

# Evolving Situation in Afghanistan: Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries



Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI)



Hansa Sehidi Foundation (HSF)

# **Evolving Situation in Afghanistan: Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries**

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Conference speakers who were unable to provide manuscripts, but whose views were critical to the Conference include Dr Mujeeb Afzal, Assistant Professor, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-e-Azam University, Pakistan; Ms Farhana Asif, Director, (Afghanistan), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan; and Mr Mohsen Roohi-sefat, Director South and West Asia Studies, Institute for Political and International Studies, Iran.

We are also thankful to the scholars and students who participated in the Conference, as well as the print and electronic media for providing this event coverage.

The successful completion of the Conference owes much to the efforts and logistical support provided by the IPRI staff, including the stage secretary Ms Aymen Ijaz. Finally, our gratitude goes to all those whom it would not be possible to thank individually for their help in making the Conference a success. ■

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ISLAMABAD POLICY  
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# International Conference Evolving Situation in Afghanistan: Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries

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Serena Hotel, Islamabad



## Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
ALP	Local Afghan Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANUG	Afghan National Unity Government
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AQ	Al-Qaeda
CAREC	Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation
CASA 1000	Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project
CASAREM	Central Asia – South Asia Regional Electricity Market
CBMs	Confidence Building Measures
CBD	Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Area
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HeI	Hizb-e-Islami
HPC	High Peace Council
HoA-IP	Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process
IS	Islamic State
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (Syria)
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
KPK	Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa
LDC	Least Developed Countries
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NA	Northern Alliance
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Directorate of Security
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OBOR	One Belt and One Road
OZA	Operation Zarb-e-Azb
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAFRON	State and Frontier Regions
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for the Afghan Reconstruction
SOFA	Status-of-Forces Agreement
TI	Transparency International
QCG	Quadrilateral Coordination Group
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

## Preface

**Ambassador (R) Sohail Amin,  
Sobia Paracha and Asiya Mahar**

This book is based on the papers presented at the two-day international Conference on ‘Evolving Situation in Afghanistan: Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries’ organised by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) in collaboration with Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), Islamabad, on May 18-19, 2016 at Serena Hotel, Islamabad. The Conference, comprised of four working sessions in addition to inaugural and concluding sessions, helped in initiating a timely and informed debate on the subject and suggested plausible recommendations for policy-makers.

The UN Security Council Resolution 1368 unanimously adopted on September 12, 2001 condemned the September 11 attacks on the United States and called on ‘all countries to cooperate in bringing the perpetrators, organisers and sponsors of the attacks to justice and that those responsible for supporting or harbouring the perpetrators, organisers and sponsors would be held accountable.’ The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established in 2001 for this purpose and Pakistan assisted this force by providing land and air passage. Later, the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO) took over the command of ISAF and Pakistan was also declared a major Non-NATO ally by the Bush Administration. In the process of the U.S.-led War against Terror, Pakistan rendered huge sacrifices in terms of human casualties and economic losses. According to report titled ‘War Related Death, Injury, and Displacement in Afghanistan and Pakistan 2001-2014’ issued by the Costs of War Project at Brown University’s Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, at least 21,500 civilians were killed in Pakistan between 2001 and 2014. Pakistan has also suffered a total loss of U.S. \$107 billion during these last fourteen years as a result of the war, with U.S.\$4.53 billion loss in the outgoing fiscal year, according to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2014-15.

President Bush had declared that the U.S. had strategic interests and a moral responsibility towards a stable and secure Afghanistan. Later, as a part of the U.S. counterterrorism strategy, President Obama came up with a more pragmatic and limited mission for Afghanistan i.e. ‘to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda and its safe havens in the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan.’ Now, Osama Bin Laden is dead and the Ayman al-Zawahiri-led international *jihād* (holy war) of Al-Qaeda has been considerably weakened in Afghanistan and they have shifted their focus towards the Middle East.

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Unfortunately, Afghanistan, as a state remains structurally weak and chronically dependent on outside support in military, political and economic terms. The Pentagon has warned recently that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) is 'operationally active' in Afghanistan and is fighting the Taliban for the establishment of a safe haven for itself. Afghanistan after fifteen years of counterterrorism operations still remains vulnerable to terrorism.

An important question, therefore, is after the withdrawal of the U.S.-NATO forces, will the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) have the capacity to provide adequate security, even in the short-term? There are weaknesses in the ANSF, which make them dependent on operational support of foreign forces. The takeover of Kunduz in 2015 by the Taliban manifested their vulnerabilities. In the face of new threats like emergence of the ISIS, the ANSF will continue to depend upon external support; in financial and training terms. In its current shape, it would be unrealistic to expect the ANSF to pressurise the Taliban and inflict unbearable losses on them; and to help bring the latter to the negotiating table.

Militarily, Pakistan's Operation Zarb-e-Azb to root out terrorists and their sanctuaries in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has been a success. However, the cooperation of Afghanistan is essential to eliminate the Pakistani Taliban's safe havens there. It is imperative for the two nations to make coordinated efforts to fight terrorism.

Being a major stakeholder in Afghanistan's peace and stability, Pakistan has been supportive of an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process with the Taliban. Stability in Afghanistan is necessary for economic development of both the countries. The success of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) also depends, inter alia, on a stable security situation in Afghanistan. A peaceful Afghanistan can ensure regional stability and economic integration.

Like Pakistan, major world powers and the regional countries also have stakes in the peace and stability of Afghanistan. In this regard, the on-going efforts of the U.S., Afghanistan, Pakistan and China are encouraging. Mutually supportive policies of the major powers and the regional countries would be required to achieve the goal of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

This book contains ten of the papers and essays which were presented at the Conference. It is organised into two parts. The first part includes the welcome address by Ambassador (R) Sohail Amin, *President IPRI*; opening remarks by Mr Kristof W. Duwaerts, *Resident Representative HSF*; inaugural address by the Chief Guest, Abdul Qadir Baloch, *Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Government of Pakistan*; and the concluding address by Lt. General (R) Nasir Khan Janjua, *National Security Advisor, Government of Pakistan*. The second part consists of the papers and thought

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pieces presented at the Conference. This Preface provides a brief summary of the proceedings.

In Session I, Mr Rahimullah Yousafzai, Resident Editor, The News, spoke on *Conceptualisation of Peace: Framework for Political Reconciliation in Afghanistan*. He said that there was no magic concept to make peace in Afghanistan as the conflict was old and complex due to involvement of state as well as non-state actors. While highlighting the positions of various parties to the Afghan conflict he said that Afghan scenario was ‘primarily a waiting game’, each actor was waiting for the other to make a move. He elaborated this point in detail and said that the Afghan Government has been waiting for the Taliban to weaken; United States has been waiting for Pakistan to take action against the Haqqani Network; while the Taliban have been waiting for a change of government in the United States. He said that the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) faced many challenges and among them the most important challenge had been Taliban’s launch of the spring offensive called ‘Omari’ on April 12, 2016. He identified the Kabul attacks as the most dangerous ones, resulting in more than seventy casualties. He stated that in response to Taliban’s offensive, the Afghan Government had launched counter offensive in fifteen provinces of Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. He observed that the QCG mechanism with four member states held the key to make peace in Afghanistan, therefore, all sides needed to be realistic while adopting pragmatic approach.

Dr Abdulbaqi Amin, Director, Centre for Strategic and Regional Studies, Kabul, Afghanistan spoke on *Current Security Situation in Afghanistan: Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and Emerging Challenges*. He discussed the security situation in Afghanistan and said that United States intervention in Afghanistan was the reaction of 9/11 attacks. He recognised that till 2005, people were optimistic about the future of Afghanistan; but since 2006, the security situation had been deteriorating in South and East Afghanistan, particularly after the fall of Kunduz in 2015 which had further exposed the precarious security situation. He highlighted the consequences of conflict in Eastern Afghanistan where people suffered from lack of healthcare facilities, education and economic opportunities. He identified that drug production had always been a challenge not only for Afghanistan, but for neighbouring countries as well. While looking at the causes of the conflict, he identified the ideological and political conflict between Communists and *Mujahedeen* who had rejected each other’s ideology. He also mentioned that presence of the U.S. forces that had further complicated the conflict dynamics. He said that Afghan people had recognised that war was not a solution to the problems and the continuation of the conflict was not in any party’s interest. He highlighted some

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challenges in reaching a resolution: first, lack of a trusted mediator in Afghan conflict; second, contradictory role of Pakistan regarding presence of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan (to enhance economic benefits, it supports U.S. presence in Afghanistan, otherwise Pakistan considers U.S. presence in Afghanistan detrimental to its interests); third, he identified U.S. policy regarding the peace process as problematic, as U.S. had been advocating intra-Afghan talks while itself holding secret talks with the Taliban.

Mr Haroun Mir, Founder of Afghanistan's Center for Research and Policy Studies, Kabul, Afghanistan spoke on *Socio-Economic Problems of Afghanistan: Minimising the Human Cost of War* and said that Afghanistan had its own socio-economic structures to maintain stability and security. He outlined that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan destroyed traditional socio-economic structures, which led to large-scale exodus of Afghan people to other states, and made it dependent on foreign assistance. He shared that the Taliban regime in Kabul had been heavily dependent on Al-Qaeda's financial support; and highlighted that during 2001-14, Afghanistan had been going through economic progress owing to economic assistance from donor countries and its GDP rate reached eight per cent. However, post - 2014, due to the transition process, Afghanistan's economy had been facing major challenges with the lowest GDP rate (one per cent). He said that Afghanistan is at an important junction of history and regional states should assist it in reaching peace. He stated that Afghanistan needed to resolve its differences with Pakistan and at the same time, there was need to develop political support for Pakistan within the country.

Ambassador (R) Aziz Ahmed Khan, former High Commissioner of Pakistan to Afghanistan and India, chaired this session of the Conference and pointed out that Afghanistan was passing through a difficult phase of history, but there had been some positive developments as well. He referred to state- building process in Afghanistan and said that despite threats of violence, the voter turnout during 2014's elections had been 60 per cent with overwhelming participation of women in the political process. He argued that awareness of women had increased and they now show a greater desire for change. He said that along with a firm response to deal with insurgency, there was need to bring insurgents into the political process. He identified that the responsibility to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan depended on Afghans themselves.

In Session II, Mr Khalid Aziz, former Chief Secretary, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, spoke on the *Significance of Stability in Afghanistan for Pakistan* and said that regional geography had been pushing governments into strategic policy-making. He said that Britain had created a buffer in the form of Afghanistan, while a second buffer was created in the North West of British India. He said that Pakistan inherited the North Western buffer

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zone and had been looking after it without resources that were available to British India. He highlighted the historical, religious and cultural linkages between the two states. He said that since 9/11, U.S. has spent U.S.\$109 billion dollars in Afghanistan, a sum that was higher than the Marshall Plan that comprised assistance of U.S.\$106 billion dollars to European allies. He highlighted the economic as well as human losses of Pakistan during the time (2001-14). He suggested that the issue of talks should be handled bilaterally between the Afghan Government and the Taliban because the issue belongs to Afghanistan. He said that stability in Afghanistan would be significant for Pakistan as it would diffuse the fire of extremism and radicalism in our country and would bring security to South Punjab, Balochistan and FATA region.

Dr Mujeeb Afzal, Assistant Professor, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-e-Azam University, spoke on *Role of India in Afghanistan*. He said that for India, Afghanistan had been a source of threat and an opportunity to build politico-military relations to undermine Pakistan's security interests. He identified that Indian strategy in Afghanistan had been to build local and regional alliances, to enhance people-to-people contacts and to initiate strategic competition with Pakistan at a moderate level. He highlighted that initially there was Moscow-Kabul-Delhi alliance that was changed into Washington-Kabul-Delhi alliance during the Taliban regime. He said that India invited Afghan elite and upper middle class to reside and get education in India to build a favourable view about India. He stated that Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi supported the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan because she had domestic alliance with the Communist Party of India, depended on Soviet weaponry and considered Soviet presence in the area as a counter-balance to the Pakistan-China alliance. He said that during the Taliban regime, Pakistan got more opportunities in Afghanistan than India, but 9/11 proved a blessing for India. India's Strategic Partnership Agreement with Afghanistan and training and capacity building projects for Afghan forces are important maneuvers. He also talked about India's use of soft power in Afghanistan in the form of infrastructure development projects, establishment of healthcare facilities and offering more than a thousand educational scholarships to university level students. However, he was the view that despite all this, India's role in Afghanistan had been a partial success story to project itself as a benign regional power.

Ms Farhana Asif, Director (Afghanistan), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, spoke on *Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process: Progress and Prospects* and said that the Process was an initiative of Afghanistan and Turkey to foster regional cooperation and connectivity. She briefly enumerated the ministerial conferences held since 2011. She

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identified that the Heart of Asia initiative was an Afghan-centred process exclusively focused on Afghanistan. According to her, the biggest strength of this process was that it was an Afghan-led process that could ensure peace and economic progress. She identified the challenges that Process had been facing given the complexity of the Afghan situation, insufficient organisational support and funding and the lack of progress in conversion of a conceptual framework into tangible results.

The session chair Major General Noel Israel Khokhar in his remarks said that Pakistan had been pursuing a policy of non-intervention and no favouritism in Afghanistan. He highlighted that two processes had been simultaneously in progress in Afghanistan: the process of stability that had a security dimension; and the process of development that had an indirect security element. As regards stability, the process has been initiated in the form of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), and its slow pace has given rise to suspicions and distrust. He said that the QCG process needed to be strengthened along with other regional initiatives such as Pakistan-Iran dialogue process as well as India-Pakistan dialogue process. He agreed that the Heart of Asia was a dynamic process to achieve peace and stability. He suggested that the two processes (QCG and HoA) should complement each other.

In the third session, Dr Vanda Felbab-Brown, Senior Fellow, Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Security and Intelligence in the Foreign Policy Program, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., spoke on *The Afghanisation Challenge: U.S. Troop Withdrawal and the Stability of Afghanistan*. She talked about two developments that reinforced the U.S. decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan: the growing influence of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in different parts of Syria and Iraq; and the fraudulent 2014 presidential election which ignited an intense and prolonged political crisis in Afghanistan. While talking about NATO's Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, she highlighted a shift in NATO's operational strategy from offensive counterinsurgency operations to training and advising of Afghan forces. She said that given the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, the U.S. forces in Afghanistan had once again engaged in limited direct offensive operations against the Taliban. She talked about the political situation of Afghanistan and said that Afghanistan's politics remained fractious and polarised due to various challenges, including the upcoming parliamentary and district elections in October 2016; the formation of a possible constitutional *Loya Jirga* in the fall of 2016 to formalise or undo the power-sharing deal between President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah. She feared that disagreements over the future power-sharing formula might enhance

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ethnic rivalries in Afghanistan and create formidable challenges for the Afghan National Security Forces.

Dr Petr Topychkanov, Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Moscow Center, presented his paper on *Russia's Interests and Potential to Contribute towards Peace and Reconciliation in Afghanistan*. He said that a peaceful and stable Afghanistan was in Russia's interest. He highlighted that Russia did not favour any particular ethnic group, but it could work with any leader in Kabul and maintain ties with any regional or ethnic group as long as they did not engage in activities directed against the Russian Federation. Analysing Russia's threat perception in the context of Afghanistan's security situation, he stated that Afghanistan did not currently pose a direct military threat to Russia, nor would it pose such a threat in the foreseeable future, but its instability could indirectly affect Russia through its allies and neighbouring states of Central Asia who were members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which might face an influx of refugees, an upsurge in Islamic extremism, drug trafficking, and trans-border crimes. He highlighted Russian concerns over its exclusion from Western assistance programmes for Afghanistan and suggested that the U.S. and NATO must revisit their decision to curtail cooperation with Russia, regarding Afghanistan as Afghanistan should not be made a hostage of the situation in Eastern Europe. He concluded that if the West resumed its cooperation with Russia, the consolidated response to security threats in Afghanistan would be far more effective than the current disjointed efforts by various countries. In this context, a coordinated policy formulated by external powers would also contribute to Afghanistan's political stability. The lack of such a policy would only lead to the escalation of internal political strife and Kabul's weakness in face of security threats.

Dr Wang Xu, Executive Deputy Director, Center for South Asian Studies, Peking University, Beijing, discussed *Cooperation between China and Pakistan on the Afghan Issue*. He said that the post-2014 withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan showed the lesser importance of Afghanistan for U.S.-NATO allies. He said that Afghanistan had become a regional issue, rather than remaining a top agenda at the global level. He stated that Afghanistan's peace was directly related to the region's stability and prosperity and in this regard, China and Pakistan had been enhancing their cooperation to promote the reconciliation process for a comprehensive political solution of the Afghan issue. He said that China valued Pakistan's unique role in Afghanistan, and stood ready to make joint efforts to push the peace and reconciliation process forward. He highlighted that China welcomed the positive efforts made by Pakistan and Afghanistan to improve their bilateral relations, while supporting an Afghan-led and

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Afghan-owned reconciliation process. He suggested that China should back efforts made by Pakistan and Afghanistan to promote their ties, strategic trust and mutually beneficial cooperation so that regional counterterrorism mechanisms within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization could be activated and the cooperation on intelligence and information sharing, equipment assistance, joint training and holding of exercises could be enhanced.

Mr Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry, Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, while chairing the session, said that Pakistan had a vital stake in peace and stability in Afghanistan. Without a stable Afghanistan, the security challenges facing Pakistan could not be effectively addressed. He emphasised that for an effective control of cross-border terrorism, strengthening of border controls to regulate movements across the border, was vital. He stressed the need for a positive response from the Afghan Government regarding effective border management. He further stated that Pakistan had been engaged in sincere and consistent efforts for promoting peace and reconciliation through an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace. Pakistan believes that a politically negotiated settlement remained a viable option. In 2015, Pakistan facilitated direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban in Murree. Unfortunately, the talks were scuttled. He pointed out that vested interests had often tried to create the perception that Pakistan controlled the Taliban. Such an impression raised unrealistic expectations from Pakistan. Mr Ahmed further pointed out that negative statements about Pakistan emanating from Afghanistan tended to impede constructive bilateral engagement. Pakistan as a policy had continued to show restraint in responding to such negative remarks. Pakistan believes that President Ghani and the Afghan National Unity Government genuinely want intra-Afghan reconciliation. However, there was need for a more unified and coherent message from Kabul in favour of peace and reconciliation with the Taliban. He further added that Pakistan, Afghanistan, the U.S., and China were also making efforts for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan through intra-Afghan reconciliation. Pakistan believes that the dream of an inter-connected and economically integrated region cannot be realised without a peaceful Afghanistan.

In Session IV, Dr Zubair Iqbal, Adjunct Scholar, Middle East Institute, Washington, D.C, deliberated upon *Stakes and Role of Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan*. He identified a fundamental change in Saudi foreign policy towards Afghanistan after 9/11 attacks. He highlighted a number of factors such as regional strategic objectives, religious affiliations and support for global allies such as the U.S., which evolved and shaped Saudi Arabia's role in Afghanistan. He elaborated that Afghanistan became less

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important in shaping Saudi Arabia's foreign policy because new Saudi foreign policy became Middle East-centric. He stated that Saudi Arabia's relations with Afghanistan were subject to developments in the Middle East. He outlined that political changes induced by the Arab Spring, Iran's emergence as a determined competitor for regional influence, lower oil prices and its impact on Saudi economy called for a rebalancing of domestic and external objectives. These developments had required a major reorientation of Saudi foreign policy with a likely reduction in Saudi Arabia's economic assistance to Afghanistan at a time when political and security challenges in that country had increased, economic growth had slowed down sharply, and governance had weakened, he added. Explaining post 9/11, Saudi Arabia's role in Afghanistan, he said that in 2008, Saudi Arabia initiated a round of peace negotiations hoping that the initiative would not only bring together the Taliban and the Afghan Government, but also encourage Pakistan and other regional partners to become more active in resolving regional issues to enhance regional stability. It had also, crucially, required the Taliban to break off relations with Al-Qaeda. Besides, this strategy was also driven by a wider regional objective of containing Iranian influence in Afghanistan by bolstering the unity of the fellow Sunni community. He said that the initiative failed due to Saudi Arabia's limited influence on the Taliban leadership. He said that given this abortive attempt in 2008, Saudi Arabia was unlikely to take a lead in bringing together the warring parties in Afghanistan again, rather it now supports regional initiatives to hold talks. He suggested that durable Saudi-Afghanistan relations would require deepening of presently limited economic interdependence between the two countries. In this context, increased trade between them and the employment of Afghan expatriate workers in Saudi Arabia could not only help to develop an alternative and a more durable source of income for Afghanistan, it could also develop a constituency in that country that could support Saudi initiative for peace.

Mr Mohsen Rohi-Sefat, Director South and West Asia Studies, Institute for Political and International Studies, Tehran, discussed the *Niches of Iranian Engagement in Afghanistan*. He said that Iran had high stakes in the stability of Afghanistan and wanted to play a constructive role like it played during the Bonn Conference in late 2001. He stated that due to the persistent instability in Afghanistan, the country had been a battlefield for the big powers to flex their muscles against Al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban. Highlighting Iran's concerns, he said that Iran shared a 900km insecure border with Afghanistan, which posed a security threat. Besides, Pakistan-Iran share a common concern over the insurgency and extremism in the country which were being supported by arms and funds from other international and regional actors. Projecting Iran's soft power in

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Afghanistan, he stated that Iran not only spent U.S.\$ five hundred million for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, but also extended education facilities to Afghan students. He was of the view that the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan had been contributing to extremism in the region. He suggested that the rehabilitation of Afghanistan, combating terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking, pursuing an Afghan friendly peace process should be the main tasks of all major powers and the Kabul Government, with the U.S. playing a lead role.

Mr Orhan Gafarli, an analyst on Russian and Caucasus Region from the Ankara Policy Center, Turkey, deliberated on the *Multi-Faceted Linkages between Afghanistan and Central Asian States*. He discussed how Central Asian countries had their own approaches and perspectives towards and about Afghanistan. However, most of the policy-level decisions regarding this country were taken under the e Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization frameworks. While these countries also had bilateral relations in the economic and political spheres with Afghanistan, the Russia's policy influence remains dominant. Highlighting the regional security challenges, he stated that the issue of regional security has become a primary debate for Central Asian countries given NATO drawdown. The failure to prevent cross-border operations of extremist groups and uncontrolled drug trafficking between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan is causing serious threats in the region, especially the threat from Daesh. Analyzing the complete withdrawal of U.S.-led NATO forces from Afghanistan and its impacts in internal (Afghanistan) and external (regional) balance of powers, he stated that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda might expand their activities again in order to seize power. In case, internal balance was not provided by the U.S., it might affect Central Asian countries as well. The regional imbalances in Central Asia and South West Asia might result in confrontation of global powers like the U.S., China and Russia and that confrontation would threaten regional and global security. Therefore, the most important issue is to ensure internal and external balance in Afghanistan.

Lt General (R) Asif Yasin Malik, HI (M), Former Secretary Defence and Member Board of Governors IPRI, while chairing the session, identified that Saudi Arabia's funding to the Afghan War put a negative impact on Afghanistan and Pakistan's social fabric. In addition, since the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and Iranian revolution coincidentally happened together, therefore, Iran's foreign policy was based on sectarianism, which was not only visible during the Afghan *Jihad* against Soviet occupation (supporting the Northern Alliance), but also visible in the present Afghan quagmire, which caused sectarian strife at the regional

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level. He acknowledged Turkey's role in Afghanistan's reconstruction and stabilisation processes by hosting the trilateral dialogues. He suggested that oil producing Arab states should contribute at least U.S.\$ 1 billion annually for ten years for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. ■

# **PART I**

## Welcome Address

**Ambassador (R) Sohail Amin**

President IPRI

Honourable Minister for States and Frontiers Region, Lt. General (R) Abdul Qadir Baloch,  
Mr Kristof W. Duwaerts, Resident Representative,  
Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), Pakistan Office,  
Excellencies and Distinguished Scholars,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am grateful to the honourable Minister for accepting our invitation to grace the inaugural session of this international conference as the Chief Guest. I thank you, Sir, for sparing your time for us.

Islamabad Policy Research Institute has the proud privilege of hosting this international conference on 'Evolving Situation in Afghanistan: Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries' in collaboration with the Hanns Seidel Foundation. I am grateful to scholars from Afghanistan, China, Iran, Russia, Turkey and the U.S. who have travelled long distances to enlighten us on the evolving situation in Afghanistan from their perspective. I wish you all a comfortable stay in Pakistan.

In addition to scholars from abroad, we will also get the privilege of listening to eminent scholars from Pakistan who are experts on the subject. I am sure that this unique gathering of scholars will be able to highlight the existing challenges to Afghanistan's security and stability and will come up with viable options for Pakistan and other stakeholders.

Afghanistan is Pakistan's immediate neighbour. We have common borders. Pakistan is home to more than three million Afghan refugees. Continuation of conflict in Afghanistan is hurting Pakistan more than any other country, apart from Afghanistan itself. Peace on our western borders is, therefore, vital for our stability and economic development.

We have higher stakes in peace in Afghanistan than any other country. Pakistan is determined and serious in ensuring that peace returns to Afghanistan because it is also in the interest of the entire region. We have been witnessing the role of major powers in Afghanistan for thirty eight years. The experience of promoting extremism to defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan has had consequences of unbearable magnitude for Afghanistan and its neighbourhood. We, in Pakistan, are still dealing with the debris that this mess had created in Afghanistan and its neighbourhood. We have given sacrifices in blood and treasure. We have lost precious lives

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of civilians and security personnel in thousands. Our economy has suffered a loss of over U.S.\$100 billion.

9/11 happened sixteen years ago. The major powers' policy of strategic intervention for state-building in Afghanistan post-9/11 not only failed, but brought untold miseries to the people of Afghanistan and serious consequences for Pakistan. Heavy costs incurred by major powers in terms of money, materials and lives did not secure the desired results. It provided opportunities to adversaries of Pakistan to use Afghan territory to destabilise Pakistan.

On its part, Pakistan has been engaged in sincere and consistent efforts to facilitate an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process to bring lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan. We believe that violence and bloodshed is not the way to achieve peace. Pakistan's assessment about bringing peace in Afghanistan is based on realism. Our war should be against the ideology: the ideology of hatred, extremism and militarism. Pakistan is determined to not let this ideology succeed.

Some of the major powers have unrealistic expectations from Pakistan. We, alone, cannot achieve what a coalition of forty eight countries has been unable to achieve in Afghanistan with all their firepower and resources. Pakistan believes that a politically negotiated settlement is the best option and our wholehearted participation in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) and Heart of Asia (HoA) processes is a manifestation of that policy.

There is a common desire on the part of all QCG members to see peace in Afghanistan and there is a desire that all those who are supposed to be on the negotiation table are there. Pakistan has time and again emphasised that bringing parties in conflict to the negotiation table is not just Pakistan's responsibility. This is a difficult task which requires patience and persistence.

We all know that our border with Afghanistan is porous. Illegal crossings and other associated issues are major challenges for both countries. Pakistan has been putting a lot of emphasis on having a well-regulated border. Both sides are in contact with each other through military-to-military channels to address this issue.

I have only laid down some of the broad contours of the role of major powers in Afghanistan and a few of the priorities in Pakistan's policy. I leave the rest to the eminent scholars from Pakistan and abroad to give us a more elaborate picture of the evolving situation in Afghanistan.

I thank you all.■

## Opening Remarks

**Kristof W. Duwaerts**

Resident Representative,

Hanns Seidel Foundation, Islamabad Office

The Islamabad Policy Research Institute and Hanns Seidel Foundation have a long history of jointly organising conferences on Afghanistan at critical junctions in the relationship between Pakistan and its western neighbour. Whereas there has been consensus during those conferences that regional and major powers need to play their part in stabilisation of Afghanistan, Pakistan continues to have a central role within that construct. This is more true with the gradual drawback of the NATO-led armed engagement. Both countries share a huge amount of historical, cultural, linguistic, and even political commonalities. 262 border crossings connect the two countries, and enable for an intense people to people contact. Over the past thirty years, Pakistan has continuously been host to more than three million Afghan refugees. Pakistan is one of the most favourite destinations for higher academic learning for Afghans; a major source of income for many Pakistani hospitals in major cities of the country is Afghans who visit for medical reasons.

With the recent inauguration of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), economic linkages have received new impetus, which might well prove to be beneficial for the whole region. Pakistan and Afghanistan certainly will need to explore ways of making CPEC mutually beneficial through increased connectivity. China itself is increasingly getting involved in setting up policies to safeguard its investments. The country currently accounts for 79 per cent of overall foreign direct investment in Afghanistan. It is seen engaging in a number of political initiatives, like for instance, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which convened for its fifth meeting just one day before the start of this conference. Just last year in 2015, China was an active stakeholder in the Murree talks, where the Taliban leadership was brought to the table.

With all the important foreign contributions which have been made, and which will continue to be made, one should not forget that the most important stakeholder in the equation should always be the people of Afghanistan through their National Unity Government (NUG). Afghanistan, as a sovereign country, should be free to decide whom to engage with and on what terms. External powers should, therefore, carefully assess their policies, and not repeat any of the mistakes of the past. ■

# Inaugural Address

**Abdul Qadir Baloch**

Minister for States and Frontier Regions  
Government of Pakistan

I am grateful to Ambassador Amin, President of IPRI and also to Mr Kristof W. Duwaerts, Resident Representative of HSF, for giving me this honour to be a Chief Guest here for today's conference to which we are attaching our hopes that it is going to come out with recommendations and conclusions which would be useful for Pakistan and be of equal value to Afghanistan as well as other stakeholders.

In 1979, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan. Since then, the 'War of the *Kalashnikov*' has continued to fester and create mistrust and suspicions in Pakistan and in Afghanistan because of a porous border that leads to weapons proliferation as well as drug exports. The post 9/11 policies of major powers for state-building have not only failed within Afghanistan, but have also affected Pakistan since our adversaries now use Afghan territory to destabilise us.

Our country has been facing multidimensional challenges due to the instability in Afghanistan and within our borders as well. Because of unrest in Afghanistan, Pakistan had been hosting five million refugees and facing border incursion and social issues. These refugees are not willing to go back because of peace and economic turmoil in their homeland. However, the frequent travel of Afghan refugees between Afghanistan and Pakistan is increasing social and strategic threats for us. Therefore, repatriation of Afghan refugees needs to be undertaken.

Pakistan, on its part, has done what the world's 48 countries could not do in Afghanistan. No country has suffered more than Pakistan due to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan as far as our efforts in eliminating and fighting terrorism are concerned. In doing so, Pakistan has suffered a total loss of \$107 billion and sacrificed more than 30,000 precious lives. Pakistan's operation Zarb-e-Azb to root out terrorists and their sanctuaries in FATA<sup>1</sup> has been a success. However, it is imperative for the Pakistan and Afghanistan to make coordinated efforts to fight terrorism.

Although the Al-Qaeda led *jihad* (holy war) has been considerably weakened in Afghanistan (since they seem to have shifted their focus towards the Middle East), splinter groups have started emerging within the Taliban, therefore, ISAF-NATO operations in Afghanistan continue to be

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<sup>1</sup> Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

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essential to eliminate extremist elements from there. While unfortunate, one must keep in mind that even after fifteen years of counterterrorism operations, Afghanistan still remains vulnerable to terrorism.

Stability in Afghanistan is necessary for the collective economic development of South and Central Asia. The success of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) also depends, inter alia, on a stable security situation since only a peaceful Afghanistan can ensure regional stability and economic integration. ■

## Concluding Address

**Lt. General (R) Nasir Khan Janjua**  
National Security Advisor, Government of Pakistan

I appreciate IPRI for holding a conference on such an important issue, involving all of us in such a rewarding exercise and finding answers to such critical questions. This issue is so vital and so important for all of us that we need to sit and talk about it in great detail and with great depth and understanding because Afghanistan has become a really big question. The biggest one being: why has the war become so perpetual in Afghanistan? What is prolonging the conflict and why?

Then, there are regional level questions: what is the role of regional borders? Why does everyone want to have Afghanistan on its side? Why have we become competitive there? Then, there are political questions: why is there not enough political stability? Why is political dispensation not working? Then, there are military questions: how has the war has been prosecuted? And then, there are the moral questions which our children will ask: how come this dirty war has come and hit us beyond every threshold in our houses and in our streets?

So, Afghanistan as of today is virtually full of questions. Going through all the recommendations that were read here, is Pakistan the singular partner to steer those recommendations or are there are others who would also like to share those responsibilities? Why is it that Pakistan is always under blame? If others have had some role, has their performance been compatible? Has that role been able to lead to or achieve success? Have the milestones been achieved?

Let me first tell you Pakistan's role in this entire process. Pakistan did not ask the Soviets to come and invade Afghanistan. But Pakistan stood with Afghanistan and the Afghan people and for the sake of world peace. Can you imagine if Pakistan had looked the other way? What if Pakistan had offered to take the Soviets to warm waters, would the world have been the same today? What if we had refused to face the Russians? At that time, nobody sent their armies to fight terrorism, we fought it. Why are we being misunderstood now?

Was 9/11 of our making? No! We had nothing to do with it. And yet now, we are being blamed for taking a U-turn on Afghanistan. The world does not understand that we have always stood with the right. The world does not know that we stand with our values and the world does not know that we stand with our morals and yet everything is put on Pakistan.

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As an ordinary practitioner and having led operations in Swat and recently returned from Balochistan, let me discuss briefly how this conflict evolved. First of all, let me say that 9/11 was the most unfortunate thing that could have happened to the world. And more so, for Afghanistan and Pakistan, because the price the two of us have paid, no one else has paid, by our blood not money.

As a practitioner, I feel that this has been a war of vengeance and since this was beyond the capacity of any one country, NATO was also involved. So virtually there were forty eight countries in Afghanistan, trying to first satisfy this thirst for vengeance and; later reconstruct Afghanistan. To begin with, the Taliban regime was dismantled, but this thirst for vengeance was not quenched; and so when it came to political dispensation, the Taliban were not made partners. An enemy was deliberately created. Had they been involved then, things would have been different now. The military mindset and thinking kept the lead and deadly operations were pursued, but the political processes were not rolled out at that point in time. The whole Afghan society was injured. With military thinking and military strategy on the lead, the situation in Afghanistan became worse each day.

How can one expect the strategy of 'surge and reconcile' to work? You slap a man and then want him to sit down with you and reconcile? That is how ten long years have been wasted. By now, all the alliances have become weary of this conflict because it has become perpetual by way of its prosecution. And then in order to retain allies, you suddenly declare its 2011 and the other side ends up declaring you may have the watch, but we have the time. You continued your operations and when your alliances further wore thin, you said its 2016 and its time to pack up.

And as of today, there is little kinetic capability left in Afghanistan. As of today, the leadership of Mullah Omar is no more. As of today, the Taliban have started to suffer fragmentation. As of today, the new leader wants to surge and establish himself as the new leader of the Taliban. As of today, the way of the war suits him. As of today, there are misperceptions about the National Unity Government. As of today, everyone had to come and clarify doubts about the NUG, Mr Kerry himself had to come and clarify that this National Unity Government is for five years. As of today, how vulnerable is the existing political dispensation? As of today, how much is Pakistan bashing suitable? As of today, the process that was initiated and brought to Murree was so scuttled that it is hard to reinstate it. As of today, we have come up with a QCG to share responsibility and as of today, efforts are being made to pursue a process of reconciliation.

Let us also ask if there is to reconciliation, then it has to be between whom? Does Pakistan have to reconcile with someone? U.S. has to reconcile, UK has to reconcile? No! The reconciliation has to be between

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the Taliban and the present Afghan political dispensation, the Afghan Government. What is the Afghan Government ready to give as political dispensation or as incentive to these Taliban to reconcile? If there is a weak political dispensation now why would the Taliban come on board, after all they have also been in this war for so long? So, everything rests on these two actors. Pakistan, like all others, is a facilitator. Why put everything on Pakistan?

Everyone is accountable for their actions. All those who have been operational commanders in Afghanistan when they are held accountable for their failures of fourteen years of fighting, violating the sovereignty of Pakistan, using drones, all they can do is blame the Haqqanis, the Taliban commanders or us. After having done all this, for so long if even the notion of victory is not visible on the horizon to satisfy the people, what has been the point?

I want to propose to the world that collectively we need to conduct a case study about how this war has been prosecuted in Afghanistan. How it has become perpetual? When Pakistan joined this war we thought a super power is coming, NATO is coming, one year, two years, three years, five years: we hoped we will get over with it and we will succeed and we will have a peaceful neighbourhood. If all wars are undertaken to seek peace I want ask those who are prosecuting this war in Afghanistan (and even elsewhere), where is the peace? By way of force, do we seek peace?

Pakistan is very much committed to peace for the people of Afghanistan and for the children of Afghanistan. We want to seek peace for our children. As of today, thousands of troops are present in that treacherous terrain between Pakistan and Afghanistan. More than sixty thousand lives have been laid. More than 1.7 billion USD have been our economic losses. Does the world realize that the terrain is so treacherous, that while we are trying to defend there is nobody taking care on the other side? Does the world know that there are easements rights that anyone can come and go because there are divided villages, divided clans, and divided tribes? Does the world know why we want to manage the border, fence it? Afghanistan does not want it to be fenced in the name of easement rights. You enter into a house, one bedroom is in Afghanistan, the other is in Pakistan. Does the world say that revisit easement rights? Does the world say lets send the refugees back, some of them who even provide sanctuaries to these Taliban? This is the problem: you want to defend your house, but you don't have a boundary wall.

We are fully committed to world peace. Our sacrifices are manifestation of this commitment. We do not want a minute's delay in having peace in Afghanistan because both of us want to belong to a future which is bright with stability and peace coming to this region, with

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Afghanistan and Pakistan becoming trade corridors, becoming gateways for the world. Together we can make the world embrace this region.

We don't want violence. We have had enough of it. From day one, we are endeavouring and we will continue to always stand with Afghanistan. We will always stand with the people of Afghanistan, the children of Afghanistan. And we will always stand with the world for global peace.

Thank you very much.■

## **Concluding Remarks**

**Kristof W. Duwaerts**

Resident Representative,  
Hanns Seidel Foundation, Islamabad Office

**T**he present conference has made important contributions towards understanding the policies of major powers and regional countries in Afghanistan. It has both lined out past mistakes and successes. I sincerely hope that it will contribute to a better understanding of the current situation in Afghanistan, and that the proceedings will be useful in drafting future approaches to foreign policies vis-à-vis Kabul.

I am thankful to the Islamabad Policy Research Institute for yet again having provided the platform to discuss these important topics, and I am looking forward to the future interactions which HSF and IPRI would be having. All the panellists, who made it a point of coming to Islamabad from various countries, presenting the audience with their learned insights and opinions, and submitting their papers well in time deserve special mention. ■

## **Vote of Thanks**

**Ambassador (R) Sohail Amin**  
President IPRI

Honourable Lieutenant General (R) Nasser Khan Janjua.  
Distinguished Speakers and Intellectuals.  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

**A**s we conclude this two-day Conference, I sincerely thank Lieutenant General (R) Nasser Khan Janjua for sparing time from his busy schedule and for enlightening us with his concluding remarks as the Chief Guest.

