Afghanistan and Its Neighbourhood

In Search of a Stable Future

Afghanistan has the potential to emerge as a major regional hub of connectivity and energy trade. At present, the countries of the region each look at Afghanistan from their own security perspective. Building economic stakes in Afghanistan for these countries would motivate them to ensure the security and stability of Afghanistan as well as the region as a whole. This could recast Afghanistan as a facilitator and convert the zero-sum game currently played by its neighbours into a positive-sum game.

Despite their bilateral rivalry, even India and Pakistan could jointly engage in Afghanistan. The broader agenda of both India and Pakistan to improve their contacts with Central Asia can be facilitated by Kabul, which would also give both countries a greater stake in a stable Afghanistan. Regional organisations could further enable the three regional security complexes (RSCs) South Asia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf to interact with each other. Finally, the strengthening of Afghan troops, reintegration of Taliban fighters and a credible power-sharing arrangement that protects the interests of ethnic minorities could together form a strategy that would help in the emergence of Afghanistan as a stable state.

This strategy needs to be complemented by a consensual approach by the regional countries to protect their genuine interests. Stability in Afghanistan is thus intertwined with the interests of the other countries in the region.

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Executive Summary

It is not yet clear what kind of post-2014 military presence the USA is contemplating in Afghanistan. As the stability of Afghanistan will depend on successful political reconciliation, the reintegration of Taliban fighters and the dismantling of cross-border Taliban safe havens, an immediate issue confronting the international community is the training of Afghan troops to assume a combat role post-2014. Moreover, the construction of alternative trade and transit routes could contribute positively to regional stability by lessening Afghanistan’s dependence on Pakistan. By serving as a land bridge, Afghanistan could not only help strengthen regional interaction, but also provide neighboring countries with new stakes in its stability. The main argument of this paper is that Afghanistan has the potential to emerge as a major hub of connectivity and energy trade that would encourage constructive engagement from neighboring countries that have varied security interests. Building economic stakes for these countries in Afghanistan would motivate them to ensure the security and stability of the country and that of the region as a whole. This could recast Afghanistan as a facilitator and convert the zero-sum game being played into mutually beneficial policies. Despite their bilateral rivalry, even India and Pakistan could jointly engage in Afghanistan. The broader agenda of both India and Pakistan to improve their contacts with Central Asia can be facilitated by Kabul, which would give both countries a greater stake in a stable Afghanistan. Regional organisations could further enable the three regional security complexes (RSCs) South Asia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf to interact with each other. Finally, the strengthening of Afghan troops, reintegration of Taliban fighters and a credible power-sharing arrangement that protects the interests of ethnic minorities could together form a strategy that would help in the emergence of Afghanistan as a stable state. This strategy needs to be complemented by a consensual approach by regional neighbors as stability in Afghanistan is intertwined with the interests of the other countries in the region.
### Introduction

After the announcement of the 2014 withdrawal of international troops from a combat role in Afghanistan there has been much speculation about the number of troops that will be deployed by the United States (US) to deal with future contingencies. The capacity of the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) to deal with the Taliban has also come under greater scrutiny. Given the security situation and geopolitics of the region, many analysts argue that the US may be contemplating a long-term presence in Afghanistan. In the meanwhile, Germany has announced that it will provide 600-800 troops to the NATO training contingent that will replace the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2014, as a contribution to regional stability.1 The question is whether continued US presence, opposed by prominent countries in the region such as Iran, Pakistan, China and Russia, will lead to a new Great Game affecting Afghanistan’s future adversely?

While the training and deployment of armed forces is important, regional dynamics are also significant for the future stability of Afghanistan. Hopes for greater stability are generated by the efforts of countries like India, with which Afghanistan has signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), and initiatives taken by other regional countries to stay engaged, including a proposed new Silk Route that would help Afghanistan emerge as a hub of trade and transit. On the other hand, the continuation of violence and inability to conclude a deal with the Taliban on an effective power-sharing arrangement has raised concerns about the viability of the on-going democratic experiment.

It is difficult to predict the exact shape of things to come. Much will depend on the future of US-Iran relations, the willingness of Pakistan to rein in groups that pose a security challenge, and the ability of neighbouring countries to develop a consensual approach to Afghanistan’s stability. Long-term stability will also depend on putting in place governance structures that are pluralistic, democratic, and strong enough to ensure a viable Afghan state that is capable of taking care of its own security.

Many see the brokering of a peace deal with the Taliban as a pre-requisite for US withdrawal from its combat operations in Afghanistan. It is recognised that the separation of entities in the UN sanction list, aimed to facilitate talks with the Taliban, did not yield much success. Continuing violence and the Taliban’s disregard for any peaceful solution suggests the tactical nature of the superficial contact between them and the US. It also reflects the weakness of the Afghan government, which has desperately tried to own up to the peace talks to assert its legitimacy in the transition process. Initial contacts were made after Pakistan facilitated some of the Taliban leaders’ travel to Paris to hold peace talks with the High Peace Council and representatives of the Afghan government. Later such talks were also held in Kyoto, Japan. The US is desperate to withdraw and would not mind a tactical peace that would help bring it out of the Afghan quagmire. Pakistan has agreed to facilitate the exit.

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There is a perception that the success of the US strategy relies heavily on Pakistan. This can be attributed to the reluctance of regional countries to play a dominant role in economic reconstruction and their unwillingness to make a joint effort to ensure stability post-2014. Due to its strong linkages with the Taliban, Pakistan will play a central role. It has positioned itself as a country that is of critical importance, with the potential to shape the course of events in Afghanistan. As for the other regional countries, at one side of the political spectrum there is the Iranian opposition to the US military presence, amidst accusations of facilitating the Taliban to mount attacks on the US. At the other side there is the Indian view of the US presence as a pre-requisite for a stable Afghanistan. Russia, which at one point asked the US to give a timeline for its exit, is now apprehensive of the deteriorating security situation. While fearing the regional repercussions of a civil war in Afghanistan, Russia is also constrained by past misadventure and is unable to provide military help. The Chinese remain ambivalent and have not unveiled any strategy, but are equally anxious about any deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan. Nor is Pakistan comfortable with a long-term US presence in Afghanistan, as that would prevent it from pursuing its strategic objectives. There is also a suspicion that post-2014, the American dependence on Pakistan will decline and the continued US presence in Afghanistan will reduce its relevance in the US strategic calculus. Garnering regional consensus on Afghanistan has therefore become an immediate prerequisite for establishing peace. The international community tried to engage the countries of the region by convening an international conference under the auspices of the UN and the Afghan government in 2009 in The Hague. This was followed by the London, Kabul, and Istanbul conferences to seek regional cooperation on Afghanistan.

The answers to the following questions will help us determine the future trajectory of the Afghan state: What would be the approaches of the countries of this region towards Afghanistan? Can regional organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) help bridge the gaps between their members and further the cause of regional consensus-building? How will the internal security situation evolve in the post-withdrawal phase? Can the Afghan army deal with the worsening security situation? Is Afghanistan’s experiment with democracy sustainable? Will efforts at reconciliation and reintegration of the Taliban succeed in motivating them to join the government? Given the diversity of the interests of regional players, will Afghanistan become a pawn in a new Great Game? What will be the future of inter-ethnic relations as well as intra-ethnic relationships in Afghanistan?

Without going into the details of the objectives of the US War on Terror, it would suffice to say that the primary aim was neither to target the Taliban nor to build the Afghan state or its institutions. The War on Terror was principally aimed at capturing/killing Osama bin Laden and dismantling al-Qaeda. As some analysts would argue, the Abbotabad raid fulfilled the primary US objective. Al-Qaeda is extremely weak today and may not pose a major threat to the US in the near future. Any future strategy with regard to Afghanistan therefore needs to take into account the Taliban, which has acquired military strength over the time. It has been able to inflict greater casualties to pressure western countries to withdraw their troops. Some of these groups are operating from the tribal areas of Pakistan and have close links with the Pakistani Taliban and other extremist groups that
are operating there. The US is quite convinced that it can persuade the Taliban to participate in the governance process in Afghanistan, through reconciliation. The continuing ISI support to the Haqqani network is a sore point between the US and Pakistan, especially after the attack on the US Embassy in Kabul in September 2011. However, the relationship between the US and Pakistan has improved and Pakistan is facilitating dialogue between the Taliban and its international interlocutors.

It is likely that to protect their strategic interests in Afghanistan, neighbouring countries might provide patronage to one group or the other, as one has witnessed in the past. Moreover, ethnic diversity and the Taliban’s pursuit of the Sunni-Wahabi brand of Islam may lead to another spate of violent civil war in Afghanistan, especially if the Taliban has a decisive say in the government. In any such scenario, there may be a danger of fragmentation of the Afghan Army along ethnic lines due to its domination by ethnic minorities. Given this context, the present study analyses the role of the countries in the region as well as the major international players.

**Afghanistan as a Land Bridge**

Afghanistan has been understood as an insulator between three regional security complexes (RSCs): South Asia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver argue that Afghanistan bears the burden of geography; while it is not strong enough to unify, as a zone of weak interaction it could serve as an insulator between the regions. Today, however, Afghanistan is no longer a zone of weak interaction. Rather, it has emerged as a zone of intensified contestation for influence, as the security situation impinges on the strategic stability of all three RSCs. While the Afghan government has assured its neighbours that its territory will not be used against them, such guarantees will not suffice as long as Afghanistan remains unstable and its central authority is incapable of controlling the border areas where insurgency is fermented and sustained. During the Taliban regime, Afghan territory was used for training terrorists to operate against India in Kashmir. Later it emerged as a safe haven for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), now known as the Islamic Movement of Turkestan (IMT), as well as Chechen rebels. Considering the geopolitics of the region and its wealth in energy resources, insularity of Afghanistan is no longer viable. Rather than working as an insulator as it did in the 19th century between the competing imperial interests of Russia and Britain, Afghanistan now has to interact with all the three RSCs it straddles. The Persian Gulf RSC is affected by the Pakistan question, whereas Iran looks at Pakistan as a proxy of Saudi Arabia. Similarly, India perceives that the China-Pakistan nexus is tailored to balance India. Thus India’s security perspective goes far beyond the South Asian RSC. Some scholars argue that the situation in Afghanistan is aggravated by India-Pakistan rivalry. This is not tenable, as it ignores the fact that the two countries have other concerns and interests than mere security. Such analyses fail to take into consideration Pakistan’s own concerns regarding the Durand line, the demand for Pashtunistan raised earlier by Afghan rulers, or Afghanistan’s desire to open trade routes and emerge as a regional hub. Moreover, the emergence of regional organisations like the SCO and CSTO is diluting the concept of the RSC. Afghanistan is the core and not peripheral to the

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security problems of South Asia, as one analyst has argued. Its emergence as a base for al-Qaeda patronised by the Taliban has challenged the security and stability of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. While there are many analyses of how Afghanistan affects regional security, the issue of governance, the nascent stage of democratic institutionalisation, problems of militias, and the expanding influence of the Taliban, the question of how these issues impinge on the regional security environment and shape regional responses has not received adequate attention. Similarly, the presence of the US impacts on all three RSCs and shapes the responses of regional countries.

According to Buzan, a regional security complex (RSC) is “a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot be reasonably analysed or resolved apart from one another”. In this context the securitisation and desecuritisation of the neighbouring countries and their links to Afghanistan needs to be understood. Rather than serving as insulator, Afghanistan has emerged as a legitimate concern of its neighbours, and thus Afghanistan can also facilitate external transformation of the three RSCs. With the emergence of non-traditional threats like militancy and fundamentalism, Afghanistan is now part of all the three RSCs. Each of Afghanistan’s neighbours is deeply affected by the events in Afghanistan and the ungoverned spaces therein, which provide sanctuaries for fundamentalist elements that can pose threats to the stability of Central Asia, the Persian Gulf and South Asia. Can Afghanistan emerge as a provider of security and stability to the entire region by denying space to fundamentalists and deal with the attendant security issues in cooperation with its neighbours? It has the potential to act as a shock absorber by stabilising itself and emerging as a hub for cooperation among the three RSCs, rather than absorbing “tensions inherent in the surrounding regional complexes (to) interact with existing domestic tensions to further deepen the conflict”, as one scholar has argued. Barnett Rubin similarly argues that Afghanistan is surrounded by countries that export their own conflicts onto its territory. Therefore, red-lines need to be drawn to put a bar on the countries of the region not to use Afghan territory to settle scores with their ‘other’. To prevent any such scenario it would be imperative to build their stakes in Afghanistan’s stability so as to put an end to the zero sum games played by Afghanistan’s neighbours. The Istanbul summit tried to convert this idea into a concrete proposal to help Afghanistan emerge as a land bridge in the heart of Asia connecting South Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia, rather than being either an epicenter or an insulator of conflicting interests.

Afghanistan remains a weak state and thirty years of civil war has led to institutional fragility. Its stability at present depends largely on international actors, and predominantly the US. Since all the three regions are affected by the developments in Afghanistan, the state will emerge as a meeting point of the three RSCs. Within the RSCs there is neither any significant security interaction nor security interdependence. However, all the RSCs face common threats of drug trafficking and fundamentalism from Afghanistan and it is imperative for them to come together and work out a common

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5 Buzan and Weaver, (2003), n.3, p. 44.
6 According to Buzan and Weaver, n.3, p. 53, this has led to external transformation and a merger of the RSCs.
In the context of Central Asia, the states have little trust in regional formats which are poorly institutionalised and thus they prefer bilateral security arrangements between themselves. This is also reflected in the patterns of their engagement with Afghanistan. In the absence of a regional format, Kabul is faced with the challenge of playing the role of a facilitator who could coordinate regional interests to bridge the gap, engage the traditional rivals and in the process stabilise itself and the region. Originally a buffer between Russia and the British Empire, Afghanistan has for long evoked the interest of superpowers in their hedging strategy. Since 1947 Afghanistan has been a stepping stone for Soviet influence in the region. Though Afghanistan was regarded as peripheral to the South Asian security complex during the Cold War, in the post-Cold War period it emerged as a major security concern and instability factor. India is currently trying its best to marginalise security issues within South Asia, to prevent them fromstunting its ability to play a global role.

The present study analyses the strategies adopted by Afghanistan’s neighbours to respond to the situation in Afghanistan and the possible role regional countries could play to influence developments in Afghanistan. In this context the paper seeks answers to the following questions. Can there be a regional approach to a resolution of the Afghan problem in which, other than neighbouring countries, organizations like the SCO, CSTO and SAARC can play a role? What are the internal challenges that Afghanistan may confront in the post-2014 scenario? What are the scenarios that can be built, especially taking into account both regional and internal dynamics that will shape the future of the Afghan state.

The way out of the Afghan quagmire is often sought through a prism that gives Pakistan a disproportionate role. Due to an over-emphasis on Pakistan as a lynchpin to the resolution of the Afghan problem, the international community has largely closed its eyes to other options. For a long time there was no serious discussion on the need to engage other countries in the region. The emphasis on the importance of Pakistan has unfortunately also meant that India-Pakistan rivalry has been highlighted as a contributing factor to the instability in Afghanistan. India’s constructive role in Afghanistan, as well as New Delhi’s genuine security concerns and legitimate stakes in the country’s future are often ignored by analysts who focus instead on India’s troubled relationship with Pakistan as a negative influence on efforts to stabilise Afghanistan. On the other hand, analysts also maintain that economic interdependence will mitigate Pakistan’s real or perceived threat from Afghanistan. As argued in this paper, despite the troubled relationship between India and Pakistan, Afghanistan can use both countries as stabilising forces.

Iran and Russia are two major powers in the region. Having been important players in the past, both countries should be engaged to optimise a regional formula. This paper

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8 Even Pakistan has been accusing Afghanistan of sheltering the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).
argues that given the engagement of different countries in Afghanistan, there is an opportunity to bring peace through their clients in Afghanistan, but only if there is a regional consensus on how to stabilise Afghanistan. The study also includes a section on the Afghan state and its strategy to survive through multiple engagements.

This study is divided into four broad sections. The first section deals with Afghanistan’s neighbours and their approaches. The second section deals with the role of regional powers like Russia and India, and the third section deals with the role of regional organisations in attempts to deal with the emerging security scenario in Afghanistan. The fourth section is focused on the internal political dynamics that will impinge on regional approaches, as well as Afghanistan’s survival strategy. The last section presents conclusions and suggestions. The study has drawn on primary sources such as government reports, UN reports, and official statements of the countries of the region available on their websites. For secondary sources the study has relied on books, newspapers and scholarly articles published in various journals. The study is limited to interviews with Indian government officials, Pakistani academics, politicians and retired military officers, as well as Afghan officials and academics, to ascertain their views on the future of Afghanistan.
1. Afghanistan, its Neighbours and the Emerging Security Scenario

Until now, the main approach of the regional countries has been to protect themselves from spill-over effects of the Afghan conflict which might set in motion a series of destabilising effects domestically. During the Soviet period, the bordering areas shared close ties with Afghanistan. The Soviets had invested and developed the northern part of Afghanistan to minimise the challenges that the revolution in Afghanistan might pose to the internal stability of its bordering regions. Islamist revolutions and tribal uprisings were thus confined within the borders of Afghanistan. Refugee flows to the erstwhile Soviet Union were kept to a minimum. In the post-Soviet era, the Central Asian countries were politically unstable, facing serious domestic challenges. Many of these countries have authoritarian repressive regimes. They fear that domestic Islamist groups might develop contacts with the Taliban and pose threats to their regime. In fact, during the Taliban rule, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and United Tajik Opposition (UTO) were active, and the Taliban government had also recognised the independence of Chechnya.

All the neighbours of Afghanistan fear the reinstatement of a Taliban regime in Kabul, and all of them are affected by drug trafficking and terrorism. While these countries lack the military capability to replace the US in Afghanistan they are unwilling to take responsibility for its stability, to which their own security and stability is inextricably linked. These countries have bilateral and trilateral engagements with the Karzai government to help safeguard their security, political and economic interests. Their attitude towards Kabul is tactical and is influenced by situational exigencies. As a result, they lack a common vision on the future of Afghanistan and have excessively relied on the US and ISAF to provide security. Some have even forged an alliance with the US and earn substantial revenues for facilitating Western operations. Given the constraints, the US has to turn a blind eye to the human rights situation within these countries as it relies on them to maintain supply routes for US troops.\(^\text{13}\) As argued by Kristian Berg Harpviken, “Afghanistan’s position at the intersection of three regions – each with a strong security dynamic of its own – systematically contravenes any initiative to foster a concerted neighbourhood effort”.\(^\text{14}\) This may not be completely true, as many countries, especially in Central Asia, simply lack the capacity to change or influence the dynamics in Afghanistan. Countries like Russia, China and Iran are similarly unwilling to invest in the security of Afghanistan as they fear getting trapped in a quagmire. Moreover, though regional countries have common stakes in Afghanistan, suspicion and mistrust between them has aggravated any joint effort to deal with the security situation. Networks of


narcotics and arms traffickers are facilitated by cross-border ties, and the problem has to be seen in a regional context if reconstruction and transition in Afghanistan are to be successful.\textsuperscript{15} Given the zero sum approach of the neighbours of Afghanistan, the US needs to play a leading role and get these countries onto a common platform. This will prevent any one of them from emerging as a spoiler. Each militia group operating in Afghanistan has maintained its ties to their former allies and warlords. There is a fear of repetition of a proxy war supported by countries in the region.\textsuperscript{16}

Apart from the regional powers, two countries in Afghanistan’s neighbourhood are able to significantly influence the future of the Afghan conflict. They are Pakistan and Iran, who share their borders and provide Afghanistan with access to the sea. Given their contested security perspectives, it is important to study the approach of each of these neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and their role in shaping the regional dynamics.

