – we are dealing with a structural problem: how to balance and adjust the constitutional shape of a “national state” with the peculiarity of its traditional structures, where center-periphery relations are constantly tense and unstable and where traditional (local) community structures have historically played an important role. Moreover, there is also a theoretical dilemma: the definition of “democratization” in a plural, fractured society. While in the model of the Western democracy this is essentially a way to allow citizens to control their leaders (following Popper’s definition of democracy in contrast to dictatorship⁸) through upward control – and where the majority decides – in fractured societies, such as Afghanistan, the crucial point for the creation of a credible and accepted democratic system lies in the balance of power relations among competing and often hostile ethno-cultural communities.

Recognizing the role of factionalism, patronage-client relations and tribalism, instead of denying their value, as well as plurality, does entail accepting

8 Cfr. I.C. Jarvie, I. C. – K. Milford, *Karl Popper: life and time, and values in a word of facts*, London, 2006, especially vol.1.

the disintegration of Afghanistan. On the contrary, these concepts represent the first step to modernize the country and to support its evolution through engagement and education. After all, '[i]n spite of the proverbial unpredictability of tribal leadership, the tribal system is an element of stability and resilience in times of turmoil and when state authority has disappeared. It provides safety, legal security and social orientation in an otherwise chaotic and anarchic world'.⁹

From this perspective, the constitution drafted after the collapse of Taliban does not help: Washington, worried by the centrifugal tendency of the Afghan system, pushed for a presidential system, with a strong, powerful President in charge of the government; a system which does not help the political *côte* deal with the above mentioned characteristics of Afghan representation.

The regional dimension and the role of Pakistan

In any case, it would be unrealistic to identify a solution for Afghanistan from within its borders. This has been a Western mistake: for years, ISAF has thought it could stabilize this Country without properly engaging its neighbors.

Obviously, after 2014, the regional dimension will acquire even greater importance: without a significant

⁹ B. Glazer, *Is Afghanistan on the brink of ethnic and tribal disintegration?*, in W. Maley (Ed.), *Fundamentalism reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, Lahore, 1998, p.177.

change in Pakistan's traditional strategy towards Afghanistan, engagement of Iran in order to convince Tehran not to act as a "lone wolf" in the post-ISAF scenario, and less polarizing support for religious fundamentalism in the area by the Arab oil monarchies (through their networks of supported centers and *madrasah*), Afghanistan will have no prospect of sustainable and credible stability.

There is little doubts that Pakistan is the key regional actor. Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has looked upon Afghanistan – and to the Pash-tun areas – with a mix of fear and desire. The Soviet occupation in 1979 offered Islamabad the opportunity to realize two main goals: to achieve a much-desired strategic depth against India (jeopardizing at the same time the dangerous relations between Kabul and New Delhi) and to control Pashtunistan (till then a worrying concept for Pakistan's territorial integrity). In the 1980s, Pakistan was the base for the Saudi-American alliance behind the *mujaheddin* and, since 1993, Pakistan has been a safe haven of the Taliban insurgency and its logistical supply line.

Afghanistan has been the greatest strategic gamble of Islamabad since that time. It has hardly paid dividends: Pakistan support for the *mujaheddin* and then for the Taliban backfired: instead of the "Pakistanization" of Afghanistan, what happened was the "Talibanization" of Pakistan, giving rise to religious extremism, sectarian

violence, illicit trafficking, violence and instability. Pakistani state structures have been eroded by the Afghan syndrome, to the point that Islamabad has often lost, over this decade, *de facto* control over some areas of its territory. Thus, ‘Pakistan has inadequate capacity to clear and hold areas and to win and sustain the support of locals. This is likely to have stemmed from Islamabad’s hesitance to embrace counter-insurgency doctrinally and operationally’.¹⁰

Still, the Taliban appears to be a useful tool for most of the fractured political and military elite of Pakistan, which prefers to retain its traditional, conventional position against India. Moreover, the majority of the population seems to prefer a ‘peace deal’ with Islamic extremists, rather than fighting them.¹¹ Taliban also serves as a political card against India – which is trying to enforce its influence over Afghanistan¹² - as well as the U.S.: the Islamist warriors render Islamabad a crucial regional actor for dealing with and for providing law enforcement officers, officials and politicians with money and illicit products from their

¹⁰ C. C. Fair – S. G. Jones, *Pakistan’s War Within*, “Survival”, 2009, 51:6, p.162.

¹¹ C. C. Fair – C. Ramsay and S. Kull, *Pakistani Public Opinion on Democracy, Islamist Militancy, and Relations with the U.S.*, USIP/PIPA, Washington DC, 7 January 2008.

¹² ‘Delhi has striven to bolster the government in Kabul and integrate Afghanistan into wider regional political and economic structures. This has not been done out of any sense of altruism. By strengthening Afghanistan, India advances its own national security objectives [...] and gaining access to Central Asian trade and energy resources’. L. Hanauer – P. Chalck, *India’s and Pakistan’s strategies in Afghanistan: implications for the United States and the region*, RAND Occasional Paper, S. Monica (CA), 2012, p.ix.

Pakistan’s passive support of the Taliban is thus a useful hedge against the day when NATO decides to start pulling out and gives up the struggle.

trafficking (especially opium). Moreover, as it has been noted: ‘Pakistan’s passive support of the Taliban is thus a useful hedge against the day when NATO decides to start pulling out and gives up the struggle. Pakistan will then have a relationship with the Pashtun future of southern and eastern Afghanistan and will have an asset in the struggle for post-NATO Afghanistan. Thus it is crucial that the alliance makes it clear to Islamabad that the Taliban are not going to succeed on the battlefield and that Pakistan must aggressively weaken both the Afghan and the Pakistani Taliban’.¹³

However, this policy is easier to suggest than to implement, for the following reasons:

1. The Pakistani army still has a “schizophrenic” position on the U.S. withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Although some elements of the powerful and autonomous military services (ISI) remain distrustful of U.S. intentions in the region, others fear the reduction of Washington’s military aid, since today’s Pakistan is characterized by greater insecurity and economic fragility than the Pakistan of the 1980s and 1990s. The

¹³ B. Riedel, *Pakistan’s Role in the Afghan War Outcome*, “The Economist”, 20 May 2010.

result is the well-known, and frustrating, Pakistani stop-and-go policy in their fight against violent Islamic radicalism. In other words, the ‘major nuisance to Islamabad’s foreign policy is the inescapable dilemma stemming from the need to reconcile bilateral and regional objectives with the need to preserve Pakistan’s global standing and strategic value to the United States’.¹⁴ Moreover, the Army maintains a traditional strategy, which does not focus on counter-insurgency. From a doctrinal point of view, it still considers its fights against the Taliban in the Swat valley and in North-West Frontier Province as low-intensity conflicts, and it does not claim to conduct population-centric counterinsurgency operations.¹⁵

2. Islamabad fears the Indian connection with Kabul (the well-known strategic encirclement doctrine); therefore, it maintains a ‘contrastive’ posture in order to keep India ‘at bay’, once NATO and Washington have abandoned the “Af-Pak” arena. However, one can hardly concur with the vision of Pakistan’s policy towards Afghanistan as being completely “India centric”, functioning only to counter India’s moves.¹⁶ This

14 Q. Siddiqui, Pakistan’s Future Policy Towards Afghanistan. A Look at Strategic depth, militant Movements, and the Role of India and the US, DISS (Danish Institute for International Studies) n. 8, 2011, p. 9.

15 C.C. Fair – S.G. Jones, Pakistan’s War Within cit, p. 162.

16 Although ‘mainly India centric’, Pakistan has other important priorities which shape its Afghan policies, such as the undermining of Afghan Pashtunistan claims, and to build economic links toward Central Asian Republics. Cf: L. Hanauer – P. Chalck, India’s and Pakistan’s strategies in Afghanistan cit, pp. 25 on.

Major nuisance to Islamabad’s foreign policy is the inescapable dilemma stemming from the need to reconcile bilateral and regional objectives with the need to preserve Pakistan’s global standing and strategic value to the United States.

is a very reductive vision of a much more complex and multifarious strategy. Indeed, for Islamabad Afghanistan plays an important role from an economic as well as political status perspective. From the economic standpoint, a stabilized Afghanistan can become a relevant hub for an already proposed inland Eurasian corridor; Pakistan is also worried about the possibility of alternative transport routes to Central Asia involving Indian and Iranian cooperation, for that will reduce Pakistan’s centrality in the Afghan conflict, as well as affecting its regional status. From a political point of view, the role of peace broker in the Afghan conflict helps Islamabad to raise its declining status *vis-à-vis* India and in the region.

3. In Pakistan, any policy which allows the U.S. and Kabul governments to reach a truce or a compromise with Taliban without its direct involvement is perceived as a political defeat and a direct blow to its international status and its regional role. This is why during these years, the Pakistani government has undermined all peace attempts which do not give emphasis

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to its role. It also sought to manipulate the so-called Doha peace process. As a matter of fact, too many generals and politicians think that it is useful ‘to save the Taliban for a rainy day’.¹⁷ It would be foolish to give them away without huge and clear compensation. As has been noted: ‘Pakistan struggles to retain its status as a frontline state. Frail in stature compared to India, Pakistan needs to constantly secure U.S. support, which has historically been granted only intermittently based on strategic priorities of the time – for instance, previously during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and currently as a major U.S. ally in the war on terror’.¹⁸

4. Talibanization is a disease which has already affected Pakistan: to go against them risks provoking a new wave of violence and instability in the Country, although it is crystal clear that as long as Islamabad maintains these links, Pakistan will remain vulnerable to increased infection. As

¹⁷ As a former Pakistani official confessed, quoted in “Right at the Edge”, *New York Times*, 15 September 2008.

¹⁸ Q. Siddiqui, *Pakistan’s Future Policy Towards Afghanistan* cit, p. 52.

a matter of fact, Islamabad’s policy of sustaining the ‘good jihadists’ has strained Pakistan’s political and social fabric. To make matters worse, it has also endangered the state when its former proxies have turned on it. What to do about the (Afghan and Pakistani) Taliban is a security dilemma with no clear answer.

5. Islamabad believes that Pashtunistan will remain an issue amongst the Pashtun. Thus, they prefer to have the upper hand with Afghanistan by supporting the Taliban, in an attempt to fend off Pashtun claims over the Pashtun territory divided by the British-designed border, the famous Durand Line of 1893. But, as Ahmed Rashid notes, Pakistan wrongly calculated that its extensive assistance would lead the Taliban to recognize the Durand Line, curbing Pashtun nationalism. In fact, the opposite occurred: not only did the Taliban refuse to recognize the Durand Line, renouncing to Pashtun’s claims over the Pakistan’s North West Frontier Province; they also supported Pashtun nationalism in Pakistan, adding a ‘religious flavor’, which made it more attractive.¹⁹ At the same time, a strong unified Afghanistan is more a danger than a resource for Islamabad, especially in the current situation, with a government in Kabul where Tajik, Hazara and Uzbek have key ministries in their hands. Beyond that, its grip over Afghanistan (or at least, part of it) represents a tremendously

¹⁹ A. Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, *New Haven (Conn)*, 2010, p. 187.

valuable card that Islamabad can use with Washington at political, military and economic level. 'Islamabad has no reason to facilitate an Afghan reconciliation process that advances U.S. objectives at the expense of its own'.²⁰ However, it is a card which may produce counterproductive results: although it does not necessarily make Pakistan an adversary for

Pakistan wrongly calculated that its extensive assistance would lead the Taliban to recognize the Durand Line, curbing Pashtun nationalism.

Washington, it has consolidated the feeling that Pakistan has not been – and never will be – a reliable partner for the U.S., with all the consequences in terms of economic, political and military support.

In conclusion, it appears clear – in terms of both the regional and domestic scenarios – that in Afghanistan we are dealing with a dangerously unstable situation. We are still on the brink of such a situation, but with some positive signals coming from the security sector (less so from the political one). And this is worrying, since in post-ISAF Afghanistan, stability will depend more on the political transition than the security one, in the sense that without a credible political transition, and without a non-contested electoral process in 2014,

²⁰ L. Hanauer – P. Chalck, *India's and Pakistan's strategies cit*, p. 46.

the costly and bloody war will have been in vain.

In order to achieve a successful transition at the political level, two factors will prove decisive: i) increased focus on traditional domestic policy patterns, rather than formal democracy procedures, without depriving the Afghan population of an acceptable form of representation and political rights²¹; ii) the involvement of regional actors, namely Pakistan, in order to reach a suitable, long-term political compromise with the insurgents. Unfortunately, the current position of Islamabad still appears to be a far cry from what Afghanistan needs.

²¹ As remarked by Elisa Giunchi: 'Clearly, the assumption that the introduction of formal democracy will foster per se internal cohesion and peace, irrespective of how power is distributed and of how national memory is constructed, is flawed'. E. Giunchi, *State-building and Sub-national tensions in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, ISPI Analysis n. 171, Milano, May 2013, p. 10.

The Myth of the Afghan threat

*and a New Reality in Central Asia
on the Threshold of 2014*

**Krzysztof
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Abstract

The article examines the extent to which Afghanistan constitutes a threat to Central Asia. The conventional thinking on the issue sees the security in Central Asia and Afghanistan as closely associated, and thus suggests that the level of security in Central Asia is directly proportional to the level of security in Afghanistan. This is because the stability in Central Asia is considered to be fragile, both by local politicians and the international community, and the region's proximity to Afghanistan magnifies this fragility. Thus considering that NATO's stabilization mission in Afghanistan will be concluded in 2014, entailing the significant reduction of U.S. and allied forces on the ground, this conventional view gives rise to serious concerns. To a certain extent, the fears concerning the developments after 2014 may appear to be reasonable. However, as this article holds, a critical approach towards the assumption of "the Afghan threat to Central Asia," is fruitful. This approach proposes that Afghanistan did not, does not and will not constitute either a direct strategic threat to Central Asia, nor a reason or necessary condition for destabilization. Based on this thinking, the fears for regional stability are nothing more than "mythological thinking," a self-fulfilling prophecy, as well as a useful argument misused for the purposes of internal and external policies. Accordingly, the Afghan myth justifies and stimulates the fight against Islamic movements, and further justifies the involvement of external players in the regional security dynamic: hence the presence of Russia in the region, U.S. bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, a French base in Tajikistan and a German base in Uzbekistan. The article concludes by arguing that the Afghan threat in Central Asia is definitely mythologized, overestimated and instrumentalized. However, this not mean that the region is currently or will be stable in the symbolic year of 2014, or that NATO's withdrawal will remain without consequences for the region.

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The notion of persistent threat to stability is a fixed category in external perceptions of Central Asia, on the part of both local politicians and the outside world. The fear has its origins in numerous internal factors (the difficult process of state-building as well as political, social and economic transformation under the conditions of dynamic changes, crises, overvaluations and conflicts) and external ones (inter alia, instability and the turbulent process of filling of the geopolitical vacuum left by the USSR in the region).

The fear over Central Asia is magnified by the region's proximity to Afghanistan – an area which for over 30 years has been fraught by conflict and internal tensions, and which has generated security problems on a global scale (notably the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001). In practice, the perception of security in Central Asia has become closely associated with the situation in Afghanistan; that is, the level of security in Central Asia is perceived as directly proportional to the level of security in Afghanistan.¹

The question of links between Central Asia and Afghanistan is now returning with renewed strength: the stabilization mission in Afghanistan headed by NATO – ISAF will be concluded in

According to the paradigm governing perceptions of Afghanistan and Central Asia by the region, the West and Russia, 2014 marks as the beginning of the probable breakdown of the fragile stability in Afghanistan, which will pose a serious threat to its northern neighbors.

2014 (the process of troop withdrawal is currently ongoing), with a likelihood of a significant reduction of US and allied forces operating within the Operation Enduring Freedom. The 13-year period during which the West was directly responsible for Afghanistan, and as such had a direct influence on security in Central Asia, will come to an end. According to the paradigm governing perceptions of Afghanistan and Central Asia by the region, the West and Russia, 2014 marks as the beginning of the probable breakdown of the fragile stability in Afghanistan, which will pose a serious threat to its northern neighbors.²

This mode of thought, illustrated by numerous examples, is deeply embedded in the public consciousness, and is reasonable to the extent that there are indeed serious challenges

¹ Compare : A. Rashid, "Taliban. Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia", Yale University Press 2001. A. Rashid, "Jihad. The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia", Yale University Press 2002. T. Donnelly, "Fergana as FATA, Central Asia after 2014 – Outcomes and Strategic Options", <http://fmsso.leavenworth.army.mil/Collaboration/FAO/Fergana-as-FATA.pdf>

² For further information: S. Blank, "Central Asian Perspectives on Afghanistan After the US Withdrawal", The George Washington University, November 2012, at http://037eabf.net-solhost.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Afghanistan_Forum_2_November_2012.pdf . S. Blank (ed.), "Central Asia after 2014", Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, November 2014 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1175.pdf>

Afghanistan did not, does not and will not constitute either a direct strategic threat to Central Asia, nor a reason or necessary condition for destabilization.

for the stability of Afghanistan and Central Asia, and there are strong ties between them. Fears concerning the developments after 2014 also appear to be reasonable. However, a critical approach towards the assumption of the “Afghan threat to Central Asia,” so fervently raised on the eve of 2014, also seems reasonable. It is a clear example of “mythological thinking,” a self-fulfilling prophecy, and at the same time, an very useful argument that is being misused for the purposes of internal policy (in Central Asia it justifies mobilization and provides grounds for soliciting external aid) and external policy (it justifies the involvement of external players in regional security). Afghanistan did not, does not and will not constitute either a direct strategic threat to Central Asia, nor a reason or necessary condition for destabilization. In spite of the rhetoric and the catastrophic scenarios forecasted for the region, in reality, this threat is unlikely to materialize.

The myth of the Afghan threat to post-Soviet Central Asia

The key aspects of the myth of the Afghan threat in Central Asia include:

- The assumption about the “power and aggression” of Af-

ghans, stemming from the trauma following the defeat of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979-1989), considered as one of the reasons for the fall of the Empire. This trauma is widely propagated by the political elites of the region, and managed by the participants and witnesses of the collapse of the Empire. It is also actively present in mass culture and media.

- The assumption that Afghanistan is a fertilizing ground for radical and militant Islam, in ideological terms, but also technically and logistically. A vivid example of this was supporting and harboring Tajik *mujahideen* during the civil war (1992-1997), and harboring Uzbek radicals in the late 1990s (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan). With support in Afghanistan, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan organized unsuccessful raids on Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000. The aim of these raids was to topple the existing regime, and establish an emirate or caliphate based in Fergana Valley. After these plans collapsed, “the Uzbeks” quickly became an organic element of both the so-called Al-Qaeda and local terrorist networks, and are nowadays capable of conducting terrorist activities on a global scale. But

any group accused of terrorist and militant activity in Central Asia is always associated with Afghanistan.³

- The assumption that Afghan radicals, including the Taliban (during the period of their rule and in the future), and Al-Qa-eda, are inherently interested in territorial expansion and a march towards Central Asia. The proof for the existence of this assumption is demonstrated, for example, by the reaction of the surrounding actors to the seizure of Kabul by Taliban in 1996. Both the conflict parties in the brutal civil war in Tajikistan, as well as their external patrons (i.e. Russia and Iran), took action to end the war in Tajikistan (June 1997) and to coordinate military assistance for the Afghan Northern Alliance, which fought against the Taliban and served as a buffer for their expansion further north.
- The assumption that Afghanistan is generating a range of threats in the area of soft security – primarily related to the activity of drug cartels, but also to the “export” of refugees.

Under this approach, the “Afghan problem” is a mainstay of national

security policies across the entire region. Afghanistan justifies and stimulates the fight against Islamic movements, which are automatically associated with Afghan radical movements. Among those accused of having ties with Afghanistan are not only representatives of armed or terrorist groups (for example the alleged IMU members), but also activists of the Hizb ut-Tahrir or Tablighi Jamaat organizations. In the propaganda spread by the media, all attempts to Islamize the public sphere have been and still are compared to Afghanistan.

The Afghan problem justifies the necessity of a decisive struggle against any threats to security - an Afghan link also emerged during the uprising in the Uzbek Andijan and adjacent towns in May of 2005 and during the conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek in June of 2010, yet in both cases, ultimately there was no evidence. It is also used to justify and gives meaning to various aspects of international relations. In case of the latter, the Afghan problem was, is, and will be the primary explanation for the military presence of Russia in the region: it is the explanation for the existence of CSTO, which officially was created to provide security from outside threats for post-Soviet states. Furthermore, every instance of regional instability results in efforts by Central Asian states to secure Russian political and military assistance.⁴

3 Compare T. Donnelly, “Fergana as FATA, Central Asia after 2014 – Outcomes and Strategic Options”, <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/Collaboration/FAO/Fergana-as-FATA.pdf>

4 Николай Бордюжа, “В Афганистане могут подготовить сирийский сценарий для стран ОДКБ”, [headline.kz](#)

The Afghan problem justifies the necessity of a decisive struggle against any threats to security - an Afghan link also emerged during the uprising in the Uzbek Andijan and adjacent towns in May of 2005 and during the conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek in June of 2010, yet in both cases, ultimately there was no evidence.

Finally, the Afghan problem is also the essential foundation for the development of relations between regional states and the U.S. and NATO following 9/11. Unprecedented and unexpected military cooperation took place (for example, via U.S. bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, French base in Tajikistan and German in Uzbekistan), and later on the Northern Distribution Network, a transport corridor to Afghanistan for ISAF's supply needs.⁵ Cooperation with the West on this gave rise to direct financial benefits, upgrading of political relations, and increased levels of security. It also resulted in the modernization and development of transport infrastructure (for example, the construction of the railroad connection between Uzbekistan and Afghan

21.10.2013 http://news.headline.kz/chto_v_strane/nikolay_bordyuja_v_afganistane_mogut_podgotovit_siriyskiy_stsenarij_dlya_stran_odkb.html

⁵ For further information: CSIS, Northern Distribution Network Program, <http://csis.org/program/northern-distribution-network-ndn>

Mazar-i Sharif). In this context, 2014 threatens the return of the greatest external threat (strictly related to the internal threats) for the region and a threat of radical overvaluations in relations with the powers from outside the region (mainly Russia, the U.S. and China).

Between myths and reality

Although the myth of the Afghan threat for Central Asia appeals to historical reality, and has a tangible impact on the current security thinking in and about the region, it cannot be - and indeed does not seem to be - treated as reality.

First of all, it is based on a biased interpretation of the situation in Afghanistan – in reference to both the past and the projections for the future.

The trauma following the defeat of the Soviet intervention (and now the projected perspective of the “defeat” of the U.S. policy towards Afghanistan) cannot overshadow the fact that after 1989 it was the USSR and Russia (later on also Uzbekistan and to a lesser degree Tajikistan) who were conducting active policy in Afghanistan by supporting the reign of Najibullah, and after his downfall, the Northern Alliance. In other words, in the relationship between Central Asia and Afghanistan, the traditional direction of expansion (and interference in internal affairs) runs from north to south, not vice versa.⁶ Obviously, the

⁶ It is noteworthy, that this trend, with almost no deviations, can

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defeat in Afghanistan was embedded in the process of the breakdown of the Empire, but it was a consequence rather than a reason.

It would be excessive to seek out the origins of Afghan Islamic radicalism in Central Asia – it was an endemic phenomenon across the region; Islam is inalienable element of the identity of Central Asian societies, with its own traditions of political activity.⁷ It is embedded in local political and social tensions (the case of the war in Tajikistan, conflict was rooted in tensions amongst the local elites regarding the division of power in the republic after the disintegration of USSR, and the introduction of ideology had only a secondary character), and further inspired by general processes concerning the world of Islam and organically related to the transformations taking place in Islam in

be seen in the region's history for at least two thousand years.

7 The last units of the anti-Soviet guerrillas (with strong Islamic features), the so-called Basmachis, were liquidated in the late 1930s. Amongst those who referred to the Basmachis's legacy, was the founder of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan – Tohir Yuldashev.

the post-Soviet area (the case of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan in the 90's illustrates this point). The further fate of Uzbek radicals (the evolution from local and ineffective actions in the Fergana Valley to their current strong position in Afghanistan) may, paradoxically, speak in favor of the transfer of radicalism in the opposite direction: from Central Asia to Afghanistan.⁸

The perceived threat of the Taliban's march towards Central Asia has no factual basis: this movement has been decisively focused on Afghanistan and has not undertaken any steps towards expansion; for Turkmenistan, for example, it was a reliable economic and political partner (Turkmenistan was the co-organizer and host for negotiations between Taliban and the Northern Alliance). There is nothing signaling a shift in the approach of the current Taliban leadership – at least with regard to Central Asia. Al-Qaeda has remained surprisingly indifferent to Central Asia – according to rather extreme opinions, several (up to 20) bomb attacks during the last decade (which have resulted in tens of people being killed) may be attributed to its inspiration. It is noteworthy that despite the ongoing presence since 2001 of U.S. forces and infrastructure in the region, the latter were not a target of a single attack from by the Taliban or

8 For further information: M. Falkowski, K. Strachota, "Jihad vs. The New Great Game. Paradoxes of militant Islamic threats in Central Asia", OSW Policy Briefs, Warsaw 2010 http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/punkt_widzenia_21.pdf J. Lang, "Radical Islamic militants of Central Asia", OSW Report, Warsaw 2013 (planned for publication in November 2013)

Al Qaeda. The scale and effectiveness of the alleged involvement of IMU and IJU in Central Asia clearly shows the weakness of these organizations in confrontation with the security apparatuses of the region's states. The threat of the incitement of an Islamic uprising/revolution by these organizations, along with that of launching a wave of terror attacks, remain a fictional scenario. In the present setting, one may presume that conflicts in the Middle East (e.g. in Syria) will remain a priority for the decision-makers and sponsors of Islamic radicals affiliated with Afghanistan and that there will be no will to disperse means and open new frontlines on a new, Central Asian section. Proof for that is found in the rerouting of the inflow of volunteers (also those from the post-Soviet area), previously directed to Afghanistan and Waziristan, to Syria (which is easily accessible and more dynamic), and even an outflow of forces from Afghanistan itself.

Although it is clearly difficult to downplay the problems of drugs, refugees, and so on, one must bear in mind that organized crime and allegations about its ties to the political elites of Central Asian states are not a new phenomenon, just related to Afghanistan and subordinated to Afghan mafias. Moreover, with regard to the threat of refugees, one must remember that out of the 5-6 million Afghan refugees in the 1980s and 1990s only a tiny portion ended up in Central Asia – in contrast to at least several

The more or less openly assumed scenario of Afghanistan's collapse following the termination of the ISAF mission in 2014 is, it seems, the most vivid manifestation of mythical thinking about Afghanistan.

tens of thousands of Tajik refugees who fled to Afghanistan during the civil war in the 90s.

The more or less openly assumed scenario of Afghanistan's collapse following the termination of the ISAF mission in 2014 is, it seems, the most vivid manifestation of mythical thinking about Afghanistan. However serious the challenge may be, the catastrophic scenarios are currently (and historically – taking into account the three years of Najibullah's rule after the formal withdrawal of Soviet forces) unjustified, and the assumption about the inevitable and immediate spill over of the possible Afghan conflict is improbable. It seems that all of the sides engaged in the intra-Afghan conflicts realize the necessity of a political settlement, based on current institutional and legal frameworks. However, this does not equate to their commitment to relinquish armed struggle and terrorist activity.

Finally, the practical attitude of the states that have exposed to both the past and present threats from Afghanistan, especially the regional states and Russia, is symptomatic. The domi-

nant feature of rhetoric with respect to Afghanistan is, as described, the indication of a serious military and terrorist threat. This lies at the heart of the activity of CSTO⁹; it is strongly related to the statutory assumptions of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (“the fight with radicalism, terrorism and separatism”)¹⁰ and finally, bilateral cooperation of the states of the region in the field of security, and especially with Russia. After 20 years of an ongoing threat emanating from Afghanistan, cooperation at the regional level is equivalent, at most, to the level of mistrust or hostility between the individual states. The CSTO (which is difficult to treat as an alliance due to Russia’s disproportionate influence and its absolute monopoly in drafting the affairs and shaping the evolution of the organization) has not developed instruments or mechanisms to coordinate actions with respect to Afghanistan. In recent years, the discussion on the potential use of CSTO forces in internal, and not external conflicts¹¹, has dominated, while the states that are potentially most exposed to threats from Afghanistan are either leaving the CSTO (e.g. as Uzbekistan did in 2012) or are refusing to allow Russians to rein-

9 Compare: *Collective Security Treaty Organization* <http://www.odkb-csto.org/>

10 Compare: *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* <http://www.secsco.org/RU123/>

11 A substantial impulse here was the coup in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 and the parallel ethnic conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. It initiated a discussion about the possibility of an intervention of CSTO (de facto Russian) forces in the internal affairs of the member states.

The position of Turkmenistan presents a highly critical review of the Afghan threat: Turkmenistan remains neutral, does not cooperate with its neighbors or Russia, and traditionally maintains good relations with the most important powers in Afghanistan.

force controls on the border with Afghanistan (Tajikistan).¹² The SCO, to an even greater extent, plays a purely symbolic role (via facade advisory institutions – such as the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure with its headquarters in Tashkent), which seems to be connected primarily to Russia’s fears over China strengthening its position in the sphere of regional security. The position of Turkmenistan presents a highly critical review of the Afghan threat: Turkmenistan remains neutral, does not cooperate with its neighbors or Russia, and traditionally maintains good relations with the most important powers in Afghanistan. The frequently raised concept of the Afghan threat either reveals extreme political blindness in the states of the region (which should be doubted) or is at least a secondary threat in regard to the specific challenges within the region, tensions between and within individual states, or Russia’s attempts

12 Tajikistan decisively opposes the return of Russian border troops to its border with Afghanistan; for an extended period of time – until September of 2013 – it withheld the ratification of treaty prolonging the stationing of the Russian 201 Base on the territory of Tajikistan.

to strengthen its own position in Central Asia.¹³

Prevailing uncertainty for 2014

Although the Afghan threat in Central Asia is definitely mythologized, overestimated and instrumentalized, this does not mean that the region is and will remain stable in the symbolic year of 2014, or that this threat will remain without consequences for the region.

Central Asia is a region that remains chronically exposed to destabilization (as is each state to a varying degree). Tensions related to the social, demographic and cultural transformations (inter alia, the growth of the role of Islam, including Salafi and radical circles¹⁴), inefficiency of the economic systems, weakness of political systems (including challenges associated with the succession of power, which is of utmost importance in the two biggest and most important countries of the region – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan), and the relatively high likelihood of violence in political life all contribute to this. The risk of escalation of tensions cannot be excluded in any of the regional states – in every one of them, an Islamic, terrorist

¹³ For further information: R.N. McDermott, "Central Asian Security Post 2014. Perspectives in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan", DIIS Report 2013:12, at http://en.diis.dk/files/publications/Reports2013/RP2013-12-McDermott-Kazakhstan_web.jpg.pdf

¹⁴ The problem is most visible in Western Kazakhstan, the area with the weakest Islamic traditions in the region, remote from region's main religious centers. Salafi movements in Kazakhstan are organically linked with similar movements in the Russian Federation (mainly those from Northern Caucasus), not Afghanistan.

or militant motif involving external players (including, potentially, groups based in Afghanistan)¹⁵ may emerge. Nevertheless, possible Afghan traces are undoubtedly over-emphasized by the authorities, and the media should not overplay the endemic character of the problems and the secondary nature of the Afghan factor in the absolute majority of possible cases. The problems threatened by 2014 will play an almost exclusively a symbolic and superficial role in this matter.

Central Asia in a bipolar world

2014 will constitute a significant turning point in the relations of Central Asia and the West (NATO, U.S.), as well as indirectly in terms of the geopolitical aspect, which is important for the functioning of the region.