I take this opportunity to extend my most sincere thanks to our Chief Guests at the inaugural and the concluding sessions, the Chairpersons of various sessions and the guest scholars who came from different destinations for their contribution and for educating us on the evolving situation in Afghanistan. The papers presented by them were the real contributions to all that has been achieved at the Conference. As a result of their contributions, we have been inspired and lifted to a higher pedestal as far as our understanding of ‘Evolving Situation in Afghanistan and the Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries’ is concerned. The entire discourse was quite thought provoking and productive. The Conference has brought forth concrete recommendations for the policy-makers of Pakistan, intelligentsia, media and for the international community.

I also wish to thank all the participants who attended the Conference for their valuable contribution and gracious presence. I thank the Hanns Seidel Foundation for making the Conference possible.

I thank you all. ■

## Conference Recommendations

**D**eliberations during the Conference brought forth a number of recommendations which are summarised below:

### Some Salient Points

Peace in Afghanistan is essential for regional peace. Pakistan is determined and serious in supporting the peace process between the Afghan Government and the Afghan Taliban, which is being facilitated by the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), comprising the U.S., China, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The peace process should be ‘Afghan- owned and Afghan-led’ and it should be supported by all the major powers and the regional countries to make it sustainable and result-oriented.

The Afghan Government’s initiative of peace talks with Hizb-e-Islami is a positive move. It will provide a foundation for talks with other groups, particularly with the Afghan Taliban. However, exclusion of the Afghan Taliban from the Bonn Process was a mistake. Today, the situation would have been different if they had been involved. Therefore, in this context, an inclusive approach is required.

The formation of a credible government in Afghanistan is critical for long lasting peace. The proportionate representation of all Afghan factions in the government will ensure an effective and workable political framework. If this principle is ignored for any reason, the fighting among various Afghan groups will continue. In the present government system of Afghanistan, there is a domination of one ethnic group in bureaucracy and the army. There is a need to create a balance of all ethnic groups in Afghan institutions by amending and reforming the Afghan Constitution in a constitutional *Loya Jirga* scheduled to meet in October 2016.

### Pakistan’s Role and Position

Pakistan should not accept responsibilities regarding peace and stability in Afghanistan which it cannot fulfill. Peace and stability in Afghanistan is important for the stability of Pakistan in particular. Both countries need to operate against terrorists with the required coordination. On its part, Pakistan launched a very tough operation called ‘Operation Zarb-e-Azb’, which has been greatly successful since most of the terrorists in North Waziristan have been eliminated, except some who have fled to Afghanistan. If a similar action is not taken on the Afghan side, it may undermine the Operation’s ultimate success.

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Pakistan is still hosting about three million Afghan refugees for the past thirty years. Despite Pakistan's best efforts, Afghanistan has not been able to take these refugees back. Now, the Afghan Government should make arrangements for an early repatriation of the refugees since they are now becoming a security risk for Pakistan, as some of them have been found providing refuge to the terrorists coming from Afghanistan.

For long-term cooperation, there should be institutional mechanisms between Pakistan and Afghanistan in areas of civil services, military and intelligence. To succeed in countering terrorism and the peace process, the blame game narrative should be replaced with a new narrative of mutual cooperation. Instead of blaming Pakistan, Afghan politicians and powerbrokers need to clean their own house by avoiding infighting and ethnic patronage, ending corruption and ensuring good governance to avoid disastrous outcomes for Afghanistan.

To dispel the mistrust within Afghan political circles about Pakistan and its policy on Afghanistan, bilateral exchanges between the two countries need to be enhanced. Exchange of political and parliamentary delegations, along with people-to-people contacts through exchange of scholars among think tanks and members of the civil society is essential to enhance trust.

### **Role of Major Powers and the International Community**

The international community also needs to empower moderate elements in Afghanistan. The recent General Elections and presence of a democratic government in Afghanistan are developments that have generated hope for the future. Afghan mediating groups, who are acceptable by both conflicting parties, should try to bridge the trust deficit between the Afghan Government and Afghan Taliban. Regional and international cooperation in terms of expertise should also be encouraged to support such groups in areas such as conflict resolution negotiations.

Afghanistan should not be made a hostage of the situation in Eastern Europe (Ukraine) by the U.S. by not welcoming Russia for finding the resolution of the Afghan conflict. The U.S. and Russia need to cooperate in establishing peace and political stability in Afghanistan. Some scholars noted that there are contradictions in the policies of major players involved in the Afghan peace process. The removal of such contradictions and adoption of impartial policies would yield positive results for peace in Afghanistan.

While major powers should provide financial assistance for sustaining the Afghan economy, international community should also promote private sector investment in Afghanistan. Private sector's investment in the mining

and agricultural sectors could be beneficial, providing employment opportunities in Afghanistan, helping develop skills, and diversifying Afghan economy and strengthening economic links with neighbouring countries.

### **Role of Regional Countries**

Endeavours like the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process are Afghan-centric and they promote Afghanistan's trans-regional links. Such undertakings are also useful for Afghan peace and should complement the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) efforts for facilitating peace talks in Afghanistan.

The major players in Afghanistan and the regional countries should promote mutually beneficial cooperation so that regional counterterrorism mechanism within the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can be activated and cooperation in intelligence and information sharing, equipment assistance, and holding of joint training and exercises can be strengthened.

China-Pakistan-Afghanistan trilateral strategic dialogue, coupled with QCG dialogue are positive initiatives, and should be pursued with vigour and sincerity. It is the shared responsibility of the regional players to ensure that stability is brought to Afghanistan.

### **Role of the Taliban**

The use of force in Afghanistan has remained counterproductive. It is high time that the concerned stakeholders pursue the process of reconciliation, rather than further escalating the conflict by continuing with the policy of fighting with the Afghan Taliban and talking to them at the same time. Without involving mainstream Taliban in the peace process, there can be no peace in Afghanistan. A Taliban-dominated Afghanistan is not in the interest of Pakistan as it may strengthen the Pakistani Taliban. However, Pakistan is in favour of their participation in the mainstream politics of Afghanistan, since they hail from Afghanistan's biggest ethnic group of Pashtuns, with 42 per cent population of the country.

### **Importance of Regional Connectivity**

A stable and economically vibrant Afghanistan could be an 'Asian transit hub', connecting Central Asia to South Asia and East Asia to West Asia. In this regard, regional developments, in particular, the One Belt and One Road (OBOR), CPEC, CASA 1000, and TAPI are likely to open avenues of economic cooperation at bilateral as well as regional levels. These

cooperative regional projects would contribute towards Afghanistan's stability, and must be pursued with collective wisdom and determination.

### **Countering IS Threat**

Many splinter groups have joined the Islamic State (IS), which can pose challenges not only to the national security of Afghanistan, but also for the region. Therefore, pace of the peace process should be accelerated in order to avoid the spread of IS in Afghanistan and to its neighbourhood

### **Strengthening Afghanistan's Political Processes**

Better governance is necessary for opening up political space for negotiations, and winning over domestic support for the sustainability of the Afghan state and basic political dispensation so that the Afghan Government is supported in taking tough political decisions; and for holding meaningful and result-oriented talks with the Taliban by offering them concrete incentives. A well coordinated Afghan policy formulated by all the stakeholders would greatly contribute to Afghanistan's peace and political stability. The lack of such a policy will only lead to the escalation of internal political strife and Kabul's weakness in face of security threats.■

## **PART II**

### **An Overview of Afghanistan's Situation**

- Conceptualisation of Peace: Framework for Political Reconciliation in Afghanistan
- Socio-Economic Problems of Afghanistan: Minimising the Human Cost of War
- Security in Afghanistan: Challenges and Solutions

# **Conceptualisation of Peace:**

## **Framework for Political Reconciliation in Afghanistan**

### *A Thought Piece*

**Rahimullah Yusufzai\***

**T**here is no magic concept to make peace in Afghanistan as the conflict is old and complicated due to the involvement of foreign powers and non-state actors. I believe the major stakeholders in Afghanistan are pursuing a waiting game.

#### **The Waiting Game**

The Afghan Government has been waiting for the Taliban to become weak and face divisions, more so after Mullah Mohammad Omar's death and now his successor Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor's killing in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan's Balochistan province. Kabul is also waiting to train and strengthen its security forces to defeat the Taliban.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are waiting for each other to make the first move. Kabul is waiting for Islamabad to persuade the Taliban leadership based in Pakistan to join the peace process, or take military action against it if it continues to oppose peace talks. Islamabad, on the other hand, is waiting for Kabul to take action against the Pakistani Taliban and ensure that India does not use Afghan soil to destabilise Pakistan.

The U.S. is waiting for Pakistan to initiate action against the Haqqani network and do more to bring the Taliban leadership to the negotiation table. China is waiting for everyone else to make up their mind so that it can commit itself one way or the other. It is against the use of violence and a keen supporter of the intra-Afghan peace talks.

As for Taliban, their policy has always been a waiting game. It appears that the Taliban actually believe this statement supposedly made by an unnamed Taliban commander that 'the Americans have the watch and Taliban have the time.' They waited for years for the withdrawal of NATO forces and are now waiting for the remaining 14,000 foreign troops to leave. They are also hoping and waiting for the Afghan forces to collapse. They are now waiting for end of Barack Obama's term as U.S. President and installation of a new one to see what policies the new administration would

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\* The author is Resident Editor of *The News* in Peshawar, Pakistan; and is also a senior analyst for Geo TV and correspondent of the BBC World Service for its Urdu, Pashto and Hindi services.

pursue in Afghanistan. They earlier waited for the five elections that have taken place in Afghanistan in the last fifteen years to go wrong and lead to serious divisions among the ruling elite. This almost happened after the presidential polls in 2014 when U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry intervened and prevailed upon the rival candidates Ashraf Ghani and Dr Abdullah to form a unity government. They are still waiting for the New Unity Government (NUG) to become paralysed due to the rift between President Ghani and CEO Dr Abdullah.

Other countries in the region having stakes in Afghanistan are also waiting for the peace process to move forward or fail, and for the U.S.-led Western forces to leave or prolong their stay. Iran, Russia, India and the Central Asian countries neighbouring Afghanistan; as well as Turkey and Saudi Arabia all have stakes in this region and they are keenly observing the unfolding of events in the war-ravaged country.

### **Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) and the Peace Process**

The Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) met in Islamabad, Pakistan in 2016 after a gap of about three months. Four meetings – two in Islamabad and two in Kabul – did not yield much so one already had lower expectations regarding the meeting in Islamabad in June 2016. As it turned out, the QCG failed to make any progress towards facilitating the peace talks between the Afghan Government and Taliban. No dates for the next meeting of the QCG were announced. The Afghan Government had showed its disinterest in the QCG by downgrading the level of its representation in the Islamabad meeting and demanded action against the Taliban leadership based in Pakistan instead of bringing it to the negotiation table.

The talks with the Afghan Taliban were supposed to take place in the first week of March 2016 and we don't know if the Taliban would eventually agree to negotiate with the Afghan Government. The prospects for this to happen are not bright. Both President Ghani and Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Khalil Karzai demanded in early 2016 that the talks should be arranged within two to three months and also progress to stop the Taliban from launching their annual spring offensive. This did not happen and the Taliban on April 12, 2016 launched their offensive named 'Omari' after their late supreme leader Mullah Omar. They heralded the offensive by carrying out many attacks, including a suicide bombing of the offices of the intelligence agency, National Directorate of Security (NDS) in Kabul on April 19 that killed about 70 persons. The Afghan Government, too, had undertaken its offensive named 'Shafaq' against militants in fifteen provinces on April 2, 2016. There was talk of war and revenge instead of

peace. These delays and disappointments explain the challenges facing the QCG. Let us first look at the existing situation.

### **Afghanistan's Position**

After the Kabul attack on April 19, Afghanistan said it will opt for war instead of peace. President Ghani also said in his April 25 speech to the Parliament that he would not ask Pakistan to facilitate peace talks with the Taliban and would instead demand that Islamabad take action against the irreconcilable Taliban leadership based in Pakistan. This was precisely Kabul's stand in the QCG meeting held in Islamabad on May 18.

### **Pakistan's Position**

Islamabad believes there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict. In its view, the war for the last fifteen years in Afghanistan did not yield any outcome. Pakistan is also opposed to any military action against the Taliban leadership based in Pakistan. As Sartaj Aziz, Advisor to the Prime Minister on foreign affairs said recently, the QCG needs to continue efforts for peaceful resolution of the issue through talks. It is not clear how long this effort will be and if the Taliban leadership would be served with a deadline. Nothing of the sort has happened yet. Pakistan has also been arguing that it is not solely responsible for bringing peace in Afghanistan as the four-nation QCG has the shared responsibility to take forward the peace process.

Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry said something new in a recent interview with the state-owned Pakistan Television that Pakistan wanted the Afghan government to make a 'solid offer' to the Taliban to make them agree to join the peace process. This was not explained, but, it apparently meant that Kabul should put on the table the incentives it can offer to the Taliban. Surprisingly, the Taliban leadership has made no such demand. Rather, they declared that they are not fighting for a few jobs in the government as their cause has higher goals (including complete withdrawal of foreign forces, enforcement of *Shariah* etc.).

### **China's Stand**

China still considers the QCG a useful platform and believes it can achieve results. China does not want its first attempt at mediation in international affairs to fail and would continue to push for a negotiated settlement to end the Afghan conflict.

## **U.S. Position**

The U.S. has been supportive of the QCG and it seemed willing to try this platform as long as it promised hope. However, the U.S. wanted Pakistan to take action against the Haqqani network ahead of everything else as it has declared it a terrorist organisation. It also wanted Pakistan to persuade the Taliban leadership to join the peace process because the U.S. has not declared the Taliban as a terrorist group. The problem is that the Haqqani network has come closer to the Taliban and its head Sirajuddin Haqqani has been one of the two deputy leaders of the mainstream Taliban faction since July 2015. In fact, he was deputy leader to the late Taliban supreme leader Mansoor and has retained his position under the new Taliban head Shaikh Haibatullah Akhundzada. Even if the Taliban leadership somehow agrees to hold talks with Kabul, it won't accept keeping the Haqqanis out of the peace process.

## **The QCG**

Can the QCG mechanism deliver? No doubt its four-member countries hold the key to making peace in Afghanistan as Pakistan and China are its important neighbours and the U.S. is its biggest supporter in terms of political, economic and military assistance. Though the QCG has made no real progress in terms of its peacemaking role, it is still the most promising platform in the absence of any other option and if the idea is to seek a negotiated political solution of the Afghan conflict.

The need for expanding the QCG has been discussed, but this perhaps could be done at a later stage as in its present shape and composition it is a compact, manageable group. Iran, India and Russia have been mentioned as possible future members of QCG. Some Taliban figures privately said these three countries could work to ensure failure of the QCG if they were kept out.

## **The Taliban Factor**

Until his death in the U.S. drone strike on May 21, Mansoor had strived to further consolidate his position as the supreme Taliban leader to attain position of strength whether it was to fight or talk to the Afghan Government. He had already consolidated his position and reconciled with most dissidents, including the family of late Mullah Omar, particularly his brother Mullah Abdul Mannan and eldest son Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, and important Taliban military figures such as Abdul Qayyum Zakir. Also, Mansoor had fought the breakaway faction of Mullah Mohammad Rasool and inflicted so many losses on it that it was near its demise. With Mullah

Rasool in Pakistan's custody and his deputy Mullah Abdul Mannan Niazi facing opposition from his own factional leaders, this small group is now at its weakest. Anyone seeking a deal at the time needed to do business with Mansoor, and now with his successor Haibatullah Akhundzada.

Also, one needs to keep in mind that the Taliban movement has been an armed group since its emergence 22 years ago. Therefore, it has little incentive in democracy or joining the political mainstream. In its present form and shape, the Taliban movement isn't ready yet to join the Afghan political mainstream.

Also, there is too much hatred and blood-feud to make any talks meaningful between the Afghan Government and the Taliban. Both sides are still unwilling to accept each other's legitimacy and strength. The Afghan Government considered the Taliban as puppets of Pakistan, while the Taliban maintained that the former was puppet of the U.S. President Karzai and now President Ghani are on record having argued why not hold talks with Pakistan in place of Taliban as Pakistan controls the Taliban. On the other hand, Taliban argued why not talk to the U.S. which is the real power in Afghanistan instead of the powerless, disunited government. President Ghani recently referred to the Taliban as criminals, terrorists and drug-traffickers. Taliban, too, have used strong language against the Afghan ruling elite. Taliban hatred of President Ghani seems more than that for former President Karzai as they are convinced the former (due to his family's long stay and contacts in the U.S.) is in Washington's control.

There are no easy ways to take forward the Afghan peace process. First and foremost, both the Afghan Government and the Taliban need to be realistic and adopt a sincere approach to talks. They must concede that they cannot win the war and would have to eventually talk to each other. Also, the Afghans have traditional *jirgas* and methods to try and resolve their disputes provided outsiders facilitate the process, instead of interfering in their affairs and taking sides.

Earlier, I talked about the waiting game.

### **Likely Afghan Government-Hizb-e-Islami Peace Deal**

So, the Taliban leadership is also waiting for Gulbaddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami to sign the proposed peace deal with the Afghan Government and to see whether it will work. The Taliban would surely want to know as to what Hizb-e-Islami will get if it gives up fighting and which one of its 25 demands would be accepted and implemented in view of the lesser enthusiasm about the deal by CEO Dr Abdullah's camp and other important segments of the Afghan Government traditionally opposed to Hekmatyar. Surely, President Ghani appears keen to clinch the deal and show it as a

success of his peace initiative, but he needs to consult and take Dr Abdullah along in view of the demands of their unity government. The deal may be signed eventually, but implementing it will be an insurmountable challenge.

If this peace deal is signed and implemented, it would send a positive message that the warring Afghan sides could negotiate and make peace without the assistance of foreigners and platforms like QCG. It would set a precedent prompting the Taliban leadership to keep this in mind when considering its options to continue fighting or settle for peace.

### **Post-Mullah Mansoor Situation**

Contrary to predictions by many analysts that Mansoor's death would lead to a similar battle of succession and fragmentation of the Taliban movement as witnessed following the revelation about Mullah Omar's death in July 2015, no such thing happened. In fact, Mansoor's killing galvanised the Taliban to close ranks and quickly name his successor to pre-empt any dispute over the issue of succession. There are reports that senior Taliban figures who had become inactive or were sidelined by Mansoor have become active and accepted Haibatullah Akhundzada as the new supreme leader.

Even the splinter faction led by Mullah Mohammad Rasool is not ill-disposed to his selection the way it had bitterly opposed Mansoor's elevation as the *ameer* (head) despite its reservations about the manner and the haste shown by the Taliban *Rahbari Shura* in choosing him as successor to Mansoor. Also, the already weak Mullah Rasool faction is confronted with the challenge of growing differences in its ranks due to the objections raised by the faction's top figures against one of its leaders Mullah Abdul Mannan Niazi, who supported unconditional peace talks with the Afghan government, used derogatory remarks against Haibatullah Akhundzada and criticised Pakistan for its interference in Afghanistan's affairs. With Mullah Rasool in Pakistan's custody since the last several months, his faction is divided and paralysed and therefore unable to play any role in the unfolding events in Afghanistan.

Taliban played safe instead of experimenting with a new leader. Haibatullah Akhundzada, one of the two deputy heads of the armed movement, was promoted to become the supreme leader. His position as deputy leader was filled by Yaqoob, the young son of late Mullah Omar. He could have quickly unified the Taliban factions due to the respect his father enjoyed among the Taliban rank and file, but it appears that his inexperience and reluctance to take on the mantle of leadership at such a young age prompted the Taliban elders to choose Haibatullah Akhundzada for what is arguably one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. Also, it

appears that Yaqoob, who is in his early 20s, is being groomed to eventually become the leader of the Taliban. The other deputy leader Sirajuddin Haqqani, head of the Haqqani network, was retained in his position. Both Yaqoob and Haqqani are primarily handling Taliban military operations and thus enjoy significant influence over the fighters.

Haibatullah Akhundzada, the cleric from the Noorzai Durrani tribe who belongs to the Taliban birthplace of Kandahar, is a firm believer in *Jihad* (holy war) and a strong proponent of *Shariah*. As a former Taliban military court judge, he has been a hardliner and so are his two deputies. They are expected to continue the inflexible Taliban policies of Mullah Omar and Mansoor. Holding peace talks with the Afghan government is unlikely to be on their agenda in the near future. The U.S. argument that Mansoor was eliminated because he was a hurdle to the peace process and a threat to its forces in Afghanistan does not hold considering the fact that almost every Taliban member is presently opposed to the peace talks and is posing a threat to the foreign troops operating in Afghanistan. Also, rather than an individual even if he happens to be the Taliban head, the Taliban *Rahbari Shura* collectively takes the decision to go to war or make peace.

The U.S. drone strike on May 21 not only killed Mansoor, it also killed the Afghan peace process. It is true there were yet no peace talks between the government and the Taliban despite the QCG's efforts, but the four countries involved in the process had not given up. There was also this widespread realisation that there is no real alternative to a negotiated political settlement of the Afghan conflict after the failure of some of the most powerful armies of the world to force a military solution against the Taliban during the past 15 years.

Having lost its supreme leader Mansoor, the new Taliban leadership would be unable to calm down its rank and file and justify holding talks with the Afghan Government, which is heavily dependent on the U.S. military and economic assistance for its survival. The Afghan Government too is finding it difficult to justify peace talks with the Taliban, particularly in the wake of the devastating April 19 attack targeting the central Kabul office of the intelligence agency, National Director of Security (NDS). Instead of asking Islamabad to facilitate peace talks with the Taliban leadership based in Pakistan, Kabul is now demanding action against the irreconcilable Taliban. Pakistan is arguing that peace must be given a chance instead of undertaking military action against the Taliban. It also wants the Afghan Government and the NATO forces to act against the Pakistani militants who have found refuge in Afghanistan and are using its soil to launch terrorist attacks in Pakistan. The use of Afghan territory by India to destabilise Pakistan is another cause of serious concern in Islamabad. All this has resulted in an almost unbridgeable trust deficit

between Islamabad and Kabul and it is doubtful if the two countries could cooperate in moving forward the peace process or fighting terrorism.

The U.S. drone strike negatively affected the already strained relations between Pakistan and the U.S. as the former lodged a protest with Washington for violating its sovereignty. The Pakistan Army Chief General Raheel Sharif also put his weight behind the protest by arranging to meet the U.S. Ambassador in Pakistan to describe the drone attack as unacceptable. Pakistan was alarmed because the first drone strike in Balochistan had crossed the so-called 'red line' and then there was the American threat of undertaking more such strikes. Pakistan went to the extent of referring to the U.S. as a 'selfish' country and asking aloud how Washington can expect Islamabad to bring peace in Afghanistan if it could not do it in 15 years.

The usually unfriendly Pak-Afghan relations deteriorated further when Islamabad protested to Kabul that the drone that struck in Balochistan had flown from Afghanistan. Kabul, on its part, accused Islamabad of harbouring the Taliban and the Haqqani network and allowing them to wage war in Afghanistan. It also continued to blame Islamabad for almost every problem confronting Afghanistan.

Matters weren't helped when following Mansoor's killing, belligerent statements were issued from Kabul and Washington that Taliban better agree to the peace talks as the new Taliban leader would meet a similar fate. This provoked the Taliban, who were unlikely to be cowed down after having fought the U.S.-led NATO and the Afghan forces to a standstill over a decade.

The prospects for peace in Afghanistan have never been so bleak; and it would take a miracle to revive the peace process.

## **Conclusion**

Though the QCG has tried and not achieved much to arrange peace talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, it should continue its efforts towards this end as there is presently no other platform to promote the Afghan peace process. Disbanding the QCG and giving up this effort due to the disappointments faced by it would cause hopelessness.

Pakistan cannot and should not be expected to solely facilitate the peace talks by bringing the Taliban to the negotiation table. Pakistan is saying this already but it needs to forcefully highlight this point to avoid being scapegoated for the refusal of the Taliban to engage in dialogue with the Afghan Government. However, the Government should restrict the activities of the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network on its soil. Afghanistan should reciprocate and restrict the activities of Pakistani

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Taliban operating from its territory. Taking military action against the irreconcilable Afghan Taliban/Haqqanis in Pakistan at this stage would mean the premature end of the QCG-led work to promote the Afghan peace process.

The expected peace deal between the Afghan Government and the Hizb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar) should be studied and its implementation monitored closely as it could serve as a precedent and model for any future peace talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, especially since the killing of Mullah Mansoor by the U.S. has damaged whatever little prospects existed for facilitating peace talks.■

# Socio-Economic Problems of Afghanistan: Minimising the Human Cost of War

Haroun Mir\*

## Introduction

Afghanistan has been mired in conflicts since the communist coup d'état of 1978 which caused the total destruction of its old social and political structures that were considered the bedrock of stability during the forty year reign of King Mohammad Zaher Shah. In addition, the influx of resources and money from belligerent camps in the context of the Soviet invasion in 1979 destroyed its traditional economy and created economic and financial dependency for the Afghan state and people.

Following the former Red Army's withdrawal from the country in 1989, the Afghan state submerged into political chaos and misery. All attempts by the international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to bring peace, failed. The country further fragmented and, therefore, some of the neighbouring and regional powers became involved in the Afghan quagmire.

The collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001 and start of the new democratic process, which began in 2001 in Germany known as the Bonn Process led to renewed hope and opportunity for Afghanistan to reemerge from the ashes of the civil war and reintegrate into the world community.

The focus of the international community for the past thirteen years concentrated on rebuilding state institutions, economic infrastructures, and a new political framework by introducing democracy. A new democratic constitution has been developed and so far successful presidential and parliamentary elections have been held.

However, after more than fourteen years of NATO's<sup>1</sup> military engagement, the country is once again in an important juncture of its history because the future post-U.S. and NATO military disengagement looks grim, and a descent of the country back into social and political chaos will have dire consequences for the neighbouring and regional countries.

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<sup>1</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

## **Profound Socio-economic Transformation of the Afghan Society**

The four decades of conflict and civil war have transformed the old foundation of the Afghan state which was based on a monarchy dominated by the Durani tribes of greater Kandahar. The communist coup in 1978 followed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 provoked a fundamental upheaval within the sociopolitical system of the country, and to this day, Afghans have not been able to define their new sociopolitical landscape.

Meanwhile, despite decades of conflicts and a blatant interference by Afghanistan's neighbours and some regional powers, particularly after the fall of the communist regime in 1992, the country and its resilient people survived fragmentation and partition. Nonetheless, the Afghan elite and middle class escaped the country adding to an already large number of Afghan refugees outside the country.<sup>2</sup> The toll of civilian casualties grew day-by-day, and some part of Kabul, particularly the western side of the city resembled Dresden in 1945.<sup>34</sup>

For the first time, the central government lost its force and during the Taliban regime, the country became a pariah state in the international community. For survival, people gathered around their charismatic religious and ethnic leaders. The country was on the brink of a civil war and ethnic cleansing. The Taliban movement was mostly composed from southern Pashtun provinces and the former Northern Alliance represented the Northern provinces.<sup>5</sup>

Another immense upheaval in the traditional Afghan society has been religious radicalisation. Traditionally, Afghans have adopted a very moderate version of Islam as part of the Hanafi School of jurisprudence whose founder Imam Abu Hanifa, had his ancestral roots in today's

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<sup>2</sup> According to the UN data on Afghan refugees, the number of Afghan refugees after the collapse of the Taliban regime reached three million in Pakistan and two million in Iran.

<sup>3</sup> The total number of Afghans killed and disabled during the conflict is based on estimations and varies according to different sources. However, the consensus is that more than 1.5 million of Afghans had been killed and another 1 million were disabled during the start of conflict until the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Editor's Note: "From February 13 to February 15, 1945, during the final months of World War II (1939-45), Allied forces bombed the historic city of Dresden, located in eastern Germany. The bombing was controversial because Dresden was neither important to German wartime production nor a major industrial centre, and before the massive air raid of February 1945 it had not suffered a major Allied attack. By February 15, the city was a smoldering ruin and an unknown number of civilians—estimated at somewhere between 35,000 and 135,000—were dead." History.com, "Bombing of Dresden", accessed August 11, 2016, <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/battle-of-dresden>.

<sup>5</sup> The best description of the conflict and its consequence is provided by former Ambassador Peter Tomsen in his book *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers* (2013).

Afghanistan. People in Central and Southeast Asia adhered to this school because its interpretation of Islamic doctrine was compatible with their moderate spirit and nature. The traditional Hanafi School advocated respect and tolerance vis-à-vis other religions, and over the centuries tolerance provided an atmosphere of understanding between Islam and other religions here. The teachings of other important religions such as Buddhism, Zoroastrian, and Hinduism have also greatly influenced people in the region.

For instance, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, no single suicide attack was committed against the Soviet Army or their families living in Afghanistan. Except for a few limited cases, the majority of former *Mujahideen* (fighters engaged in  *Jihad*-holy war) spared the lives of innocent people, even those of Afghan Army conscripts. Traditionally, forgiveness has been an important part of Afghan culture and religious teachings.

However, the influx of foreign fighters during the *Jihad* (holy war) against the former Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and a deliberate policy of radicalisation by the Arab Gulf countries sowed the seeds of religious radicalisation in Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> Increased suicide bombings in Afghanistan and Pakistan have unveiled the real impact of the teachings of *madrassahs* (religious schools) on young minds. Consequently, the new young Afghan generation has become more radical religiously with a very narrow interpretation of Islam based on the rigid Salafi doctrine. Today, this new phenomenon is impacting the entire South and Central Asian region.

Meanwhile, the traditional Afghan economy which was based on agriculture and trade collapsed. In the absence of strong central government in Afghanistan, notorious regional lords competed among each other to gain control of resources, and the already limping Afghan economy grew dependent on the war, narcotics, and foreign handouts.<sup>7</sup>

Even before the start of the conflict in terms of per capita GDP,<sup>8</sup> Afghanistan has always been one of the poorest countries in the world. According to United Nations standards, the Afghan economy has ranked with those of the world's Least Developed Countries (LDCs).<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> Haroun Mir, "Turning Madrassas Against Radicalism" August 2006, *International Affairs Forum*, Center for International Relations, <http://www.ia-forum.org/Files/GAEBMK.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Idress Ahmad Rahmani and Haroun Mir, "Regional Trade and Decline of Private Investment in Afghanistan," (Afghanistan's Center for Research & Policy Studies, 2008), [http://www.academia.edu/221125/Regional\\_Trade\\_and\\_Decline\\_of\\_Private\\_Investment\\_in\\_Afghanistan](http://www.academia.edu/221125/Regional_Trade_and_Decline_of_Private_Investment_in_Afghanistan).

<sup>8</sup> Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

<sup>9</sup> Estimates of Afghan GDP put Afghanistan at the bottom of the list of countries in World Bank data files for GDP per capita. The estimate of GDP per capita for the year 2007 was roughly about \$310.

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country's economic base has always been agriculture and animal husbandry, with only a few small factories. Only recently has the service sector increased due to influx of aid money, which accounts for more than 40 per cent of the economy. Agriculture constitutes 30.27 per cent of GDP and industrial production 26.65 per cent.<sup>10</sup>

Prior to the start of the conflicts in 1979, Afghanistan was considered self-sufficient in terms of its agricultural production, except for the years of severe droughts when food had to be imported and aid was sought from the international community. In other areas of production, such as industrial and mining sectors, it did as well as in the agricultural and livestock sectors. Statistics, from the Ministry of Planning in 1971, show that the country was well on track towards increasing domestic production and economic prosperity. During the decades of conflict, much of Afghanistan's industries and economic infrastructure was destroyed, and an economy of war particularly based on opium became prominent.<sup>11</sup>

Before Afghanistan sank into perpetual conflict, it had not been a prominent producer of opium among the 'Golden Crescent' countries.<sup>12</sup> Iran was producing an estimated 600 tonnes per year of opium gum, Pakistan another 500 tonnes, and Afghanistan roughly 300 tonnes.<sup>13</sup> Opium production became more widespread in Afghanistan only after Iran started to curb on its production in wake of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, and Pakistan introduced the 'Hadd Ordinance' the same year.<sup>14</sup> Since the former Soviet invasion followed by internal conflict, Afghanistan has become a major producer of opium not only in the region, but in the entire world. In 2007 alone, the country churned out an estimated 8200 tonnes of opium— a market share of over 90 per cent.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Data collected from the Afghanistan Central Bank.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Ward and William Byrd, *Afghanistan's Opium Drug Economy* (SASPR working paper series, World Bank, 2004), <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFGHANISTAN/Publications-Resources/20325060/AFOpium-Drug-Economy-WP.pdf.pdf>. In 2004, the opium economy accounted for more than a third of estimated total (opium inclusive) GDP.

<sup>12</sup> The Golden Crescent is the name given to drug production in the geographical area shared by the three countries Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran.

<sup>13</sup> Lemar Aftaab, *Afghanmagazine.com*, April 2, 2008, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/118534/page/3>.

<sup>14</sup> Iqbal Khattak, "Increase in Poppy Cultivation in Pakistan in 2003," *MamaCoca.org*, accessed 11 August 2016, [http://www.mamacoca.org/FSMT\\_sept\\_2003/en/doc/khattak\\_pakistan\\_poppy\\_2003\\_en.htm](http://www.mamacoca.org/FSMT_sept_2003/en/doc/khattak_pakistan_poppy_2003_en.htm).

<sup>15</sup> UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey-2007*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, and Ministry of Counter Narcotics (Afghanistan Government, 2007), accessed August 11, 2016, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan-Opium-Survey-2007.pdf>.

In addition, a majority of Afghans became dependent on international humanitarian aid for their subsistence and survival. Poverty reached an unprecedented level, where in late 2001 people in geographically isolated central Afghanistan were feeding on grass.<sup>16</sup> By 2000, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates in Afghanistan had more resources than the Taliban regime in Kabul. Economic production was at its lowest, education and healthcare were not existent, many Afghans left the country, and a majority of the population was on the brink of famine.<sup>17</sup>

The tragic terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001 reshaped the destiny of Afghanistan and something unimaginable happened in the country: yet another world superpower leading a formidable military alliance entered Afghanistan.

### **The U.S. and NATO Intervention and Revival of Interest in Afghanistan**

Immediately after September 11, 2001, Afghanistan, which was diplomatically isolated and on the brink of famine and human catastrophe, suddenly received the attention of the entire world, and thus, brought the NATO's military intervention to the country.

For the first time after decades of conflict and civil war, Afghans from different political and ethnic backgrounds were brought together outside of the region in order to decide a new political process during the Bonn Conference<sup>18</sup> which re-shaped the future of the country forever. This new political process has created renewed hope that after decades of strife, suffering, and bloodshed Afghanistan might see a bright future and regain its pre-1980s position in the world community.

Politically, different Afghan ethnic groups widely accepted the new power-sharing mechanism which was inclusive of all political groups, except to the Taliban. Indeed, the lack of representation of moderate Taliban leaders in the Bonn process as well as in the transitional government headed by Mr Karzai forced a considerable number of them to seek refuge elsewhere. This prompted the agenda of the hardline Taliban

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<sup>16</sup> "WFP Resumes Food Aid Deliveries Into Afghanistan," *reliefweb*, September 29, 2001, <http://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/wfp-resumes-food-aid-deliveries-afghanistan>.

<sup>17</sup> Oxfam International et al., *The Cost of War: Afghanistan Experience of Conflict, 1978-2009*, *Oxfam.org*, November 2009, <https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/afghanistan-the-cost-of-war.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Editor's Note: On Nov. 27, 2001, delegates from traditionally hostile ethnic factions, united only by their opposition to the Taliban, were brought together for the first time when the United Nations convened a conference in Bonn, Germany, on the future of Afghanistan.

leadership to impose their vision of military resistance on the moderate ones who had been in favour of a settlement with Kabul.<sup>19</sup>

The current political system, despite its difficulties, has achieved important strategic gains in the last fourteen years. Since 2004, three presidential and two parliamentary elections have been held, and in 2014, a landmark peaceful transfer of political power from one democratically elected leader to another was achieved, for the first time in the history of Afghanistan. This milestone was made possible by the will of ordinary Afghan people, who braved the threat of violence imposed by the Taliban and came out in masses, to vote for their favourite candidates.

Also, significant economic progresses have been achieved since 2001. According to Afghan government sources, the GDP has been growing steadily between 10 to 13 per cent annually - until 2013.<sup>20</sup> Important economic infrastructures have been rebuilt or newly built. Necessary reforms have been initiated to promote free market economy and open trade regime.

Socially, Afghanistan remained very conservative and isolated during the Taliban regime who banned education and executed women publically. After the collapse of their regime, schools and universities have opened again. Free media outlets<sup>21</sup> are growing throughout the country. Educated talented Afghan women have risen to leadership positions in the public and private sectors.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, before 2001 Afghan national security institutions were non-existent, and most of the country was ruled by militia forces. After the collapse of the Taliban regime, the foundation of strong security forces was put in place. Today, the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) constitute a formidable force of more than 370,000.

## **The National Unity Government (NUG) and New Challenges**

The contested 2014 presidential election in the backdrop of an already very tenuous situation due to drawdown of U.S. and NATO forces from the

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<sup>19</sup> Haroun Mir, "The Benefits of Negotiating with Moderate Taliban Leaders," *CACI Analyst.org*, April 18, 2007, <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4595>.

<sup>20</sup> Data on Afghanistan's GDP from UN data.

<sup>21</sup> Ann Procter, *Afghanistan's Fourth Estate: Independent Media*, USIP Report (United States Institute of Peace, 2015), <http://www.usip.org/publications/2015/08/10/afghanistan-s-fourth-estate-independent-media>. One of the best achievement is the past fourteen years has been the rapid development of private free media in Afghanistan. Currently there are more than twenty private TV channels, 100 of private radio and a very large number of print media.

<sup>22</sup> Women's right and empowerment is another important development in the Afghan society. The women rights are enshrined in the Afghan constitution with specific quota for women in the Afghan parliament.

country has indicated that the recent gains in Afghanistan are still fragile and reversible.

It has been close to two years since the inception of NUG and the inauguration of the two leaders, President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah, in September 29, 2014. In fact, following the election crisis, that required the international community's intervention and particularly mediations brokered by the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, the two main candidates agreed to form a coalition government. The perilous situation was always predictable and there was enough warning about it in the run up to the presidential election in 2014.

However, the leaders of the new government, due to the worse political tension and deep election crisis, were not ready to immediately address these tremendous challenges. During their election campaign, they increased people's expectations by making unrealistic promises. No major candidate warned the population about the difficult times ahead of the new government as a consequence of NATO's drawdown and significant reduction in international financial assistance for the country.

In addition, the Karzai government seriously crippled by years of corruption and bad governance did not help smooth out these transitions. The former president in a personal confrontation with the U.S. and other NATO allies further aggravated the political crisis. He deliberately avoided helping the two major candidates to elaborate on an effective action plan to remedy the foreseen crises. Hence, in addition to the emerging challenges, the NUG inherited all the failures of the previous government.