\section*{1.1. Pakistan}

Pakistan sponsored and nurtured the Taliban in the past, and continues to remain its greatest patron, thus holding the key to stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan joined, a bit reluctantly, the War on Terror and its decision was to a large extent influenced by India’s offer to provide the US with bases for Operation Enduring Freedom.\textsuperscript{17} From the beginning, however, Islamabad attempted to save the Taliban regime and persuaded them to surrender Bin Laden, though this was refused by Mullah Omar.\textsuperscript{18} As the US launched attacks and dismantled the Taliban regime with the help of the Northern Alliance, Pakistan feared the loss of strategic depth in Afghanistan, and managed to secure its strategic and intelligence assets before the allied forces began their operations.

In the post-Bonn phase, the interim regime was dominated by non-Pashtun leaders from the erstwhile Northern Alliance, which was considered a close ally of India, Russia and Iran. Pakistan made a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Taliban, and sought the induction of ‘good’ Taliban into the government. It contributed to the elimination of al-Qaeda functionaries by arresting leaders like Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, Ramzi Yousuf, Younis al-Mauritani and others hiding in various Pakistani cities. The US focused more on al-Qaeda than on the Taliban in the initial phase of the war. The resurgence of the Taliban can be attributed partly to the US digression of its attention to Iraq, and partly to Pakistan’s decision to provide safe havens to Taliban members fleeing from Afghanistan. The group then emerged as a major threat to the US presence and stability in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{19}

Pakistan’s indispensability to the entire stabilisation effort in Afghanistan is depicted in the words of its former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, who stated in October 2010: “Nothing will happen without us, because we are part of the solution”. Yet, Pakistan’s


\textsuperscript{17} Gen. Musharraf in his memoir mentions: “India might be tempted to undertake a limited offensive; or, more likely, they would work with the US and the UN to turn the present situation into permanent status quo”, Gen. Musharraf, (2006), \textit{In the line of Fire}, Simon and Schuster, London, p. 202.


\textsuperscript{19} Ahmed Rashid, (2008), \textit{Descent into Chaos}, ibid.
concept of a solution to the Afghan problem and the US road map to stability differ vastly. Pakistan’s confidence regarding its centrality to the solution derives from the fact that Afghanistan is dependent on Pakistan for its transit, and most importantly Pakistan is in control of groups that are crucial for the establishment of a durable peace in Afghanistan. In fact, Rawalpindi has used these groups as a part of its strategy to orchestrate attacks on Indian and US interests in Afghanistan.

Given the zero sum game that Islamabad pursues vis-à-vis India, it would not tolerate its presence in Afghanistan. As explained by a former Pakistani diplomat who had dealt with Afghanistan in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: “If India recognises Pakistan’s prime position in Afghanistan, then it has to be careful about its involvement in Afghanistan”. Similarly, another official working in the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi stated: “Afghanistan is to Pakistan what Nepal is to India. Pakistan’s security is linked to Afghanistan. Thus India needs to be sensitive and reduce its presence”. Such a stance has not found much support among the international community that is making an effort at stabilisation. According to P. J. Crowley, the then spokesman for the US State Department: “We have worked hard across the region to try to move countries beyond a zero sum mentality. Pakistan has an interest in what happens in Afghanistan. So does India. And likewise, going in the other direction, Afghanistan has an interest in what goes on in countries that border it, whether it’s Pakistan and India on one side or Iran on the other”.

While earlier, the US did lend a sympathetic ear to Pakistan’s viewpoint and discouraged India’s involvement in the training of Afghan security forces, this attitude changed with the 2011 attack on the US embassy by the Haqqani group sheltered in North Waziristan, and Pakistan’s double game in the anti-terror cooperation. Given Pakistan’s approach, the US considered plausible India’s involvement in Afghanistan and its ability to strengthen the Afghan security forces. Many would disagree with the proposed Pakistani ‘solution’ that recommends inclusion of the Haqqani network, which is close to Rawalpindi, in dialogues concerning the future of Afghanistan. Ironically, at one point of time the British and Americans were persuaded by Pakistan to consider Haqqani as a political alternative to the Taliban.

Other than engaging Pakistan by adopting a carrot and stick approach, the US lacks alternative options that would facilitate its smooth exit. As expressed by Bruce Riedel in the New York Times, the Americans face serious limitations in Pakistan: “We can’t make Pakistan stop being naughty.” While testifying in the Senate Armed Services Committee, Admiral Mike Mullen sketched a dismal picture of counter-terror cooperation with Pakistan: “Extremist organisations serving as proxies of the government of Pakistan are attacking Afghan troops and civilians as well as U.S. soldiers. For example, we believe the Haqqani Network — which has long enjoyed the support and protection of the Pakistani government and is, in many ways, a strategic arm of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence

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20 Interview with Amb. Ayaz Wazir, 10 December 2011.
21 Interview with a Pakistani official working in the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi, March 2012. The interviewee prefers to remain anonymous.
Agency—is responsible for the September 13th attacks against the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.24 Earlier, the US had put ISI on its internal list of “terrorist and terrorist support entities”. Yet there is no visible change in Islamabad’s approach. Rather than acknowledging the complexity of the insurgency and its cross-border connections, it accuses the Karzai government of non-cooperation in the prevention of cross-border raids conducted by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from Afghan soil. Another reason is that the “Pakistan Army continues to dominate decisions pertaining to Afghanistan and in which the foreign ministry remains marginal or play lip service”.25

Pakistan’s insecurity vis-à-vis Afghanistan has its own trajectory, though lately it has linked it to India. Historically this was fuelled by Afghanistan’s repeated claim to the Pashtun areas in Pakistan and its refusal to recognise the Durand line as the border. This problem precipitated during Mohammad Daoud’s rule in Afghanistan as Prime Minister from 1954-1963 and President from 1973-1978.26 The Taliban also refused to recognise the Durand line. Pakistan is apprehensive of Pashtun irredentism and successfully undermined the Pashtun ethnic affinity with an emphasis on religion. Its ability to foster the Taliban in Kabul for the first time gave Islamabad a control over Kabul it had never possessed in the past. It has worked incessantly since then to suppress Pashtun identity and consequent irredentist claims over the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), now known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.27 Pakistan believes that the Taliban have always emphasised a broad Islamic identity that will help it to overcome ethnic differences not only among various ethnic groups, but also between the tribes. The Taliban effort to downplay the salience of ethnicity by highlighting Islamic ties made Pakistan believe that such emphasis would reduce the salience of the Pashtunistan issue in Afghan politics, and help them counter India’s presence.28

The Taliban rule in Afghanistan helped Pakistan expand its territorial depth by making Afghanistan a training ground for Kashmiri militants.29 The post-Soviet strategy of Islamabad coincided with the uprising in Kashmir. With the Islamist fervour inherited from Zia’s regime, the Afghan jihad injected a new aspiration into the jihadists. Facilities for training the Kashmiri militants expanded from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) into the tribal areas and further into Afghanistan as foreign militants were inducted to keep the cadence of the movement going. The Mujahedin government was supportive of the cause of self-determination in Kashmir, and as some argued: “it portends new Islamic assertiveness on righting past wrong. Afghanistan’s relevance to the shaping of an Islamic geopolitics in the region is far greater than is usually understood”.30

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25 Interview with a retired Foreign Service Officer from Pakistan, Islamabad, 9 December 2011.
Dominated by the Ghilzai Pashtuns, the Taliban continues to be Islamabad’s best bet in Afghanistan. In the 1971 war with India, Islamists in Afghanistan protested the government’s ‘pro-India’ policies. In Pakistan, some believed that the Taliban would successfully keep India out of Afghanistan, its strategic backyard. This policy was piloted by the Pakistan Army and the ISI, disregarding the suggestions of its Foreign Ministry. During the anti-Soviet jihad, Pakistan encouraged religiously oriented parties from Afghanistan to operate from its soil, marginalised pro-Pashtun nationalist parties like the Afghan Millat, and prevented the royal family to have direct contacts with the resistance movement. Pakistan continues to follow the same policy of not allowing peace to be established without its favourites playing significant roles. It believes strongly that only the Taliban can salvage the current strategically disadvantageous position of Pakistan. As a result, Islamabad has frustrated any attempts to marginalise the Taliban or efforts to bring them to the negotiating table without their concurrence. Pakistan thus arrested Mullah Baradar when it became known that he had opened an independent line of communication with President Hamid Karzai. Similarly, it is unhappy with the US opening its own channel of communication with the Taliban.

In spite of several threats to Pakistan’s own internal cohesion and stability from Taliban and al-Qaeda affiliates, Pakistan continues to support radical Islamists. It strongly believes that it has the capacity to control them in the future, if need be, once the situation in Afghanistan works to its advantage. Pakistan’s Central Asia strategy also requires a friendly regime in Afghanistan. In the past Pakistan was the main interlocutor liaising with the Taliban government and the international community. This dominant role marginalised Taliban government officials and was deeply resented.

Instability in Afghanistan will continue to have a destabilising effect on Pakistan. Pakistan’s reliance on the Taliban and Haqqani network to deal with its own insecurity syndrome may therefore backfire. The tribal areas that have now become a staging post for the Haqqani group and their cohorts are becoming increasingly ungovernable, with a galvanising effect on stability. These areas are now home to several sectarian groups including affiliates of the fundamentalist Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The emergence of an Islamic emirate under the Taliban in Afghanistan will bolster these groups, who perceive Pakistan as an ally of the US. While on the one hand, Pakistan considers TTP as a threat, on the other it refuses to recognise the domestic network that has sustained the group and helped it in executing deadly attacks in the main cities of Pakistan.

Pakistan continues to externalise its security threat. Though the Army emphasises that this is their own war, others present the War on Terror as the “US war”. Parties like Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) and militant groups do not perceive it as Pakistan’s war, and this portrayal has helped them to form coalitions with anti-American extremists,

34 Pakistan allowed Afghan officials to talk with Mullah Baradar. The Taliban has said that Baradar does not represent the Islamic Emirate, that he is a prisoner and not independent to take decisions, and also does not have the authority to speak on behalf of the Taliban. See Tariq Khan, “Secret Meeting: Afghan Official met ‘ex chief’ of Quetta Shura”, Express Tribune, 13 August 2012.
preventing greater cooperation on the War on Terror. This has also justified non-action against the Haqqani network, which has transnational usage as a strategic tool. Moreover, Pakistan has accused the Indian presence in Afghanistan of fuelling the Balochi insurgency and TTP terror.\textsuperscript{36} As explained by former Foreign Minister Hina Rabani Khar, “the deep-seated cause of difficulties in Pak-US ties was the trust deficit due to different reasons, mainly including long demanded action against the Haqqani Network and alleged safe havens of militants in Pakistan”.\textsuperscript{37} As this indicates, there is a growing voice from Pakistan’s civil society asking Islamabad to abandon their support to militants.\textsuperscript{38} Many political leaders believe that “if the Agency wanted to bring peace to the war-ravaged Afghanistan it could do it within a month”.\textsuperscript{39} This contention was supported by Nawaz Sharif, then leader of the main opposition party, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) who hinted at the dominant role played by the Pakistani military and intelligence agency (ISI) in Afghanistan, and argued that the country’s foreign and defence policies were “run by some people in disregard of parliament which should have discussed and formulated them”\textsuperscript{40}

Speaking at the National Defence University (NDU) in Islamabad in June 2012, Pakistan’s former Prime Minister Yusuf Raja Gilani said:

\begin{quote}
For us the most important capital in the world is Kabul, and the government of Kabul is the most important partner. A peaceful, stable and sovereign Afghanistan is an absolute prerequisite for stability and peace in Pakistan. Pakistan is the first to suffer at the hands of strife in Afghanistan, and the first to benefit from peace in Afghanistan. However, we strongly believe that the solution of Afghanistan will have to come from within Afghanistan. It will have to be led by the Afghans and owned by the Afghans.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

Pakistan was perturbed that it was marginalised and kept in the dark on the US secret negotiations with the Taliban. It was especially unhappy with the role of Qatar in these negotiations. However, since June 2012 Pakistan reappeared in the US calculus in Afghanistan. The trilateral was revived, and Pakistan was consulted on peace negotiations. It released some of the Taliban prisoners. Two groups who could be central to peace are under the control of Rawalpindi. The first is the Taliban controlled by Mullah Omar’s Quetta Shura, active in Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan provinces. The second is the Haqqani network, operating from North Waziristan and controlling Paktika, Paktia, Khost and Ghazni. According to one report, the Taliban consulted with and sought the views of Pakistan, and discussed the list of issues they planned to discuss with the US. It

\textsuperscript{40} Ghawar Ghumnam, “Stress on Peace with our Own people”, Dawn, 30 September 2011.
\textsuperscript{41} Online at: http://www.pid.gov.pk/pm%20speech%20at%206th%20annual%20convocation%20on%2014-6-2012.doc
was also reported that they shared the details with the Haqqani group. However, it is not clear whether the Haqqani network is part of the Taliban leadership council.

It is likely that Pakistan would strive to gain an upper hand in the future political configuration that is currently being negotiated. Though unhappy, it grudgingly accepted the dominant role of the US in Afghanistan. It would not however give up the strategy of using militants to emerge as a major stakeholder in Afghanistan. As has been reported in the media, the jihadists, including Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e-Islami, held a meeting in Rawalpindi in July 2012 to raise funds and recruit fighters. While Pakistan pledges that it wants peace in Afghanistan, the duality of its approach towards the Afghan conflict is a major hindrance. It is not yet clear whether Pakistan will change its tack towards Afghanistan unless it has a major say in the future composition of the Afghan government post-2014.

1.2. Pakistan-Afghanistan: Uneasy Relations

Pakistan’s relationship with Afghanistan has been tenuous. Pakistan blames Afghanistan of harbouring the TTP in its territory, while Kabul blames Islamabad of being an obstacle to peace and stability in Afghanistan. In the past, Kabul blamed Islamabad for the attack on the Indian Embassy, supposedly done to hamper Indian investment in Afghanistan and put pressure on Afghanistan’s growing relations with New Delhi. The two countries have been unable to bridge the trust deficit. As viewed by an official in the Pakistan foreign ministry: “Right now, Karzai is the biggest impediment to the peace process”.

To reduce its dependency on Islamabad, Kabul is eager to create multiple stakeholders with an interest in the stability and survival of the current government. However, Pakistan is also expanding its contacts, inviting the High Peace Council and its Chairman Sirajuddin Rabbani and many of its members from the erstwhile Northern Alliance to Islamabad. It has also held trilateral meetings to effectively engage Kabul. For example, in November last year Pakistan Turkey and Afghanistan agreed to conduct joint military exercises and Pakistan offered Afghanistan to train the Afghan police and signed two MoUs during their trilateral meeting in Istanbul. Islamabad is wary of a 250,000-strong Afghan Army trained by India, which could pose a potential threat to Pakistan on its western border. However, Kabul may be equally apprehensive that the ISI might recruit Afghan officers on the pretext of providing training. A tripartite border coordination mechanism has been constituted to deal with constant friction among the border forces of Pakistan and Afghanistan, also involving ISAF troops.

Pakistan knows that a civil war in Afghanistan would not benefit it. As a retired Pakistani diplomat said, “Pakistan needs an Afghanistan that does not threaten it, and allows it to

44 For details on Pakistan’s engagement in Afghanistan, see Rizwan Hussain, (2005), Pakistan and the Emergence of Islamic Militancy in Afghanistan, Ashgate, London.
import energy from Central Asia. Beyond this, Pakistan should not expect anything. If Pakistan wants to pursue strategic depth in Afghanistan no one can stop it but in the process it will become Afghanistan. It is Afghanistan that has strategic depth in Pakistan rather than the other way around”. The situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan is very different today as compared to the early 1990s. In case instability persists, Pakistan’s border regions will suffer and terror attacks may reverberate in other parts of the country due to local militant networks.

1.3. Iran

Iran has significant strategic interest in Afghanistan. It shares a 580-km border with the country. However, since 2001 Iran has looked at Afghanistan from the perspective of its relations with the US. Historically, Iran adopted a hedging strategy towards Afghanistan. In the past, it supported various Shia groups. It also played an important role in getting them together under one umbrella i.e. Hizb e Wahadat, to support the Islamabad Accord (mediated by Pakistan) which proposed to establish a broad-based government in the post-Najibullah period. It continued to support Shia groups during the peak of the Taliban rule, leading Grand Ayatollah Safi Golpaygani to ask why countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan should be under the “yoke” of the “Wahabi” sect.

Iran’s policies are influenced by five major concerns. The first is the fear that Sunni fundamentalist Islamists may assume power in Kabul. Second, due to the Iranian regime’s cultural and ethnic linkages with the Shias of Afghanistan, it is concerned that any destabilisation of Afghanistan will impinge directly on its stability. Third, it does not want to shoulder the burden of refugees which it sees as a potential source of instability. Fourth, drug trafficking is a major problem, and fifth, Iran is concerned that instability in Afghanistan provides a reason for the US to maintain its presence there. Many of Iran’s concerns are shared by other countries in Central Asia.

Iran has long opposed the rise of the Taliban, viewing them as proxies of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Though its main goal is to limit the Afghan conflict to that country itself, it supports some Afghan factions while seeking to keep any single faction from having full control of the country. In 1999, Iranian diplomats were killed by the Taliban when Mazar-e-Sharif was captured. Iran continued to recognise Rabbani’s government as the legitimate authority in Afghanistan. Along with India and Russia, Iran supported the Northern Alliance as a counter-measure to Taliban domination. The Taliban also had a hand in instigating Sunni Islamist insurgents in Sistan-Balochistan, supported by the US in the past. However, due to Tehran’s deteriorating relations with the US, Iran is left without much choice but to provide support to the Taliban as a tactical measure. In the

48 Ambassador Ayaz Wazir in a presentation on “Confidence Building Measures between India and Pakistan: A Giant Leap or a Small Step Towards Peace?” at the conference “Securing a Frontline State: Alternate Views on Peace and Conflict in Pakistan” organized by Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS) and the Centre for Research and Security Studies, 8-9 December 2011, Islamabad, Pakistan.
‘Islam Awakening Conference’ held in Tehran in September 2011, it even tried to broker talks between the Taliban and Afghan government officials.

Iran has provided shelter to Afghan refugees, but unlike Pakistan, it has prevented their assimilation into its society. In 2007 it expelled around 350,000 Afghan refugees despite the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. Iran is concerned about the presence of refugees on its soil and the repercussions it may have for its society and economy.

Iran was initially supportive of the US effort in Afghanistan and played an active role in the Bonn I conference held in 2001 by getting all the factions together to accept Hamid Karzai as the head of the interim regime. It also allowed US humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to pass through its territory as a part of Operation Enduring Freedom. Reportedly, Iran even sought a rapprochement with the US. Iran’s supreme leader Mohammad Khatami persuaded the conservative elements to support the coalition effort in Afghanistan to get rid of the Taliban and thus expand Iran’s regional reach. It also expelled Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was not only opposed to Karzai, but also vowed to attack US troops stationed in Afghanistan. However, due to the growing tension with the US over nuclear issues, Iran has increasingly sought the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan. It is apprehensive that the US presence in Afghanistan is detrimental to its interests, and fears the US may target Iran from there. The US has alleged that Iran is supplying arms to the Taliban. In January 2012 it claimed to have seized 48 Iranian-made rockets in southern Nimroz. There were also reports that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (especially the Qud force) supported the Taliban as a counter-strategy against the US, indicating State support to the Taliban. Iran also supplied sacks of currency to the government in Kabul to protect its interest from being undermined by the US and to keep the anti-US constituency within the Afghan government in good humour. The aim and manner in which these funds were transferred raised questions despite both Tehran and Kabul acknowledging and justifying such cash transactions. Iran has also reportedly funded pro-Iranian opposition parties and their MPs in Afghanistan to spread anti-US sentiments. These politicians have been asking uncomfortable questions regarding the conduct of the US troops, and are also in the forefront of anti-US campaigns.