The involvement of the U.S. and NATO in the region in connection with the operation in Afghanistan (2001-2014), apart from the temporary and tangible practical aspect (bases, transit of people and goods, development of infrastructure) carried a tremendous political load. According to the assumptions of both sides, the mission was meant to bolster the stability of the region and individual states, as well as empower of states

¹⁵ An example of this was the emergence of the Jund Al Khalifah organization in Kazakhstan. It is held responsible for a series of bomb attacks there in 2011 and 2012. The organization was created based on Salafi circles, with inspiration coming from the Islamic Jihad Union. Despite seriously limited strength and effectiveness, the organization's activity reveals an area that could be utilized by radicals from outside the region. For further information, see J. Lang, "Radical Islamic militants of Central Asia", OSW Report, Warsaw 2013 (planned for publication in November 2013)

in terms of their national security, political and economic dimensions, in light of the diminishing effectiveness of interdependencies inherited from the USSR and maintained by Russia. As one consequence, among others, a greater openness to cooperation with the West (although also South Asia, for example) was to be achieved. The goals set forth have been achieved to a significant degree: due to cooperation with the West, individual states have received financial support, raised the level of national security, strengthened their international legitimacy and increased room for political maneuver. In several important ways, the goals turned out to be overly optimistic: the assumed impulse for the transformation and modernization of the region had been overestimated, the level of trust between region's elites and the West insufficient, and day-to-day cooperation difficult. The NDN did not live up to expectations – Pakistan remains the main and most attractive transport corridor with Afghanistan for the coalition and the existing infrastructure is being gradually dismantled (the closure of the Manas Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan is planned for the July of 2014). Unfortunately, the temporary benefits (and costs) of cooperation with the West have not translated into stronger relations between the region and NATO/U.S. on a systemic and long-term basis.¹⁶

¹⁶ For further information: S. Blank (ed.), "Central Asia after 2014", Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, November 2014 <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute>.

Unfortunately, the temporary benefits (and costs) of cooperation with the West have not translated into stronger relations between the region and NATO/U.S. on a systemic and long-term basis.

The expected reduction or termination of the U.S. and NATO presence in Afghanistan after 2014 will be accompanied by a range of simultaneous processes, namely, a far smaller economic presence in the region than previously expected, redefinition of strategic assumptions on a global level, passiveness of the American policy, economic crisis, a dynamic development of Chinese influences in the region, etc. This will entail the loss of a platform which has hitherto organized the activity in Central Asia, a significant reduction in Western involvement in the region, and the loss of its position by one of the key strategic actors in the region. Inevitably, the West (especially NATO) will face the need to redefine its assumptions, goals and instruments both in Afghanistan and in Central Asia.

Substantial limitation of the Western presence in Afghanistan and Cen-

army.mil/pdf/files/PUB1175.pdf

M. Laruelle, S. Peyroule, V. Axyonova, "The Afghanistan-Central Asia Relationship: What Role for the EU?", EUCAM Working Paper No. 13 http://www.frife.org/download/EUCAM_WP13_Afghanistan.pdf

J. Mankoff, "The United States and Central Asia after 2014", CSIS January 2013, http://csis.org/files/publication/130122_Mankoff_USCentralAsia_Web.pdf

Substantial limitation of the Western presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia with regard to 2014 lays an open ground for Russia and China.

tral Asia with regard to 2014 lays an open ground for Russia and China. For Russia, 2014 presents further opportunities to attempt to rebuild its position in Central Asia, centering on security (i.e. the further development of the CSTO) as well as political and economic issues (based on Customs Union and Eurasian integration projects). The effectiveness of these organizations is still a subject for elaboration (CSTO and the problem of Russia's military presence in Central Asia; Kazakhstan's growing criticism of the Customs Union, and so on), yet the key issue is their political significance – and with regard to the changes associated with 2014, this means an increasing Russian pressure on the region. In terms of the security issues regarding Central Asia and Afghanistan, one can expect Russia's reactive stance (contrary to popular opinion there are no direct threats to Russia's security originating from Afghanistan or Central Asia) and Russian attempts to manage the potential internal tensions in the particular states.

However, the most important strategic challenge will be the new phase of rivalry with China over the influence in the region. For years this has been suppressed by, in particular, the

U.S./NATO presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, which was feared simultaneously by Moscow and Beijing. China's position in Central Asia (as well as in Afghanistan) is systematically growing – it reveals its power mainly through economic activity, the consequence of which is China's increasing political influence and ambition, aimed securing its own interests.¹⁷The last two decades show that China has been able to maintain the security of Xinjiang (China's priority in the region) mainly through effective cooperation with Central Asia, as well as with Pakistan (which has a direct influence on the development of situation in Afghanistan, including leverage on Islamic radicals). Such an approach – soft influence on existing political structures utilizing economic instruments – can be considered a key characteristic of Chinese policy, and one that can be expected to emerge towards Afghanistan and Central Asia in 2014. However, the effectiveness of this policy threatens Russia's position in the region to a much greater degree that the presence of U.S. forces in Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, China's instruments are not effective in the situations of violent crises and collapse of the state structures (as revealed during the 2010 crisis in Kyrgyzstan), which situations that may well occur in the region in the future. Subsequently, one can expect a con-

17 For further information: A. Jarosiewicz, K. Strachota, "China vs. Central Asia. The achievements of the past two decades", *OSW Studies*, 2013, at http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace_45_cina_vs_asia_ang-net.pdf

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frontation of the two rival powers and two models of influence- building in Central Asia and its neighborhood (Afghanistan). These aspects of the change, which is represented by 2014 together with the internal dynamics of the region's states, will play a crucial role in shaping the situation in this part of the world.

Central Asia- Afghanistan Security Nexus: Post-2014 Perspectives

**Azad
Garibov***

Abstract

With the approaching drawdown of U.S. forces from Afghanistan by 2014, Central Asian countries seem worried that Taliban will use this as momentum to launch a new offensive, threatening to re-destabilize the country and make it a safe haven for terrorism and extremism.

It has repeatedly been stated by Central Asian leaders that re-destabilization of Afghanistan could bring about serious security implications for the region including spillover of violence, spread of extremism and increases in drug trafficking. The mobilization of extremist groups with links to Afghanistan and increase in trafficking is already being observed in Central Asia, and the situation will likely be exacerbated if Afghanistan collapses into anarchy and violence. The internal weaknesses of Central Asian countries make them increasingly vulnerable to the negative impacts of the situation in Afghanistan. The combined effects of the rise of violence in Afghanistan and internal weaknesses of Central Asian countries has the potential to leave the whole region extremely insecure vis-à-vis the possible deterioration of stability in Afghanistan after 2014.

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The longest war in the U.S. history – the Afghan war - has already cost about half a trillion U.S. dollars, and has taken the lives of about 2200 American soldiers.¹ Over the past years, U.S. public opinion has been increasingly turning against the Afghan war, demanding that the president end the war and pull out American troops. The withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan started in June 2011. Washington has already announced that U.S. forces in Afghanistan will cease combat missions in 2013, leaving the burden of those operations to U.S. special and elite forces, and trained Afghan forces.² It is expected that the majority of American and all international troops will leave Afghanistan by 2014. With this deadline approaching, Central Asian (CA) countries seem increasingly worried that Afghan army will be incapable of fighting the Taliban without the support of foreign combat troops. As many fear in Central Asia, with new momentum, the Taliban will be able to resume full-scale insurgency to defeat Hamid Karzai's government. While it is unrealistic to posit that Taliban will be able to reestablish the jihadist regime that was in place until the U.S. invasion in 2001, it is quite possible that without fully-

¹ *Casualties by Category, National*, *The Washington Post*, May 2013 update, at <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/national/fallen/>

² Elizabeth Bumiller (February 2012) in Stephen Blank, "Central Asian Perspectives on Afghanistan after the U.S. Withdrawal", *Afghanistan Regional Forum*, *Elliot School of International Affairs, George Washington University*, No. 2, November 2012, at http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/images/Afghanistan_Forum_2_November_2012.pdf

As many fear in Central Asia, with new momentum, the Taliban will be able to resume full-scale insurgency to defeat Hamid Karzai's government.

fledged American military commitment, the Taliban can destabilize the country in the long term, making it a safe haven for terrorists and extremists. Therefore, Afghanistan, already unstable, is likely to become more so, and the negative implications of this destabilization might ripple across CA.

What kind of security threats does the destabilization of Afghanistan represent for Central Asia, and why is this region particularly vulnerable to such threats? To answer this question, the article looks at the current rise of militancy and illegal trafficking in the region, attempting to illuminate its development prospects after the withdrawal of foreign combat troops by 2014. However, examining only the factors external to the Central Asian region – threats coming from Afghanistan - is not enough to fully understand the CA-Afghanistan security nexus. Therefore, the article also explores the internal weaknesses of the regional countries, specifically their political systems, in order to uncover the reasons that CA countries are vulnerable to negative influences from Afghanistan.

View from Central Asia on Post-2014 Afghanistan

Many officials and experts from CA countries have little faith that the Karzai government has the legitimacy or competency to survive the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO troops.³ Over the course of the last decade, the U.S. tried to establish a legitimate central government in Afghanistan, cut down opium production, and build up security forces capable of subduing Taliban and other forms extremist-terrorist behavior. However, the opposite happened: opium production rose, exceeding the period of civil war and Taliban rule in the country; the Afghan army in which the Americans invested so much to train and equip is not yet a capable of controlling the whole territory of the country or to fight terrorism and extremism; and most importantly, Hamid Karzai has not become a national leader who can mobilize the Afghan elite and society to build a new, stable and developing Afghanistan.

Even though there are two more years to go until 2014, signs of serious concerns about the possible implications of withdrawal for CA are already visible across the region. In March 2011, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon expressed concern over NATO plans to withdraw troops by

3 Chaye Sarah, "Forgotten Player in a Post-2014 Afghanistan: Uzbekistan", *Pakistan Observer* September 11, 2012, at <http://pakobserver.net/201209/11/detailnews.asp?id=173376>

2014, and the possible spill-over effects on regional security, specifically regarding terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, weapons smuggling and illegal immigration.⁴ In January 2012, Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov stated that "the announced withdrawal of American and ISAF forces from Afghanistan by 2014 can increase the threat of spillover of terrorist and extremist activity, tension and confrontation in this vast region and lead to the emergence here of a permanent source of instability."⁵ He stressed that this withdrawal would bring about "an increased threat of the expansion of terrorist and extremist activities."⁶

At the NATO Chicago summit in May 2012, CA countries once more expressed their concerns about the possible consequences of the pull-out of troops. Two weeks later, at the meeting of the SCO in Beijing, the dominant issue for CA countries was again Afghanistan. Moreover, during Russian President Putin's visit to CA countries in the beginning of June 2012, the Afghan issue was raised by CA leaders as the one of the most pressing problems for the region.

4 "Tajikistan concerned over decision to withdraw anti-terrorist coalition forces from Afghanistan", *RIA Novosti*, 12 March 2011, in Beluer Christian, "Central Asia Security policy Brief № 7", *Center for Security Policy and OSCE Academy*, February 2012, at http://osce-academy.net/uploads/docs/bleuer_policy_brief7.pdf

5 Farkhad Tolipov, "Central Asia And Afghanistan After 2014", *Central Asia and Caucasus Institute*, April 18, 2012, at <http://cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5756>

6 *Financial Times*, "US confronts challenge of Afghan exit", July 2012, at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/1188dc8e-c6d...#axzz1zhdOUNL>

In short, many in CA are worried that the possibility of civil conflict, with combat and extremist incursions swirling up against the borders of CA, represents a serious national security threat to the region, particularly to the Central Asian countries bordering Afghanistan. Already unstable, Afghanistan is likely to become more so, and the negative implications of destabilization will course through the region. For CA, the most serious

lately the Uzbek security forces in late 1990s and the U.S. global war on terror launched in 2001, many extremist organizations retreated to Afghanistan, to the uncontrolled tribal areas on the border with Pakistan. This significantly lowered the terrorist-extremist pressure on regional countries. As a result, CA countries had a fairly calm and peaceful period during the first decade after the war was launched in Afghanistan.

Already unstable, Afghanistan is likely to become more so, and the negative implications of destabilization will course through the region.

risks of the withdrawal, threatening security and stability in this region, include the spillover of terrorism and extremism and an increase in drug trafficking.

Spillover of extremist violence

During the late 1990s, when violence was on the rise in Central Asia, regional terrorist and extremist organizations used the territory of Afghanistan as a safe haven to hide from attacks by government forces, and also as a location to train their fighters. Moreover, the participation of CA terrorist groups in illegal activities in Afghanistan such as drugs and arms trafficking provided a vital source of income. With successful operations by government troops, particu-

However, during recent few years, the Karzai regime has continued to weaken and the Taliban has actively consolidated its power over certain parts of the country. Along with the Taliban, CA-origin extremist groups hiding in Afghanistan again have begun to remobilize both in Afghanistan and Central Asia, deploying their militants northwards, closer to the borders with CA. For instance, in Tajikistan, which experienced a brutal civil war from 1992 to 1997, the presence of armed Islamic opposition linked to Afghanistan is now being felt in certain parts of the country, particularly in the Rasht valley - the main passage route for the Afghan opium into Tajikistan.⁷ On July 8, 2009, an armed skirmish took place between the Tajik armed forces and Mullo Abdullo's fighters, who returned to Tajikistan from Afghanistan having been in hiding there for about a decade. As a result, 17 people died from both

⁷ Azad Garibov, "Post-2014 Afghanistan and Central Asia-What to Expect", *News.az*, June 27 2012, at <http://www.news.az/articles/63161>

sides. The next wave of instability in Tajikistan broke out in August 2010, when a group of 25 prisoners accused of terrorism escaped from the State National Security Committee's detention center in Dushanbe. A few days later, on September 3, 2010 two suicide bombers hit the police station in Khujand – Tajikistan's northern capital. On September 19, at least 28 government troops were killed in a sudden attack in Kamarob Gorge. The Tajik Defense Ministry insisted that fighters from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Chechnya were part of the ambush.⁸

In Uzbekistan, which also experienced severe extremist violence during the late 1990s, three extremist groups – the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), and the Hizb ut- Tahrir (HuT) – constitute the largest threat to Uzbekistan in terms of groups with links to Afghanistan. After a mostly peaceful decade, Uzbekistan was hit by violence when police were targeted by extremist terrorists in Andijan in May 2009. The deputy head of the interior ministry's counter-terrorism department, Colonel Hasan Asadov, was killed in August 2009.⁹ Since then, Uzbekistan remains alarmed about the possibility of an outbreak

⁸ Andrew McGregor, "Jihad in the Rasht Valley: Tajikistan's Security Dilemma", The Jamestown Foundation, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36990&cHash=c323d4b798

⁹ Sanobar Shermatova, "Should C Asia Fear Taliban Spillover?", Institute for War and Peace Reports, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Security-Watch/Articles/Detail?ots591=4888caa0-b3db-1461-98b9-e20e7b9c13d4&lng=en&id=109497>

of terrorist violence. More importantly, the IMU is no longer a small band of militants focused solely on toppling the Uzbek regime as it was during the 1990s. According to different sources, it has between a few hundred up to five thousand armed fighters in Afghanistan and is currently trying to relocate its basis from southern Afghanistan to the northern provinces that directly border CA in order to more effectively operate in Uzbekistan.¹⁰

Kazakhstan, which had been considered the most stable country in the region, experienced its first ever suicide bombing attack in 2011, for which responsibility was claimed by Jund al-Khalifah (Soldiers of Khalifah) - a group of ethnic Kazakh mujahedeen based in Afghanistan. In 2012, eight people (including the attackers themselves) were killed by terrorists in Kazakhstan and 13 terrorists were killed by security forces in operations against terrorist-extremist cells. The killing of 14 border guards on the border with China and of 12 civilians in Ile Alatausk national park in 2012 are also considered by many to be terrorist attacks.

Thus, these facts demonstrate that extremist militancy connected to Afghanistan is already on rise in CA and "accordingly, it can be further triggered by the ISAF withdrawal and re-destabilization of Afghani-

¹⁰ *ibid*

stan.¹¹ There are well-established ties and cooperation between Central Asian and Afghan extremist groups and local jihadist organizations, working in cooperation with or in the spirit of Al-Qaeda, and Afghanistan's lawless and under-governed regions make ideal sites for terrorist training camps and planning for the "Islamic Emirate" in Central Asia.¹²

Now, as the Taliban is actively preparing for the post-2014 period, attempting to spread its zone of influence across the whole country, CA states have reasons to worry about the possible spill-over effects to their region. The possible advancement of the Taliban militants' area of operations to the north after the withdrawal of coalition troops means that the battleground will shift from central and southern Afghanistan closer to Central Asia's borders. As highlighted by Paul Quinn-Judge, Central Asia Director for the International Crisis Group, "If the Taliban took over in that part of the region, I think it would be a very disturbing development for most of the countries of Central Asia."¹³ If this happens, CA-origin radical Islamist allies of the Taliban, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), could gain a

11 Azad Garibov, "Post-2014 Afghanistan and Central Asia-What to Expect", *News.az*, June 27 2012, at <http://www.news.az/articles/63161>

12 Kamoludin Abdulloev, "Another Jihad in Central Asia", *United States Institute of Peace*, June 2012, at <http://kamolkhon.com/download/Contagious-Jihad-June-2012.pdf>

13 Tom Gjelten, "Afghan War Could Spill Over Into Central Asia", *NPR*, December 31, 2009, at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=121973427>

The possible advancement of the Taliban militants' area of operations to the north after the withdrawal of coalition troops means that the battleground will shift from central and southern Afghanistan closer to Central Asia's borders.

valuable foothold and an excellent jumping-off point to CA. Therefore, the regional countries have solid reasons to worry about the possibility of the rise of the terrorist and extremist threat during the post-withdrawal period, bearing in mind that after defeating the western "enemy", most of the extremist forces of the region engaged in fighting foreign troops in Afghanistan may decide to return back to launch "sacred wars" in their own countries, as happened during the 1990s.

Moreover, the decision by Central Asian states to allow their territories to be used to bring military freight into Afghanistan via the Northern Distribution tied Central Asian governments directly to the Afghan war. In the view of the Taliban and other Islamist movements, "Central Asia is now part of the general theater of war."¹⁴ So, cooperation over the northern supply and withdrawal routes, as well as the U.S.' military

14 Tom Gjelten, "Afghan War Could Spill Over Into Central Asia", *NPR*, December 31, 2009, at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=121973427>

assistance to local regimes, makes them a legitimate target for terrorists and extremists.

Rise of drug trafficking

Another major problem for CA, which could become more serious after the drawdown of foreign troops and re-destabilization of the situation in Afghanistan, is the steadily increasing drug trafficking. A considerable portion of the heroin produced in Afghanistan “makes its way through Central Asia bringing not only drug addiction but the attendant criminal networks, as well as serving as a funding source for terrorist activities.”¹⁵

Currently Afghanistan produces around 90 percent of the world’s opium used to make heroin in a thriving international trade worth an estimated 65 billion USD a year, according to the United Nations.¹⁶ Although the traditional route for Afghan narcotics continues to run through the porous borders of Iran and Pakistan, the UNODC estimates that 30 per cent of this of opium now flows through the ‘northern route’ - the an estimated 90 tons of heroin along different paths through the Central Asian States to the Russian Federation, Europe and newly growing Chinese mar-

¹⁵ Faisal Al Yafai, “Central Asia fears a spillover of instability as NATO leaves”, *The National*, June 12, 2012, at <http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/central-asia-fears-a-spillover-of-instability-as-nato-leaves>

¹⁶ “Shifting Afghan Drug Trade Threatens Central Asia”, 19 January 2011, *The Moscow Times*, at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/shifting-afghan-drug-trade-threatens-central-asia/429125.html>

A considerable portion of the heroin produced in Afghanistan “makes its way through Central Asia bringing not only drug addiction but the attendant criminal networks, as well as serving as a funding source for terrorist activities.”

ket every year.¹⁷ Increased counter-narcotics cooperation from Pakistan meanwhile, together with tightened security along the border with Iran, has further squeezed traffickers in the south and west. A military surge in 2010 in southern Afghanistan also pushed drug trafficking up into the north, closer to the borders with Central Asian republics.¹⁸ After the withdrawal of coalition troops by 2014, many experts believe that in a power vacuum and the total absence of any struggle in Afghanistan against drug production, trafficking through CA will certainly increase. The year 2014 looms large in the minds of many regional and international government officials, and a brief look at regional efforts to date provides little evidence to suggest that Central Asian states will be able to contain the anticipated increase in drug trafficking. In the presence of poorly guarded and complex terrain, as well as corruption, it is likely that

¹⁷ UNODC, “Central Asia: The Situation”, at <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/central-asia.html>

¹⁸ “Shifting Afghan Drug Trade Threatens Central Asia”, 19 January 2011, *The Moscow Times*.

an increased volume of drugs will penetrate Central Asia once the already unstable situation in Afghanistan further deteriorates after 2014.

Internal weaknesses of Central Asian states

There is every indicator that Afghanistan's evil twins – extremist-terrorism and drug trafficking - will impact the security of the region after 2014. However, exclusively examining external factors cannot provide a comprehensive answer to the question of why the situation of extremism-terrorism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan might seriously affect CA and threaten regional stability during the post-2014 period.

Central Asian countries are ill-prepared to handle either resurgent Islamist militants or the rise of drug trafficking. It is frequently claimed that radical Islamism in the region is foremost a home-grown phenomenon. The priority for CA countries in preventing the spillover of extremism and rise in drug tracking is given to intensifying operations against any signs of religious activism and hardening borders. The military force is used as a main means in this struggle, as well as improving border security, principally in its material aspects, including buildings, infrastructure, equipment etc. This is frequently done with international support, again in accordance with the needs that local authorities express

There is every indicator that Afghanistan's evil twins – extremist-terrorism and drug trafficking - will impact the security of the region after 2014.

However, instead of merely focusing on to crack down of religious activism and extremist terrorism, regional authorities should on the root causes of the problem. Central Asian governments' traditional methods of governance, based on a strong secular narrative and intolerance to dissent, seem to push displeased groups towards Islam, including in its radical forms.¹⁹ Consequently, no matter how many terrorists killed and how many religious activists are put into jail, new people, particularly youngsters, join to the extremist cells supplying them with new blood. Or if we look at drug trafficking, only the smaller-scale smuggling passes through the mountain pathways or across rivers and the overwhelming proportion of opiates is not smuggled into the region. It passes across the border by the truckload on established roads and through official checkpoints with the cooperation of government officials, or at least individuals or groups closely connected to the local authorities in the region.²⁰

¹⁹ Jos Boonstr, "Afghanistan and Central Asia: Nobody move, nobody gets hurt", *EUROACTIV*, 20 February 2013, at <http://www.euractiv.com/development-policy/afghanistan-central-asia-move-ge-analysis-517956>

²⁰ Cornelius Graubner, "Central Asia: A Look at Sources of Violence and Instability", *Eurasianet*, August 7, 2012, at <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65760>

Central Asian countries are ill-prepared to handle either resurgent Islamist militants or the rise of drug trafficking.

Therefore, it is naïve to assume that the fight against the spillover of conflict and rise of drug trafficking can be successfully waged merely by focusing on tightening up the borders and training and re-equipping border guards serving on the borders with Afghanistan. However, political authorities in all the at-risk countries still insist on focusing on these aspects, and avoid accepting that internal problems may also play a role. Their logic here is very simple - it is easier for them to present themselves as victims who fought extremist enemies of the West and consequently legitimize their certain oppressive domestic policy strategies by emphasizing the threats of Afghan extremism and drug trafficking.

Thus, in trying to understand the Afghan-CA security nexus, one should definitely take into account the internal weaknesses of CA countries that put them at risk, and significantly downgrade their chances in waging a successful struggle against the identified threats.

Conclusion

Experts in the region and abroad are worried that the impact of Afghanistan's evil twins – drug trafficking and the export of religious extrem-

ism - are already strongly felt in CA and could bring more violence to the region after 2014. Jihadist groups and elements have been consistently present in Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan could provoke jihadist resurgence in the region. Due to Central Asia's proximity to Afghanistan and the porous and poorly guarded border between Afghanistan and the region, there is potential for violence and instability to spill over. Particularly worrying for Central Asian regimes is that with the U.S. preparing to leave, the Islamist militants in the Afghanistan – now battle-hardened from their war against Western forces- are trying to consolidate their presence in northern Afghanistan, which provides a perfect foothold to penetrate CA through uncontrolled mountain passes and river crossings. Cooperation of the CA countries with the U.S. in establishing Northern Distribution Network over their territories will serve as a further trigger for terrorist attacks, as punishment for being in an alliance with “unbelievers”.

Another serious concern related to the possible security implications of withdrawal is the rise of drug trafficking. CA has already become the one of the main export routes for Afghan opiates towards Russia, China and Europe. The annual drugs production and trafficking via CA has been on the rise for the past several years, causing numerous problems

Greater instability in Afghanistan after 2014 promises to bring about a rise in opium production and drug trafficking to Central Asia.

for CA countries, including the growth of drug use, establishment of organized crime groups, and funding for extremist propaganda and terrorist activities. Greater instability in Afghanistan after 2014 promises to bring about a rise in opium production and drug trafficking to CA.

The vulnerability of CA to the negative effects of the Afghanistan's possible destabilization is in part the consequence of internal weaknesses in the regional countries. Conditions within the regional countries are conducive to thriving militancy and trafficking. Authorities of CA countries often use the threat of "spillover" from Afghanistan to attract international support and to legitimize their domestic policies instead of trying to find genuine strategies to address this problem. Consequently, the combined effect of violence in Afghanistan and domestic weaknesses of the CA countries could leave the whole region extremely insecure vis-à-vis the possible destabilization of Afghanistan after 2014.

International Aid to Afghanistan

and Its Importance in the Post-2014 Era

**Salih
Doğın***

Abstract

After almost 35 years of war, the Afghan economy is extremely fragile, and the country's future is mainly dependent on international aid. According to the World Bank, foreign aid has generated the majority of Afghanistan's GDP over the last decade. The political and security uncertainties that the country now faces, represented by the upcoming presidential election and Transition Process respectively, could jeopardize its progress. Therefore, this article will first of all provides insights into the security handover period and its possible effects on the Afghan economy, by establishing a connection between security and economic concerns. The importance of the international aid received by Afghanistan to date is explained, in light of the need to create a self-sufficient Afghanistan by the end of the Transformation Decade. In this regard, the analysis will present recommendations on what the international community should do after 2014, and how to use the international aid efficiently.

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Afghanistan has been a theatre of war for almost 35 years. The Soviet invasion (1979-1989) was followed by a civil war and a Taliban-led era until 2001. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. launched Operation Enduring Freedom, and since then there has been an American War in Afghanistan. Millions of Afghan people have been killed in these 35 years and millions more have been relocated for an indefinite period of time, and are trying to live under unacceptable conditions.

Afghanistan has become an economically dependent country because of the poverty and lack of political cohesion in the country following the U.S.-led operation in 2001.

Afghanistan has become an economically dependent country because of the poverty and lack of political cohesion in the country following the U.S.-led operation in 2001. The economic situation is in part the result of the insecurity and instability. Yet, especially in the last five years, the economic and security problems of this war-torn country have grown into a “cause and effect” relationship due to bad governance and high-level corruption.

Both the economy and the security situation of Afghanistan have improved. The country is experiencing

“the most advanced, most democratic, most secure and most prosperous era in the last 35 years of its modern history”¹, but things could be better. One of the most important factors in Afghanistan’s economic recovering is the ever-increasing inflow of the international aid/assistance.² The growth of the service and agricultural sectors has also had a positive impact on the economy; however, living conditions of the Afghan people remain among the worst in the world. The lacks of housing/shelter (especially in the areas which have higher number of internally displaced persons), medical care (in particular, midwifery), clean and safe water, public infrastructure, and high crime rates are some of the main issues that could give rise to serious difficulties for the Afghan government in the near future.

The unemployment rate—another negative factor in terms of the economy—has increased sharply, from 9 percent in 2009 to 15 percent in 2011.³ The top recruiting body of the state was the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF); hence the total number of officers in the Afghan police and army has increased to 350,000 from

¹ Salih Doğan, “Post-2014 Afghanistan and the role of the United States”, *Strategic Outlook*, 17 February 2013, at <http://www.strategicoutlook.org/asia---pasific/news-post-2014-afghanistan-and-the-role-of-the-united-states.html>

² The international community has pledged more than USD 67 billion between 2003-2010.

³ There are different statistics on the unemployment ratio in Afghanistan but these are the lowest ones, from Gallup. CIA World Factbook records show that the unemployment ratio in Afghanistan was 35% in 2008 (the most recent record).

The top recruiting body of the state was the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF); hence the total number of officers in the Afghan police and army has increased to 350,000 from less than 40,000 in 2007.

less than 40,000 in 2007. The quality of the Afghan national security forces could not match its growing size, due to insufficient training of new recruits. A substantial proportion joined simply to earn some money and earn a living for their family. They were neither willing nor qualified to fight against Taliban militants in a combat zone.

This is one of the main reasons that led NATO to hand over the security control of the provinces and districts to Afghan forces in five stages rather than all at once. The first tranche was begun in March 2011, and Afghan President Hamid Karzai launched the fifth and final tranche of transition on 18 June 2013. The security issues were not prioritized exclusively, and the economic concerns were also borne in mind during the transition process.

Security Handover: Transition Process (2011-2014)

At the NATO Summit in Lisbon, Portugal on 19-20 November 2010, the *Inteqal* – the Dari and Pashtu word for transition – process was agreed

between NATO and the Afghan government. According to the long-term partnership agreement, the lead responsibility for Afghanistan's security will be progressively transferred from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to the Afghan National Security Forces. The goal was to have it completed by the end of 2014.⁴

President Karzai announced the first group of districts and provinces on 22 March 2011, in accordance with the decision proposed by the Joint Afghan-NATO *Inteqal* Board (JANIB), which was founded at Kabul Conference in July 2010 to manage decisions regarding which districts and provinces to transfer, based on security, governance, economic, development and the operational situation on the ground.⁵ Thus not only the competence of the Afghan National Security Forces and the level of security needed for Afghan citizens to carry out their daily lives but also the economic conditions and development of local governance were taken into consideration in JANIB's decision-making process.

In the months following March 2011, other stages of the *inteqal* were implemented according to the JANIB decisions. Once the final tranche has

4 Ian Traynor, "NATO maps out Afghanistan withdrawal by 2014 at Lisbon summit", *The Guardian*, 20 November 2010, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/20/nato-afghanistan-2014-withdrawal-lisbon>

5 Jayshree Bajoria, "Security Transition in Afghanistan", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 22 March 2011, at <http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/security-transition-afghanistan/p24456>

The successful conclusion of the Transition Process – if everything goes according to plan – will lead to the prioritizing of economic growth over security.

been successfully completed, the Afghan police and soldiers will be in charge of security across the whole country. It is anticipated that this period will be finalized by the end of 2014, when the combat mission of the NATO and U.S. troops concludes, and they leave the country. Those combat troops will be replaced by a small number of forces⁶, whose mission will be to train, advise and assist the Afghan police and soldiers. Following the end of the Transition Process, the Transformation Decade (2015-2024) will begin. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen expressed his hopes for the country during this decade in a statement: “Afghanistan’s future is clear: a country led by Afghans, defended by Afghans and working for the benefit of Afghans.”⁷

The successful conclusion of the Transition Process – if everything goes according to plan – will lead to the prioritizing of economic

6 The exact number of troops that will stay in Afghanistan in post-2014 era has not yet been decided by the U.S. and other NATO countries. Many experts and researchers including the retired United States Army General Stanley Allen McChrystal have remarked that at least fifteen to twenty-five thousand troops should stay in the country after 2014.

7 Statement: NATO Secretary General on the ISAF Command handover, 18 July 2011. North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s Official Website. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_76529.htm

growth over security. This is urgently needed. Even if security and stability is achieved on all fronts in the post-2014 era, it will still take years for Afghanistan to manage its own economy. At present, Afghanistan is in need of international aid to enable the central government even to pay the salaries of the Afghan national security forces without it. This points to the fact that the international aid has been, and remains a key component of the Afghan economy, now and in the future.