Meanwhile, the NUG was inaugurated based on a power-sharing mechanism for the sake of resolving the election crisis but sadly no discussion took place between the two leaders over a common agenda and urgent action plan in view of impending major crises. The political bickering among the two camps did not disappear after the inauguration ceremony, and it took a long time for the two leaders to form a cabinet. Even now, the cabinet is not fully functional and key ministers in the security sector are acting ministers. In addition, the two leaders have yet to develop an action plan to address other key issues such as the peace process, electoral reform, and Afghanistan's relations with major regional countries.

Consequently, the security situation has further deteriorated: the Taliban have expanded their territory, and the growing rate of Afghan security force casualties has become alarming. The economy has simply crashed. The peace process and rapprochement with Pakistan despite being the main priority of President Ghani is still in limbo.

Despite the speeches and generous promises to the Afghan people, little has been achieved.<sup>23</sup> A few months back, President Ghani declared *Jihad* on corruption, but no meaningful progress has yet to be made in this direction. People have become disillusioned with the NUG and many among the middle class have left the country in order to seek better opportunities in Europe, particularly Germany.

Most of the disenfranchised former political supporters of the two leaders have regrouped into different political opposition coalitions, and are now questioning the legitimacy of the NUG. Some of them are calling for an early presidential election and others for an immediate *Loya Jirga*. Therefore, the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry had to travel once again to Kabul in order to appease anxious politicians and the public that an imminent collapse of the NUG will not be allowed.

Meanwhile, the Taliban announced their new spring offensive named after their late leader Mullah Mohammad Omar, and categorically rejected President Ghani's olive branch. The remaining months of 2016 are anticipated to be even bloodier than 2015 and the number of casualties will be unbearable for the government and the Afghan people. According to the UN report on Afghanistan, during 2015 alone, more than 5,500 security personnel and approximately 11,000 civilians died.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Political Challenges***

In addition to a bloody insurgency, the Unity Government is facing tremendous socio-economic challenges, and the country has become more politically fragmented. Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah emerged as the heads of very loose and inhomogeneous political coalition just for the sake of winning the election. The two leaders lacked a well-elaborated policy agenda on which they could have agreed and created a work plan for the government. Indeed in his speeches, President Ghani has always referred to his vision and agenda for Afghanistan, but after close to two years, he still struggles and has not been able to make the NUG efficient and effective.

Meanwhile, the interaction between the two leaders has been seriously affected by the tensions during the election crisis. This was

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<sup>23</sup> Office of the President, "Inaugural Speech by Dr Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai as the President of Pakistan" (Afghanistan Government, 2014), gov.af, <http://president.gov.af/en/news/36954>.

<sup>24</sup> UNAMA and OHCHR *Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2015*, annual report (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kabul, 2016), [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_”final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_”final_14_feb_2016.pdf).

obvious when they started the negotiation over the formation of cabinet and distribution of key government portfolios. Contrary to their initial assurances of having an inclusive government, they distributed most of the important positions to their very close collaborators, thus, excluding everyone else.

NUG is divided between two political camps, which is heavily affected by past political misgivings. Not all ministers are equal in the eyes of the two leaders, and not all of them are accountable. This environment of mistrust has pushed President Ghani to impose stringent restrictions on his cabinet ministers and their institutions. This unforeseen political environment has seriously stifled the new administration to the point of creating administrative paralysis. If the current trend continues, there are high risks that the country might become even more politically and ethnically fragmented, thus, threatening the tremendous socio-economic gains that Afghanistan has achieved since the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001.

One of the important mandates of the NUG, for instance, is to reform the electoral system and review the current system of the government by convening a constitutional *Loya Jirga* before next September. During the past three presidential and two parliamentary elections, flaws in the electoral system caused great concerns and provoked serious crises. Therefore, a meaningful reform of the system is called for. A heavily centralised governing system, where important decisions are taken in Kabul without engaging local stakeholders at the provincial level, is perhaps not an efficient system in today's Afghanistan anymore. Many of in the country have had hopes that President Ghani would start the process of transition from political patronage to a pluralistic and inclusive system. However, the partisan politics of the NUG has pushed strong powerbrokers to mobilise their political base using new ethnic narratives, thus, impeding the reform process.

### ***Governance and Economic Deterioration***

President Ashraf Ghani, during his eloquent inaugural speech on September 29, 2014, explained his vision for Afghanistan as a decade of transformation from 2015- 2024. One of his key messages consisted of improving governance and defying systemic corruption, which has been affecting all aspects of life in the country. In fact, high level of corruption and bad governance in the past has seriously thwarted the international community's efforts to stabilise Afghanistan. Millions of U.S. dollars allocated for the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan have been misused or wasted. Afghans have rightly accused the former President

Karzai for allowing emergence of an economic system based on mafia structure and patronage, which led to collusion between powerful politicians and businessmen.

At the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF), the Afghan Government committed itself to enact and enforce a legal framework to combat corruption.<sup>25</sup> Despite these commitments to rein in corruption, little progress has been achieved and Afghanistan still remains at the bottom of Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI).<sup>26</sup> According to the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), corruption still remains one of the major threats hindering the stabilisation and reconstruction process of Afghanistan.

Regrettably, corruption is not considered taboo in Afghan society anymore and it has become ingrained in the culture as an accepted norm. Therefore, it will require a multifaceted approach to curb and control it. While people acknowledge that improvements in the security and economic sectors require time, they will not tolerate any failure in fixing a dysfunctional government which has failed to address endemic corruption and a culture of impunity. The inability of the NUG to implement a comprehensive reform agenda is a big concern. The Government's coffers are empty, and it is greatly dependent on generous contributions from the international donor community for its survival. Therefore, the next conference on Afghanistan in Brussels in late 2016 is likely to be a difficult one for President Ghani.

Indeed the drawdown of U.S. and NATO forces has had a significant impact on the economy, but inaction of the NUG since September 2014 is also to blame. Despite a decrease in donor financial assistance for the country, there are still plenty of resources dedicated by donor countries for development projects in Afghanistan.

## **Future Directions**

There is an undeniable fact that the NUG despite all of its failures is the result of a legitimate democratic process based on an agreement between the two leading candidates who roughly represented more than 70 per cent of the voters during the 2014 presidential election. Any other unconstitutional alternative to NUG will further increase political

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<sup>25</sup> Ruder Trend, *Lessons and Opportunities from the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework*, special report (United States Institute of Peace, 2015), <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR378-Lessons-and-Opportunities-from-the-Tokyo-Mutual-Accountability-Framework.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2015*, Transparency International, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2015>.

fragmentation and deepen the current crisis. Even an attempt for early presidential election without substantial reform in the electoral system will not reduce the current political crisis. Despite their differences, the two leaders of the NUG have one important common interest which is: political survival for the next three years and perhaps potential political alliance in view of the 2019 presidential election. In fact, the two leaders admit that one will not politically survive without the other and are capable of overcoming their differences when their personal interests are threatened.

The leadership of the NUG, unfortunately, has lost the opportunity to make significant breakthrough in its key priorities in the past 17- 18 months. It was easy to mobilise popular support by addressing people's grievances and dissatisfaction from the previous government. In fact, the NUG still has the opportunity to reassert itself politically by setting a realistic agenda for the remaining year. The Afghan people admit the limits of NUG in terms of improving security and economic situation which require long-term measures. However, improvement in delivery of public services, fighting corruption and nepotism, and making senior government officials accountable are simple actions that could positively change people's perceptions.

In order to prevent a return to chaos and bloodshed post U.S. and NATO disengagement from the country, Afghanistan's immediate neighbours and key regional powers must cooperate in finding a road map for political settlement and economic reintegration of the country into the region.

### ***The Peace Process***

The start of spring in Afghanistan is a presage for heavy battles, and this fighting season will be worse than 2015 for the Afghan security forces as well as for the civilians. Despite President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani's tireless efforts, the Taliban have categorically refused to negotiate with the Afghan Government. Ghani began his new initiative by visiting the right capitals such as Beijing and Riyadh, which are considered key allies of Pakistan in the region. He then made a number of concessions to the Pakistani authorities such as accepting an unprecedented trip to the Pakistan Army General Headquarter, sending Afghan cadets to their military academies, and allowing signing of a controversial Memorandum of Understanding for intelligence sharing between the two countries. Sadly, his unilateral concessions have not been reciprocated by the Pakistani side, which has created a strong political backlash in the country. Hence, he started doubting the sincerity of Pakistani authorities particularly, when he

learned that they concealed the death of the former Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar for over two years.

Similarly, former president Hamid Karzai had failed in his efforts to reach out to the insurgents. He also made peace with the Taliban a key mandate of his second term presidency and engaged in an active regional diplomacy. However, lack of meaningful progress made him resentful and thus, he became frustrated not only with Pakistan, but also with Afghanistan's key strategic partner, the United States.

Once again a very weak government in Kabul, which is plagued with political bickering, growing corruption, and bad governance will not be able to make an important breakthrough in crucial peace efforts without the support of its key international partners.

Meanwhile, the Taliban, despite last year's territorial gains, face deep internal crises. Their growing split over leadership and fratricide fighting has seriously affected them. The emergence of Islamic State (IS) fighters in eastern Afghanistan is an additional challenge to them. Their monopoly of Islam and religious legitimacy is fiercely contested by emergence of IS, and they have already lost the loyalty of majority of the foreign fighters inside Afghanistan. Therefore, the Taliban are avoiding any direct negotiation with Kabul until they are capable of resolving their internal differences. They fear that being around the same table with officials from the Afghan Government might further deepen their current split, and they might lose more of their fighters to IS.

Nonetheless, despite the recent setbacks, President Ghani has taken the right steps towards the peace process. In fact, there are two major components to a lasting political settlement in Afghanistan: one is indeed dialogue with the insurgents who have legitimate grievances and the other, perhaps the most important one, is settlement of historic differences with Pakistan.

The contentious differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan go back to the time of Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. Since then, consecutive Afghan governments have shied away from addressing the core issues which have prevented peaceful coexistence between the two countries. The Afghan political elite are fully aware of some of Pakistan's legitimate demands and privately recognise them. However, embarking on serious negotiations with the Pakistanis on these highly politicised and controversial topics requires a strong political mandate and unequivocal political support, which is not the case with the NUG.

Despite current escalation of violence throughout the country and the latest truck bombing in Kabul, there is no alternative to a political settlement in Afghanistan the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) framework where Afghanistan and Pakistan have been negotiating in

presence of the U.S. and China is the right venue for advancing towards a settlement between Kabul and the Taliban.

Afghanistan heavily relies on the United States military and economic support and China enjoys tremendous leverage over Pakistan. Therefore, countries such as the United States and China could assist Afghanistan and Pakistan in resolving their historic differences, which is the first step towards a comprehensive political settlement and a sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

### ***Regional Economic Integration***

A just and sustainable peace, which is the ultimate goal of the Afghan people, will not be achieved without an economically viable Afghan state. The Afghan economic dependency is not sustainable and donor contributions have already significantly reduced. For instance, the expenditure of the Afghan security forces, around U.S.\$4 billion are fully paid by NATO countries. In addition, share of the illegal economy such as opium production is growing again and it has been undermining the legitimacy and authority of the Afghan state. Therefore, the future of the country lies in its economic reintegration in the region, which is only possible through a regional consensus over a stable and peaceful Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's unique geographic position opens tremendous opportunities for it to become a hub for trade and transit between South and Central Asia. Since early 1990s, India and Pakistan have shown interest in fossil fuel reserves in Central Asian Republics such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. After the U.S. involvement, the idea of making Afghanistan an energy bridge gained momentum and the trans-Afghanistan pipeline widely known as Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI) is considered a major project.<sup>27</sup> In addition, realisation of Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000)<sup>28</sup> is an important step in this direction because for the first time in recent history Pakistan will become dependent on the transit routes of Afghanistan.

Lately, China as an emerging world power and a major regional player, put forward its own initiative for regional cooperation known as 'One Road One Belt', which consists of inter-regional economic integration

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<sup>27</sup> Asian Development Bank, "Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India Establish Landmark TAPI Pipeline Company," Asian Development, November 13, 2014, <http://www.adb.org/news/turkmenistan-afghanistan-pakistan-and-india-establish-landmark-tapi-pipeline-company>.

<sup>28</sup> World Bank, "Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission & Trade Project (CASA-1000)," World Bank Group, <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P145054?lang=en>.

by reviving the old Silk Road in Eurasian landmass. The Afghan people hope to receive the benefit of the geographic position of Afghanistan and regain its old strategic importance by becoming a trade and transit hub between South and Central Asia, as well as China and the Middle East.

In addition, Afghanistan's underground mineral resources and mines are its only opportunities for much needed capital and a gateway out of the infernal circle of conflict and poverty. Located near two emerging world powers (such as China and India), which are in dire need of mineral resources to sustain their current economic development needs, Afghanistan with its untouched and large reserves of mineral resources, can offer the best deals to both countries.

In fact, the only economic sector that can help Afghanistan through this period of economic transition, is the mining sector. In order to overcome challenges related to poverty and dependency on foreign assistance, the country is in dire need of capital for investment in its economic infrastructure. The vision of the new National Unity Government in Kabul is summarised in a single sentence delivered by President Ghani during his inauguration ceremony in Kabul:

We believe the geographic location of Afghanistan can change this country to a transit route. The mines can change Afghanistan to an industrial country; similarly, our land and water can change Afghanistan to a dynamic agricultural land.<sup>29</sup>

So far, the Chinese and Indian companies have shown interest in the mining sector and have already secured important contracts respectively in the copper and iron mines. In order to extract resources from these mines and transport it out of Afghanistan, both China and India need to cooperate in stabilising the country and modernising its transportation infrastructure. Therefore, the Afghan mining sector offers a unique opportunity for collaboration and cooperation among regional countries.

## **Conclusion**

The current democratic process and the past gains will not survive if the U.S. decides to prematurely leave Afghanistan. The future of Afghanistan post-U.S. and NATO military disengagement looks grim, and a descent of the country back into social and political chaos will have dire consequences for the neighbouring and regional countries. However, while there is an ongoing debate about the international community's achievements in Afghanistan over the past fourteen years and survivability of the NUG, the state of affairs when civil war was raging and Taliban ruled over most parts

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<sup>29</sup> Office of the President, "Inaugural Speech by Dr Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai."

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of the country from 1996 to 2001, is still fresh in the minds of the Afghan people, which only makes them optimistic about the future.

The international community's mission is only half done, but full achievement is still possible. There is hope for the country particularly after the democratic and peaceful transfer of political power for the first time in the country's history. The Afghans need the continued support of the international community for another few years and a firm commitment from the regional countries.

New regional dynamics will certainly lead to greater regional cooperation, particularly after the recent thaw in U.S.-Iran relations, and re-emergence of Iran as a regional player after removal of sanctions. In addition, China's diplomatic engagement in Afghanistan, particularly in the context of the peace process, is a positive development and a factor in the fight against terrorism and religious radicalism. Through regional cooperation and continued commitment from the U.S. and other NATO countries, it is possible to make the future of Afghanistan sustainable and irreversible. ■

# Security in Afghanistan: Challenges and Solutions

Dr Abdulbaqi Amin\*

## Introduction

Security and political stability is a state in which people feel safe about their lives and properties, and problems in a country are resolved through discussion and negotiations; issues like power transmission and dissatisfaction about government policies are addressed through legal channels, and no ultra-legal movement is undertaken to bring reforms. In a stable society, neither organised crime occurs nor national and reformist movements become armed against the government, and individual crimes are addressed by judicial organs. Social justice can only be achieved in a secure and stable situation and by applying proper policies in society; but instability brings class system and mafia which are often the main factors behind continuous instability in a country. Human beings can focus on their economic condition only if their life and family are safe. Communities discovered agriculture and industry after providing shelter for themselves, and feeling safe about their lives. How does a society achieve such a state?

Good governance is a pressing necessity of modern societies and is defined as competent and fair management of resources (both human and material) of communities. There is a direct relation between governance and security: good governance brings security and stability in societies, and bad governance destabilises societies; and in an insecure and unstable condition, good governance cannot be achieved.

There is no society without problems, whether these problems are due to wealth distribution or power sharing; but in a stable society, these problems are addressed through negotiation and agreements without jeopardising national interests.

## Security and Stability in Afghanistan (Past and Future)

Afghanistan was relatively stable right after it gained independence on August 19, 1919. However, cultural disputes between King Amanullah Khan and religious scholars paved the way for commotion and instability and Habibullah Kalakani came to power in January 18, 1929. However, he could not remain in power for more than nine months. The situation during the regime of King Mohammad Nader Shah and King Mohammad Zahir

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Shah was relatively stable. Political reforms were brought in during the sixth decade of the past century, and proper steps were taken for good governance: freedom was given to the people; parties were allowed to function and people were more involved in making policies. Daoud Khan's coup d'état opened the door to instability and insecurity in Afghanistan. Although he announced the first Republic Regime in Afghanistan, he allocated more authority to himself as compared to the king, and deliberately relied on the then-Soviet Union and communist elements. In this period, ideological disagreements were at the peak and he was surrounded by communist circles. When he tried to put distance between himself and the Marxists and Soviet Union, a coup conspiracy against him was designed in the Russian Embassy in Kabul; and determining their own fate (which is the absolute right of the people) was once again forced by weapons. When communists came to power in Afghanistan, they shed a great deal of blood in Afghanistan, they imprisoned religious scholars and intellectual opponents and brutally buried most of them alive. In 1978, communists killed 5000 people in Afghanistan,<sup>1</sup> and resistance against communists soared, with all parts of the country becoming armed against them and the communist regime was unable to resist. Thus, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and changed the leadership by killing Hafizullah Amin on December 27, 1979, and appointed Babrak Karmal as the head of the Afghan Government.

Soviet Union intervention brought more instability to Afghanistan; and, Americans who were afraid of Soviet expansion, planned to use the resistance of Afghans to overthrow them. Thus, Afghanistan became a battlefield of the two super powers of the world. As a result of the Geneva Agreement in 1988, Soviet Union withdrew its forces from Afghanistan and after withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan; civil war occurred in Afghanistan which overthrew the Najeeb government on April 28, 1992.

Afghans did not achieve stability and security even after the victory of the *mujahideen* (those engaged in holy war) in Afghanistan and since the Afghan *Jihadi* (holy war) groups did not come to an agreement on power sharing, civil war occurred in Afghanistan which led to the emergence of a new movement under the name of the Taliban. The Taliban ruled in Afghanistan for five years, with civil war still taking Afghan victims. After

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<sup>1</sup> The list, also called the Saur Death List of Afghanistan, was made public by the Netherlands National Prosecutor's Office and National Police in 2013. See for details: AIHRC, *Death List of Afghanistan*, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, accessed 14 August, 2016, [http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/list/3%20Translation%20death%20list%20Internetversion%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/list/3%20Translation%20death%20list%20Internetversion%20(3).pdf).

the 9/11 attack in the United States, American forces with the support of NATO<sup>2</sup> invaded Afghanistan.

### ***Foreign Troop Fatalities***

From 2001 on, the number of U.S. forces gradually increased in Afghanistan. In November 2001, there were 1300 U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan which increased to 9700 in December 2002, and in April 2004, the number reached 20300.<sup>3</sup> Till 2004, the war had not intensified in Afghanistan and after their overthrow in 2001, the Taliban were unable to take power again and the number of foreign troop fatalities was fewer. In fact, until the end of 2004, the highest casualty rate of foreign troops was in 2002, in which 69 soldiers were killed.

From 2003 onwards, the Taliban under Mullah Omar's leadership once again began to organise and launch operations against foreign troops. On the other hand, after 2004, due to intensification of the war in Iraq, Americans kept their 20300 troops in Afghanistan until 2006. In 2005, the number of fatalities reached 129, and after that, war intensified year after year. In 2006, 193 foreign soldiers; in 2007, 228; and in 2008, 296 foreign soldiers were killed in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup>

When Barack Obama became the President of the United States in 2009, he outlined the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan in three points: increasing U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan; security transition to the Afghan forces; and the beginning of U.S troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. Thus, he gradually increased U.S. troops in Afghanistan and the number of these troops reached 67400. From 2001-04, the coalition forces had fewer casualties compared to post-2004. And the Taliban were yet to organise their ranks. From 2004-08, the fatalities of foreign troops began to increase. In 2004, the number of casualties was 60; in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 this number was respectively 129, 193, 228 and 296. From 2008-10, war intensified and the fatalities increased and reached 516 in 2010. 2011 had the highest number of foreign troop casualties in Afghanistan: 710. Since then, however, fatalities have been decreasing and were reduced to 166 and 72 in 2013 and 2014; and eventually 26 in 2015. In the first three months of

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<sup>2</sup> *North Atlantic Treaty Organization.*

<sup>3</sup> "A Timeline of U.S. Troops in Afghanistan since 2001," *Associated Press The Big Story*, October 15, 2015, accessed 18 July 2016, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/50d29d8b2d444fdeb963d38dd792e21f/timeline-us-troops-afghanistan-2001>.

<sup>4</sup> Watson Institute for International Studies, *Costs of War: War-related Death, Injury, and Displacement in Afghanistan and Pakistan 2001-2014*, Watson Institute for International Studies (Brown University, 2015), accessed 14 August, 2016, <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2015/War%20Related%20Casualties%20Afghanistan%20and%20Pakistan%202001-2014%20FIN.pdf>.

2016, there were only two casualties among foreign troops; and the main factor behind reduction of fatalities has been the security transition to the Afghan security personnel.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Foreign Troop Fatalities from Insider Attacks***

Another obstacle in the way of foreign troops is insider attacks of so-called ‘green-on-blue’ attacks where an Afghan soldier turns and kills foreign troops. For instance, on August 5, 2014, an American General was killed and 16 ISAF members were injured in one of these attacks in the National Defence University of Marshal Fahim. From 2008-15, 91 attacks of this type have been carried out by the Afghan security forces which have left 148 soldiers dead and 188 others injured.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that the foreign troops have also carried out the same attacks on Afghan security forces. On July 21, 2015, an Afghan military base was targeted by U.S. helicopters which left nine Afghan soldiers dead and six others injured. In another incident on September 8, 2015, officials in the Afghan Ministry of Interior claimed that due to the NATO air strike in Helmand, 11 counter-narcotics police of Afghanistan were killed, but NATO denied responsibility.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Afghan Security Forces***

The Afghan Security Forces include the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, Afghan Border Police, Afghan Local Police, and forces of the National Directorate of Security. In 2012, there were 157, 000 national police, 17, 000 local police and 195, 000 National Army forces in Afghanistan. Currently, the total number of national police and the Army is

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<sup>5</sup> “Home and Away: Iraq and Afghanistan War Casualties,” *CNN.com*, August 14, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/war.casualties/>

<sup>6</sup> Bill Roggio and Lisa Lundquist “Green-on-blue attacks in Afghanistan: The Data,” *The Long War Journal*, May 23, 2012, accessed July 18, 2016, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/green-on-blue\\_attack.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/green-on-blue_attack.php)

“Afghan Police were killed in NATO airstrike?” *DW.com*, <http://www.dw.com/fa-af/11-D9%BE%D9%88%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%87%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%88-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF/a-18698405>

<sup>7</sup> “Afghan Officials Blame NATO After 11 Police Officers Killed in Airstrike” *RT.com*, September 8, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/314685-us-airstrike-officers-afghanistan/>

352000, with 30000 local police work alongside with them to maintain security in the country.<sup>8</sup>

Since the formation of these forces in 2002, there have been casualties every year; but these casualties were fewer during the first years because the Afghan forces had a secondary role in the war. In 2007, 2008 and 2009, Afghan troop deaths were respectively 966, 983 and 931. In 2010, 2113 soldiers were killed. In 2011, the security transition was initiated, therefore, Afghan troops fatalities began to increase after that. In 2012 and 2013, the number of Afghan soldiers killed increased to 2765 and 4350. And in 2015, 7000 Afghans security forces were killed and 12000 injured.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Civilian Casualties (2001-15)***

Civilian casualty is one of the most inhuman aspects of war. International laws are made to prevent civilian casualties in war (for instance, the Geneva Convention on protection of civilians). These Laws oblige the parties of war to respect civilian status during war, but since there is no centralised force to enforce these laws at the international level, therefore, parties engaged in war do not observe these laws and thus, remain reckless about civilian casualties.

In 2001, when the U.S. and coalition forces began their attack on Afghanistan, the number of civilian casualties was very high and reached to 2375. Later from 2002-06, 2422 Afghan civilians were killed in Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> In 2007, the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) began to collect the statistics of civilian casualties in Afghanistan. But the data collection protocols of UNAMA's reports were different in 2007 and 2008, compared to 2009 and the years after that. If one studies the reports of UNAMA on civilian casualties, one will find that whenever war intensified between the Taliban on one side, and the Afghan and coalition forces on the other, civilian casualties have also increased. After 2007, the number of civilian casualties increased (except in 2012). In 2007, the total number of civilian casualties was 1523, but this number reduced to 1102 in 2015. It should be noted that in these statistics, UNAMA has not included those incidents of civilian casualties which were not

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<sup>8</sup> US Department of Defense, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan* (U.S. Government, 2015), [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1225\\_Report\\_Dec\\_2015\\_-\\_Final\\_20151210.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1225_Report_Dec_2015_-_Final_20151210.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> "Murad: Strengthening the Afghan Air Force to Reduce Casualties," *Radio Liberty*, February 26, 2016, <http://da.azadiradio.com/a/27491120.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Watson Institute, *Costs of War*, 2015.

verified or were out of the reach of UNAMA; and the casualties caused by drone attacks and the foreign forces are not included in these statistics either. Yet according to the statistics of the United Nations, from 2007-15, the number of civilian fatalities in Afghanistan was 62375.

### **The Condition of War in Afghanistan**

After the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG), security situation deteriorated all over the country, and contrary to previous years, conditions in the Northern provinces deteriorated more than Southern and Eastern provinces and with the collapse of Kunduz on September 29, 2015, insecurity reached its climax. After the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, Kunduz was the first city that fell into the hands of the Taliban. According to the *Long War Journal*, in October 2015, from 398 districts in Afghanistan, 31 districts were under the control of the Taliban, and in 36 others, the Taliban were dominant except for the district centres which were under government control.

### **ISIS in Afghanistan**

In July 2014, soon after Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself the Caliph of Muslims, Abdul Qaher Khorasani and Abdul Rahim Muslemdest who were from the Taliban pledged alliance to him, and thus, ISIS emerged in Afghanistan. Later on January 26, 2015, the ISIS leader appointed Hafiz Saeed Khan<sup>11</sup> from Pakistan as the governor of Khorasan and Abdul Rauf Khadim (the former deputy to Taliban's military commission) as the deputy governor.

The ISIS first started their activities through propaganda and publicised videos and journals in Kabul and Nangarhar and then eventually captured four districts in Eastern Afghanistan. In May 2015, for the first time, news about fights between the Taliban and ISIS were reported but the Taliban denied these reports and stated that they have fought not with the ISIS fighters but with robbers, murderers, kidnappers and armed individuals.<sup>7</sup> Later, Mullah Akhtar Mansoor (who at that time was known as deputy of Mullah Mohammad Omar) sent a letter to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and demanded that he avoid intervention in Afghanistan, but ISIS rejected it and issued a *fatwa* (Islamic ruling) in Afghanistan and declared the Taliban

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<sup>11</sup> Editor's Note: Reuters in Peshawar, "ISIS's Leader in Pakistan and Afghanistan Killed in U.S. Drone Strike", *The Guardian*, accessed August 14, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/12/isis-leader-pakistan-afghanistan-hafiz-saeed-khan-killed>.

as heretics. After that, opposition and fights between the two groups increased and these fights reduced the domination of ISIS in Eastern Afghanistan.

There are contradictory reports about the number of ISIS in Afghanistan; Russia has shown concern about the presence of ISIS in Afghanistan and has estimated their number in Afghanistan to be 10, 000. But the Afghan Government has stated that this information is not accurate.<sup>12</sup> Although the exact number of ISIS fighters in Afghanistan is not available, but one can say that ISIS has stopped expansion and is vastly suppressed in Afghanistan.

### **Impacts of Instability on Living Conditions in Afghanistan**

Instability and war in Afghanistan has deeply affected the living conditions in Afghanistan. First of all, governance systems providing public services have been negatively affected. Although, governance was not strong before the war, but when the war began, the concept of governance changed from government for the people to government against the people. Most of the time, the government has used its facilities against the people, and addressing the needs of the people is a secondary issue, and national assets are spent on the continuous existence of the regime.

Modern weapons were used in Afghanistan, even forbidden chemical weapons, which besides vast civilian casualties, negatively impacted the environment and various types of diseases augmented in the country. Currently, thousands of Afghans die due to cancer.<sup>13</sup> According to the Afghan Government, 60, 000 people are diagnosed with tuberculosis every year, 14, 000 of which lose their lives.<sup>14</sup>

The hospitals are also in very bad condition and the government provides medical care only to the security forces and their families. But most Afghans do not have access to proper health services; therefore, a large sum of money is going out of the country for medical treatment. There are governmental hospitals, but they provide very poor services and sometimes due to contaminated lab equipment, diseases have been transferred from one patient to other. According to the surveys, 191 under 5 children die out of every 1000; and 1600 mother dies from 100000 pregnant mothers annually. Only 15 per cent of the Afghan Ministry of Public

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<sup>12</sup> “Officials of the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior of Afghanistan: ISIS does not Exist in Afghanistan,” Farsi.ru, February 3, 2016, accessed 18 July 2016, <http://farsi.ru/doc/10270.html>.

<sup>13</sup> “Minister of Public Health: Annual 20, 000 Afghans to Develop Cancer,” DW.com, February 3, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> “14,000 Afghans Die from Tuberculosis Annually,” *Azadi Radio*, 2016, <http://da.azadiradio.com/a/27632961.html>.

Health's budget is funded by the Afghan Government, while 85 per cent of its budget is provided by international donors.<sup>15</sup>

Due to insecurity, weakness of academic cadres, lack of monitoring and lack of exact and fair system of evaluation, the country's education system is weak; and most students who have graduated from secondary schools do not have the qualities of a graduate. Scientific research is very low and there is no university that offers PhD education. Applied scientific research to reform and analyse government policies is also frail.

Afghanistan is an agricultural country, but so far has failed to be self-sufficient in terms of food and imports more than one third of its food from other countries. Afghanistan has unique fruits but due to the lack of appropriate transport and transit issues, most of these fruit are sold in internal markets at low prices and do not find their way to the markets in the region.<sup>16</sup> Goods industry is also damaged in Afghanistan and the country produces less than 10% of its goods and 90% of goods are being imported from outside the country.<sup>17</sup> Thus, trade balance is lost in the country; its import rate is as high as 96 per cent, while its export rate is only 4 per cent.<sup>18</sup> In 2015, the Afghani currency lost its value by 20 per cent against foreign currencies.

Drug production and addiction has increased exponentially; Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium. In 2015, there were 3.5 million addicts in the country, while this number was 3 million in 2014 and 2.6 million in 2013. However, the government does not have any preventive policy against this. This catastrophe threatens the future of Afghanistan and its neighbours are not safe. Today, in Iran, the addiction rate has gone up.

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<sup>15</sup> Anwar Tarabi, "Public Health Situation in Afghanistan," *Subha* 8, 2016, <http://8am.af/1392/10/02/condition-ministry-health-in-afghanistan/>.

<sup>16</sup> Mohammad Hossein Emad, "Agriculture, the Engine of the Economy and Provider of Afghanistan", *BBC.com* 2013, [http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2013/08/130827\\_k05\\_ag\\_projects\\_challenge\\_opportunity](http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2013/08/130827_k05_ag_projects_challenge_opportunity).

<sup>17</sup> "The Worst Situation is in Commerce," *DW.com*, August 23, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Commerce and Industry, *Shocking Trade in Afghanistan, 96 percent of Imports, 4% of Exports* (Afghanistan Government), August 5, 2014, <http://ensijam.com/economy/6844-%D%8AA%D%8AC%D%8A%D%8B%D%8AA-%D%8AA%DA%A%D%8A%D%86%D%80%D%8AF%D%87%D%86%D%8AF%D%87%D%81%D%8BA%D%8A%D%86%D%8B%D%8AA%D%8A%D%86%D%8B-96-%D%8AF%D%8B%D%8B%D%8AF-%D%88%D%8A%D%8B%D%8AF%D%8A%D%8AA-4-%D%8AF%D%8B%D%8B%D%8B%D%8AF-%D%8B%D%8A%D%8AF%D%8B%D%8A%D%8A>.

## **Impacts of Insecurity and Instability in Afghanistan on the Region**

In today's world, no one can avoid the negative impacts of insecurity and instability of their neighbours. Instability in Afghanistan has affected the security and development of South Asia. The frontier boundaries of Pakistan that were peaceful have now become unstable in the aftermath of the U.S. military invasion of Afghanistan. Many Pakistanis have lost their lives. The opium production is not an in-house threat, but a threat that spreads to Pakistan and Iran via smugglers. The drug addiction in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) is increasing day-by-day; according to Pakistani statistics, in 2013, there were 6.3 million drugs addicts, of whom 700 die in a single day. On the other hand, the Iranian statistics also show 1.325 million drug addicts, who use more than 500 tonnes of opium. Moreover, in the last five years, 70,000 drug addicts increased globally and according to some sources, between 63-65 per cent drugs are directly and indirectly correlated with crimes. Therefore, poppy production endangers the future of these trio countries. Due to instability in Afghanistan, regional trade has also faced many challenges and problems and thus, its volume have been badly affected. Many big regional projects (CASA-1000 and TAPI) have been stalled. This instability and insecurity creates hindrances in the integration and exchange of goods processed between Central Asia and South Asia.

## **Opportunities for Reconciliation in Afghanistan**

### ***Withdrawal of Foreign Troops***

The U.S. officially stopped its military operations at the end of 2015, and promised that all its troops will withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2016. Although, they took this promise back after the rise of insecurity in Afghanistan, but most western countries are willing that with openings of peace talks, they will leave Afghanistan, and hence, the biggest obstacle to peace and stability will be removed, because the Taliban have already declared that as long as there is are presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan they will continue to fight. The sooner foreign forces leave Afghanistan, the greater the chances that Taliban's war would become illegal (Because their main argument for fighting is that there are foreign troops inside Afghanistan). Hizb-e-Islami was also convinced that armed struggle must stop and instead a political struggle should be started.

### ***Reconciliation with Hizb-e-Islami***

Hizb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar) has shown interest in reconciliation with the Afghan Government and in a near future it is possible that they would reach a mutual agreement. After the agreement, Hizb-e-Islami would start its struggle within the framework of the constitution. Though, these talks have taken months and had its challenges, this is a hope. These talks had two main qualities: First, these were intra-Afghan talks and were far away from outsider's influence as both parties recognised the need of reconciliation. Second, these negotiations are not based on getting privileges, rather were about how to reach lasting peace.

### ***Inability to Bear the Consequences of Conflict***

The cost of war for both sides is overwhelming. The cost of war is not only about the costs incurred in a military zone, but is also hampering the government from properly handling its basic duties, such as good governance and bringing balanced development to the country. Poverty and unemployment has been quite high although there are no precise statistics.

### ***Public Opinion of Afghans***

The majority of Afghans are fed up with the continuous conflict and now-and-then Afghan leaders raise their voices for peace. The spirit of war has become colorless. If this public opinion was present in a more stable democratic country, it would have affected policy, but Afghanistan is a war-torn country where civil society does not have any impact on the policies. As a consequence, public opinion has not been able to bring appropriate pressures or impacts.

### ***The Alarming Threats of a New Crisis***

The alarming threat of a new crisis and the emergence of another new armed opposition have increased the concerns of all. The Taliban have also lost large areas in the East, the North is been insecure in general, peoples are migrating from Afghanistan, and there is higher percentage of unemployment. In the continuation of this situation, Afghanistan should expect more threats and crises.

When there are so many positive opportunities for a peaceful Afghanistan, given below are the causes and factors that are making peace efforts harder:

*Incorrect interpretation of 'negotiations'*

Negotiations means that the engaged parties must be prepared to compromise their positions and come to a middle point. The High Peace Council in Afghanistan (HPC) established in 2010, made 'surrender' a condition for peace and this was a factor behind the failure of HPC. Due to this interpretation, HPC started its re-integration programme. Instead of to making contacts and start negotiations with the Taliban leadership and solves issues with them, the HPC opened its branches all over the country with the motive that the Taliban fighters should stop fighting and lay down their weapons. This made the Taliban more sensitive towards them: they considered this a hostile administration and thought that in the name of peace, the government is encouraging Taliban to 'surrender'. To a large extent, HPC's peace efforts were exhibitivite and unreal in nature, which made little contribution to the peace efforts in the country.

*Hopes from foreign countries about peace and stability*

The principle reason behind the continuous war is the absence of intra-Afghan dialogues. This was also a key factor behind the Afghan civil war and insecurity after the collapse of Dr Najeeb's government in 1992. In post-2001 scenario, the U.S. and NATO felt that the Afghan issue should be resolved through negotiations, that's why in the London Conference (2010), participants focused on the necessity of regional cooperation where the regional countries were asked to apply pressure on the armed opposition groups to come to a compromise deal with the Afghan Government. After the establishment of HPC, the ex-President in various statements said that the key to peace in Afghanistan was in the hands of Pakistan and the U.S.A. Therefore, he made several visits to Pakistan and via United Kingdom numerous trilateral meetings were also arranged between UK-Afghanistan-Pakistan. In these trilateral meetings, reconciliation with the Taliban was emphasised. But, all the dates of reconciliation passed without any direct meetings (face-to-face talks) with the Taliban. The security situation is getting worse. The Afghan Government has overestimated Pakistan's role. On the other hand, Pakistan is also highlighting its role beyond its capabilities because it wants to take ownership of the Afghan issue, and show that they dominate the Taliban's decisions.

The current Afghan President was also influenced by this thought that the key to peace in Afghanistan is in the hands of Pakistan. Therefore, he visited Saudi Arabia, UAE and Pakistan which are considered a strategic triangle in the region and moreover, Ashraf Ghani also visited China, which has strategic relations with Pakistan. Ghani also moved closer towards

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Pakistan and compared to Karzai's era his relations with India are not that warm. But all these attempts failed and even the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) talks have not given any tangible results despite many hopes.

*Absence of a mediator*

In the current situation, it is difficult to initiate reconciliation talks until there is a non-government mediation group, which is acceptable to all engaged parties of the conflict. In the absence of a mediation group, contacts established with the Taliban were not strong and after some time, the process became stalled. Foreigners can't play a mediatory role in Afghanistan because most of them belong to opposite sides and some of them have goals and interests of their own, therefore, instead of a mediatory role they follow their own interests.