Although Tehran has apprehensions regarding the rise of Sunni fundamentalism in Afghanistan, it also sees the Taliban as an effective instrument of opposition to the US. It is critical of the US-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) which mandates the

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58 According to President Hamid Karzai, Iran pays EUR 500,000-700,000 twice a year in cash. Iranian legislators have also questioned these transfers. Amin Mehrpour, “Iran Legislators Query Cash for Karzai”, Asian Times online, 9 November 2010, online at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/LK09Ak01.html
maintenance of military bases and stationing of American troops in Afghanistan. Expressing Iran’s reservations, a foreign ministry spokesperson said that the agreement would intensify insecurity and instability in Afghanistan. There are media reports that Iran even threatened to expel Afghan refugees from Iran if Afghanistan were to ratify the SPA. Iran and Afghanistan, however, have agreed to expand security cooperation like intelligence sharing and joint counter-narcotics operations, and have decided to hold annual meetings on security to prepare for the post-withdrawal scenario. Iran has expressed its support for a multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan, and would like to see a strong government in Kabul that is beholden neither to Islamabad, Riyadh or Washington.\(^{60}\)

Iran sees the growth of extremism in Afghanistan as a result of the strategic cooperation between international powers and their regional allies. Thus, a solution cannot be achieved without regional cooperation and “transition of responsibilities to the Afghan people and popular government”.\(^{61}\) Many of the countries of the region share a perspective similar to that of Iran. Iran is also involved in the Silk Route initiative, which calls for a regional approach. Moreover, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan are engaged in a trilateral initiative against narcotics, and have agreed to cooperate in border management to control drugs smuggling. Iran has invested heavily in Heart, and is among the top five exporters and importers of goods to and from Afghanistan.\(^{62}\) It needs to be noted here that western Afghanistan was historically a part of Iranian territory. Iran has built a 176-km railroad from Iran to Heart, and is working to develop infrastructure and communication links to connect Afghanistan to the outside world. It is currently working on a rail network that would connect the Iranian port of Chabahar with Zahedan in Afghanistan.

Iran wants to create an economic sphere of influence in Afghanistan, though it also has political interests and would not like Afghanistan to become a nurturing ground for Wahabism.\(^{63}\) According to the Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce, ‘an estimated 2,000 Iranian private firms, many financed by the Iranian government, operate in Afghanistan’.\(^{64}\) Others have pointed out that Iran has been able to create spheres of influence in Afghanistan since the overthrow of Zahir Shah, ranging from ideological and political to economic spheres of influence at different points of time. Iran has energised Shia revolutionaries and maintained close links with Shia clerics in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, building a political sphere of influence. After the Soviet withdrawal and till the rise of the Taliban in 1995, Tehran worked tirelessly for the inclusion of the Shias in power-sharing arrangements that were being worked out to end the conflict.\(^{65}\) At the same time, Iran has historically maintained a cultural sphere of influence in western Afghanistan due to the presence of Hazaras and Tajiks speaking Dari, a language similar to the Farsi spoken in Iran.


\(^{62}\) Mohsen Milani, “Iran and Afghanistan”, Unites States Institute of Peace (USIP), online at: http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-afghanistan


Interestingly, Afghanistan is apprehensive of the “cultural imperialism” that Iran tries to propagate through its socio-cultural influence and funding through the Khomeini Relief Committee. “The Kabul government fears that Iran is attempting to weaken the influence of the central government as a way to establish its own sphere of influence in western Afghanistan”. Many of the Hazara leaders studied in Iran, and some have been able to create leverages through Afghan intellectuals, who are mostly Shia. To promote cultural ties in the region, Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan have agreed to establish a common television network. Iran has also established religious schools and charities and encourages students passing from Iranian universities to establish religious schools in Afghanistan. It has invested in building schools, roads and electricity transmission lines in the Shia-dominated Heart province, giving it visibility and influence.

Iran has used ethnic and religious links to successfully put pressure on Afghanistan through economic and political leverages. Its decision to stop its supply of fuel in January 2011 led to a crisis situation in Kabul. This was ostensibly done due to suspicion that the fuel was mainly going to the US and NATO troops, as the demand for fuel doubled within a year coinciding with the US surge. Iran continues to hold this card. However, it is in a dilemma and has remained ambivalent in its approach to Afghanistan. It is concerned about the Taliban-US talks which may result in the Taliban becoming a part of the government in Kabul as a part of power-sharing deal. This would likely increase the leverage of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Water will be a major issue between Iran and Afghanistan. Iran does not want Afghanistan to build the Bakhshabad hydel power project over the Farah River, which would not only facilitate irrigation and produce electricity, but also divert water affecting the Sistan-Balochistan Province of Iran. Many believe that attacks on the Salma dam construction site, the Kajaki dam in Helmand and sites in Kapisa Province were the handiwork of the Taliban supported by Iran. The two countries have a dispute over the sharing of Helmand River water, and have established a joint commission to look into the issue.

Given the above-mentioned factors and Iran’s larger concerns regarding instability in Afghanistan, the question is how Iran will respond to the post-withdrawal situation in Afghanistan? Iran does not have a well thought out plan in Afghanistan. Its policy has largely been dictated by its relations with the US. Iran will try and protect its own sphere of influence in western Afghanistan and areas dominated by Hazaras, Tajiks and Uzbeks, with which it shares linguistic affinities. Iran would have to do a tough balancing act as destabilisation of Afghanistan would impinge on its stability. Its primary goal has been to ensure representation to the Shia, mainly Hazaras, which would help Iran to retain its

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69 Near Bakshabad hydropower facility, which is a US$ 2.2 million project in Bala Baluk in Farah Province, Afghan forces found a cache of Iranian-made explosives leading many to believe that Iran was involved. Jason Motlagh, “Iran in a Spending Spree in Afghanistan”, Time Magazine, 20 May 2009, online at: http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1900013,00.html, accessed on June 17, 2012
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influence. Iran is wary of the Afghan refugees, and wants to prevent spill-over effects of the Afghan conflict which might compound its domestic problems. To prevent a long-term presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan, Iran favours a regional approach to peace in Afghanistan. It also wants to actively participate in all international initiatives on Afghanistan. It was part of the Istanbul Summit, Bonn conference, Dushanbe conference, and the Tokyo donor summit last year. Iran also attended the Delhi Investment summit on Afghanistan, jointly organised by India and Afghanistan in 2012. Tehran does not want to be left out of any plans for a future roadmap for Afghanistan that may put Iran in a disadvantageous position.

The prospect of a long-term US presence is not very pleasing to the Iranian government. At the same time, a growing prospect of civil war also brings in the anxiety of another spate of refugee flows and increasing drug problems. Given its current problem with the US, Iran is likely to adopt a hedging strategy by aiding the Taliban. Keeping its larger interests in mind, Iran is unlikely to give full-scale support to the Taliban, but would still help them enough to pressure the US. The ideological rivalry between Shia Iran and Saudi Arabia and its proxies may manifest in a violent manner, and it is not clear how this tension will pan out post-2014.

To deal with the post-withdrawal situation there have recently been several high-level visits between Afghanistan and Iran. President Ahmedinijad and Iranian Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi visited Kabul in 2011 to discuss terrorism, drug trafficking, arms smuggling and other border problems. The two countries also discussed expanding their defence ties.

1.4. Central Asia

The approach of Central Asian states towards Afghanistan is defined largely by a fear of transnational crime and radicalisation. These countries are actively involved with Afghanistan, on a regional, multilateral and bilateral basis. Since they share their borders with Afghanistan, they have huge stakes in its stability as it impinges directly on their own stability. All the countries have cooperated to varying degrees with the US and NATO to sustain their war efforts in Afghanistan, yet most of them are cautious about their policies and have rather extracted a price for extending help to the US and Western countries. As one analyst aptly described the situation, “they have each found ways to live with and even profit from Afghanistan’s debilitated state.” However, their position on how to integrate the Taliban is not clear. These countries are not ready to be directly involved in Afghanistan as they neither have economic strength nor the military capacity to do so.

The Central Asian countries approach to the presence of the US varies, depending on their security perspective. For some, the US presence provides an opportunity to balance their interests’ vis-à-vis Russia. Tajikistan, for example, has engaged both the US and Russia to maximise its gain, though Uzbekistan feels uncomfortable given its relations

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with the US over Andijan and resents Russian domination in any regional security framework. While closing their borders with Afghanistan to minimise spill-over effects, all these countries are afflicted by criminal networks, drugs and weapons smuggling, and Islamist radicalisation. The various responses of individual Central Asian countries to the crisis in Afghanistan are discussed below.

1.4.1. Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has relentlessly promoted a ‘six plus three’ formula. As described by Uzbekistan’s ambassador to the US, this formula refers to “the United States, Russia, NATO, who are, in fact, involved in the peacemaking mission, as well as Afghanistan’s immediate neighbours: China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan”. The Uzbek government feels that “it is important to ensure Iran’s participation in the negotiation process”. The ‘six plus three’ formula was proposed by President Islam Karimov in 2008 at the NATO summit in Bucharest. However, the formula has been a non-starter, as it fails to include countries that have extensive engagement and entrenched interest in Afghanistan, and are also in a position to influence future political dispensation. Uzbekistan is wary of the Islamic Movement of Turkistan (IMT), which poses a challenge to its security. It is not hesitant in advocating a dialogue with moderate Taliban members. Uzbekistan does not believe that a military solution will lead to peace. During the civil war, Uzbekistan provided asylum as well as safe passage to Dostum and his Jumbesh-i-Milli party.

Uzbekistan has also emerged as a major transit route for the ISAF in Afghanistan. It has been supportive of the coalition effort in Afghanistan and has allowed the Germans to use its airfield in Termez, which mostly provides logistical support. It has also allowed NATO humanitarian aid to pass through Hairaton Bridge.

In 2005, the relationship between the US and Uzbekistan deteriorated over the Andijan massacre, after which Uzbekistan suspended US operations from its Karshi-Khanabad (K2) airfield in Southeast Uzbekistan. Washington has now mended its ties with Tashkent to facilitate the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. After Secretary Clinton’s visit to Uzbekistan in 2010, the two countries have been working to improve their relations. The US Congress also approved the training of Uzbek military officers in human rights in the US. The urgency in re-establishing relations with Uzbekistan came after Pakistan blocked the Ground Line of Communication, which is a vital supply route for NATO troops, following the Salala attack. According to Senator Lindsey Graham, the US planned to reroute about half of what it ships into Afghanistan via Pakistan to the northern route through Uzbekistan. At the time of writing, 75 per cent of the northern

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71 Transcription of Uzbekistan Ambassador’s Speech to the Atlantic Council, online at: http://www.acus.org/event/providing-security-and-stability-afghanistan-uzbekistans-view/transcript, 14 October 2010.
72 Transcription of Uzbekistan Ambassador’s Speech to the Atlantic Council, online at: http://www.acus.org/event/providing-security-and-stability-afghanistan-uzbekistans-view/transcript, 14 October 2010.
73 This was earlier known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and changed its name to the Islamic Movement of Turkestan (IMT) in 2001. The change of name suggests its broader pan-Islamic ambition that includes all the Central Asian countries.
74 Online at: http://www.nato.int/issues/nato-uzbekistan/index.html
76 US Discusses Supply route with Uzbekistan, Dawn, September 30, 2011, online at:
distribution network traffic was passing through the Termez Airbase in Uzbekistan, leased by Germany.\(^7^7\)

Uzbekistan has completed the Termez-Hairatan railway project with the aid of the World Bank, and has extended this rail network to Mazar-e-Sharief.\(^7^8\) It has built 11 bridges in the Mazar-e-Sharief and Kabul areas and is also constructing a 275-mile high voltage transmission line connecting Termez with Pul-e-Khumri and using India’s transmission line to supply electricity to Kabul.\(^7^9\) However, due to its scepticism about a regional approach, it is not a signatory to the Istanbul declaration, signed by thirteen other countries to support efforts to bring stability in Afghanistan. Iran, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan took the decision in 2003 to open up a trans-Afghan transport corridor to connect Asia with the Gulf. Uzbekistan maintains good relations with Afghanistan and supplies electricity thanks to a transmission line constructed by the erstwhile Soviet Union.

Beyond helping the US operation in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is not in a position to influence events in Afghanistan. The Islamic Movement of Turkistan (IMT) and Hizbut Tahrir continue to pose a threat to Uzbekistan, and the government’s fight against terrorism remains a major commitment.

1.4.2. Tajikistan

Tajikistan shares a border of more than 800 km with northern Afghanistan. The civil war in Tajikistan was launched by the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) with help from the Taliban in Afghanistan. After the government reached an agreement with the IRP, and they formed a United Tajik opposition party, some IRP members were dissatisfied with the deal and fled to Afghanistan where they joined the IMT. In the recent past, bomb attacks in Tajikistan have been attributed to Islamist elements. Like its Central Asian counterparts, the Tajikistan government would not like to see a re-emergence of the Taliban. With the expansion of Taliban influence into the northern part of Afghanistan, militant groups from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have again become active, especially in Kunduz.

Tajikistan was the first Central Asian country to agree to support NATO transit through its territory. In February 2009, Tajikistan announced that it would allow transit of non-lethal supplies to Afghanistan. In 2008 Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran agreed to establish the Economic Council of the Persian Speaking Union. They have agreed to improve rail and road links with Afghanistan, cooperate on drug-related issues, and build highways connecting the three countries. Tajikistan has agreed to transmit 500 KW of energy to Afghanistan and Iran. Most of the drugs from Afghanistan exit through


\(^7^8\) Online at: http://www.railway-technology.com/projects/hairatanuzbekistan/

\(^7^9\) John C. K. Daly, “Uzbekistan Afghan Proposal Relevant and Timely”, online at: http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Analysis/Outside-View/2009/11/05/Outside-View-Uzbek-Afghan-proposal-relevant-and-timely/UPID1691257429600/ Also see: http://www.mea.gov.in/outgoing-visit-detail.htm?21734/Transcript+of+the+media+briefing+by+Secretary+West+on+VicePresidents+ongoing+visit+to+Uzbekistan
Tajikistan. Drugs and terrorism are the two major challenges Tajikistan faces from instability in Afghanistan.

Until 2005, the security of the Tajik border with Afghanistan was the responsibility of the Russians. As of now, this responsibility lies with Tajik border guards. However, given the flow of drugs from Afghanistan, Russia has again offered to guard the border. In 2011, the two countries signed an agreement to cooperate on fighting terrorism, narcotics and weapons smuggling.

1.4.3. Turkmenistan

The state of Turkmenistan has maintained a policy of neutrality and refuses to be a part of any anti-Taliban alliance. Interestingly, its consulate in Heart maintained good relations with the Taliban, while the one in Mazar maintained good relations with the anti-Taliban alliance. In 2007 Turkmenistan secretly donated food, clothes and fuel to persuade the Taliban to move into the interior of Afghanistan and away from the Turkmenistan border. However, 9/11 changed the country’s perspective on neutrality. Turkmenistan is now trying to build its relations taking into consideration the geopolitical reality of the region. It also wants to find alternative markets for its energy resources which are still monopolised by Russia.

Afghanistan imports electricity from Turkmenistan and seems to be a major transit route for Turkmenistan’s energy exports, while Russia is its key energy importer. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline is considered as an alternative to the erstwhile proposed Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline. In 2007, the two countries formed a joint intergovernmental commission on trade and economic relations. In August 2011, during Karzai’s visit to Turkmenistan, the two countries agreed to build a railway line connecting the eastern part of Turkmenistan with Andkhoy, a border town in Faryab Province of Afghanistan (Atamurat-Ymamnazar in Turkmenistan to Akina-Andkhoy in Afghanistan). Turkmenistan has also underwritten Kabul’s debt.

Turkmenistan is supportive of an intra-Afghan dialogue. It proposed a five-point peace proposal which proposes to hold an international conference of stakeholders, train Afghan civil servants under the patronage of the United Nations (UN), build rail links, construct the TAPI pipeline and supply electricity at a subsidised rate. Though this proposal has few enthusiastic takers, Turkmenistan ratified its Friendship and Cooperation Agreement with Afghanistan in August 2011.

Turkmenistan has permitted NATO to operate a training camp for peacekeepers in the country. In his efforts to bolster support from the Central Asian countries for Afghanistan post-2014, President Hamid Karzai visited Turkmenistan in February 2012 and discussed bilateral projects.

83 Turkmenistan elaborates on 5-point peace formula in Afghanistan”, News Central Asia, online at: http://newscentralasia.net/2011/05/24/turkmenistan-elaborates-on-5-point-formula-for-peace-in-afghanistan/?upn_export__
1.4.4. Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan shares no borders with Afghanistan and was the first Central Asian country to pledge forces to Afghanistan. The US has depended on Kyrgyzstan and the lease of Manas Airbase for its operations in Afghanistan. However Kyrgyzstan threatened to close down the base and its Parliament passed a law to this effect, ostensibly due to Russian pressure and promises of an aid and loan package worth US$ 2.1 billion. After intense negotiations in June 2009, Kyrgyzstan agreed to a US and NATO base subject to annual renewal. Kyrgyzstan’s President Kurmanbek Bakiyev conceded after Washington promised to pay US$ 60 million extra in rent and renovation of the base. However, the present Kyrgyz President says he will ask the US to vacate the base in 2014 when the agreement expires.

The Central Asian countries lack a common strategy towards Afghanistan. At present they are busy with various projects to help NATO and ISAF for short-term economic gains. Disputes between the central Asian countries on how to share their own natural resources like water, minerals and energy have embittered their bilateral relations. This adds to their inability to develop a common strategy towards Afghanistan. A unified centralised response to Afghanistan is difficult to achieve given the regime-centric approach of each state.

1.5. China

China established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan in 1955. The two countries signed a friendship and non-aggression treaty in 1960 and completed their boundary demarcation in 1964. However, their relations remained low key. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan changed China’s approach towards the region. China supplied arms and ammunition to the Mujahedin when they were engaged in the fight against the Soviets. Though China did not recognise the Taliban government, several official delegations visited Kabul and met with Taliban officials during 1996-2001, seeking Taliban assurances not to support the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Reportedly, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) concluded an agreement with the Taliban towards the end of 1998 in which the Taliban pledged to refrain from providing “any training to Chinese Muslims in China’s Xinjiang province and that it will assist the Chinese authorities maintain places of worship and madrassas as in China”. In spite of such assurances, according to Wikileaks a Uighur training camp was functioning in Tora Bora.

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85 The base was leased to the US in 2001. US operations at the base contributed around US$ 64 million to the Kyrgyz economy in the fiscal year 2008. This included US$ 17.4 million in payments for use of the base, US$ 22.5 million for airport operating and land lease fees, and US$ 23.7 million in contracts such as construction projects and commodity purchases. Joseph Giordono, “Manas Air Base Closure signed into Kyrgyz Law”, 21 February 2009, online at: http://www.stripes.com/news/manas-air-base-closure-signed-into-kyrgyz-law-1.88320
89 Peter Lee, “Taliban Force a China Switch”, Asia Times online, 6 March 2009, online at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/KC06Ad01.html
in July 2001, training 25 militants, some of whom had studied in Pakistani madrassas. During Operation Enduring Freedom, 320-600 ETIM-sponsored militants were fighting alongside of the Taliban.\textsuperscript{90} Before 9/11, China was opposed to military action against the Taliban. However, post-9/11 it supported UN Security Council resolutions 1368 and 1373 on combating terrorism. It also supported the Bonn agreement that established the Afghan transitional government in 2001.