Afghan Economy

I went to Afghanistan once to observe the 2009 presidential election, and spent a week in Balkh and Jowzjan provinces, in the northern part of the country. I spoke with local people in Aqcha and Mazar-i Sharif. During my visit to Afghanistan in August 2009⁸, I had the chance to visit Habibe Kadiri High School, founded by the Turkish Ministry of National Education in 2008, and I stayed there for two nights. The school had a small backyard, and part of it was being used for gardening. In that small garden, the school was producing 7-8 different kinds of vegetables and fruits including tomatoes, pomegranates, pears, apples, and peaches. From the top of the school building,

8 For more information about my visit to Afghanistan, including the observation of the 2009 presidential election see, “Afghanistan Başkanlık Seçimleri: Mezar-ı Şerif ve Akça Gözlemleri 1-2”, USAK Gündem, at <http://www.usakgundem.com/yorum/250/afghanistan-seçimleri-mezar-ı-şerif-ve-akça-gözlemleri-1-.html> & <http://www.usakgundem.com/yorum/261/afghanistan-seçimleri-mezar-ı-şerif-ve-akça-gözlemleri-2-.html>

it was possible to see for miles across the city, but I couldn't see a single other fruit or vegetable garden.

After thinking about what I had seen from the terrace roof, it was easy to understand why no one else was cultivating fruit gardens. Even though the Aqcha district and Jowzjan province was among the safest and most secure places in Afghanistan, local people were still living in fear of the Taliban, and some were still receiving threats. This situation puts them in a position whereby that they cannot see a future without war, battle, blood and tears. Otherwise, they would have no reason not to engage in gardening and farming in the small-scale cultivation areas around their villages and cities.

Today, the Afghan economy is much stronger than it was in 2009. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP - purchasing power parity) has almost doubled since 2009, and reached approximately USD 35 billion in 2013. Afghanistan's GDP comes from agriculture (24.3 percent), industry (23.3 percent) and services (52.5 percent) sectors according to Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) recent Afghanistan country report.⁹ The end of a long-term drought¹⁰ in the country spurred strong growth in agricultural sector during the last two years. Total GDP growth increased from 7.2 per-

⁹ Country Report: Afghanistan, Economist Intelligence Unit, 3rd Quarter 2013, at http://www.eiu.com/FileHandler.ashx?issue_id=1590873943&mode=pdf

¹⁰ Favorable weather is quite important for the Afghan agriculture sector.

Despite the fact that the Afghan economy has developed at a remarkably rate since the collapse of Taliban in 2001, this growth is mainly due to the inflow of international aid and donor-led development projects.

cent in 2011 to 11.9 percent in 2012, according to the Asian Development Bank's recent report Asian Development Outlook 2013.¹¹ The total workforce increased to 15 million from 10 million people over the past decade due to population growth and returning Afghan citizens.¹²

Despite the fact that the Afghan economy has developed at a remarkably rate since the collapse of Taliban in 2001, this growth is mainly due to the inflow of international aid and donor-led development projects. In fact, Afghanistan is still exceedingly deprived and the Afghan economy is on a cliff edge, whereby any decrease in the international development aid could have a serious impact.

International Aid to Afghanistan Until 2013

Although there is not much information available about Afghanistan's economic situation during the civil war and the Taliban-led era, it is not

¹¹ Asian Development Bank, "Asian Development Outlook 2013: Asia's Energy Challenge", Part: Afghanistan, pp. 178-180, April 2013.

¹² Mehmet Yegin et al., "Afghanistan'ın Geleceği Var mı?", Analyst, USAK Publications, Vol. 2 No. 17, July 2012, pp. 16-28.

Since the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan and the end of the Taliban regime in December 2001, the international community has pledged approximately USD 105 billion for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan

hard to say that times were tough, because of the wars in the 1980s and 1990s. The Afghan economy has always been predominantly dependent on agriculture, and the industrial sector was based on agricultural production. Therefore, it has long been among the poorest economies in the world. Accordingly, foreign aid has been crucial for Afghanistan's future in the post-2001 era.

The first international donors' meeting was held in Tokyo in 2002, with the view to rebuilding Afghanistan. As a result, nearly USD 6.3 billion was pledged for the following 5 years (2002-2006). Even though this amount was three times higher than Afghanistan's 2002 GDP, the country has remained among the world's fifteen least developed countries since then. On the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report - 2013, Afghanistan was ranked 175 out of 187 countries.

Since the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan and the end of the Taliban regime in December 2001, the international community has pledged

approximately USD 105 billion for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan (Table 1). The post-9/11 era was a breakthrough in Afghanistan's economic history, as "Afghanistan moved to the top of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) agenda"¹³ for the first time since the end of the Cold War.

Table 1. Foreign Aid Pledged and Disbursed, 2002-2013 (USD in millions)¹⁴

<i>United States</i>	79,879
<i>Japan</i>	13,150
<i>European Union</i>	2,880
<i>Germany</i>	2,680
<i>Asian Development Bank</i>	2,270
<i>Britain</i>	2,220
<i>World Bank</i>	2,140
<i>Total</i>	104,776

As of December 2011, a total of USD 70 billion had been disbursed.¹⁵ This shows that international donors have failed to provide the amount that they promised. As of 2010, more than half of the total international aid has been spent on the security sector, and invested in the Afghanistan National Security Forces.¹⁶ In 2011, due to the

¹³ Ministry of Finance, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. "Development Cooperation Report 2010", Aid Management Directorate, Budget Department.

¹⁴ Source: Afghanistan Ministry of Finance (MoF), Development Cooperation Report 2012; Congressional Research Service Report for Congress. Note: Table includes international donors of over USD 2 billion.

¹⁵ Ministry of Finance, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. "Development Cooperation Report 2012", Aid Management Directorate, Budget Department.

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, "Aid and Conflict in Afghanistan", Asia Report No. 210, August 2011.

increase size of the Afghan forces, 68 percent of the foreign aid disbursed within the year was assigned to security expenses.

NATO has announced that they will withdraw their troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. A new era called “Transformation Decade (2015-2024)” will start in Afghanistan, and will shape the country’s future. However, the Afghan economy will still be dependent upon international aid for many more years, since in 2015, the Afghan government will not even have the budget to pay the salaries of 350,000 Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

The international community, mostly the U.S., pays for the majority of the ANSF’s expenditures. As outlined by U.S. President Barack Obama at the NATO Summit in Chicago on 20-21 May 2012, international donors should pledge more money for the post-2014 era of Afghanistan for the Afghan army and police.

According to the Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will need an estimated budget of USD 4.1 billion per year for a 228,500 member Afghan force.¹⁷ The current size of the police and army in Afghanistan is around 352,000, requiring a budget of approximately USD 6 billion. Whether the size and

¹⁷ Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan, 21 May 2012. North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s Official Website, at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87595.htm

According to the Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will need an estimated budget of USD 4.1 billion per year for a 228,500 member Afghan force.

cost of the ANSF should be cut was also considered; however, this depends on the status of Taliban reconciliation. Assumptions with reference to post-2014 Afghanistan should not be based exclusively on the assumption that “everything will run smoothly”. If it doesn’t, it will not be easy for Afghanistan to fund a USD 4.1 billion budget given that their GDP is around USD 20 billion.¹⁸ It is extremely optimistic to say that ‘Afghan economy will continue to improve during the Transformation Decade (2015-2024) and the financial support of NATO and the U.S. will gradually decrease’.¹⁹ Especially if the reconciliation of Taliban doesn’t go well as is expected, it will be extremely difficult to talk about security and stability in Afghanistan, not to mention a stable economy.

¹⁸ CIA World Factbook, “Country Briefing: Afghanistan”, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

¹⁹ Salih Doğan, “U.S. presidential election and the future of Afghanistan”, Today’s Zaman, 10 June 2012, at www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=283075

Future of International Aid to Afghanistan in the Post-2014 Era

On 5 December 2011, at an international conference in Bonn, Germany, Afghan President Hamid Karzai stated that Afghanistan will need at least USD 10 billion foreign aid per year for at least a decade.²⁰ In July 2012, Tokyo hosted the Afghan government and the international community (almost eighty governments, international organizations and other related parties) for discussions on the future of Afghanistan in the Transformation Decade. The importance of the Tokyo Conference (2012) was that it emphasized the amount of the foreign aid to be delivered for the social and economic development projects, not just security-related assistance.

International donors pledged USD 16 billion in development aid over a four-year period (USD 4 billion per year from 2012 to 2015) and according to the annex of the Tokyo Declaration –the Tokyo Framework of Mutual Accountability– up to twenty percent of the development assistance is conditional on the Afghan government’s commitment and ability to take strong measures against corruption and implement good governance.²¹ Afghan President Hamid

Karzai has welcomed the volume of the development aid by announcing a week before the conference that USD 4 billion would be sufficient in line with the recent World Bank estimation, which suggests USD 3.9 billion a year throughout the Decade of Transformation.²² Yet, the governor of the Afghan Central Bank had declared that a total of 7 USD billion per annum would be needed for further economic development, months before the Tokyo Conference took place.²³

The United States, Japan and the United Kingdom were among the main donors at the Tokyo Conference. While U.S. officials have not declared an exact amount, saying that the figure will be in accordance with the average amount the U.S. has given over the last decade, Japan pledged USD 3 billion through 2016, with almost 75 percent of directed toward development projects, according to Japan’s Foreign Minister, Koichiro Gamba.²⁴ Even though the pledged amount differs from country to country, all governments were of one mind regarding future aid (post-

20 Howard LaFranchi, “Karzai: Afghanistan will need \$10 billion a year”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 5 December 2011, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Foreign-Policy/2011/1205/Karzai-Afghanistan-will-need-10-billion-a-year-but-that-s-a-bargain>

21 *The Tokyo Declaration: Partnership for Self-Reliance in Afghanistan From Transition to Transformation*, Office of the President, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, at <http://president.gov.af/Content/files/Tokyo%20Declaration%20-%20Final%20English.pdf>

22 Richard Hogg et al., *Afghanistan in transition: looking beyond 2014. Directions in development; countries and regions*. Washington DC: The World Bank, 2013, at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/02/17423299/afghanistan-transition-looking-beyond-2014>

23 Jane Perlez, “\$16 Billion in Civilian Aid Pledged to Afghanistan, With Conditions”, *The New York Times*, 8 July 2012, at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/09/world/asia/afghanistan-is-pledged-16-billion-for-civilian-needs.html?_r=2&ref=world&

24 Arshad Mohammed and Kiyoshi Takenaka, “Donors offer \$16 billion Afghan aid at Tokyo conference”, *Reuters*, 8 July 2012, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/08/us-afghanistan-clinton-idUSBRE86601120120708>

2016), in that it shall be based on the performance of the Afghan government in areas of good governance, combating the widespread corruption, and promoting the rule of law and human rights.

The World Bank estimates that the economic growth of Afghanistan will slow in 2013 and 2014, since there are many political and security uncertainties in the final phase of the Transition Process.²⁵ Even the planned withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO troops by December 2014 could damage economic growth by two percent, as a consequence of the decreased foreign expenditure. It is likely that 50,000 Afghans could lose their jobs with the closure of the Bagram base alone, and this alone could affect up to 250,000 people who are the dependents of the those employees.²⁶ Any drastic decline in the international assistance in addition to upcoming withdrawals and closures could cause a reversal in progress, jeopardizing the achievements of the last 10 years.

Under today's conditions, Afghanistan may need more than USD 10 to 12 billion, since the salaries of the Afghan police and soldiers alone will cost more than USD 6 billion af-

25 Claudia Nassif and Omar Joya, *Afghanistan economic update*, Washington DC: The World Bank, April 2013, at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/04/17659303/afghanistan-economic-update>

26 Khalid Koser, "Afghanistan 2014: Preparing for the Humanitarian Transition", *Brookings Institution*, 28 August 2013, at <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/08/28-afghanistan-humanitarian-koser>

The World Bank estimates that the economic growth of Afghanistan will slow in 2013 and 2014, since there are many political and security uncertainties in the final phase of the Transition Process.

ter 2014. Despite billions of dollars in aid over the last decade, it is still not enough for Afghan government to offer a minimum standard of living to its people. In order to achieve the most important goal, which is to render the Afghan state and the economy self-sufficient by the end of the Transformation Decade in 2024, the international community, the Afghan government and Afghan people have a lot to do. There is no doubt that international aid will remain central in order for all the stakeholders to succeed in Afghanistan.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In Afghanistan, a new partnership needs to be built that includes Afghans, the government, international actors and the immediate neighbors to focus on the money come to the country. Therefore, a network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be created in Afghanistan, and humanitarian aid, especially the money from international actors, should be distributed through this network. This could better equip the authorities to make good use of international aid, ensuring that it reaches

ordinary Afghans. Local researchers and experts have repeatedly lamented that only 10 to 20 percent of foreign aid reaches the Afghan people due to the endemic corruption in the Afghan government.

According to the 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), an annual ranking published by Transparency International²⁷ (a non-governmental organization that inspects and publicizes political corruption worldwide), Afghanistan was ranked 174 out of 176 countries,²⁸ with a score of 8 out of 100 (where 0 means that a country is perceived as highly corrupt and 100 means it is perceived as highly transparent).²⁹ This marks a significant regression over the past 8 years, given that in 2005, it was ranked 117 out of 159 countries. According to a recent report by the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC), the cost of corruption in Afghanistan is nearly USD 3 billion every year.³⁰

Next presidential elections will be held in Afghanistan on 5 April 2014. According to the Afghan Constitution, the current president Hamid

Karzai will not be allowed to run for a third presidential term. One of the new president's first goals should be to address corruption, which has been the international community's main criticism of the Karzai administration. Also the elections will cost an estimated USD 350 million, which the Afghan government cannot afford alone, so the international community and other donor institutions ought to sustain their aid pledges to ensure a free and fair election in Afghanistan.

The aim of the international development assistance should be to support success, security and stability in the country. Long-standing security and stability is essential for the country to invest, produce, build, and create a better future for its citizens. The level of international aid pledged for Afghanistan is critical, and its influence on the quality of an ordinary Afghan's daily life is a vital aspect of this.

Until now, most of the incoming international aid has been consumed by security-related expenditures. From now on, the budget reserved for social and economic development, education, health, agriculture, and urban and rural development must be increased. Each province and district should concentrate on delivering basic services to its people, and the population has to be persuaded that the Afghan government and local authorities are investing all their efforts

27 For more information regarding the Transparency International (TI) see, at <http://www.transparency.org/whoweare>

28 North Korea and Somalia ranked 174th with the same score "8" as well so Afghanistan was on the bottom of the list.

29 Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2012", <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/#sthash.RWZNTGot.dpuf>

30 Azem Arash, "Afghan Govt Graft on the Rise, Corruption Monitor Says", *Tolo News*, 24 March 2013. (Accessed September 2013) <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/9884> For more information regarding MEC see, <http://www.mec.af/en>

and money into the future of the Afghan people.

If there are no improvements to the economic and social situation of Afghanistan, security and safety alone will not bring peace to the country and its people. Security is a fundamental condition for the Afghan government, local and foreign NGOs, and Afghan people to work to build a better Afghanistan for future generations. However, political, social and economic stability is needed to *sustain* security in Afghanistan. It is crucial to involve citizens in regenerating and revitalizing their own lives and finding new opportunities through ‘economic, social and institutional reforms’.³¹

³¹ Joseph Ingram and Claire Lockhart, “Afghanistan: It’s About Development, Stupid”, *The World Today*, Chatham House, Vol. 66 No. 2, Feb. 2010, pp. 10-13.

How Can Afghanistan Cope with the Challenges

Facing Its State and Society After 2014?

**Gülay
Mutlu***

Abstract

Afghanistan's development is undermined by the convergence of demographic, social, economic, and of course, political challenges. However, an examination of the figures released by the IMF, the World Bank, the EIU, and the Asian Development Bank and others, reveal the potential of Afghanistan's future. Security will be the country's core issue after 2014; there will be a host of security-related challenges. Opportunities, however, remain. In this article a summary of Afghanistan's political history will be followed by data and analysis on the economic opportunities within the country. The author attempts to answer the question posed in the title: "how can Afghanistan cope with the challenges facing its state and society after 2014?" In investigating whether there are any ways to develop and revitalize Afghanistan and Afghan society after decades of war, the focus of the article will shift from the current situation to the country's positive opportunities. The author concludes with recommendations for improving the country's image.

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In the late 1970s, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan coincided with the ouster of the Western-supported regime in Iran, abruptly changing the international climate. The Islamic revolution turned Iran into a weak and turbulent country, meaning that with the invasion of Afghanistan Soviet Russia would easily be able to reach the gulf countries and their oil and gas resources. Afghanistan's strategic position straddles Western Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian subcontinent. Due to its geopolitical position Afghanistan has witnessed great power struggles on its territories, causing economic, social, and political instability.

Feudal and clan structures dominate Afghan society, and the rivalry between these clans causes instability not just at the societal level but also in the country's political life. Due to a lack of central authority, clan leaders in rural areas have the power to provide justice, security and the physical requirements of the community. Another key characteristic of Afghanistan is the dominant role of Islam in social and cultural life. For example, peaceful, non-political Sufi schools were common in Afghanistan. Clan leaders, known as *hans*, were able to secure political positions due to the political quietism of the Sufi schools.

According to the IMF, Afghanistan's population in 2012 was about 31 million. The population is not homo-

Feudal and clan structures dominate Afghan society, and the rivalry between these clans causes instability not just at the societal level but also in the country's political life.

geneous: ethnically, is divided into Pashtun (42 percent), Tajik (27 percent), Hazara (4 percent), Aimak (4 percent), Turkmen (3 percent), and Baluch (2 percent) minorities.¹ In religious terms, Afghanistan is 99 percent Muslim: 80 percent Sunni and 19 percent Shi'a. Also notable is the fact that 76 percent of Afghans live in rural areas. This heterogeneous make up prevented occupying forces from controlling all parts of the country. Turkish scholar Metin gives an historical analogy in his article on Alexander the Great's Afghan campaign of 330-327 B.C.² Although Alexander the Great commanded the most organized, technologically advanced, modern army of his time, and his great achievements and successful army are impressive to this day, he was completely defeated in Afghanistan; Gürçan attributes that defeat to the power of the rural clans.³

1 Information about Afghanistan, CIA World Factbook, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

2 Metin Gürçan, "Countering the Insurgency In Afghanistan: Wrong Diagnosis Wrong Treatment", *Journal of Central Asian & Caucasian Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 12, 2011, p. 46.

3 *ibid.*

From the Soviet invasion to the U.S. war on terrorism

Afghanistan became a significant player in international relations in the second part of the 19th century. After its defeat in the Crimean War (1854-1856), Tsarist Russia turned east and began occupying Central Asia. In that period, Russia and Great Britain met on India's northern border. Consequently, the Russian encroachment elicited British security concerns. After the Bolshevik Revolution (1917), Afghan-Soviet relations improved at Britain's expense. After 1933, however, Afghanistan – like all Middle Eastern countries – moved away from Russia and Britain, and developed closer relations with Germany.

From 1945 to 1979, Afghanistan's internal political dynamics continued to develop; however the period was concluded with the invasion of the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion aroused world suspicions, as it provided the Soviet Union with easy access to the Persian Gulf and Middle Eastern oil reserves. Additionally, the fall of the Shah's regime in Iran ultimately turned to the Soviets' strategic disadvantage. The invasion of Afghanistan led to Moscow losing power and influence in its Central Asian republics.⁴ The Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion was supported by Western and Middle Eastern countries, and

⁴ Oktay Tanrısever, "Rusya'nın Orta Asya'da Sarsılan Hegemonyası ve Afganistan Politikası", in M.Turgut Demirtepe, Güner Özkan (eds.) *Uluslararası Sistemde Orta Asya ve Dış Politika ve Güvenlik*, (Ankara, USAK, 2013), p.5.

The invasion of Afghanistan led to Moscow losing power and influence in its Central Asian republics.

eventually, ten years after the invasion, Moscow had to withdraw.⁵

After the Soviet war Afghanistan transformed into a country under the influence of Marxist ideas mixed with radical Islamic tendencies, and therefore, not surprisingly, this period saw the emergence of various jihadist groups.⁶ In the mid-1990s the Taliban took control of most of the country. The core platform of the Taliban was to create an Islamic government based on *Sharia* (religious law). The Taliban displaced the ruling members of the Afghan government in September 1997. Anti-Taliban forces continued fighting to regain control of the country, but they were not successful. The Taliban took control of over approximately 90 percent of the country and changed its name to the Islamic State of Afghanistan. The Taliban continued to gradually consolidate their power until 1999.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., the Bush administration accused the al-Qaeda terrorist organization and its wealthy Saudi mastermind, Osama bin Laden, of planning the deadly attacks that took thousands of lives. The Taliban was also ac-

⁵ *ibid.* p.6.

⁶ *Afghanistan Country Profile*, Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008, p. 5.

cused of supporting and promoting terrorism on Afghan territory. Russia supported the U.S. due to its experiences in the war in Chechnya. Finally, the U.S.-led coalition was sometimes unsuccessful in preventing attacks by Taliban forces which resulted the loss of American soldiers. It is against this background that the U.S. has cooperated and coordinated with anti-Taliban forces in its efforts to combat the Taliban. In May 2011, President Obama announced that “the mastermind of the worst terrorist attacks on American soil is dead, almost 10 years after the attacks that killed about 3,000 people.”⁷ This continuous state of war has destroyed the country’s social, economic, and cultural life. First of all the elites all gradually left Afghanistan. In addition the government still does not control of all the country’s territory. The rise of warlord-ism due to the lack of a strong central government is unsurprising. Again, power and authority has been traditionally clan-based; these clans, in turn, are dominated by warlords. They generate resources to prolong their rule through crime, foreign assistance, trade duties, and, most importantly, taxation.⁸ Moreover, the violence and disorder has given rise to economic recession and ethnic tensions.

⁷ CNN International, *Osama bin Laden is dead*, May 3, 2011, at <http://insidethemiddleeast.blogs.cnn.com/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-is-dead/?iref=allsearch>

⁸ Mark Sedra, “Challenging the Warlord Culture: Security Sector Reform in Post Taliban in Afghanistan”, (paper 25, Bonn International Center for Conversion, Bonn, Germany, 2002), p. 6.

Afghan economy 2001-2012

Wars and instability have devastated Afghanistan’s financial structure since 1979. The picture has not changed considerably following the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. Although Afghanistan’s GDP has increased over the last four years, its value in 2011, 23.6 billion USD,⁹ is still relatively low.

The Afghan government’s income tax collection capacity is inadequate and it is unable to cope with the black economy. The current unemployment rate of approximately 35 percent is almost the same as the pre-NATO intervention figure. Close to 36 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Widespread corruption, poor tax collection, inefficient of the public institutions, and insufficient infrastructure still haunt the country. As a consequence, long-term plans for economic development are sidelined by the need for short-term expedients. Foreign investors, accordingly, are also delaying their plans in the country. It is clearly very difficult to establish the necessary legal and physical infrastructure for large investments in such an unstable and insecure environment.

On the other hand, some positive developments have been observed in the Afghan economy in the last few years. In 2002, the total labor force

⁹ *Afghanistan Country Report*, Economist Intelligence Unit, May 2013.

The Afghan government's income tax collection capacity is inadequate and it is unable to cope with the black economy. The current unemployment rate of approximately 35 percent is almost the same as the pre-NATO intervention figure.

was around 5.5 million.¹⁰ Today, natural population growth together with the return of Afghan emigrants from neighboring countries have resulted in a bigger labor force of 7.5 million.¹¹ In 2002, the GDP shares of agriculture, industry, and services¹² were 60 percent, 20 percent, and 20 percent, respectively.¹³ Today, these shares are 31.6 percent, 26.3 percent, and 42.1 percent, respectively.¹⁴ One of the drivers of this change is foreign investment; another is the investment in construction and other small-scale industries by returning Afghan refugees.

Although today 78.6 percent of the labor force still works in agriculture,¹⁵

¹⁰ See: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/afghanistan>

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² According to the World Bank, the services sector will continue to account for about half of economic growth in 2011/2012, mainly "fuelled by the growth in the telecommunications sector. In addition, donor funding and development projects will continue to drive the demand for transportation and distribution services" Afghanistan Economic Update, October 2011, The World Bank, Poverty Reduction, and Economic Management, South Asia Region.

¹³ "Afghanistan: Time to move to Sustainable Jobs Study on the State of Employment in Afghanistan", ILO, May 2012.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.* "More than 77% of Afghans live in rural areas, where

the growth in industry is not negligible. Textiles, cement, soap, shoes, household items, hand-made carpets, and mineral extraction were near non-existent in 2002. Afghanistan's natural gas and mining industries are also developing. Considering its natural resources, if political stability can be established, Afghanistan's energy and mining industries - currently in their infancy - could take off.

One of the main signs of economic development is the change in exports. While exports in 2012 were 3.5 billion USD,¹⁶ before the NATO intervention, this figure was only 571 million USD.¹⁷ In contrast, imports have increased from 1.3 billion to 5.3 billion USD.¹⁸ Afghanistan still imports goods that require high capital and exports raw materials and low-profit goods. Afghanistan's economy has been based on agriculture for many years, but only 11 percent of its land is arable.¹⁹ Agriculture remains under-mechanized due to Afghanistan's mountainous terrain, and the harsh continental climate restricts agricultural diversity and efficiency.

Afghanistan's infrastructure has suffered from decades of war and insta-

agriculture continues to be the main economic activity. At the national level, as almost 60% of the workforce is employed in the agricultural sector and as about 80% of the Afghan households mostly or partly depend on agriculture related income".

¹⁶ See: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/afghanistan>

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ See: <http://www.imf.org/external/country/afg/index.htm?type=9998#55>

One of the main signs of economic development is the change in exports. While exports in 2012 were 3.5 billion USD, before the NATO intervention, this figure was only 571 million USD.

bility; this is evidenced by the abundance of abandoned roads, harbors, and airports. However, it can also be seen that infrastructure investment have been accelerating and the building of railways, pipelines, and highways is transforming the country into a huge construction site.

Challenges and Opportunities: Security, Energy and Mining

Despite doubts about whether the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) can independently secure the country after 2014, the progress they have shown in 2007 and especially after 2009 cannot be denied.

Until 2009, rather than educating or training, the main aim was to increase ANSF's operational capacities.²⁰ Counterterrorism was the top priority. But this strategy alienated the public and brought new recruits to the Taliban. In 2009 training the security forces became the primary concern. Activities aiming to qualitatively improve Afghan security forces were prioritized by the "NATO Training Mission" (NTM-A) along with the EU's recent "EU-Police Mission"

²⁰ Ian S. Livingston & Michael O'Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index*, (Brookings, August 2013).

(EUPOL) project. But the U.S.' insistence on the Taliban-al-Qaeda connection, along with suspicions that Afghanistan might again harbor terrorism, allows military units within security to gain importance. Mark Schrecker²¹ of the U.S. Military Academy underlines the misperception that the Afghan strategy that began under President Bush and continued under President Obama is about U.S. national security. Many American generals make the same mistake. When designing a strategy, it is essential to go beyond any perception that views the Taliban and al-Qaeda as inseparable, says Schrecker.²²

Therefore, if the country is to be self-governing, it is important to increase the quality of the Afghan security forces while simultaneously increasing their size after 2014. By May 2012, the NATO fund, established in 2007, had given a total of €490 million in financial aid to ANSF.²³ Also EUPOL, which had 160 personnel in 2007, has since sent 350 personnel to Afghanistan.²⁴ NTM-A, on the other hand, appointed 2500 personnel in order to train all of the security forces, increase their operational capacities, and give technical and logistic assistance in addition to the EU's police training.²⁵

²¹ Mark Schrecker, *U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan Flawed Assumptions Will Lead to Ultimate Failure*, 2010.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Ian S. Livingston & Michael O'Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index*, (Brookings, August 2013)

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Maxime H.A. Larivé, "From speeches to actions: EU involvement in the war in Afghanistan through the EUPOL Af-

With these measures, 50,000 ANSF personnel have been trained since 2009. Also, while the literacy rate among the security forces was below 14 percent before 2009, in 2012, 212,000 personnel were taught how to

Afghanistan will be in need of support for many years to come. The continued development of the quality of its security forces is important.

read and write.²⁶ Turkey's contribution to this field is significant. It has educated more than 8000 soldiers, covered the educational expenses of more than 959 military personnel in Turkey, and given 8 million USD worth of military aid to Afghanistan.²⁷ The total number of security personnel in Afghanistan also deserves a mention. While there were only 6000 soldiers in the Afghan National Army in 2003, this had increased to 100,131 by 2009,²⁸ to 152,000 by the beginning of 2011, and then to 177,725 by March 2013.²⁹ On the other hand, the Afghan National Police force (ANP), established by the coalition forces after Taliban had been driven out of the country, was started from scratch in 2009 with 94,958 members. By 2011

ghanistan Mission", *European Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2012.

26 ISAF Media Background

27 TIKA Report,

28 Ian S. Livingston & Michael O'Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index*, (Brookings, August 2013)

29 *ibid*.

it had grown to 118,800 and by March 2013, the total number of ANP personnel was 151,766.³⁰

The change since 2009 is impressive. But in order for these forces to maintain Afghanistan's security after 2014, similar successful initiatives towards training and expansion are needed.

Afghanistan will be in need of support for many years to come. The continued development of the quality of its security forces is important. A political solution is also key. If meetings are held with the Taliban, attacks against the security forces might decrease.

In terms of the instruments that Afghanistan could potentially use in order to become self-sufficient and shed its image as an insecurity-exporting country, these can be assessed in three general categories. Firstly, the country is geographically located at the crossroads of international energy and transportation routes that are gaining importance day by day. Secondly, Afghanistan is rich in energy and mineral resources. Thirdly, if the political power and basic state functions are maintained, Afghanistan may develop with trade credits or investments via SMEs. Afghanistan may attract investments that optimize use of its natural resources and recently developed workforce capital; if it can do this and advertise itself as a crossroads to international actors,

30 *ibid*

Natural gas and oil reserves are the other important energy resources. In Afghanistan an estimated 3.6–3.65 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves remain undiscovered.

there would be no obstacles to accomplishing significant growth in the mid-term.

Currently, Afghanistan's electricity supply does not satisfy demand. While in 2002 Afghanistan imported 105 million KW, it now imports 120 million KW.³¹ Considering that only 7 percent of the population has access to electricity,³² the country's total demand is not currently an achievable goal. But importing energy is not an issue for Afghanistan – in the long-run it may even have the potential to export electricity. Like its regional neighbors Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan has hydroelectric potential. It has high and steep valleys and roaring rivers. In order to harness this potential, more than 500 micro hydroelectric centers³³ have been built by provincial development teams and international donors in the last ten years. However, the data shows that production is still less than what it was before the Soviet intervention in 1979.

31 IMF Country Report No. 12/245, 2012.

32 *ibid*

33 See: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Presentation_%20Ashraf.pdf

Natural gas and oil reserves are the other important energy resources. In Afghanistan an estimated 3.6–3.65 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves remain undiscovered.³⁴ According to American geologic studies, Afghanistan also has 3.6 billion barrels of oil and 1.325 million barrels of liquid natural gas reserves.³⁵ If these findings can be proven, then Afghanistan has potential energy resources that can compete with Turkmenistan in Central Asia.

Afghanistan's energy resources are not limited to these possibilities. The parallel, high and steep mountains and valleys throughout the country and the enormous height differences within short distances make it a uniquely suitable environment for eco-friendly wind power. For example, the city of Herat is famous for its seasonal, high "120-days winds". The southern part of the country has more wind-power potential than the wind turbine-using European countries. Also, investing in wind power carries a reasonable expenditure for Afghanistan. The reason for that is the energy infrastructure is weak in the country, and an estimated 158.000 MW³⁶ can be produced by wind power.

Beneath Afghanistan's rugged land lie mineral reserves worth 1-3 tril-

34 See: http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/programs/economic_growth#Tab=Description

35 See: <http://afghanistan.cr.usgs.gov/oil-and-natural-gas>

36 *ibid*

lion USD.³⁷ The reserves, composed mainly of iron, lithium, chromium, coal, copper and gold, are largely unexploited and untouched. In fact, according to speculation by the international media, Chinese and Indian-based companies are now preparing to make giant investments in the Afghan market. Since 2008 some companies have been granted operating licenses for the copper mines in Aynak and iron ores mines in Hajigak. Some, with backing from Beijing and New Delhi, have even started to enter the southern parts of Afghanistan, where Western investors fear to go.

How Can Afghanistan Cope with Its Challenges?