Face-to-face negotiations are successful when the two engaged sides of the conflict decide to solve their issues through reconciliation. In the current situation, a mediatory group could decrease the regional intelligence interferences and efforts. Secondly, it would be helpful to reach an agreement, because, it can make divided and opposite views more coherent and can even play a guarantor role. For example, talks between the Afghan Government and Hizb-e-Islami Afghanistan (Hekmatyar), have not reached an agreement yet and in the absence of a mediator group, they are becoming time-consuming.

*The term 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' negotiations*

The former President Hamid Karzai insisted on an 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' negotiation process. It was reported that some sides are not honest and trying for division of Afghanistan, and therefore in many governmental discussions, they agreed on an Afghan-led peace process. However, the problem is that the Afghan Government is heavily engaged with its opposition in armed conflict. If a mediatory group is there, then whether the way to peace is 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' or not becomes passé since the Afghan Government would be taken into confidence in every matter by this mediatory group.

*Pakistan's stand*

Pakistani governments do not have a clear policy towards Afghanistan, and there are many other factors responsible for their contradictory Afghan policy. On the one hand, they have been badly affected by the security situation in Afghanistan. On the other hand, they want to resist the influences of India in Afghanistan. Pakistan is also not happy with

American presence and its policies in Afghanistan. They are sensitive that U.S.A is empowering India to compete with China in the region. However, since they can't say this openly and publically, because they need Washington's economic and military aid. Hence, they have a very contradictory policy towards the Taliban. They sometimes arrest top Taliban leadership and hand them over to the U.S. and Afghan government and sometimes help them to strengthen their foothold in Afghanistan. On the one hand, Islamabad considers Taliban's ideology a threat to Pakistan's security, but on the other hand, it strives to use them for the attainment of their own goals in Afghanistan. They have also shared in political circles that they have leverage over the Taliban. However, the Taliban have expressed that they are independent in their decisions and no one can represent them. This contradictory Pakistani policy has created serious obstacles in the way of peace.

#### *U.S. policy towards Afghanistan*

It was the Americans who said that negotiation with 'terrorists' is not possible and they must be wiped out. When affording the longest war became difficult for them, they tried to transfer security and military operational responsibility to the Afghans. As a result, this war became an intra-Afghan war, and the casualties also became Afghani. Now, we rarely hear that American or NATO soldiers are killed in Afghanistan (the total fatalities for foreign forces were 26 in 2015). Every day, hundreds of Afghans get killed as a result of the war being brought to the country by America.

In the London Conference, Americans paved the way for direct talks with the Taliban. However, Americans only discuss their own problems and issues with the Taliban and never talk about solutions to the Afghan problem. The fact is, the Americans consider themselves 'neutral' and want Afghans to negotiate with each other. However, the situation demands that Americans play a more pivotal role and use their leverage for facilitating intra-Afghan negotiations. Lack of American interest could lead to prolonged conflict.

### **Steps towards Peace and Stability**

#### *Formation of a Mediation Group*

It is not necessary that this group should have great number of members; it can have 15 members. These members must be composed of Afghan politicians and academic personalities. They should be realistic,

intellectuals, and neutrals who do not represent any political group, but are acceptable to the engaged parties of the conflict.

### ***Establishment of a Guarantor Group***

In the current situation, the necessity of establishment of a foreign pivot to Afghan peace process who should work within the framework of Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) and United Nations is important, to prepare grounds for the implementation of decisions made by the Afghan mediation group and play a role in the enforcement of commitments made by the engaged parties of the conflict. Moreover, this guarantor would also help the mediator group. This pivot can be made up of six foreign ministers of Islamic countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Malaysia, Sudan and UAE) and special representatives of OIC, UN and European Union.

### ***Civil Society Movement***

The emergence of pressure groups for bringing peace and ending war is a primary step which must be taken. These groups are there in Afghanistan, but they don't have any coordination with each other. There are also other Afghans groups outside the country who work for peace. All sides must come together and make a pivot of peace and reconciliation so that the engaged parties should listen to them. The research centres inside Afghanistan should conduct research on peace and stability, the causes of continuous bloodshed and its solution. Conferences, roundtables, discussions and publications iterate the necessity for peace and reconciliation and should remind Afghan policy-makers about their responsibilities.

### ***Coordination between Regional and International Think Tanks***

Strategic think tanks can prepare grounds for the peace process through academic programmes and research publications and can give recommendations to the Afghan government and policy-makers. Think tanks can also impact public opinions to influence regional and international policies. In this regard, strategic think tanks of China, Pakistan, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Russia, USA and Europe can coordinate a conference which can develop a road map for the engaged parties in the Afghan conflict. An Afghan mediation group should also be launched at the end of such a conference.

## **Conclusion**

### ***War is not a Solution***

The last fifteen years have shown that war is not a solution and through war, we can't bring peace and stability to the country. Therefore, this experience should not be repeated and must be avoided. The Afghan issue is solvable through negotiations. 'Pressurising' and 'threatening' are tools of war, and if used as a 'peace strategy' would not be helpful in the peace process.

### ***Stability is in the Interest of all Afghans***

Some Afghans might think that due to the regime change in 2001, some circles reached advantage and privilege, and, if negotiations occur, they may be deprived of all the privileges they have and lose the benefits they have gained since 2001. These circles are, hence, becoming a hindrance in the peace process. But the fact is that continuous war is not in the interest of any Afghan party. War kills without any discrimination, it affects the living conditions, and in the presence of war no one can provide a good living for one's followers. All Afghans are convinced of this fact and now raising their voices for peace. The Afghan Government and even Taliban are seeking peaceful negotiation and a solution of the conflict.

### ***Stability of Afghanistan is Important for Regional Stability***

In the last three decades, Afghanistan has played a key role in South Asia and during this time regional concerns have also been about its security and stability because an insecure Afghanistan is a threat to them. In fact, drug trafficking and drug addiction is on the rise in Pakistan and Iran, while the instability has become a hindrance for economic integration and development of the region.

### ***Stability in Afghanistan Strengthens Global Stability***

Good governance, active political participation, and an efficient civil society struggle for a better future are guarantees of peace and stability in the country and also for a peaceful world.

### ***Regional Stability can strengthen 'Moderates'***

Wars bring out extremist opinions and reactions. Experience and history has proven that wars cannot solve long-term problems, rather increases them. It weakens peaceful coexistence in society, directs movements and groups

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towards the abolition of friendly policies. For moderation and peaceful coexistence strengthening stability is critical. ■

# **South Asia's Security Concerns in Afghanistan**

- Significance of Stability in Afghanistan for Pakistan
- Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process: Progress and Prospects

# Significance of Stability in Afghanistan for Pakistan

Khalid Aziz\*

## Introduction

The world's best armies—composed of U.S. and NATO forces—have battled in Afghanistan against the Taliban since December 2001 and by the end of 2014, the U.S. had spent more than 1 trillion dollars and the allies lost countless soldiers, while many more were injured. Pakistan has suffered greatly during this war: its financial losses amount to \$107 billion, while more than 21,500 civilians have died during the war and the ensuing wave of terrorism. Yet the Taliban remain resilient in Afghanistan. The region has suffered immensely and the war prevents economic growth and development. At the same time, misgovernance and corruption adds to its security risks.

Although there is a drawdown of foreign forces in Afghanistan since December 2014, and the U.S. forces will be reduced to provide capacity building to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and also furnish support in operations when necessary. Nevertheless, despite President Obama's claims of withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan, for all practical purposes, the Afghan war goes on – but in a different manner. It must also be said that it was the success of the Taliban on the battlefield that forced this revision in the withdrawal of troops.

The Taliban's ability to launch operations, like the one that led to the capture of the Afghan city of Kunduz for fifteen days in October 2015 was a shock to the Afghans and the international community. The New York Times reported:

The insurgents held Kunduz for just 15 days, but during that time they destroyed government offices and facilities, seized military hardware, hunted down opponents, and freed prisoners from the city's two prisons.<sup>1</sup>

Why the Taliban targeted Kunduz and not any other city points to ancient rivalries that are at play in this war.

While it is simpler for the U.S. and NATO to have an easy-to-understand narrative of the war as, a 'War on Terror' it actually misleads

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<sup>1</sup> Rod Norland, "Taliban End Takeover of Kunduz After 15 Days," *New York Times*, October 13, 2015, accessed May 20, 2016, <http://nyti.ms/27H27eW>.

analysis and veils the real drivers that are at work. an erroneous aggregation of causes can lead to the execution of ineffective policies; David Kilcullen, an expert on insurgencies, has identified this problem and put it eloquently:

Dozens of local movements, grievances and issues have been aggregated.....into a global *jihād* against the West.<sup>2</sup>

The advent of ISIS in Nangarhar and cross-border raids into Pakistan by the escaped TTP elements, with safe-havens in Afghanistan, has caused further regional insecurity. While the failure of re-conciliation with the Taliban so far places a big question mark regarding the chances of peace in the region, we must not forget that other spoilers who can be best defined as *criminal entrepreneurs*, will avail themselves of any opportunity that they can find to make money by reducing the ability of the states to guard its people and interdict criminal activities like drug trafficking or gun-running. These activities are the sources of employment and fulfillment of ambitions that are unrequited due to lack of economic growth for a majority of people in certain parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

## **Geostrategic Considerations**

Throughout history, the heavily populated regions of what now constitute Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iran had growing populations with limited resources to sustain them, and were thus, unable to generate sufficient incomes from trading or agriculture. On the other hand, to the South of this region lay the fertile/prosperous lands of the Indian subcontinent that was home to a very rich and diversified civilisation. The Gangetic plain alone, generated more than 25 per cent of the world's GDP in the 16th and 17th centuries – roughly equivalent to China's position today. Kings of the region only knew of two ways to accumulate resources; either through taxes or by war and usurping resources of weaker neighbouring states.

Mahmud of Ghazni, a ruler of Turkish descent in Ghazni that lies in today's Afghanistan, invaded India 17 times in 27 years between 1000-1027 AD. There were other invaders like Babur, the Lodhis, and Khiljis, who came to India and established dynasties there. Another Afghan ruler Ahmed Shah Abdali, who ruled Afghanistan, raided India nine times between 1747 to 1769. After the East India Company defeated the Sikhs in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sikh War of 1849, the Sikh Empire was dissolved. This brought the British close to what later became Afghanistan and Central Asia. Britain's primary

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<sup>2</sup> David Kilcullen, *Blood Year: The Unraveling Of Western Terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Khalid Aziz, "Drivers of Radicalism and Extremism in Pakistan," (country paper, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Islamabad), accessed May 20, 2016, <http://bit.ly/1svgLp9>.

concern was to prevent Russia from threatening their ‘Jewel in the Crown,’ that was India. This led to the following boundary creation in the region:

- Demarcation of Afghanistan’s northern boundary with Russia in 1885-1888.
- The Durand Line defining the boundary with India 1893-1895.
- The Afghan boundary with Russia in the Pamir was delineated in 1895 settling the border between the territory of Bokhara and Kashmir, Chitral, Gilgit and Afghan regions of Badakhshan and Wakhan.

### **Guarding the North-Western Borderland**

British India was very active and concerned in protecting its North-West frontier from any interference from the North; being a world power, at that time, it had the resources to undertake the guardianship of the North-West. However, when it decided to grant independence to the subcontinent by dividing it into Pakistan and India; Britain for some reason did not make adequate arrangements for the future of this region. Was it thoughtlessness or was there any other reason for this strategic forgetfulness?

Did Britain suffer from strategic amnesia or was it a typical imperial maneuver to keep the successor states dependent upon it for the provision of security? One answer to the mystery is available in the February 6, 1946 letter by the Governor General Lord Wavell addressed to the Secretary of State for India in London, recommending that a part of India comprising North West Frontier Province, Balochistan, West Punjab and Sindh may be created as another state to protect Britain’s interest in this part of Asia.<sup>4</sup>

As we disaggregate the causes that have led to a continuation of hostilities in Afghanistan, we must not forget to underline the important geostrategic feature of this region. Afghanistan lies at an extremely important geographic location: to its East lies Pakistan, and a fifty miles long piece of land in the Afghan Wakhan region acts as an entrant into the strategic Chinese Xinjiang province. To Afghanistan’s North lie the former Soviet Republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, that can become the source for future regional prosperity by exporting their abundant energy and mineral resources to Pakistan, India or westward to the Middle-East and Europe. To its West, Afghanistan is bordered by the regional powerhouse of Iran that is now emerging as another important

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<sup>4</sup> Khalid Aziz, *Causes of Rebellion in Waziristan*, policy report, Regional Institute of Policy Research & Training (Peshawar: RIPORE, 2007), <http://riport.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf%20downloads/publications/causes%20of%20rebellion%20in%20waziristan.pdf>.

regional player from years of isolation, owing to the sanctions imposed on it by the West. Further to Afghanistan's North lies resurging Russia.

As the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan began in 2014, two events put the world back into a familiar Cold War pattern. These events were connected to Russia's pre-emptive annexation of Crimea, a part of Ukraine, and its attempt to shape events in Eastern Ukraine to prevent an expansion of NATO that was looking eminent. Some have suggested that the U.S. may even be happy to remain in Afghanistan to apply pressure upon Russia and China. If the U.S. war goal in Afghanistan was the elimination of Al-Qaeda as a threat in Afghanistan, it was achieved in May 2011 with the death of Osama Bin Laden. Currently, the U.S. forces are presumably following a new goal to protect the Afghan state. It is speculated that the presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan provides it with a pivot to influence the Chinese bid to reshape the region by making it a hub of interconnectivity to other parts of the world based on 'One Belt One Road,' (OBOR) concept.

### **Ethnic Tensions and Alignments in Afghanistan**

The historian William Dalrymple, while identifying the drivers of conflict in Afghanistan, has highlighted the tribal conflict that is always simmering below the surface between two of Afghanistan's largest tribal confederacies. The Ghiljais are the largest confederacy in the country and have ruled territories of what later became Afghanistan from 1000 AD to 1747; however they were replaced by the competing confederacy of the Durranis in 1747.

The Ghiljai populace is 13 million; of whom 9 million dwell in Afghanistan. Paktia in Afghanistan is the home of this tribe, but they are also residing in Jalalabad, Paktia, and Khost. Its largest tribe is the Suleman Khel while the next largest are the Kharotis. The Ghiljais are mostly herdsmen and thus nomadic in their lifestyle, as they are in search of pastures. Some 4 million Ghiljais live in Quetta, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the Punjab in Pakistan. The Niazi branch of Ghiljai in Pakistan lives in Bannu and Mianwali. The Ghiljai, Tanoli live in the Tanawal region of Hazara mountains.

Based on long-term hydrological data available for Afghanistan and the dry Central Asian region indicates dwindling grassland commons for the last many decades. In some cases, in parts of Afghanistan, especially in the dry South, the water table has gone down, drying up the underground water channels forcing the land owners, who belong to the Durrani tribal confederacy to enclose the commons and prevent the Ghiljais from pasturing their herds. This has marginalised them economically and led

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several of them to find alternate livelihoods; many joined the Afghan armed forces.

It has been argued that these dreadful circumstances pushed the Ghiljai to launch the communist coup against Sardar Daud in 1979 in order to wrest the state's control from the Durrani-Tajik group to improve their livelihoods. Those in the lead of the take-over of power were Ghiljais associated with the Khalqi wing of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). It is argued that when the *Mujahedeen* reaction organised by West and managed through Pakistan succeeded, the Ghiljai came back in the garb of the Taliban to control the Afghan state.<sup>5</sup>

General Stanley McChrystal Commander of U.S./ISAF forces in Afghanistan in 2009-10, has argued in his report to President Obama in the 'Commander's Initial Assessment (2009)' that the ISAF commanders must understand the social and political dynamics prevailing in Afghanistan. Tribal unhappiness generates support for the insurgents and defeats the goals of the coalition.<sup>6</sup> This refers to the issue discussed above of the need to *disaggregating the problem*. And this is something that we do not hear much about except as a periodic reference by some insightful writer.

Within Afghanistan, the 9/11 war was diagnosed as a Pashtun rebellion against President Karzai's regime which supported the empowerment of three ethnic groups – the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras of the North. This situation prevailed from December 2001 to the middle of 2006, when his Popalzai tribe became powerful in its own right as the U.S. surged its forces in the South and made the Southern tribes very rich and powerful as the Karzai clan spread its patronage widely in the South through the President brother Ahmed Wali Karzai. His death at the hands of his own bodyguard prompted Britain's *Guardian* newspaper to state:

[His death], was the personification of modern-day Afghanistan – corrupt, treacherous, lawless, paradoxical, subservient and charming. Now with his violent death Karzai has also come to symbolise Afghanistan's enduring tragedy.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Khalid Aziz, "Need for a Pak-Afghan Treaty on Management of Joint Water Courses" (paper, Regional Institute of Policy Research & Training, Peshawar, 2007), <http://riport.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf%20downloads/publications/NEED%20FOR%20A%20Pak-%20Afghan%20Water%20Treaty.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Stanley McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment*, report (Kabul: International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), 2009), [http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment\\_Redacted\\_092109.pdf?sid=ST2009092003140](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf?sid=ST2009092003140).

<sup>7</sup> Simon Tisdall, "Ahmed Wali Karzai, the Corrupt and Lawless Face of Modern Afghanistan," *Guardian*, July 12, 2011, accessed May 21, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/12/ahmed-karzai-modern-afghan-warlord>.

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The ascendancy of the non-Pashtuns, prior to 2006-07, was resented by them and helped spiral the insurgency. Although there is a counterargument to this finding that says that Karzai may have been beholden to the Tajiks prior to the arrival of U.S. troops into the South of the country when the influence of the Pashtuns re-emerged. It should be noted that once institutional changes are orchestrated, it takes a long time to neutralise their effects. For instance, the Tajiks who constitute only 27 per cent of the Afghan population, obtained 70 per cent of the officer Corp jobs in the Afghan army. Although Karzai himself is a Pashtun, yet as William Dalrymple comments, his presence then was not seen as more than window-dressing.<sup>8</sup>

It is true that through the power-sharing agreement under the National Unity Government of President Ashraf Ghani and Dr Abdullah Abdullah on January 12, 2015 brought a new team to power. Thus far, real power in Afghanistan, still rests with the dominant tribal allegiances within the institutions that have existed since 2001. President Ashraf Ghani is an Ahmedzai, Ghiljai, who belongs to the larger Ghiljai confederation. He has begun the process of modifying the leadership in important ministries and has begun to bring in former Khalqis belonging to his tribe. He has been able to do so in the Afghan Ministries of Defence, the National Directorate of Security and the Afghan National Security Council. More changes along these lines are expected in the future. Reaction was not long in coming from the Durrani-Tajik bloc when President Ghani's brilliant move to mend bridges, with Pakistan, took shape during his visit to Islamabad in November 2014.

President Ashraf Ghani took the initiative to bring about cooperation between Pakistan's premier intelligence agency, the ISI, and its Afghan counterpart, the NDS, who signed an MoU of cooperation in May 2015. After its signing, three things happened in quick succession in Kabul. In the backdrop of stringent criticism in public quarters against the MoU including criticism of the President by his subordinate Director of NDS, Mr Nabil,<sup>9</sup> who shortly thereafter resigned in protest. The MoU was also condemned in the Afghan parliament and Mr Karzai, the former Afghan President stated in India, that the MoU was an embarrassment and will not be allowed to remain;<sup>10</sup> the statement is meaningful coming from someone who still wielded power.

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<sup>8</sup> William Dalrymple, "A Deadly Triangle" (Brookings essay, Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2013), sec. 2, accessed May 20, 2016, <http://brook.gs/KCpOOJ>.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Ruttig, "Political Cleavages over Pakistan: The NDS Chief's Farewell", *Afghan Analysts Network*, accessed May 21, 2016, <http://bit.ly/241dzNJ>.

<sup>10</sup> Suhasini Haider, "MOU with ISI Dropped says Karzai," *Hindu*, accessed May 21, 2016, <http://bit.ly/27KpRyV>.

To embarrass Pakistan further, the NDS disclosed that Mullah Omar, the recluse leader of the Taliban had died earlier but that Pakistan had kept it a secret.<sup>11</sup> This led to an enormous backlash against President Ashraf Ghani, who in order to retain power and be relevant in Afghan politics, criticised Pakistan for terrorist bombings in Kabul in August 2015.

Clearly, real power in Afghanistan still lies with the ethnic triumvirate of the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazaras, although the authority is shifting now that President Ashraf Ghani has begun to bring in Ghiljai into the power structure; thus clearly a large number of the Pashtun, in whose areas the war is being conducted and who have been the main target of NATO/ISAF operations, is ignored. This is one big weakness in the fabric of Afghan and West's counterinsurgency efforts. It is no wonder that despite the expenditure of billions of dollars and loss of countless lives, the Taliban have not been defeated or reconciled. This absence of ethnic coherence in Afghanistan indicates that unless a solution is found to the larger issue of the tussle between the Ghiljai and the Durrani confederacy, the war in some form or another is likely to continue unabated.

### **India's Presence in Afghanistan**

In his insightful essay on the drivers of war in Afghanistan, Dalrymple begins by narrating how a female Indian army officer teaching English to army cadets viewed the events.

Major Mitali Madhumita, was awakened by the ringing of her mobile phone. Mitali, a 35-year-old Indian army officer from Orissa, had been in Kabul less than a year. Fluent in Dari, the most widely spoken language in Afghanistan, she was there to teach English to the first women officer cadets to be recruited to the Afghan National Army. 'It was a sensitive posting, not so much because of gender issues as political ones: India's regional rival, Pakistan, was extremely touchy about India providing military assistance to the government in Afghanistan and had made it very clear that it regarded the presence of any Indian troops or military trainers there as an unacceptable provocation.'<sup>12</sup>

India's presence in Afghanistan is viewed as a threat by Pakistani strategists who would wish that it was not so; yet India remains in Afghanistan and is associated with security matters, reviving memories in the minds of the Pakistanis of a previous Cold War Era when Afghan-India

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<sup>11</sup> "Mullah Omar 'Died Two Years Ago', Taliban Remain Mum," *Hindustan Times*, accessed May 21, 2016, <http://bit.ly/1OFi0Xy>.

<sup>12</sup> William Dalrymple, "A Deadly Triangle," sec.1.

cooperation against Pakistan, and active sponsorship of the irredentist Pakhtunistan movement that at times\ boiled over into hot contact with the use of Pakistan Air Force and clash of militaries in Bajaur region of Pakistan in the early 1960s. In order to prevent the re-emergence of a similar alliance, Pakistan is likely to undertake counter-measures now that there is a strategic alignment also between the U.S., Afghanistan and India. It is, therefore, very worrying for Pakistani strategists to note the presence of safe-havens for terrorists like Mullah Fazalullah and Mangal Bagh, as well as the Baluch insurgents within their borders.

### **The Benefits of Peace for Pakistan**

From the above description of the situation, and a different analysis of the drivers of conflict in Afghanistan, it is clear that peace will only come when the issues pertaining to the following class of disputed positions is ameliorated:

- Finding a solution to the ongoing conflict between the Ghiljai and the Durrani tribal confederacies.
- Creating greater economic opportunities for the marginalised members of the Afghan population.
- Reconciliation with the Taliban will be best achieved by bilateral negotiations between the Afghan Government and the Taliban (or should it be conducted as peace-building between the two contesting tribal confederacies?). This later is a new design and holds more promise than the QCG approach that grows out of the U.S. narrative of the 9/11 War on Terror and is, thus, flawed.
- Bridging the distrust between Pakistan and India on Afghanistan is essential and must be initiated as early as possible.
- Peace in Afghanistan can only be achieved if the international climate remains peaceful and if it does not bring tension to the region vis-à-vis containment of Russia or balancing China by creating new pressure points in the region.

If we are lucky to obtain relief in the areas described above or at least begin to move in the right direction, then one can assume that the following benefits could flow into Pakistan and the region. Once peace is restored in the region, the fires of extremism and radicalism will extinguish. It must be noted, as stated earlier, those who are benefitting the most from regional unrest are the ‘criminal entrepreneurs,’ who want unrest in the region and in weak states, so that they may conduct their illegal trade based on drug

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trafficking, smuggling, human trafficking and gun-running. Such individuals wish to create unrest, as it allows them to prosper at the expense of general insecurity for the majority.<sup>13</sup> If relative security is created in the region, Pakistan will benefit in numerous ways:

- Increase in trade with Afghanistan that today stands at about \$2.5 billion annually.
- Security will allow Pakistan and India as well as the other states in the region to multiply regional trade by connecting with China, India, Central Asia, Iran and the Middle East. This alone can generate billions of dollars' worth of trade and employment opportunities leading to an average regional annual growth rate of 8-10 per cent per year. This will transform the entire region and convert it into a hub of economic growth giving a better life to all the people.
- Peace will improve the security situation in Pakistan and consequently reduce its security budget.
- It will expedite the completion of power projects like CASA-1000<sup>14</sup> and the TAPI<sup>15</sup> leading to propelling of industrial growth.
- These changes will act as a catalyst for the CPEC<sup>16</sup> whose benefits will spread much further than envisioned at present.
- This design of growth can only come about with the commitment towards peace by the great powers and India and Pakistan. If peace can increase Pakistan's total net assets through an 8 -10 per cent annual growth, it could become a huge engine of regional growth.

It is, thus, obvious that peace in Afghanistan will be of immense significance to Pakistan and the region as well as to its poor masses who are struggling to make ends meet. ■

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000).

<sup>15</sup> Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project (TAPI).

<sup>16</sup> China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project (CPEC).

# Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process: Progress and Prospects

Farhana Asif\*

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on evolving an effective regional approach for bringing lasting peace to Afghanistan through enhanced cooperation in countering security and terrorism threats and promoting regional cooperation and connectivity. While Afghanistan has been part of a number of regional groupings, including South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), a regional process centred on Afghanistan, namely Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) was instituted in 2011 to strengthen Afghanistan's active engagement with its neighbours and the regional countries aiming at smooth transition from the drawdown of US and NATO forces to the end of the transformation decade in 2024. The idea is based on Afghanistan's strategic centrality to transform it into a potential transport hub at the crossroads of East and West.

This chapter attempts to examine the impact of regional engagement under the HoA-IP which has already completed five years. Tracing the evolution of the Istanbul Process, the chapter assesses its effectiveness in channelising regional efforts towards building trust and confidence while reflecting upon the limitations and challenges in achieving the objectives.

## Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process

### *Origin*

The concept of HoA-IP emerged in 2011 as a joint initiative of Afghanistan and Turkey. It aimed at providing a platform for increasing regional cooperation through discussion, to bring about peace, security and connectivity for long-term stability in Afghanistan. The Process is aimed at expanding coordination between Afghanistan, its neighbours and regional partners in facing common threats, including terrorism, narcotics, poverty and extremism. It encourages the 'Heart of Asia' member countries to engage 'in sincere and result oriented cooperation for a peaceful and stable

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Afghanistan, as well as a secure and prosperous region as a whole.’<sup>1</sup> The basic idea is inspired by a famous couplet from a poem by Allama Iqbal (in *Javed Nama*):

آسیا یک پیکر آب و گل است  
ملت افغان در آن پیکر دل است  
از گشاد او گشاد آسیا  
وز فساد او فساد آسیا

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Asia is a living body, and Afghanistan is its heart.  
In the ruin of the heart lies the ruin of the body.  
So long as the heart is free, the body remains free.  
If not, it becomes a straw adrift on the wind.<sup>2</sup>

The term ‘Heart of Asia’ (*Qalb-e-Asya*), thus, denotes Afghanistan’s location at the intersection of Asia’s three regions, viz. South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, for which Iqbal says that it can either be a centre of prosperity and stability or of poverty and instability.

Afghanistan’s active regional engagement in the HoA-IP was preceded by its joining the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) in 1992, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) in 2005, membership to SAARC in 2007 and observer status to Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2012. The HoA-IP is, however, unique as it is the only regional process which is Afghanistan-specific and led by Afghanistan as its permanent co-chair. Unlike other regional organisations, it is not an alliance conforming to a specific geographic region. Three important elements underpin the interaction among the Heart of Asia countries namely, i) political consultations, ii) implementation of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) and iii) consistency with other regional processes and organisations.<sup>3</sup>

HoA-IP does not seek to replace the existing mechanisms or regional setups. Its role is rather to augment and support the efforts of existing regional organisations in promoting economic cooperation, regional integration, improving security and forging people-to-people contacts.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan, *Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process* (Afghanistan Government, 2016), accessed August 4, 2016, <http://www.heartofasia-istanbulprocess.af/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Allama Iqbal and Afghanistan,” Dr Prem Network Website, accessed August 4, 2016, <http://www.instablogs.com/alama-iqbal-and-afghanistan.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan, “Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.”

### ***Goals and Objectives***

Trust-building is one of the primary goals of HoA-IP.<sup>4</sup> The Process sees continuous and effective dialogue between Afghanistan and its near and extended neighbours on issues of common interest as an important step for the stability and prosperity. To this end, the Process seeks to employ Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) so that participating countries can benefit from available expertise in different fields.

### ***Structure and Working***

The HoA has fourteen participating countries<sup>5</sup> that act as a core group, with Afghanistan as the permanent co-chair. Each year, a co-chair is nominated from among the participating countries on voluntary basis that hosts the Ministerial Conference. In addition, a number of countries from outside the region, called Supporting Countries, are associated with the process to provide assistance for its activities. Besides, several other regional and international organisations also support the HoA-IP (Annex 1).

Ministerial Conference<sup>6</sup> is the prime event of HoA-IP held annually, which is devoted to a specific theme, for fortifying regional cooperation and connectivity. The deliberations for the outcome document are carried out in the Senior Officials Meetings (SOM) that precede the conference. The delegations in these meetings are led by high ranking officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the participating and supporting countries. In the absence of an established headquarter, the Regional Cooperation Directorate in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan is working as Secretariat of the HoA-IP. Following is a brief overview of the five Ministerial Conferences outlining the evolution of the process:

### ***Istanbul Ministerial Conference***

The first Ministerial Conference of HoA-IP was held in Istanbul on November 2, 2011. It adopted the Istanbul Process Document along the theme ‘Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan,’ which outlined the framework of cooperation amongst the Heart of Asia countries. The Conference deliberations helped in bringing diverse perspectives regarding regional integration of Afghanistan with neighbouring and regional countries as a tool for promoting lasting peace and stability. Initially, an exhaustive list of 43 CBMs was formulated to provide Afghanistan an opportunity for

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

developing exchanges and cooperation with various partners in diverse fields. The Istanbul Conference successfully launched HoA-IP, but it needed clarity in terms of goals and plan of action. Following the Conference, Afghanistan and Turkey continued consultations involving other Heart of Asia countries for delineating the framework of future cooperation in the Process.

### ***Kabul Ministerial Conference***

The Kabul Ministerial Conference was convened on June 14, 2012 along the theme, 'Istanbul Process: A New Agenda for Regional Cooperation.' The Conference identified following parameters for future cooperation:

- i. Political consultations, involving Afghanistan and its near and extended neighbours;
- ii. A sustained incremental approach to implement the CBMs; and
- iii. Bringing greater coherence to the work of various regional processes and organisations, particularly as they relate to Afghanistan.

After thorough discussions, following six CBMs were approved for promoting exchanges and cooperation in a phased manner:

<b>CBM</b>	<b>Lead Countries</b>
i. Disaster Management	Pakistan and Kazakhstan
ii. Counterterrorism	Afghanistan, Turkey and United Arab Emirates (UAE)
iii. Counter-Narcotics	Russia and Azerbaijan
iv. Trade, Commerce and Investment Opportunity	India
v. Regional Infrastructure	Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan
vi. Education	Iran

The membership of CBMs is open for all participating and supporting countries as well as the regional and international organisations represented in the Process.

### ***Almaty Ministerial Conference***

The third Ministerial Conference was held on April 26, 2013 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The theme of the conference was 'Istanbul Process: Stability and Prosperity in the 'Heart of Asia' through Building Confidence and

Shared Regional Interests.’ Building on the previous conferences, the Almaty Ministerial Conference recognised adoption of implementation plans for the six CBMs, endorsed during the SOMs, as a first step towards the delivery of concrete results.

### ***Beijing Ministerial Conference***

The fourth Ministerial Conference titled ‘Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process: Deepening Cooperation for Sustainable Security and Prosperity of the ‘Heart of Asia’ Region’ was hosted by the People’s Republic of China on October 31, 2014 in Beijing.<sup>7</sup> Chinese Premier Li Keqiang gave a five-point proposal on resolving the Afghan issue.<sup>8</sup> First, Afghanistan should be governed by the Afghan people. Second, political reconciliation must be moved forward under an ‘Afghan-led, Afghan-owned’ peace process. Third, the international community should honour its pledge of assisting Afghanistan in resurrecting its anemic economy and removing the breeding grounds of extremism. Fourth, Afghan people should have the chance to independently choose their social system and development model. Fifth, the international community’s support for Afghanistan in cultivating its external relations should be based on mutual respect and equality. The UN should have a leading role in coordinating the international efforts to extend support to Afghanistan vis-a-vis capacity building.

The Beijing Conference became a watershed moment in the HoA-IP; during the conference’s preparatory phase in 2013-14, China as the co-chair played an important role in enhancing the stature and scope of the HoA-IP. Through effective collaboration with Afghanistan, an effort was made to propel the Process from a conceptual stage towards pursuit of tangible goals. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani chose Beijing as his first destination for a state visit, sending a strong signal to the world regarding importance of the process for Afghanistan’s regional engagement in the post-NATO era. The initiative was hailed by the U.S. State Department as Beijing’s demonstration of its commitment in Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> Pakistan played a proactive role in the Beijing Conference and its preparatory meetings; and also offered to host the fifth ministerial conference in Islamabad in 2015.

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<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Afghanistan, *The Fourth ‘Heart of Asia’-Istanbul Process Ministerial Conference*, (Afghanistan Government, 2014), <http://www.heartofasia-istanbulprocess.af/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Fourth-HoA-Ministerial-Conference.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, *Let Us Join Hands to Promote Security and Prosperity of Afghanistan and the Region*, Li Keqiang Speech, (Government of China, 2014), [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1206566.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1206566.shtml).

<sup>9</sup> S. M. Hali, ‘China Pumps Adrenalin in ‘Heart of Asia,’ *Oly.com*, accessed August 4, 2016, <http://oly.com.pk/china-pumps-adrenalin-in-heart-of-asia/>.

### ***Islamabad Ministerial Conference***

Pakistan hosted the fifth Ministerial Conference on ‘Enhanced Cooperation for Countering Security Threats and Promoting Economic Connectivity’ in Islamabad on December 9, 2015. President Ashraf Ghani and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif jointly inaugurated the Conference, which was co-chaired by Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani and Pakistan’s Advisor to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz.

The Conference aimed at cementing regional ties through a set of CBMs. It sought to explore new prospects while expanding existing opportunities in order to achieve sustained prosperity in the HoA countries. The Heart of Asia countries also focused on discussions regarding the need for evolving a regional approach through enhanced coordination for countering security threats surrounding the region.

The Conference adopted a forward looking ‘Islamabad Declaration’ which reviewed the security situation in Afghanistan; stressed regional cooperation to address security and terrorism challenges; reiterated support for facilitating an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process; promoting regional economic cooperation through enhanced trade, investments and transit; and developing connectivity through energy and infrastructure projects such as CASA-1000,<sup>10</sup> TAPI gas pipeline<sup>11</sup> and CPEC.<sup>12</sup>

The participation of eight Foreign Ministers and other dignitaries in the conference demonstrated the increasing confidence being reposed in the IP by the Heart of Asia countries. The Conference also provided an opportunity for effective diplomacy on the sidelines. President Ashraf Ghani and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif held trilateral and quadrilateral meetings involving the United States and China, which led to the establishment of the Quadrilateral Coordination group (QCG) for facilitating the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process, that had remained suspended since the first round of direct peace talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban. A bilateral meeting was also held between Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj and Advisor to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz leading to an agreement for commencement of the Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue.

The sixth Ministerial Conference will be held in New Delhi in December 2016. The first Senior Officials Meeting (SOM), in this regard, was held in New Delhi on April 26, 2016. The theme of the Conference will be ‘Addressing Challenges, Achieving Prosperity.’

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<sup>10</sup> Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000).

<sup>11</sup> Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline (TAPI).

<sup>12</sup> China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

## **Evaluation and Prospects**

An objective evaluation of the HoA-IP reveals important strengths due to which it has emerged as a credible regional initiative for promoting long-term peace and stability. These include:

### ***Afghan-centred Process***

While Afghanistan is a member of a number of regional organisations of West, Central and South Asia, the HoA-IP is the only regional process which is exclusively focused on Afghanistan-centred regional cooperation. This gives Heart of Asia process a distinct role of conceiving and fostering regional cooperation projects and initiatives specific to the needs of Afghanistan to pave a pathway for stability, concord and connectivity with its neighbouring countries, and beyond.

### ***Long-term Approach***

The HoA-IP has, since the beginning, recognised that peace, security and economic development of Afghanistan are intrinsically linked. One cannot exist without the other. Therefore, the focus has to be on efforts for bringing political stability in the country through an inclusive intra-Afghan reconciliation process supported by region-centric economic growth and connectivity. This is a pragmatic approach which, through sustained application, is making significant contribution to the efforts for long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan, and the region.

### ***Complementary Process***

The HoA-IP, though signifying a regional approach for peace and stability in Afghanistan, does not tend to impose external recipes. The focus of the Process has been on encouraging best practices of regional engagement for achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan. This process, therefore, in addition to its own ideas and initiatives attempts to complement the activities of other regional organisations, in which Afghanistan is a member. In this context, HoA-IP is serving as an important catalyst for promoting Afghanistan's trans-regional linkages, with a view of creating mutual stakes of Afghanistan with its neighbouring and regional countries as well as supporting states and organisations.

Although, since its conception, the HoA-IP is marked by continuity, regularity and creation of opportunities for constructive parleys among participating countries, it faces multiple challenges. Following are some of the key challenges:

One, the complexity of the situation makes the task exigent. The HoA-IP's efforts hinge upon the idea of strengthening regional engagement. Experience has shown that regional processes require constancy for a meaningful progress in promoting engagement and cohesion. Thus, dealing with this paradoxical challenge remains an important focus of HoA-IP that calls for initiatives that can be suitably employed to advance the objectives of HoA-IP, namely regional engagement, and stability in the region.

Two, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process is not a regional grouping like many other existing fora. It, therefore, does not have the organisational support that is available to other regional and international organisations working through their own secretariats and bureaucratic set-ups. The Process also lacks secure modes of financing; this constraint, therefore, hinders effective implementation and progress of the CBMs and other initiatives. In 2013, a study was carried out to discern the funding modalities for HoA-IP which sought to 'identify options on potential funding mechanisms for the different CBMs and inform decisionmakers of the Heart of Asia participating countries on how best to ensure pooling resources to implement the different confidence building measures in a sustainable manner.'<sup>13</sup>

Three, an important challenge is the transition of the Process from conceptual plane towards pursuing tangible initiatives and projects. In other words, this requires guiding it from the domain of abstract to the one of practicality. This transition is already underway. While, during the initial years the focus understandably was on elaborating concepts, for past two years or so, and particularly since the Beijing Ministerial Conference in 2014, there is an increasing emphasis on making some substantial progress on the initiatives of engagement. The challenge would be not to let this focus get diluted.