China is circumspect about its role in Afghanistan, and only started to take a more active role given Taliban support to Uighur separatists. It is equally apprehensive of the close linkage that exists between terrorists in South Asia and Central Asia. Moreover, Russian and Indian involvement in Afghanistan made Beijing reconsider its approach towards Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{91} Its policies towards Afghanistan are greatly influenced by its strategic interests in Central Asia and South Asia, which could be threatened by events unfolding in Afghanistan. It is also aware of the threats posed by Islamist fundamentalism in both these regions. In 1996 it established the Shanghai Five to deal with issues of terrorism and drugs trafficking emanating from Afghanistan. In February 2012, a Chinese student was killed in Peshawar and a TTP statement said that this was done in retaliation for Chinese policies towards Uighurs.\textsuperscript{92}

Whereas bilaterally, China exerts its influence on Pakistan to rein in terrorists that target China, internationally it defends Pakistan’s contribution to the War on Terror. Beijing has gently nudged Pakistan to deal with Uighur separatists living in Pakistan. It also suspects that tribal areas of Pakistan might serve as safe havens for Uighur separatists. In 2008, the TTP held two Chinese engineers hostage, while Chinese workers were killed in Balochistan, and in the Lal Mosque, seven Chinese were taken hostage in 2007. Not long before this, China asserted that Pakistani militants were complicit in a bomb blast in Kashgar. Due to close China-Pakistan relations, there are to some extent fewer attacks on Chinese interests as compared to attacks on US and Indian interests. Nevertheless, Chinese workers are increasingly being targeted by Pakistan-based groups.\textsuperscript{93} China has now realised the need to develop an independent approach to terrorism, given the close links between militants that are beyond the control of the Pakistani state.

China’s concerns are similar to those of other neighbours of Afghanistan. It does not want radical Islamists to have influence in its Xinjiang province, or support ETIM militants. Beijing is worried at the prospect of the return of the Taliban, though it is cautious about raising the issue of Taliban support to ETIM. In the past, China maintained cordial relations with the Taliban in an effort to persuade them not to give sanctuary to Uighur militants, and provided arms to the Taliban in return for this favour. However, the capture of several ETIM militants by US troops proved that the Taliban did not (or could not) honour the Chinese request. In spite of such threats, US analysts regard it unlikely that China would undermine or run contrary to Pakistan’s interests in

\textsuperscript{90} Online at: http://wikileaks.org/gitmo/pdf/ch/us9ch-000278dp.pdf
\textsuperscript{92} “Why did the Taliban Kill a Chinese Student in Peshawar”, online at: http://registan.net/2012/03/12/whats-behind-the-taliban-killing-of-a-chinese-student-in-peshawar/
Afghanistan, as Islamabad is their best bet to curtail India’s domination of South Asia and its growing influence in Central Asia. Thus, Beijing policy has been ambiguous and its engagement centred on the protection of its core interest in preventing spillover effects without showcasing its influence in Afghanistan. It favours reintegration and reconciliation of the Taliban and has been supportive of Pakistan’s role.

China has been active within the SCO and plays a dominant role in shaping the SCO agenda towards Afghanistan. In 2006, the two countries signed the Good-neighbourly Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. China also signed a comprehensive economic partnership agreement with Afghanistan during Hamid Karzai’s visit to Beijing in 2010 to attend the SCO meeting as an observer. In the past, Pakistan advised Kabul to move closer to China after the US exit. Similarly, Taliban operating in Afghanistan may not target China. For example, in 2004 when 11 Chinese labourers working on a World Bank-supported road project were massacred, the Taliban organised a demonstration of 3,000 people as a show of solidarity with the Chinese. So as to avoid jeopardising their investments, Chinese companies maintain links with militants through their security officers and pay them regularly. There were reports in 2007 that the Chinese are supplying weapons to the Taliban, and President Karzai has raised this issue with his Chinese counterpart.

China is now involved in several infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. China’s Metallurgical Company has won a bid to extract mineral resources in Aynak in northern Afghanistan worth an estimated US$ 88 billion, and has been awarded a 30-year lease to develop copper mines there. This is the single largest foreign investment in Afghanistan to date. Afghanistan is expected to earn US$ 1 billion in annual royalties. According to a report by the Central Asia Caucasus Institute, China is planning the construction of a US$ 500 million electrical plant and a supporting railway from Tajikistan to Pakistan. The mine should be fully operational within six years, and provide employment to 10,000 Afghans, while US$ 400 million of royalties (more than half the present annual state budget) would accrue the Afghan government annually. The mining is estimated to “generate millions of dollars in taxes and US$ 200 million in annual shareholder revenues.” China has also won the approval of Afghanistan for oil exploration and extraction in Amu Dariya basin, for which Afghanistan has signed an agreement with China National Petroleum Corporation. China plans to build a railway linking Xinjiang with Afghanistan, in line with its western regional development policy (Xibu Da Kaifa). Moreover, China is planning to build border access routes and supply depots through the Wakhan Corridor. Pakistan is not happy with the opening of the Wakhan Corridor, as it will compete with the Karakoram highway as a transit route.

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99 “The Emerging China Afghanistan Relations”, Central Asia Caucasus Institute, online at: online at: http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4858
In 2012, China and Afghanistan established the China-Afghanistan Strategic and Cooperative Partnership, in which they agreed on five pillars of cooperation, in the political, economic, cultural and security fields, as well as on regional and international affairs. According to the agreement, the two countries believe that “The China-Afghanistan Strategic and Cooperative Partnership will also contribute to the peace, security, stability and development in the region and beyond”. China wants to deepen its security engagement with Afghanistan and is currently also providing training to Afghan police and security personnel.

Many believe that Chinese economic engagement will have a stabilising effect on Afghanistan. There has in fact been a convergence of Chinese and US interests on Afghanistan, after the US sought Chinese cooperation to work together in South Asia. The US wants Beijing’s help to persuade Pakistan to act against the terrorists sheltered in tribal areas. However, Beijing has stood by the side of Islamabad. Worried about the growing linkages between Uighur militants and Pakistani terrorists, Beijing has integrated terrorism prevention and counter-terrorism into its Pakistan policy. According to some Chinese scholars, although officially, Beijing is mum on the US presence in Afghanistan, there is tacit support of US presence because it is felt that only Washington has the capability to provide security. Western analysts have pointed out that the continuing US engagement in Afghanistan detracts US attention away from the Pacific region. Some argue that despite an expanding economic engagement in Afghanistan to the tune of US$ 200 million, Beijing has no concomitant security pledge. However, Chinese scholars argue that if the US after investing millions of dollars could not salvage the security situation in Afghanistan, neither could China have accomplished the same. Other Chinese scholars feel that China should train the Afghan security forces and if need be supply arms and ammunition. They also suggest that China and India could jointly train the Afghan security forces. For the first time, India, China and Russia held a trilateral in Moscow to discuss Afghanistan and India-China had their first bilateral meeting focused on Afghanistan in Beijing in April this year. This will help bridge the gap between China and India on their Afghan engagement.

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104 Such a view was expressed by Chinese scholars in a conference on China-Afghanistan relations held at Jamia Millia Islamia University in February 2012, and also in the CICIR-IDSA Dialogue in New Delhi, March 2013.
2. The Extended Neighbourhood

Among other extended neighbours, Russia and India are two countries that do not share borders with Afghanistan, yet have the potential to influence the conflict dynamics in Afghanistan and contribute significantly to peace.

2.1. Russia

Geopolitics in the Central Asia region has helped Russia to emerge as an important player. As an erstwhile superpower with global ambitions, it has an abiding interest in Afghanistan and feels it should not emerge as a launching pad for external influence over its ‘near abroad’. Russia is concerned about a Taliban takeover in Afghanistan because of the implications it may have for its own problems with Islamists in Chechnya. Russia is aware that the situation in Afghanistan may become a major factor in regional instability in the future. Moscow is also not confident of the capabilities of the bordering Central Asian states to deal with the emerging threat of radicalisation. Mutual mistrust and suspicion have prevented a concerted regional policy that will protect them from spill-over effects of an Afghan crisis.

For Russia, Central Asia remains crucial to its sphere of influence. Immediately after the emergence of the Central Asian countries, Russia remained embroiled in its own problems. However, it maintained its security links with the Central Asian states through various bilateral and multilateral instruments. To formalise these links, it steered the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and became the main security provider to maintain its military monopoly over the Central Asian region, “rather than share security responsibilities with Beijing”.

Russia was supportive of the US intervention in Afghanistan. According to one analyst, “In the 2000s, following the opening of American bases in the region, Russia’s geopolitical revival, the rapprochement between Putin and the Central Asian regimes and the re-launching of the industrial-military complex enabled Moscow to regain power”. This enabled it to assert its influence over the region. Russia looks with suspicion at the US airbase in Manas and feels that its sphere of influence is being intruded by the US presence. In 2007 it used economic tactics to pressure Kyrgyzstan not to renew its contract with the US for using the Manas airbase. It reportedly offered financial compensation to Dushanbe for the loss it incurred by not leasing out the base to the Americans.

During the Soviet period, the policy was to insulate its border from any threat emanating from Afghanistan. To achieve this objective of creating a buffer zone it developed the

\text{108} \text{ Russia announced a new law regarding migrant workers which affected Kyrgyzstan. Many from Kyrgyzstan look at Russia as a source of employment. This was a tactics to pressure Kyrgyzstan to close the Manas airbase. See Jim Nichol, (2009), “Kyrgyzstan and the Status of US air base in Manas: Status and Implication”, CRS report, 1 July 2009, p. 5.}
Northern part of Afghanistan and tried to integrate it culturally and economically with its bordering region. Russia now wants to pursue a similar policy as it did in the 1990s by supporting the Northern Alliance. It is concerned about a Taliban takeover and consequent implications. However, given its past intervention in Afghanistan, Moscow is careful not to get involved in Afghanistan’s problems. Moreover, it does not want it to be a rallying point for jihadists who are fighting the US.

The relationship between the US and Russia improved following Obama’s historic visit to Moscow in July 2009, which aimed at resetting their relations. Though the US wants to limit Russian engagement with the region, it is left with few choices. It cannot rely on Pakistan solely for transit of its convoys, which have frequently been attacked. The Iranian route is strictly off-limits to Washington, leaving Russia as an alternative option. Russia is now being encouraged by the US to play an active role in Afghanistan and in return Moscow wants to be consulted on Afghanistan. Some discussions regarding Russian engagement in Afghanistan are held in the Russia-NATO forum. It also wants the missile defence program in Poland and the Czech Republic to be scrapped. Russia and the US have established a Working Group on Counter Terrorism and Russia-NATO Council for Counter Narcotics. Like Iran, Russia’s concerns pertain to drugs and Islamic fundamentalism, which it fears will fuel radicalism in Chechnya.

To take the relations forward, Russia for the first time was invited to the NATO summit at Lisbon, which brain-stormed the US exit strategy. As a result of consultations with Russia, it agreed to provide transit to non-lethal NATO supplies and extended reverse transit to non-NATO members who have contributed troops to Afghanistan. It agreed to allow the US and NATO troops to use its base in Ulyanovsk on the Volga River and to open cargo and logistics facilities for the international troops. It agreed to supply M17 helicopters and train the Afghan air force and police. Out of several routes, NATO received some supplies of non-lethal weapons through Riga port in Latvia. These cargos are carried into Afghanistan through Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The first such consignment arrived in June 2010. Russia trains around 225 Afghan army officers in Russia and has agreed to train and equip the police force. It is training Afghan helicopter technicians in advance maintenance, which will enhance the capacity of the Afghan security forces under the Helicopter Maintenance Trust fund signed with the US. Russia has also agreed to help Afghanistan in infrastructure projects. During Karzai’s Moscow visit in January 2011, Russia agreed to expand the 264-mile Salang tunnel that connects Kabul to Northern Afghanistan and handles ten thousand vehicles a day.

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113 US Russia Cooperation on Afghanistan (2012), June 18, US Department of State, online at: http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rlns/193096.htm. At present, 10 countries of the council that are being involved in the project of Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund have delivered about US$ 20 million, including more than US$ 3.3 million by Russia. See “Russia-Nato Discusses Cooperation on Helicopter package”, 24 April 2013, online at: http://en.afghanistan.ru/doc/446.html
Moscow’s late foray into Afghanistan is to some extent conditioned by the economic interests of its businessmen. It presumes that this would also let Russia retain its traditional sphere of influence in the region. For many years, Russians have been silent watchers of the situation in Afghanistan but now Russia seems to be changing its approach towards the evolving situation. It is now trying to develop synergy with countries like Pakistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan and evolve a common approach to the issue of drug trafficking in Afghanistan. It also hosted a quadrilateral summit that provided an opportunity for Russia to play a visible and domineering role.

Despite its apprehension regarding a long-term US presence in Afghanistan, Russians are keen that the US should stabilise Afghanistan before they wind up their operations. It is feared that US withdrawal “will bring a lot of problems, new internal war, new civil war to Afghanistan” and that the Afghan forces are not ready to take charge of post-transition security.114 However, according to Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin, “The point is that when the counter-terrorism operation in Afghanistan is over [...] we will insist that the American military presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia must be scaled down.”115 As explained by Russia’s ambassador to NATO, Russia will provide help “until the necessary conditions are provided to establish stable local authorities capable of independently deterring radical forces and controlling the country. That is why we are helping NATO by providing transit for goods and training personnel for Afghanistan, including anti-narcotics officers”.116 Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov has stated that his country is prepared to help as long as it is consulted more closely in the decision-making process on Afghanistan. This is also endorsed by President Putin who has argued that NATO’s presence serves the national security interests of Russia, though the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia has cautioned that: “We do not support plans to reformat the ISAF into a long-term foreign military presence in Afghanistan without a United Nations mandate and under a different guise”.117

Russia has asked for details of the US plan after 2014. However, the ambiguity regarding the duration of the US presence and number of troops it plans to retain in Afghanistan raises concerns. According to Ashraf Ghani, one of the advisers to President Karzai, “The U.S. has many 10- to 25-year-long agreements, a wide range of agreements”.118

Russia is thus concerned regarding the situation in Afghanistan yet it is not willing to play a lead role in securing Afghanistan. Bilaterally it provides limited support to Afghanistan’s armed forces. Russia is also worried of increasing Chinese activities in Central Asia and Afghanistan. It thinks that US presence would check this, though it is not in favour of a long-term US presence.

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116 Boris Gromov and Dmitry Rogozin, “Russian Advice on Afghanistan”, New York Times, 11 January 2010. Boris Gromov is the Governor of the Moscow region, commanded the 40th Soviet Army in Afghanistan and Dmitry Rogozin, Russia’s ambassador to NATO
117 Vladimir Radyuhin “India, Russia Agree on Afghan Peace, But Differ on Drawdown”, The Hindu, 29 April 2013. online at: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/india-russia-agree-on-afghan-peace-but-differ-on-drawdown/article4665226.ece
2.2. India

India’s has enormous security stakes in the stability of Afghanistan. As an emerging power it cannot remain confined to the South Asia RSC as Afghanistan affects the stability of the region. India’s presence in Afghanistan is to address its security concerns and help structure the regional security architecture that would facilitate its aspiration to play a more visible role in the politics and economic affairs of the region. Afghanistan provides a new challenge to India to shape the regional security architecture to prevent spill-over of conflict dynamics from Afghanistan and play a proactive role rather than reacting to the evolving situation. India has enormous goodwill and would like to capitalise on it and play a larger role in seeing peace established in Afghanistan. India is not perceived by the Afghan people and its political elite as a country with hegemonic ambitions. The goodwill that it has earned in Afghanistan is unparalleled in South Asia.

There have been attempts to portray India’s engagement in Afghanistan within a limited parameter of India-Pakistan rivalry without taking into consideration India’s aspirations and security concerns. International terrorism has been at the core of India’s foreign policy for more than two decades. As an emerging power eager to play a global role, India wants to “override the regional imperative” while Pakistan desires “to reinforce it”, leading to an emphasis on the India-Pakistan dimension. To offset Pakistan’s game plan to portray India’s engagement in Afghanistan as a manifestation of India-Pakistan rivalry that would invite a zero sum response from Islamabad, New Delhi has offered to discuss its engagement in Afghanistan with the Pakistani government at the highest level. Pakistan has however repeatedly refused to discuss Afghanistan issues with India. Indian policymakers often reject the emphasis on “India-Pakistan rivalry” attributed to its engagement in Afghanistan, which tends to see India’s engagement within a narrow prism. Pakistan has attempted to link a resolution of the Kashmir issue to its cooperation in Afghanistan. India has already rejected US attempts to make a resolution of the Kashmir issue central to stability in Afghanistan. To quote the former Foreign Secretary of India: “the issue of peace and stability in Afghanistan needs to be addressed separately and comprehensively and not within the matrix of India-Pakistan relations [...] India neither sees Afghanistan as a battleground for competing national interests nor assistance to Afghan reconstruction and development as a zero sum game”. Pakistan’s refusal to discuss Afghanistan bilaterally with India is not surprising. As a retired Pakistani diplomat said, “Islamabad’s Afghan policy is determined by GHQ, Rawalpindi, the bureaucrats and politicians have no role in it except for towing their line”. Considering the Pakistan Army as the real power in Pakistan, India needs to engage the Army to synchronise each other’s red-lines in Afghanistan.

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120 Senior Official and Adviser to the Prime Minister of India who would not like to be identified, interview held on August 09, 2012. The same is endorsed by India’s former ambassador to Afghanistan and senior official in the Ministry of External Affairs. Interview held in June 2011.
121 Interview with a senior Indian diplomat and adviser to the Prime Minister of India, 9 August 2012.
122 “I will encourage dialogue between Pakistan and India to work towards resolving their dispute over Kashmir… If Pakistan can look towards the east with greater confidence, it will be less likely to believe that its interests are best advanced through cooperation with Taliban”, Barack Obama, “Renewing American Leadership”, Foreign Affairs, 86(4), 2007, p. 10. See also Smruti S. Pattanaik, (2008), “Kashmir Has Nothing to Do with Stability in Afghanistan”, IDSA Comment, 18 November 2008, online at: http://idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/KashmirhasnothingtodowithstabilityinAfghanistan_SSPPattanaik_181108.
123 Nirupama Rao’s speech on “Afghanistan-India-Pakistan Trilogue”, organized by Delhi Policy Group, 13 June 2010, online at: http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530115890
124 Interview with a retired diplomat who was also a former Ambassador to Afghanistan, Islamabad, 9 December 2011.
India’s involvement in Afghanistan aims to address the following concerns. First, it supports a plural government in Afghanistan representing all the ethnic groups. Second, for a viable state that can pursue an independent foreign policy, Afghanistan needs outlets to the outside world for trade. Connectivity therefore becomes the key issue and India is supportive of the Silk Route. Third, Afghan forces must be combat capable to take responsibility in the post-transition period. The Strategic Partnership Agreement that the two countries signed in October 2011 is an important step in this regard. Fourth, the ability of Afghanistan to emerge as a self-sustaining economy would help the emergence of a viable state. India is engaged in the economic development of Afghanistan, which is likely to sustain its presence in the post-transition phase. Fifth, the contesting interests of the regional countries would make Afghanistan unstable. India would like to be engaged with the regional countries in finding a solution to Afghanistan and at least support the Afghan government’s multilateral political and economic initiatives.\(^{125}\) It shares Kabul’s apprehensions regarding drug problems and extremism in Afghanistan.