Development in Afghanistan is very much connected with maintaining stability and state order, and with ending the armed conflicts. The more the Kabul government consolidates its control of the country and invests in infrastructure and law to seriously attract international investments, the more Afghanistan will grow and develop. Anthony Cordesman³⁸ sets stability as the priority and suggests a governing system that includes Afghanistan's warlords in addition to the central government.

Many studies view the Taliban's increased activity in the region -- which is expected to rise even more after

37 See: http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/programs/economic_growth#Tab=Description

38 "Afghanistan in Transition: A Trip Report with Anthony Cordesman", at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Km2wXtmAj3Q>

the coalition forces' withdrawal from the country -- as the biggest threat to stability. But the Afghanistan of the 1990s, in which Taliban had eliminated all of its rivals, is a far cry from the Afghanistan of today. The new Afghanistan has a more politically conscious public and a military that can stand up to the Taliban.

In fact, the primary barrier to maintaining stability is weakness of the central government, which cedes more ground to the Taliban than the Taliban is able to win for itself. On the top of list of the government's shortcomings is its inability to provide basic services and corruption. A majority of Afghans see corruption as a serious problem.³⁹ This is an issue which could generate bigger problems. When 36 percent of the population live in poverty,⁴⁰ justice loses its meaning, and the possibility of Taliban stepping in to fill this void increases. In short, the Afghan government's greatest obstacle is its own institutional weakness.

If the Afghan administration takes steps towards resolving its issues and makes progress, it may blunt the Taliban's appetite for power. Under the current circumstances, the best decision would be to negotiate upon a solution and structure that secures stability. Otherwise, in an Afghanistan that struggles with civil war and

39 Ian S. Livingston & Michael O'Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index*, (Brookings, August 2013)

40 IMF Country Report No. 12/245.

Afghanistan is a country of great opportunities despite its current issues. Even though the aid and investment since the intervention has not been sufficient, it has been directed toward the right goals.

internal disputes, the aforementioned potential growth areas will not create prosperity and the Afghan people will be condemned to live in poverty and misery.

Afghanistan is a country of great opportunities despite its current issues. Even though the aid and investment since the intervention has not been sufficient, it has been directed toward the right goals. Socio-economic improvement can be seen in various levels. It is only fair to say that these improvements, when compared with other countries, carry Afghanistan to the top of the list. These improvements show that if enough investment and aid is provided, Afghanistan can develop. When we consider the country's resources and potential under a stable environment, development seems possible for Afghanistan. But, in order to maintain stability, the Afghan administration must first show some real effort in addressing its deficiencies. Moreover, before the coalition forces' withdrawal, agreements should be signed to end the conflicts and to produce stability within a reasonable timeframe.

ISAF's Security Transition in Afghanistan and CSTO's Search for a New Role in Central Asia

**Janara
Borkoeva***

Abstract

The article discusses the impending withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan and its possible impacts on the Central Asian region. As has been widely accepted, and as the author of the paper agrees, the main challenge is will be security.

This is because Afghanistan's current government is not considered stable or legitimate by the majority of the population. Therefore, many experts predict that the Taliban will return to the power following the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan, and will spread their influence to Central Asia. Additionally, after the withdrawal, along with the ethnic Uzbek and Tajik radical terrorist groups in northern Afghanistan, international Jihadist organizations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Tabligi Jamaat, Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat Ansarullah, or Jundullah will operate more freely on the ground. At this juncture, a serious question arises: how will regional countries, particularly Russia, respond to such threats? Accordingly, the article discusses the response of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to the possible destabilization of Afghanistan and the Russian policy in Central Asia in the light of the ISAF coalition's withdrawal. CSTO is seen as a military-political organization led by Russia to oppose or balance NATO in the Central Asia. As such, NATO's enlargement reduces Russia's traditional sphere of influence, and vice versa. In this sense, in the absence of a strong NATO presence, CSTO is planning to fill the vacuum by building up its military capacity, taking preventive measures to ensure regional security, and providing support to Afghanistan to enable it to stabilize as a peaceful, sovereign and independent state free of terrorism and drugs. The paper concludes by arguing that regardless of the benefit for the individual countries in the region, Russia is pushing the CSTO to enhance its own influence and interests in Central Asian region.

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The withdrawal of the ISAF from Afghanistan in 2014 has generated heated discussion among scholars and politicians of Central Asian states on the possible impact on the security of the region.

Many experts argue that the withdrawal will create serious threats and challenges to the regional security of Central Asia, especially in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which will face the spread of international terrorism and possible territorial incursions by terrorists. Some experts have speculated that the Batken 1999-2001 scenario could be repeated.¹ At the same time, other experts disagree that the withdrawal

Without a common enemy – the U.S. - the terrorists will fight their respective governments. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, who have strong ex-Soviet leaders, have effective state suppression systems, while Kyrgyzstan is vulnerable due to its weak government, inter-ethnic tensions (mostly with Uzbeks).

will have a huge impact on Central Asian countries. They believe that the terrorist forces have been weakened over the past decade by NATO's presence in the country. However,

¹ Tajikistan: Shadow-Boxing with Militant Threat, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 3 October 2006, at <http://iwpr.net/report-news/tajikistan-shadow-boxing-militant-threat>

many countries are preparing for the worse and making efforts to strengthen and equip their armed forces.

The NATO/ISAF mission has been engaged in Afghanistan for more than a decade, following the tragic events of 9/11. Since 2003, NATO has led the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF). During the Lisbon NATO Summit, it was decided that the coalition forces would withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2014.² As of August 2013, the ISAF mission comprised 87,207 units of 49 ISAF Troop Contributing Nations, including all 28 NATO members, plus several signatories of the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP), the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD)³, the Istanbul Cooperative Initiative (ICI), and some Contact Countries and Partners Across the Globe.⁴

Central Asia Analyst Thomas Lake believes that Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are the most likely to be affected, especially when the activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) are taken into

² Daniele Riggio, *NATO Support to the Afghan Stabilization Process: An Evolving Mission for a Long-Term Commitment*, in Oktay F. Tanrisever (ed.), *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11*, IOS Press, *NATO Science for Peace and Security*, Netherlands, 2013, pp. 23-24.

³ *International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF): Key Factors and Figures*, Available at: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/2013-08-01%20ISAF%20Placemat-final.pdf>

⁴ Daniele Riggio, *NATO Support to the Afghan Stabilization Process: An Evolving Mission for a Long-Term Commitment*, in Oktay F. Tanrisever (ed.), *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11*, IOS Press, *NATO Science for Peace and Security*, Netherlands, 2013, p.21.

consideration⁵. Without a common enemy – the U.S. – the terrorists will fight their respective governments. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, who have strong ex-Soviet leaders, have effective state suppression systems, while Kyrgyzstan is vulnerable due to its weak government, inter-ethnic tensions (mostly with Uzbeks). As such it faces the highest risk of inter-state tension in the region.

Despite being geographically more distant from Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan may also face the threat of Islamic incursions due to their vast energy resources, which could become key terrorist targets.⁶ Moreover, recent activation of radical groups in Kazakhstan has been observed.

Expert M.B. Olcott also believes that there is a risk of destabilization of Central Asian region after the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan in 2014 despite the efforts of Central Asian states to strengthen their National Armies⁷. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov noted that an ethnic Uzbek and Tajik terrorist group in northern Afghanistan has plans to invade territories of post-

5 *Afghan Withdrawal: Domestic And Regional Implications*, Business Monitor International, Available at: http://www.riskwatchdog.com/2013/08/13/afghan-withdrawal-domestic-and-regional-implications/?utm_source=Adestra&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Click%20here%20to%20listen&utm_campaign=Central%20Asia%20podcast&utm_term=BMO%20Free%20Trials

6 *Ibid.*

7 Vadim Volovoi, *Afghanistan i Stabilnost v Tsentralnoi Azii (Afghanistan and Stability in Central Asia)*, Available at: <http://www.geopolitika.lt/?artc=3676>

Soviet countries.⁸

Georgian diplomat and politician Gamlet Chipashvili stated in an interview that the Taliban will return to power following the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan, and will spread their influence to Central Asia, particularly Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. He also believes that the Taliban will move towards the South Caucasus, and that these events will increase the volume of drug-trafficking.⁹

On the other hand, there is also a view that the exacerbation of the situation around Afghanistan and the Central Asian region is advantageous for unstable countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and for Russia, which as ever wants to enhance its role and dominance in the region. Experts note that Afghanistan's current government is unstable, and that its legitimacy is rejected by the majority of the country's population. Many experts predict return of the Taliban to power in post-2014 Afghanistan.¹⁰

Sergei Masaulov, the Head of the Center for Perspective Research, be-

8 *Radikalnii Extremizm-Ugroza dlya Vseh (Radical Extremism is a Threat for Everybody)*, Available at: <http://newkaz.ru/comment/20130620/5231325.html>

9 *Taliby Rasprostryanyat Svoe Vliyanie na Tsentralnyu Aziju, Osobenno na Kyrgyzstan i Tajikistan (Talibans Will Spread Their Influence to Central Asia, particularly to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan)*, Available at: <http://www.stanradar.com/news/full/3847-taliby-rasprostranjat-svoe-vlijanie-na-tsentralnuju-aziju-osobenno-na-kirgiziju-i-tadzhikistan.html?page=17>

10 *Viktoria Pafilova, Uhod SSHA s Afghanistana – Chas X Dlya Vsei Tsentralnoi Azii (The U.S.A.'s Departure from Afghanistan is X Hour for Central Asia)*, Available at: <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/62828.html>

believes that the U.S. wants to maintain its presence in Afghanistan even after the withdrawal of its core contingent. He notes that the division of Afghanistan is the only possible threat. He speculates that Afghanistan could split into three states: to the north, the Islamic state of Horasan; Pashtun on the south; and Hazara Khanate in the center.¹¹

Shohrat Kadyrov, Senior Editor of Central Asia website and an Orientalist at Russia's Academy of Science, argues that the Taliban never posed a threat to the Muslim countries of the former Soviet Union, and further, that the demonization of the Taliban enables the Central Asian ruling elites to justify their power and their inability to develop national ideology. He notes that ruling elites fear that ethnic nationalism in their countries will be replaced by Islamic ideologies. Another expert, Leonid Gusev, argues that even if the Taliban poses no threat to Central Asia, there are radical movements such as Al-Qaida, IMU and other terrorist groups in northern Afghanistan that do pose real threats to regional countries. He cites the 1999-2001 incursions of these movements to Central Asia¹².

Despite statements by NATO officials, the Afghan authorities and Afghan police that Taliban forces have

11 Viktoria Pafilova, *Uhod SSHA s Afghanistana – Chas X Dlya Vsei Tsentralnoi Azii (The U.S.A.'s Departure from Afghanistan is X Hour for Central Asia)*, Available at: <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/62828.html>

12 *Ibid.*

There have been several border clashes recently, across the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan, Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan, and Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan borders.

been weakened¹³, there is still a risk that the Central Asian region will be destabilized after the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan in 2014. Therefore, the ongoing withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan in 2014 will have a major impact not only on war-torn Afghanistan, but also the whole region of Central Asia, giving rise to intra and inter-state tensions. Prohibited extremist groups, such as IMU, Hizbut-Tahrir, Tabligi Jamaat, Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat Ansarullah, Jundullah (Allah's Warriors), Jihadism and others, are actively functioning in Central Asian countries. The situation is exacerbated by the collusion of high-level officials and law-enforcement personnel¹⁴ with these movements.

Additionally, the post-2014 stability prospects are endangered by the existing inter-state tensions in Central Asia. For example, cooperation between Central Asian states is very fragile, where downstream countries

13 ISAF spokesman: *Taliban are considerably 'weakened'*, Available at: <http://www.dw.de/isaf-spokesman-taliban-are-considerably-weakened/a-16372534>, [Accessed on 20 September 2013]

14 Viktoria Pafilova, *Uhod SSHA s Afghanistana – Chas X Dlya Vsei Tsentralnoi Azii (The U.S.'s Departure from Afghanistan is X Hour for Central Asia)*, Available at: <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/62828.html>

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan accuse upstream Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan of water misuse. Another issue is undefined border lines, a problem inherited from the Soviet Union. The countries have been unable to agree on the demarcation and delimitation of their state borders, which creates a great deal of misunderstanding between authorities and local populations. There have been several border clashes recently, across the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan, Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan, and Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan borders. In addition, there are eight enclaves in Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan has two Tajik and four Uzbek enclaves, and Uzbekistan has one Tajik and one Kyrgyz enclave on its territory. The most dangerous of these is the Uzbek Sokh enclave in Kyrgyzstan¹⁵, which has regular clashes. Kyrgyzstan's deputy PM on security, rule of law and border issues stated that borders with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are the most difficult for Kyrgyzstan, and noted that there are 58 hot spots on Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. More than 371 km of Kyrgyzstan's national border has still not been delimited.¹⁶

Due to competing interests, low levels of trust, and tension among the regional actors, Central Asian coun-

15 Porofovaya Bochka Tsentralnoi Azii (Powder keg of Central Asia), 9 January 2013, Available at: http://forbes.kz/process/porofovaya_bochka_tsentralnoy_azii

16 Do Sih Por Naibolee Slojnyy dlya Kyrgyzstana yavlyayutsa Granitsy s Uzbekistanom i Tajikistanom – Atakhanov (Borders with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan still remain the most difficult for Kyrgyzstan – Atakhanov), 13 May 2013, Available at: <http://kg.akipress.org/news:574499>

Due to competing interests, low levels of trust, and tension among the regional actors, Central Asian countries cannot cooperate effectively.

tries cannot cooperate effectively. It is expected that Uzbekistan will inherit a significant volume of the U.S. weaponry. It already has the largest military in the region¹⁷, and Kazakhstan, which has the most advanced economy in the region, is its opponent. These two countries are competing for regional dominance.

The CSTO and Its Role in Security of Central Asia

In the light of the coalition's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the top candidate for ensuring the security and stability of Central Asia is the Russian-led CSTO, as Central Asian countries are incapable of doing so independently. Recently, Russian influence in Central Asia has decreased. Uzbekistan broke off its CSTO membership and began to cooperate closely with the U.S., and Moscow has faced problems during talks with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan on long-term leases for its military bases there. Russia is insisting on extending the lease for Kant Air Base

17 Afghan Withdrawal: Domestic And Regional Implications, Business Monitor International, Available at: http://www.riskwatchdog.com/2013/08/13/afghan-withdrawal-domestic-and-regional-implications/?utm_source=Adestra&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Click%20here%20to%20listen&utm_campaign=Central%20Asia%20podcast&utm_term=BMO%20Free%20Trials

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(in Kyrgyzstan) to 49 years, although the agreement was only signed for 15 years. Further, Kyrgyz authorities approved the closure of the U.S. Manas Transit Center. Russia has written off 488.9 million USD of Kyrgyzstan's debt. The agreement with Tajikistan on the Russian military base was reached after long negotiations, and was prolonged until 2042.¹⁸

Moreover, Russia has promised to allocate a 1.1 billion USD military-technical aid package to Kyrgyzstan and 200 million USD to Tajikistan under the auspices of the CSTO. It is expected that the aid to Kyrgyzstan will include artillery, armored vehicles and portable surface-to-air missiles, and air defense upgrades and current equipment repair to Tajikistan. Moreover, Russia has extended its leases on military bases located in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.¹⁹

¹⁸ Vadim Volovoi, *Afghanistan i Stabilnost v Tsentralnoi Azii (Afghanistan and Stability in Central Asia)*, Available at: <http://www.geopolitika.lt/?arte=5676>

¹⁹ Joshua Kucera, *Great Game in Central Asia After Afghanistan*, 27 March 2013, Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2013/03/27/the-great-game-in-central-asia-after-afghanistan/>

The U.S. has suggested it will shift its interests to Asia-Pacific²⁰ rather than Central Asia and the Middle East. Currently, China and Russia cooperate in different spheres of influence in the region, as there is third player, the U.S., with its own hegemonic aspirations. The growing economic influence of China in Central Asia affects Russia's regional interests. Russia is dominant in the military sphere, as it is difficult for Russia to compete with China in the economic sector.

The growing economic influence of China in Central Asia affects Russia's regional interests.

Russia is trying to strengthen its military presence in the region via the CSTO platform, and through establishing military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the rearmament of those countries. These actions will help Russia to contain the U.S. in Central Asia and counterweight to economic presence of China.²¹

The CSTO, previously the Tashkent Treaty, was established on 7 October 2002, and is a post-Soviet regional security bloc. Currently, it has six members: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan was a member for four years but officially withdrew

²⁰ Barack Obama says Asia-Pacific is 'top US priority', *BBC News Asia*, 17 November 2011, Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-15715446>

²¹ *Ibid.*

its membership in December 2012.²² The Organization is seen as a military-political organization lead by Russia to oppose NATO, as the latter's enlargement threatens Russia's traditional sphere of influence. Moreover, Russia perceives the establishment of anti-missile systems in Eastern Europe countries as a threat to its own national security. Hence, through enhancing regional integration through the CSTO, Russia is strengthening its traditional influence in Central Asian and the post-Soviet region, in opposition to the strategy of the U.S. and NATO.

Russia's main reason for establishing the CSTO was the integration of its 'near abroad'. The escalation of situation in Afghanistan posed serious threats to the security of all the CIS member states, including Russia, and southern regions of the CIS needed protection. After taking control over Kabul²³, the Taliban activated military activities near the southern borders of the CIS, and launched incursion attempts in autumn 1999 and spring 2001 in Kyrgyzstan.²⁴ In addition, car bombs were planted in

22 *Sessiya Soveta Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti 19 Dekabrya 2012 (The session of the Collective Security Council 19 December 2012)*, Available at: http://www.odkb-csto.org/session/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=1544

23 *Alyayev Andrei, Dehkanov Suleiman, ODKB kak Sistema Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti: Sovremennoe sostoyanie i perspektivy (The CSTO as a System of Collective Security: Modern Conditions and Prospects)*, *Observer* 1/2007, pp. 67-77, p. 68.

24 *Amin Said, Analiz Batkenskikh Sobytiy 1999-2000 (Analysis of Batken Events in 1999-2000)*, Available at: <http://easttime.ru/analytics/kyrgyzstan/2013/05/14/analiz-batkenskikh-sobytiy>

Tashkent²⁵ by members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

Moreover, Chechen separatists were becoming increasingly active and demanding independence from Russia. The activation of extremist-Islamic groups in Central Asia, supported by the Taliban and other radical groups of Arabic-Muslim world represented a significant challenge for Russia. These events generated heated discussions in regard to peacekeeping, conflict resolution, economic cooperation and organized crime.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks marked a turning point in further development within the CSTO. Central Asian countries began to cooperate more closely with the West, and agreed to host NATO bases on their territories. Consequently, Russia sought to strengthen its role in the region through the CSTO, and opened Kant Air Base on Kyrgyzstan's territory, which is 30 km away from the U.S. Manas Transit Center in Bishkek²⁶ as well as another base in Tajikistan with 5,000 troops²⁷. Russian RIA Novosti published an article in 2009 stating that Russia wants a strong military contingent in Central Asia within

25 *Polat Abdumannob, Butkevich Nikolai, Unraveling the Mystery of the Tashkent Bombings: Theories and Implications*, Available at: http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/demokratizatsiya%20archive/08-4_PolatButkevich.PDF

26 *Radyuhin, Vladimir, A New Big Game in Central Asia*, *CDI Russia Weekly*, July 18, 2003, Available at: <http://cdi.org/Russia/268-12.cfm>

27 *Olcott, Martha Brill, Central Asia's Second Chance*, Washington DC.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005, p. 189

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the CSTO comparable to the NATO forces in Europe, and that the CSTO is gradually transforming itself into a full-blooded military set-up²⁸. The CSTO established the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF) to combat terrorism in 2001, comprised of battalions from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Tajikistan, with a total manpower of 1,500.²⁹ Later on, in 2009, the CRDF was became the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF).³⁰ 95 percent of troops of the CRRF are military staff belonging to Russia and Kazakhstan.

The CSTO is an observer in the UN General Assembly and fully recognized by the UN as a regional organization. According to the Charter of the CSTO, the members of the bloc cannot join other military alliance or groups of states, and aggression against one member state is per-

28 Russia Wants CSTO to be as Strong as NATO, May 29, 2009, Available at: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090529/155118377.html>

29 Allison, Roy, *Central Asian Military Reform: National, Regional and International Influence*, in Cummings, Sally (ed.), *Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia*, London, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003, pp. 227-228

30 Tolipov, Farkhod, *CSTO: Collective Security or Collective Confusion*, Available at: <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5168>

ceived as an aggression against the all member states.³¹ The Organization is open to accepting new members and observers, and current members have right to leave the bloc if they wish.

The effectiveness of the CSTO and CRRF was questioned during the Osh 2010 inter-ethnic clash in Kyrgyzstan. The request of Kyrgyzstan's Interim Government's for assistance during the event was rejected. The Secretary General of the organization stated that the CRRF can be used only in case of external threats.³² The Charter of the Organization states that '...matters falling within the national jurisdiction of the member state' shall be strictly respected and the mechanism of joint consultations to resolve the threat is activated only in case of international threat to security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the member states.³³

The discussion of the withdrawal of ISAF forces is also on the CSTO's agenda in regard to the possible implications for its southern member-states. Recently, the leaders of the Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) and Russia held an unofficial meeting

31 *Ustav Organizatsii Dogovora o Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti (The Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization)*, Available at: <http://odkb.gov.ru/start/index.htm>

32 *Bordyuja: ODKB ne Budet Zadeistvovat Silovoi Potentsial v Kirgizii (Bordyuja: The CSTO Will Not Use Forces in Kyrgyzstan)*, Available at: http://www.odkb-csto.org/news/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=594

33 *Ustav Organizatsii Dogovora o Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti (The Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization)*, Charter II, Article 5, Available at: <http://odkb.gov.ru/start/index.htm>

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in Bishkek on 27-28 May 2013³⁴ in addition to the CSTO Summit on 23 September 2013 in Sochi³⁵ to discuss the development of the situation in Afghanistan after 2014, equipping the CSTO's CRRF with modern weapons, and cooperation among agencies dedicated to fighting against extremism. The Presidents agreed to build up the CSTO military capacity and to take preventive measures to ensure security in Central Asia. They considered the possibility of protecting the Tajik-Afghan border in light of the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan, and providing support for Afghanistan to help it stabilize and become a peaceful, sovereign and independent state free of terrorism and drugs.

Nikolai Bordyuzha, the Secretary General of the CSTO, stated that the possible developments in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the ISAF forces in 2014 were discussed at the Bishkek Summit. According to Bordyuzha, there is a risk that the situation will worsen, and will thereby affect the CSTO countries. He high-

34 *V Bishkeke Zavershilsa Neformalnii Summit ODKB (The Unofficial Summit of the CSTO in Bishkek is Over), The Official web-site of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, 28 May 2013, Available at: http://www.president.kg/ru/news/2131_y_bishkeke_zavershilsya_neformalnyiy_sammit_odkb/*

35 *Deistvovat na Upredjenie (Act in Advance), Kyrgyzstan's Newspaper Slovo Kyrgyzstana, 25 September 2013, pp.1-2.*

lighted four factors: first of all, Afghanistan is an instability zone, and this will necessarily impact bordering countries. Secondly, a large number of radical movements are located in the country, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The aim of these movements is the invasion of Central Asian CSTO members. Thirdly, there is ongoing drug-trafficking through Central Asia and Russia to the EU. And finally, Afghanistan hosts radical extremists from Central Asian countries, and these militants are trained to fight the political regimes in their home countries.³⁶ As a result, the CSTO will work in two directions. The first is toward the enhancement of interaction with Afghan authorities, and the second is aimed at strengthening the CSTO's force potential. Moreover, the CSTO intends to enhance protections on the Tajik-Afghan borders, which is 1,344 km³⁷.

During the Sochi Summit, Tajikistan's President stated that the threat from Afghanistan is growing in border areas. According to the President, the IMU and Taliban are moving closer to the Tajik-Afghan border, and militants are attempting to displace people from those border areas. He also noted that the country does not have the means to protect the border, referring specifically to the 60

36 *ODKB Gotova Borotsa s Afghanskimi Ugrozami (The CSTO is Ready to Fight Afghan Threats), Golos Rossii (The Voice of Russia), 19 June 2013, Available at: http://www.odkb-csto.org/obzor-pressy/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=2086*

37 *Ibid.*

percent of the border which is highly mountainous, obviously complicating the situation³⁸. After the report by the CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha on the situation on Tajik-Afghan border, the Presidents of the CSTO countries decided to provide assistance to Tajikistan to strengthen its national border. The aid includes the construction of new frontier post buildings, restoration of a warning and signaling system and equipping border troops with of air patrol and surveillance tools, including radar. The CSTO countries will provide military-technical assistance to Tajikistan's border troops according to their abilities within three months.³⁹

The closure of the U.S. Manas Air Base was on the agenda of Kyrgyzstan and the CSTO for a long time. In 2008, then-President Bakiev declared its closure, however, and the Base was transformed into the Transit Center. Many experts argued that the closure of the base serves Russia's interests⁴⁰. Kyrgyzstan's Parliament approved a draft law on the denunciation of an agreement between the governments of Kyrgyzstan and the U.S. from June

38 *Vystuplenie Prezidenta Respubliki Tajikistan Emomali Rahmona na Otkrytom Zasedanii Sessii Soveta Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti Gosudarstv-Chlenov ODKB (Speech of President of Republic of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon on open session of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO member-states), 23 September 2013. Available at: <http://www.prezident.tj/ru/node/5196>*

39 *Sessiya Soveta Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti ODKB. Sochi, 23 Sentyabrya 2013 (The session of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO. Sochi, 23 September 2013). Available at: http://www.odkb-csto.org/session/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=2703*

40 *Kyrgyzstan: Afghanistan Drawdown Puts Manas in Reverse Gear, EurasianNet.org, 21 September 2013. Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65945>*

Central Asian Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have competing interests and their cooperation is not effective, while Belarus is a passive member of the CSTO, and Armenia participates in the bloc only because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

22, 2009 on June 20, 2013. President Atambaev signed the law on June 26, 2013. The closure date for the base is July 11, 2014⁴¹. Some experts believe that the closure of the base will chill relations between the two countries; however others argue that the base will be moved to other location.

Russia is the main actor and decision-maker in the CSTO, and despite the apparently collective nature of the organization, its main tasks and direction are decided by Russia. Central Asian Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have competing interests and their cooperation is not effective, while Belarus is a passive member of the CSTO, and Armenia participates in the bloc only because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These two latter countries ignored the Bishkek Summit in May 2013 and President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan was absent from the Sochi Summit on September 2013. Thus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajiki-

41 *A. Atambaev Podpisal Zakon o Denonsatsii Soglasheniya s SSHA po TsTP 'Manas' (A. Atambaev Signed a Law on Denunciation of an Agreement with the U.S.A. on Manas Transit Center), Akipress News Agency, 26 June 2013. Available at: <http://kg.akipress.org/news:577778>*

stan are the most interested in these Summits, as they seek military assistance from Russia to enhance their forces in light of the impending withdrawal of the coalition forces. The Organization is used by Russia as a tool to enhance its military presence in its traditional area of influence, the so-called 'near abroad'. In addition, Russia is also concerned about the possible spread of Taliban forces to its Caucasus territory through Central Asia, where they pick up followers.

Conclusion

The upcoming withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan will undoubtedly have an impact on the Central Asian region and beyond, especially taking into consideration the possible return of the Taliban to power in post-NATO Afghanistan. Central Asian countries are also mostly Muslim, and with weak governments, the radicalization of Islam in those countries is a real concern shared by many experts. Recently, numerous radical movements have become active in the region, attracting even officials and police officers as their followers. The radicalization of the region is a threat for both Russia and China, who have minority Muslim populations with separatist ambitions. Therefore, ensuring security in the region and fighting against the spread of terrorism and extremism are in the national interests of Russia and China.



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NATO- Russia Council

*and Its Relevance to Afghanistan's
Security Before and After 2014*

**Beishenbek
Toktogulov***

Abstract

This article examines the post-9/11 developments in NATO-Russia relations and Afghanistan's role in setting the scope of their bilateral cooperation. More specifically, the article analyzes the efforts of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), a mechanism for cooperation between

NATO and Russia in fighting terrorism and insurgency in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014. Subsequently, the paper prospectively assesses Russia's position in relation to the post-NATO Afghanistan. NRC was established in 2002, in response to increasing concerns about terrorism after 9/11. Drawing on the positive cooperation generated by the post-9/11 fight against terrorism, NRC provided a fresh start for NATO-Russia relations, and facilitated building bridges in order to tackle new security challenges, with a special emphasis on terrorism, in the broader Euro-Atlantic region. Thus since the establishment of NRC, NATO and Russia have been cooperating more intensively. In terms of it being a safe haven for terrorists, Afghanistan immediately rose to the top of the agenda as a key issue for cooperation between NRC and Russia.

Accordingly, under the NRC, NATO and Russia have actively cooperated on the stabilization of Afghanistan, and even signed transit agreements for transferring and transmitting non-military equipment through Russian territory to Afghanistan, to be used by the NATO mission (ISAF). Nonetheless, the article argues that despite the level of cooperation achieved, one can scarcely argue that this cooperation will endure. This is because, as the forthcoming NATO withdrawal shows, Russia's post-2014 cooperation with NATO in Afghanistan will depend on the nature of the NATO mission. In this sense, Russia has expressed that for it to further cooperate with NATO in Afghanistan, NATO needs to have a valid legal basis, and UN Security Council authorization.

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Under the NRC, NATO and Russia are actively cooperating on the stabilization of Afghanistan, which is a common security issue. ISAF is considered to be one of the most successful instances of practical cooperation since 2008 when Russia signed a transit agreement with the Alliance, allowing Russian territory to be used to transport ISAF's non-military equipment through to Afghanistan. Significantly, this cooperation has not been hampered by the 'Russia's growing opposition to NATO's eastward expansion, the development of a missile shield, and the globalization of NATO's involvement'.¹ This article examines NATO-Russia relations vis-à-vis September 11th, providing analyses of NATO-Russia cooperation on the NRC level prior to 2014 along with Russia's perspective on the post-2014 Afghan mission.

9/11 and its Effect on NATO-Russia Relations

NATO has intensified its cooperation with Russia since the creation of the NRC in 2002, which replaced the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC). Positive cooperation on Afghanistan in the post-9/11 context was fundamental in shaping the NATO-Russia relations, leading to the creation of the NRC. The key stimulus for Russia-NATO rapprochement was the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and Putin's offer of assistance

¹ Roger E. Kanet and Maxime Henri Andre Larive, "NATO and Russia: Perpetual New Beginning", *Perceptions*, Spring, Vol-ume XVII, No 1, 2002, pp. 75-96

NATO has intensified its cooperation with Russia since the creation of the NRC in 2002, which replaced the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council.

in the U.S.-led 'war on terror'. Putin conveyed Russia's solidarity with the United States and underscored the need for closer anti-terrorist cooperation between the West and Russia. Moscow allowed U.S. forces to use Russian airspace for operations in Afghanistan, and did not oppose the creation of U.S. bases in the former Soviet Central Asian republics.² Central Asian states offered flyover rights and other support for the coalition's anti-terrorism operations in Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan hosted coalition troops and provided access to airbases and in recent years, most of the regional states have also participated in the Northern Distribution Network for the transport of U.S. and NATO supplies to and from Afghanistan.³ Putin's consent to the deployment of Western forces in Central Asia and to the use of Central Asian airfields during the U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan represented a dramatic turn in Russia's Central Asian policy.⁴

² Luca Ratti, 'Back to the Future? International Relations Theory and NATO-Russia Relations Since the End of the Cold War', *International Journal*, Spring 2009, p. 404

³ Jim Nichol, 'Central Asian: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests', *Congressional Research Service*, 9 January 2013, pp. 1-67

⁴ Lena Jonson, "Introduction", *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Lean Jonson, New York, London: I.B. Tauris Co Ltd, 2004, p. 1.

Russian involvement in Kyrgyzstan's recent moves to end U.S. use of the Manas air base seems to run counter to Russia's positive cooperation on Afghanistan.⁵ However, in explaining this rapprochement, it should be borne in mind that Putin's strategic reassessment had already begun before September 11th. When he came to power in 2002, one of his foreign policy decisions was to end the freeze in NATO-Russia relations.