Despite these challenges, the HoA-IP is making steady progress. It presents immense prospects for the participating and supporting countries as well as regional and international organisations associated with the process to garner initiatives of regional engagement contributing towards the shared goal of restoring peace in Afghanistan. In this way forward, attention should be paid *inter alia* on the following important elements of the process:

**First**, the focus has to remain on strengthening interaction in the three key strands of the Heart of Asia Process namely, i) political

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<sup>13</sup> Peter J. Middlebrook and Landell Millswith, *Study of Funding Modalities for Heart of Asia Confidence Building Measures*, report, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (Afghanistan Government, 2014), <http://www.heartofasia-istanbulprocess.af/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Report-Study-of-Funding-Modalities-for-Heart-of-Asia-Confidence-Building-Measures-December-2013.pdf>.

consultations, ii) CBMs and iii) coherence with other regional processes and organisations. These three areas are the life-force of the HoA-IP and strengthening interaction in these areas would contribute towards enhanced efficacy of the process.

**Second**, it is important that HoA-IP retains its distinct character. Therefore, for promoting cooperation in various areas, effective use should be made of existing bilateral and regional processes for bringing in peace, economic development and regional connectivity while avoiding creation of new mechanisms and structures.

**Third**, since 2011, the CBMs have emerged as important means for promoting useful cooperation and exchanges in the six identified areas closely related to peace and stability of the region. There is a great need to strengthen and deepen cooperation in these CBMs through expanded activities.

**Fourth**, connectivity in the fields of energy and infrastructure is of key importance. In this regard, a number of mega projects such as CASA-1000, TAPI and CAREC<sup>14</sup> Transport Corridors are under varying stages of development. The HoA-IP should continue to make its valuable contribution in the efforts for expediting these connectivity projects.

## **Conclusion**

During the last five years, HoA-IP has emerged as an important initiative for promoting regional engagement in order to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan. The Process has been playing an important role in trust building and synchronising mutual efforts by Afghanistan, its neighbours, regional countries and the broader international community. Despite numerous challenges, the Process has made significant progress through regular political consultations at the foreign ministers' as well as senior officials' levels, implementation of CBMs and pursuit of coherence with other regional processes and organisations. It is also gradually moving from the conceptual domain to an era of achieving tangible goals. The Heart of Asia community anticipates that in the coming years the efforts and activities of the Process will continue to make important contribution towards the regional cooperation and connectivity agenda with a view to achieve durable peace and stability in Afghanistan, and the entire region. ■

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<sup>14</sup> Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC).

**List of Countries and Organisations Supporting the HoA-IP**

<b>Participating Countries</b>	<b>Supporting Countries</b>	<b>Regional and International Organisations</b>
Afghanistan	Australia	Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)
Azerbaijan	Canada	Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation/Asian Development Bank (CAREC/ADB)
China	Denmark	Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures
India	Egypt	Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)
Iran	European Union	Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)
Kazakhstan	France	North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
Kyrgyz Republic	Finland	Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC)
Pakistan	Germany	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
Russia	Iraq	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
Saudi Arabia	Italy	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)
Tajikistan	Japan	United Nations (UN)
Turkey	Norway	World Bank (WB)

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Turkmenistan	Poland	
United Arab Emirates	Spain	
	Sweden	
	United Kingdom	
	United States of America	

# **Role of States Assisting Peace in Afghanistan**

- The Afghanisation Challenge: U.S. Troop Withdrawal and the Stability of Afghanistan
- Cooperation between China and Pakistan on the Afghan Issue
- Russia's Interests and Potential to Contribute towards Peace and Reconciliation in Afghanistan

# The Afghanisation Challenge: U.S. Troop Withdrawal and the Stability of Afghanistan

Dr Vanda Felbab-Brown\*

## Introduction

After more than a decade of struggles against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, U.S. President Barack Obama hoped to extricate the United States from militarily participating in Afghanistan's counter-insurgency. But as the end of his presidency fast approaches with the summer of 2016, Afghanistan is once again facing a deep precipice. Very few trends in the country are going well. The U.N. Special Envoy in Afghanistan Nicholas Haysom went as far as to state in March 2016 when briefing the U.N. Security Council that if Afghanistan merely survives 2016, the United Nations mission in the country will consider it a success.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. drone killing of the Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour in Balochistan, Pakistan in May 2016 provides a fillip to the embattled Afghan government and may in the long-term result in fragmentation and internal withering of the Taliban. But that outcome is not guaranteed and nor likely to materialise quickly.

Since U.S. and NATO deployments in Afghanistan handed fighting over to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) at the end of 2014, the Taliban has mounted and sustained a tough military campaign, with the Afghanistan war more bloodier than at any other time since 2001. Despite the Taliban's internal challenges and recent fragmentation, its military energy is not showing any signs of fizzling out. In fact, tactical and even strategic victories have been accruing to the insurgency. Insecurity has significantly increased throughout the country, civilian deaths have shot up, and the Afghan security forces are taking large, and potentially unsustainable, casualties. Other ANSF deficiencies persist. Significant portions of Afghanistan's territory, including the provincial capital of Kunduz and multiple districts of Helmand, at least temporarily fell to the Taliban over the past year and half. Many other districts and provinces are under serious Taliban pressure. Affiliated insurgent groups, such as the Haqqani Network and Hizb-e-Islami, also remain deeply entrenched.

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<sup>1</sup> Eltaf Najafzada, "If Afghanistan Survives 2016, UN Will Consider It a Success," *Chicago Tribune*, March 17, 2016, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/sns-wp-blm-afghan-nations-2c8ab8a8-ec23-11e5-a9ce-681055c7a05f-20160317-story.html>.

Although far less potent than the Taliban and the Haqqanis, the Islamic State (IS) also established itself in Afghanistan in 2015. Mostly composed of Taliban defectors, it faces multiple strong countervailing forces.

Most ominously, Afghanistan's politics remains fractious and polarised. The National Unity Government (NUG) of President Ashraf Ghani and his Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and rival Abdullah Abdullah that was created in the wake of the highly contested and unresolved presidential elections of 2014 has never really gotten on its feet. Fundamental structural problems of the government remain unaddressed. Two years on, the government may face its end as a result of a possible constitutional *Loya Jirga* (Grand Assembly) in the fall of 2016. The *Jirga* could alter the basic power arrangements in Afghanistan, codifying or undoing the President-CEO structure of the National Unity Government. Even in its absence, Afghanistan will face potentially debilitating crises of legitimacy, including as a result of the parliamentary and district elections scheduled, after a year's delay, for October 2016.

Afghanistan's elite has not taken any steps to heal the country's deep and broad political wounds. Instead, the dominant mode of politics is to threaten to plot the demise of the government and focus on a parochial accumulation of one's power at the expense of the country's national interest, perhaps the very survival of the post-2001 order. While Afghan politicians do not wish a return to a civil war, their reckless and selfish actions and the need to pay off their patronage networks continually nudge the country in that direction. Out of the gamut of security, economic, geostrategic, and political challenges, it is these rapacious, predatory, and self-centered political schemes and predilections that pose by far the biggest threat to the country. This political misbehaviour further augments the country's vulnerability to the vagaries of foreign financial and military support, on which Afghanistan will be structurally dependent for years to come.

This chapter looks at the evolving international support for Afghanistan since the formation of the National Unity Government in Afghanistan out of the 2014 presidential crisis. It describes the end of the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission and its transformation into a new Resolute Support mission, and the planning for a post-2016 U.S. military and NATO presence in Afghanistan. The second section describes key military developments in Afghanistan since the fall of 2014 and the intensity of the Taliban's battlefield thrust. The final section returns to the National Unity Government and more broadly the state of governance in Afghanistan, and the way they interact with the security and economy of the country.

## **Wanting to Get out of the War, and Not Being Able to? U.S. Interests in and Support for Afghanistan**

The principal objective of U.S. policy in Afghanistan since the 9/11 attacks has been – and continues to be – making sure that the country does not once again become a haven for virulent terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State in Khorasan (IS). The premise underlying this policy is that if any part of the territory in Afghanistan once again comes under the control of Salafi groups or Taliban sympathetic to such groups,<sup>2</sup> their capacity to increase the lethality and frequency of their terrorist attacks – including attacks against the United States – will increase since they will be able to use these safe havens to plan and train for their operations and more easily escape retaliation by the West.

Al-Qaeda was severely degraded, and perhaps temporarily demoralised by the Arab Spring. For the past five years, it was largely displaced from Afghanistan to Pakistan. But it has lost none of its zeal to strike Western countries and undermine governments in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.<sup>3</sup> And it appears to be experiencing some new lease on life in Afghanistan, where a large Al-Qaeda camp was bombed by U.S. forces in December 2015. The group continues to look for opportunities to exploit and territories to colonise, even if only vicariously through proxies, such as in Western and Eastern Africa, even if some of its local alliances are only fleeting and unreliable.<sup>4</sup> So Al-Qaeda remains a prime target, as does the

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<sup>2</sup> For a debate on how tightly aligned Al-Qaeda and the Taliban groups are or are not, see Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al-Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010) and Alex van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban/Al-Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan, 1970-2010* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2011).

<sup>3</sup> On Al-Qaeda strategic planning, see Bruce Riedel, “The Al-Qaeda Document Release: What They Tell Us about Bin Laden and His Supporters,” *Brookings Institution*, May 3, 2012, <https://www.brookings.edu/2012/05/03/the-al-qaeda-document-release-what-they-tell-us-about-bin-laden-and-his-supporters/>; and Daniel Byman, “The History of Al-Qaeda,” *Slate*, September 1, 2011, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-history-of-al-qaeda/>. On Al-Qaeda in Yemen, see, for example, Bruce Riedel, “Al-Qaeda’s “Final Trap” in Yemen: Costly Demise Planned for U.S.,” *Brookings Institution*, May 27, 2012, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/al-qaedas-final-trap-in-yemen-costly-demise-planned-for-u-s/>.

<sup>4</sup> On Al-Qaeda in West Africa and Nigeria, see Vanda Felbab-Brown and James Forest, “Nigeria’s Boko Haram Attacks Are Misunderstood As a Regional Islamist Threat,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 12, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2012/0112/Nigeria-s-Boko-Haram-attacks-are-misunderstood-as-regional-Islamist-threat>; and Vanda Felbab-Brown and James Forest, “Political Violence and the Illicit Economies of West Africa,” *Journal of Terrorism and Conflict* 24, no.5, 2012, <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F09546553.2011.644098>. On Al-Qaeda in the Horn of Africa, see International Crisis Group, *Somalia: An Opportunity That Should Not Be Missed*, (Africa briefing no. 87, International Crisis

newly-established Islamic State in Khorasan, with its stronghold in Nangarhar. The growth of IS in Afghanistan has been limited by infighting with the Taliban and a determined U.S. bombing campaign against IS targets in Afghanistan. IS has also mishandled its relationship with local populations – presenting itself as far more brutal and far less economically (prohibiting poppy cultivation, for example) and socially sensitive than even the Taliban.

Second, the United States has a strong interest in a stable Afghanistan. The United States made a strong commitment to the Afghan people. Afghanistan's stability or instability has implications for America's reputation – and self-perception – as a country that can be relied upon to honour its commitments. In mobilising support for Operation Enduring Freedom, it made a pledge to the Afghan people to help them improve their difficult condition and not abandon them once again. Afghans crave what others do – relief from violence and insecurity and sufficient economic progress to escape dire, grinding poverty. On its own, this altruistic rationale would not be sufficient to undertake – or to perpetuate – what has turned out to be an immensely costly effort in Afghanistan. But once the United States made the decision to intervene, a consideration for the elemental needs of the people whose lives this country has come so profoundly to alter must matter. As Secretary of State Colin Powell argued in the summer of 2002 when warning President George W. Bush about the consequences of invading Iraq, with intervention comes responsibility for the lives of the local population. 'You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people,' he said, with purposeful irony. 'You will own all their hopes, aspirations, and problems. You'll own it all.'<sup>5</sup>

A disintegration of the Afghan state after 2014 or an outbreak of intense fighting will be a great boost to Salafi groups throughout the world: Once again, a great power will be seen as having been defeated by the Salafists in Afghanistan. From a strategic perceptions standpoint, few areas are as important as Afghanistan. The perception that the United States has been defeated does not require that the Taliban has again taken over the country. From the Salafi perspective, merely a gradual, but steady crumbling of the Kabul government, with a progressively greater accretion of territory and power to the Taliban, would be sufficient to claim victory. As would an outbreak of civil war after 2014, even if the Taliban did not

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Group, 2012); and Ken Menkhaus and Jacob Shapiro, "Non-State Actors and Failed States: Al-Qaeda's Experience in the Horn of Africa," in Harold Trinkunas and Anne Clunnam, eds., *Ungoverned Spaces: Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010): 77-94.

<sup>5</sup> Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 150.

rapidly take over Kabul and still could not control the majority of Afghanistan's territory.

And fourth, and crucially, an unstable Afghanistan will further destabilise Pakistan, and as a result the entire Central and South Asian region. Pakistan's tribal areas as well as Balochistan have been host to many of the Salafi groups, and the Afghan Taliban uses these areas as safe havens. Thus, Pakistan's cooperation in tackling these safe havens has been important for U.S./ISAF operations in Afghanistan. But the reverse is also true: If Afghanistan is unstable and contains Salafi groups that leak out into Pakistan, the latter becomes deeply destabilised and distracted from tackling its other crises, including militancy in the Punjab and a host of domestic calamities, such as intense political instability, economic atrophy, widespread poverty, and a severe energy crisis.

The Pakistani state is already deeply hollowed out, with its administrative structures in decline for decades. Major macro-economic deficiencies have increased and deep poverty and marginalisation persist amidst a semi-feudal power distribution, often ineffective and corrupt political leadership, social and ethnic internal fragmentation, and challenged security forces.<sup>6</sup> The internal security challenge is far more insidious than recently experienced and taken on by the Pakistani military in the tribal and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) areas: Far more than the Pashtun Pakistani Taliban in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), it is the Punjabi groups such as the Punjabi Taliban, Laskar-i-Taiba (Army of the Righteous), and Sipah-e-Sahaba (Soldiers of Muhammad) who pose a deep threat to Pakistan.

Thus, neither the United States nor Pakistan benefit from instability in Afghanistan. Despite the beliefs of many Afghans and a narrative propagated by former President Hamid Karzai,<sup>7</sup> the United States is *not* seeking to manage the Taliban insurgency and other militants in Afghanistan as an excuse to perpetuate military bases in Afghanistan. According to the New Great Game narrative, the United States wants to maintain bases in Afghanistan to limit the growth of China's influence and Russia's power in Central Asia. In fact, that is not the case. The U.S. pivot to Asia is a pivot to East Asia, and the United States would prefer not to be bogged down in Afghanistan.

Not only is there no desire to keep large U.S. bases in Afghanistan for the supposed 'New Great Game in Central Asia,' there is in fact large fatigue in the United States with Afghanistan and Pakistan. The public

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Stephen Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); and Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Author's interviews with President Hamid Karzai, Kabul, September 2014 and 2015.

support for U.S. persisting engagement in Afghanistan is weak, and President Barack Obama wanted to end the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan even though he has not been able to accomplish that objective during his presidency.

Indeed, until the summer of 2014, U.S. support for Afghanistan after that year remained uncertain and underspecified. When, in 2009, the Obama administration inherited the war from the administration of George W. Bush, the military situation in Afghanistan looked ominous. The Taliban and Haqqani insurgencies had expanded, and the quality of Afghan governance was steadily deteriorating. Afghanistan was experiencing its greatest insecurity since 2001 as well as intense corruption.<sup>8</sup> Despite all this, during his 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama emphasised Afghanistan as the important yet unfinished ‘war of necessity,’ unlike the ‘war of choice’ in Iraq that he promised to terminate as quickly as possible, implying that as President he would indeed focus on the Afghan conflict in a smarter, more focused way.

But despite the election rhetoric, from the moment the Obama administration took over, it struggled with some of the very same dilemmas that perplexed the Bush administration. Since Al-Qaeda was the primary source of terrorist threats against the United States, was it also necessary to continue combating the (more locally engaged) Taliban? Could an effective counterterrorism mission be prosecuted essentially just by airborne and offshore assets? Or was it necessary to defeat the resurgent Taliban on the ground and construct a stable Afghan government? Should the U.S. military engagement be intensified—with all the blood, treasure, and domestic ramifications that it would entail—or should the U.S. military engagement be significantly scaled back? By the winter of 2013, strong voices in the White House argued that what happened on the ground in Afghanistan mattered only to a limited degree for the successful prosecution of the anti-Al-Qaeda campaign, and that the needed counterterrorism operations against Al-Qaeda and its allies could be effectively conducted from the air, reducing the need for a foreign presence on the ground in Afghanistan itself.<sup>9</sup>

The increasingly difficult relations between the White House and then-Afghan President Hamid Karzai (who was alienated from, distrustful,

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<sup>8</sup> For the increase in international military casualties, Afghan civilian casualties, and the number of insurgent attacks from 2001 through 2008, see iCasualties, “Afghanistan Coalition Military Fatalities by Year,” Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, [icasualties.org](http://icasualties.org). See Ian Livingston and Michael O’Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> This section draws on Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence: Strategies and Realities of Counterinsurgency and State-building in Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013).

and provocative of Washington) only strengthened the hand of those who wanted to pull the plug on U.S. participation in the Afghanistan war. For almost two years, Karzai had been unwilling to sign a status-of-forces agreement (SOFA) between Afghanistan and the United States, an important signal to other NATO and U.S. allies in Afghanistan. Although many Afghans, including prominent elders who were hardly effusive about the United States in other circumstances, lined up behind the SOFA. Karzai was outraged by U.S./ISAF accidental killings of Afghan civilians. More importantly, he remained un-persuaded that U.S. presence in Afghanistan would help stabilise the country instead of serving what Karzai imagined were the true U.S. interests in Afghanistan: to use the country as a platform for prosecuting a New Great Game against Russia and China in Central Asia.<sup>10</sup> By the spring of 2014, the White House spoke of winding down the Afghanistan War<sup>11</sup> -- at the latest by the end of 2016 and, should the SOFA not be signed, perhaps as early as the end of 2014 with the expiration of the mandate of the United States and ISAF, who had been pursuing the war in Afghanistan for over a decade.

Then two developments shook the White House and the U.S. Congress in the late spring and summer of 2014, reducing the pressure for withdrawal from Afghanistan. First, the virulent off-shoot of Al-Qaeda in Iraq – the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)<sup>12</sup> – swept through parts of Syria and Iraq, taking over many Sunni areas, and in May 2014 even threatened the capital of Iraq, Baghdad.<sup>13</sup> The White House, although long determined to get out of the Iraq war and change the focus of U.S. national security policy from the Middle East to East Asia, now sprang into action, bombing ISIS targets in Iraq and mobilising an international coalition against the re-invigorated insurgency in Iraq and Syria. Yet ISIS was able to rapidly entrench itself in the Middle East and was becoming an inspiration for *jihadi* groups in Africa and South Asia. Several renegade Taliban

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., chap 6. For a detailed evaluation of how the rift between President Karzai and the United States emerged and whether it was avoidable, see Ronald Neumann, *Failed Relations between Hamid Karzai and the United States: What Can We Learn?* special report (United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., 2015), <http://www.usip.org/publications/2015/05/20/failed-relations-between-hamid-karzai-and-the-united-states-what-can-we>.

<sup>11</sup> White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by President Obama in Address to the Nation from Afghanistan,” *Whitehouse.gov*, May 1, 2012, [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/01/remarks-president-address-nation-afghanistan](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/01/remarks-president-address-nation-afghanistan).

<sup>12</sup> ISIS is interchangeably also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or simply as the Islamic State (IS).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Tim Arango and Duraid Adnan, “Militants Pose Threat on Eve of National Elections in Iraq,” *New York Times*, April 29, 2014; Jim Sciutto and Greg Botelho, “Iraqis ‘Up Against The Wall’ As Isis Threatens Province Near Baghdad,” *CNN.com*, October 10, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/10/world/meast/isis-threat/>.

commanders also declared allegiance to ISIS. Although the presence of ISIS in Afghanistan was – and continues to be – limited (as discussed below), the White House took notice of the spectre of reinvigorated *jihadism* there.

Second, the highly contested and fraudulent 2014 presidential election in Afghanistan ignited an intense and prolonged political crisis. By July 2014, the crisis seemed to have brought the country to the edge of major political and ethnic violence and nearly provoked a military coup, potentially sparking civil war.<sup>14</sup> The White House now instructed the U.S. Embassy to go into overdrive to avert such a disaster. Thus, even when the recount of the vote in the runoff election confirmed massive fraud by the organisations of the two principal contenders—Ashraf Ghani, the former Afghan minister of finance (seen as a technocratic pro-reform Pashtun candidate), and Abdullah Abdullah, the former Afghan minister of foreign affairs (seen as a Tajik status-quo candidate)— and as neither of them was ready to accept defeat, the U.S. Embassy and State Department persuaded both of them to form a National Unity Government.<sup>15</sup> The September 2014 political agreement covered the bare minimum of a deal, sketching out its mere outlines, with many details as well as deeper structural electoral and constitutional reforms left to be worked out later. They remain unresolved today.

Nonetheless, the newly sworn-in President Ashraf Ghani and his so-called Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah accomplished what they both highlighted as their key campaign objective: keeping the United States and other ISAF international partners in Afghanistan after 2014. Their National Unity Government (NUG) just barely beat the U.S. October 2014 deadline to sign the SOFA. The new U.S. and international military coalition mission – Operation Resolute Support – started in January 2015 and is slated to run through the end of 2016. Thus, after a decade of large-scale offensive counterinsurgency operations, the U.S. and NATO mission roles in Afghanistan changed to far more limited ones, of advising and training -- and, in extremis, active military support of – the Afghan forces.

Given the intensity of the fighting and the spectre of ISIS in the Middle East and potentially also South Asia, the U.S. government agreed not to reduce U.S. military presence in Afghanistan for the rest of 2015, and renewed that commitment for 2016. At least until then, the United States would provide 9,800 troops, and the NATO allies another 2,000. Crucially,

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<sup>14</sup> Author's interviews with Afghan politicians and civil society representatives and U.S., ISAF, and international diplomats and military officers, September–October 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Author's interviews with international advisors, U.S. embassy officials, representatives of other embassies in Kabul, and Afghan politicians, Kabul, Afghanistan, September 2014.

the White House also agreed to keep at least some U.S. military bases outside of Kabul open until the next U.S. administration took over in 2017.

The combat mandate for U.S. forces was officially restricted by the White House only to force-protection and counterterrorism operations confined to Al-Qaeda, whose large bases were discovered in Afghanistan in late 2015 as the terrorist group appeared to experience a second life there.<sup>16</sup> The counterterrorism operations were also expanded to include targeting the ISIS in Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> Yet as the security situation continued to deteriorate in 2015 and did not improve in the first part of 2016, U.S. forces in Afghanistan once again engaged in limited direct offensive operations against the Taliban as well – operations which exceeded the training, advising, and US-force protection mandates of Operation Resolute Support, even though U.S. commanders justified them in those terms.<sup>18</sup>

Given the precariousness of the security situation, the White House also reversed its previous decision to change the U.S. presence in Afghanistan after 2016 to a mere 1,000-soldier embassy-level protection force.<sup>19</sup> Instead, at least in 2017, by which time a new U.S. President would take over from President Obama, the United States would keep 5,600 troops in Afghanistan, the level to which U.S. presence was originally envisioned to decline in 2016.

Moreover, in May 2015, preceding the White House, NATO announced plans to keep a small civilian-led military mission in Afghanistan after 2016. According to the then-head of NATO forces in Afghanistan, General John Campbell, the post-2016 NATO mission would be deployed around a base in Kabul and used among other functions to bolster the Afghan air force and intelligence service.<sup>20</sup> What in diplomatic and military planning of 2012 was imagined as a Transformational Decade through 2024 (by which time Afghanistan would be militarily and economically capable of standing on its own feet, due to hoped for mineral revenues) became more like a Decade of Hanging On and hoping for a breakthrough in peace negotiations with the Taliban.

The fact that NATO member states, particularly Germany, and even Italy, were more forward-leaning than the United States in pushing for

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<sup>16</sup> Eric Schmitt and David Sanger, “As U.S. Focuses on ISIS and the Taliban, Al-Qaeda Reemerges,” *New York Times*, December 29, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Carla Babb, “U.S. General: Major Taliban Split Emerging in Afghanistan’s Helmand Province,” *Voice of America*, March 10, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Azam Ahmed and Joseph Goldstein, “Taliban Gains Pull U.S. Units Back into Fight in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, April 29, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Emre Peker and Margherita Stancati, “NATO Plans Civilian-Led Mission in Afghanistan After 2016,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 13, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Tim Craig, “NATO Hopes to Keep a Base in Afghanistan, U.S. General Says,” *Washington Post*, May 23, 2015.

continuing military presence in Afghanistan after 2016 was a bittersweet development for Washington. Throughout much of the post-2001 military engagement in Afghanistan, it was the United States that pressed ISAF partners to contribute more troops and remove combat-restrictive caveats from their mandates – mandates which caused U.S. soldiers to dub the ISAF mission as ‘I Saw Americans Fight.’

Nonetheless, it was not a newly-discovered sense of burden-sharing that motivated Germany and other European governments to press for a U.S. and NATO military perseverance in Afghanistan after 2016, but rather the crisis of Afghan refugees flooding into Europe. In 2015, nearly 180,000 Afghans applied for asylum in Europe, many in Germany, forming the second-largest refugee group after the Syrians.<sup>21</sup> Though the migrants often suffered horrific conditions at the hand of smugglers, risking drowning and other privations on their way to Europe, and though European governments sought to send them back, the flow did not abate in the early part of 2016. In the spring of 2016, according to the United Nations, some 1,000 Afghans were leaving their homes daily, displaced by fighting.<sup>22</sup> (Not all would of course seek to leave Afghanistan for abroad.) With growing European domestic opposition to accepting the Afghan refugees or those from the Middle East, various European governments, including Germany, pressured the Afghan government to prevent the would-be migrants from leaving Afghanistan, reportedly even threatening to cut off aid to the Afghan government. The European governments classified the Afghan migrants as economic migrants and not refugees from insecurity, thus, making them ineligible for asylum.<sup>23</sup> Germany extensively advertised this policy in Afghanistan, while promising to help create economic opportunities for Afghans *within* Afghanistan.

Indeed, many of those fleeing Afghanistan were reacting to the combination, within Afghanistan, of rising insecurity and economic deprivation. The departure of the vast majority of Western forces not only radically shrank Afghanistan’s GDP, but also eliminated tens of thousands of jobs of translators, drivers, and cultural advisers for many young Afghans. Many of the migrants wanting to leave Afghanistan were of the ‘bright, young, westernised educated Afghan generation’ assumed to be the transformation engine of the country. Disenchanted, they now saw little

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<sup>21</sup> Erin Cunningham, “Europe Wants to Deport Afghan Migrants, but Kabul Is Reluctant to Accept Them,” *Washington Post*, March 19, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> “1,000 Afghans Flee Fighting Every Day: UN,” *Outlook Afghanistan*, May 18, 2016, [http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national\\_detail.php?post\\_id=15277](http://www.outlookafghanistan.net/national_detail.php?post_id=15277).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Angela Stanzel, “Eternally Displaced: Afghanistan’s Refugee Crisis and What It Means for Europe,” European Council on Foreign Relations, May 2016, [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR\\_170\\_-\\_ETERNALLY\\_DISPLACED\\_1430.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_170_-_ETERNALLY_DISPLACED_1430.pdf).

economic opportunity and showed little faith in the country's political and security developments. The 2015 Survey of the Afghan People by the Asia Foundation, conducted for the eleventh year, revealed for the first time since 2015 that the majority of Afghans (57 per cent) believed the country was headed in the wrong direction, with insecurity, unemployment and a poor economy, and corruption identified as the biggest problems.<sup>24</sup> Despite Ghani's and Abdullah's campaign promises to improve the rule of law and reduce corruption, some 90 per cent of Afghans continued to report corruption as a daily problem.<sup>25</sup> Interviews also suggested that some of the modern and presumably-transformative Afghan generation would be willing to settle for some form of Taliban rule, though with limits their power, in the hope that the Taliban in power would be less corrupt than the post-2001 Afghan politicians.<sup>26</sup> Even if not completely representative, and anecdotal, such interviews likely present a highly-skewed, situational, and fluid set of preferences. Nonetheless, they were yet another indicator that the engine of Afghan transformation, the young generation's break with the patterns of their fathers and mothers, was at best highly tenuous and up for grabs.<sup>27</sup>

### **Hanging on and Struggling: Afghan National Security Forces**

Despite the characterisation by the European governments that only economic opportunism, not their personal safety, drove the Afghan migrants out of their country, security in Afghanistan did in fact deteriorate in 2015 and did not show signs of improvement in the first half of 2016. In fact, most analysts and even Western officials expected a tough and bloody 2016.<sup>28</sup>

According to the United Nations, 3,545 Afghan civilians were killed in 2015, with another 7,457 wounded, the highest total casualties since 2009.<sup>29</sup> Sixty two per cent of civilian casualties were attributed to the

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<sup>24</sup> Asia Foundation, "Afghanistan in 2015: A Survey of the Afghan People," Asia Foundation, 2015, <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2015.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Tim Craig, "Why Disaffected Young Afghans Are Warming to a Taliban Comeback," *Washington Post*, March 1, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Anna Larson and Noah Coburn, *Youth Mobilisation and Political Constraints in Afghanistan: The Y Factor*, special report (United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., 2014), [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR341-Youth\\_Mobilization\\_and\\_Political\\_Constraints\\_in\\_Afghanistan.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR341-Youth_Mobilization_and_Political_Constraints_in_Afghanistan.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg quoted in Erin Cunningham, "Taliban Fighters Seize Afghan Territory as NATO Chief Visits Kabul," *Washington Post*, March 15, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> UNAMA, *Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Annual Conflict*, annual report (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2016),

Taliban and other anti-government forces, seventeen per cent on pro-government forces, and two per cent on international troops, with the rest of undetermined.<sup>30</sup> These increasing civilian casualties have also intensified displacement: between January and November 2015, more than 300,000 Afghans fled their homes, a 160 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2014.<sup>31</sup>

Afghan security forces too took large casualties, another ominous indicator of the security trends. Although conflicting numbers were released and hushed up, the casualty rate might have been twenty eight per cent higher in 2015 than in 2014, a year when at least some top-level U.S. military officers considered the ANSF casualty rate unsustainable.<sup>32</sup> In 2014, more than 20,000 soldiers and support personnel were lost due to deaths and injuries as a result of combat, desertions, and discharges.<sup>33</sup> Facing even more pressure from the Taliban than the Afghan military, the police lost almost a quarter of its members in 2015, some 36,000, many through desertions.<sup>34</sup> For years, the police force was known to have been plagued by corruption and for being abusive towards civilians, while reform efforts struggled.

Indeed, the problem of desertion in ANSF was only one of the long-standing deficiencies in the force that became blatantly manifest after 2014 when ISAF handed the Afghan military a stalemate war with the Taliban, requiring the ANSF to fight on their own. The problem of soldiers going AWOL and deserting is nothing new, particularly in the tougher fighting environment of Afghanistan's south. Poor rotation and R&R practices, often undermined by corruption, with those not being able to buy themselves leave never receiving it, have been one of the causes. The increasing insecurity making it more difficult for soldiers to travel to their homes during leave is another. Western advisers have encouraged their Afghan counterparts to redress both problems.<sup>35</sup> With the Afghan economy

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[https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc\\_annual\\_report\\_2015\\_final\\_14\\_feb\\_2016.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/poc_annual_report_2015_final_14_feb_2016.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> "UN Launches Appeal for \$393M Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan," *Associated Press*, January 27, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Jon Harper, "US Commander: Afghan Casualties Not 'Sustainable,'" *Stars and Stripes*, November 5, 2014; and "US General: Afghan Army Being 'Rebuilt' for Taliban Battle," *Associated Press*, January 25, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew Rosenberg and Azam Ahmed, "Figures from U.S.-led Coalition Show Heavy 2014 Losses for Afghan Army," *New York Times*, March 3, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/03/world/figures-from-us-led-coalition-show-heavy-2014-losses-for-afghan-army.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Jessica Donati and Ehsanullah Amiri, "Afghan Police Force Struggling to Maintain Membership," *Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Author's interviews with NATO Officials, Kabul, September and October 2015.

in poor shape since 2013, signalling a steep decline in employment opportunities for Afghans, joining the ANSF is still an attractive economic option for many (apart from opium poppy cultivation). However, a high casualty rate not only demoralises the force, but also makes it economically costly for many Afghan families to send their sons to the ANSF.

Still, at least until the fall of 2015, recruitment seemed to have replenished poor retention. But since the fall of 2015, some reports have indicated that recruitment has also fallen, in part due to the Taliban putting more effective pressure on families not to send their sons to ANSF.<sup>36</sup> At least in some of the most contested areas, such as Helmand, poor recruitment and retention seem to have given rise to ghost soldiers, i.e., those on the payroll but not actually on the battlefield.<sup>37</sup>

Other serious deficiencies include poor logistics and planning, lack of specialty enablers such as medical evacuation teams, and deficiencies in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) plus other sustainment functions. Such capacities take a long time to develop, and ISAF did not begin adequately focusing on them until 2011, late in the process of developing the ANSF.

Determined far more by what excess goods, the logistics headquarters wants to get rid of rather than based on an area's needs, logistics remain a combination of Afghan tribalism, the legacy of Soviet-era bureaucracy, and U.S. legalism. The complicated system of multiple authorisations for supplies at multiple levels results in ample opportunity for corruption, with officials at various levels holding up requests until they are paid off.<sup>38</sup> An internet-based system the United States has provided as an alternative has reduced some of the problems, but is vulnerable to electricity and signal disruption. The Taliban frequently target electricity and cell towers, particularly in areas where local operators do not pay sufficient extortion fees to them. ISR experienced a significant contraction when the Obama administration, for a variety of reasons, including the fight against ISIS in the Middle East, decided to pull significant signal intelligence assets from Afghanistan.

The lack of Afghan close-air-support assets is particularly problematic and a great boost to the insurgency. Because of counterproductive restrictions on its mandate, Resolute Support has often had to allow Taliban forces to mass and strike before air assets can come to

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Antonio Giustozzi and Ali Mohammad Ali, "The Afghan Army after ISAF" (briefing paper series, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 2016), 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Author's interviews with officials of Resolute Support and top Afghan officials of ANSF, Kabul, September and October 2015.

ANSF's support. NATO officials at times suggest to their Afghan counterparts that all of these problems are far worse on the Taliban side, including no air support, and that therefore the ANSF can adapt to them.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, nursed on such enablers and support functions being previously provided by ISAF, the ANSF are not accustomed to living without them. These deficiencies greatly undermine morale and lead to poor recruitment and retention.

And there are chronic problems: Financially, the ANSF are and will be fully dependent on U.S. and other foreign funding for years to come. So far, the United States has allocated U.S.\$68 billion towards building self-sufficient Afghan forces, and sixty one per cent of the U.S.\$113 billion in U.S. reconstruction efforts.<sup>40</sup>

Arguably, the greatest achievement of the ANSF so far is having refrained from engineering a military coup in the summer of 2014 and staying together, not fracturing along ethnic lines. Nonetheless, ethnic and patronage fragmentation of the ANSF remains a real possibility, and one that may yet disastrously erupt. As an excellent recent report by Antonio Giustozzi and Ali Mohammad Ali puts it, the divisions in the Afghan Ministry of Defence and security forces more broadly go beyond 'former *mujahedeen* versus non-*mujahedeen*, educated versus non-educated, corrupt versus non-corrupt, pro-Ghani versus pro-Abdullah, Pashtuns versus non-Pashtuns' and among various political factions and parties; the rifts and divisions are often highly individualistic.<sup>41</sup> These forms of patronage and personal corruption have undermined unit cohesion and plague even senior-level appointments.

Moreover, politically-motivated long delays in appointing and replacing ministers of defence, interior, and other top military, police, and intelligence officers have had serious debilitating effects on the ANSF. In a country like Afghanistan where institutions are weak, individual leadership has substantial effects.

Poor unit leadership at the local level, bought with money instead of based on merit, also contributed to the dramatic fall of the provincial capital Kunduz City in September 2015, to date the Taliban's most spectacular victory and one that shook Afghanistan. For the first time since 2001, the Taliban managed to conquer an entire province and for several days hold its

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. See also Giustozzi and Ali, 10.

<sup>40</sup> John Sopko, "Testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives: Assessing the Capabilities and Effectiveness of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces" (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), Arlington, 2016), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/testimony/SIGAR-16-17-TY.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Giustozzi and Ali, 11.

capital. The psychological effect in Afghanistan was tremendous. Kunduz is vital strategic province, with major access roads to various other parts of Afghanistan's north. Moreover, those who control the roads— still the Taliban—also get major revenue from taxing travelers, which is significant along these opium-smuggling routes.

It took weeks for the ANSF to retake the provincial city, far longer than was expected (including by the Taliban). Months later, in the spring of 2016, the Taliban still exhibited substantial influence over the roads in Kunduz and neighbouring provinces. 493 civilians died and another 1,392 were wounded in the weeks-long fighting.<sup>42</sup>

United States air support was ultimately essential in retaking Kunduz, preventing a military domino effect in the north and inflaming the political crisis. It also came with a terrible price: during the fighting, the U.S. mistakenly bombed a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital where at least thirty patients and doctors died, and more were wounded. False reports from Afghan forces on the ground that the hospital had become Taliban headquarters, reductions in IRS capacities, and malfunctioning equipment were the sources of the tragic mistake of the U.S. gunship operators.<sup>43</sup> Despite this awful event, however, it remains vital to maintain and expand U.S. air support for the Afghan forces, including direct application of U.S. kinetic firepower beyond in extremis support, to prevent similar Taliban offensives. It is especially important to augment the provision of U.S. intelligence assets. Significant reductions in U.S. assistance, whether of troops, intelligence, or air support, will greatly increase the chances of another major Taliban success—like that of Kunduz, and perhaps again in Kunduz -- producing political instability.

The subsequent 2015-16 winter, like the one before, brought none of the previously-typical ‘winter lulls’ in fighting. Instead, the Taliban continued a major push in the north, continually contesting territory and influence in Kunduz as well as Badakhshan and Baghlan. In January 2016, the Taliban sabotaged Baghlan’s electricity pylons, cutting off Kabul from power for several weeks during a bitter-cold winter and driving home to many Kabulis relatively shielded from the Taliban violence that the fighting was no longer so distant. Violence in Kabul had been steadily on the rise before winter began: In 2015, Kabul experienced an eighteen per cent rise

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<sup>42</sup> “UN: 2015 Civilian Injuries in Afghan War Worst Since 2009,” *Associated Press*, February 14, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Rod Nordland, U.S. General Says Kunduz Hospital Air Strike Was ‘Avoidable,” *New York Times*, November 25, 2015; and Matthew Rosenberg and Joseph- Goldstein, “U.S. Role in Afghanistan Turns to Combat Again, with a Tragic Error,” *New York Times*, May 8, 2016.

in civilian casualties,<sup>44</sup> including some of the deadliest attacks, mostly attributed to the Haqqani network, including on August 7, 2015 that led to the deaths of 43 and 312 wounded.