After independence, India signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Afghanistan in 1951 and has historically maintained good relations with Kabul. India retained its diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, except for a brief period from September 1996 to 2001, when it decided to close its embassy and consulates due to threats from the Taliban. It was only after 9/11 and the dismantling of the Taliban regime that it decided to reopen its consulates and Embassy and participate in the first Bonn conference. Keeping the reconstruction of war-ravaged Afghanistan in mind, India prioritised economic engagement. According to a Ministry of External Affairs report: “India’s programmes cover four broad areas – infrastructure projects, humanitarian assistance, small and community based development projects, and education and capacity development”.\(^{126}\) It tailored various development projects after consultation with the Afghan government and according to its requirements. India has invested in “building capacities and institutions for effective state system that is able to deliver goods and services required by the Afghan people.”\(^{127}\) It is providing scholarships, training bureaucrats and helping in capacity-building in the agriculture sector. It has highly acclaimed medical missions in Kabul, Heart, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif providing free medical consultation and medicines to 30,000 Afghans every month.\(^{128}\)

Indian projects have high visibility and touch the life of ordinary Afghans and have generated enormous goodwill – a political capital – towards New Delhi. The Indira Gandhi paediatric hospital, the Pul-e-Khumri-Kabul electricity transmission line, the Afghan Parliament building and the Zaranj-Delaram Highway are some of the significant investments. India recently announced an additional Rs 600 crore (approximately US$ 120 million) to meet the escalation cost of the Salma dam power project which will


\(^{126}\) \textit{Ministry of External Affairs, “India-Afghanistan Relations”, online at: http://meaindia.nic.in/meaxpsite/pressrelease/2011/01/bilateralafghanistan.pdf}

\(^{127}\) Speech by Minister of State for External Affairs at the Afghanistan International Investment Conference”, 30 November 2010, online at: http://www.meagov.in/mystart.php?id=530116745

\(^{128}\) \textit{Ministry of External Affairs, “India-Afghanistan Relations”, online at: http://meaindia.nic.in/meaxpsite/pressrelease/2011/01/bilateralafghanistan.pdf}
generate 52 MW of power and irrigate 40,000 hectares of farmland.\textsuperscript{129} The Cabinet finally approved the escalation cost in January this year which will cover the cost till December 2014.\textsuperscript{130} India has now proposed US$ 100 million worth of community-based development projects which it plans to implement in 34 provinces of Afghanistan. These development projects will be implemented in the agriculture, health, education and rural development sectors. It will also be used to provide vocational training, sanitation and drinking water facilities. The number of scholarships for Afghan students is now raised from a total of 650 to 1,000 students per year.\textsuperscript{131} India has approved US$ 91 million as scholarships to Afghan students to study in India. India wants to contribute towards a capable Afghan state that can look after its own security. It has agreed to strengthen the Afghan Army and has undertaken to train its security forces to face the security challenges post-2014.

India initially confined itself to economic reconstruction and was not involved in training of security personnel given objections raised by Pakistan. The international community was too eager to placate Islamabad as it played a central role in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan’s duality – providing safe havens to the elements responsible for terrorist acts in Afghanistan while partnering with the US in an anti-terror alliance – created international misgivings. As a result, towards the end of 2010 the US encouraged India’s involvement in the training of troops and strengthening of security forces which could facilitate the US exit from Afghanistan.

India has vociferously supported an Afghan-led process, as it feels this process will prevent interference from outside, especially that of Islamabad. Since the fall of the Taliban, Pakistan has made several attempts to side-line India in Afghanistan. It initially tried to link stability in Afghanistan to the resolution of the Kashmir issue, and then accused India of destabilising Pakistan through its consulates in Afghanistan. Kabul rejected these allegations and offered Islamabad to open its consulate next to the Indian consulate, if it so wished.\textsuperscript{132} The US was not convinced of Pakistan’s allegations about Indian activities. It rather asked Pakistan to change its mind-set towards India.\textsuperscript{133} Reacting to Pakistan’s complaints regarding the Indian consulate, US Special Representative James Dobbin stated that it is minuscule and ‘perfectly reasonable’ given India’s economic and cultural relations with Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{134} Islamabad, however, succeeded in side-lining India at the London conference in 2010, and managed to gain Turkey’s support to deny India an invitation to the first Istanbul conference held the same year. India therefore sought close collaboration with Kabul and relied on Karzai and the US to protect India’s legitimate interests. India’s constructive engagement now bears

\textsuperscript{129} “India’s Afghan Thrust: Local Projects, Scholarships, Dam”, \textit{Indian Express}, 17 August 2012.

\textsuperscript{130} “Reconstruction and Completion of Salma Dam Project in Afghanistan by M/s WAPCOS Ltd.”, \textit{The expenditure on the projects will be met from the Non-Plan head of ‘Aid to Afghanistan’ budget of the Ministry of External Affairs.}, Press Information Bureau, 10 January 2013, online at: http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=91466

\textsuperscript{131} “India’s Afghan Thrust: Local Projects, Scholarships, Dam”, \textit{Indian Express}, 17 August 2012.

\textsuperscript{132} Interview with a Senior Adviser to President Karzai, New Delhi, January 2012.

\textsuperscript{133} Richard Holbrooke said that although Pakistan discussed India’s involvement in Balochistan during his visit to Islamabad it did not provide credible evidence of such involvement. Chidanand Rajghatta, “US backs out India from Balochistan Wrangle”, 31 July 2009, \textit{Times of India}, online at: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2009-07-31/us/28181669_1_india-and-pakistan-balochistan-afpak-envoy-richard-holbrooke

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fruit, as India is consulted and participates in all major meetings pertaining to the future of Afghanistan.

Kabul’s decision to engage with India is also aimed at asserting its independence in making its own foreign policy choices, ignoring pressure from Pakistan to tow Islamabad’s line. According to President Karzai, “We fought the Soviets. We fought the British. We fought everybody else because we wanted to keep this sense that we are independent, our sovereignty. For that reason, we are requesting our friends in Pakistan that we will have relations with India because we are sovereign, and we will have relations with India because it’s in our interest.”

As Pakistani support to the Taliban continues, the talks with the Taliban remain elusive. Kabul’s patience in waiting for Islamabad’s action is wearing thin and thus it is not surprising that India and Afghanistan took steps to sign the Strategic Partnership Agreement. The US has acquiesced to India’s role in the region in the absence of any constructive approach that would lead to a resolution of the security transition in Afghanistan and facilitate its exit. In the face of Pakistan’s intransigence, Russian reluctance and Chinese ambiguity, India has emerged as a clear choice. From being marginalised due to Pakistan, India is poised to play a larger role to protect its interests in the post-withdrawal security situation. This comes from the painful realisation that the process of reconciliation and reintegration of the Taliban is not an Afghan-led process. The US has recently tried to engage Pakistan to seek its help in facilitating talks with the Taliban. Islamabad has again re-emerged as a major player when it released some of the Taliban leaders kept in its captivity.

2.3. Reducing Tension: India-Pakistan Engagement

India, while adopting a multi-pronged strategy towards Afghanistan, also realises the importance of Pakistan for the resolution of the Afghan problem. Initially, India tried to confine its engagement to the economic development of Afghanistan, so as not to ruffle too many feathers in Pakistan. Yet Indian workers and its embassy became the target of terrorist attacks carried out by the Haqqani network supported and sheltered by the Pakistani intelligence agency, the ISI. India slowed down its pace of investment after repeated attacks by the Taliban and relied on its own personnel to provide security to its workers engaged in various developmental projects. In fact, after the attack on the embassy and later the suicide attack on the hotel that killed staff of India’s medical mission in Kabul, there was some rethinking in New Delhi on the strategy regarding its presence there. To alleviate Indian fears, President Karzai visited India on his way to attend the SAARC summit in Thimpu, personally assuring the safety of Indian workers. He requested New Delhi not to reduce its engagement with Afghanistan. India’s decision to remain engaged was demonstrated by its decision to raise its aid to US$ 2 billion in the aftermath of the attack by Pakistan-sponsored groups. Given the strategic uncertainty, New Delhi has banked on the Afghan government and has expressed its willingness to cooperate with other regional countries to sustain its presence in Afghanistan. For example, India’s Vice President visited Tajikistan in April and Uzbekistan in May this

year to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation and discuss post-2014 withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. It is already upgrading Ayni Airfield in Tajikistan.

Pakistan is perturbed with India’s presence in its strategic backyard. A recent study argues that if Pakistan’s concerns vis-à-vis India remain unaddressed, Pakistan’s geographical location provides “unmatched advantage [...] to compete with Indian strategic presence in a subversive manner”.136 While this report calls for transparency on India’s activities in Afghanistan,137 Pakistan is not prepared to accept India’s presence let alone its explanation for its presence. There is a strong feeling that due to its geographical location and Afghanistan’s landlocked status, Pakistan enjoys a monopoly to determine the future course of the Afghan state, in which New Delhi would not play a role. Many strategic planners in Pakistan have repeatedly reminded President Karzai that in order to build good relations with Pakistan, India needs to reduce its footprint in Afghanistan.

The discourse on India-Pakistan rivalry in Afghanistan is of recent origin. The two countries have fought three wars, but Afghanistan was never used by India as a front to threaten Pakistan. Yet, Pakistan is opposed to India’s presence in Afghanistan.138 Taliban’s ouster from Kabul was perceived as a strategic loss to Pakistan. Members of the Northern Alliance came to dominate the government for a brief period post-2001. The domination of this group, which was once supported by India, was perceived as the growing influence of India. Pashtun elements who are part of the government continue to be critical of Pakistan and blame it for the worsening security situation. This anti-Pakistan feeling is thought to be benefiting India at the cost of Pakistan. Such an impression continues to dominate the thinking in Islamabad.

India’s attempt to engage Pakistan bilaterally is an effort to address Islamabad’s apprehensions regarding India’s intentions in Afghanistan. India has kept the dialogue going in spite of domestic opposition to any such contact in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks. It agreed to include Balochistan in the bilateral joint statement in Sharm al Shaikh that was issued on the side-lines of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit. A dialogue on the issue would allow the two countries to deal with Pakistan’s accusations linking Indian consulates in Afghanistan to violence in Balochistan. The main purpose was to keep channels of communication open between the two countries to address the issue of mistrust and suspicion. An absence of dialogue would heighten such predicaments. As a senior government of India official pointed out, “Pakistan does not want to discuss Afghanistan with India though it makes all kinds of claims on India’s so-called role in Balochistan”.139 Similarly, trade between India and Afghanistan over the land route through Wagah is not allowed by Pakistan. While Pakistan allows Afghan trucks to deliver goods at Wagah, these trucks go back empty as a similar facility is not extended to India. At present, however, Pakistan allows India to export wheat to Afghanistan through the Karachi port.

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137 Ibid., p. 47.
139 Interview in New Delhi with a senior Indian government official who prefers to remain unnamed. He emphasized that it is India who should be complaining about Pakistan in Afghanistan rather than the other way around. See also the then Foreign Secretary’s statement ‘Media Briefing by Foreign Secretary on her Discussions with Pakistani Foreign Secretary’, 25 February 2010, www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530115594
Unlike other countries in the region, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan are not trilaterally engaged at the official level. Officially, Pakistan does not recognise any role for India in Afghanistan. Unofficially, however, these three countries have several dialogues at the track-two level. Deliberations between former diplomats and officials have been held in India and Afghanistan, though Pakistan has been reluctant to host any such trilateral meeting in its territory. Pakistani participants feel that such dialogues actually do not further any understanding, as the countries stick to their national narratives. There are divergent views among retired bureaucrats and policy makers in Pakistan on whether India and Pakistan can develop synergy in their approach in Afghanistan. Some argue that confidence-building between the two is important before any such cooperation can materialise, while others feel that India has to recognise Pakistan’s ‘prime’ position in Afghanistan. Some argue for a ‘reciprocal sensitivity’ to each other’s interest in Afghanistan, though at present security cooperation is impossible.

To deal with the situation arising out of the withdrawal of international troops India has tried to engage in economic reconstruction, training the Afghan police and its civil servants to strengthen the backbone of the Afghan government which will withstand the process of transition beyond 2014. India has also tried to reconnect with all the ethnic groups in Afghanistan through various development programs. To prevent the possibility of Pakistan trying to push certain radical groups backed by its army and intelligence agency to dictate the terms of a future settlement, India has reiterated that transition in Afghanistan has to be an Afghan-led process.

2.4. Multilateral Efforts

India has been supportive of regional initiatives to engage the stakeholders of peace in Afghanistan, as this will directly impinge on security and stability. According to a senior Indian official from the Ministry of External Affairs, the primary objective is to emphasise “to the wider audiences the importance of a regional approach and the important role of both India and Pakistan to this end. In other words, discouraging solely Pakistani based approaches and solutions. We also wanted to tell Pakistan of our desire to work on the issues of mutual interest and rejection of a zero sum game and calculation. Pakistan also will be restrained to accuse us publicly of excluding it from regional cooperation and initiatives. Further to these, it was an avenue for our emerging civil society to participate and contribute to foreign policy. So it is a win-win process”.

Apart from engaging Pakistan, there are several other initiatives of which New Delhi is a part. Efforts were made for a trilateral engagement at track one and a half level between India, Iran and Afghanistan. An attempt at this was made by the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in 2010, in which scholars from the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) of Iran and officials and members of parliament from

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140 Narrated by two Pakistani retired diplomats in Islamabad who prefer to remain unidentified.
141 As expressed by Tanvir Ahmed Khan: “Pakistan should not fight shy of opening a direct conversation about Afghanistan’s future with New Delhi as neither India nor Pakistan can eliminate the other from the Afghan scene”, “Reality Check”, Dawn, 31 January 2012.
142 Interview with Ambassador Ayaz Wazir, a retired diplomat who was handling the Afghanistan desk in Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1980s, Islamabad, December 2011.
143 Interview with Shireen Mazari, International Organizing Secretary, Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf, 13 December 2011.
144 Comments by an official from the Ministry of External Affairs, India, who prefers to be unidentified, interviewed in April 2012.
Afghanistan participated. New Delhi had earlier expressed its desire for a trilateral initiative, but things did not move given the damp in India-Iran relations after India’s vote in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution against Iran. Foreign Ministers of India, Iran and Afghanistan met in New York to finalise the Iranian proposal for a trilateral initiative on Afghanistan, without much success.145 A report of the American think tank Centre for Security and International Studies (CSIS) suggested that the US needs to compromise and should not oppose Kabul from developing intimate ties with Tehran, as it can be a valuable diplomatic interlocutor and a trading partner to Kabul.146 One Afghan diplomat also argued that “a trilateral cooperation mechanism between Afghanistan, Iran and India, particularly on the economics and trade front would be vital for the stability of the country. New Delhi and Kabul need to persuade the US on this”.147

Tehran has its own vested interest in cooperating with India.148 It has engaged India to curtail Pakistan’s dominant position in Afghanistan and has approved Indian investment in building an alternative port in Chabahar, Iran.149 New Delhi has also built the Zarang Delaram Highway in Kandahar and Heart, connecting Afghanistan to the Iranian border. Recently India has approved a US$ 100 million investment in Chabahar port, which was delayed given Iran’s ambivalence. During a meeting that took place on the sidelines of the NAM summit in Tehran in August 2012, India, Iran and Afghanistan decided to set up a Joint Working Group to look into trilateral cooperation to develop Chabahar. India’s Foreign Minister visited Tehran in May this year to hold a meeting under the framework of the Joint Commission. Earlier, Iran along with India and Russia had supported the Northern Alliance to counter the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, then backed by Pakistan, UAE and Saudi Arabia. However, after 9/11 this consensus seems to have broken down. Iran is not happy with New Delhi’s stance on its nuclear program and also uncomfortable with the growing India-US relationship.

New Delhi’s relations with Kabul have kept it in a good stead. Kabul has kept India informed of developments about the future transition. The trust factor that exists between these two countries has provided India with an assurance that the Karzai government will protect India’s interests. The interests of Afghanistan are intertwined with India’s, as neither country wants to see the domination of Islamabad in the emerging power equation in Afghanistan. Therefore, while New Delhi supports a multi-ethnic government it is not supportive of the return of a hard-line Taliban to power. The result of close collaboration has resulted in twelve visits by President Karzai to India since he assumed power in 2002.

The two countries signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement in October 2011. Articles 4 and 5 clearly lay out the principal areas in which this partnership will be sought: “Security

145 “Now, an India, Iran, Afghanistan Tri Summit”, Indian Express, 21 September 2010, online at: http://www.indianexpress.com/news/now-indiairanafghanistan-trisummit/684954/
147 Lecture by Ahmad Nasir Ahmad Andisha, Ambassador of Afghanistan to Australia, 6 August 2012, New Delhi.
148 Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, “Ahmadinejad Hunkers down with Karzai”, Asia Times Online, 9 March 2010, online at: http://atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/LC09Ak01.html
149 The agreement was signed in 2003. Iran has now allowed India to invest in a US$ 100 million project. See Pranab Dhal Samanta, “India in a Bind as Iran Okays Port Investment”, Indian Express, 23 August 2012.
cooperation between the Sides is intended to help enhance their respective and mutual efforts in the fight against international terrorism, organised crime, illegal trafficking in narcotics, money laundering and so on”. As stated in Article 5: “India agrees to assist, as mutually determined, in the training, equipping and capacity building programs for Afghan National Security Forces”.\textsuperscript{150} From India’s and Afghanistan’s point of view, this partnership is significant. India is apprehensive of the US draw-down and is slowly reconciling itself with the fact that the Taliban may be part of the ruling regime in the future. According to a key official in the External Affairs Ministry who would prefer not to be named, “we are in touch with all the groups to protect our interests in Afghanistan”. Some scholars believe that India may have blocked the inclusion of strong pro-Pakistani elements in the post-2014 government that would assume control in Kabul.\textsuperscript{151} While it is relying on the possibility of an “Afghan led and Afghan owned” negotiation, it is also aware of the weakness of Kabul to strike through a deal with the Taliban independently. Pakistan holds the key to success. India is reluctant to have a military footprint in Afghanistan and has been extremely cautious of this. Though some Indian scholars feel a military footprint is a pre-requisite for influence, as a lot is at stake in Afghanistan this does not have popular support within India.\textsuperscript{152} Some American scholars argue that India’s “force projection in Afghanistan – through advanced training or operational troop deployment – would solidify India’s role as the primary provider of security in South Asia.”\textsuperscript{153} In a response to the Afghan Ambassador to India Shaida Abdali’s statement that Afghanistan would be looking forward to lethal and non-lethal weapons and equipment for Afghan armed forces, Syed Akrubuddin, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs said that India will consider collaboration within the strategic partnership council, which is an appropriate forum to discuss any such request.\textsuperscript{154} Reacting to President Karzai’s request to Delhi to supply lethal and nonlethal weapons to enable Afghanistan to prepare for the post-2014 transition, Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary said, “As a sovereign country Afghanistan can pursue its own policies, but we hope that it would mind the overall peace and security situation”.