Following the positive cooperation immediately after 9/11, Russia rekindled its interest in boosting relations with the Alliance, and the West was prepared to reciprocate. For instance, early in October 2001, Putin made his first trip to Brussels and met with NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson.

It was the then-British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, among NATO leaders, who first suggested the establishment of a new mechanism of cooperation. British officials suggested the post-9/11 realignment as a way to overcome old enmities and build new bridges.⁶ Eventually, after several consecutive rounds of negotiations between the Alliance and Russia, the new mechanism was named as 'NATO-Russia Council (NRC)', and was formally established at a special

⁵ Oksana Antonenko and Bastian Giegerich, 'Rebooting NATO-Russia Relations', *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 2, April-May 2009, p. 18.

⁶ NATO, the European Union, and the Atlantic Community: the Transatlantic Bargain Challenged, ed. Stanley R. Loan, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2005, p. 171.

The objective behind the creation of the NRC was quite clear: to provide a fresh start for NATO-Russia relations, drawing on the positive cooperation generated by the post-9/11 fight against terrorism.

NATO Rome Summit, at a transformed airbase *Practica Di Mare* on 28 May 2002, five years and one day after the signing of the Founding Act and launch of the PJC.⁷ According to the Rome declaration, NATO member states and Russia would work as equal partners in areas of common interest and the NRC would provide a mechanism for consultation, consensus building, cooperation, joint decision, and joint action for the member states of NATO and Russia on a wide spectrum of security issues in the Euro-Atlantic region.⁸

The objective behind the creation of the NRC was quite clear: to provide a fresh start for NATO-Russia relations, drawing on the positive cooperation generated by the post-9/11 fight against terrorism. This move has also led to cooperation on Afghanistan's security at the institutional level, with the creation of the NRC. In this

⁷ Kara Bosworth, "The effect of 11 September on Russia-NATO relations", *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 3:3, 2002, p. 380.

⁸ NATO-Russia Relations: A New Quality. Declaration by Heads of State and Government of NATO Member States and the Russian Federation, May 28, 2002, at http://www.nato-russia-council.info/media/69549/2002.05.28_nrc_rome_declaration.pdf

sense, NRC's relevance to Afghanistan's security before and after 2014 must be analyzed in greater details given that Russia and NATO actively cooperate on the stabilization of Afghanistan.

NRC and Cooperation on Afghanistan

Working towards security and stability in Afghanistan is an important area of cooperation for the NRC, because Russia and NATO allies have a common interest in ensuring that Afghanistan is peaceful, stable and secure, and can never again become a haven for terrorists. To this end, Russia supports the NATO-led ISAF in Afghanistan in accordance with UNSCR 1386, adopted unanimously on 20 December 2001, which authorized the establishment of an ISAF to assist the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding area, so that the Afghan Interim Authority as well as the personnel of the United Nations could operate in a secure environment.⁹

On 11 August 2003 NATO took over command of the ISAF in Afghanistan, marking the first time in NATO's history that it had taken charge of an 'out of area' operation, beyond the Euro-Atlantic confinements specified in the Strategic Concept of April 1999. The Alliance aims to help establish a

secure and stable Afghanistan with a fully representative government. Based on the December 2001 Bonn Conference 2001, as reflected in UN Security Council Resolutions, NATO will remain in Afghanistan as long as it takes to achieve these objectives, in order to help Afghanistan emerge from nearly four decades of authoritarian rule, foreign occupation and civil war.

Support for ISAF

In 2008, NATO asked Russia to allow the land transit of non-military equipment for ISAF contributors across Russian territory to Afghanistan in support of the NATO-led ISAF. The transit arrangements for non-lethal goods proved critical to the development of the northern supply route to Afghanistan, linking rail transportation between the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. At that time, the NATO-led ISAF was about 47,000 strong, tasked with consolidating the authority of Hamid Karzai's weak central government across the country.

The agreement was concluded at the NATO 2008 Summit in Bucharest, where the question of Ukraine and Georgia's membership in NATO was slated to hold a key place on the agenda. Russia harshly opposed NATO's eastward expansion, and warned of the political and military consequences of moving forward with such plans. NATO discounted Russia's threats until the Russian

⁹ Resolution 1386 (2001) on the Situation in Afghanistan Adopted by the Security Council at its 4443rd Meeting, on 20 December 2001

Ambassador to NATO, Rogozin, suggested that Russia might point warheads at Ukraine if it were to join the Alliance.¹⁰ Ultimately, NATO turned down Georgia and Ukraine's applications for Membership Action Plans (MAP) in Bucharest.

Despite this political drama, NATO and Russia did manage to produce one important initiative in Bucharest: Russia signed a transit agreement with the Alliance, allowing for the transport of non-military equipment for ISAF contributors through Russian territory to Afghanistan. It should also be noted that Russia is also obliged to assist ISAF with transit agreements under the Security Council Resolution, which called upon members of the UN to provide ISAF with 'such necessary assistance as may be required, including providing flyover clearances and transit.

In 2010, NATO and Russia entered into discussions on amendments to improve the 2008 arrangement and to better clarify the types of equipment that could be moved.¹¹ At the Lisbon Summit in 2010, NRC leaders agreed on amendments to the arrangements, allowing land transit of non-lethal

¹⁰ Julianne Smith, 'The NATO-Russia Relationship: Defining Moment or Déjà vu?', Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2008, p. 6

¹¹ Only non-lethal cargo will be transported using multi-modal commercial transit. 'Non-lethal' means goods valid for international transport, with exceptions as defined in the Annex to Decision No 219 by the government of the Russian Federation on the 28 March 2008 (explosives, ammunition and all weapons), 'Questions and Answers on ISAF Transit and Russia', 18 July 2012, at <http://www.nato-russia-council.info/en/articles/18-july-2012-transit-agreement-qa/>, accessed on 17 April 2013

Despite this political drama, NATO and Russia did manage to produce one important initiative in Bucharest: Russia signed a transit agreement with the Alliance, allowing for the transport of non-military equipment for ISAF contributors through Russian territory to Afghanistan.

cargo through Russian territory both to and from Afghanistan. As a result, more than 60,000 ISAF containers have been transported by railway by Russian carriers to ISAF in Afghanistan. In 2012, the Russian government extended the transit scheme to multimodal transportation – rail, road and air transport by amending 2008 resolution. Thus, ISAF cargo can now be transported through Russia by rail, road and air depending on economic parameters and other specific conditions. The Russian government has also approved the use of Ulyanovsk International Airport as a hub for transit to and from Afghanistan, due to its proximity to air freight transport and international rail infrastructure.

The NRC Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund

In Lisbon, the NRC leaders agreed to establish an NRC Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund to enable the Afghan Armed Forces (AAF) to operate

their helicopter fleet. The goal of the project is to contribute to the ability of the AAF to operate its fleet of Mi-17 and Mi-35 helicopters more efficiently, providing training for the Afghan maintenance technicians, along with helicopter spare parts. During the first phase, ten donor nations, including Russia, contributed to the Trust Fund project, providing maintenance and repair capacities, including spare parts and technical training. Training started in 2012 and the Novosibirsk Aircraft Repair Plant in Russia is serving as the main center for Afghan maintenance personnel. The 19 trainees who completed the training were reintegrated back into the Afghan National Army Air Corps as of September 2012, and 30 Afghan maintenance personnel – representing about 20 percent of AAF helicopter technicians – were successfully trained in April 2013.¹² During the second phase, more specialized and intermediate maintenance training will be offered, promoting the self-sufficiency of the AAF, which will be essential after full responsibility for security in Afghanistan has been transferred to the ANSF and the NATO-led ISAF has withdrawn at the end of 2014.

NATO-Russia cooperation on Afghanistan also includes the provision of counter-narcotics training for Afghan, Central Asian and Pakistani personnel.

Counter-Narcotics Training of Afghan, Central Asian and Pakistani Personnel

NATO-Russia cooperation on Afghanistan also includes the provision of counter-narcotics training for Afghan, Central Asian and Pakistani personnel. The NRC Project for Counter-Narcotic training was launched in December 2005 by NRC Foreign Ministers to address the threats posed by the trafficking of Afghan narcotics. In cooperation with the UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the project was aimed at building local capabilities and promoting regional networking and cooperation by sharing the combined expertise of NRC nations with mid-level officers, initially from Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan since 2010. Along with the project's seven beneficiary countries, 21 NRC nations are involved in the project as well as two non-NRC contributors, Finland and Ukraine. This project is unique since it brings together source and transit countries for trafficking with the nations that are ultimately targeted as markets for drugs. Since its inception, the project has trained over

¹² 'NATO-Russia Council Practical Cooperation Fact Sheet', November 2012, p. 5.

2500 counter-narcotics personnel from across the region.¹³ Crucially, many of the counter narcotics officers trained have since been involved in the most significant drugs hauls in the region. At the Lisbon Summit, the scope of the project was expanded to provide further assistance to institutional capacity building in the future. In 2013, it will further continue to introduce new areas, including training officers in the use of sniffer dogs. Two additional fixed training sites will also be added: a Canine Training School in Rostov on Don, and the Siberian Federal District Law Institute in Krasnoyarsk.¹⁴

NRC and the Fight against Terrorism

It is also important to mention how Russia and NATO are cooperating on the institutional level in the fight against international terrorism. Significantly, at the PJC meeting on 13 September 2001, Russia joined NATO's condemnation of terrorism, and its pledge not to let those responsible for such an appalling act to go unpunished. They agreed to intensify their cooperation under the Founding Act to defeat this scourge. Cooperation has taken the form of joint threat assessments, regular exchanges of information, in-depth consultation, civil emergency planning for terror-

ist attacks, high-level dialogue on the role of military, lessons learned from recent terrorist attacks and, scientific and technical cooperation. An Ad-hoc Working Group was created to discuss conceptual approaches to addressing the terrorist threat and to develop practical cooperation. This effort has shown that NATO and Russia share many common views on both the nature of the terrorist threat and how to address it; given the unique challenges posed by terrorism, NATO-Russia work in this field has had to be both diverse and multi-dimensional.¹⁵

Three high-level conferences were held in Rome and Moscow in 2002 and in Norfolk in 2004, in order to explore the role of military in combating terrorism, and generate recommendations for ways to develop practical military cooperation in this area. At an international conference on lessons learned from recent terrorist attacks in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2005, representatives of law enforcement, rescue and health departments and services of NRC member states who had been involved in terrorist-response operations came together to share their practical experience of preventing terrorist activity, consequence management and dealing with hostage-taking. Following the expert-level discussions, some studies and assessments have been tested through joint exercises. In addition,

¹³ 'NATO to Expand Counter-Drugs Training Project', *RIA Novosti*, 10 April 2013, at <http://en.rian.ru/world/20130410/180563702.html>

¹⁴ 'NATO-Russia Council Project Took Stock of Training in 2012', *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)* at <http://www.unodc.org/centralasia/en/news/nato-russia-council-project-took-stock-of-training-in-2012.html>

¹⁵ Andrei Kelin, "NATO-Russia Cooperation to Counter Terrorism", *NATO Review*, Autumn 2005

joint projects have been established, such as the Cooperative Airspace Initiative (CAI) and the Stand-off Detection of Explosive Devices (STANDEX).

The political significance of the NRC became apparent for Moscow in the aftermath of the Beslan school hostage crisis of September 2004. According to official statistics, 344 civilians were killed, 186 of them children, and hundreds more wounded. For many Russians, this was their 9/11.¹⁶ On 7 September, the NRC met in extraordinary session and became the first international body to adopt a statement resolutely and unambiguously condemning what had taken place, defining it as ‘a crime and a direct threat to our common security, shared democratic values and basic human rights and freedoms.’¹⁷ One of the immediate results was the approval of an action plan on terrorism to coordinate practical cooperation under the NRC. The adopted plan was a new format for NATO-Russia cooperative efforts to combat terror-

¹⁶ Cindy C. Combs and Martin Slann, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, eds., Cindy C. Combs and Martin Slann, New York: Info-Base Publishing, 2007, p. 40

¹⁷ The NRC categorically rejects terrorism in all its manifestations. It reconfirms that terrorist acts pose a direct challenge to common security, to shared democratic values and to basic human rights and freedoms. NRC nations agree that there is no cause that can justify such acts, and call for unity of action in the international community in addressing this insidious threat. They will do everything in their power to fight all forms of terrorism, acting in conformity with the UN Charter, international human rights and humanitarian law, as well as other existing commitments. They stand united in support of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, as well as the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. “NATO-Russia Council Action Plan on Terrorism”, e-Library, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_72737.htm, accessed on 29 March 2013

The political significance of the NRC became apparent for Moscow in the aftermath of the Beslan school hostage crisis of September 2004.

ism: in the plan, they outlined measures to enhance the capabilities of Russia and NATO to act, individually and jointly, in three critical areas: preventing terrorism; combating terrorist; and managing the consequences of terrorist acts. Thus, NATO and Russia were proceeding from statements of intent and exercises to exploring the possibilities for joint practical actions, including actions involving the use of military means, to counter the terrorist threat.

NRC and Afghanistan’s Security after 2014

Since NATO took over ISAF in 2003, it has been conducting security operations, while also training and developing the ANSF. Since 2011, responsibility for security has gradually been handed over to the Afghans. This process is scheduled to be completed at the end of the 2014, when ISAF’s mission will end. After 2014, the Alliance will lead a follow-on mission to train, advise and assist the ANSF during the transformation process (2015-2023) with the aim of continuing to support the development and maintenance of the Afghan security forces and institutions. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stressed that “the new mission

will not be ISAF by another name. It will be different, and be significantly smaller. Its aim will be to train, advise and assist the Afghan forces, not substitute for them.”¹⁸ It will have a regional approach and will be based in Kabul and in the North, West, South and East. The focus will be on the national institutions such as the security ministries, and the corps levels of army and police command.

The question is, ‘Will Russia continue to cooperate with NATO on the NRC level as ISAF is withdrawn by the end of 2014?’ It seems that Russia-NATO cooperation on Afghanistan is coming to an end. This is partly for objective reasons; when the Alliance withdraws the majority of its troops, it will not need Russia’s help to the same extent. It is likely that they will continue to cooperate in line with the previous projects or other new projects on the NRC level. After his visit to Moscow in April 2013, NATO Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, said that he and his Russian counterparts agreed that their counter-narcotics training efforts have been successful and could be expanded. It was also recognized that there is a common interest in NATO’s success in Afghanistan, and in continuing to support stability in the region. Speaking on post-2014 NATO-Russia cooperation, he stated that

18 ‘NATO Defense Ministers Endorse Concept for New post-2014 mission in Afghanistan’, 5 June 2013, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_101248.htm, accessed on 12 August 2013

‘Will Russia continue to cooperate with NATO on the NRC level as ISAF is withdrawn by the end of 2014?’

‘As we look to the post-2014 period Afghanistan is going to have many different needs that the international community will have to address. Some of them will be in the security field, but there may be additional areas relating to securing the borders, fighting corruption, or dealing with other transnational crime, where NATO-Russia cooperation can be among the catalysts for greater regional cooperation. The focus may shift away from the security field, but NRC countries could provide a real impetus that could bring the Central Asian countries, Pakistan, India and China into new initiatives to support Afghan sovereignty and economic development. The counter-narcotics training project has provided a model for future cooperative projects. It has already gone beyond just training Afghans, to providing capacity building in Central Asia and Pakistan. There is an opportunity to be even more inclusive, given that the Central Asian neighbors of Afghanistan as well as Pakistan have an even

more direct stake in avoiding any backsliding after 2014.¹⁹

Given that ISAF is expected to leave Afghanistan by the end of the 2014, Russia is worried about the subsequent consequences for the stability of the region. Indeed, many observers believe that the situation in Afghanistan is far from secure, and its future after the troops withdrawal remains quite uncertain. Russia is concerned about two important threats that are expected to rise following the end of the ISAF mission: terrorism and Afghan narcotics, and their potential spread to the neighboring states. Russia's main worry is that NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan might lead to a Taliban victory, and a return to the turbulent conditions of the 1990s, when Islamist militants infiltrated the neighboring post-Soviet republics of Central Asia and threatened the stability of Russia's southern flank.²⁰ Similarly, the inflow of the Afghan heroin became the main challenge from Afghanistan, posing a vital threat to its human security, via its direct impact on Russian society. While present trafficking through Central Asia accounts for 25 percent of Afghan heroin exports and 15 percent of opium exports, 90 percent of the heroin that goes through Central

19 'NATO Deputy Secretary General Talks about Moscow Visit', 3 April 2013, <http://www.nato-russia-council.info/en/articles/20130403-nrc-ambassador-vershbow-interview/>, accessed on 12 August 2013

20 Fred Weir, 'Russia Urges NATO to Stay in Afghanistan beyond 2014', 19 April 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2012/0419/Russia-urges-NATO-to-stay-in-Afghanistan-beyond-2014>, accessed on 22 September 2013

Although Russia has expressed that further cooperation is possible, it claims that NATO needs a UN mandate for the post-2014 Afghan mission.

Asia ends up in Russia.²¹ In this respect, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov urged NATO to keep its forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014. This demonstrates that the preservation of stability in Afghanistan is in Moscow's fundamental interests, as in the Alliance's.

More importantly, Russia is distinguishing between the Afghanistan issue and the disagreements on other major issues like NATO expansion and the development of missile defense system. This indicates it is clearly in Russia's interest to cooperate on Afghanistan. As noted earlier, Russia is aware that instability in Afghanistan would have negative repercussions in Russia. This is why it has embarked on cooperation with NATO and is willing to cooperate on the mission beyond 2014.

Although Russia has expressed that further cooperation is possible, it claims that NATO needs a UN mandate for the post-2014 Afghan mission. The Russian Ambassador to NATO, Alexander Grushko, said that 'further cooperation is possible but will depend on the nature of the

21 Ekaterina Stepanova, 'Afghanistan after 2014: The Way Forward for Russia', *Ifri Russia/NIS Center*, 2013, p. 12, cited in *World Drug Report 2011*, New York, UNODC, 2011, p. 71.

NATO mission in Afghanistan beyond 2014 and must have a reliable legal basis and be approved by the UN Security Council. There should also be a clear understanding of the strategic tasks the international community intends to work on in Afghanistan.²² Earlier, Russia's Acting Ambassador to NATO Nikolai Korchunov had gone further, saying that Russia will stop cooperating with NATO over Afghanistan after 2014 unless the Alliance obtains UN Security Council authorization for its new training mission in Afghanistan. 'It is a precondition both for carrying on the operation and for our cooperation with NATO on that issue post-2014,' he told Reuters in an email.²³

Russia wants to know more about the scale and scope of post-2014 mission in Afghanistan before deciding whether to continue to cooperate with the Alliance. Putin's special envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov said that

'At the end of the day NATO is a military bloc. If a military-political group appears in the neighborhood of Russia territory, without our consent and with tasks unknown to us, this is problematic. Our current cooperation with NATO is based on the current NATO mandate from the UN Security Council.

²² Nigel Chamberlain, 'Prospects for a Productive NRC Meeting in April', *NATO Watch*, 8 March 2013

²³ Adrian Croft, 'NATO Must Have UN Mandate for post-2014 Afghan Mission', *Reuters*, 10 October 2012

And we only cooperate with such mission as have a mandate for which we have also voted.'²⁴

NATO Secretary General Rasmussen met with Afghan journalists to provide answers regarding NATO's operations in Afghanistan and a new mandate from the UN Security Council. He said that

'At Chicago we agreed on very clear status for the post-2014 mission. We agreed that we would seek a sound legal basis, such as a UN Security Council Resolution. This is our preferred option. But let me also stress that an international legal point of view it would be sufficient to have an invitation from the Afghan government. So an invitation would be sufficient. But, if this is complemented with a UN Security Council Resolution that would be even better.'²⁵

Notably, agreement on the chemical weapons situation in Syria was reached between Russia and the U.S. The UN Security Council voted unanimously to secure and destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpile. Russia previously vetoed three West-

²⁴ Gabriela Baczynska, 'Russia Wants Answers on NATO post-2014 Afghan Mission', *Reuters*, 25 October 2012

²⁵ 'Rasmussen Brief Afghan Journalists on NATO Mission in Afghanistan', *Khaama Press*, 4 January 2013, at <http://www.khaama.com/rasmussen-brief-afghan-journalists-on-nato-mission-in-afghanistan-26404>

ern-backed resolutions pressing President Bashar Assad's regime to end the violence in Syria. I would argue that the recent successful negotiations between Russia and the West on the Syrian issue means a green light for major security issues such as the post-2014 Afghan negotiations.

To conclude, it is true that there is some disagreement between NATO and Russia in regard to the post-2014 mission in Afghanistan. However, the objective situation in Afghanistan and in the region is pushing NATO and Russia towards cooperation. In this sense, they should find common ground to cooperate on the NRC level. However, this can only be realized if cooperation prevails over rivalry.

Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Afghanistan

**Gulsah
Gures***

Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the issues of gender inequality and women's human rights in Afghanistan by looking at the developments in the fields of education, political participation and economics over the past 12 years. This complex issue will be studied by assessing what has been achieved on paper so far, and how much of that has been implemented successfully. The author concludes that if Afghan women are empowered to make meaningful contributions to deciding the country's post-conflict development priorities, and are listened to by their male colleagues in the political, economic and social contexts, the country's socio-politic and economic development prospects will be improved. To this end, the author suggest that the international community should increase its development-focused support to post-2014 Afghanistan by prioritizing education, the protection of civil and human rights, and economic and social development by underlining the strong connection between women and development.

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The critical year of 2014 will see the transition of security responsibilities. Now that this is fast approaching, there is an increasing focus on security and military priorities due to the existing unstable and unpredictable situation in Afghanistan. Though there are general concerns with regard to post-2014 Afghanistan, nearly half of Afghan society - namely women, have an additional concern in addition to security. This is the significant possibility that they rights that have regained since 2001 will be traded away either as part of peace negotiations, or in return for support from warlords, or for votes from swing voters in the country.¹ These concerns have been voiced by various actors, both internal and external, in several different fora since the London Conference in January 2010. Since then, the handover of security responsibilities has dominated the international agenda, together with the issue of troop withdrawal and Afghan President Hamid Karzai's statements favoring peace talks with more senior Taliban members who are not related to terrorist organizations.² Although Afghan President Karzai promised that Afghan women's rights will not be compromised during these peace talks,³ this insufficient to allay con-

1 Joint Norwegian Agency for Development (Norad) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency(Sida) Gender Review-Afghanistan, 7 June 2011, pp.6-17.

2 "Karzai Says He Has Always Favored Peace Talks With Taliban", RFE/RL, 29 January 2010, at http://www.rferl.org/content/Karzai_Says_He_Has_Always_Favored_Peace_Talks_With_Taliban/1943664.html

3 Julian Borger, "Afghanistan conference sets out plan for two-

cerns. During the Kabul Conference (July 2010), international donors and politicians voiced their concerns that the hard-won gains of Afghan women since 2001 may be sacrificed in peace deal.⁴ Similarly, during an event held in the American Embassy compound in Kabul, Afghanistan in March 2013, Afghan businesswomen conveyed their concerns with regard to women's human rights in the upcoming transition period. These women asked US Secretary of State John Kerry, "what will happen if Afghan officials negotiate a peace accord with the Taliban whose leaders are determined to reinstitute restrictions on the role of women?"⁵

Indeed, there are several developments that have exacerbated these concerns. At minimum, there are multiple weaknesses in the implementation, reporting and accountability of the high-level political commitments with regard to the gender equality and women's human rights in Afghanistan. Further to this, there is an identifiable correlation between the intensifying insurgency since 2005-2006 and the erosion of some of the gains made in terms of the rights of Afghan women. Notably, the passing

tier peace process", *The Guardian*, 28 January 2010, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/28/afghanistan-london-conference-analysis>

4 Joint Norwegian Agency for Development (Norad) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency(Sida) Gender Review-Afghanistan, 7 June 2011, p.20.

5 Michael R. Gordon "Kerry Hears Afghan Fears From Women in Business", *The New York Times*, 26 March 2013, at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/27/world/asia/kerry-hears-concerns-of-afghan-businesswomen.html?_r=0

of the “Shiite Personal Status” Law in 2009 places heavy restrictions on the rights of women from the Shia sect, in contradiction to not only the Afghan Constitution but also in violation of a number of national and international binding documents signed or adopted by the Afghan Government. In addition, the strong criticism by conservative Afghan MPs of the ‘Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law’ -which criminalizes numerous acts of violence against women - during the parliamentary debate in May 2013 show that the concerns of Afghan women and the international community with regard to the losing the hard-won gains of Afghan women are quite legitimate.⁶ These two events also triggered an outcry in national and international fora.

Indeed, over the past 12 years, the Afghan government together with the international community has invested significant effort in providing and strengthening gender equality and women’s human rights, which entails struggling against so many political, economic, social, cultural and security challenges. This is demonstrated in a number of policy and strategy papers and international commitments. However, the implementation

6 Jon Boone, “Afghanistan’s Women Find Their Voice”, *The Guardian*, 18 April 2009, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/apr/18/afghanistan-womens-rights-politicians>; European Parliament Resolution on Women’s Rights in Afghanistan, B6-0197/2009, 22 April 2009, at [of these documents and commitments has not yielded the expected results. It is true that when considering the tragic situation of Afghan women and gender relations in Afghanistan during the Taliban era, some extraordinary achievements have been made, especially in the field of education and political participation. On the other hand, gender inequality persists. Its extent varies among different ethnic groups in Afghanistan as well as between urban and rural communities, and also depends on education level, religious affiliation, economic status and security situation.⁷ Having said this, seeking to explain the failures in implementation with reference to ‘local culture’ is criticized by Prof. Deniz Kandiyoti:](https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxhZmdoZW5wb2xpy3lzaXRlfGd4OjZlZjZlZDFkZjU0YzQ:Joint Norwegian Agency for Development (Norad) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency(Sida) Gender Review-Afghanistan, 7 June 2011, p.38.</p>
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...violations of women’s rights in Afghanistan are over-determined by overlapping and mutually reinforcing sets of influences: the dynamics of gendered disadvantage, the erosion of local livelihoods and growing poverty, the criminalization of the economy and insecurity at the hands of armed groups and factions. Combinations of new pressures (such as poverty, indebtedness and predation by local strongmen) with existing practices (such as early

7 Joint Norwegian Agency for Development (Norad) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency(Sida) Gender Review-Afghanistan, 7 June 2011, p.31.

marriage of girls against the payment of bride price) create outcomes that may easily be misread as unmediated expressions of local “culture”. Such misidentification detracts critical attention from the full nexus of influences that deepen the vulnerability of girls and women.⁸

In order to examine this highly significant issue in detail, this paper will first provide a brief outline of the gender-based demographic features of the country. In the second part, the commitments of the Afghan government in relevant strategy and policy papers and international treaties will be examined. Thirdly, the implementation track in the areas of education, political participation and labor market will be reviewed. In the fourth and the final part, a concluding evaluation will be submitted.

Gender-based Demographic Features

According to the 2011-2012 Statistical Yearbook of the Afghan Central Statistics Organization (CSO), approximately 49 percent of the total settled population of Afghanistan is female. This settled population was estimated to be around 25 million

⁸ Deniz Kandiyoti, “The Politics of Gender and Reconstruction in Afghanistan”, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Occasional Paper 4, February 2005, p.32.

According to the 2011-2012 Statistical Yearbook of the Afghan Central Statistics Organization (CSO), approximately 49 percent of the total settled population of Afghanistan is female.

people in 2011-2012,⁹ of which the great majority is young (11.5 million or 46.1 percent of the total settled population is under the age of 15) and living in rural areas (19.1 million Afghans live in rural areas, and only 5.9 million Afghans live in urban areas).¹⁰ The country’s fertility rate in 2005-2010 was 6.6, the second highest in the world after Niger,¹¹ though the decreasing population growth rates from 3.77 percent in 2000-2005 to 2.66% in 2005-2010¹² show that the current demographic structure will continue in the foreseeable future.

According to estimates by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Afghan females aged between 15 and 49 made up 42.3 per-

⁹ According to the 2012-2013 estimations, total settled population is 25.5 million (12 455 700 female and 13 444 000 male). For further information, please see: CSO of Afghanistan, “Population Estimation 2012-2013: Settled Population of Afghanistan by Civil Division, Urban, Rural and Sex 2013-2013”, Population Statistics, <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/6449>

¹⁰ CSO of Afghanistan, “Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012: Population”, <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/7108>, pp. 6-7. These figures do not include the nomadic population which is estimated to be 1.5 million.

¹¹ The Economist, “Afghanistan’s Demography: A Bit Less Exceptional”, 23 June 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21557370>

¹² UN Data Bank, “Afghanistan: Population Growth Rate (percentage)”, World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, UN Population Division, <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=afghanistand&d=PopDiv&f=variableID%3a47%3bcrID%3a4#PopDiv>

cent of the total population in 2000, 42.6 percent in 2005, and 43.3 percent in 2010.¹³

Afghan Settled Population by Sex and Age, 2011-2012¹⁴

Age	Total	Male	Female	%
Total	24 987 700	12 782 000	12 205 700	100
0-4	4 879 182	2 373 708	2 505 474	19
5-9	3 744 680	1 902 185	1 842 495	15
10-14	2 897 639	1 524 594	1 373 045	12
15-19	2 368 063	1 250 690	1 117 373	9
20-24	2 027 792	1 038 565	989 227	8
25-29	1 674 245	826 931	847 314	7
30-34	1 395 516	664 820	730 696	6
35-39	1 225 447	585 981	639 466	5
40-44	1 058 169	535 176	522 993	4
45-49	917 456	485 347	432 109	4
50-54	774 191	426 538	347 653	3
55-59	623 315	353 268	270 047	2
60-64	481 068	276 037	205 031	2
65+	920 937	538 160	382 777	4

The Afghan Government's Commitments to Women

This section will present gender-related aspects of strategy, policy and international documents signed or adopted by the Afghan government, in order to show the political commitments made by the Afghan government.

13 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Afghanistan: Women Aged 15-49", <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/p2k0data.asp>

14 CSO of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012: Population", <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/6070>, p. 7. These figures do not include the nomadic population which is estimated to be 1.5 million.