An even deadlier attack, again attributed to the Haqqanis, took place in April 2016. It caused even larger casualties: more than 60 dead and 300 wounded.<sup>45</sup> At first oblivious to the suffering it caused and only focused on enhancing its intimidation power, the Taliban quickly claimed the attack and then, after a resulting public outrage, distanced itself from it. Well beyond these spectacular attacks, the Taliban upped pressured on businesses in Kabul during 2015 and escalated attacks against restaurants and hotels frequented by foreigners, successfully driving most to shut down. It has, thus, forced the international community even in Kabul into an ever-shrinking space behind fortified walls, limiting its interactions with Afghans and undermining international assistance efforts by depriving them of Afghan input. Moreover, various kidnapping rings, many unrelated to the Taliban and some rumoured to be related to Afghan security forces, proliferated in Kabul throughout the winter of 2015 and spring 2016, targeting foreigners, further reducing the operational capacity of the international community in Kabul.

A winter lull in the fighting did not occur in Afghanistan's south either. Instead, the Taliban mounted an aggressive campaign, particularly in Helmand and Uruzgan, further escalating attacks in the spring. After Kunduz, the losses in Helmand, the scene of the U.S. 2010 surge were perhaps the most dramatic and some of the largest tactical victories for the Taliban in terms of psychological impact. After months-long pounding from the Taliban, the ANSF withdrew from several districts, including Musa Qala and Now Zad, with the Afghan 215 Corps assigned to Helmand melting away 'due to incompetence, corruption, and ineffectiveness.'<sup>46</sup> Even Rahnatullah Nabil, the former head of the Afghanistan Intelligence Agency who resigned in protest against government policies, characterised the morale of Afghan forces in the province as 'extremely low,' with discipline breaking down and 'junior commanders openly defying their superiors.'<sup>47</sup> The Taliban also overran the Sangin district, by May 2016, thus taking control or credibly contesting authority in eleven out of the province's fourteen districts. For the Taliban to strengthen influence over Helmand is important for many reasons, including because it facilitates

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<sup>44</sup> UNAMA, February 2016.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Michael Pearson, Masoud Popalzai and Zahra Ullah, "Death Toll Rises after Taliban's Deadly Attack in Kabul," *CNN.com*, April 20, 2016.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. General Wilson Shoffner quoted in "U.S. General: Afghan Army Being 'Rebuilt' for Taliban Battle," *Associated Press*, January 25, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Nabil quoted in *ibid*.

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access to the large drug revenues of the province and allows the group to develop significant political capital by sponsoring livelihoods for the rural population in the opium poppy economy.<sup>48</sup> By the summer of 2016, further losses in the provinces were avoided only by intensification of U.S. air support and several emergency deployments of U.S. and U.K. special operation forces and eventually an advisory battalion to assist the struggling ANSF in the province.

It is likely that in the summer of 2016, the Taliban will significantly increase pressure on Kandahar. The group has been preparing the ground for more than a year, gaining road control in Zabul and Uruzgan and developing bases and safe havens in Ghor. Attempting to assassinate the feared provincial police chief of Kandahar, General Abdul Raziq, will become a high priority for the Taliban. Accused of mafia-don-like behaviour and severe human rights abuses,<sup>49</sup> Raziq has been effective in keeping the Taliban out of Kandahar City and surrounding districts. But in addition to the consolidation of criminal rackets in Kandahar under his thumb and major human rights violations, the price of greater security from the Taliban has also been bad governance and tribal discrimination. If the Taliban succeeds in assassinating him, it will open up major power fights over political, economic, and criminal influence in Kandahar, and benefit from inserting itself into the resulting power fights.

Indeed, as has been the case in Afghanistan over the past decade, Taliban military efforts or those of affiliated insurgencies are not necessarily the cause of all insecurity. In many areas, Herat being a prominent example, the insecurity also crucially involves score-settling among rival powerbrokers, politicians, businessmen, and tribes trying to better position themselves within patronage networks or to get the upper hand in local power struggles over economic resources. Sometimes, such as in Balkh (where the local governor Atta Mohammad Noor has refused to step down in clear defiance of Kabul) reports of insecurity are inflated to obtain government appointments and signal to the government in Kabul that local powerbrokers cannot be fired or else insecurity will get much worse.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For details on the Taliban and drugs, see Vanda Felbab-Brown, “No Easy Exit: Drugs and Counternarcotics Policies in Afghanistan,” (paper, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2015), <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2015/04/global-drug-policy/FelbabBrown--Afghanistan-final.pdf?la=en>.

<sup>49</sup> For details on Raziq and his complex role in Kandahar, see Matthieu Aikins, “Our Man in Kandahar,” *Atlantic*, November 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/11/our-man-in-kandahar/308653/>; and Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence*, chap. 5.

<sup>50</sup> For such thinly veiled threats and manipulation by Herat’s predominant powerbroker and a key politician and warlord Ismail Khan, see, for example, “Herat Will Become Insecure within Weeks if Govt Keep Looking the Other Way: Ismail Khan,” *Afghanistan Times*,

Although such violent political and economic contests may not be about the Taliban to start with, they allow the Taliban to insert itself into the local conflicts and gain crucial footholds or strengthen its local position.

Yet despite significant challenges and failures at the provincial level (like Kunduz and Helmand) by the summer 2016, the ANSF did not collapse wholesale or even quit as the Iraqi army did, for example, in facing the Islamic State in 2014. Nonetheless, the government in Kabul continued facing a difficult dilemma: should it remain spread thin throughout Afghanistan and thus be deployed in a reactive mode to the Taliban's nimble attacks, or should it pull back further from non-strategic rural areas, ceding more ground to the Taliban? The former has so far allowed the Taliban to dictate the tempo and areas of engagement; the latter is very politically costly. In the fall of 2015, the Afghan government attempted to escape the dilemma by significantly increasing local militias on Kabul's payroll, including the Afghan Local Police (ALP). The Afghan government asked the United States, which has been footing the bill for the ALP, to pay for at least an additional 15,000 militiamen, a fifty per cent increase from the currently authorised 30,000 ALP force. In addition to generating more presumed fighters against the Taliban, such an ALP enlargement would also allow the struggling NUG to appease political opponents who have been constantly threatening to pull down the government by transferring financial resources, military and political power to them. But well aware that the NUG faced many problems controlling the ALP and that many of the powerbrokers would deliver no more than ghost ALP forces while pocketing the money, the United States appropriately refused to pay for such an enlargement.<sup>51</sup>

As the 2016 summer approaches, the Taliban shows no signs of losing its momentum and the ANSF is showing no signs of getting an upper hand. The prospect is one of a prolonged fighting at best. What then is the theory of an endgame and cessation of conflict for the Afghan government and the international community? One answer is simply hanging on and hoping for the Taliban to self-destruct and wither from within, as a result of the mismanagement of its internal organisation, internal fragmentation (perhaps intensified by a U.S. decapitation strategy) or extensive alienation of the Afghan population even in areas where the Afghan government is not liked. The second is hanging on in the hope that the Taliban is willing to negotiate some tolerable power-sharing terms. The two are, of course,

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April 28, 2015. On Atta and Balkh, see Jawad Sukhanyar and Rod Nordland, "‘They Cannot Remove Me by Force’: A Strongman on Afghan Infighting," *New York Times*, April 2, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Author's interviews with RS officials and Afghan government officials, Kabul, September and October 2015.

interconnected. The larger problems the Taliban faces on the battlefield - whether of its own doing or because of ANSF resistance or other insurgent challengers - the more willing it is going to be to accept a less ambitious negotiated deal. Nonetheless, the question is whether it is sufficient for the ANSF to merely hang on until that moment that the Taliban self-destructs, or whether the ANSF's current problems will continue sapping its morale unless it wins some significant tactical victories against the Taliban. Yet showing such tactical victories is much more difficult for the ANSF than for the Taliban, since the Taliban accrues psychological gains by taking over districts and provinces, even temporarily, but the ANSF does not get equivalent points by hanging onto districts or provinces. The decapitation policy toward Taliban commanders has so far not created a psychological impression that the Taliban is on the ropes. Nor has it, objectively, slowed them significantly – the insurgent group has been able to replace its command structures rather effectively.

The U.S. killing of Mullah Mansour in Balochistan, Pakistan may set off further fragmentation of the group, more intense than what occurred after the Taliban revealed that Mullah Mohammad Omar, the founder of the Taliban, died in Pakistan in 2013. In some years, any such intense fragmentation may cause the Taliban do undo itself from within, if the Taliban does not handle the leadership succession well. If that happens, the killing of Mansour may well turn out to be an important inflection point. However, fragmentation does not *ipso facto* mean either reduction in conflict or the inevitable strengthening of ANSF. Fragmentation of the group may merely further fragment and complicate the violent conflict, without making it less intense or brutal. Meanwhile, the killing of Mansour sets further back any, however, distant prospect of negotiating with the Taliban as leadership changes will need time to consolidate control and develop credibility, including on the battlefield, to negotiate.

### **Pushing Afghanistan to the Brink: Political Infighting and Misgovernance**

Not only is there no broad societal and elite consensus on the negotiations with the Taliban, there is equally no such consensus on elemental matters of governance or elite appreciation of the precariousness of Afghanistan's conditions. Afghan elites remain deleteriously fractious and self-interested, engaged in constant brinkmanship, scheming, and plotting, with the belief that they can pursue their power plays without pushing the country over the cliff into civil war. Most of the scheming may well be merely to maximise political leverage and receive jobs for themselves and their clients as compensation for reducing political pressure, rather than in fact seeking to

actually topple the Afghan government. But the constant crises and brinksmanship consume most of the political energy in the country and paralyse governance, despite popular disenchantment growing daily and without regard for the fact that Afghanistan cannot afford the same degree of non-governance as Nepal could get away with for a decade *after* the civil war ended there. In Afghanistan, an intense insurgency is burning.

At least in the immediate term, the political space for Ghani to persevere in the negotiations overtures is circumscribed by the upcoming Fall 2016 parliamentary and district elections and a possible convening of a *Loya Jirga* (grand constitutive assembly) to decode, codify, or end the President-CEO arrangement and the Government of National Unity. As part of the NUG agreement and in its first year, Abdullah expected that the 2016 *constitutional Loya Jirga* would change the Afghan system into a parliamentary one, with a reformed voting system in Afghanistan reflecting that change. In the first year of the NUG, he defined his legacy calling for such a constitutional *Loya Jirga*.

Yet Ghani clearly prefers the existing presidential system, and sees any such future constitutional *Loya Jirga* (if it takes place at all) as a possible mechanism to reduce Abdullah's role to that of an ordinary vice-president instead of a CEO. Such constitutional changes and the political firestorm they trigger in Afghanistan may be incorporated into the negotiations with the Taliban; conversely, they may further reduce any Afghan domestic political space for the Taliban negotiations. Nonetheless, as originally envisioned in the NUG deal, such a constitutional *Loya Jirga* cannot take place before parliamentary and district elections are held as they are to name a large portion of the delegates to the constitutional the *Jirga*.

Despite this, some Afghan politicians still insist that the NUG pact expires by the end of September 2016. With former President Hamid Karzai foremost among them, these powerbrokers seek to use the alleged expiration of the NUG as a mechanism to end the Ghani-Abdullah government and augment their own political power, even taking over the government themselves. Karzai has been proposing a traditional *Loya Jirga*, which he believes he can stuff with his supporters. Both Ghani and Abdullah are opposed to such a format. Other opposition politicians, such as Anwar al-Huq Ahadi, former finance minister, have called for rapid national presidential elections to take place before Fall 2016.<sup>52</sup> Although such calls have so far not gathered any steam, they are indicative of the fractious politics and fragility of existing governing arrangements.

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<sup>52</sup> Erin Cunningham, "Afghan Elites Calling for New Elections," *Washington Post*, March 30, 2016.

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Regardless whether or not there is any binding legal requirement to hold any *Loya Jirga* (and there is not), the political situation is explosive one way or another. Even the absence of a process will be used as a pretext to rock, if not altogether bring down the government. Political and ethnic sentiments will be whipped up, with street violence potentially used as a coercive political mechanism or erupting spontaneously as a result of miscalculation.

The politics surrounding the traditional *Loya Jirga* are about bringing the NUG down. However, even without these pressures, the Government of National Unity is deeply troubled. The chasm between the Abdullah and Ghani sides has not closed. Although this government may have averted civil violence or a coup, it created another form of paralysis. A year and half after its formation, basic daily governance in Afghanistan persists in a debilitating and corrosive limbo. Ghani and Abdullah took months to agree on a few ministerial appointments, even though former ministers had been fired soon after inauguration. Run by deputies and stuck in uncertainty and inertia, the line ministries thus continued to stagnate as vehicles of personal enrichment rather than being reformed into effective tools for delivering public services and administration. Crucial positions such as Minister of Defence and Attorney General were left vacant for over a year, and in some cases filled only with Acting Ministers. Even as of late May 2016, the Ministry of Defence and the national intelligence agency are still run by acting heads only. Although all provincial governors were placed in an acting status by Ghani soon after he became president, almost two years later, many have still not been replaced by permanent governors. Kabul still lacks an appointed mayor.

At the national level, Ghani has sought to deal with the governance paralysis and the awkwardness of the power-sharing arrangement by not sharing power and bypassing Abdullah. Rather than running policy through line ministries and investing in institution-building, at least early on in his administration Ghani focused on building up the president's office. Greatly expanded, the President's Office now not only formulates policy, but also seeks to direct its implementation.<sup>53</sup>

The troubles stemming from the power-sharing arrangement and from Afghan governance in general are a forceful, if distressing, reminder that power in Afghanistan often comes from personal networks and that institutions do not function or are easily subverted by behind-the-scenes powerbrokers. Thus, even reform-minded and knowledgeable technocrats without strong personal networks, such as Ghani, may have a very limited

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<sup>53</sup> For details, see, for example, Azam Ahmed, "Afghan Leader Said to be Centralising Power as Unity Government Plan Stalls," *New York Times*, March 20, 2015.

implementation and governing capacity - as well as many political debts - even while formally sitting at the centre of power. Building up personal networks over the difficult, complex, and long-term process of building up institutions is readily tempting.

The distribution of power in the President-CEO arrangement, of course, continues to be intensely contested by the two men and their networks. The more Ghani manages to execute policy through different channels, such as the President Office, the more the network behind Abdullah feels disempowered and frustrated, not only with Ghani, but with Abdullah himself since he can deliver less and less to his backers. And indeed, Abdullah is increasingly considered a spent force by his former northern backers who increasingly believe that rocking the government and generating crises is a far more effective way to secure government positions than relying on Abdullah to obtain them.

It is precisely this politics of brinksmanship that debilitates Afghanistan at a time of an intense security challenge and economic morass. As long as manufacturing political crises and threatening to topple the government is the basis of political and economic redistribution in Afghanistan, any *Loya Jirga* or negotiated NUG or even collapsed NUG will not improve governance or provide a way out of the political paralysis. Indeed, while some Afghans believe that the *Loya Jirga* might end the indecisiveness and paralysis of the NUG, the odds are high that it would not. Unless Afghan politicians stop behaving in narrowly self-interested predatory and rapacious ways, any new government will face many of the same problems as the current NUG is facing.

Meanwhile, the political deadlock, subnational governance paralysis, and security uncertainties are compounding Afghanistan's bad economic predicament and have had a pronounced and lasting effect on Afghanistan's fragile economy. Domestic economic performance in 2013 and 2014 was even worse than expected, with massive economic shrinkage, large unemployment, capital flight, and a chronic as well as acute fiscal crisis as tax and custom collections plummeted. From nine per cent in 2012, Afghanistan's GDP growth shrunk to 3.7 per cent in 2013 and two per cent in 2014.<sup>54</sup> Afghanistan's domestic revenues declined from a peak of 11.6 per cent of GDP in 2011/12 to 9.7 per cent in 2013 and continued to drop in 2014.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Omar Joya, *Afghanistan Country Economic Update: Macroeconomics and Fiscal Management Global Practice*, World Bank, April 2015, [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/05/15/090224b082e8582d/2\\_0/Rendered/PDF/Afghanistan0economic0update.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/05/15/090224b082e8582d/2_0/Rendered/PDF/Afghanistan0economic0update.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> William Byrd, "Afghanistan's Continuing Fiscal Crisis: No End in Sight," (Peace brief 185, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., 2015),

Uncertain whether a new government would be formed or whether the country would be plunged into civil war, many Afghans stopped passing money to Kabul, amassing as much as possible, pressed by the need for skyrocketing bribes, and having to repay debts much faster than previously.<sup>56</sup> Instead of fifty per cent of such revenues being diverted to personal coffers or local patronage networks, in many cases, that portion grew to eighty per cent.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, revenue theft in 2014 turned out to be the worst since 2001.

Combined with the fact that much of Afghanistan's previous legal economic growth was tied to the money brought in by the foreign security forces now leaving, the country is experiencing more than an acute fiscal crisis. For months, Kabul could not pay salaries to civil service workers. In addition to the structural fiscal gap of 25-40 per cent of Afghanistan's GDP that the international community has had and will have to bridge in the coming years,<sup>58</sup> the international community had to provide immediate stopgap funding of U.S.\$190 million to allow the Afghan government to cover at least some of its most politically sensitive financial obligations, such as salaries. Even then, the Afghan total budget shortfall was U.S.\$537 million.<sup>59</sup>

In 2015, Afghanistan's government succeeded in delivering a spectacular turnaround in revenue generation: from an eight per cent drop in 2014 to a twenty per cent rise in 2015. As William Byrd and M. Khalid Payenda show, only one-fifth of this revenue growth came from currency depreciation and other macroeconomic factors. More than half came from stronger and more effective tax collection efforts, including better control of corruption; improvements in monitoring of customs and tax departments; and firing of corrupt managers. A little less than a quarter came from new taxes, such as on cell phones<sup>60</sup> – not a measure widely politically popular.

Nonetheless, major structural economic problems remain, with the overall economic outlook grim in the short-term, as intensifying violence suppresses investment and augments financial and human capital flight. Unemployment hovers around twenty five per cent and underemployment is

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<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB185-Afghanistans-Continuing-Fiscal-Crisis-No-End-In-Sight.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Author's interviews with World Bank and IMF officials, Afghanistan, September and October 2014, and Washington, D.C., November 2014.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Hogg et al., *Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2013).

<sup>59</sup> Byrd.

<sup>60</sup> William Byrd and M. Khalid Payenda, "Afghanistan's Revenue Turnaround in 2015," (Peace brief. 201, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., 2016), [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB201-Afghanistans\\_Revenue\\_Turnaround\\_In\\_2015.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB201-Afghanistans_Revenue_Turnaround_In_2015.pdf).

much higher.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, the NUG paralysis and political infighting have left some 25,000 government positions vacant.<sup>62</sup> In 2015, the value of the Afghan currency dropped by over twenty per cent, driving up the costs of imports. The promise of the country's mineral wealth worth U.S.\$1 trillion and producing revenues to wean Afghanistan off dependence on foreign aid, opium poppy cultivation, and human development remains just a promise. Meanwhile, Integrity Watch Afghanistan estimates that 1,400 mines operate illegally in Afghanistan, while only 200 pay taxes to the government.<sup>63</sup>

Economic frustration undermines the government's legitimacy and fuels, even indirectly, the insurgency and encourages politics of brinkmanship and populism. Unless the Afghan elites come to realise that not just the national interest, but the very survival of the post-2001 political dispensation requires a suspension of narrow, parochial, self-interested politics and better governance *and* a political opposition that is loyal to the basic interests of the country and the Afghan people.

## **Conclusion**

Although Afghanistan passed through a critical juncture in the fall of 2014, when after an election, power was peacefully handed over to a new government, the country continues to face a series of political tripwires. Among the most significant are upcoming parliamentary elections and, most importantly, the 2016 *Loya Jirga* that is supposed to formalise (or undo) the power-sharing deal between President Ghani and CEO Abdullah that averted major instability and violence after the elections. Regardless of whether or not the *Loya Jirga* actually takes place, it or its shadow will likely unleash an intense political crisis in Afghanistan. The brinkmanship politics surrounding the *Jirga*, exploited by Afghan politicians to augment their political and economic power and/or to topple the Afghan government, risks unleashing street and ethnic violence in Afghanistan in the fall of 2016 and putting a terrible strain on the ANSF, testing its capacity to stay together. Should such street violence erupt, it also provides an immense opportunity for the Taliban to exploit militarily and politically.

Meanwhile, the power-sharing arrangement has turned out to be a stubborn beast, with governance mostly paralysed for months. Although improving governance and fighting corruption were key campaign promises

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<sup>61</sup> Kristina Shevory, "Once a Bright Spot, Afghan Telecoms Face Unsustainable Losses," *New York Times*, April 8, 2016.

<sup>62</sup> "25,000 Posts Still Vacant in the Afghan Government Institutions," *Khaama Press*, March 30, 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Research by Integrity Watch Afghanistan quoted by Najafizada.

of both candidates, eight months after the formation of the government, few improvements can be noticed by the Afghan people.

The potential major political crises come on top of the major structural challenges that Afghanistan has faced and will continue to face for years to come. The Afghan state continues to be dependent on increasingly fickle foreign support for funding large parts of its budget, including all of its military expenditures. Its economic prospects have significantly worsened compared to three years ago and remain dim for the foreseeable future. The promise of its mineral resources funding the Afghan state and the development of the country has been slow to materialise.

The Taliban insurgency is more than entrenched; it has engaged in some of the most intense fighting since 2001. Insecurity has increased across the country, and a long hot 2016 summer and autumn lie ahead. Another major security crisis like the autumn 2015 fall of Kunduz City is likely. Civilian casualties continue growing, and Afghan security forces are challenged on the battlefield and suffering from sustainment problems.

Amidst this very difficult governance situation, and as a way to address some of the country's structural challenges which have been severely compounded by persisting violence, President Ghani staked his political capital on negotiations with the Taliban. In a bold move, he reached out strongly to Pakistan (often seen by Afghans as the source of all of Afghanistan's problems). But Pakistan has not managed to persuade the Taliban to either show up seriously at the negotiating table, or to reduce its violent insurgency in Afghanistan. Ghani has little to show for his pains, and his domestic political space will continue to shrink as the 2016 autumn of crises approaches.

Whenever talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban actually get under way, they are likely to last for years, well beyond 2016 when the foreign troop presence is supposed to be reduced to 5,600. Increasingly, it is imperative to direct military operations with an eye toward their impact on negotiations, such as by determinedly targeting Taliban commanders opposed to the negotiations who might defect and create splinter groups or embrace IS.

Equally, however, governance in Afghanistan cannot persist in a condition of paralysis of the past year and half. Starting to deliver governance improvements is crucial for the sustainability of the Afghan state and the basic political dispensation in the country. Better governance buys time, opens up political space for the negotiations, and strengthens the government's hand in them. But even a negotiated deal will not address inadequate governance in Afghanistan.

It is imperative that Afghan politicians put aside their self-interested scheming and rally behind the country to enable the government to

function, or they will push Afghanistan over the brink into intensified insurgency, and outright civil war. In addition to restraining their political and monetary ambitions and their various power plays in Kabul, they need to recognise that years of abusive, discriminatory, exclusionary governance; extensive corruption; and individual and ethnic patronage and nepotism are the crucial roots of Afghanistan's predicament. These have corroded the Afghan Army and permeate the Afghan Police and anti-Taliban militias. Beyond blaming Pakistan, Afghan politicians and powerbrokers need to take a hard look at their behaviour in recent years and realise they have much to do to clean their own house to avoid disastrous outcomes. Not all corruption or nepotism can or will disappear. But unless outright rapacious, exclusionary, and deeply predatory governance is mitigated, the root causes of the insurgency will remain unaddressed and the state-building project will have disappeared into fiefdoms and lasting conflict. At that point, even negotiations with the Taliban will not bring peace.

The U.S. killing of Mansour in May 2016 may set off a new wave of Taliban fragmentation. But while the leadership replacement process may temporarily hamper Taliban attacks in Afghanistan and some years later turn out to be the inflection point that set off the Taliban's disintegration, Afghanistan still needs to brace for a bloody summer 2016. Even with the killing of Mansour, the Taliban's operational capacity has not collapsed. Should the Taliban not be able to pull off an effective leadership transition, they may merely fragment into violent conflict and make it more complex, without reducing its viciousness and intensity.

Whatever the state of (non)negotiations with the Taliban and the state of the military battlefield, delivering governance improvements is crucial for the sustainability of the Afghan state and the basic political dispensation in the country. Better governance buys time, opens up political space for negotiations, and strengthens the government's hand in them. It also boosts the capacity of ANSF on the battlefield.

U.S. policy in Afghanistan faces a difficult dilemma with respect to how to demand from and stimulate in Afghan politicians and powerbrokers better political behaviour and governance. The more tentative and short-term U.S. commitment to Afghanistan appears, the more Afghan politicians, particularly those with ability to leave Afghanistan, engage in hedging and short-term power and profit-maximising behaviour and liquidate assets to be ready for an exit. On the other hand, the more unconditional U.S. commitment appears, the more Afghan powerbrokers believe they can rock the Afghan government to extract concessions and payoffs, assuming that the United States will prevent crisis-making from being irretrievable and that Afghanistan will not slip into a civil war.

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Meanwhile, governance suffers, crucial state-building does not take place, and the Taliban accrues tactical victories.

Thus, despite significant U.S. counterterrorism interests in Afghanistan, the criticality of Afghanistan for Pakistan, in the stability of which the United States also has crucial interests, and despite U.S. large sacrifices in Afghanistan and humanitarian interests, U.S. military presence, economic aid, and other forms of engagement should not be unconditional. If, for example, Afghan politics pushes the Afghan security forces into splintering along ethnic lines, and ethnic violence in Afghanistan takes on new dimensions, it may well be time to go out. ■

# Cooperation between China and Pakistan on the Afghan Issue

Dr Wang Xu\*

## Abstract

With the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) led International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) withdrawal in 2014, the United States (U.S.) and its allies have been less focused on Afghanistan, which 'demoted' the Afghan issue to a regional issue from being a top global agenda. Afghanistan, located in the Central Eurasia or Inner Asia, has geopolitically strategic significance. Its peace is directly related to the region's stability and prosperity, to which the international community and its neighbouring states in particular should attach great importance. Recently, as important and immediate neighbours to Afghanistan, China and Pakistan have been enhancing their cooperation on promoting the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan in order to conclude a comprehensive political solution and commit to regional peace and stability. However, various factors including political, economic and security challenges within Afghanistan internally as well as traditional geopolitics and games among major powers externally bedevil the Afghan reconstruction process with uncertainties, and also overshadow bilateral and multilateral cooperation on promoting the 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' reconciliation process regionally and globally.

## Current Situation and Challenges in Afghanistan

*Afghan politics is beset with troubles both at home and abroad. The National Unity Government (NUG) cannot administer this state effectively or even effectually. Both sides of the peace table, read as NUG and Afghan Taliban, are harassed by their own internal discords and differences separately, which led reconciliation process to a bleak outlook.*

Foremost, the NUG brokered by the U.S. and governed by expediency among various political factions is risky structurally and systematically. Numerous and insuperable contradictions between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah's camp have been causing delayed political consensus, particularly relating to major affairs such as cabinet formation and

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provincial governors' appointments. In the future, the delivery of and power sharing within NUG are still highly uncertain.

Then, intensifying fragmentation of Afghan politics sharpens contradictions among factions. Local forces and strongmen are rising and warlords are preparing for battles proactively. A perspective of simplified interfluvium of Afghan political spectrum among ethnic groups or religious sects or between the North Alliance and Taliban may not be in point anymore. Conflicts of interests penetrated through ethnic groups now influence various areas, tribes and families. In particular, since the leak of Mullah Omar's death in late July 2015, in view of Ghani's pro-Pakistan policy and favour of talk with the Taliban, and his tough political personality as well, differences and discords within Ghani's camp have been surfacing with each passing day also.

Moreover, dissidence within the Taliban on the peace talk, their relationship with Pakistani authorities and also other issues between military and political factions and even among different political factions have intensified further. The confirmation of Omar's death activated those factions to scramble for the helm, and also gave a rise to sharpening contradictions and escalating armed conflicts within the Taliban on the brink of splitting up. In the future, Taliban may be faced with a lot of problems of unity and internal integration.

Finally, on the request of the Afghan Government, the U.S. slowed down its pace of withdrawal, but still does not care for brokering power-sharing within Afghanistan. The U.S., who is capable of intervention in deed at present, seems inclined to wash her hands off the matter, either by interpreting the principle of 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' narrowly or campaigning regional countries to assume liability jointly.

In brief, Afghan politics is beset with numerous troubles currently. Both sides of the peace talk are faced with the risk of collapse so that neither side can achieve consensus separately in the near future. Prospects surrounding the peace talks allow no room for optimism. In addition, there may come more severe challenges in the future. Firstly, to maintain political stability, it is critical for the NUG to carry forward electoral and parliamentary reforms smoothly on schedule. Secondly, resolving contradictions and reaching consensus on power-sharing between Ghani's and Abdullah's camp as well as within their own camps separately at the earliest, is directly related to a way forward for the Afghan people and the future of Afghanistan. If the NUG remains ineffective or even ineffectual, it will not be easy for Afghanistan to gain lasting and adequate support and resources politically, economically or militarily from the international community. Thirdly, the international community lacks alternatives for Afghan politics. Once NUG collapses, it could lead to another round of

political instability and even internal conflict or war in Afghanistan, and there will be no other effective measures or mechanisms to maintain peace and stability except the *Loya Jirga* (Grand Assembly).

***The Afghan economy has deteriorated and will be faced with more severe challenges.***

Foremost, the malformed structure of the Afghan economy has not been rectified. It heavily relies on the services sector related to the foreign military presence and lacks endogenous growth, like a sort of ‘anaematopoiesis.’ Withdrawal of ISAF delivered a heavy blow to the Afghan economy and caused an obvious massive recession. According to estimates from the World Bank, Afghan GDP growth would remain minus 0.5 per cent in 2015, leading frugal government finances into another disaster.

Furthermore, international financial assistance has been imbalanced from area to area, with rural areas getting very little. Migration of people from rural areas, into major cities like Kabul, led to decreasing income and high unemployment for the urban masses. Unemployment rate has reached 50 per cent or above in some areas. This will definitely and severely challenge social stability in Afghanistan. Finally but more worryingly, Afghan people’s confidence and hope for their political and economic prospects of the state are getting frustrated. A great number of younger generation, highly educated younger population in particular, desire to migrate abroad. Among the huge migration into Europe at present a great number of refugees are Afghan. They either manage to slip across the borders into Europe or are deluded by radical ideologies in the Middle East and join extremist groups there, a few of whom even go back to Afghanistan for terror activities, imposing a severe threat to peace and stability in Afghanistan as well as the whole region.

***The leak of Omar’s death proved to be a watershed moment for the Afghan security situation. Prior to it, overall security once improved with local conflicts intensifying but deteriorated afterwards. Meanwhile, Islamic State (IS) from Middle East has been trying to influence the region, implication of which should not be neglected.***

To begin with, before the confirmation of Omar’s death by the Taliban, two sorts of conflicts threatened Afghan security. One was the intensified conflict between the Afghan Taliban and the so-called Islamic State (IS) group in eastern Afghanistan. Since the Pakistani military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb (ZeA) in tribal areas near the Afghan-Pak border in

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June 2014, some splinter groups of Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP) have suffered heavy blows and fled to eastern Afghanistan. These TTP groups, which tried to rebrand themselves as IS to re-merge, clashed violently with the Afghan Taliban to gain territory in Nangarhar and other provinces in eastern Afghanistan. The other is the offensive in northern Afghanistan by the Afghan Taliban. Conflicts in the east, as mentioned above, limited the Taliban's attacks in southern Afghanistan - its traditional strongholds. The Taliban uncharacteristically intensified its fight in the north of Afghanistan. They dared to mobilise hundreds of fighters to attack and even captured Kunduz city (the strongpoint) in northern Afghanistan, shocking the Afghan Government and the whole world.

Since the Taliban confirmed Omar's death, three other critical treats have emerged and aggravated the security situation. Firstly, owing to the standstill of peace talks, the Afghan Taliban increased attacks on Kabul and other major cities and terror attacks in Afghanistan shot up. Secondly, conflicts within the Taliban between Mullah Mansoor and Mullah Rasool factions escalated into massive violent clashes in the southern province Zabul. Thirdly, affected by Mansoor's injury in an internal clash and even rumours of his death, the pro-fight faction of the Taliban surged in the southern province Helmand and once fully controlled the strategically important Sangin area in December 2015. The security situation deteriorated further. Additionally, the extremist group from the Middle East, namely IS, merely injected limited presence and influence into Afghanistan. There are three types of persons the so-called IS group is constituted. A very few of them are local militants appointed by IS from the Middle East directly; more of them are militants of TTP splinter groups fleeing to Afghanistan after ZeA; others are Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) related militants fleeing to northern Afghanistan especially Badakhshan after ZeA. In terms of organisational network and financial links, the latter two sorts of militants have not established closely direct links with the Middle East, and they are just rebranding themselves. However, involvements of the Middle East extremist group are dimly visible in the conflicts with and within Taliban. The former's infiltration overshadows Afghan security in three ways. Firstly, it accelerates the transition from the 'moderate' first generation to the 'tough' third generation among militants and extremists in the region. Secondly, it intensifies armed confrontation among various militant groups in Afghanistan. Thirdly, it makes the peace talks more difficult; even if the Afghan Government and the Taliban reach a preliminary agreement on the talks, the Taliban hardliners will deny implementing the solutions.

## **Relations between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan and its Challenges**

*China enjoys traditional friendship with neighbouring Afghanistan, while its relations with another Afghan neighbour Pakistan serves as a model for international relations. Recently, with joint efforts from both sides, Pak-Afghan relations improved and the trend of benign interaction between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan emerged.*

China and Pakistan enjoy mutual trust, understanding and support. Both countries maintain close high-level exchanges and enhance cooperation in various fields, and contact and work closely with each other on global and regional issues as well. During Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan in April 2015, both sides agreed to elevate their bilateral relationship through an All-weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership, enriching the China-Pakistan Community of Shared Future, to ensure the perpetual continuity of China-Pakistan friendship from generation to generation. As for cooperation on Afghanistan between the two countries, China views it from three perspectives. Firstly, China values Pakistan's unique role on Afghanistan and stands ready to make joint efforts with the formee to push the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, according to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as a neighbour, China welcomes the positive efforts made by both sides to improve bilateral relations, which are conducive to resuming the Afghan reconciliation process and realising regional stability.<sup>2</sup> It China supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process, and is open to any initiative that will lead to national peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. China will continue to play a constructive role to this end and remain in contact and coordination with all parties.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, because of the Durand Line issue and the Taliban, Pak-Afghan relations have been tense for a time. However, since Ghani assumed office in September 2014, he adopted a positive Pakistan policy and endeavoured to improve the torn relations, expecting Pakistan could help to restart the peace talk. Meanwhile, Ghani remains committed to his predecessor Karzai's friendly China policy and expects China to play a key role in Afghan peace and reconstruction. Afghanistan expects China's strengthening political, economic and security support and assistance in the

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<sup>1</sup> "China, Pakistan Elevate Relations, Commit To Long-Lasting Friendship," *Xinhuanet*, April 21, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/21/c\\_134167525.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/21/c_134167525.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Lu Kang, "Regular Press Conference" (MoFA, Government of China, 2015), accessed May 2, 2016, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1328340.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1328340.shtml).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

context of NATO's withdrawal and decreasing assistance from the international community, and also wants to draw on China's influence on Pakistan to press Taliban back to the table and make progress on the Afghan reconciliation process.

***Some progress has been made for cooperation between China and Pakistan on the Afghan issue.***

The first round of China-Pakistan-Afghanistan trilateral strategic dialogue held in Kabul in February 2015, as well as the first round of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) dialogue of the peace process held in Islamabad in January 2016, brought the delayed talk process hopes of rebooting. To promote international cooperation on Afghan peace process, no matter bilaterally, trilaterally or multilaterally, it hinges in large part on the improvement of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, historical burdens inherited from traditional geopolitics and games among major powers is delaying the process of mutual trust and cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Subjected to various parameters internally as well as externally, the Afghan peace and reconstruction process is beset with uncertainties and its outlook remains gloomy. Located as 'Heart of Asia', a peaceful Afghanistan, with its geostrategic significance, serves the interests of all stakeholders and will contribute to the economic development and social welfare for the whole region. Unfortunately though, thanks to the complicated trans-border ethnic issues, traditional geopolitics and games among major powers, Afghanistan serves as 'the Graveyard of Empires' all the time. It is critical for all parties and stakeholders to put aside old-fashioned differences and push every joint effort into the Afghan peace and reconstruction process. China should take the following measures for this cause: Foremost, China should take fully advantage of the cooperative mechanism within the framework of the Istanbul Process (IP) to urge all parties to fulfill their commitments of confidence building measures. China should enhance cooperation with Pakistan, implement consensus reached by all parties during the fifth foreign ministers' meeting of IP at the earliest, and put the QCG mechanism to good use for resumption of the peace and reconciliation process. Moreover, China should work with the international community to help and assist Afghanistan as per actual demands and feasibility. Taking China's the One Belt and One Road (OBOR) initiative as an opportunity, it can strengthen its cooperation with Pakistan to provide Afghanistan with

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developmental assistance of necessity on transport infrastructure, energy and agriculture and deepen the connectivity and economic integration of the region. Furthermore, China should back efforts made by Pakistan and Afghanistan to promote their ties, strategic trust and mutually beneficial cooperation so that regional counterterrorism mechanisms within the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) can be activated and the cooperation on intelligence and information sharing, equipment assistance, joint training and exercise enhanced.

In brief, the Afghan issue is longstanding, intertwined and deeply related to the region's stability and prosperity. Its political solution serves the Afghan people's interest. China and Pakistan should strengthen their cooperation, play constructive roles and support the principle of 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' to ensure the comprehensiveness, legitimacy and continuity of the peace and reconciliation process and achieve substantive progress towards stability and prosperity of the whole region at the earliest.■

# Russia's Interests and Potential to Contribute towards Peace and Reconciliation in Afghanistan\*

Dr Petr Topychkanov\*\*

## Russia's Policy towards South Asia

Russia has adopted several doctrinal documents that devote a lot of attention to the South Asian countries – primarily Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. The 'Concept of the Foreign Policy Doctrine of the Russian Federation' approved in 2013<sup>4</sup> reveals that Russia's relations with these countries represent independent and occasionally interconnected vectors of the country's foreign policy; nevertheless, they do not form a cohesive regional strategy.