India has successfully used economic aid to connect itself with the people of Afghanistan. Many Afghans perceive India as a country that has no intention to dominate Afghanistan. On the other hand, as an important senior government of India functionary said: “we would not have been a regional power without our involvement in Afghanistan. This has been enabled by its aid program. Few years back India did not figure as an important player in Afghanistan. But now India matters”. This official further added: “in the 1990s India was out of Afghanistan and did not figure in any of the regional initiatives. However, its present engagement in Afghanistan has opened up opportunities for India to be part of regional multilateral efforts and play a proactive role as was the case in the

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\item \textsuperscript{150} Online at: http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=100018343&pid=2339&flg=1&sz=8e
\item \textsuperscript{153} Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk, “Strengthen the Bond”, Hindustan Times, 11 July 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Online at: http://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?l=21719/Transcripts+of+media+briefings+on+Hon+VicePresidents+Forthcoming+Visits+to+Uzbekistan; See also press release, http://www.mea.gov.in/incoming-visit-detail.htm?21737/Visit+of+President+of+Afghanistan+to+India; See also transcript of the Afghan President’s interaction with foreign journalists and think tanks on 22 May 2013: http://www.afghanembassy.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=303&lang=en
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investment summit which was organised by the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi to explore economic opportunities in Afghanistan”.155

Till date, 100 Indian firms have established business in Afghanistan to the tune of US$ 25 million.156 As declared by S. M. Krishna, former Foreign Minister of India, speaking in the Delhi Investment Summit on Afghanistan, “the military draw-down should not result in a political or security vacuum that will be filled by extremists once again. There should be something productive in its place. We feel that foreign investment and domestic private sector development, both small and large scale, can play that role. Let the grey suits of company executives take the place of olive green or desert brown fatigues of soldiers; and CEOs, the place of Generals.”157 Though some Indian analysts are sceptical and feel the Taliban’s return will overturn India’s engagement, the current policy suggests that India would not be deterred by such a prospect. It has opened up channels of communication with all the groups, taking Afghanistan’s reality into consideration. Thus it is not surprising that the Taliban praised India for not putting a military footprint in Afghanistan in spite of it being goaded by the US. India can consider the following measures to deepen its engagement:

(i) Consolidate its economic developmental effort in Afghanistan. If need be, India should not hesitate to provide more aid to various developmental schemes. Building schools and universities to harness human resources and train future intellectuals would be important.

(ii) Double the scholarships for Afghan students to study in Indian universities and professional institutes.

(iii) Form coalitions with likeminded countries to keep the ethnic groups together, so as to confront radicalisation.

(iv) Work in tandem with other regional countries to ensure stability. India should not hesitate in leading frequent proactive discussions and consultations with other countries in the region on how to stabilise Afghanistan.

(v) If need be, open a bilateral channel of communication with Pakistan’s government and military to minimise Pakistan’s apprehensions regarding India’s role in Afghanistan.

(vi) Make its presence visible in Afghanistan as it has already started to do by building transport communication networks and constructing the Parliament building.

(vii) Increase its investments in health care in Afghanistan by building hospitals and opening dispensaries in remote areas.

India’s investments have generated tremendous goodwill in Afghanistan which will ultimately help India gain strategic influence. What has also helped India is the anti-Pakistan sentiment. As a young faculty member in Kabul University said, “The younger generation of Afghans do not understand the historical linkages. They feel that Pakistan

155 Interview with a senior official at the National Security Council, 9 August 2012.
156 Elizabeth Roche and Ruchira Singh, “Delhi Meeting Seeks to Open Investment route to Kabul”, Mint, 29 June 2012. The Ministry of External Affairs and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) jointly hosted an ‘Investors Summit’ in New Delhi in June this year, in which 270 private sectors firms attended.
157 Foreign Minister’s Speech, 28 June 2012, online at: http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=530119677
sends terrorists to Afghanistan whereas India has built roads, infrastructure, hospital facilities and other health care.” India has preferred multilateral bodies to engage within a regional framework in Afghanistan, creating less scope for a zero sum game undercutting each other’s interest.

158 Interview with a lecturer from Kabul University, Islamabad, 7 December 2011.
3. Regional Organisations and Regional Initiatives

Apart from various international actors and their geopolitical objectives, regional organisations have important roles to play in Afghanistan. Until now they have played a very limited role due to the organisational structures and diverse interests of their members. These organisations are also not recognised as core security providers in the region due to lack of consensus among the members regarding their role in bolstering security, as well as the unwillingness of NATO to involve these regional organisations in Afghanistan. The member countries however can become a source of instability if their interests are adversely affected. The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) remains largely security-centric in its approach to the Central Asian states, while the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has concentrated mainly on cooperation on terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime affecting the security of its member countries. Though in the short term it is comfortable with the US presence and its role as a major security provider, given Chinese emphasis on connectivity Beijing is constructing transport and communication networks while taking precautionary measures to deal with security challenges emanating from an unstable Afghanistan.

3.1. The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)

CSTO is an organisation without any consensus on its strategic vision. Its role in internal security has been questioned by the member countries and it is not clear on its external objectives. It is unlikely that it will take the place of NATO in Afghanistan in the future, though at one point of time it was considered as a major bloc that might challenge NATO’s eastward expansion. Though NATO at one point was willing to consider the Russian proposal for a CSTO-NATO cooperation in Afghanistan, the US successfully blocked any such initiative. Washington felt such cooperation would provide legitimacy to Russia’s standing as a ‘security manager’ in Central Asia. This would also legitimise Russia’s demand to address post-Soviet Eurasia security issues in consultation with Moscow. Russia continues to seek CSTO-ISAF cooperation on drug trafficking and feels that the lack of response to this suggestion only reduces the efficiency of cooperation.

The organisation has not yet taken off, for various reasons. Members such as Belarus and Uzbekistan have different stances on the functioning of the CSTO. As the main architect of this organisation, the Russians are clear that they would not like to put...
their soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan, due to the bitter experiences of the past. Rather, Russia has proposed to Tajikistan to reconsider the deployment of the Russian army in its border with Afghanistan. Russia has been arguing for a strengthening of the CSTO as a forum. Moscow wants to increase its influence through a variety of counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics initiatives under the CSTO.\textsuperscript{164} Unfortunately the member states would not like to concede a dominating position to Moscow. By engaging Central Asian countries independently, the US can undermine Russia’s geopolitical agenda in this region.

After 1999, Uzbekistan failed to renew its membership in the CSTO and only returned to it in 2006. However, except for 2007 it did not participate in its activities. Uzbekistan also refused to sign the Collective Operational Reactive Force (CORF). This was formed in 2010 to adopt a collective response, to help CSTO members if they face external threats, while avoiding interventions in the internal conflicts of member states. Between 1999 and 2005, Uzbekistan attempted to court the US, but their partnership fell apart over the massacre at Andijan. Russia acted quickly to get Uzbekistan into the fold of CSTO in 2006 and went to the extent of condoning the massacre. In June 2012, Uzbekistan decided to pull out of the CSTO citing the lack of strategic plans with regard to Afghanistan and disregard for the concerns of Uzbekistan.\textsuperscript{165} Two other countries, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, have raised the price of rent for Russian bases in their countries. Tashkent was not happy with Russia’s decision to open a base in Kyrgyzstan, with which it has problems.

While the IMT continues to be active on the Afghanistan-Tajikistan as well as Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan borders, Russia has withdrawn its border guards from the Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan borders and refuses to redeploy them. The Central Asian countries feel that Russia is trying to expand its influence through the CSTO in the name of dealing with terrorism, and that any security arrangement with NATO needs to be clinched bilaterally rather than through the CSTO. Countries like Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are part of NATO’s Partnership for Peace Initiative. The 2007 Dushanbe meeting of the CSTO authorised its members to conduct joint operations aimed at peacekeeping and contemplated deployment elsewhere with UN authorisation.

Uzbekistan was seemingly moving back to the US fold and was open to the suggestion of providing a base to the US in return for military hardware. Tashkent however adopted a law in its Parliament banning foreign military bases, thereby ending any such speculations. In the CSTO meeting in December 2011, Russia proposed that military bases by non-CSTO countries can only be established after the concurrence of other member states.\textsuperscript{166} Given the post-2014 situation in Afghanistan, the Central Asian states are eager to maximise their interests by forming new understandings with the US and

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\item M.K. Bhadra Kumar, “Tashkent Deserts CSTO-Again”, \textit{Asia Times}, 3 July 2012, online at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Africa/NG03Ag01.html
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NATO through bilaterally arrangements. Russia’s efforts are aimed to preserve its role as a “legitimate and dominant security provider in the post-Soviet space”.

CSTO is not prepared to take any proactive role as an organisation in Afghanistan. Though it has formed a working group on Afghanistan in 2005 under the auspices of the CSTO Foreign Ministers Council, its cooperation until now has been limited to strengthening Afghan security institutions and curbing drug trafficking out of Afghanistan. Rather, it aims to protect the border of its member states and contain spill-over effects of the Afghan war in the form of terrorism and drug trafficking. Rivalry and internal struggles to find a political niche in an organisation dominated by Russia has prevented the CSTO to consolidate itself as an effective organisation. This reduces its potential to play an efficient role in Afghanistan.

3.2. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

The SCO has the potential to play a role in Afghanistan since its members as well as observer countries have enormous stakes in Afghanistan. The role of the SCO has however remained marginal in the War on Terror as individual countries have entered into agreements with the US to provide base facilities and offer supply routes to NATO troops in Afghanistan. While it is felt that the US will be able to provide effective security in this region, member countries signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism in 2001, and agreed on a Regional Anti-Terror Structure (RATS) in 2002, headquartered in Tashkent. Since 2003, it has conducted counter-terrorism exercises with up to 10,000 troops drawn from all the member states. The SCO focuses on terrorism, extremism and separatism as major security challenges. This cooperation aims to manage the threat that instability in Afghanistan may pose. In June 2009, the member states signed an agreement known as the Convention on Counter-terrorism. Afghanistan has been attending SCO meetings as a Special Invitee since 2004, and was given an observer status in the June 2012 summit in Beijing.

The SCO established a contact group on Afghanistan in 2005 to facilitate interaction between SCO and Afghanistan. However, as described by Leonid Moiseyev, the Russian President’s Special Representative for SCO affairs, “inside Afghanistan, SCO member states are ready to work only on an individual basis and mainly on economic issues.” This reflects the reluctance of the organisation to play an effective role. There is also suspicion about the US and NATO presence in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan faced the problem of Islamic radicalism in 2005. It was suspected that the US was supporting the ‘coloured revolution’ through its NGOs and that this could be a reason for instability.

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170 For details, see http://www.hrichina.org/content/5230
Even though none of the SCO countries want to invest in Afghanistan’s security, the SCO in 2005 called upon the US to announce a timeframe for its withdrawal from Afghanistan and dismantling of the bases it has acquired in Afghanistan and Central Asia. This was followed by Uzbekistan’s decision to close the US base there. In the 2009 SCO meeting on Afghanistan held in Moscow, the member countries stated, “SCO was one of the appropriate fora for a wide dialogue with participation of partners on the Afghanistan-related issues in the context of joint efforts of the international community on Afghanistan and for practical interaction between Afghanistan and its neighbouring states in combating terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime.”

SCO also has an anti-drug strategy adopted in the Astana summit.

The SCO, which from time to time has issued statements of common interest on Afghanistan, has confined itself to deal with problems of trafficking of narcotics and terrorism. During his previous tenure as President of Russia, Putin went to the extent of proposing a security belt around Afghanistan to deal with this problem. The two countries that have a major say in the SCO are China and Russia. They both have economic and military capabilities unlike other members. However, the two countries have different points of view with regard to any military engagement in Afghanistan. While Russia wants the SCO to emerge as more security-oriented given its links with Central Asian countries, the Chinese want it to evolve as an economic organisation that would further Chinese interests. NATO was until recently reluctant to provide any space to the SCO that would allow a significant say either to Russia or China in regional affairs. Moreover, the SCO is not clear about the kind of role it can play in the stabilisation of Afghanistan. The March 2009 SCO summit in Russia focused on Afghanistan and highlighted the need for SCO members to help fight terrorism. According to a scholar, “some Central Asian leaders are worried about Moscow exploiting Afghan problems to create a more defense-oriented organisation out of the SCO”. An SCO plan of action in Afghanistan was adopted in 2009 to deal with terrorism, organised crime and drug trafficking. It also includes the sharing of intelligence and involves Afghanistan in a phased manner in the SCO effort to combat terrorism.

Russia claims that the SCO was created before 9/11 precisely so as to deal with the Afghan problem. As a part of a joint counter-terrorism exercise, the SCO started holding peace mission exercises in 2007. However, such exercises are limited to addressing problems of terrorism in Central Asia and do not deal with the situation within Afghanistan. In the June 2011 Astana summit it was felt that peace and stability in Afghanistan will impact the region and the world, calling for an independent, peaceful and neutral Afghanistan. Russia has advocated the SCO’s closer cooperation with Afghanistan and wants to upgrade SCO contact with regional organisations formed by the former Soviet states, including close security cooperation with the CSTO.

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176 For the Plan of Action of SCO and Afghanistan, see http://www.sectsco.org/EN/show.asp?id=99
177 Putin’s speech in the Beijing SCO summit, online at: http://rusemb.org.uk/foreignpolicy/170
Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev, writing in the Moscow Times of 15 June 2011 on “The Smart Power of SCO”, argued that it is “possible that the SCO will assume responsibility for many issues in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of coalition forces in 2014.” As has been the case in the past, these issues would pertain to terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime. However, it is unlikely to get involved in Afghanistan in any meaningful manner to ensure stability. The member states will continue to rely on the NATO and ISAF forces. Since the SCO does not have a common position, the member countries have inked bilateral and trilateral engagements with Afghanistan to enhance their security interests. They have provided transit and bases to the coalition troops operating there purely on a bilateral basis and resist any discussion on these issues with any other regional powers. The SCO as a regional organisation needs to bind together its members and the observers to weave together a plan that is acceptable to all. The SCO does not have any country that can play the role of a leader to steer a plan on augmenting security in the post-withdrawal phase in Afghanistan. It is caught in between balancing the interests of China and Russia to a large extent, and those of Uzbekistan to a lesser extent.

3.3. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

Afghanistan became a member of SAARC in the 2007 summit held in New Delhi. Its membership in this organisation facilitates its interaction with the South Asian countries. Kabul has sought greater trade and counter-terrorism cooperation from SAARC member countries, notably from Pakistan. SAARC has two important agreements on cooperation on terrorism. First is the SAARC convention on terrorism adopted in 1987 and second is the additional protocol on terrorism adopted in 2003.

During the anti-Soviet jihad, many jihadists from the subcontinent were recruited to fight the Soviets. Some of the countries in South Asia, especially Pakistan and Bangladesh, are fighting this anti-Soviet legacy in terms of growing fundamentalism and terrorism and the Talibanisation of their polity. In Pakistan and Bangladesh these jihadists are now committed to establishing an Islamic state along the lines of the Taliban. For example, one of the slogans coined by Bangladeshi radicals was “Amra hobo Taliban, Bangladesh hobe Afghanistan” (“We will become Taliban and Bangladesh will become Afghanistan”). Calling for Islamic Sharia, groups like the Jamaatul Mujaheddin Bangladesh not only orchestrated bomb blasts in 63 out of 64 districts in Bangladesh, but for the first time the country also witnessed suicide attacks. Thus, the situation in Afghanistan affects the overall regional stability in South Asia.

Afghanistan is one of the least developed countries within the SAARC and would benefit from the concessions provided to the Least Developed Countries (LDC) under the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). SAARC also has separate funds for developing communication networks as one of the windows available under the SAARC Development Fund (SDF). The organisation has agreed to establish connectivity within the region and beyond. There are other possibilities within the SAARC for cooperation. For example, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan can cooperate among themselves at the

sub-regional level under the SAARC charter. The World Bank has recommended the establishment of a Western grid connecting Afghanistan, Pakistan and India in a regional energy network. Allowing India to trade with Afghanistan through Wagah can be contemplated within the regional framework as a bilateral framework would complicate the matter and bring in bilateral security dynamics. As a member of SAARC, Pakistan can allow India to trade with Afghanistan through its territory within such a regional connectivity framework.

All the three regional organisations have the potential to play a responsible role in Afghanistan. The members of these organisations are also countries of the region with great stakes in Afghanistan. As individual countries they may not have the capacity, but through regional organisations they can work jointly rather than at cross purposes.

3.4. Building Stakes in Afghanistan’s Stability

The US has encouraged Afghanistan to take the initiative for cooperation with neighbouring countries once described as at ‘cold peace’. Building multiple stakeholders through granting mining rights and facilitating energy and transport connectivity would provide regional countries a greater stake in Afghanistan. The US is already in the process of handing over combat responsibility to the Afghan troops and aims to complete the process by 2014. The US is also negotiating future arrangements with Afghanistan that will provide political and legal sanction for its presence there. According to President Karzai, Afghanistan has agreed to nine bases for ‘mutually beneficial’ security cooperation in return for ‘security and economic’ guarantees to Afghanistan. There are apprehensions regarding the capability of Afghan troops to take over the security responsibility in the face of growing Taliban assaults. Nevertheless, several regional countries are engaged in Afghanistan in bilateral and multilateral frameworks to protect their interests and help Afghanistan to deal with its stability challenges. The countries of the region have an interest in Afghanistan’s stability. However, they vary in their approaches on how to contribute to long-term stability. Pakistan has emerged as a prime actor in ensuring Afghanistan’s stability, yet it has also been a prime accused in its instability. Though in this context India, Iran and Russia have a similar outlook, they do not have a similar approach towards the problem. While Afghanistan continues to depend heavily on Pakistan, Iran has tried to protect its interests by arming the Taliban. As it has become clear that the Taliban will likely participate in the future Afghan government, each country has opened up their channels of communication with the Taliban to protect their interests.

The countries of the region have engaged Afghanistan through multiples initiatives. The presidents of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia and Tajikistan have agreed to cooperate in building infrastructure and improving energy cooperation through joint working groups. The Central Asia and South Asia (CASA) electricity and transmission project will connect energy hungry South Asia to Central Asia, and this initiative is pushed by both the US and Russia. It is proposed to be funded by the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank

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180 Afghanistan has insisted that the US must guarantee that it will respond to any cross-border incursion or attack on its territory. However, the US has made it clear that presently it aims at a security arrangement and not a defense treaty that will pledge military intervention against aggressors. As reported by David Zucchino, “US Seeks Use of Nine Afghan Military Bases After 2014”, Los Angeles Times, 9 May 2013, online at: http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-afghanistan-bases-20130510,0,6566369.story
and the Islamic Development Bank. However, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have some disagreements over the project. While Tajikistan would benefit substantially, Kyrgyzstan would not get much benefit proportional to its US$ 200 million investment, since Tajikistan is not interested in transmitting Kyrgyzstan’s electricity as it is also a major electricity producing country. On the other hand, Russia has expressed its interest to invest if invited by this grouping. There are transnational electricity grids already supplying power to Afghanistan. For example, Heart is connected to the Turkmenistan grid, Mazar-i-Sharif is connected with Uzbekistan and Kunduz is connected with Tajikistan, and there is also the Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul transmission line which connects Kabul to the Uzbekistan grid.

In the quadrilateral meeting hosted by Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan it was claimed that the security and stability of the region depends on these countries, but there was no proposition on how to translate their vision into action. It was also recognised that Afghan troops need to be trained in combat operations to take care of the situation after 2014.\textsuperscript{181} In this regard, Russia has agreed to help Afghanistan in training its security forces. These four countries have agreed to establish a Joint Economic Council.

Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran established the Economic Council of Persian Speaking Union in 2008, and have agreed to improve rail and road links between them and Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Tajikistan have built a bridge on the Pyanj River to facilitate trade between them. This bridge is financed by the US government. China is also planning to build road links connecting China with Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. China has contributed a US$ 10 billion loan for infrastructure development within the region. China has proposed to build railroad from Afghanistan to Xinjiang via Central Asia to transport copper ore from Afghanistan. It has also proposed to build a 1300-megawatt high transmission power line from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan through Afghanistan to Peshawar.