First and foremost, is the Bonn Agreement of December 2001, which was seen as a framework for the establishment of democratic governance. In this document, specific focus was given to the role and status of women in this challenging process by encouraging women's involvement in all levels of the new government, and underlining the necessity of advancing the role of women in the society.¹⁵ The relevant women-specific articles in the 2004 Constitution and the establishment of the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) should be evaluated as the results of the Bonn process.¹⁶

The current Constitution (adopted in 2004) has several articles targeting at increasing and protecting the legal rights of women. Article 22 clearly states that women and men have equal in rights and duties before the law, by strictly prohibiting any kind of discrimination and distinction.¹⁷ Articles 44 and 53 require the State to develop and implement the necessary programs to design and to promote a balanced education for Afghan women, and to provide the necessary aid to women.¹⁸ Article 58 announces the establishment of the Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan to monitor developments, both

15 National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAP-WA) 2008-2018, at <http://mowa.gov.af/en/page/6686>, p.5

16 Ibid.

17 The Supreme Court of Afghanistan, "Laws: Constitution of Afghanistan", at <http://supremecourt.gov.af/en>

18 Ibid.

achievement and violations, in the field of human rights. This institution is also responsible for conveying the human rights violations raised by individuals to the relevant legal authorities and assisting those people in defense of their rights.¹⁹ The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) was established in June 2002.²⁰ Articles 83 and 84 of the Constitution addresses the representation of women in the bicameral national assembly of Afghanistan, which is composed of the *Wolesi Jirga* (House of the People) and *Meshrano Jirga* (House of Elders). Accordingly, in the *Wolesi Jirga*, at least two seats from each province are reserved for women, and the President is assigned to reserve half of the seats for women in the *Meshrano Jirga*.²¹ Furthermore, Article 7 states that Afghanistan must comply with the treaties (United Nations Charter, international treaties, inter-state agreements and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) to which Afghanistan is party. Afghanistan has signed and ratified a number of binding international agreements promising to enforce women's human rights. The country's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against

19 The Supreme Court of Afghanistan, "Laws: Constitution of Afghanistan", <http://supremecourt.gov.af/en>

20 Harvard Kennedy School, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, "Establishment of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission", at <https://sites.google.com/site/afghan-policysite/Home/establishment-of-the-afghanistan-independent-human-rights-commission>

21 The Supreme Court of Afghanistan, "Laws: Constitution of Afghanistan", <http://supremecourt.gov.af/en>

Women (CEDAW) in March 2003, without any reservations, is the most significant among them. However, Dr. Laura Grenfell draws attention to a crucial point of conflict with the Constitution:

Despite Afghanistan's basic recognition of gender equality under the law, fulfillment of its obligations under CEDAW may be threatened by Article 3 of the 2004 Constitution. This article states, "No law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." While Islam *per se* is not inimical to women's rights, this provision has the potential to undermine women's rights in Afghanistan because its interpretation by a conservative judiciary could invalidate the rights recently gained by women. Because Afghanistan made no reservation to CEDAW with regard to this provision, Afghan courts will have to reconcile Articles 3, 7, and 22 of the Constitution in the future in order to avoid possible conflict.²²

The establishment of the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) by

22 Grenfell, Laura; "The Participation of Afghan Women in the Reconstruction Process", *Human Rights Brief*, 12/1, 2004, at <http://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/vol12/iss1/7/>, p.23

the Afghan Interim Administration as part of the executive of the Interim Administration is considered as a significant step in demonstrating the political will of the Afghan leadership to secure and expand the legal rights of women.²³ Today, MoWA has 9 central departments and 34 provincial departments to reach Afghan women and carry out its activities.²⁴ Furthermore, in 2005, the MoWA established the Inter-ministerial Commission on the Elimination of Violence against Women (IMC-EVAW), in order to launch a coordinated action plan among all the relevant stakeholders in improving the social status of Afghan women and reaching an overall solution to gender inequality.²⁵

In 2004, Afghanistan would have been eligible to join the community of nations committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Due to the ongoing conflict situation in the early 2000s, Afghanistan was unable to attend to the Millennium Summit of the United Nations held on 6-8 September 2000 in New York. Thus it could not sign the United Nations Millennium Declaration at the conclusion of the Millennium Summit on 8 September 2000, at which world leaders had unanimously agreed upon certain objectives based on shared values and principles to be achieved

23 Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs, "Introduction to MoWA", at <http://mowa.gov.af/en/page/1332>

24 MDG Afghanistan Project, "Challenge Questions: Gender", at <https://sites.google.com/site/mdpafghanistan/challenge-questions/gender>

25 MoWA Brochure on the EVAW Commission, p.1.

The establishment of the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) by the Afghan Interim Administration as part of the executive of the Interim Administration is considered as a significant step in demonstrating the political will of the Afghan leadership to secure and expand the legal rights of women.

by 2015.²⁶ However, in 2004, the government of Afghanistan approved the Millennium Declaration together with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)²⁷ based on an adjusted time frame and targeted figures according to the realities of the country; i.e. most of these global targets were 'Afghanized'. Furthermore, a ninth Goal of 'Enhancing Security' was added to the existing eight, in consideration of the fact that development is directly linked to security. Afghanistan promised to reach the goals in the MDGs by 2020 instead of 2015, by taking 2002-2005 as the baseline instead of 1999 as agreed by the international community.²⁸ Of the 9 MDGs of Af-

26 Kabul Process, "MDG", at <http://www.thekabulprocess.gov.af/index.php/ands/mdg>

27 8 MDGs are as follows: Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger (goal 1), achieving universal primary education (goal 2), promoting gender equality and empowering women (goal 3), reducing child mortality (goal 4), improving maternal health (goal 5), combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (goal 6), ensuring environmental sustainability (goal 7), developing a global partnership for development (goal 8). For details please see, UNDP Afghanistan, Millennium Development Goals Status in Afghanistan, at <http://www.undp.org.af/MDGs/MDG-status07.htm>

28 Kabul Process, "MDG", at <http://www.thekabulprocess.gov>

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ghanistan, Goal 3, ‘to promote gender equality and empower women’, is targeted at eliminating gender disparity at all levels of education by 2020, in economic spheres by 2020, and in access to justice by 50 percent by 2015, and completely by 2020. The final aspect of this is to increase female participation in elected and appointed bodies at all levels of governance to 30 percent by 2020.²⁹

In 2005, the Afghan government adopted ‘The Way Ahead: Work Plan of the Afghan Government’, during the Berlin Conference.³⁰ This paper, referring to the constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination with regard to women’s political participation as voters, candidates and civil servants, underlined the reinforcement of the MDG Goal on

af/index.php/ands/mdg

²⁹ UNDP Afghanistan, *Millennium Development Goals Status in Afghanistan*, at <http://www.undp.org.af/MDGs/MDGstatus07.htm>

³⁰ *National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAP-WA) 2008-2018*, <http://mowa.gov.af/en/page/6686>, p.18.

education and gender mainstreaming in all sectors, programs and policies.³¹

During the London Conference (31 January-1 February 2006), the Afghanistan Compact was signed as a new framework for cooperation by the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations and the international community upon the completion of the terms of the Bonn Agreement in 2005 (i.e. having passed a new Constitution in January 2004, conducted the Presidential elections in October 2004 and the National Assembly and Provincial Council Elections in September 2005).³² Principles 5 and 7 of the Afghanistan Compact (2006-2010) underlined the importance of the development of women’s human capital in addition to men’s in order to create robust human capacity and effective state mechanisms together with necessary civil society institutions. The principles also recognized that Afghan men and women have equal rights and responsibilities in all policies and programs.³³ In its benchmarks and timelines, the expectation with regard to the full implementation of the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan and the strengthening of female participation in all Afghan governance institutions by late 2010 was voiced.³⁴ With regard to education, targets were put forward

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p.19.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Afghan Foreign Ministry, The Afghanistan Compact*, at <http://mfa.gov.af/en/page/3881>, p.7

for increasing the enrollment rate of female students in all levels of education as well as increasing the number of female teachers, giving marketable skills training to women together with men.³⁵ Furthermore, improving conditions for vulnerable Afghan women - defined as poor female-headed households - and their employment rates was also mentioned.³⁶

Another important development during the London Conference in 2006 was the initiation of the interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (i-ANDS) by the Afghan Government, complementing the Afghan Compact by detailing the country's future development agenda for 2006 - 2010.³⁷ In this strategy paper, there were strong references to the existing gender inequality in Afghanistan across almost all spheres of life, by giving the rationale, context, constraints along with the possible strategies to overcome the challenging obstacles either in the form of capacity building or advocacy or awareness programs. Those constraints were listed as the weak capacity of the government in mainstreaming gender; cultural, social and religious sensitivities on gender issues, underdevelopment, lack of education affecting the pace and acceptance of reforms; social resistance to the schooling of the girls, physical obstacles such as lack

35 *Ibid.*, p.10.

36 *Ibid.*, p.11.

37 *European Commission Country Strategy Paper for Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 2007-2013*, p.10.

of female teachers-especially in rural areas, early marriages, shortage of schools for girls; low participation of women in economy due to low literacy rates, lack of skills, restricted mobility, lack of financial and technical services; persistence of widespread inequalities though the constitutional guarantees and poor representation of women in leadership and power.³⁸

In order to materialize the benchmarks within the allocated time stated in the Afghanistan Compact and the ANDS, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) 2008-2013 was adopted by the Afghan Government and the international community during the Paris Conference in 2008.³⁹ The ANDS (2008-2013), which has three pillars, namely security, governance and socio-economic development covering 17 sectors, includes a Gender Equity Cross Cutting Strategy. In this strategy paper, after the main problems faced by Afghan women and men are discussed in-depth, policies to be followed in order to reach certain benchmarks in the coming few years were designed based on gender specific issues such as nondiscrimination and equality considered in terms of rights and duties.⁴⁰

38 "Afghan Foreign Ministry, *Afghanistan National Development Strategy: An Interim Strategy for Security, Governance, Economic Growth & Poverty Reduction*", Reliefweb, 30 January 2006, at <http://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-national-development-strategy-summary-report-interim-strategy>, p.16, p.35, p.48, pp.51-52, p.54, p. 71, p.79, pp. 90-94.

39 *National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAP-WA) 2008-2018*, at <http://mowa.gov.af/en/page/6686>, p.7

40 *Ibid.*

In 2008, the Afghan government also adopted the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA 2008-2018) as a policy framework in order to carry on and coordinate the Afghan Government's efforts of protecting women's citizenship rights in Afghan society, in line with the objectives stated in the Constitution, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and CEDAW.⁴¹

In 2009, the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law, criminalizing numerous acts of violence including child marriages, forced marriages, selling and buying girls or women for the purpose or under the pretext of marriage, the tradition of giving away a woman or girl to settle a dispute, rape, beating and several other acts of violence against women, was signed by the President Karzai as a decree and, only three years later, in May 2013, it was submitted for ratification by Parliament. This led to a series of provocative remarks by conservative MPs, who described the decree as "un-Islamic". Thus it has not been ratified by Parliament.⁴² Although the law can still be implemented due to its presidential decree standing, legitimacy comes with the parliamentary ratification.⁴³ There has been no development on this issue since then.

During the Kabul Conference in July 2010, the Government of Afghanistan initiated 22 National Priority Programs (NPPs) in order to improve its development efforts.⁴⁴ In addition to the fact that gender has been mainstreamed in all programmes of the Human Resource Development Clusters, the Afghan government also adopted the MoWA Priority Program in order to increase the capacity of the Ministry for successful and timely implementation of the NAPWA.⁴⁵

Last but not least, with regard to Security Council Resolution 1325 of October 2000 on women, peace and security, calling for a gender perspective in post-conflict processes in all UN peace and security operations and in UN programming in addition to the increased participation and representation of women at all levels of decision-making during the reconciliation and transition process,⁴⁶ a National Action Plan (NAP) has not yet been developed for its implementation, despite the fact that the government had voiced its commitment to SCR 1325.

41 *Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs, NAPWA*, at <http://mowa.gov.af/en/page/6686>

42 *Sethna, Razeshta; "Afghan Women's Rights under Threat", The Guardian*, 20 June 2013, at <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/jun/20/afghan-womens-rights-under-threat>

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Kabul Process, "Prioritization"*, at <http://www.thekabulprocess.gov.af/index.php/clusters--npps/prioritization>

45 *Afghan women's Network (AWN), "Women in the Peace Process of Afghanistan"*, p. 2.

46 *UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), "Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security"*, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>

Implementation Track

On the issue of the implementation of gender related action plans and international commitments in all these documents, although the political commitments are high and some of the achievements are quite impressive, there remain many flaws in the implementation process. This section of the paper will cast a critical eye on the implementation process over the past years by looking at three specific fields, namely education, political participation and economic activity.

A) Education

Widespread illiteracy, particularly among females, has been observed as one of the significant consequences of the war and conflict situation in the country, which has destroyed the core of the state institutions as well as the economy. Although the country has had some remarkable achievements in the field of education since 2001, Afghanistan still has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. According to the Afghan Ministry of Education, the estimated literacy rate of the total Afghan population aged 15 and above is around 26 percent, and the gender gap remains large here with the female literacy rate much lower (12 percent) than the male literacy rate (39 percent).⁴⁷ Literacy is much lower in rural areas, especially in insecure and remote regions and among nomadic people, due to the lack of infra-

47 Afghan Ministry of Education, "Strategic Plan-Program Four: Literacy", <http://moe.gov.af/en/page/2015>

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structure and difficulties in accessing education services.⁴⁸ Several nine-month literacy programs have been developed separately for male and female populations all over the country. As seen from the table here below, the number of these literacy courses (both for males and females) is decreasing and the number of graduates is quite low in comparison to the number of students enrolled. Between 2009 and 2012, although the number of female graduates increased, the participation of females in these courses decreased significantly.

Some significant developments recorded in the field of education are as follows: 9,000 out of 12,500 schools existing today have been built since 2001; the number of teachers increased from 20,700 men in 2002 to 174,400 people in 2011 - 50,000 of whom are female. More than 60 million textbooks for both primary and secondary schools have been published and distributed.⁴⁹

48 Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) 2008-2013, p.30.

49 David Cortright and Kristen Wall, "Afghan Women Speak: Enhancing Security and Human Rights in Afghanistan", Kroc

Since 2001, a remarkable increase in the enrolment rates in schools of and especially in the number of female students has been observed: the number of students in 2002 was 900,000, consisting of only males.

Literacy Activities by Gender between 2009 and 2012⁵⁰

	2009 2010	2010 2011	2011 2012
Total Number of Courses	31 278	27 087	22 660
*Courses for Males	13 531	11 819	11 278
*Courses for Females	17 747	15 268	11 382
Total Students	682 679	607 669	574 433
*Male Students	287 124	251 850	278 801
*Female Students	395 555	355 819	295 632
Graduates	104 994	159 970	227 539
*Male Students	27 092	50 125	90 680
*Female Students	77 902	109 845	136 859

This increased to 8.4 million students by 2012, and 39 percent are female.⁵¹ However, at higher levels of schooling, the percentage of girls decreases. For instance, in 2008, only 26 percent of Grade 12 graduates were female.⁵² As seen from the table below, there is a decreasing tendency in the gender parity index when moving from primary level enrolment to tertiary level enrolment. This is mainly due to the persistence of barriers to female ed-

Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, August 2012, p.16.

⁵⁰ *Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2011-2012", at <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/7108>, p.93.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Joint Norwegian Agency for Development (Norad) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency(Sida) Gender Review-Afghanistan, 7 June 2011, p.17.*

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ucation such as early marriage, limited mobility for girls, and the lack of value given to female education, in addition to the worsening security situation - which triggers attacks on schools, teachers and students (mostly girls' schools).⁵³

Since the female enrolment rate decreases with each year of schooling, the percentage of the schools allocated for girls is also decreasing from 39.1 percent at the primary level, to 33.2 percent at the secondary level and to 28.1 percent at the high school.⁵⁴ Especially in rural areas, 80 percent of districts do not have high schools for girls.⁵⁵ In addition to the separate schools for female students, training of female teachers is also crucial in providing schooling for girls at

⁵³ *David Cortright and Kristen Wall, "Afghan Women Speak: Enhancing Security and Human Rights in Afghanistan", Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, August 2012, p.16.*

⁵⁴ *Joint Norwegian Agency for Development (Norad) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency(Sida) Gender Review-Afghanistan, 7 June 2011, p.17.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

all levels. In 2010, only 30 percent of the 170,000 teachers and 38 percent of the students going to Teacher Training Colleges were female.⁵⁶

Gender Parity Index in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Level Enrolment, 2002-2011⁵⁷

Gender Parity Index in:	Primary Level Enrolment	Secondary Level Enrolment	Tertiary Level Enrolment
2002	0.46	---	---
2003	0.57	0.35	0.28
2004	0.44	0.21	0.28
2005	0.59	0.33	---
2006	0.63	0.37	---
2007	0.63	0.38	---
2008	0.65	0.43	---
2009	0.67	0.49	0.24
2010	0.69	0.51	---
2011	0.71	0.55	---

B) Political Participation

The steps taken by the Afghan government with regard to women's participation in the new political order have been encouraged by the international community. Six out of 60 Afghan delegates attending to the Bonn

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ UN Data Bank, "Gender Parity Index in Primary Level Enrolment", at <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=Afghanistan&d=MDG&f=seriesRowID%3a611%3bcountryID%3a4>; UN Data Bank, "Gender Parity Index in Secondary Level Enrolment", <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=Afghanistan&d=MDG&f=seriesRowID%3a613%3bcountryID%3a4>; UN Data Bank, "Gender Parity Index in Tertiary Level Enrolment", at <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=Afghanistan&d=MDG&f=seriesRowID%3a614%3bcountryID%3a4>

negotiations held in November 2001 were women; 12 percent of the participants during the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002; 20 percent of the Constitutional Loya Jirga in December 2003; and seven out of 35 mem-

Six out of 60 Afghan delegates attending to the Bonn negotiations held in November 2001 were women; 12 percent of the participants during the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002; 20 percent of the Constitutional Loya Jirga in December 2003; and seven out of 35 members of the Constitutional Commission were women.

bers of the Constitutional Commission were women.⁵⁸

In accordance with the 2004 Constitution, Afghan women have held more than 25 percent of the seats in the national parliament since 2006.⁵⁹ With the adoption of this electoral law in May 2004, 68 women in the September 2005 elections and 69 women in the September 2010 elections entered the *Wolesi Jirga* (65 seats were already reserved for women), equal to

⁵⁸ National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAP-WA) 2008-2018, at <http://mowa.gov.af/en/page/6686>, p.5 : Grenfell, Laura; "The Participation of Afghan Women in the Reconstruction Process", Human Rights Brief, 12/1, 2004, at <http://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/vol12/iss1/7/>, p.23

⁵⁹ "Afghanistan: Seats held by women in national parliament, percentage", UN Data Bank, at <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=afghanistan&d=MDG&f=seriesRowID%3a557%3bcountryID%3a4>

27.7 percent of the seats.⁶⁰ However, initially only 11 women entered the *Meshrano Jirga* in the February 2010 elections, but in January 2011, with the assignment of 17 women members by the President, this number increased to 28, giving 27.45 percent of the seats to women.⁶¹ These figures are above the world average. Furthermore, the number of female candidates for *Wolesi Jirga* increased from 12 percent in 2005 to approximately 16 percent in 2010, though it remains the case that female candidates for parliamentary elections face serious challenges in relation to campaigning in public.⁶²

Proportion of seats held by women in Afghanistan's National Parliament⁶³

Year:	1990	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Seats held by women in %	3.7	27.3	27.3	27.7	27.7	27.3	27.7	27.7	27.7
Total Number of Seats in the Parliament	189	249	249	242	242	249	249	249	249
Seats Held by Men in the Parliament	182	181	181	175	175	181	180	180	180
Seats Held by Women in the Parliament	7	68	68	67	67	68	69	69	69

Currently, there are nine women in the 70-member Afghanistan High Peace Council, which was set up in 2010 as a body of the Afghanistan Peace and

Currently, there are nine women in the 70-member Afghanistan High Peace Council, which was set up in 2010 as a body of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) to broker peace with the Taliban.

Reintegration Program (APRP) to broker peace with the Taliban.⁶⁴ These nine female members of the Council are trying to form a united voice and to be heard by the other members in the Council. They established a committee in order to protect the constitutional rights of Afghan women during the negotiations.⁶⁵ They are mostly excluded from the major decisions

and main consultations.⁶⁶ There are also Afghan women on the peace talk committees of provincial and local levels but, as in the Council, they are

⁶⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Database, "Afghanistan: Wolesi Jirga (House of the People)", at <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2381.htm>

⁶¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Database, "Afghanistan: Meshrano Jirga (House of Elders)", at <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2382.htm>

⁶² Joint Norwegian Agency for Development (Norad) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) Gender Review-Afghanistan, 7 June 2011, p.17.

⁶³ UN Millennium Development Goals Indicators, "Afghanistan: Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliament", 01 July 2013, at <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx>

⁶⁴ Miriam Arghandiwal, "Women on Afghan peace council say they are sidelined", Reuters, 22 March 2012, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/22/us-afghanistan-women-idUSBRE82L0FP20120322> ; Selah Hennesy, "UN: Women's Rights at Risk in Afghan Peace Process", Voice of America, 30 July 2013, at <http://www.voanews.com/content/united-nations-womens-rights-at-risk-in-afghan-peace-process/1713318.html>

⁶⁵ Miriam Hennesy, "Women on Afghan peace council say they are sidelined", Reuters, 22 March 2012, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/22/us-afghanistan-women-idUSBRE82L0FP20120322>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

only symbolically involved in the ongoing peace talks.⁶⁷ The Gender Policy of the ARPR, issued by the Council's Joint Secretariat in September 2011, underlined the importance of a gender balance in the composition of committees.⁶⁸ All in all, these figures, both in Parliament and the Council, show that Afghan women hold a symbolic place at the political table rather than true participation. Their meaningful participation in the design and implementation of national peace and reconstruction processes is necessary if their voice is to be heard in the political context.

C) Economic Activity

Since the Afghan economy has largely been dominated by the informal sector (80 to 90 percent), and it is hard to capture the features of this informal economic activity and the share of women there, only the share of women in public sector is given below.⁶⁹ The percentage of women in public sector employment has fluctuated over the years and is still far from the targeted level.

67 Stefanie Nijssen, "Afghanistan in Transition: The Peace Process & Afghanistan's Women", Civil Military Fusion Center, April 2012, p.3.

68 Ibid.

69 National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAP-WA) 2008-2018, at <http://mowa.gov.af/en/page/6686>, p.72

Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector⁷⁰

Share of Women in Public Sector Employment	%
2002	19.2
2003	17.8
2004	18.5
2005	25.9
2006	18.0
2007	17.6
2008	18.4

For a number of reasons, such as limited access to education and vocational training and dealing mainly with agriculture, livestock, handicraft etc, either without being paid or underpaid, along with high fertility, inability to exercise reproductive rights, very limited access to work outside the house, limited access to productive assets, wage discrimination-especially in the civil service, and the weak position of women in the informal sector,⁷¹ the position of Afghan women in the labor market is very weak, especially in the rural areas (where the majority of the population resides). To address this, the Afghan government launched several programs designed to aid rural development, such as the National Solidarity Program (NSP), the National Area Based Development Program (NABDP), the National Rural Access Program

70 UN Millennium Development Goals Indicators, "Afghanistan: Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector", 01 July 2013, at <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx>

71 National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAP-WA) 2008-2018, at <http://mowa.gov.af/en/page/6686>, pp.69-72.

(NRAP), the Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program (AREDP) and the Microfinance Investment Support Facility in Afghanistan (MISFA). Nearly one-third of the beneficiaries were rural women.⁷²

Afghanistan's GII in comparison to selected countries and groups, 2012⁷³

	GII Value	GII Rank	Maternal Mortality Ratio	Adolescent Fertility Rate	Female Seats in Parliament (%)	Population with at Least Secondary Education (%)		Labour Force Participation Rate (%)	
						Female	Male	Female	Male
Afghanistan	0.712	147	460	99.6	27.6	5.8	34	15.7	80.3
Nepal	0.485	102	170	86.2	33.2	17.9	39.9	80.4	87.6
Pakistan	0.567	123	260	28.1	21.1	18.3	43.1	22.7	83.3
South Asia	0.568	-	203	66.9	18.5	28.3	49.7	31.3	81
Low HDI	0.578	-	405	86	19.2	18	32	56.4	79.9

Among these programmes, the NSP is particularly important because it provided for the widespread involvement of rural women in community decision-making structures through Community Development Councils (CDCs), by getting benefit from the block grants.⁷⁴

Last but not least, with regard to the newly developed Gender Inequality Index (GII) in 2010, replacing the

⁷² Statement by H.E. Dr.Husn Banu Ghazanfar, Minister of Women's Affairs at the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations, 2 March 2012

⁷³ UNDP Human Development Report (HDR) 2013, Afghanistan: HDI Values and Rank Changes in the 2013 Human Development Report, Explanatory Note on 2013 HDR Composite Indices, p.4.

⁷⁴ Statement by H.E. Dr.Husn Banu Ghazanfar, Minister of Women's Affairs at the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations, 2 March 2012

previous Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), and reflecting gender-based inequalities in the dimensions of reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity, Afghanistan had a GII value of 0.707 in 2011. This put it at 141 out of 146 countries in that year's index.⁷⁵

With a GII value of 0.712, the country was ranked 147th out of 148 countries in the 2012 index. In comparison to the South Asian GII average of 0.568 and low HDI countries' GII average of 0.578 in 2012 index, Afghanistan's GII value is still quite high.

Conclusion

Since 2001, the Afghan government, with the assistance of international community, has taken gradual but significant steps towards ensuring gender equality and women's human rights. Considering the Taliban rule, the fragile security situation,

⁷⁵ UNDP Human Development Report (HDR) 2011, Explanatory Note on 2011 HDR composite Indices, Afghanistan: HDI values and rank changes in the 2011 Human Development Report, at <http://hdrstats.undp.org/images/explanations/AFG.pdf>, p.4

economic difficulties, the devastated infrastructure and a number of other political, economic, religious, cultural and social barriers, this has been an extremely challenging task from the start. Although there are many aspects open to criticism, a certain momentum has been achieved and the hard-won gains either regained or obtained by Afghan women should not be traded away as part of peace negotiations with the Taliban. The Afghan women who have robust education, influential political participation and strong positions in the labor market will be able to make a great contribution to sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Without a doubt, if Afghan women can have a meaningful seat at the table in deciding the country's post-conflict development priorities and having their voice heard by their male colleagues in the political, economic and social contexts, the socio-politic and economic development of the country will improve in the long-run. For this purpose, international community should increase its development-focused support to post-2014

Afghanistan by giving precedence to education, the protection of civil and human rights, and economic and social development, by underlining the strong connection between women and development.

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The United Nations Security Council and Post-2014 Afghanistan

M. Zeki Günay*

Abstract

This paper examines the ways in which the issue of Afghanistan has been discussed by the permanent members at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), based on an analysis of statements and speeches by each permanent member's representative during Security Council meetings between 2011 and 2013. The future of Afghanistan is highly dependent on the strategic and economic interests of the permanent members of UNSC. This paper will discuss and compare the views of each permanent member; specifically in relation to: the progress on, and prospects for, peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan; the handover of security responsibility to the ANSF; the current security situation in the country; future engagement of the UN and international cooperation in Afghanistan. The author concludes that the divergence of priorities and concerns, especially between Russia, and to a lesser degree China, and the other permanent members of the UNSC on vital issues in Afghanistan stands as one of the main challenges to an effective and unified UN policy towards Afghanistan in the post-2014 period.

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Afghanistan is approaching the critical year of 2014, when presidential elections will be held, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will withdraw, and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will assume responsibility for maintaining security in the country. The current situation in Afghanistan raises certain concerns with regard to the future of the country and the region as a whole. The decisions of the permanent members at the UNSC in relation to Afghanistan play a significant role for the country's future.

This paper examines the discussions on Afghanistan among the permanent members of the UNSC, based on statements and speeches by each permanent member's representative during Security Council meetings between 2011 and 2013. The paper reviews each permanent member's position on the progress on, and prospects for, peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan; the handover of security responsibility to ANSF; the security situation in Afghanistan; and the UN's future engagement and international cooperation in Afghanistan.

The future of Afghanistan is highly dependent on the strategic and economic interests of the permanent members of the UNSC in Afghanistan. The U.S. has focused mainly on eliminating Al-Qaeda and preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorists.¹ Russia, on the

other hand, has been concerned about the strengthened U.S. presence in the region, along with the risk that terrorism and drug trafficking will affect its own interests and those of its near neighborhood in Central Asia.² China also has sought to limit U.S. influence in Afghanistan, to secure its economic interest in the country, and to contain potential threats targeting Xinjiang.³ The foreign policy decisions of France and the UK towards Afghanistan have been motivated mainly by their solidarity with the U.S. and the importance of a multilateral approach to the conflict.⁴ The priorities of the permanent members of the UNSC have been manifested during official discussions on Afghanistan. The UNSC has been instrumentalized by the interests of its permanent members and has become a forum whereby permanent members have advanced their own interests.⁵ Despite the consensus among all permanent members that the UN should play the central role in coordinating the international efforts in Afghanistan in the post-2014 period, there are divergent priorities

vival: *Global Politics and Strategy* 55, No. 1 (2013), p. 87.

2 See Vishal Chandra, "Russia's Growing Afghan Re-Engagement," *Strategic Analysis* 35, No. 4 (2011), pp. 552-558.

3 Christian Le Mièrè, Gary Li and Nigel Inkster, "Chapter Ten: China," *Adelphi Series* 51, No. 425-426 (2011), pp. 222-223.

4 Eva Gross, *The Europeanization of National Foreign Policy: Continuity and Change in European Crisis Management* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 64, 103.

5 Gilles Dorronsoro, "The Security Council and the Afghan Conflict," in *The United Nations Security Council and War: The Evolution of Thought and Practice since 1945*, ed. Vaughan Lowe, A. Roberts, J. Welsh, D. Zaum (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 453.

1 Paul D. Miller, "The US and Afghanistan after 2014," *Sur-*

Despite the consensus among all permanent members that the UN should play the central role in coordinating the international efforts in Afghanistan in the post-2014 period, there are divergent priorities and concerns regarding vital issues in Afghanistan, especially between Russia, and to a lesser degree China, and the other permanent members of the UNSC.

and concerns regarding vital issues in Afghanistan, especially between Russia, and to a lesser degree China, and the other permanent members of the UNSC. This divergence among permanent members at the UNSC represents one of the main challenges to an effective UN policy and cooperation towards Afghanistan in the post-2014 period.

Peace and Reconciliation in Afghanistan

During the UNSC meetings between 2011 and 2013, discussions on peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan have focused mainly on the ‘ideal’ type and process of reconciliation, the 2014 elections and the necessary steps to achieve a long-lasting peace and stability. All permanent members agree that the peace process should be led and owned by the Afghans. However, there remain differences among permanent members of the UNSC

with regard to priorities, and means for supporting the peace process.

The conduct and results of the 2014 presidential elections in Afghanistan bear significant importance for peace and stability in Afghanistan.⁶ While representatives from China, France, the UK and the U.S. have focused on the upcoming elections during the UNSC meetings, the Russian delegation has not addressed the issue as such. Russia’s ‘insufficient’ focus on the coming elections in Afghanistan is discouraging for cooperation on the success and conduct of the elections. The Taliban office in Doha is a point of disagreement at the UNSC meetings on Afghanistan. While representatives from France, the U.S. and the UK welcome the opening of the Taliban office for the establishment of inter-Afghan political dialogue,⁷ Russia’s representative Vitaly Churkin has concerns with regard to the office:

It merely introduced additional complications and exposed the true intentions of the Taliban, who have no interest in talks with Kabul but are seeking political legitimacy for using force to take power after the international forces’ withdrawal. We have to learn the lessons of this undertak-

⁶ Ali A. Jalali, “Afghanistan: Challenges of the Transition to Peace,” *Emirates Lecture Series*, No. 91 (2012): 11.

⁷ UN Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the 6983rd Meeting held on 20 June 2013 (S/PV.6983)* available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6983

ing, rid ourselves of illusions about the Taliban's true goals and take a more responsible approach to the issue in the future.⁸

Consensus and cooperation among permanent members of the UNSC on the possible contributions of the Taliban office in Doha to a reconciliation process would ease the way for dialogue with Taliban. Russia's concerns about the office will have significant influence, not necessarily positive, on cooperation and the formation of an effective UN role in the Afghan peace process.

Differences remain among permanent members of the UNSC on the proper means for supporting the peace process. The Russian delegation gives particular attention to the UN sanctions regime during the UNSC meetings on Afghanistan, in comparison with other permanent members. Churkin, representing Russia, emphasized that 'the Security Council sanctions regime must remain the most important counter-terrorism tool ... in building peace, stability and security in Afghanistan.'⁹ Churkin opposed including individuals and entities on the Security Council's sanctions lists in

the peace dialogue.¹⁰ Churkin's emphasis on ensuring the effectiveness of the sanctions and strict compliance by states may challenge cooperation among permanent UNSC members on the efforts to include the Taliban in the inter-Afghan political dialogue.

Representatives from China, the UK and the U.S., on the other hand, have emphasized the importance of economic factors for lasting security and stability in Afghanistan.¹¹ China's representative Wang Min declared China's support for the Afghan Government's efforts to build the economy, increase employment and improve living standards.¹² China's motivation is mainly based on the perceived threats to its investments in Afghanistan's mineral resources and the sustainability of trans-Afghan infrastructure, including oil and gas pipelines, key to China's influence in the region.¹³ The UK representative Mark Lyall Grant argued that 'irreversible transition and progress on the political track must be supported by governance and development progress.'¹⁴

⁸ UN Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the 6935th Meeting held on 19 September 2013 (S/PV.7035)*, available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.7035

⁹ UN Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the 6935th Meeting held on 19 March 2013 (S/PV.6935)*, available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6935

¹⁰ UN Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the 6896th Meeting held on 19 December 2012 (S/PV.6896)*, available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6896

¹¹ For analysis of Afghan economy and budget, see Nicholas Redman, "Chapter Four: The economy, the budget and narcotics," *Adelphi Series* 51, No. 425/426 (2011), pp. 97-120.