For instance, Russia intends to continue developing a 'privileged strategic partnership' with India.<sup>5</sup> As for Afghanistan, 'The Russian Federation together with Afghanistan and concerned countries, the United Nations, the CIS<sup>6</sup>, the CSTO<sup>7</sup>, the SCO<sup>8</sup> and other multilateral institutions, will make consistent efforts to find a just and lasting political solution to the problems faced by this country with due respect for the rights and interests

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\* The chapter is based on various articles published by the author: Vladimir Moskalenko and Petr Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities" (Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow, 2014), [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/russia\\_and\\_pakistan2014.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/russia_and_pakistan2014.pdf); Petr Topychkanov, "The West Should Not Reject Russia's Assistance in Afghanistan" (Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow, 2014), <http://carnegie.ru/2014/10/14/west-should-not-reject-russia-s-assistance-in-afghanistan>; Petr Topychkanov, "Russian Policy on India and South Asia," (Moscow defense brief, Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, Moscow), <http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/1-2013/item1/article1/>.

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (Russian Federation, 2013), [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a regional association of several post-Soviet nations.

<sup>7</sup> Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

<sup>8</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

of all its ethnic groups and achieve a post-conflict recovery of Afghanistan as a peace-loving sovereign neutral state with a stable economy.’<sup>9</sup>

Russia’s approach to South Asia and nearby regions are also outlined in its military documents, namely the ‘Russian National Security Strategy 2015’ and the updated ‘Maritime Doctrine 2015.’ The Strategy takes note of the negative impacts that the situation in a number of South Asian countries has on the international climate.<sup>10</sup> The updated Maritime Doctrine 2015 divides Russian naval policy between six regions: Atlantic, Arctic, Antarctic, Caspian, Indian Ocean, and Pacific. Within each region the doctrine assesses four naval functions: operations, transport, marine science, and the development of natural resources. However, unlike the focus of the 2001 policy, the focus of the doctrine is on the Arctic and the Atlantic.<sup>11</sup>

An article by Vladimir Putin, published in February 2012, contributes to the understanding of Russian policy in South Asia. He writes that Russia is ‘an integral and organic part of Greater Europe’ that is trying to take advantage of Asia-Pacific growth, particularly the growth of China and India. He describes Russia’s policy on China in great detail, but there are only two sentences on India and no mention of Pakistan. As for Afghanistan, the following passage is of note. Putin names terrorism and ‘heroin aggression’ as the main threats coming from Afghanistan, but when he writes of Russian interests in this country, he does not refer to the War on Terror at all. According to the Russian President, Afghanistan’s stable and peaceful development and the fight against drug trafficking are Russia’s major interests.<sup>12</sup>

Based on these political declarations, the following conclusions on South Asia’s place in Russian foreign policy can be drawn:

- For at least the next ten years, the region will pose numerous threats to Russia’s security; some of them are political instability, interstate conflicts, terrorism, and drug trafficking.
- While addressing these issues, Russia intends to develop bilateral relations with South Asian countries and will actively participate in various multilateral political forums.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, *Russian National Security Strategy*, Russian Federation Presidential Edict (Russian Federation, 2015), <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> President of Russia, *Russian Federation Marine Doctrine* (Russian Federation, 2015), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50060>.

<sup>12</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Russia and the Changing World,” *Moscow News*, February 27, 2012.

- South Asia is viewed as a region whose ‘integrational’ processes are of interest to Russia and its economy. India is considered the main engine of growth in the region and seen as a ‘privileged strategic partner’; Afghanistan is a close neighbour; Pakistan is a major regional power, whose place in Russia’s foreign policy is similar to that of Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Turkey.

However, given the fragile regional security of South Asia, three directions of a potential military response by Russia would include maintaining an adequate military presence in the southern areas that are under the purview of the South Operational-Strategic Command created in 2010; and having a periodic presence of the Russian Navy in the Indian Ocean. Also, according to the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2010):

The Russian Federation assigns troop contingents to the CSTO Collective Rapid-Response forces for the purpose of responding promptly to military threats to CSTO member countries and resolving tasks determined by the CSTO Collective Security Council for their utilization in accordance with the procedure envisioned by the Agreement on the Procedure for the Operational Deployment, Utilization, and Comprehensive Support of the Central Asia Collective Security Region Collective Rapid Deployment Forces.<sup>13</sup>

This is the officially declared policy of the Russian Federation in South Asia.

### **Russia’s Concerns in Afghanistan**

Russia’s primary concern in Afghanistan is maintaining security in the Afghan-Central Asian region. Moscow seeks to prevent instability in Central Asian countries, some of which - Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan - are its allies CSTO, a military alliance of post-Soviet states. In addition, Russia has a vested interest in stemming the flow of drugs coming from Afghanistan.

But while a peaceful, stable, and developing Afghanistan would be in Russia’s interest, Moscow does not have vital stakes in any of the possible Afghan regimes. Thus, it would be dangerous and pointless for Russia to get involved in Afghanistan’s internal power struggle. Moscow can work

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<sup>13</sup> **President of Russia, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, (Russian Federation, 2010), <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/461>.**

with any potential leaders in Kabul and maintain ties with any regional or ethnic groups as long as they do not engage in activities directed against the Russian Federation.

At the moment, Moscow has no significant economic interests in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, if the situation there stabilises, the Russian Federation might take part in rebuilding the Afghan economy within the framework of international assistance efforts. But the prospects for and potential extent of this sort of aid remain unclear at this time, and it would be inexpedient for Russia to finance the rebuilding effort in Afghanistan on its own.

Afghanistan does not currently pose a direct military threat to Russia, nor will it pose such a threat in the foreseeable future - even if the Taliban come to power in Kabul and manage to gain control over the entire Afghan territory, including its northern regions. This is a fairly unlikely scenario. The Taliban's influence and potential to take and maintain power in Afghanistan are not as great as many people think. The Taliban itself represents a complex sociopolitical group with a number of internal factions and conflicts, and the conservative Afghan society is not generally amenable to religious radicalism. All told, the 1996–2001 Taliban rule was an aberration.

An unstable Afghanistan does, however, pose indirect risks to Russia's security, primarily in the form of the drug trafficking that originates on Afghan territory and reaches the Russian market through Central Asian countries. In the last decade, this threat has grown enormously. International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) and U.S. troops essentially neglected the war on drugs, fearing backlash from a significant part of the Afghan population.

There is also a threat that the Afghan territory may turn into a training ground for terrorists and militants that target Russia, which is another serious risk. Extremists training in Afghanistan would not necessarily be limited to groups that originate in the North Caucasus. Russia has recently been confronted by a geographically and ethnically diverse pool of Islamic extremists.

Furthermore, the situation in Afghanistan may affect Russia's security indirectly by way of Moscow's allies in Central Asia. These nations fear the possible consequences of destabilisation in Afghanistan, which may include an influx of refugees or an upsurge in Islamic extremism, drug trafficking, and trans-border crime, and they may well turn to Moscow for help.

The power struggle between the Pashtuns - Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, which nevertheless does not constitute the majority of the Afghan population - and other ethnic groups, particularly Tajiks, Uzbeks,

and Hazaras, may draw Tajikistan, Russia's nominal ally, and Uzbekistan into internal Afghan conflicts. In this context, Dushanbe and Tashkent would very likely try to influence Moscow's Afghan policies, hoping to make the Russian Federation serve Tajik and Uzbek interests. Something similar happened in the 1990s when Russia was drawn into supporting the Tajik- and Uzbek-dominated Northern Alliance that was fighting the Taliban government in Kabul.

### **Russia's Tools in the Region and Potential in Afghanistan**

Russia's resources in and around Afghanistan for countering these threats are rather limited. It has no allies inside the country, and its relations with individual Central Asian states are complex and require careful calibration. Russian military presence in the region is relatively minor and is directed mainly against traditional adversaries, such as potentially hostile states and their armies, rather than tasked with combating terrorism or insurgencies.

There are essentially no reliable borders along the route from Afghanistan to Russia that could stop armed groups or individual terrorists from reaching Russian territory. It would be extremely expensive to fortify the border between Russia and Kazakhstan, one of the longest land borders in the world (over 4,350 miles), and it would also be counterproductive politically given the close relations and numerous integration projects between the two countries. The Tajik-Afghan border must be strengthened, but Tajikistan's positions and interests will determine how effective control along this border will be. Dushanbe does not see eye-to-eye with Moscow on every issue despite the official alliances between Tajikistan and the Russian Federation. Another Russian ally, Kyrgyzstan, has a relatively weak central government and strong regional clans, making border control difficult. Afghanistan's borders with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are controlled from the north by Ashgabat and Tashkent, which are not bound by any alliances with Moscow.

Russia's protections against Afghan drug exports are also weak and ineffective. Central Asian and Russian criminal organisations are certainly involved in Afghan drug traffic, and these groups are apparently patronised by corrupt law-enforcement and other government officials in their respective countries. Evidence indicates that some of the so-called Afghan drugs are, in fact, produced in Central Asian countries. In addition, the fact that Russia experiences an enormous influx of labour migrants from Central Asia - particularly from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan - complicates efforts against drug smuggling.

Nevertheless, Moscow does have a number of tools at its disposal for increasing its own security and that of the region. It can engage in focused

diplomacy inside Afghanistan and in relations with regional powers, especially India, Iran, China, and Pakistan. It also has military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and can interact with its CSTO partners and use the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a Eurasian economic, political, and security union, as a platform for diplomacy. However, in order to use these tools effectively, Moscow will need to develop a cohesive strategy.

### **Russia and the West in Afghanistan**

Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai officially became the President of Afghanistan on 29 September 2014. The U.S.-Afghanistan ‘Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA)’, which went into effect on January 1, 2015, was signed the next day. The agreement permitted a limited U.S. troop presence on Afghan territory over a period of ten years. The Afghan Government promised to provide the troops with access to military facilities in Kabul, Bagram, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar, Helmand, Gardez, Jalalabad, and Shindand.<sup>14</sup> A similar agreement between NATO and Afghanistan was signed the same day.

The transfer of power in Kabul and the signing of these agreements with the United States and NATO again raise the question of security cooperation between Russia, Afghanistan, and its Western partners. Alexander Grushko, Russia’s permanent representative to NATO, said in an August 2014 interview that Russia remains interested in bilateral assistance to Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup> However, Russia’s cooperation with the U.S. and NATO on Afghanistan was effectively frozen by the West in April. Expressing the official position of the Russian Federation, Ambassador Grushko stated, ‘I’m confident that NATO understands that any attempts to project force in Russia’s direction are hopelessly misguided and counterproductive.’

It is difficult to disagree with this assessment. Such a method of punishing Russia for the annexation of Crimea deprives the United States and NATO of the opportunity to more effectively strengthen Afghanistan’s defence capabilities and counteract the threats of terrorism and drug trafficking. Refusing Russia’s assistance in Afghanistan looks incredibly wasteful given the withdrawal of coalition troops from the country as well as the need to commit substantial resources to combating the threat of

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<sup>14</sup> Afghanistan, Security and Defence Cooperation Agreement, Afghanistan-U.S., September 30, 2014, <http://mfa.gov.af/Content/files/BSA%20ENGLISH%20AFG.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> “Interview with Ambassador Alexander Grushko, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to NATO,” *Interfax*, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to NATO, August 28, 2014, <http://www.missiontonato.ru/en/news/546/>.

ISIS<sup>16</sup> in the Middle East and stemming the spread of the Ebola virus in Africa.<sup>17</sup>

Russia's cooperation with the West is crucial in securing Afghanistan's peaceful future. Russia supplies the Afghan Air Force with helicopters, provides for their maintenance, and trains the country's technical specialists. It also participates in counteracting drug production and trafficking and ensures the transit of U.S. and NATO military and civilian cargo through Russian territory. In September 2013, Russia and Afghanistan launched a joint initiative on border security.

The Ukrainian crisis will not be resolved in the foreseeable future, and Moscow is certainly not planning to reconsider its decision to annex Crimea. Therefore, the United States and NATO must revisit their decision to curtail cooperation with Russia, including on Afghanistan. Afghanistan should not be made into a hostage of the situation in Eastern Europe.

At this time, Washington and Brussels are confident that they can manage without Russia's participation in solving Afghanistan's security problems. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai's coming to power and the signing of the cooperation agreements only boosted their confidence; the West has ostensibly created favorable conditions for itself in Afghanistan, obviating the need to consider other external powers.

Many in Russia, Afghanistan, and other countries in the region do not share this view. First, despite the resolution of the political standoff between the two presidential candidates, the political situation in Afghanistan remains volatile. To ensure the regime's survival, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai will have to balance between the interests of various forces inside the country, including the anti-Western factions, and external forces - Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India, and the Central Asian republics. Second, whether the West likes it or not, Russia has long participated in multilateral and bilateral assistance projects in Afghanistan. The most promising recent example is the negotiations between Russia, Afghanistan, and India, and the resulting agreement on the India-sponsored export of Russian weapons to Afghanistan.

If the United States and NATO continue to refrain from cooperating with Russia on Afghanistan, Russia will maintain its assistance through bilateral agreements with Kabul, multilateral agreements with regional powers, and international organisations such as the SCO. The assistance Russia and other regional powers render to Afghanistan will continue to increase irrespective of Kabul's cooperation with Washington and Brussels.

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<sup>16</sup> Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

<sup>17</sup> Rachel Kleinfeld, "ISIS and Ebola, Two Sides of the Same Coin," *Hill*, October 1, 2014, <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/219357-isis-and-ebola-two-sides-of-the-same-coin>.

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If common sense prevails and the West resumes its cooperation with Russia, the consolidated response to security threats in Afghanistan will be far more effective than the current disjointed efforts by various countries. A coordinated policy formulated by external powers would also contribute to Afghanistan's political stability. The lack of such a policy will only lead to the escalation of internal political strife and Kabul's weakness in face of security threats. ■

# **Transnational Security Problems & Neighbouring Regions**

- Stakes and Role of Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan
- Multi-Faceted Linkages between Afghanistan and Central Asian States

# Stakes and Role of Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan

## *An Essay*

**Dr Zubair Iqbal\***

### **Introduction**

Saudi Arabia, in cooperation with the United States, Pakistan, and a few other countries played a major role in forcing the Soviet Union to end its occupation of Afghanistan. It reportedly provided up to U.S.\$1 billion per year in public and private funding during the last few years of the conflict. Afghanistan had become a strategic asset for Saudi Arabia as an upholder of the Islamic banner that cemented the former's leadership position in the Islamic world. Although Saudi Arabia continued to support the Taliban rule, misgivings about its path had started to emerge. The 9/11 attacks and the U.S.-led intervention brought about fundamental changes in Saudi Arabian policy towards Afghanistan. Since then Saudi Arabia's role in Afghanistan has evolved, shaped by a number of factors including regional strategic objectives, religious affiliations, and support for global allies such as the United States. While limited financial support to the post-Taliban government was resumed, Afghanistan became less important in shaping Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. Nongovernmental Saudi actors, however, continued to influence direction of cultural and social policy in Afghanistan.

Since 2011, focus of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has shifted, making its relations with Afghanistan subject to developments in the Middle East. First, the Arab Spring-induced political changes have destabilised the Middle East region. At the same time, Iran has emerged as a determined competitor for regional influence. More recently, Saudi Arabia's economic conditions have weakened on account of lower oil prices and global economic slowdown, calling for a rebalancing of domestic and external objectives. These developments have required a major reorientation of Saudi foreign policy with a likely reduction in the country's economic assistance to Afghanistan at a time when political and security challenges in the latter have increased, economic growth has slowed down sharply, and governance has weakened. The near term outlook remains highly uncertain.

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This essay briefly analyses the evolution of Saudi Arabia/Afghanistan relations during the post- Taliban period; reviews recent developments in the Middle East region and their impact on the Kingdom; assesses the country's potentially conflicting strategic objectives and their implications for Afghanistan; and finally explores options for Saudi support for Afghanistan.

### **Post-Taliban Saudi-Afghan Ties (2002-10)**

Diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan were restored in early 2002 after Hamid Karzai's government replaced the Taliban administration. With the U.S./NATO-ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) taking on a dominant role in supporting the new government against the Taliban, Saudi Arabia adopted a more modest and supportive role. The new Saudi strategy was not only aimed at providing humanitarian aid (which exceeded U.S.\$200 million per year over the next decade), but also bolstering like-minded religious entities in Afghanistan with the aim of preserving Saudi Arabian leadership position as the centre of the Islamic world. It also sought to encourage peace negotiations between the government and the Taliban. However, its role in rebuilding the economy as a vehicle for stabilisation and security became less important.

Much of the rapid growth in Afghanistan during 2002-10 was driven by the huge war-related expenditures funded by the U.S./NATO under the ISAF. However, it had unintended consequences such as rapid and unsustainable growth of a war-driven services sector, increase in income inequality, and a weakening of law and order. In particular, the overwhelming dependence of the Afghan economy on temporary inflows of external resources for the war effort, including grants that exceeded half of the government expenditure during 2002-10, weakened the underlying economic position. These developments not only negatively impacted the peace process, but also hampered the peace-making efforts of other stakeholders, including Saudi Arabia.

Given its religious leadership position, long-standing involvement in Afghanistan, but reduced financial clout, Saudi Arabia quietly pursued options for peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban in a regional context. In 2008, Saudi Arabia initiated a new round of peace negotiations. It was expected that the initiative would not only bring together the Taliban and the government, but also encourage Pakistan and other regional partners to become more active in resolving regional issues and enhance regional stability. The initiative crucially required the Taliban to break off relations with Al-Qaeda. This strategy, which

paralleled the U.S./NATO approach and had tacit support of the Afghan government, was also driven by a wider regional objective of containing Iranian influence in Afghanistan by bolstering the unity of the fellow Sunni community.<sup>1</sup> The initiative failed which partly reflected Saudi Arabia's limited influence on the Taliban leadership. A subsequent joint effort by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries also failed.

### **Arab Spring, Winding Down of U.S./NATO Campaign in Afghanistan (2011-15)**

Starting in 2011, two major events altered the Saudi-Afghan equation: the Arab Spring which spawned popular rebellion in the Middle Eastern countries against authoritarian regimes which necessitated a fundamental re-focusing of Saudi Arabia's strategic interests towards its near neighbours in the Middle East; and the winding down of the U.S./NATO military intervention in Afghanistan that brought forth the underlying economic and security weaknesses in Afghanistan, while the Taliban insurgency remained unabated. While Saudi Arabia's interest in and ability to help Afghanistan declined, the latter's need for such help from the former and other regional countries increased.

The Arab Spring that began in 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt, spread quickly to Libya, Yemen and Syria. The Moroccan and Jordanian monarchies also came under pressure. The fall of governments-autocratic but republican - in these countries and the widening civil war in Syria badly damaged Saudi Arabia's and other GCC countries' perceived sense of regional security. Protests for greater degree of freedom and civil rights were ignited in Bahrain by the Shia majority. Protests also took place in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province - the primary oil producing area - with a large Shia population that complained of discrimination. The Saudi authorities responded to these developments by (a) repressing dissent by force; (b) increasing benefits and subsidies amounting to about U.S.\$120 billion to citizens with the aim of dissuading dissent; and (c) funding resistance/reactionary forces in the affected countries to defeat the rebellion and restore more friendly governments in those countries.

These steps have led to a sharp and enduring increase in government spending requiring reallocation of oil revenues towards domestic imperatives and to help 'near' neighbours, in part, at the cost of other 'far' beneficiaries, including Afghanistan. At the same time, tensions with Iran and its allies (Iraq, Syria and Lebanon) increased, necessitating higher

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<sup>1</sup> Nic Robertson, "Sources: Taliban Split with Al-Qaeda, Seek Peace," *CNN.com*, accessed 10 July 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/10/06/afghan.saudi.talks/>.

military outlays. Saudi Arabia's strategic priorities changed, calling for a reorientation of foreign policy. Following the 2013 coup in Egypt that toppled the democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood government, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates committed to providing U.S. \$20 billion to the new government for the 'security and stability' of Egypt. Assistance at a somewhat lower level has been maintained since then. Participation in active hostilities and humanitarian help for Yemen has also added to claims on Saudi resources. Syrian rebel claims on Saudi support have continued to increase. Steps, including financial assistance, have been taken to shore up the Jordanian and Moroccan monarchies.

The new foreign policy became more Middle East-centric. External security was bolstered through enhanced support for friendly neighbours through material assistance to forces fighting unfriendly regimes (Yemen and Syria) and to help counter the influence of a resurgent Iran in the region. The negative impact on Afghanistan was only partially offset by increased attention to countering Iran's rising influence in that country.

On the other hand, following the 2012 U.S.-Afghanistan agreement to phase down U.S./NATO military role, Afghanistan's need for external financial assistance and security support increased which could not be met from domestic or non-ISAF sources. Domestic capacity to mobilise revenues deteriorated, while expenditures increased manifold, resulting in endemic and rising fiscal deficits. With no alternative avenues of funding (such as Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries) to fill the resource gap, economic growth in Afghanistan fell from an average of ten per cent per annum in 2002-11 to less than three per cent per annum in the subsequent three years. Unemployment and political uncertainty increased.

Lower assistance and increased insecurity has discouraged investment; growth is expected to remain around three per cent in 2016-17, well below Afghanistan's potential growth rate and insufficient to ensure sustainability.

### **Post-2015: Lower Oil Prices, New Realities, and Policy Options**

A paradigm shift is underway in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other GCC member countries with fundamental implications for not only Afghanistan and but also the broader Middle East/ Central Asia region. The confluence of intensified regional challenges, U.S. pivot towards Asia at the expense of the Middle East, rise of Iran as a determined competitor for regional influence, and a likely extended economic downturn owing to lower global oil prices has called for a reorientation of Saudi Arabia's overall strategy. In addition, the composition of population has changed: majority of which is now below the age of thirty and unemployment is high around 12-13 per

cent, stressing the viability of the social contract between the ruling family and citizens. These factors, combined with a more uncertain world, have amplified the need for rebalancing domestic and external objectives. Saudi Arabia's relations with Afghanistan will not be immune to these developments.

Under the new leadership, the Saudi kingdom is attempting to target the following potentially conflicting internal and external objectives: (a) sustaining the social contract between the ruling family and masses and nurture the existing political structure under constrained economic resources; and (b) enhancing its external security by strengthening its regional strategic position, countering Iran's resurgence, and cementing its leadership of the Islamic world. Even though Saudi Arabia's political economy has become more diversified and its global relations have deepened over the past several decades, instruments to achieve these two broad objectives have remained primarily oil and religion. It has used a combination of oil-related financial wealth and religion (including religious leadership in the Muslim world) to achieve domestic and foreign objectives. Both religious faith and oil earnings have been used to cement and sustain its social contract with the citizens who have forfeited their rights to choose their rulers in exchange for assured economic and political security. The same combination has also been effective so far in ensuring external security through the achievement of strategic targets in the region and farther afield.

The Saudi economy has, since 2015, been confronted with a dramatic fall in oil prices which will have a major impact on its ability to simultaneously achieve these dual objectives. The rising demand on the government for sustaining the domestic economy and meeting the mounting outlays on security-related expenditures have, in the face of a sharp reduction in oil revenues, led to a significant drawdown of official foreign assets. Under current assumptions, oil prices will recover only moderately over the medium term. Though still comfortable, official foreign reserves cannot be drawn on indefinitely. Hence, the Saudi authorities will have to take steps to prioritise spending and restructure the economy so as to cushion it against external shocks, including rising security challenges. Under these circumstances, it is likely that funding to support 'far' neighbours, such as Afghanistan, will be hard to come by at a time when other donors (constrained by their own economic challenges) are winding down their commitments to such beneficiaries.

The new strategy announced recently by Saudi Arabia (National Transformation Plan) confirms the shift in its foreign policy. Its focus is on building the domestic economy to accommodate the rapidly growing young population, redirecting the shrinking resources for strengthening security,

while defending its role as the leader of Islamic world. It aims to create a modern economy free of oil dependence, allow private sector participation (including foreign investors) in its oil industry, increase the Kingdom's stakes in the global financial market, promote small and medium scale private enterprises, progressively eliminate subsidies, while a range of new industrial sectors will be developed with the support of foreign investment. This will call for a redrawing of the social contract between the rulers and the ruled. Given the widespread structural distortions that have held the economy back, this Plan implies a very ambitious effort. Even if only a modest part of the Plan were to be implemented, it requires major reallocation of resources and a fundamental reordering of priorities towards redefined domestic objectives and progress towards regional security. Concurrently, a broad consensus among the religious groups will have to be reached to not only define the Kingdom's leadership role in the Islamic world, but also the costs involved. No clear signs have as yet emerged on these issues.

### **How will the Emerging Outlook for Saudi Arabia affect its Stakes in Afghanistan?**

In the period ahead, Saudi Arabian stance towards Afghanistan will be determined by a number of factors. These include its financial position following the redirection of resources to meet its regional strategic objectives and domestic economic revitalisation, the extent to which Afghanistan can supplement Saudi Arabian regional strategy to contain Iran's influence, and the role Saudi Arabia can play to help the peace process between the Taliban and the Afghan government in collaboration with U.S., China, and Pakistan. Moreover, the role of the religious lobby in Saudi Arabia, though somewhat less assertive than in the past, will continue to affect foreign policy. The following scenarios and related policy options for Saudi/Afghan relations are worth considering.

First, oil prices continue on their current trend, recovering gradually over the medium-term, but remaining below the highs reached in 2013-14. The domestic economic reform programme is put into effect in Saudi Arabia, but subsidy reductions are pursued gradually so as not to drastically alter the social contract that could create political pressures and weaken the authorities' ability to address external challenges. It is assumed that regional conflicts will continue and hegemonic competition with Iran will persist.

Second, Iran, taking advantage of the recent electoral outcome in support of reform and liberalisation, undertakes the needed shift in its domestic political power balance in order to support economic reforms,

eases its confrontational regional stance, and pursues greater integration with the region and the global economy at large. Such a stance would also increase the chances of cooperation with Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries - major oil producers - to facilitate a mutually beneficial, faster increase in oil prices.

Third, the *status quo* is maintained. Regional conflicts continue with mounting instability and the cost of these conflicts increases for Saudi Arabia. Domestic economic reforms in the country are postponed and financial constraints deepen under broadly unchanged oil prices.

Finally, a possible scenario could envision increased Taliban/Afghan government hostilities with likely negative effects on Pakistan - a country whose stability is attached high importance by Saudi Arabia.

The second scenario would be the most constructive option for the evolution of Saudi Arabian stakes in Afghanistan. This scenario would imply reduction in regional tensions, greater room for resource transfers to countries like Afghanistan, and peace prospects within Afghanistan as Iranian and Saudi Arabian regional interests would converge. Above all, it could lay the foundations for increased regional cooperation, leading to greater integration and increased interdependence among Middle Eastern countries, thus, promoting economic growth and reducing reasons for conflict. However, for this scenario to materialise, a number of forces have to come in play. First, the shift in political power in Iran from the current power base to the newly-elected moderates must take place. This change of policy stance in Iran would crucially depend upon the relative success of global and regional efforts for resolving regional conflicts and settlement of civil wars. This outcome could also benefit from an early and successful implementation of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) strategy in Iran.

The third scenario would be the least productive. Even though it may result in greater Saudi Arabian funding to Afghanistan - both official and unofficial (including by religious groups) - to counter increased Iranian support for its surrogates, Afghanistan's challenges will deepen. Recent developments, including the possibility of Afghan forces supporting Saudi-led effort in countries like Yemen against Shia-leaning *Houthies*<sup>2</sup>, do not bode well. However, diplomatic efforts by the Afghan authorities to balance their relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran appear to have been helpful.

The first scenario, which could leave the regional quagmire unaffected, could imply a reduced flow of funding from Saudi Arabia and declining interest in actively seeking solutions to the Afghan challenges. This may also be consistent with the evolving interests of the younger leadership that seems to be taking over decision making in the new Saudi

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's Note: The *Houthies* is a Zaidi Shia-led movement from Sa'dah, northern Yemen.

government; it is clearly more interested in addressing the domestic economic challenges than those afar.

While the new Saudi administration has not yet articulated its stance towards Afghanistan, it will remain engaged with other parties - Pakistan, U.S., and China - to assist financially and politically in order to seek peace in Afghanistan. Given its abortive attempt in 2008, Saudi Arabia is unlikely to take a lead in bringing together Afghan warring parties. The non-state actors, including the religious groups, will remain engaged, cementing the already existing deep-seated religious links. However, a durable stance in the period ahead would require deepening of presently limited economic interdependence between the two countries. Increased trade and employment of Afghan expatriate workers could not only help develop an alternative and a more durable source of income than foreign aid for Afghanistan, it could also develop a constituency in that country that could support Saudi initiative for peace. Saudi private sector investment in the mining and agricultural sectors could be mutually beneficial, providing employment opportunities in Afghanistan, helping develop skills, and - perhaps, in conjunction with the Chinese OBOR initiative - diversifying Afghan economy and strengthening economic links with Central Asia, thus, reducing dependence on Iran. Deepening of economic links and prospects of sustainable growth may also encourage the Afghan authorities to undertake much-needed regulatory reforms and ease restrictions that have had a negative effect on growth and income equality.

## **Conclusion**

Since 2011, major strategic changes in the Middle East region have impacted Saudi Arabia/Afghanistan relations. Following the Arab Spring-related political upheavals, a number of Saudi Arabia's neighbouring countries have been destabilised with potentially adverse effects on the country's security. At the same time, resurgence of Iran as a competitor for regional influence appears to have challenged Saudi Arabia's strategic interests in the Middle East and surrounding Muslim countries, including Afghanistan. In the wake of this, Saudi Arabia's strategic focus shifted towards the Middle East. At the same time, the winding down of U.S./NATO military operations in Afghanistan and the associated increase in insecurity have had a dramatic negative effect on the Afghan economy. With Saudi Arabia and other non-U.S./NATO donors unable to fill the gap, Afghanistan's economic growth has plummeted and social unrest has increased.

Sustained fall in global oil prices in 2015 has further compounded the strategic challenges for Saudi Arabia. Confronted with financial constraints

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and mounting claims on its resources to address domestic economic and regional challenges, Saudi Arabia has been forced to revise its priorities. While precise articulation of its revised strategy is underway, the recent announcement of its comprehensive economic reform strategy provides clues to its future direction. The authorities intend to use the Kingdom's oil wealth and reduced export earnings to expand the non-oil sector of the economy and to reduce dependence on unstable oil earnings. At least in the near to medium-term, it will entail the use of available resources to step up growth and employment in the domestic economy.

How this new economic strategy affects Saudi relations with other countries in the region will crucially depend upon how the regional security environment evolves. If the regional tensions are eased and there is more cooperation, especially between Saudi Arabia and Iran, oil prices may start to rise sustainably and the cost of regional conflicts may fall, creating room for greater assistance to countries like Afghanistan. However, under unchanged conditions and given the aim of preserving regional strategic interests, lesser resources will be available for supporting friendly countries far afield. It is likely that financial support for Afghanistan, that appears to have remained broadly unchanged at about the same level as in 2013 (committed U.S.\$475 million), will not increase.

Saudi Arabia may consider an alternative option to supplement its assistance and strengthen its bilateral bonds with Afghanistan. It could foster closer economic linkages by supporting a larger number of Afghan expatriate workers in the Kingdom, encourage Saudi private investment in Afghanistan in mining and agriculture, and in joint initiatives for trade with Central Asia. Closer coordination with the Chinese OBOR initiative may help. By promoting economic well-being and sustainability, such initiatives could also facilitate peace negotiations between the Taliban and Afghan authorities. ■

# Multi-Faceted Linkages between Afghanistan and Central Asian States

Orhan Gafarli\*

## Abstract

After the withdrawal of NATO from Afghanistan in 2014, the issue of regional security became the primary debate for Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Central Asian countries have common cultural, political and historical ties and they are also neighbours with Afghanistan. Therefore, if there are any problems in the security issues in Afghanistan, it has a negative impact on the Central Asian region. The CA countries have their own approach towards resolving the political, economic and security issues in Afghanistan. They are developing cooperation with Afghanistan in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CENTO). In addition, these countries also have bilateral relations in the economic and political sphere with Afghanistan. The question this chapter seeks to answer is focused on security. The main purpose is to examine the role and approach of the Central Asian countries in Afghanistan's transformation into a stable country.

## Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asian countries Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan gained independence and started to re-establish relations as sovereign states with Afghanistan. Apart from their geographical proximity, they also have links to their minority ethnic kin in Afghanistan. This is clearly reflected in the ethnic and lingual structure of the country. The population of Afghanistan includes many different ethnic groups: 45 per cent Pashtun; 33 per cent Tajik; 10 per cent Hazara; 8 per cent Uzbek; 13 per cent Turkmen and Baloch. Languages spoken are Pashto (35 per cent); Afghan Persian (50 per cent); Turkic languages (Uzbek- Turkmen 11 per cent) and other ethnic languages (4 per cent). Afghanistan has borders with

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Pakistan (2.430 km), Tajikistan (1.206 km), Iran (936 km), Turkmenistan (744 km), Uzbekistan (137 km) and China (76 km).<sup>1</sup> How important Afghanistan is for Central Asia and South West Asia region can be understood when one considers these borders.

Many of these Central Asian countries do not have an established democracy, their political systems are becoming authoritarian, religious fundamentalist radical groups are in opposition to state policy, previously socialist now capitalist systems are not successful, and there is no respect for basic principles of human rights. Such political changes can have repercussions for Afghanistan. Due to political instability in the latter, extremist groups find refuge in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan; while existing political and religious radical groups in the latter seek refuge in the northern regions of Afghanistan in order to be free from the pressures of local governments. Afghanistan and these Central Asian countries have been interconnected over the past twenty years. When evaluating Afghanistan, the geography connecting Central Asia and South West Asia, as well as the geography creating a common insecurity area with similar problems should be remembered.

In 2011, the Arab Spring began in the Middle East and led to major socio-political and security changes in the entire region. If the Arab Spring affected the Greater Middle East to such a great extent, as Americans describe it, then it can also overtake Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Central Asian countries.

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Daesh) declared itself in 2014 in Syria and the process of establishment of a new state in Rakka brought the possibility of them opening a new front in Central Asia, probably on the Afghan border also created serious concerns.

Failure to prevent cross-border operations of political Islamic groups between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan has caused serious threats for the region. Some Central Asian countries have become keen on radicalising opponent groups in their own country in the context of political Islam. Such a situation brings legitimacy to the authoritarian regimes in the region. Although regional security problems look like threats, they are also perceived as an opportunity by authoritarian regimes. We see that this situation creates the sociological background of regional security issues. This sociology in Central Asia caused the export of 'Political Islam' or 'radical Salafism' from Afghanistan. Since the Central Asian countries went through the process of 'Sovietising' for almost seventy years, concepts of

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<sup>1</sup> Orhan Gafarli, *Avrasya Çıkmazı: Yeni Büyük Oyunu Kim Kazanacak [New Great Game in Eurasia: Who Will Win?]*, (Ankara: Nobel Academic Publishing, 2015).

‘political Islam’ were marginalised. But ‘Political Islam’ exported from Afghanistan has a ‘New Islamic’ story to tell to former Soviet countries.

Security problems between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries are not only about radical political Islamic movements. We can also add drug trafficking to the security issues. Export of drugs, via Central Asian countries that it has borders with, to the former Soviet geography is very important in terms of security. Withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan would further ensure uncontrolled drug trafficking and more freely maneuvering radical political Islamic movements.

For bilateral cooperation to eliminate security concerns, the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan work through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The first part of this chapter will review the situation in Afghanistan after NATO’s. Then, it will examine Afghanistan policies of Central Asian countries at the level of international organisations. Finally, the chapter will evaluate cooperation between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan for the elimination of regional security issues.

### **Post-NATO Afghanistan and Central Asia**

In 2001, after the military intervention by the U.S. in Afghanistan, South West and Central Asia entered into a new era in terms of regional security and stability. Afghanistan became important in the South West and Central Asia due to its relations with neighbours in the region and its internal instability problems. In this regard, taking Afghanistan into account in a comprehensive manner as Central Asia’s most important security problem, in the context of ‘the third world security’ is very important.

In 2002, after the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan, insecurity was overcome by short-term strategies under the leadership of Hamid Karzai. Karzai’s government, although unable to fully cope with the existing social threats, left them ‘frozen’ for the future incumbents of the Afghan government.<sup>2</sup> The Taliban which is the most important of these threats collapsed due to the U.S. military intervention. However, it was not completely obliterated and has managed to keep itself alive with the support it receives from outside and inside the region. After the Arab Spring, Daesh which is different from the Taliban, started to wreck havoc and their activities raised serious concerns in the Central Asian region. After NATO’s withdrawal from Afghanistan, establishment of Daesh on the border of Syria and Iraq, more importantly, following fragmentations in Al-

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Qaeda and Taliban, it has been observed that radical groups have been supporting radical Islamists in Central Asian countries and in Afghanistan. The number of young people from Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, attending the Daesh camps in Syria is increasing.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, NATO's withdrawal plan from Afghanistan needs to be examined closely

### **NATO's Withdrawal Plan from Afghanistan**

After the removal of troops from Iraq, American troops have started to withdraw from Afghanistan. This was an important message of U.S. President Barack Obama to the American public after he came to power. According to the U.S. plan announced in 2013, the NATO mission and the U.S. presence in Afghanistan would only last until 2016. Withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan started in 2014. After the withdrawal of NATO troops, for security purposes, the number of U.S. troops was reduced to 9600 until 2016. It is expected that U.S. troops will leave Afghanistan for good in 2017. Currently, there are 33000 American soldiers in Afghanistan.

### ***Afghan Troops***

Troops in Afghanistan play an important role in ensuring the country's stability and security. For that reason, the Afghan Army after NATO should be assessed in terms of state security. Commander-in-Chief of the Afghan Army is the President of Afghanistan. Defence Minister and Army Chief of Staff are considered to be military heads. The Afghan National Army is composed of 185,000 personnel, according to 2013 figures. The Air Force consists of 6, 600; the police and gendarmerie consist of 6000 personnel. These figures are expected to increase after the withdrawal of NATO military forces from Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)***

After the withdrawal of NATO, security issues of Afghanistan will become even more central because the groups which the Central Government tried to balance with the support of the United States will be left alone. The Taliban, Islamic Jihad and Al-Qaeda will expand their activities again in

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<sup>3</sup> A.A. Kazantsev, "Tsentralnaya Aziya: Sovetskaya Gosudarstvennost' Pered Vyzovom Radikal'nogo Islama" [Central Asia: Secular Statehood Challenged by Radical Islam], (Valdai paper 42, Valdai Discussion Club, January 19, 2016), <http://valdaiclub.com/publications/valdai-papers/central-asia-secular-statehood-challenged-by-radical-islam/>.

<sup>4</sup> Orhan Gafarlı, *Avrasya Çıkmazı: Yeni Büyük Oyunu Kim Kazanacak* [New Great Game in Eurasia: Who Will Win?].

order to seize power. These extremist groups in Afghanistan have close ties with regional actors.