Turkmenistan ratified a Friendship and Cooperation Agreement with Afghanistan in August 2011. It has proposed connecting to Afghanistan by expanding its own infrastructure,\textsuperscript{182} Turkmenistan this year completed construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan and Tajikistan railway line, which is likely to increase trade with Afghanistan.

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) proposed gas pipeline is another regional initiative. This would also connect the South Asian region to Central Asia, not only to ensure energy security but also to create a common interest between India and Pakistan, as without stability in Afghanistan the construction of such a pipeline may not be possible.\textsuperscript{183} This will give both India and Pakistan a stake in Afghanistan’s future.

\textsuperscript{181} Press Statement following the “Meeting of Presidents of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan”, 2 September 2011, online at: http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/2766
\textsuperscript{182} Turkmenistan elaborates on 5-point peace formula in Afghanistan”, News Central Asia, online at: http://newscentralasia.net/2011/05/24/turkmenistan-elaborates-on-5-point-formula-for-peace-in-afghanistan/?utm_export__
\textsuperscript{183} The pipeline was to be started in 2012 and scheduled to be completed two years later, and to provide 33 billion cubic meters (over one trillion cubic feet) of Turkmen gas to Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. According to the agreement, India and Pakistan would each receive 14 billion and Afghanistan 5 billion cubic meters of natural gas a year. The undertaking is financed by the Asian Development Bank, in which the US and Japan each hold 552,210 shares, the largest proportion of shares among its 67 members at 12.756 percent a piece, online at: http://theglobalrealm.com/2011/01/05/nato-trains-afghan-army-to-guard-asian-pipeline/
stability. Recently China and Turkmenistan signed an agreement to export Turkmen gas to China via Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{184} This pipeline would pass through Afghanistan and Tajikistan to reach China.

The US, Pakistan and Afghanistan strategic dialogue is held to facilitate regional understanding. Similarly, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the UK have held a trilateral dialogue on the future of Afghanistan, while India, the US and Afghanistan are also proposing to have a trilateral strategic dialogue on Afghanistan to coordinate their policies towards Kabul after 2014. In another trilateral meeting between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkey just before the Istanbul summit, Pakistan offered to train Afghan troops. During the visit of the Afghan Defence Minister to Pakistan in January this year, the two sides agreed to explore the possibility of defence cooperation measures that the Afghan and Pakistan armies intend to initiate on an “enduring training relationship”.\textsuperscript{185} The two countries have established the Afghanistan and Pakistan Joint Council to discuss issues of security and stability in Afghanistan while simultaneously engaging various groups through the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC). High-level security, military and intelligence officials from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkey have signed a Protocol on Conduct of Mutual Exercises and Courses and Protocol on Training Cooperation between Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{186} Iran is also engaged with Afghanistan and Pakistan in a trilateral framework to deal with common challenges of radicalism and drug trafficking.

There is a trilateral dialogue forum encompassing China, Pakistan and Afghanistan, unofficially known as the Pamir group. Building on the Indo-Russian joint working group on terrorism, India, China and Russia have also formed a trilateral forum to discuss larger global issues including Afghanistan. In the Foreign Ministers meeting held in Moscow in April last year they urged that ISAF should fulfil its task in Afghanistan “in accordance with the mandates of UNSC resolutions” and their withdrawal should be guided by the security situation on the ground.\textsuperscript{187} The first India, Russia and China trilateral focused on Afghanistan, and was followed by an India-China dialogue on Afghanistan held in Beijing in April this year.

Given the vast economic interests, these regional initiatives are likely to create stakeholders in peace and stability in Afghanistan. Karzai has successfully multilateralised various projects and has invited regional countries to participate in exploring Afghanistan’s mineral resources. The Silk Route proposal is an important initiative in this regard. While it has awarded Aynak to China, exploration of the Hajigok copper mine has been given to an Indian consortium which plans to invest US$ 14 billion there. The building of TAPI would create joint stakes for India and Pakistan. Initiatives like the India, Russia and Iran proposed multi-modal transport network would increase their stakes in Afghanistan’s stability. To facilitate trade, New Delhi, Tehran and Kabul have agreed to give Indian goods heading towards Afghanistan and Central Asia preferential

\textsuperscript{184} See Robert M Cutler, “China Lifts Turkmen Gas Sale”, 15 June 2012, Asia Times Online, online at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/NF15Ag02.html
\textsuperscript{185} See the Express Tribune, 29 January 2013.
\textsuperscript{186} For details, see http://www.dha.com.tr/joint-statement-released-after-6th-trilateral-summit-of-afghanistan-pakistan-and-turkey_228628.html
\textsuperscript{187} For the full text of the Joint Communiqué of the Russian, Indian and Chinese Foreign Ministers Meet, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-04/14/c_122980038.htm
treatment. All these investments would tie these countries’ interests to the security and stability of the region. It is hoped that China may play a role in persuading Pakistan to contribute meaningfully to the peace efforts in Afghanistan since Beijing now has a greater economic stake.

While pursuing its Afghan policy by aligning its vital interests with other countries of the region, India’s engagement with Pakistan would further the prospect of a regional solution. Given the fact that an unstable Afghanistan would affect the two countries, marginalisation of one would lead to a zero sum game which is not in the interest of either country.  

The ring road in Afghanistan connects various regions within the country and also connects the neighbouring countries. Since Afghanistan wants to emerge as a hub of transit, this would generate a source of revenue for the country. Its land-locked status could be converted into an opportunity through transit facilities. Afghanistan has also tried to balance the US and Iranian interests and has engaged both politically, economically and strategically.

Many scholars argue that Afghanistan is a victim of a new Great Game played by the regional countries and the US. It is also important to note that the weak central government in Afghanistan provides little confidence to the regional countries. As a result, each country pursues a policy of hedging so that they do not suffer from the spillover effects of an unstable Afghanistan, even though “Uzbeks and Tajiks in post-Soviet Central Asia live in a completely different mental universe than their co-ethnics in the South”. The complexity of the security dynamics is such that the countries of the region do not have a common approach to what they would consider security or even a modicum of stability in Afghanistan. As a result, the US has emerged as an important country that will influence the shaping of the regional security dynamics. Pakistan will also play a major role, while to a large extent the regional security situation will be determined by internal dynamics within Afghanistan that are beyond the control of the countries of the region.


4. Challenges of Political Fragmentation in Afghanistan

Historically, the Afghan state has been dominated by the Pashtuns, not only due to the fact that they are the dominant population but also because the Afghan royalty stemmed from the Pashtun tribal confederation. The Durrans ruled Afghanistan for 300 years, until it was declared a republic in 1973. The royal family derived their support largely from the Pashtun tribes in the South. During Amir Abdur Rahman’s rule he resettled some Pashtun tribes in the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara dominated areas to create pockets of support in the North. This was also an effective way to deal with the threat posed by the Ghilzai Pashtuns in the South. The King ruled through tribal levies that constituted the bulk of his military. The King also patronised the ulema and Mullahs to gain support to his rule. The state was centralised and all power was concentrated in the hand of the King after he ended the ‘regional political autonomy that had formerly characterised Afghanistan.’ His successor, King Amanullah, made the nation the source of legitimacy for the rulers, introduced modern education, reduced the role of the Mullahs and made loya jirga the source of his authority. Political reforms that could transform the tribal society were introduced which overhauled tribal social and legal norms and undermined the role of the ulema and the privileges they enjoyed during Amir Abdul Rehman’s period. After Amanullah’s removal, the successive governments restored the patronage system established by King Amir Abdul Rahman. The traditional Afghan state system was based on tribal affinity, was hierarchical in nature and sustained through a system of patronage that comes with clan and tribe identity. Loyalty based on tribal affiliation was replaced when the Communists took over power.

The Communists promoted minority culture and language to dilute the majoritarian state that symbolised Pashtun domination. Politicisation of ethnicity, based on the rural-urban divide, pre-dated the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Reforms sought by the Communists pitted the Pashtun kings and Communists on the one side and the rural Pashtuns, Mullahs and tribal Khans on the other side, transcending ethnic and religious divides. Later the government raised a counter-insurgency militia force to defend the state. The promotion of minority culture created dissonance among other groups.

The 1964 constitution ended ethnic preference and all the ethnic groups were awarded equal treatment under this constitution. In 1978 the Communists encouraged other languages like Uzbek, Baloch, Turkamani and Nooristani which received the status of official languages in addition to Dari and Pashto. Some analysts feel that the domination of Pashtuns had declined significantly during the Communist regime. This decline was

evident during the reign of Karmal, who sought an alliance with the non-Pashtun resistance and military commanders.\(^{194}\)

A sense of marginalisation among the Afghan Pashtuns became a real challenge as the state pushed its modernisation campaign. In its efforts to control the rural areas, both Islamists and ethno-nationalists benefitted. In rural areas the movement against the Communist regime was spearheaded by the *ulema* and the Islamists, whereas political parties and groups dominated the urban space. Both the Islamic alliance and the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) were supported by outside forces. Political parties in the past did not have any social base. According to a scholar of Afghanistan, “the earlier political parties both Communist and religious varieties were ‘supra-ethnic and internationalist in their outlook’ [...] the internecine fighting among the Islamic parties in Kabul led to the radical polarisation of ethnic alignments.”\(^{195}\) Historically there were no dominant elements that would distinguish the Islamists from the Communists. The political parties and factions within them exhibited communal divisions based on tribal loyalties, religion and regional loyalties that have fragmented the Afghan politics.\(^{196}\) Ethnic identities have sharpened over time. Ethnic alliances have hardened as leaders have been willing to make opportunistic alliances for their personal aggrandisement. The rulers of Kabul in the past ruled this region with patronage extended to the tribes in return for loyalty to the central government. This problem became glaring after the Soviet withdrawal.\(^{197}\) The divisions were so deep that there was not even a consensus among the Pashtuns on the interim government. Despite that tribal identity is not a major factor that would determine loyalty and tribal fault-lines have the propensity to re-emerge if there is no external threat. Given the breakdown of tribal consensus and decline of Pashtun domination, struggles between various ethnic groups to capture power have become an inherent feature in Afghanistan since 1990.

The sharpening of ethnic identity did not leave any room for Pashtun domination over Afghanistan as was the case in the past. Afghan society also underwent a change. The long drawn anti-Soviet war heightened expectations of the Mujahedeen especially after the humiliating withdrawal of the Soviet forces. Thus any practical solution now required consensus among the Mujahedin groups. While the Pashtuns wanted to reassert their historic domination, other ethnic minorities that enjoyed privileges during the Communist regime were not ready to give up their positions. As a result, various stakeholders looked at their future in terms of ethnic aggrandisement. The post-Soviet withdrawal phase only confirmed the existing fragmentation of political classes along the lines of ethnicity, tribal affinity and the ideological underpinnings of their movements. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the US wanted Pakistan to discontinue its support for the fundamentalists and help the moderate factions.\(^{198}\) Various understandings however failed as the Mujahedeen continued to pursue their personal agenda. Pakistan’s support for Hekmatyar was not acceptable to other groups. The attempt to put in place a consensual government in Kabul failed. For example, the Peshawar accord was not

\(^{194}\) Ibid., p. 625.
supported by the groups based in Iran. Power-sharing between various groups became tenuous. The fight for Kabul continued and Pakistan’s desire to seek connectivity to the newly independent Central Asian states prompted it to look for an alternative.

The Taliban emerged as a pan-Islamic movement dominated by the Pashtuns, which did not assure the minority populations. Subsequent Taliban conquests resulted in the killing of ethnic minorities. The Tajiks and Uzbeks who traditionally dominated government positions and the bureaucracy were removed from their positions in the areas that came under the control of the Taliban. The Taliban had Pashtun governors in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar and replaced all Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara bureaucrats with Pashtuns, which worked to the advantage of Islamabad. The fundamentalist brand of Islam propagated by the Taliban created unease among the people. They dominated the political landscape through their firing capacity and co-optation of local commanders through bribery. Popular support for the movement has however waned over time. Hekmatyar’s extremism had already divided the Pashtuns and the Taliban ascendancy further divided Afghans in terms of ethnicity. The breaking of tribal norms, structures and decision-making processes only heightened ethnic polarity. Earlier Ulema’s were more accommodating of the ethnic groups, but Islamists denigrated the tribal system to pursue a radical political ideology that excluded ethnic minorities. Though the ethnic groups are not homogeneous and sub-divided into clans and other identities, they maintained homogeneity with reference to other ethnic groups. As a scholar on Afghanistan argued “A person’s clan or tribal identity can be more important in Afghan society and political life than the fact that one is simply a Pashtun.” Degeneration of society reflected on the state and the contest to dominate it. These cleavages were manipulated to buy loyalty, to provide patronage and protection. At the same time various tribes also have their own internal rivalries, which are often bloody. The Mullahs now exert an overarching role due to their money and muscle power, emerging as the supreme authority replacing the tribal structure based on the concept of the tribal jirga dominated by tribal elders. In analysing the Afghan situation the shift of power from the tribal leaders to the Mullahs cannot be ignored.

The long drawn Afghan jihad has criminalised the society and has resulted in warlordism with several repercussions for the present power structure. During the period of Mujahedeen resistance, warlords and commanders created their zones of influence for the economic and political sustenance of their war efforts. As insecurity grew and the future appeared uncertain due to internecine war, many Pashtuns felt the need to align with the Taliban to survive. In 2001, Hamid Karzai inherited a state that was internally fragmented struggling for survival against the contradictory pulls of the warlords supported by external powers. Managing the internal contradictions became the biggest challenge, and continues to be so. The contours of the Afghan war have also changed. From being organised largely as Sunni and Shia groups under the patronage of Pakistan and Iran, the


[200] Ibid., p. 19.


[202] The Hizb Wahadat was formed from the coalition of eight Islamic parties only Ayotullah Mohseni’s party Harkat-i-Inqilabi-i-Islami was out of this umbrella organization.
the formation of such broad groups is no longer possible, even though Pakistan has a greater control over the Sunni groups in the form of the Taliban.

After Karzai took over power, he co-opted those militia leaders who might pose a threat to his regime. For example, Maqdoom Amin Fahim was asked to demobilise his militia forces to contest for the post of Vice President. In the South, while the Karzai family was able to consolidate their base in Kandhahar, Gul Agha Sherzai was removed and was made Governor in Nanghar province. Unfortunately his exit led to the disbandment of his militia and the Taliban stepped in to fill the vacuum in the absence of a state. Most of the warlords were prohibited from consolidating their power base. Karzai got rid of these warlords tactfully while trying to extend his hold over areas that were under the command of Northern Alliance affiliates.

The Karzai government has failed to establish firm control over the South even though President Karzai himself belongs to the politically powerful Durrani tribe. According to a scholar, “A handful of relatively stable quasi-states were built by major commanders in the North, but tribal politics and Pakistan interests prevented the development of similar zones of stability in the South.” The South was rather ruled through a system of patronage. According to one analyst, “With traditional leading families decimated and their influence weakened by years of exile, most of the local leaders available to Karzai were relatively recent militia-backed strongmen”. Due to the Taliban’s rise, the dynamics between the Pashtun tribal leaders and the locals had changed, and many were empowered due to their links with the Taliban. The southern part of the country, moreover, remained outside of the formal governance system due to the tribal societal structure that determines interactions between the tribal/sub tribal groups.

The Taliban is now trying to expand its control from the southeastern regions to other parts of Afghanistan. Northern Afghanistan was never a stronghold of the Taliban. They are still trying to make their presence felt through extortion of money, placing notices in mosques to pay ten per cent of their income and intimidating people in the night. As a Taliban commander reportedly said, “The Process of Talibanisation is new in Balkh. We are at the stage of propaganda: inspiring people, inviting them to jihad, preaching in mosques.” There are reports that the IMT is helping the Haqqani network in carrying out attacks in northern Afghanistan, mainly in Baghlan, Takhar, Kunduz and Faryab as a quid pro quo for the sanctuary provided to them by the Haqqani network in North Waziristan. Such activities have a psychological impact on people’s belief in the Taliban’s presence, especially in the absence of any similar activities by the Northern Alliance who once had a strong foothold in this region. A re-tribalisation of the Taliban has been taking place since 2008, evident through the clerical networks active in

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206 Englehart, Ibid., p. 751.
Helmand, Zabul and Uruzgan. The southeastern and eastern networks, however, are more regional than tribal.209

The Taliban is also facing the problem of rivalry, as the Pashtuns remain divided along tribal and clan affiliations, especially in rural areas. The recruitment of Ghilzai Pashtuns in large numbers was done to provide military power to the Taliban after their defeat in Mazar. In the past the Ghilzai felt marginalised as they were not included as members of the Kandahar Shura, which was dominated by the Durranis who did not allow Pashtuns from the Southeast or elsewhere to join their inner circle.210 For this reason the Ghilzai resisted their recruitment as foot soldiers for the Taliban.211 It was only later that the Taliban allowed a few non-Kandaharis into their inner circle. However, Ghilzais have now started to dominate the Taliban Shura due to elimination and arrest of some top Taliban leaders. Hence, the Durrani domination has undergone a transformation and the leadership now consists mostly of the Ghilzai Pashtuns. Their influence is dominant in Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Zabul, Paktiya, Paktya, Gardez, Wardak and Logar, coinciding with the areas dominated by the Ghilzais.212 As one analyst has argued, even if the Taliban movement is dominated by the Ghilzais it cannot be called a pan-Ghilzai movement though its influence coincides with the Ghilzai land.213 Another study however claims that the Quetta Shura continues to be dominated by Durrani Pashtuns.214 Since the Pashtuns have been mobilised on religious grounds, their tribal affiliation remains weak. Nevertheless, tribal affiliation remains a portent factor for mobilisation, if there is such a need in the future. Interestingly, the Taliban movement is also divided and there are factions within which are based on sub tribe and regional loyalties. It is also not clear which groups among the Taliban are pro-talks. Young radical Talibans are replacing the commanders who are killed in the war, and these may not be in favour of talks.