¹² UN Security Council, *S/PV.6896*, 19 December 2012

¹³ Michael Clarke, "China's Strategy in 'Greater Central Asia': Is Afghanistan the Missing Link?" *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 40, No.1 (2013), p.14.

¹⁴ U.N. Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the 6574th Meeting held on 6 July 2011 (S/PV. 6574)*, available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6574

In a similar vein, Susan E. Rice, on behalf of the U.S., stated that ‘Afghanistan’s security depends not only on strong capable security forces, but also on the Afghan people’s access to economic opportunity and their belief that their Government is effectively serving their needs.’¹⁵ The lack of a unified emphasis on the economic issues, especially on the part of Russia, inhibits the development of comprehensive UN role in Afghanistan, given the importance of economic factors for peace and stability in any state.

Nor has the issue of human rights in Afghanistan been prioritized by all of the permanent members during meetings between 2011 and 2013 on Afghanistan. At the UNSC, while the French, UK and U.S. delegations have focused on the need to protect and promote human rights, especially the rights of women, for a successful transition in Afghanistan, representatives from China and Russia did not address the problem. Grant, representing the UK, urged the Government of Afghanistan to ensure the full implementation of the law on the elimination of violence against women.¹⁶ The U.S. representative Rosemary DiCarlo argued that the protection of the rights of Afghan women is essential for sustainable peace, reconciliation, stability and economic growth in

15 UN Security Council, Provisional Verbatim Record of the 6840th Meeting held on 20 September 2012 (S/PV.6840), available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6840

16 UN Security Council, S/PV.6896, 19 December 2012

The lack of a unified emphasis on the economic issues, especially on the part of Russia, inhibits the development of comprehensive UN role in Afghanistan, given the importance of economic factors for peace and stability in any state.

Afghanistan.¹⁷ Rice, on behalf of the U.S., condemned all violence against women:

The United States continues to work with the Afghan Government, civil society and the international community to increase awareness of women’s rights, prevent the abuse and detention of women and girls and hold the perpetrators of such violence accountable. We support the United Nations and Afghanistan’s continuing efforts to establish and to expand the protection and shelter services for victimized women.¹⁸

China and Russia’s failure to acknowledge human rights issues in Afghanistan, especially the rights of women, at the UNSC meetings remains a concern with regard to developing comprehensive UN policies for Afghanistan, taking into account the importance of women’s role in eco-

17 UN Security Council, S/PV.6983, 20 June 2013

18 UN Security Council, S/PV.6840, 20 September 2012

conomic development and stability in the country.¹⁹

These differences between Russia/China and other permanent members with regard to priorities and means for implementing out the peace process have been influential in the lack of a breakthrough in Afghanistan.²⁰ Aside from the issue of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, the other issue discussed at the UNSC meetings between 2011 and 2013 has been the transition of security responsibility to ANSF and the current security situation in the country. The following section of the paper focuses on the views of the representatives of UNSC permanent members on these issues, discussing points of divergence.

Transition of Security Responsibility to ANSF and Security in Afghanistan

During the UNSC meetings on Afghanistan, discussions on transition of security responsibility to the ANSF and security in Afghanistan have focused mainly on the timing of the transition, capabilities of the ANSF and the necessary means for achieving security in Afghanistan. Permanent members of the UNSC have emphasized various concerns and priorities concerning the transfer of security responsibility and Afghanistan's secu-

rity. This divergence complicates the formulation of effective UN policies and achieving cooperation among permanent members of the UNSC for Afghanistan after 2014.

Representatives from China and especially Russia have concerns about the security situation in Afghanistan and the transfer of security responsibilities to ANSF. NATO's complete military withdrawal from Central Asia will contribute to regional instability and terrorism. Over the last decade, international forces have helped suppress the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and some fundamentalist movements targeting China's control over Xinjiang.²¹ China's representative Li Baodong noted that the protection of Afghanistan's security and stability should be a priority during the withdrawal of forces.²² On the transfer of security responsibilities, Wang Min, representing China, stated

All parties should comply with international humanitarian law and other relevant international law and carry out their responsibilities for the protection of civilians. When handing over responsibility for security, the parties concerned should adopt a responsible, prudent and progressive approach and give priority to

19 See Carol J. Riphenburg, "Gender Relations and Development in a Weak State: The Rebuilding of Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* 22, No. 2/3 (2003), pp.187-207.

20 For the domestic reasons leading to failure in reconciliation, see Amin Saikal, "The UN and Afghanistan: Contentions in Democratization and State building," *International Peacekeeping* 19, No. 2 (2012), pp. 228-229.

21 Younkyoo Kim and Fabio Indeo, "The New Great Game in Central Asia post 2014: The US "New Silk Road" Strategy and Sino-Russian rivalry," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 46, No. 2 (2013), p.280.

22 UN Security Council, S/PV.6840, 20 September 2012

the capacity-building of the Afghan security sector.²³

The withdrawal of the international coalition from Afghanistan could facilitate the expansion of the Taliban and create serious security problems for Russia and Central Asian countries.²⁴ Russia is particularly con-

NATO's complete military withdrawal from Central Asia will contribute to regional instability and terrorism.

cerned about the terrorist activity and drug-related problems spreading from northern Afghanistan to the countries of Central Asia.²⁵ Accordingly, Russia's representative Alexander Pankin expressed opposition to a fast-tracked transfer of security responsibilities:

We remain convinced that there can be no justification for an accelerated transfer of security responsibilities of ISAF in favor of the Afghan army and police without due consideration of the reality of the situation and the military capacity of the ANSF, without which ISAF's withdrawal will surely aggravate the general situation in the country.²⁶

23 UN Security Council, S/PV.6983, 20 June 2013

24 Kim and Indeo, 280.

25 Oksana Antonenko, "Chapter Nine: The Central Asian states and Russia," *Adelphi Series* 51, No. 425-426 (2011), p. 201.

26 UN Security Council, S/PV.6983, 20 June 2013

The withdrawal of the international coalition from Afghanistan could facilitate the expansion of the Taliban and create serious security problems for Russia and Central Asian countries.

ISAF's withdrawal decision has raised concerns in Moscow about regional stability and led Russian high-level officials to suggest that Moscow needs to offer a greater level of support to the mandate.²⁷ Nevertheless, Russia's representative Churkin continued to express concerns about the uncertainty concerning the format, objectives and legal basis of the remaining military presence in Afghanistan. Churkin requested full clarity on objectives and size of a future NATO operation in Afghanistan, which, in Russia's view, can be established only after ISAF reports on the completion of its mandate to the Security Council. Churkin warned that turning ISAF into a new international mission without a UN mandate could create important legal problems in relation to any logistical support.²⁸ Russia's reservations about remaining international forces and a future NATO operation in Afghanistan underline the challenges of finding a common

27 Antonenko, p.206.

28 UN Security Council, S/PV.7035, 19 September 2013; For discussions on the significance of the UN for Russian foreign policy, see Ritsa A. Panagiotou, "The Centrality of the United Nations in Russian Foreign Policy," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 27, No. 2, (2011), pp.195-216.

position among all permanent members of the UNSC on security issues in Afghanistan.

Representatives from France, the UK and the U.S., in contrast, have commended ANSF on taking the lead in Afghanistan's security and its continued capacity building. Gérard Araud, representing France, praised the Afghan authorities for assuming the responsibility for security:

That was an important step forward and demonstrated that Afghanistan is on the path to reassuming full sovereignty. The Afghan National Security Forces are now able independently to defend the entire Afghan population against attacks by armed terrorist groups. The international coalition will now play only a support role in those efforts.²⁹

The UK's representative, Grant, is also convinced that the ANSF will be 'ready, willing and able to effectively manage Afghanistan's security after 2014 and to tackle any residual insurgent threat.'³⁰ DiCarlo, on behalf of the U.S., also noted that the ANSF has successfully taken the lead in Afghanistan's security and is becoming stronger and more capable, with the ISAF moving into a supporting role,³¹ in accordance with the current

²⁹ UN Security Council, S/PV.6983, 20 June 2013

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

The divergence regarding the transfer of security responsibility and the capabilities of ANSF exists mainly between Russia and the U.S., France, and the U.K., and complicates prospects of cooperation among permanent members of the UNSC on the necessary steps to be taken for stability in Afghanistan in the post-2014 period.

U.S. strategy in Afghanistan, which is aimed at building up the Afghan national army.³² The divergence regarding the transfer of security responsibility and the capabilities of ANSF exists mainly between Russia and the U.S., France, and the U.K., and complicates prospects of cooperation among permanent members of the UNSC on the necessary steps to be taken for stability in Afghanistan in the post-2014 period.

At UNSC meetings on Afghanistan, representatives from Russia have addressed drug-related crimes much more frequently than representatives of other permanent members. One of Russia's priorities for strengthening regional and international security is eliminating or reducing illicit drug

³² Dmitri Trenin and Alexey Malashenko, *Afghanistan: A View from Moscow* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), 11; for factors behind Obama's Afghanistan policy, see Dana Allin, "Chapter Two: US policy and Afghanistan," *Adelphi Series 51*, No. 425-426 (2011), pp. 47-68.

production and trafficking.³³ According to the Federal Drug Control service of the Russian Federation, every year 800 tons of heroin is produced in Afghanistan, 35 percent of which is consumed in Russia.³⁴ The United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) forecasts an increase of areas under opium poppy in the south and west of Afghanistan and then expansion of poppy plantations in the north of Afghanistan.³⁵ Accordingly, Churkin, the representative from Russia, expressed the urgency and significance of the drug problem at the UNSC:

It is also important to resolve the issue of drugs in Afghanistan in order to ensure long-term stability there, given that the 2014 factor could undermine advances achieved in the security sector and risk Afghanistan's becoming a breeding ground for terrorism and organized crime. All of the factors of the Afghan drug threat can be considered to constitute threats to international peace and security.³⁶

³³ See *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, 12 February 2013. An English language version of the text is available at http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D

³⁴ Alexander Lukin, "Central Asia and Afghanistan in Russia's Strategy," *International Affairs: A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy & International Relations* 57, No. 5 (2011): 59.

³⁵ Mikhail Konarovsky, "The NATO Operation in Afghanistan: Results and Possible Scenarios for Russia," *International Affairs: A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy & International Relations* 59, No. 5 (2013), pp. 44-45.

³⁶ UN Security Council, S/PV.6935, 19 March 2013

Stability in and around Afghanistan is highly dependent on the solution of the drug problem. Afghanistan is still the main producer and cultivator of opium globally.³⁷ It is very hard, if even possible, to overcome such a significant problem without full cooperation and determined efforts on the part of all the parties involved. This unified approach, however, seems to be missing among permanent members at UNSC.

Pakistan can play a key role for Afghanistan's stability, as it is the only actor capable of persuading the Taliban to enter peace talks and of influencing the Taliban's position during the negotiations.³⁸ At the UNSC meetings, representatives of China and the UK in particular have emphasized Pakistan's role in Afghanistan's security, stability and prosperity. Liu Jieyi, on behalf of China, welcomed arrangements for additional support by Pakistan for national reconciliation in Afghanistan.³⁹ China's focus on Pakistan is based on its strategy to counterbalance U.S. and Indian ambitions and interests in the region.⁴⁰ China does not want the Afghan problem to become the rationale for continued U.S. political, economic and military presence near its borders.⁴¹ China

³⁷ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2013*, available at http://www.unodc.org/unodc/secured/wdr/wdr2013/World_Drug_Report_2013.pdf

³⁸ James Sperling and Mark Webber, "NATO's Intervention in the Afghan Civil War," *Civil Wars* 14, No. 3 (2012), p.364.

³⁹ UN Security Council, S/PV.7035, 19 September 2013

⁴⁰ Clarke, 7.

⁴¹ Raghav Sharma, "China's Afghanistan Policy: Slow

China supports a strong and stable Pakistan to counter India's growing influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

supports a strong and stable Pakistan to counter India's growing influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan.⁴² The UK's representative Philip Parham also welcomed the efforts of Afghanistan and Pakistan to strengthen their bilateral relationship and common understanding in regard to the Afghan peace and reconciliation process.⁴³ Grant, representing the UK, encouraged Afghanistan and Pakistan to 'renew their focus on the benefits of a more trusting and mutually supportive relationship'.⁴⁴ Despite the importance of Pakistan for political settlement with the Taliban,⁴⁵ there is no shared interest and effort among permanent members at the UNSC meetings for prioritizing Pakistan's role for solutions to Afghanistan. This attitude adds to the challenge of formulating common policies and cooperation on Afghanistan.

The lack of consensus among the per-

Recalibration," China Report 46, No.3 (2010), p. 209.

⁴² Elizabeth Wishnick, "There Goes the Neighborhood: Afghanistan's Challenges to China's Regional Security Goals," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 19, No.1 (Fall/Winter 2012), p.92; For India's interests in Afghanistan, see Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "Chapter Eleven: India," *Adelphi Series* 51, No. 425-426 (2011), pp. 231-246.

⁴³ UN Security Council, S/PV.6935, 19 March 2013

⁴⁴ UN Security Council, S/PV.6983, 20 June 2013

⁴⁵ See Adam Roberts, "Doctrine and Reality in Afghanistan," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 51, No. 1(2009): 33-34, 52-55; Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "Chapter Seven: Pakistan," *Adelphi Series* 51, No. 425-426 (2011), pp. 167-186.

manent members of the UNSC on the capabilities of the ANSF, the timing of the transition of security responsibility to Afghans, and priorities for achieving security in Afghanistan remains a challenge to comprehensive common action on Afghanistan among the permanent members of the UNSC. The UN's future engagement and international cooperation in Afghanistan also has been one of the key issues on the agenda.

UN's Future Engagement and International Cooperation in Afghanistan

During the UNSC discussions on future UN engagement and international cooperation in Afghanistan, all permanent members are agreed upon the need for the UN to play the central role in coordinating the international efforts in Afghanistan now and after 2014. Despite this consensus, priorities with respect to UN's future involvement in and international cooperation for Afghanistan do vary, especially between Russia/China and other permanent members. This divergence underlines not only the absence of a common vision among permanent members for UN's future role in Afghanistan and the challenges of cooperation in relation to Afghanistan in the post-2014 period, but also the shortcomings of the UN's current role in Afghanistan.

Concerning the UN's role in Afghanistan, the UK representative emphasized that UNAMA has a vital role in supporting the Afghan Government

for fulfilling its commitments.⁴⁶ Grant underlined the importance of ‘One UN’ approach in Afghanistan:

UNAMA must retain the right presence throughout the country. It must provide the right level of support for the international community to deliver on agreed commitments, in particular on the human and women’s rights agenda. [T]o achieve that it is vital for UNAMA and United Nations agencies to adopt a “One UN” approach and better coordinate activities on the ground.⁴⁷

The UN has been successful in launching foreign aid programs for Afghanistan. However, there have been problems concerning the gap between commitment and spending, and the ways in which aid has been allocated.⁴⁸ Martin Briens, representing France, underlined that the international community needs to better coordinate its civil assistance and recognize Afghanistan’s budget priorities. The Afghan government, on the other hand, must use funds properly based on local needs. It must establish the necessary infrastructure for developing and exporting Afghan resources and opening the country to the world.⁴⁹

46 UN Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the 6793rd Meeting held on 27 June 2012 (S/PV.6793)*, available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6793

47 UN Security Council, *S/PV.7035*, 19 September 2013

48 Saikal, p.227.

49 UN Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the*

The UN has been successful in launching foreign aid programs for Afghanistan. However, there have been problems concerning the gap between commitment and spending, and the ways in which aid has been allocated.

Representatives of the UK emphasized the importance of progress in governance and development for political transition and progress in Afghanistan. In this respect, Grant, representing the UK, stated that the international community must arrange continued and long-term commitments for supporting economic growth and basic social services in Afghanistan.⁵⁰ Rice, on behalf of the U.S, stated that Afghanistan’s development and the integration of the region will bring greater prosperity for Afghans and their neighbors.⁵¹ Economic development in Afghanistan can motivate neighboring states to work constructively with the Afghan government.⁵² In this respect, Rice emphasized the New Silk Road initiative, and argued that the international community has an important role in making this vision a reality:

6497th Meeting held on 17 March 2011 (S/PV.6497), available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6497

50 UN Security Council, *Provisional Verbatim Record of the 6735th Meeting held on 20 March 2012 (S/PV.6735)*, available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6735

51 UN Security Council, *S/PV.6840*, 20 September 2012

52 Nicholas Redman, “Chapter Four: The Economy, the Budget and Narcotics,” *Adelphi Series 51*, No. 425-426 (2011), p.97.

Economic development in Afghanistan can motivate neighboring states to work constructively with the Afghan government.

The New Silk Road is an Afghan-led venture, a rallying point for securing Afghan, regional and international commitments to support Afghanistan's transition and develop a sustainable Afghan economy that will benefit the whole region. The creation of a New Silk Road will help Afghanistan and its neighbors maximize the value of their natural resources, build human capacity, create jobs, generate revenue to pay for needed services and capitalize on the region's economic potential.⁵³

The New Silk Road strategy is driven also by wider geopolitical considerations such as checking the influence of Russia and China in the region. This motivation has led to opposition, especially from Russia.⁵⁴ Concerns from Russia and China add to the challenges to effective cooperation on Afghanistan in the post-2014 period.

UNAMA, until now, has conducted limited negotiations and consultations with the Taliban in peace talks,

which had a partial impact on large-scale reconciliation in Afghanistan.⁵⁵ Sharing these concerns, Philippe Bertoux, representing France, argued that the UN should take more responsibility in Afghanistan and strengthen the political role of the UNAMA in order to ease the implementation of the political processes. Bertoux also mentioned the need 'to simplify the Mission's mandate and to strengthen its capacity to coordinate the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations'.⁵⁶ On the UN's future engagement in Afghanistan, France's representative Béatrice Le Fraper du Hellen stated

France endorses the three poles ... as being at the heart of the Mission's work beyond 2014: political good offices; human rights, particularly the rights of women; and consistency of international aid. Proper cooperation with the funds and programmes remains key in terms of electoral reform, countering drug trafficking, supporting the Afghan police, the reintegration of insurgents and aid to refugees. On all these fronts, we are pleased to continue working with the United Nations as the central actor for the future of Afghanistan.⁵⁷

53 UN Security Council, S/PV.6625, 29 September 2011

54 Jeffrey Mankoff, *The United States and Central Asia after 2014*, (Washington, D.C.: CSIS/Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), pp. 20-21.

55 Saikal, p. 229.

56 UN Security Council, S/PV.7035, 19 September 2013

57 UN Security Council, S/PV.6793, 27 June 2012

Rice, on behalf of the U.S., underlined that UNAMA's resources should be stabilized following significant budget reductions over the past two years, so that UNAMA can carry out its mandate based on its core functions.⁵⁸ DiCarlo, representing the U.S., mentioned that UNAMA has critical contributions to make in the run-up to the critical year of 2014:

Most critical is UNAMA's leadership in continuing to provide support to ensure that the 2014 Afghan presidential election proceeds as planned. UNAMA's support for regional diplomacy and the political process, in coordination between the Government of Afghanistan and donors, in implementing the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework will also be a key part of the preparations as Afghanistan looks towards 2014.⁵⁹

Representatives from Russia and China, on the other hand, mainly declared the need for the UN to play a central role in coordinating the international efforts in Afghanistan after 2014. They do not share the above-mentioned concerns raised by France, the U.S. and the UK.⁶⁰

On regional cooperation in Afghanistan, China is keen for the Shanghai

58 UN Security Council, S/PV.6935, 19 March 2013

59 UN Security Council, S/PV.6983, 20 June 2013

60 UN Security Council, S/PV.7035, 19 September 2013

Cooperation Organization (SCO) to take an active role in Afghanistan.⁶¹ Accordingly, China's representative Liu Jieyi noted that the SCO should be utilized to strengthen regional cooperation.⁶² Li Baodong, on behalf of China, however, also noted that 'regional cooperation initiatives should fully respect Afghanistan's sovereignty, prioritize the legitimate concerns of the countries of the region, and be conducted consistently on the basis of adequate consultations.'⁶³

Churkin, representing Russia, similarly noted the importance of strong cooperation between the UN, SCO and CSTO. Churkin welcomed UNAMA's intention to improve collaboration with these organizations but expressed concerns about NATO 'which is stubbornly ignoring the CSTO's calls for improving bilateral cooperation on Afghanistan, particularly in the area of the fight against drugs.'⁶⁴ Tactical differences between Russia and the U.S. have hindered joint action between NATO and CSTO. Russia favors the rapid destruction of the poppy fields in Afghanistan, whereas the U.S. supports a more gradual action, to avoid antag-

61 Pan Guang, "China's Policy on the Conflict in Afghanistan," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 8, No.3 (2010), p.118.

62 UN Security Council, S/PV.7035, 19 September 2013

63 UN Security Council, S/PV.6840, 20 September 2012; For China's attitude towards sovereignty, see: Chengqiu Wu, "Sovereignty, Human Rights, and Responsibility: Changes in China's Response to International Humanitarian Crises," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 15, No.1 (2010), pp. 71-97.

64 UN Security Council, S/PV.7035, 19 September 2013

Russia favors the rapid destruction of the poppy fields in Afghanistan, whereas the U.S. supports a more gradual action, to avoid antagonizing the Afghan population.

onizing the Afghan population.⁶⁵ The U.S. and its allies have not been successful at halting the supply of illicit heroin and opium from Afghanistan.⁶⁶ Representatives from Russia, accordingly, underlined the need to improve activities under existing formats, such as the SCO,⁶⁷ and urged that the experience of the CSTO in fighting drug trafficking be utilized.⁶⁸ Pankin, on behalf of Russia, requested external players to respect the decisions taken by the countries of the region in the framework of these organizations.⁶⁹ Tactical differences between Russia and the U.S. with regard to counter narcotics strategies, and Russia and China's emphasis on the importance of respect for regional countries' decisions, challenge prospects for effective cooperation on Afghanistan in the 2014-period.

⁶⁵ Kim and Indeo, p. 280.

⁶⁶ Nigel Inkster and Virginia Comolli, "Chapter Three: The Producer States," *Adelphi Series* 52, No. 428 (2012), p.83.

⁶⁷ UN Security Council, S/PV.6983, 20 June 2013

⁶⁸ UN Security Council, S/PV.6793, 27 June 2012

⁶⁹ UN Security Council, Provisional Verbatim Record of the 6625th Meeting held 29 September 2011 (S/PV.6625), available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PV.6625; For divergence between Russia's approach to international intervention and the U.S., see: Samuel Charap, "Russia, Syria and the Doctrine of Intervention," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 55, No. 1 (2013), pp. 35-41.

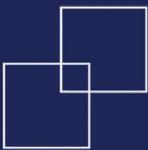
The divergent attitudes among permanent members of the UNSC with respect to the UN's future involvement in and international cooperation for Afghanistan contribute to the challenges in reaching a unified position and in drafting an effective UN role for post-2014 Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Peace and stability in post-2014 Afghanistan is highly dependent on the strategic and economic interests of the UNSC permanent members in Afghanistan. The UNSC has not been in a position to represent interests of the whole international community. Despite the consensus among all permanent members at the UNSC that the UN should play the central role in coordinating the international efforts in Afghanistan in the post-2014 period, there are varying priorities and concerns about vital issues in Afghanistan. The main division is between Russia, and to a lesser degree China, and the other permanent members at the UNSC.

Divergence among permanent members of the UNSC mainly stems from different views on priorities and means for carrying out the peace process; the capabilities of the ANSF; the timing of the transition of security responsibility to Afghans; priorities for securing Afghanistan; the UN's future involvement; and international cooperation in Afghanistan. A common approach and understanding among

permanent members at the UNSC on these issues is vital in formulating comprehensive and successful policies towards Afghanistan. The divergence among permanent members at the UNSC on these issues presents a challenge to an effective UN role and cooperation in Afghanistan in the post-2014 period.



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Afghanistan's Borderlands

*and the Politics of Center-periphery
Relations Before and After 2014:
A Case for Cautious Optimism*

**Oktay F.
Tanrisever***

Abstract

This article explores the impact of Afghanistan's borderlands on the politics of center-periphery relations in Afghanistan during the security transition in 2014. The article discusses the developments in Afghanistan's borderland regions by examining the characteristics of its border areas with Pakistan and Iran, as well as with the Central Asian states and China. The article argues that there are grounds for cautious optimism concerning the capacity of Afghanistan's central government to strengthen its political authority over these areas in the aftermath of the security transition in 2014, if Afghanistan's borderlands are more closely integrated into the post-2001 process of state-building, and if Afghanistan's borders with all of its neighbors are adequately secured.

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Afghanistan is located at the heart of Asia, forming the critical crossroads between the North and the South as well as the East and the West of Asia.¹ This feature shapes not only the regional politics around the country, but also its domestic politics too. Afghanistan's regions, which are closely linked to the neighboring regions, participate in the political processes at Afghanistan's political center in Kabul very actively. In this respect, Afghanistan's borderland regions play a crucial role in the politics of its center-periphery relations. In these borderland regions, domestic and external forces shape not only Afghanistan's domestic politics of center-periphery relations, but also its relations with neighboring countries.²

This article seeks to explore the dynamics of the center-periphery politics in Afghanistan by focusing on the critical role of Afghanistan's borderlands in the center-periphery relations during the process of the security transition in 2014. The article examines the characteristics of Afghanistan's borderlands in terms of their socio-economic, political, and security dynamics. It also analyzes the roles of these borderlands in terms of their impact on Afghanistan's relations with its neighbors. Finally, the article

1 Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia", PRIO Papers on Afghanistan in a Neighbourhood Perspective, No. 3, Oslo: PRIO, 2012, pp. 6-21.

2 Steven Parham, Controlling Borderlands? New Perspectives on State Peripheries in Southern Central Asia and Northern Afghanistan, Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2010.

discusses the role of the political elite in Kabul in enhancing political integration before and after the security transition in 2014.

The main argument of this article is as follows: Afghanistan's central government could extend its political authority over the borderlands after the 2014 security transition by integrating the borderlands into the ongoing process of state-building, and containing the centrifugal influences of the neighboring states, especially Pakistan and Iran. The article maintains a cautious optimism concerning the capacity of the well-educated technocratic elites, many of whom were educated in the U.S. and Europe, to attract the loyalty of the borderlands to the political center in Kabul.

The article is structured as follows: it starts with an analysis of the historical background against which Afghanistan's center-periphery relations have developed over the centuries, leading up to 2001. Next, the paper will focus on Afghanistan's process of state-building and Kabul's approach to the development of center-periphery relations between 2001 and 2013. In this section, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) will also be analyzed as the key element of Afghanistan's state-building process. Then, the paper will focus on the characteristics of the borderlands and the capacity of the central government in Kabul to project its political power and influence in these areas. In the penultimate

section, the article discusses the challenges facing the central authorities in Kabul in ensuring security and stability in the borderlands in the aftermath of the security transition in 2014. The article ends with the conclusions.

The Historical Background

Although Afghanistan has a long history as a viable political unit, it has never had a highly centralized government. Afghanistan's regions have enjoyed significant levels of autonomy, especially in socio-cultural matters.³ This is partly related to the fact that Afghanistan's population has been largely rural and tribal, and partly due to the failure of the central governments to penetrate into the regional and tribal life through integrative processes and modernizing reforms. In addition to the domestic dynamics of Afghanistan, the international rivalries in its neighborhood have not prevented the development of a suitable environment for the creation of a strong centralized government in Afghanistan.⁴

In fact, Afghanistan's center-periphery relations have developed over centuries, since the formation of tribal communities in Afghanistan and the settlement of various tribal communities from the neighboring regions around Afghanistan. Until the nine-

teenth century, the regional autonomy enjoyed by these tribal communities was uncontested by the central authorities, as the loyalty of the tribal leaders was considered sufficient for maintaining the status quo in Afghanistan.⁵

Since mid-nineteenth century, Afghanistan has witnessed several internationally - backed attempts at increasing the centralization of the political power at the expense of regional autonomy. The nineteenth century saw two such attempts at centralizing the central-periphery relations. Both of these attempts were supported by the British Empire, seeking to prevent the advances of the Russian Empire into the South Asia, out of defensive concerns. It was hoped that the British-backed central authorities in Afghanistan could prevent the relatively weak Afghan regions from collaborating with the Tsarist Russia. This rivalry is also known as the "Great Game".⁶

Nevertheless, these British-backed attempts at centralizing political power in Afghanistan were largely unsuccessful, due to strong resistance from local tribal leaders. Eventually, these attempts unexpectedly strengthened and united the Afghan tribal leaders against the British-backed centralizing Afghan rulers. Eventually, Af-

³ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

⁴ Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban*, New York: Da Capo Press, 2002.

⁵ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.

⁶ Edward Ingram, "Great Britain's Great Game: An Introduction," *The International History Review*, Vol.2, No. 2, 1980, pp. 160-171.

ghanistan started to experience a considerable degree of stability in its center-periphery relations following the British-Russian agreement on ending the Great Game in 1907. Accordingly, Moscow accepted Afghanistan within the British zone of influence, and London stopped supporting the attempts at centralizing the political power at the hands by friendly political actors in Kabul.⁷

In the 20th century, the central authorities in Kabul have sought to develop more effective ways of modernizing the country, by trying to avoid backlashes from the regions in the aftermath of the Great Game. However, they have not come across any magical solution. Afghanistan's King Amanullah Khan sought to modernize the country without directly challenging the autonomy of the peripheral regions and tribal communities during his rule between 1919 and 1929. His modernization strategy was aimed at creating modern institutions and culture in Kabul, and spreading that culture to the rest of the country, by making them attractive to the traditional local communities in Afghanistan's peripheral regions. However, he faced fierce resistance from regional tribal leaders.⁸ During the inter-war years as well as the early years of the Cold War, Afghanistan was not a pop-

7 Evgeny Sergeev, *The Great Game, 1856–1907: Russo-British Relations in Central and East Asia*, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press with Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.

8 Michael Barry, *A History of Modern Afghanistan, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.*

During the inter-war years as well as the early years of the Cold War, Afghanistan was not a popular theatre for Great Power rivalries.

ular theatre for Great Power rivalries. Nevertheless, the Soviet expansionism during the 1970s and its Cold War rivalry with the United States undermined the political stability in Kabul, considerably reducing the remaining hopes for Afghan modernization.⁹

In fact, the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan came to power in Kabul following a coup d'état in 1978. The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Red Army in 1979 initiated a new centrifugal trend in Afghanistan's center-periphery relations. Not surprisingly, Afghanistan's peripheral regions and their tribal leaders were united in the fight against the Soviet-backed central authorities in Kabul. This civil war among the warring factions of Afghanistan ended when Moscow admitted defeat in 1989, when the Soviet occupation forces started to withdraw. In line with the waning Soviet influence to his rule, Mohammed Najibullah's power also came to an end in 1992.¹⁰

In the absence of any clear international support for any of the lead-

9 Barnett R. Rubin, *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

10 Mark Galeotti, *Afghanistan: the Soviet Union's Last War*. London: Frank Cass, 1995.

The non-Pashtun ethnic groups in Afghanistan, such as the Hazaras, the Tajiks, the Uzbeks and the Turkmens, lost their grand coalition in the mid-1990s when Tajikistan's civil war started to have a divisive impact on the Tajiks in Afghanistan.

ers, regional actors in Afghanistan sought to re-establish the parameters of the new order in the country. In fact, Burhaneddin Rabbani emerged as the leading Mujahedeen leader who managed to win the support of various regional communities, mainly in the northern and western parts of Afghanistan. He also took advantage of the fact that the Mujahedeen leaders of Gulbeddin Hikmetyar and Sibghatullah Mojaddedi had failed to gain the support of a clear majority of the Pashtuns (Afghanistan's largest ethnic community, located mainly in the southern parts of Afghanistan). That divide played into the hands of Burhaneddin Rabbani.¹¹

The non-Pashtun ethnic groups in Afghanistan, such as the Hazaras, the Tajiks, the Uzbeks and the Turkmens, lost their grand coalition in the mid-1990s when Tajikistan's civil war started to have a divisive impact on the Tajiks in Afghanistan. In the meantime, the Pashtuns started to unite around the Taliban, which was

¹¹ Sultan Akimbekov, "Conflict in Afghanistan: Conditions, Problems, and Prospects" in *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?*, ed. Boris Rumer, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2002, p.75.

originally the political movement of the ultra-radical Islamic seminary school students. This movement was promoted by the Pakistani security services, initially among the Pashtuns, and gradually in the rest of Afghanistan. The founding leader of this ultra-radical group was Mohammad Umar, who replaced President Burhaneddin Rabbani by force in 1996.¹²

Afghanistan's center-periphery relations were radically changed when this Pakistani-backed Taliban movement had consolidated its position throughout Afghanistan, since the traditionally more influential northern local communities lost their power to the Pashtuns from the southern parts of Afghanistan, following the Taliban's capture of the central power in Kabul. In order to resist the expansion

Afghanistan's center-periphery relations were radically changed when this Pakistani-backed Taliban movement had consolidated its position throughout Afghanistan

of the Taliban's power in the northern parts of Afghanistan, the Tajiks, the Uzbeks and the Turkmens established the "Northern Alliance", by gaining the external support of the Central Asian republics, Russia and Turkey.¹³

¹² Michael Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Taliban Movement in Afghanistan*, London: Pluto Press, 2001.