Russian-Afghan relations are an important issue for Central Asia and for Russia which is mover and shaker behind the newly founded Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). *Kazakhstan* is one of the founders of the EEU and a prominent member. For that reason, it is worried about possible threats from the south that will affect the economy and social life of Central Asian countries while developing the EEU mechanisms. *Tajikistan* is willing to join the EEU, but the country needs to become stable to realise this. *Uzbekistan* is worried about the possible activation of Islamic groups in Afghanistan after NATO drawdown. It is very important at this point for the EEU to be an economically secure region. *Turkmenistan* has experienced firsthand the fallout of soured relations between Russia and the U.S.; China and itself, concerning energy. Russia sees China as an alternative to western gas markets. This would negatively affect the selling price of Turkmen gas to China and China would be less dependent on the latter. For this reason, Turkmenistan would try to find a way to supply its own gas to the world markets. For Turkmen gas to be able to open to the new markets via South Asia, Afghanistan needs to be a safe country. This is quite important and necessary. Thus, considering interests of Afghanistan and other countries in the region and competition of global powers, some security issues that can be carried to the global arena may emerge in the South West and Central Asia in the near future. The Taliban and other separatist powers may become more active in the region.

### **Central Asian Security Organisations and Policies towards Afghanistan**

Afghanistan has borders with three Central Asian countries: Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Central Asian countries develop policies related to Afghanistan under the umbrellas of two international organisations, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

#### ***Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)***

Except from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Central Asian countries are all members of the CSTO established under Russian leadership. Turkmenistan is not a member of any military cooperation due to its neutral status. Uzbekistan manages its relations with CSTO according to its relations with Russia and according to its perceived threats.

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In a statement, on May 7, 1992, related to the establishment of Russian Federation Military forces, Russia invited Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to make a collective security treaty. In line with Russia's demand, CIS leaders gathered in Tashkent on May 15, 1992. Six member countries (Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Armenia) signed the Collective Security Treaty (Tashkent Treaty) in the summit. On October 7, 2002 Presidents of Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan established the CSTO in Tashkent. With this treaty, the parties formed a new military alliance, according to which if a Member State is the victim of an armed aggression, the other Member States will act according to the common defence policy.<sup>5</sup> Hence, it is indeed ironic that this is a common defence organisation of former alliance countries after the dissolution of the Soviet Union under the leadership of Russia. Except from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, other Central Asian countries are in close cooperation with Russia because they could not increase their military powers due to their economic situation. But Kazakhstan has a different type of coordination with Russia compared to other countries. Kazakhstan-Russia relations are based on an equal partnership.<sup>6</sup> It has partnered with Russia because of projects like Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), CSTO, Customs Union, EEU and because of Russia's wealth. Uzbekistan also has leadership claims in Central Asia and its perspective related to many issues depends on Kazakh-Russian relations. Thus, Central Asian countries develop common defence strategies against threats from Afghanistan because of their close economic and military relations with Russia. Kazakhstan is considered one of the most important countries in Central Asia and it signed an agreement with Russia to combine Kazakh and Belarus air defence systems in 2014; and recently a S-300 defence system has been delivered to Kazakhstan by Russia.<sup>7</sup>

Russia plans to actively rearm the Armed Forces of Kyrgyzstan on the basis of threats from ISIS in Central Asia. In 2014, the NATO military base in Kyrgyzstan was closed due to Russia's pressure. It is said that

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<sup>5</sup> Gontar Sergey Mikhaylovich, The System Of Collective Security Of The Russian Federation in the Format of CSTO and Preconditions of Its Creation, *Science Journal of Volgograd State University* 18, no. 2 (2013): 125-130.

<sup>6</sup> Karina Levina, "Russian-Kazakhstan Relations: Step to the Common Future," *Academia.edu*, 2014, accessed May 15, 2016, [https://www.academia.edu/9728850/Russian-Kazakhstan\\_Relations\\_Step\\_to\\_the\\_Common\\_Future](https://www.academia.edu/9728850/Russian-Kazakhstan_Relations_Step_to_the_Common_Future).

<sup>7</sup> Askar Muminov, "Almaty will be the Headquarters of a Unified Air Defense of Russia and Kazakhstan," *Kursiv.kz*, May 27, 2015, [http://www.kursiv.kz/news/obshchestvo/almaty\\_stanet\\_edinym\\_shtabom\\_pvo\\_rossii\\_i\\_kazakhstan/](http://www.kursiv.kz/news/obshchestvo/almaty_stanet_edinym_shtabom_pvo_rossii_i_kazakhstan/).

Russia would do everything in its power to complete the plan of rearmament of Kyrgyzstan. Russia and Kyrgyzstan have an arms deal worth U.S.\$ one billion dollars. Therewithal, Kyrgyzstan is a member of Eurasian Union. The other country that is in need of economic and military support of Russia is Tajikistan. During Putin's visit to Dushanbe in October 2012, an agreement was signed to extend the lease of a military base in Tajikistan until 2042.<sup>8</sup>

While other countries in Central Asia have been establishing closer ties with Russia and becoming more and more dependent on it, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan act independently compared to them. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are members of the CSTO, but Uzbekistan withdrew from the organisation in 2012.<sup>9</sup> Leaders of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan who gathered on October 8, 2015 confirmed that they will apply their own policies to ensure military and political security in Central Asia.<sup>10</sup>

The most important body established by CSTO members against international terror is the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (Russian: Коллективные силы оперативного реагирования, КСОР; KSOR) which is a joint arms taskforce comprising of independent military units from the CSTO member states. The body was created in 2009 with the general purpose to counter limited military aggression against CSTO member states, to fight against terrorism and drug trafficking.<sup>11</sup> There was a large-scale military operation 'Thunder 2012' on the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border on September 14, 2012.<sup>12</sup> On May 19, 2015, members of the CSTO conducted an unexpected military exercise in the framework of Collective Rapid Reaction Forces in Tajik-Afghan border. The main aim of this exercise was to see the capacity to prevent possible threats from Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Russia Gets 30-Year Extension for Base in Tajikistan," *BBC.com*, October 5, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-19849247>.

<sup>9</sup> Gennadiy Sysoyev, Yelena Chernenko, and Maksim Yusin, "Uzbekistan Breaks Away from the Collective," *Kommersant*, June 29, 2012, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/1969156>.

<sup>10</sup> "Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan will Jointly Guard the Border with Afghanistan," *Sputniknews*, October 8, 2015, <http://ru.sputniknews-uz.com/world/20151008/681055.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Yuriy Gavrilov, Vladimir Kuzmin, Mikhail Falaleyev, "The Amount of Force: Yesterday CSTO Created a Collective Rapid Reaction Force," *Rossiyskaya gazeta* 4842, February 5, 2009, <http://rg.ru/2009/02/05/armiya.html>.

<sup>12</sup> CSTO, *The First Anti-Drug Exercise 'Thunder 2012,'* Collective Security Treaty Organization, September 14, 2012. [http://www.odkb-csto.org/training/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=1203&SECTION\\_ID=95](http://www.odkb-csto.org/training/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=1203&SECTION_ID=95).

<sup>13</sup> "CSTO Collective Forces Repelled an Attack by Conventional Fighters from Afghanistan," *Interfax-AVN*, May 9, 2015, <http://militarynews.ru/story.asp?rid=1&nid=376854>.

Between September 14 and 15, 2015, a CSTO meeting at the level of heads of state was held to discuss ‘manifestations, key regional and global issues, including - the intensification of terrorist and extremist groups and as a whole the situation emerging at the borders of the countries of the Organization.’<sup>14</sup> Similarly, another meeting was held at the level of Heads of State of the CIS in October 2015 to strengthen security of borders and improve military cooperation.

This was followed by another joint military exercise of private forces and intelligence in the framework of CRRF in April 2016.<sup>15</sup> The main purpose of all military exercises has been to show the capability of the members to take measures against terrorist groups and drug trafficking from Afghanistan. The interesting thing that happened during these military exercises was that a terrorist camp near the Tajik-Afghan border came to light. The camp was cleared by the CRRF teams. However, Tajik intelligence denied being aware of the camp which seems rather impossible given its proximity to the military exercises. The actual aim of this particular military exercise may have been to destroy the terrorist camp, but why then the need to call it a ‘military exercise’ instead of an operation is not clear.

### ***Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)***

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is another major international institution under whose ambit issues related to Afghanistan are addressed. China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan established an organisation in 1996 called the Shanghai Five. In 2001, the number of members increased to six with the participation Uzbekistan. Members with Observer Status include Afghanistan, Mongolia, Iran, India, Pakistan while Turkey, Sri Lanka, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia have Dialogue Partner status.

The SCO focuses on terrorism, extremism and discrimination. These issues are a top priority for the Central Asian countries which are founders of this organisation. Thus, in 2001, the SCO Regional Anti Terrorist Structure was established which is the most important organ of SCO. According to information given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, 99 terrorist activities in 2009 were prevented due to this structure. In 2012, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Russia launched an extensive

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<sup>14</sup> “The Leaders of the CSTO in Dushanbe Began Negotiations in Narrow Format,” *Tass.Ru*, September 15, 2015, <http://tass.ru/politika/2262133>.

<sup>15</sup> CSTO, *Joint Doctrine Forces and Intelligence Agents ‘Search-2016,’* Collective Security Treaty Organization, April 18-22, 2016, [http://www.odkb-csto.org/training/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=6096&SECTION\\_ID=213](http://www.odkb-csto.org/training/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=6096&SECTION_ID=213).

military exercise scheduled to take place in three stages under the SCO framework, with the participation of Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik and Chinese armed forces. Uzbekistan did not participate. In September 2012, a similar military exercise was launched in Tajikistan. More than 2000 soldiers participated in this military exercise and aircrafts from Tajik Military Base and Kant Base in Bishkek also participated. The military exercise was launched close to the Afghan borders of Central Asian countries. The real message of the SCO in this military exercise was to show that the possible future problems that could stem from Afghanistan can be solved under the SCO framework. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan had problems during these military exercises. Uzbekistan did not participate in the exercises, and did not give permission to Kazakh soldiers for passage to Tajikistan by land.

The SCO has been in coordination with CSTO since April 25, 2015 for the purpose of preventing threats from Afghanistan. In February 2016, an agreement was made with China to start anti-terror operations on the Afghan Tajik border and to establish a common centre for improving coordination. On the other hand, between October 8-9, 2015 Russian Defence Ministry organised an international conference on Afghanistan and security issues in Central Asia. Chiefs of General Staff of member countries of SCO and General Secretaries of SCO, CSTO and CIS participated in this conference.<sup>16</sup> A joint study is expected to be prepared under SCO in order to prevent possible threats from Afghanistan and propaganda calls for terrorism from the internet. To prevent possible threats after the withdrawal of NATO's International Security Assistance Force from Afghanistan, China is likely to enhance coordination with Central Asian countries. It would be natural for it to use disagreements among Central Asian countries. However, it should be pointed out that although China cooperates with Dushanbe against terrorism on the Afghan-Tajik border, it does not cooperate with Kabul.

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<sup>16</sup> A.A. Kazantsev, "Tsentralnaya Aziya: Sovetskaya Gosudarstvennost' Pered Vyzovom Radikal'nogo Islama" [Central Asia: Secular Statehood Challenged by Radical Islam], (Valdai paper 2 (42), Valdai Discussion Club, January 19, 2016), <http://valdaiclub.com/publications/valdai-papers/central-asia-secular-statehood-challenged-by-radical-islam/>.

## **Bilateral Relations between Central Asian Countries and Afghanistan**

### ***Turkmenistan-Afghanistan Relations***

Turkmenistan- Afghanistan diplomatic relations began in 1992. The aim of strategic cooperation between the two countries is to take support from the United States for energy transit projects. If we consider Turkmenistan's policies related to Afghanistan, we see two different periods. In the first period, Turkmen gas would have entered the world market via Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. This project, called TAPI, was later put on the shelf after Baku Tbilisi Ceyhan and Southern Gas Corridor came into the picture. When the Taliban came into power in Afghanistan in 1996, relations between the two countries ended. The reason for giving up this project in the short run was the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and serious security problems in this route.

Because of Turkmenistan's International Status of Neutrality, it is not in any military alliance under the leadership of Russia. After 2001, Turkmenistan constructed its Afghan policy in coordination with Uzbekistan. After Uzbekistan's withdrawal from CSTO, the two countries started to cooperate in order to prevent possible threats from Afghanistan. On October 7, 2015 Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov paid an official visit to Uzbekistan and signed a bilateral agreement with Islam Karimov based on common actions for security especially against the Taliban which has been getting stronger in the north of Afghanistan. In 2015, Daesh emerged as a serious threat on the Afghanistan- Turkmenistan border. Daesh flags were removed by Afghanistan along the border. Under these conditions, a new front can be opened by Daesh in Central Asia and due to weakness of Turkmenistan's border with Afghanistan, this border seems to have attracted the attention of Daesh members. Even now, some Turkmens are fighting among the ranks of Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan and have also joined Daesh. In fact, Turkmen members of Daesh in Afghanistan's Faryab, Badghis, and Jowzjan provinces are potential sources of threat.

In the second period, the most important foreign policy issue of Turkmenistan related to Afghanistan was energy. After its energy links with Russia deteriorated and after its problems with Azerbaijan on division of the Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan has been searching for new export routes for its natural gas. Since Turkmenistan can not join the Southern Gas Corridor due to Russia's pressures and its problems with Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan is keen on creating a new export route via Afghanistan. In the 1990s, a project called TAPI which was proposed by Beyaz, but later put on the

shelf, has come up again. But due to the political and social situation in Afghanistan, it may not be possible to implement this project in the near future and many experts claim that Turkmenistan uses this project as a pressure instrument against Azerbaijan.

### ***Kazakhstan- Afghanistan Relations***

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan's first diplomatic relationship started with Afghanistan in 1992. But these relations were disrupted by the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Following the establishment of a temporary government of Afghanistan in 2002, Kazakhstan opened a diplomatic mission in Afghanistan. Later, in 2003, Kazakhstan Embassy was opened. Intergovernmental commissions operate between two countries. At the same time, activities to improve economic relations take place. Intergovernmental Commissions have been meeting every two years since 2007. Meetings took place in Astana in 2007, 2010, 2012, 2015 and in Kabul in 2008, 2011 and 2013. Afghanistan and Kazakhstan have serious cooperation on education. 822 Afghans study in Kazakhstan universities. Kazakhstan has investments in Afghanistan on education and health totally U.S.\$238 million. Kazakhstan has provided humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, worth U.S.\$ 17 million dollars. According to 2014 figures, trade volume between the two countries is 336 million dollars. The most important areas of cooperation between two countries are, therefore, trade, education and health together with prevention of drug trafficking.

The biggest threat from Afghanistan to Kazakhstan is drug trafficking. Astana, cooperates more with Kyrgyzstan and Russia to prevent drug trafficking. The actual reason for this is that both countries are in EEU and Customs Union. Because of this, security policies of Kazakhstan are based on the Customs Agreement signed under EEU and carried out under the CSTO framework.

### ***Uzbekistan-Afghanistan Relations***

Uzbekistan, among Central Asian countries, is the one which emphasises Afghan relations the most. There are several reasons for this. First, there is Uzbek minority in the northern parts of Afghanistan and therefore, any social crisis has direct and indirect impacts on Uzbekistan. In fact, the country is actively interfering in Afghanistan's internal policies with regard to their own safety. In the north, it wants to create a buffer zone to prevent

threats that may come from the south. It openly supports Afghanistan's Uzbek origin elites in power in the Northern Coalition.<sup>17</sup>

Uzbek relations with Afghanistan began in 1992. There is a 144 km long border between the two countries. 8 per cent of the Afghan population is Uzbek and they reside primarily on the Uzbek border. As far as the strategy of Uzbekistan vis a vis Afghanistan is concerned, Tashkent's position presented in 48-50 General Assembly meetings of United Nations in 1993 and 1995 should be examined. The strategy has two sides: First, in 1997, it proposed to create an international cooperation format of '6+2' on diplomatic level (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, China and Iran plus Russia and the U.S.) in order to solve the political crises in Afghanistan. Second course has been to direct the political economy in Afghanistan on its own. We can see here that there are more Uzbek-centred policies in Afghanistan. It should be noted that a number of policies proposed by Uzbekistan in the form of international cooperation did not draw considerable interest.<sup>18</sup>

The Northern Alliance and the Taliban sat around the same table during the international conference on Afghanistan held in Tashkent in 1997. Also, it was this conference where Iran signed the same declaration with the U.S. for the first time since the 1979 Revolution. In the declaration, territorial integrity of Afghanistan was particularly emphasised. As a matter of fact, it was very crucial for Afghanistan at the time because with that Kabul saw the other Central Asian countries did not have claim on its territories. Because in many cases, the fact that Uzbekistan actively interfered in domestic affairs of Afghanistan and played the Uzbek minority card was perceived by Afghans as a territorial claim.<sup>19</sup>

As for the failure in Afghanistan being the focus of the International Cooperation Platform, the main reason might be explained as follows. The fact that Uzbekistan's regime in power turned it into a problem in time has been one of the main reasons. That is to say, the authoritarian regime's lack of transition into democracy in Uzbekistan resulted in further 'authoritarianism' of the country and breakdown of relations with Western

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<sup>17</sup> Orhan Gafarlı, *Avrasya Çıkmazı: Yeni Büyük Oyunu Kim Kazanacak [New Great Game in Eurasia: Who Will Win?]*.

<sup>18</sup> Yuri Sarukhanyan, "Skromnyy Akter V Afganskom Uregulirovanii: Strategiya Uzbekistana V Afganistane" [The Modest Actor in the Afghan Settlement: the Strategy of Uzbekistan in Afghanistan], *Central Asia Analytical Network*, August 21, 2015, <http://caanetwork.org/archives/4897>.

<sup>19</sup> "Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan," Wordpress.org, July 21, 1999, <http://worldpress.org/specials/pp/tashkent.htm>.

countries due to the Andijan events. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan reiterated a similar proposal in 2001.<sup>20</sup>

In 2008, Uzbekistan's second phase of diplomatic activity with Afghanistan started, following the lifting of economic sanctions of Western countries on Uzbekistan as a result of the Andijan events. Uzbekistan proposed establishing the 6+2 international cooperation platform on Afghanistan again. However, the proposal was not met with enthusiasm once again. On the other hand, it should be noted that Uzbekistan could promote its military cooperation with the U.S. after the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan, mainly because Uzbekistan left the CSTO and pursued a more independent Afghan policy. In 2015, a U.S.\$6.2 million agreement on guarding borders with Afghanistan and providing military aid was signed between the U.S. and Uzbekistan. It should be especially noted that in Afghanistan, NATO used the northern transit route through Uzbekistan. 40 per cent of the necessary military supply was transported through the aforesaid transit route.

Uzbekistan's Afghan policy should be seriously taken into consideration. Unlike other Central Asian countries, it develops more independent policies on Afghanistan. For Uzbekistan, it is important to form an International Cooperation in case it has to face potential opposition of any radical Islamist groups from Afghanistan.

### ***Tajikistan – Afghanistan Relations***

Another important country with the longest borderline (1, 357 km) and close relationship with Afghanistan is Tajikistan. Their relations date back to 1992. The Taliban control 60 per cent of the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, according to 2015 data. Considering the relations between the two countries from a historical perspective, 33 per cent of the Afghan population is Tajik. They play a crucial role in Afghanistan's political life.<sup>21</sup>

After Tajikistan gained its independence, the first foreign visit of the head of state was to Afghanistan. Preparations for establishing commissions on intergovernmental relations were launched in 1992. The outbreak of civil war in Tajikistan in 1993 damaged relations between the two countries. The fact that Taliban groups were among those which participated in the civil war and the uncontrolled border crossing between both countries had negative impacts on the relations between Dushanbe and Kabul. Lack of

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<sup>20</sup> Yuri Sarukhanyan, "Skromnyy Akter V Afganskom Uregulirovanii: Strategiya Uzbekistana V Afganistane" [The Modest Actor in the Afghan Settlement: the Strategy of Uzbekistan in Afghanistan].

<sup>21</sup> Orhan Gafarlı, *Avrasya Çıkmazı: Yeni Büyük Oyunu Kim Kazanacak* [New Great Game in Eurasia: Who Will Win?].

border control was considered one of the main reasons of the extension of civil war in the country.

The Taliban regime's grabbing power in Afghanistan had negative impacts on the relations with Tajikistan. Drug trafficking became the main problem between the two countries during this period. Moscow assumed total control of borders against the drug trafficking transited to Russia and Europe through Tajikistan. After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2002, the fences between the two countries began to be mended again. During the process of re-establishment of democracy in Afghanistan, Tajikistan cooperated with international organisations. Standing against drug trafficking was the most important of all in terms of mending relations between the two. The major negotiation issue between the Karzai and Rahmon meeting in 2005 was the redevelopment of cooperation between both countries. Eleven intergovernmental agreements were signed between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, including providing border security, as well as in the fields of education and health. Among the Central Asian countries, Tajikistan is the one which is most severely threatened by Afghanistan. According to the information obtained by the Russian military resources, the Taliban regime controlled 60 per cent of the border between the two countries in 2015.<sup>22</sup> As a result of the lack of control by Afghanistan's central government on these borders, the main transit country for drug trafficking is still Tajikistan. In addition to this, due to the prevailing authoritarian regime in Tajikistan, leaders of the radical Islamist movements still continue their activities in regions controlled by the Taliban on the Afghan side of the border. Dushanbe is faced with the danger of infiltration of these activities into Tajikistan. The radical Islamist groups in Afghanistan are pointed to be the main reason of a potential civil war. Furthermore, this can lead to infiltration of Daesh propaganda into Tajikistan through Afghanistan and further radicalisation in the country. In order to deal with such threats, Tajikistan engages in close military relations with Russia and military maneuvers of CSTO focus on this country.

Despite all these negative developments, there is significant cooperation in the field of electricity between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Afghanistan is the main energy supplier of Tajikistan. Also, Tajikistan is the country which supplies Afghanistan and Pakistan with electric power through Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>22</sup> A.A. Kazantsev, "Tsentralnaya Aziya: Sovetskaya Gosudarstvennost' Pered Vyzovom Radikal'nogo Islama" [Central Asia: Secular Statehood Challenged by Radical Islam], Valdai paper (42), Valdai Discussion Club, January 19, 2016, <http://valdaiclub.com/publications/valdai-papers/central-asia-secular-statehood-challenged-by-radical-islam/>.

### ***Kyrgyzstan – Afghanistan Relations***

As other Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan established its relations with Afghanistan in 1992. Despite the fact that they are not border countries, the fact that they have common borders with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the Fergana Valley and radical Islamist groups prevail in the region, the country is always threatened. The relations between the two countries are at a very low level. On June 21, 2014, the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan was opened as a step towards Electric Power Cooperation.

The process of promoting relations between Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan began in 2002. After the Taliban regime fell in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan inaugurated the CASA – 100 project, CASAREM (Central Asia – South Asia Regional Electricity Market) with Tajikistan. The primary objective of CASAREM is to create an electric power market binding the Central Asia and Southern Asia regions together. While today Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (the Central Asia region) are exporters of electric power, Afghanistan and Pakistan (the Southern Asia region) are importers of electric power. As the protocol on establishment of the power line (CASA – 1000) that envisages delivery of Central Asia’s electricity to the Southern Asia was signed between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Afghanistan in May 2012, the CASA – 1000 project which is 750 km long and costs U.S.\$873 million dollars is envisaged to come into operation in 2016.

Given this, Kyrgyzstan is developing its Afghan policy in two directions. The first direction is to form cooperation within the framework of CSTO in order to export power through Tajikistan and to take precautions for potential threats against the Fergana Valley; and to form military cooperation with Kazakhstan and Russia for being a member of the EEU and CSTO.

### **Conclusion**

Central Asian countries’ relations with Afghanistan develop in three directions. The first are the policies carried out within the framework of organisations such as CSTO and SCO to provide regional security and to take measures against potential threats from Afghanistan. The second are the energy policies involving e.g. Uzbekistan within the context of Turkmenistan’s energy projects. The third direction is the CASA – 1000 energy project between Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan develop their security policies in cooperation with Russia. Russia provides these countries with a security umbrella. This umbrella serves as an important circle for these three countries against potential threats from Afghanistan. After mending fences

with the U.S. and European countries, Uzbekistan has been trying to implement more independent policies in the region. Due to its international status, Turkmenistan takes sides with Uzbekistan which has been trying to be more independent in the region. However, it should be noted that CSTO under the leadership of Russia is considered a very important alliance against severe threats in the region. Kazakhstan, being richer among the Central Asian countries and developing its military technology through the weapons purchased from Russia, develops its policies in this direction since it does not have direct borders with Afghanistan and considers other neighbours as a buffer zone. In terms of security, it focuses on the borders with neighbours. Still, it faces very serious problems due to drug trafficking which reach Russia through Kazakhstan.

The CSTO and SCO platforms are important in the region. Within the frameworks of these organisations, countries are more eager to develop their security policies. However, developing independent security policies towards Afghanistan is rare. Only Uzbekistan's policies aim at providing security for its own borders. It can be suggested that without support from the Western countries to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, these countries might easily turn towards allying with Russia.

The relations between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan are developing quite seriously. Kyrgyzstan is focused on developing its relations with Tajikistan mainly because it is the major transit country for energy from Tajikistan to Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have established dialogues with the U.S. and European countries in order to create an electric power corridor. Since Russia is aware of these two countries seeking foreign support, it tries to fulfill the deficiencies of Tajikistan in this respect. Russia wants itself to be regarded as a cooperater in creating an energy corridor in the region.

Thus, finally it is necessary to indicate that Russia is the country with which the Central Asian countries cooperate the most in both military and economic terms against potential threats from Afghanistan. Russia's Afghan policy considerably reflects on the foreign policies of the countries in the region as well. The main reason why the Central Asian countries do not follow more independent policies with Afghanistan is the fact that these countries cannot sufficiently grow militarily and politically. In the near future, Central Asian countries might develop policies within the framework of the U.S. - Russia balance. ■

## **Annexure 1: Conference Speakers' Biographies**

**Dr Abdulbaqi Amin** is working as General Director at Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS) and as an Associate Professor at Law Department Salam University, Kabul, Afghanistan. He has published several articles and participates regularly in local and international conferences. He has done his doctorate in Jurisprudence Comparison and International Law from the Islamic University, Sudan.

**Ms Farhana Asif** is working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Director (Afghanistan) where she is assigned tasks pertaining to transit trade, regional connectivity and economic cooperation with Afghanistan. In 2015, she served as Director (Heart of Asia) at the Ministry and was the focal person for the coordination of the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. She also worked on the initial draft of the Islamabad Declaration that was adopted at the end of the Conference. She has served for four years in the Pakistan Embassy in Spain. Ms Asif holds a Masters Degree in Economics from Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

**Mr Haroun Mir** is working as a manager in various development projects and as a political analyst in Afghanistan. He has served as special assistant to late Ahmad Shah Massoud, Afghanistan's Defence Minister from 1993-99. He is a co-founder and director of Afghanistan's Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS), where he authored and co-authored a number of studies on Afghanistan's economic, political, and security situation. He has an undergraduate degree in Physics from the University of Paris VII in France and a graduate degree in Economics from George Mason University in Virginia, U.S.A.

**Mr Khalid Aziz** heads the Regional Institute of Policy Research & Training, Peshawar, Pakistan. He was a member of the Pak-Afghan Peace Jirga convened in Kabul in 2007 and was the Convener of the Pakistan Policy Group in the Track II initiative. He has also served on numerous government posts including Advisor to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) for the National Finance Commission (2010). He holds a Master's degree in Political Science from Peshawar University and an M. Phil from Cambridge University.

**Mr Mohsen Roohi-Sefat** is a representative from the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) in Tehran, Iran. He was the Consul General of Iran in Peshawar from 1988-91. From 1998-2002, he was the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Iranian Embassy in New Delhi, India; and between 2003-07, he was Deputy Chief of Mission in Islamabad, Pakistan. He has also been the acting Consular General in Qandahar, Afghanistan.

**Dr Muhammad Mujeeb Afzal** is Assistant Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) in Islamabad, Pakistan. Previously, he has served as a research scholar for the Central Asian Institute, and as a Senior Research Fellow for the Area Study Centre, Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) in Islamabad, Pakistan. He is the author of *Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian Muslims* (2014).

**Mr Orhan Gafarlı** is a Political Risk Analyst at the Ankara Policy Center, Turkey and also is a contributor analyst at The Jamestown Foundation and The National Interest. He is the author of the book 'Eurasian Quandary' (2015). He is a doctoral candidate of International Relations at Ankara University; and completed his Masters at the International School for Caucasus Studies at Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia.

**Dr Petr Topychkanov** is an Associate at the Carnegie Moscow Center's Nonproliferation Programme. Since 2009, he has also held the position of senior researcher at the Center for International Security at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAN). In 2014, he joined the Center's Information Security Problems Group. Dr Topychkanov has been an expert at the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) since 2014; a participant of the Programme on Strategic Stability Evaluation at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta, Georgia) since 2009; and an associate of the South and Central Asia Project at the York Centre for Asian Research (Toronto, Canada) since 2015. He earned his doctorate in History from the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Moscow State University in 2009. He is also a Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow (2010-11).

**Mr Rahimullah Yusufzai** is Resident Editor of *The News International* in Peshawar and is also a senior analyst for Geo TV and correspondent of the BBC World Service for its Urdu, Pashto and Hindi services in Pakistan. He has been reporting on the Afghan conflict since the 1980s and also on the issues of militancy and terrorism in Federally Administered Tribal

Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and rest of Pakistan for the past fifteen years.

**Dr Vanda Felbab-Brown** is a Senior Fellow at the Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence in the Foreign Policy Program at The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., U.S.A. She is an expert on international and internal conflicts and non-traditional security threats, including insurgency, organised crime, urban violence and illicit economies. Her fieldwork and research have covered, among others, Afghanistan, South Asia, Burma, Indonesia, the Andean region, Mexico, Morocco, Somalia, and eastern Africa. She is the author of two books, numerous policy reports, academic articles, and opinion pieces. A frequent commentator in U.S. and international media, Dr Felbab-Brown regularly provides congressional testimony on these issues. She received her doctorate in Political Science from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and her bachelor's from Harvard University, U.S.A.

**Dr Wang Xu** is serving as an Associate Professor and Executive Deputy Director of Center for South Asian Studies in Peking University, where he specialises in regional and Islamic studies in South Asia, particularly Pakistan and Afghanistan. Dr Xu earned a doctorate in South Asian Studies from Peking University in 2007.

**Dr Zubair Iqbal** is Adjunct Scholar at the Middle East Institute (MEI), Washington, D.C., U.S.A. since 2008. Prior to this, he worked with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for thirty five years, retiring in 2007 as Assistant Director of the Middle East and Central Asia Department. At the IMF, he participated in missions to 54 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America. He also served as senior advisor to the Saudi Arabian Executive Director to the IMF. In addition to operational work, Dr Iqbal conducted and guided research in trade policy issues, role and effectiveness of foreign aid, external debt, Islamic banking and finance, regional integration (primarily in the Middle East), and transition from oil dependence to more diversified economies. In the process, he wrote or edited five books and over forty articles in the IMF and external research publications. He earned his doctorate degree in Economics from Michigan State University, U.S.A. ■

## **Annexure 2: IPRI Publications**

### **IPRI Journal**

The *IPRI Journal* is a biannual refereed journal enjoying wide circulation in Pakistan and abroad. It is being published since 2001 and consists of Research Articles on strategic issues and events of regional and international importance with relevance to Pakistan's national policies. Book Reviews of latest publications on International Relations and Political Science also feature in the *Journal*. The IPRI Journal is privileged to have been upgraded to category (X) in Pakistan's Social Science journals by the country's Higher Education Commission (HEC).

### **IPRI Paper/s**

Written by IPRI scholars, the *IPRI Paper* is an in-depth study of a contemporary national or global issue published as a monograph. Some of the monographs published to date include:

- *Challenge of Identity and Governance Quaid's Vision: The Way Forward* (2013)
- *Bharat Mein Mazhabi Zafrani Rukh* (2012)
- *Genesis and Growth of Naxalite Movement in India* (2011)
- *Naxal Tehreek: Ibtida aur Farogh* (2011)
- *China's Peaceful Rise and South Asia* (2008)
- *The Ummah and Global Challenges: Re-organizing the OIC* (2006)
- *Pakistan's Vision East Asia: Pursuing Economic Diplomacy in the Age of Globalization in East Asia and Beyond* (2006)
- *Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan* (2005)
- *India-Pakistan Nuclear Rivalry: Perceptions, Misperceptions, and Mutual Deterrence* (2005)
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- *Rise of Extremism in South Asia* (2004)
- *Ballistic Missile Defence, China and South Asia* (2003)
- *Pakistan and the New Great Game* (2003)
- *Nuclear Risk Reduction in South Asia* (2002)
- *Pak-US Strategic Dialogue* (2002)
- *Bharat Mein Intehapasand Hindu Nazriyat ka Farogh* (2001)
- *Terrorism* (2001)

## **IPRI Books**

The Institute organises annual national and international conferences/seminars/workshops on critical thematic topics. The papers presented and the proceedings of these events are published in IPRI Books:

- *Policy Approaches of South Asian Countries: Impact on the Region* (2016)
- *Building Knowledge-Based Economy in Pakistan: Learning from Best Practices* (2016)
- *Solutions for Energy Crisis in Pakistan Volume II* (2015)
- *Major Powers' Interests in Indian Ocean: Challenges and Options for Pakistan* (2015)
- *Roadmap for Economic Growth of Pakistan* (2015)
- *Pakistan's Strategic Environment Post-2014* (2014)
- *Future of Economic Cooperation in SAARC Countries* (2014)
- *SCO's Role in Regional Stability and Prospects of its Expansion* (2013)
- *Potential and Prospects of Pakistani Diaspora* (2013)
- *Rights of Religious Minorities in South Asia: Learning from Mutual Experiences* (2013)
- *Transition in Afghanistan: Post-Exit Scenarios* (2013)
- *Solutions for Energy Crisis in Pakistan* (2013)
- *Eighteenth Amendment Revisited* (2012)
- *Islam and State: Practice and Perceptions in Pakistan and the Contemporary Muslim World* (2012)
- *Stabilising Afghanistan Regional Perspectives and Prospects* (2011)
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- *Arms Race and Nuclear Developments in South Asia* (2004)
- *Conflict Resolution and Regional Cooperation in South Asia* (2004)

- *The State of Migration and Multiculturalism in Pakistan*, Report of National Seminar (2003)

### **Journal of Current Affairs (JoCA)**

*IPRI Insight* presented research studies by IPRI scholars, recommendations of conferences organised by the Institute, and summary of guest lectures. The first issue of *IPRI Insight* was published in October 2013 and the second, covering November 2013-June 2014, appeared in September 2014. The publication has now evolved and is due to be published in 2016 as a biannual *Journal of Current Affairs* aimed to encourage the research work of young scholars and academics.

### **IPRI Factfile**

The *IPRI Factfile* was a bi-monthly compilation of facts, reports and comments about specific global and domestic issues gathered from various sources. It served as a valuable resource material. It was discontinued in May 2013. Some of the issue-based files are mentioned in the list below:

- *Security Situation: A Review (2013)* (March-April 2013)
- *Suppression Fails to Subdue Kashmiris (2013)* (January-February 2013)
- *Positive Turn in Pak-Russian Relations (2012)* (November-December 2012)
- *Pakistan-India Peace Process (2011-2012)* (September-October 2012)
- *Evolving Situation in Afghanistan (July-August 2012)*
- *Pak-US Relations: Ups and Downs (2008-2012)* (May-June 2012)
- *Balochistan: Facts and Fiction* (March-April 2012)
- *Abbottabad and Salala Attacks* (Jan.-Feb. 2012)
- *Pakistan's Response to Internal Challenges Part II: Governance and Politics* (December 2011)
- *Pakistan's Response to Internal Challenges Part I: Economy and Security* (November 2011)
- *Twenty Years of Pak-Uzbek Ties (1992-2011)* (October 2011)
- *Post-Withdrawal Scenario in Afghanistan* (September 2011)
- *Recent Trends in Pak-US Relations* (August 2011)
- *Sixty Years of Pak-China Diplomatic Relations (1951-2011)* (July 2011)
- *Federal Budget 2011-12* (June 2011)
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- *Arabs Rise for Change* (April 2011)
- *Pak-Saudi Relations (1999-2011)* (March 2011)
- *Twenty Years of Economic Cooperation Organization (Part-II)* (February 2011)

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- *Twenty Years of Economic Cooperation Organization (Part-I)* (January 2011)
- *Pakistan: A Victim of Terrorism (Volume III)* (December 2010)
- *Kashmir Struggle Enters New Phase* (November 2010)
- *Pakistan's Water Concerns* (October 2010)
- *Pakistan's Floods 2010* (September 2010)
- *Pakistan - Turkey Relations* (August 2010)
- *Iran-Pakistan Peace Pipeline* (July 2010)
- *Federal Budget 2010-11* (June 2010)
- *Pakistan-U.S. Strategic Dialogue - Fourth Round* (May 2010)
- *Afghanistan: US Exit Strategy* (April 2010)
- *Whither Kashmir? Part II* (March 2010)
- *Whither Kashmir? Part I* (February 2010)
- *Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan* (January 2010)
- *Pakistan-India Peace Process (2008-2009)* (December 2009)
- *Contours of U.S. 'AfPak' Strategy* (November 2009)
- *Afghanistan Presidential Elections 2009* (October 2009)
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- *Mumbai Terrorist Attack* (February 2009)
- *Israeli Assault on Gaza* (January 2009)
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- *Pakistan - Sri Lanka Relations* (October 2008)
- *Presidential Election 2008* (September 2008)
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- *Judicial Issue in Pakistan* (May 2008)
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- *Pakistan-Iran Relations* (July 2007)
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- *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (2001-2006) Vol. II* (May 2007)
- *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (2001-2006) Vol. I* (April 2007)
- *Pakistan-India Peace Process* (March 2007)
- *Pak-Afghan Relations (2005-07)* (February 2007)
- *US-India Agreements and Treaties (1997-2006)* (January 2007)
- *Pakistan and Africa (1981-2006)* (December 2006)
- *World Islamic Economic Forum* (November 2006)
- *Pakistan Earthquake 2005: Rescue, Relief, Rehabilitation and Construction (Vol. II)* (October 2006)
- *Iran Nuclear Stand-off* (September 2006)
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- *South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)* (June 2006)
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- *US-India Nuclear Deal* (April 2006)
- *US President George W. Bush's Visit to Pakistan* (March 2006)
- *Pakistan's War on Terror* (February 2006)
- *UN Peacekeeping Operations and Pakistan* (January 2006)
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- *The Constitution of Afghanistan(2004)* (February 2004)

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- *Elections in Pakistan-2002* (November 2002)
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- *Indo-Pak Summit July 2001* (July 2001)
- *War Crimes Tribunal and the Case of Kashmir* (June 2000)
- *Afghan Refugees* (April 2001)
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- *Important Events of Year 2000* (January 2001)
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- *Political Developments in Pakistan since October 12, 1999*  
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