¹³ Roy Utman, *How We Missed the Story: Osama Bin Laden,*

The concerns of the “Northern Alliance” about the radicalization of the Taliban and the use of Afghanistan’s territory by international terrorist organizations for their terrorist activities inside and outside Afghanistan were also shared by the international community. One of these Afghanistan-based terrorist organizations, Al Qaida, threatened global security when its terrorists carried out horrendous attacks in the United States on September 11th 2001. This act alerted the international community to the nature of the Taliban regime and the need to rebuild the state with its center-periphery relations in Afghanistan.¹⁴

Process of State-Building and Kabul’s Approach to the Center-Periphery Relations between 2001 and 2013

The prevention of international terrorist groups and the Taliban from using the territory of Afghanistan formed the cornerstone of Afghanistan’s state-building strategy in the aftermath of 9/11 and the counter-terrorism operations of the U.S.-led coalition, which started shortly after 9/11.¹⁵ In a similar vein, Afghanistan’s center-periphery relations in the post-9/11 era have also been shaped by the attempts of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) at rebuilding

the Taliban and the Hijacking of Afghanistan, Washington D.C: USIP Press, 2008.

¹⁴ Rick Fawn, *From Ground Zero to the War in Afghanistan* in Mary Buckley and Rick Fawn, eds., *Global Responses to Terrorism: 9/11, Afghanistan and Beyond*, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 11-24.

¹⁵ Stephen Biddle, “Ending the War in Afghanistan”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 5, 2013, pp. 49-58.

the state at the center in Kabul and expanding its authority to the peripheral areas through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).

Initially, the priority of the international community in its state-building strategy in Afghanistan was the eradication of terrorists and the Taliban regime as their main sponsor. In this respect, the successful combat operations of the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom played a crucial role in preparing the ground for state-building process and the redefinition of Afghanistan’s center-periphery relations. In this context, the role of the ISAF was to assist the Afghan Interim Authority for ensuring the security of Kabul and its environs so that the international community could contribute to the Afghan state-building process in a secure environment.¹⁶

Gradually, the Afghan Interim Authority has succeeded in establishing the state structures of Afghanistan, training its personnel and supplying them with logistical support, thanks to the generous contributions of the international community. The election of Hamid Karzai as President of Afghanistan as well as the members of the Afghan Parliament enhanced the political legitimacy of the emerging political order in Afghanistan. The Afghan government and its ministries have created the institutional framework for the process of state-

¹⁶ Kenneth Katzman, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy”, *Congressional Research Service*, 17 August 2010.

building in Afghanistan. Among the central political institutions in Kabul, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) assumed a key role in cooperating with the ISAF and stabilizing the peripheral regions in Afghanistan.¹⁷

Although the ISAF was originally established as a United Nations operation, it became a NATO mission in 2003. It was only after 2006 that NATO took responsibility for the security of all territories of Afghanistan. While ISAF has used its own civilian and military capabilities in combating the insurgents, it has also skillfully deployed a disarmament strategy towards the moderate elements of Taliban units if and when they rejected violence as a means to their ends. In these occasions, ISAF has preferred to use strategies for rehabilitating and reintegrating them into the Afghan society. This strategy has been effective, particularly in the borderland regions.¹⁸

This state-building strategy of Afghanistan required the regions to follow instructions issued from Kabul. This strategy is necessitated by security needs, particularly in Afghanistan's peripheral regions. Unlike Kabul, these regions have been more vulnerable to the terrorist attacks of

¹⁷ Thomas Johnson, "Afghanistan's Post-Taliban Transitions: The State of the State-building after War," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, No. 1–2, March–June 2006, pp. 1–26.

¹⁸ "International Security Assistance Force", Available online at <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf> (accessed on 5 November 2013)

Although the ISAF was originally established as a United Nations operation, it became a NATO mission in 2003. It was only after 2006 that NATO took responsibility for the security of all territories of Afghanistan.

the various groups based mainly in the southern parts of Afghanistan and along its border with Pakistan. While the Afghan government under President Hamid Karzai has been largely accommodating to all ethnic communities and tolerant towards local traditions, it has been quite slow in strengthening regional governments and ensuring their autonomy, for understandable reasons.¹⁹

Both the international community and the Afghan political center in Kabul have considered the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to be the most effective instrument for restructuring the peripheries and strengthening regional governments and local communities in response to the needs of the Afghan people living in these areas. PRTs enabled international donors to channel aid to the areas where the need is greatest. These PRTs have cooperated with the regional governments, civil society organizations, and local people in the areas of health, education, gender mainstreaming,

¹⁹ Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai, "Building A Viable State in Afghanistan: A Delicate Balance", Available online at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/WBI/Resources/Afghanistan-All-Articles-Oc09.pdf> (Accessed on 15 November 2013)

The Afghan security transition in 2014 is a crucial milestone in realizing the objectives of the state-building process in Afghanistan. By transferring security responsibility to the ANSF, The ISAF and the PRTs will cease to exist after 2014.

agriculture, transportation, communications and business development. The PRTs have functioned from the regional military bases of ISAF.²⁰

The Afghan security transition in 2014 is a crucial milestone in realizing the objectives of the state-building process in Afghanistan. By transferring security responsibility to the ANSF, The ISAF and the PRTs will cease to exist after 2014. After the successful completion of security transition in 2014, the central and regional governments will provide the services formerly provided by the ISAF and its PRTs.²¹ This is a considerable challenge for the central and regional governments in Afghanistan on an individual basis, as well as for the smooth functioning of the center-periphery relations, particularly in the borderlands of Afghanistan following the completion of the Afghan security transition in 2014.

20 Candace Karp, "Securing Afghanistan: A Step towards Successful State Building?", *Security Challenges*, Vol.1., No.1, 2005, pp. 15-20.

21 *Ibid.*

Characteristics of the Borderlands in Afghanistan

Compared to the centrally-located regions, the borderlands of Afghanistan occupy a crucial role in Afghanistan's center-periphery relations, since these regions do not only respond to the developments at the center but also to the developments at the other side of the inter-state boundaries. The way in which these borderlands develop is likely to have a significant impact on the success of the Afghan security transition in 2014. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the characteristics of these borderlands in detail.

Afghanistan's borderlands are not uniform. They can be grouped into three regions: the borderland with Pakistan in the South Eastern and the Southern parts of Afghanistan; the borderland with Iran in the western part of Afghanistan; and finally the borderland with the Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as well as China in the Northern and the North-Eastern parts of the country. These neighboring countries have close ties with these borderlands of Afghanistan either in the form of interactions between the co-ethnics located at the both sides of the borderline or in the form of cross-border movements of people, goods and services. Nevertheless the influences of the neighboring countries in Afghanistan through the borderland areas do not always contribute to the security and stability of the country.

This is particularly true of the destabilizing impacts of Pakistan and to a lesser extent Iran.²²

Afghanistan's borderlands with Pakistan include Nuristan, Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, Paktia, Khost, Paktika, Zabul, Kandahar and Helmand, which are located in the South Eastern and the Southern parts of Afghanistan, with its major cities of Jalalabad and Kandahar. These borderlands are inhabited mainly by the following ethnic groups: Pashtuns, Nuristani and Baluchistani people. These borderlands are characterized by high levels of insecurity due to their close ethnic and social ties to the Taliban bases located in the Waziristan region of Pakistan. The controversial relations of Pakistani security services with the insurgents in these borderlands make the security situation even worse. In addition to Al-Qaida, Taliban, Haqqani Network and Lashkar-e Tayyiba are the main terrorist networks based in these borderlands. These areas are located on the Southern Distribution Network linking Afghanistan and the transportation ports in Pakistan. Opium production is very high in the Helmand and Kandahar regions. In these regions the literacy rate is also significantly lower than Afghanistan's average.²³ Since

22 Smruti S. Pattanaik, *Afghanistan and Its Neighbourhood: In Search of a Stable Future*, New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA)/ Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 2013.

23 "Strategic Geography" in Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman, eds., *Afghanistan to 2015 and Beyond*, London: IISS, 2011, pp.1-XX.

Pakistan is the neighboring country to these borderlands, cross-border relations have been characterized by insecurity and drug trafficking. This is reflected in Afghanistan's relationship with Pakistan, which suffers from a lack of mutual trust and difficulties in border management.²⁴ This makes the security situation very unstable.

Afghanistan's borderlands with Iran covers Nimruz, Farah and Herat, which are located in the western part of Afghanistan, with Herat as the major urban center. The population is composed mainly of the following ethnic groups: Aimaks, Tajiks and Pashtuns. These borderlands are generally stable with the exception of Herat, which has occasionally been targeted by the Taliban terrorists. Its transportation infrastructure is underdeveloped. The only parts of the Afghan Ring Road which are still waiting to be constructed are located in the northern parts of these borderlands. Farah is the main opium cultivation center in these borderlands. The literacy rate is almost same as Afghanistan's average.²⁵ Iran is the neighboring country to these borderlands. Although Iran has been occasionally accused by the Afghan authorities of supporting violence in urban areas such as Herat and Kabul, Afghanistan and Iran have achieved pragmatic cooperation over border management

24 Moeed Yusuf, *Decoding Pakistan's 'Strategic Shift' in Afghanistan*, Stockholm: SIPRI, 2013

25 "Strategic Geography" in Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman, eds., *Afghanistan to 2015 and Beyond*, London: IISS, 2011, pp.1-XX.

Although Iran has been occasionally accused by the Afghan authorities of supporting violence in urban areas such as Herat and Kabul, Afghanistan and Iran have achieved pragmatic cooperation over border management issues as well as the fight against drug trafficking.

issues as well as the fight against drug trafficking. These pragmatic bilateral relations and Iran's role in cross-border trade and economies of these borderlands reinforce the expectation that Iran could potentially play a more constructive role in the future.²⁶

Afghanistan's borderlands with the Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as well as China include Badghis, Faryab, Jawzjan, Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan, which are located in the Northern and the North-Eastern parts of Afghanistan, with Mazar-e Sherif and Kunduz as major urban centers. The main ethnic groups of these borderlands include Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmens and Kyrgyz people. Although these borderlands are the most stable of all Afghan regions, there have been terrorist attacks by the Taliban and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Faryab, Balkh and Kunduz regions. These borderlands are

located on the Northern Distribution Network linking Afghanistan and the transportation ports in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Russia and the Baltics. The main center of opium production in this region is Badakhshan. The literacy rate and the schooling levels in these borderlands are slightly higher than Afghanistan's average.²⁷ Since the Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as well as China are the neighboring country to these borderlands, the levels of cooperation between Afghanistan and the neighboring countries are very satisfactory for Kabul. Afghanistan seems to be interested in expanding the scope of the existing cross-border cooperation with these states to include non-security issues, such as trade and energy.²⁸

Overall, Afghanistan's borderlands display diverse characteristics with few commonalities in terms of the sources and levels of security problems, characteristics and policies of the neighboring countries and socio-economic development levels. This diversity and the specific issues of center-periphery relations make the stabilization and development of these borderlands very important. Therefore, it is crucial for Kabul to integrate its borderlands more closely with its ongoing state-building pro-

²⁷ "Strategic Geography" in Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman, eds., *Afghanistan to 2015 and Beyond*, London: IISS, 2011, pp. 1-XX.

²⁸ See Oktay F. Tanrisever, ed., *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11*, Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2013.

²⁶ Bruce Koepke, *Iran's Policy on Afghanistan: The Evolution of Strategic Pragmatism*, Stockholm: SIPRI, 2013.

cess. In this context, it is also essential to discuss the key challenges for the center-periphery relations in the aftermath of the Afghan security transition in 2014.

Challenges for the Center-Periphery Relations in the Aftermath of the Afghan Security Transition in 2014

The Afghan security transition in 2014 is likely to pose significant challenges to the smooth functioning of the center-periphery relations after the ANSF assumes the main responsibility for the security of Afghanistan and the PRTs are transferred to the regional Afghan authorities. Besides, as demonstrated above, the security situation continues to pose a serious problem for the Afghan authorities, especially in the borderlands with Pakistan and to a lesser extent with Iran, despite the enhanced capabilities of ANSF.²⁹ Challenges for the center-periphery relations in the aftermath of the Afghan security transition in 2014 include: firstly, the need to integrate Afghanistan's borderlands into the post-2001 process of state-building more closely through a bottom-up strategy; secondly, the loyalty of regional administrators in the borderlands; thirdly, the financial sustainability of Afghanistan's central and regional administrations; fourth, the need to enhance the military capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF); and finally, the

²⁹ Ben Barry, "The ANSF and the Insurgency" in Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman, eds., *Afghanistan to 2015 and Beyond*, London: IISS, 2011, pp.121-139.

The first major challenge for the center-periphery relations in post-2014 Afghanistan seems to be the need to integrate Afghanistan's borderlands into the central government's process of state-building in the post-2001 period more closely through a bottom-up strategy of political integration, rather than a top-down strategy.

management and security of Afghanistan's borders with all of its neighbors.

The first major challenge for the center-periphery relations in post-2014 Afghanistan seems to be the need to integrate Afghanistan's borderlands into the central government's process of state-building in the post-2001 period more closely through a bottom-up strategy of political integration, rather than a top-down strategy.³⁰ Although this is a very difficult and challenging task, Kabul as the political center could benefit from its successful implementation, as it will consolidate the post-2001 state-building process in the borderlands and in all the peripheral regions in a sustainable manner. In particular, the bottom-up strategy has the advantage of making the central and regional political

³⁰ M. Nazif Shahrani, *Afghanistan's Alternatives for Peace, Governance and Development: Transforming Subjects to Citizens & Rulers to Civil Servants*, Waterloo, Ontario: The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), 2009.

It could be very dangerous if the warlords or former Mujahedeen leaders took control of the regional staff and the capabilities of the ANSF in order to promote their own self-interests.

institutions created by the post-2001 state-building process more effective and responsive to the needs of local communities.³¹ To this purpose, Kabul needs to decentralize socio-political power—but not military power—and share the socio-economic and political power with the loyal political actors in the borderlands in order to accommodate moderate tribal leaders in the provinces without strengthening the position of the radical segments of Taliban.³²

The second most important challenge is the need to gain the loyalty of regional administrators in the borderlands. It is crucial to empower the bureaucrats and politicians, who are affiliated primarily with the Afghan government both in Kabul and the borderland regions. It could be very dangerous if the warlords or former Mujahedeen leaders took control of the regional staff and the capabilities of the ANSF in order to promote their own self-interests. An equally dangerous scenario relates to the possibility that the Afghan warlords and former

31 Lucy Morgan Edwards, "State-Building in Afghanistan: A Case Showing the Limits?", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 92 No. 880, December 2010, pp. 967-991.

32 Amin Tarzi, "Recalibrating the Afghan Reconciliation Program", *Prism*, 2011, Vol.1, No.1, pp.67-78.

Mujahedeen develop closer ties with the neighboring countries, above all Pakistan and Iran. This could considerably weaken the central power and create a risk of territorial fragmentation into fiefdoms and potentially independent smaller states.³³ Although this is a very unlikely scenario, it could definitely multiply the security risks for the entire region around Afghanistan. In this sense, the upcoming elections in Afghanistan will be decisive in redefining the composition of the central and regional elites in Afghanistan.³⁴

Until the Afghan government achieves its financial sustainability, it is likely to ask for external financial assistance from major donor countries.

The third important challenge is the financial sustainability of Afghanistan's central and regional administrations, which requires solid tax revenues for the state budget. Unfortunately, Afghanistan's ability to collect taxes is very limited due to the fact that its economy is not based on industrial or agricultural production, aside from the opium cultivation. Although the opium cultivation is a lucrative business for the criminal net-

33 Antonio Giustozzi, "War and Peace Economies of Afghanistan's Strongmen", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2007, pp 75-89.

34 Kevin Sieff, "Ahead of Afghan Elections, Warlords and Bureaucrats Prepare Campaigns", *The Washington Post*, 6 October 2013

works, it does not constitute a reliable tax base for the Afghan government for its central and regional expenditures. Until the Afghan government achieves its financial sustainability, it is likely to ask for external financial assistance from major donor countries. However, the ongoing global financial crisis makes this even more unlikely, due to the need for financial resources for the economic recovery of the donor countries themselves.³⁵

The fourth challenge is the need to enhance the military capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in maintaining the strength of the political center vis-à-vis all regional rivals in the security dimension and in ensuring the security of the borderlands. It seems that the ANSF will continue to need more training and military equipment in order to cope with the security challenges in the Afghanistan's borderlands with Pakistan. Although NATO is expected to provide more training to ANSF as part of its planned follow-on mission in Afghanistan ("Resolute Support"), NATO does not seem to be prepared to equip the ANSF with such sophisticated weapons systems, due to the risk that they may be captured by the terrorists or warlords in future. This makes the challenge even more complex.³⁶

³⁵ Nekia Lane, *Economics of Self-Sustainability: The Future of Afghanistan's Economy*, Kabul: The Civil-Military Fusion Centre (CMFC), August 2013

³⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Uncertain Role of the ANSF in Transition: Establishing Real World Criteria and Metrics*, Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies

Last but not least is the challenge of the management and security of Afghanistan's borders with all of its neighbors, particularly Pakistan and Iran. This is a very important challenge for Kabul, since it requires the cooperation of very reluctant neighbors. In this respect, Kabul could request the members of international community to encourage these "reluctant neighbors" to contribute to Afghanistan's security more constructively. Afghanistan's neighbors could even think about creating a regional cooperation organization, with the inclusion of major global powers such as the United States and the European Union after the successful realization of the Afghan security transition in 2014.³⁷

Conclusion

To conclude, the developments in the borderlands of Afghanistan are likely to play a decisive role in the politics of center-periphery relations in the aftermath of the Afghan security transition. Compared with the central regions, these Afghan borderlands could also have a greater impact on both Afghanistan's domestic politics in Kabul and also on Afghanistan's relations with neighboring countries.

Among Afghanistan's borderlands, the borderlands with Pakistan are likely to remain the most vulnerable

(CSIS), 2013.

³⁷ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Securing, Stabilizing and Developing Pakistan's Border Area with Afghanistan*, Washington DC: GAO, 2009.

in terms of security. These borderlands have already been destabilized by Pakistan-based terrorist and insurgency groups. This trend seems unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. However, the process of democratization in Pakistan and the increasing influence of business elites could limit the destabilizing activities of the Pakistan-based groups.

Unlike the borderlands with Pakistan, the borderlands with Iran have a considerable potential to develop into stable zones of economic development in the foreseeable future if the ongoing dialogue between the United States and Iran yields tangible results for promoting pragmatic cooperation. Iran has its own self-interest in curtailing the growth of Taliban-type radical movements along its own borders.

Among the borderlands of Afghanistan, the borderlands with the Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as well as China have the most realistic prospects for becoming secure and stable zones of socio-economic development with opportunities for cross-border cooperation in the foreseeable future. In fact, trade between Afghanistan and the energy-rich Central Asian economies could also flourish in the near future too. This could contribute to the socio-economic development of not only these borderlands, but also the rest of Afghanistan.

All in all, Kabul as the political center of Afghanistan faces the challenge of accommodating its borderlands by strengthening its influence in these peripheral areas, as well as weakening the centripetal influences of the neighboring states, above all Pakistan and Iran, in Afghanistan's borderlands. Despite these challenges, there is a strong basis for a cautious optimism concerning the capacity of Afghanistan's new bureaucratic elites to attract the loyalty of the borderlands to the political center in Kabul.

Commentaries

*Afghanistan and
Its Future*

*Iran's
Afghanistan
Policy: Security
Parameters*

Afghanistan and Its Future*

Hikmet Çetin**

The Afghan people, and particularly the younger generation, want to leave the past behind them and look to the future. But for Afghanistan, any vision of a viable future depends on the achievement of security, peace and stability after 2014. In this regard, there are a number of critical steps that have yet to be taken.

Afghanistan was established as an independent state in 1748. But given its location along routes frequently used as thoroughfares for various waves of migration, it repeatedly faced occupation. In the 19th century in particular, it became a virtual buffer zone between the Russians to the north and the British Empire to the south. But it was in the 20th century that Afghanistan experienced its greatest national tragedies. In the 28 years between the military coup of 1973 and the international intervention in 2001, the country underwent coups, internal conflicts, struggles for power, and Soviet occupation. As a result, the country's infrastructure, institutions and establishments all collapsed.

* This article was first published in the November 2013 issue of *Analist* journal (www.usakanalist.com), in Turkish. *Caucasus International* is grateful to the editorial board of *Analist* for their reprinting permission.

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The Afghan people suffered greatly; during this period nearly 1.5 million Afghans perished and a further six million migrated to other countries, chiefly Pakistan and Iran.

In 1989, after a decade of war and occupation, the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan under the terms of an agreement. But then the *mujahideen*, who had formerly collaborated to fight the Soviets as a unified force turned against one another in a brutal struggle for power. International public opinion, particularly in the Western world, remained indifferent, essentially abandoning the country to its fate. Then in 1994, the Taliban, taking advantage of the weakened authority, internal struggles and the atmosphere of insecurity, gradually rolled out a government from Kandahar. By 1996 it had brought the entire country under its power. The Soviet withdrawal had not just resulted in the rise of the Taliban; Afghanistan became a virtual free zone for various terrorists and their training camps, religious radicals, jihadists, drugs, and organized crime. Afghanistan remained out of the international spotlight until the 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

Afghanistan and 9/11

September 11th 2001 marked a new era for Afghanistan. Once the attacks were attributed to the Afghanistan-based terrorist organisation al-Qaeda, a U.S.-led coalition acting on a UN

Security Council resolution staged a military intervention in the country. This military intervention removed the Taliban from government and destroyed the terrorist camps. In addition to the U.S.-led invasion force, the International Security and Aid Force (ISAF) was created by another UN Security Council Resolution, tasked with providing security, initially in Kabul and throughout virtually the entire country.

9/11 can be considered a milestone not only for Afghanistan, but also for NATO, marking the first application of Article Five of the Washington Agreement in the organization's history. The day after the 9/11 attacks, the North Atlantic Council met and agreed that 9/11 had activated the conditions of Article Five, which provides for collective self-defence action in the face of an armed attack. Thus, NATO members were called to contribute to ISAF. In line with the resolution and the call, Turkey too sent troops to Afghanistan and assumed ISAF command from 2003 onwards.

The twelve-year process and beyond

Twelve years have passed since the creation of the U.S.-led coalition and the NATO intervention. During this period, states and international organisations and institutions have given their support to Afghanistan. They have contributed to building peace, security, and stability, and to the reso-

lution of the country's socio-economic problems. Successes have been observed in a good many areas, but no lasting solution has been found to the problem of terror. Peace, security, and stability have not been achieved.

A long-term solution to Afghanistan's security issues requires the creation of a national security force (i.e. an army and police force). This issue has been a priority during the 12-year conflict, and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), which has nearly 352,000 members, is now capable of assuming responsibility. Regardless of the significance of this advance, it remains the case that there are still significant deficiencies and problems regarding military and police training, vehicles, and equipment.

During this period, there have been important developments in the field of education. For example the number of students in primary level education has reached eight million. But more importantly, a significant number of these are girls, who previously were prevented from going to school by the Taliban. There have also been important investments and major progress in the areas of health, transportation, electricity, water, and other infrastructural spheres. Nearly five million refugees have returned to Afghanistan. A constitution has been drafted and presidential elections have been held for the first time in Afghanistan's history. But despite all these developments,

the priority for Kabul remains the as yet unresolved problems of terrorism and security. Cutting against this is the issue that Afghanistan, one of the world's poorest countries, has not received sufficient international aid to boost the economy.

The international forces, the U.S. and NATO, will leave the country in 2014. This year will be a vital and critical one for Afghanistan's future. The country's security problems will be inherited by the ANSF, and the post-2014 NATO and American military presence will only provide back-up, training, and consultative functions. After 2015, the plan is for ISAF to be replaced by "Resolute Support", a new non-combat NATO mission to provide training, back-up, and consultancy. The bilateral security agreements between the U.S. and Afghanistan stipulate that a combat force of around 10,000 will be stationed there alongside the training and consultative mission.

Further, 2014 will also be important for Afghanistan because presidential elections are scheduled to take place. According to the Constitution, Hamid Karzai cannot run for a third term and consequently a new president must be elected. It will not be easy to find a candidate who can secure a broad consensus; already 17 applicants for candidacy. Karzai's support will therefore be decisive in selecting a new president. The same year will witness the Provincial Council

election, which are similar to local government elections. Given the previous election experience, it is likely that these elections will be conducted peacefully.

To conclude, ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan after 2014 requires decisions to be made and steps to be taken on certain critical matters.

(1) In terms of economic and social indicators, Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. In recent years, it has struggled with inadequate foreign aid. Furthermore, when the U.S. prioritized Iraq, it tried to solve the Afghanistan problem with too few soldiers and too little economic assistance. From now on it will be necessary to consider the socio-economic conditions in Afghanistan and guarantee continued economic aid for many years to come;

(2) Along with training, Afghanistan's security forces should be provided with equipment, vehicles, and supplies;

(3) It is plain that lasting solutions to the problem of terror cannot be achieved through military measures alone. Political measures are also required. Thus a compromise within a framework of clear principles must be reached with the Taliban. The peace process needs to be accelerated, with Afghanistan taking responsibility and providing the lead;

(4) Regional cooperation, and in par-

ticular cooperation with neighbouring countries and Pakistan, is extremely important in order to achieve security and stability in Afghanistan.

If these measures are taken, it will be possible for Afghanistan and the Afghan people, who have lived under the shadow of war, foreign occupation, and instability since 1973, to attain peace and stability. Afghans, and particularly the new generation of young people are committed to building a future. For this reason Afghanistan, the Afghan people, and in particular Afghan women need international support, solidarity, and assistance more than ever before.

Iran's Afghanistan Policy: Security Parameters*

Eyüp Ersoy**

The U.S. has been gradually decreasing the number of its combat troops in Afghanistan and continuing negotiations with the Karzai administration on the timing and terms of the complete withdrawal from the country. Although the parties have not yet reached full agreement on these questions, they have agreed that the troop presence will be considerably reduced by the end of 2014. Iran is keen to lead those countries that will need to reshape their policies toward Afghanistan in the post-2014 period, depending on the changing conditions in the country.

Iran's major parameters in relation to its strategy during as well as after the U.S. invasion in Afghanistan are its threat perceptions and the security precautions developed in response to those threat perceptions. Consequently, it is crucial to extensively analyze the security parameters that constitute the foundations and framework of Iran's Afghanistan policy.

* This article was first published in the November 2013 issue of *Analist* journal (www.usakanalist.com), in Turkish. *Caucasus International* is grateful to the editorial board of *Analist* for their reprinting permission.

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A close opponent, a distant opponent, and a distant opponent getting closer

The Iranian regime has two opponents in Afghanistan at present: the U.S. and the Taliban. As an example of strategic pragmatism, Iran supported the U.S., the distant opponent, in its struggle against the Taliban, the close opponent, during the early phases of the U.S. invasion in Afghanistan. For instance, the Iran administration reached an agreement with U.S. on preventing Al-Qaeda terrorists from escaping over its borders, allowing U.S. soldiers who were forced to cross Iranian borders during the invasion to return freely, encouraging its allies in the Northern Alliance to support the U.S. against the Taliban, and cooperating with Pakistan (against which Tehran has struggled for influence in Afghanistan) in support of a new administration in Kabul. Nevertheless, the continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan after the Taliban means that the distant opponent is getting closer, generating Iran's first security parameter in relation to its policy on Afghanistan.

The Iranian leadership sees the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan as part of Washington's strategy to surround Iran, and perceives the existence of permanent U.S. bases in Afghanistan as a particular threat. For instance, according to Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamanei, the existence of these permanent bases constitutes a threat, because real security in Af-

ghanistan is impossible as long as Washington keeps its military forces in the country. The major source of concern for Iran is the Shindand air base in the Herat province of Afghanistan. Located on the main road between Herat and Kandahar, Shindand Airbase is 120 km from the Iranian border and the second largest military base in Afghanistan. Iran is anxious about the potential for its use by the U.S. troops in operations hostile to Iran, particularly intelligence gathering activities.

The second factor considered by Iran in determining its Afghanistan policy is the position and role of the Taliban in Afghanistan's political and social life. For the Iranian administration, the Taliban's rise to power has posed the most serious threat to national security since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Moreover, the killing ten Iranian diplomats working at the Iranian Consulate in Mazar-i Sharif in August 1998 by the Taliban almost sparked a war between Iran and Afghanistan. The real threat for Iran is the mentality the Taliban represents, and the political and social order it imposes rather than its military force. Iranian social scientists have named this mentality *Talibanism*, considering it to be the most serious "ideological threat" to Iran. At this point it should be noted that in branding *Talibanism* as a threat to its values, Iran's perception of the origins of the primary ideological threats has shifted from the West to the East.

For example, according to Ali Ümidi from Isfahan University, Talibanism is a conservative, totalitarian and fascist narration of Islam that completely rejects the religious and political doctrines of Shia Islam that are practiced in Iran. Moreover, Emir M. Hacı-Yusufi from Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran believes that the Taliban is "a terrorist group which reflects an unrealistic and fake description" of Islam. He argues that this group is also anti-Iranian; thus, it targets not only the "religious" but the also the "Iranian" aspects of Iran. Finally, Ibrahim Abbasi from Isfahan University suggests that the spread of the Taliban's Salafi/Wahhabi Islamic views among Sunnis and especially the Sunni Beluch may generate "a critical threat against Iran's national identity and territorial integrity".

The third security parameter determining Iran's Afghanistan policy is the Afghanistan policy pursued by Pakistan, Iran's main rival for regional influence. From the perspective of the Iranian administration, Pakistan's rapidly diminishing influence in Afghanistan following the overthrow of the Taliban is a positive development, in light of the fact that Pakistan is one of the three countries around the world which recognizes the Taliban administration. During the post invasion era, the primary goal of Iran's security policy will be to restrict the influence and activities of Pakistan and its Afghan allies on the political and social life of Afghanistan.

Stability in Afghanistan, stability in Iran?

The determinant of Iran's Afghanistan policy is the chronic political and social instability in Afghanistan. In addition to the security parameters mentioned above, this instability has generated two crucial security threats for Iran. Firstly, the long term instability has caused large waves of mass migration from Afghanistan to Iran; Iran currently has about three million Afghan refugees, of which one million are official and two million are unofficial. This situation continues to cause problems, crucially, security threats and economic, social and legal issues. Secondly, the instability in Afghanistan has created a serious drug trafficking problem for the Iranian administration. Iran is one of the major transit routes for global drug trafficking originating in Afghanistan. Among other negative consequences, more than 4000 police officers have lost their lives during the struggle against drug trafficking since 1979. Moreover, drug addiction has risen to significant levels in Iran, and the flow of drugs from Afghanistan has led to over one million drug addicts in Iran, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Following from this analysis, Iran's policies on Afghanistan will be shaped by its security parameters. The threat that Afghanistan poses against Iran derives mainly from the instability in the country. The Iranian administration can be expected to support sta-

bility in Afghanistan in the post-2014 period, or at least to prefer "a stable instability", considering Tehran's other interests and goals.

Notes for Contributors

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