4.1. Problems of Militarisation

Most of the Afghan warlords have raised private militias in a bid to ensure personal security and wield power post-2014. They are likely to emerge as the biggest challenge to peace in the event of a civil war or ethnic contestation in Afghanistan. The warlords have also cultivated political patronage and are connected to the higher officials in the government. In the process some of them have developed a sense of impunity for violations of human rights and are engaged in retribution of their opponents. Government functionaries have patronised them to secure themselves from extortion and attacks by criminal elements and the Taliban. Security and stability being keywords for Western countries that want to exit from Afghanistan, these militias have emerged as new associates in enforcing security, gathering intelligence and also helping NATO convoys to

211 The Taliban Shura based in Kandahar was dominated by the Durrani Pashtuns (six out of ten). It was never broadened to include Ghilzai’s, Ahmad Rashid, (2000), *Taliban, Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, I. B. Tauris, pp. 98-99 and 187.
212 Seven are Hotaki Ghilzai, one from Ghilzai, and three from Kakar Gharughshui, see Thomas H Johnson and Chris Mason, (2007), “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan”, *Orbis*, Winter, pp. 77-78.
214 However, another study says the Taliban continues to be dominated by Durrani Pashtuns. See “Quetta Shura: A Tribal Analysis”, Tribal Analysis Centre, October 2009.
pass dangerous terrain. Due to this role there is an increasing criminalisation and a nexus between drug dealers, militias, arms smugglers has been established.\textsuperscript{215} Limited knowledge of the local dynamics has been a major handicap for the coalition forces. One of the reasons for militarisation is the creation of militias just after 2001 to help the ISAF with manpower in the absence of an Afghan army. The US recruited militiamen to use them to establish security without the deployment of its own military personnel so as to reduce casualties among its own troops.\textsuperscript{216} The Disarmament, Demobilisation and Rehabilitation (DDR) and Disbandment of Illegal Armed groups (DIAG) programs have not been very successful and the local strongmen have managed to retain some armed militias in the name of security. Some of the forces that have subsequently been created are the Afghan National Auxiliary Police, Community Defence Forces, Community Defence Initiative and region specific militias like the Afghan Public Protection program in Wardak, the Kandahar Strike force formed by Ahmad Wali Karzai, and the Afghanistan Local Police. These have further militarised society. Instead of resolving the threats from the Taliban, they have become a law unto themselves and have been involved in extensive rights abuses and criminal activities. This has added to the problems of Karzai. As the Human Rights Watch reports, “all of the programs have at times been hijacked by local strongmen or by ethnic or political factions, spreading fear, exacerbating local political tensions, fuelling vendettas and ethnic conflict, and in some areas even playing into the hands of Taliban insurgents, thus subverting the very purpose for which the militias were created.”\textsuperscript{217}

The international forces also work closely with these militias. Such private militia groups, referred to in Afghanistan as \textit{arbakai},\textsuperscript{218} are based on an institution of tribal community policing, a part of Pashtun practice that survived in Loya Paktia. Today the \textit{arbakai} encompass “irregular forces created by formal governments programs.”\textsuperscript{219} While tribal structures are functional to some extent in the eastern part of Afghanistan and in other areas there are tribal \textit{lashkars}, the \textit{jirgas} were not involved in the creation of the new \textit{arbakai}. Rather, they were paid directly by the ISAF forces, rendering them uncontrollable when the payment stopped.\textsuperscript{220} Many in Afghanistan hate these militia groups and prefer the Taliban because they ruthlessly punish the corrupt in their effort to ‘cleanse’ the political system and deliver justice. In 2001 the coalition forces won over local commanders by bribing them. However, with the strengthening of the Taliban such methods are no longer working. As argued by one analyst, the Taliban network revived quickly and its hierarchical nature does not allow local commanders to negotiate with the coalition forces directly. If one group is co-opted, “this can trigger a rapprochement of the

\textsuperscript{215}“Nato Turns to Militias in Afghan Battle”, online at: \url{www.channel4.com/news/articles/world/asia_pacific/nato+turns+to+militias+in+afghan+bATTLE/3651297.html}
\textsuperscript{217}Human Rights Watch, “Just Don’t Call it a Militia: Impunity, Militia, and the “Afghan Local Police”, September 2011, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{218}For a detailed analysis of the \textit{arbakai} system, see Mohammed Osman Tariq, (2008), “Tribal Security System in South west Afghanistan”, Crisis States Research Centre, Occasional Paper no. 7, online at: \url{http://www2.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/crisisStates/download/op/OP7Tariq.pdf}
\textsuperscript{219}Human Rights Watch, (2011) “Just Don’t Call it a Militia”, September, p. 1, online at: \url{www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/afghanistan0911webcover.pdf}
competing ones with the Taliban.”\(^{221}\) The Taliban has banked on the rivalry that exists between local commanders to expand its influence. Not to be left behind, the Tajik and Uzbek militia leaders are strengthening their militias for an ultimate showdown, if necessary post-2014. According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, the National Directorate of Security (NDS) has reactivated militia networks in the North through the Shura-e Nazar and Jamiat-I-Islami networks and “these groups operate with impunity.”\(^{222}\) Unfortunately the Afghan Local Police as a civil defence force funded by the US is nothing more than the legitimisation of these militias, whose links go up to the central government. Added to this problem is the CIA’s unlimited delivery of cash to the President’s palace to buy patronage and influence.\(^{223}\) This has added to corruption corroding the system from within. Dependence on warlords and relying on them as a ‘sole reference point’ in the fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda has fragmented the age-old tribal system that the West could have worked with.\(^{224}\) Similarly, the US has deployed more contractors than military personnel in Afghanistan.\(^{225}\)

Plurality of political opinion is almost absent in Afghanistan. Similarly the tribal elders have lost their relevance and the jirga has lost most of its sanctity. Sometimes a jirga is convened by a new strongman to demonstrate his strength.\(^{226}\) In these tribal jirgas the more radical younger generation are having a dominant voice. The Taliban attempted a major image makeover to assuage its new supporters and to overturn opposition to their ascendancy. In May 2009, Mullah Umar issued a 69-page new code of conduct known as ‘Lahiya’ which urges its fighters not to target civilian populations among many other guidelines.\(^{227}\) Such an attempt is clearly to win the political space abdicated by an increasingly unpopular coalition force. Sometimes incorrect intelligence is purportedly given to the coalition forces to cause maximum civilian collateral damage to make them unpopular with the Afghans. Neither the illegitimate warlords who are responsible for human rights abuses nor their equally brutal successor Taliban generate any hope for the future. Killing people for disbelief in Islamic values and public stoning of alleged adulterers amply demonstrates the brutality of the Taliban. These incidents do not give an assurance of a future in which the Taliban may be a part, even if international efforts at negotiation with them succeed.

International efforts and internal power equations notwithstanding, the ability to form an inclusive government comprising of all the ethnic groups and the reconciliation and reintegration of the Taliban into the Afghan society and polity would have a far-reaching


\(^{222}\) Human Rights Watch, September 2011, p. 2, online at: www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/afghanistan911webcover.pdf


\(^{224}\) Lucy Morgan Edwards, “Afghan Held Hostage by warlords”, The Afghan Express, 16 April 2013, online at: http://theafghanistanexpress.com/afghan-held-hostage-by-warlords/

\(^{225}\) According to the DOD, As of March 2013, there were approximately 108,000 DOD contractor personnel in Afghanistan, representing 62% of the total force (see Appendix A). Of this total, there were nearly 18,000 private security contractors, compared to 65,700 U.S. troops. See Moshe Schwartz and Jennifer Church, (2013) “Department of Defense’s Use of contractors to Support Military Operations: Background, Analysis and Issues for Congress”, CRS Report, May 17, p. 2.


impact on regional peace. Internal stability and peace in Afghanistan is intertwined with larger issues of regional security. One important factor, which has been reiterated by all Afghans including the Taliban, is the unity of the Afghan state. Amid bitter power rivalries, fragmentation of the state is a major risk.228 Perhaps this may act as a unifying force and enable the different warring factions to agree on a peace deal in the future.

4.2. Viability of the Afghan National Security Forces

The Afghan Army was initially dominated by the Tajiks. During General Abdul Rahim Wardak’s tenure some Pashtuns especially the Ghilzai Pashtuns joined, the southern Pashtuns from the Durrani tribe however, did not join the Afghan National Army (ANA).229 At present the ANA has about 41 per cent Pashtuns, 34 per cent Tajiks, 12 per cent Hazaras, and 8 per cent Uzbeks.230 The senior officers continue to be the former Northern Alliance figures and dominantly Tajik. The ethnic balance among the junior officers is now being rectified but the northerners continue to be suspicious of the ‘purportedly hegemonic ambition of Pashtuns’.231 Efforts are continuing to strengthen the ANA. It is getting nearly 2.7 billion of advanced war materials consisting of 22,000 vehicles, 44 aircraft and helicopters, and 40,000 additional weapons to prepare for the post-withdrawal scenario.232 According to a report published in October 2012, 5,118 anti-government elements were registered under the Afghan National Peace and Reintegration program and 1,000 were demobilised since 2010 when this program was introduced.233

Recruitment to the Afghan Local Police was done without careful scrutiny or verification by the Afghan government. The procedures for recruitment have not been followed and in many cases “the process is influenced by commanders, local authorities and local influential figures”.234 This is one of the reasons why there is a possibility of Taliban or al-Qaeda elements infiltrating the security forces. Attacks on the coalition forces by Afghan security forces saw an increase. However, the coalition forces feel these attacks are not due to infiltration as claimed by the Taliban but mainly due to misperception and ignorance of Islam and other factors. Till August last year, in 34 incidents of ‘green on blue’ attacks 45 soldiers have been killed and sixty nine were wounded. In 35 attacks the Afghan security forces have killed 53 and wounded 22 of their comrades.235 Such killing by ‘misunderstanding’ creates mistrust and helps the Taliban to consolidate its strength. The Afghan government has arrested hundreds of soldiers and dismissed many of them

231 Ibid., p. 35.
Minority groups are opposed to the proposal of reintegration of the Taliban since they have been empowered politically and would not like to concede to Taliban domination in the future. Some reports suggest that the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (UIF) and the ethnic Hazaras are rearming themselves to deal with the post-withdrawal situation. They fear that the US will compromise with the Taliban to withdraw its troops and use them to counter Iran. There are also tensions between the Pashtuns and the Tajiks. Tension between the Tajik-dominated ANSF and the Pashtun-dominated Afghan Local Police (ALP) are reportedly brewing. Many of the Pashtuns support the Taliban as they fear that they may be marginalised in the new setup. Some are pessimistic about the security transition from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to the Afghanistan National Security Force (ANSF) and feel that loyalty to the Taliban will guarantee their security. A Communist-era intelligence official stated that “affiliation of soldiers and officers with the Taliban, anti-Soviet Mujahedin and notorious warlords might undermine the efforts for a unified army, and may lead to civil war.” The Taliban refused to engage Kabul in the reconciliation process, as this would be tantamount to recognising Karzai’s government as legitimate. The Government is also under constant pressure from the Pakistani establishment to reduce the regime’s

after evidence was found regarding their sympathy with the Taliban. Afghanistan’s Defence Ministry spokesman General Zahir Azimi blamed the ‘regional intelligence agency’ for these attacks. Surprisingly, these attacks have now completely stopped. Morale is low in the forces and this has been capitalised by the Taliban as more soldiers desert Afghanistan’s infant security forces. Nearly one third of the Afghan forces are replaced and retrained due to desertion and attrition. The casualty figure has also risen steadily, raising fears about the smooth transition of a combat role to the Afghan Army. There are reports of officers also defecting to join the Taliban. The impression that the Taliban is gathering strength does not help the fragile peace in Afghanistan. The coalition force casualty rose to 711 in 2010, while in 2012 it stood at 402 and till 2013 April it was 56. The Afghan National Army is being readied to take over transitional responsibility though there are doubts regarding its capability to hold on in the face of incessant attacks by highly motivated Taliban cadres.

240 Online at: http://icasualties.org/oei/
241 General Wardak suggested to build up the ANSF, improve governance, rule of law and economic development, enhance coordination between Afghan security and civilian entities, forge a much closer partnership between ISAF and ANSF, utilize increased ISAF forces as a bridge for transition to Afghan security responsibility, have Afghan-led operations including detention activities, expand security perimeters, proceed with fully supported Afghan-led reintegration and reconciliation programs, seal and secure the borders with the proper deployment of forces, increase public awareness of the Afghan government’s and international communities’ progress and achievements in Afghanistan, adopt a comprehensive solution to the counter-narcotics strategy, including alternative livelihoods, make serious efforts to achieve closer practical regional cooperation, improve Afghan government revenue collection, make more effective civil-military aid application, apply lessons learned in all future operations, and finally, fully optimize all elements of Afghan national sovereignty, 3 June 2010, online at: http://www.nato-pa.int/default.asp?SHORTCUT=2147,
243 Interview with a senior Tajik official who would prefer not to be named. New Delhi, 27 February 2012.
closeness to India and reduce India’s footprint in Afghanistan if it wants Islamabad to facilitate communication between them and the Taliban. This is one of the reasons why Karzai tried to cultivate the civilian regime in Islamabad, though without much success as the Pakistani military remained adamant. As an Afghan diplomat privy to Afghanistan-Pakistan talks said, “While it is the civilians who do the talking from the Afghan government side and the Afghan Army chief silently listens; it is the Army who does the talking from Pakistan side and the civilians listen silently”.

Many in Afghanistan believe close contact with the civilian government in Pakistan is unlikely to bear fruit.

4.3. Talking to the Taliban

In spite of international community objections, since his second tenure President Karzai has been open to talks with any group who is ready to surrender arms and accept the Afghan constitution. In 2005, Tahkim-e-Solh (Strengthening Peace) was launched by Sebghatullah Mujadidi who was given the responsibility to explore the possibility of initiating talks with the Taliban in an effort to reintegrate non-criminal combatants. His efforts failed, as most of those who surrendered were low-level fighters and did it for financial compensation having no impact on peace process. To hold formal talks with the Taliban, Karzai later convened the National Consultative Peace Jirga and set up the High Peace Council (HPC) which administered the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation effort following recommendations made by various committees of the Jirga to develop an action plan and peace strategy. The HPC managed to contact the mid-level Taliban officials, and Rabbani, who was later assassinated, visited Pakistan to seek their cooperation. However, the outcome of these efforts continue to be mired with uncertainty. The distrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan has marred the process. The communication gap between the two was visible when the Pakistani Prime Minister, commenting on the talks with the Taliban, stated that “When Karzai shares his roadmap with America and they share the roadmap with us, then we will be in a position to comment on it”. The killing of Rabbani also added to the trust deficit between the two countries as Afghanistan accused Pakistan and its supported groups, especially the Taliban of having a hand in the killing. This killing indicated that the Taliban does not want the High Peace Council to emerge as another route for the reconciliation process. To scuttle the emphasis on an Afghan-led process emphasised by the international community, Pakistan has also held back some of the groups from entering into negotiations with Kabul. Given Pakistan and Afghanistan’s mutual mistrust of the US and its talks with the Taliban, the two countries finally decided to form a Joint Peace Commission in 2011 on the release of prisoners and holding of an Ulema conference in Kabul. Though both the countries established the Afghanistan Pakistan Joint Commission for Peace and Reconciliation there are reports that the Taliban representatives held talks with the US which remained inconclusive over the exchange of prisoners. Pakistan also released thirteen Taliban leaders to facilitate the talks without much success. Even the Ulema conference was boycotted by Pakistani Ulemas, as they feared the forum would be used to condemn the Taliban.

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246 Afghan diplomat delivering a lecture on “Transition in Afghanistan”, New Delhi, 6 August 2012.
President Karzai has been critical of Western-initiated secret talks with the Taliban which initially kept him out of the loop. Karzai felt it undermined his credibility as the President of Afghanistan. As a mark of protest he withdrew the Afghan Ambassador from Doha. His main complaint was that he was not adequately consulted. Speaking in the Afghan Parliament, President Karzai said, “Afghanistan is not a political laboratory for foreigners [...] Peace negotiations will be led by the Afghan nation and no other country.”

There were however earlier reports that the Afghan government represented by Qayyum Karzai had held talks with Taliban representatives in 2008. It was only in October 2010 that Karzai confirmed that “ unofficial contacts” with the Taliban had been going on for quite some time. These talks were not substantial but were preliminary and exploratory in nature. This contact is significant as the Taliban leadership had earlier described Karzai as the “puppet” of the US and refused to have a dialogue with him. Karzai’s visit to Qatar in April this year did not bear fruits. The visit was to seek Doha’s assurance that the Taliban office there would not be used for political purposes but for peace talks. Karzai does not want the Taliban to emerge as an equal partner undermining his legitimacy in the peace talks. However, the Taliban took the opportunity of talks and opened their office under the name of Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan and flew the Taliban white flag eliciting an angry reaction from Karzai, who called off the talks. Now efforts are on to find an alternative to the Doha process. According to a report published in April this year, Pakistan has put preconditions to facilitate talks, some of which are severing ties with India, sending Afghan army officers to Pakistan for training and the immediate signing of a Strategic Partnership Agreement.

The US lost several years believing that the Taliban could be defeated and was unwilling to negotiate any power-sharing arrangement with them. However, the decision of drawing down as a part of Obama’s Af-Pak strategy made the US amenable to this idea for a smooth security transition. A secret meeting to open communication links was held in Munich on 28 November 2010 between the Taliban, the US, Germany and Qatar, and in February, after discussing with Tayyab Agha, a final decision was taken to establish an office at Doha. This meeting was reportedly facilitated by the German intelligence agency. There was no communication between Qatar and Afghanistan on what would be the role of Doha in these talks. Karzai though was opposed to any political reconciliation with the Taliban without their agreeing to give up arms. In a speech to the Afghan Parliament he expressed his government’s desire to have the Taliban office opened in Saudi Arabia and Turkey rather than Qatar. To assuage Karzai on Doha’s role, Qatar sent an emissary to Kabul to apprise him of the situation. Interestingly, custody of the Taliban leaders freed from Guantanamo Bay was given to Qatar rather than Afghanistan. This signifies a secondary role for Kabul. However, Kabul refused to go along with the US

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251 Alissa J. Rubin, “Karzai Arrives in Pakistan to Discuss Afghan Peace Talks”, Washington Post, 16 February 2012.
decision to transfer prisoners to Qatar, leading to the suspension of talks. In spite of Kabul’s assertion to play a major role in these talks, the fact is that it is not in a position to negotiate peace as the Taliban does not want to have direct talks with Kabul. The Taliban has described these contacts as ‘initial talks’. The Afghan government, not to be side-lined in the matter, also intervened in the cancellation of a proposed UNAMA-sponsored inclusive intra-Afghan dialogue that was supposed to take place in February 2013 in Turkmenistan.

Efforts are on to talk to other dominant groups who can play a role in establishing peace in Afghanistan. There are reports that Hekmatyar’s representatives are engaged in talks with Kabul. Some members of the HPC along with members of three opposition political parties reportedly met the Hizb-e-Islami leaders and had informal talks with them in Paris.257 The Taliban was represented by Maulavi Shahabuddin Dilawar and Muhammad Naeem put forward their views.258 Similarly the Taliban sent a representative to Japan to participate in a talk with Masoon Stanikzai, a senior member of the HPC. Hizb-e-Islami also participated in this conference.259 Though there is no unity of approach between the Hizb-e-Islami and the Taliban, the local commanders of Hizb prefer to work closely with the Taliban and acknowledge Mullah Omar’s leadership to operate in Taliban dominated areas.260 These two groups are also suspicious of each other. Though talks with the Taliban were suspended, they resumed once again reportedly after Grossman met some of the senior Taliban leaders in Qatar.261 The US administration clarified that without the go-ahead from the government of Afghanistan, Washington will not hold further talks regarding integration and reconciliation. It further clarified that the past talks were only preliminary in nature and aimed to build confidence and to ascertain the possibilities of opening a dialogue between the Taliban and the Karzai government on the future of Afghanistan.262 However, Mullah Omar, to clarify the Taliban stance on talks, in his Eid message said that these talks “had not meant submission or abandoning our goals”.263 They were rather considered as a tactical measure to reach these goals. Afghanistan was recently given access to Mullah Baradar, a top Taliban leader who is in the custody of Pakistan, to facilitate Kabul’s peace initiative though he is yet to be released from prison.

According to a leaked NATO report, based on 27,000 separate interrogations of 4,000 captured insurgents, it was revealed that “Pakistan manipulation of the Taliban senior leadership continues unabatedly [and] senior Taliban leaders meet regularly with ISI personnel who advise on strategy and relay any pertinent concerns of the government of Pakistan”. One insurgent even went to the extent of saying: “The Taliban are not Islam. The Taliban are Islamabad”.264 An Afghan analyst however argued that the Quetta Shura is not so much in the control of Pakistan as was the case before. The Quetta Shura is

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258 They said, “On the one hand they say that peace must be achieved an on the other, they add new people to the black list; they say that they will leave Afghanistan but sign strategic pacts in false hopes of prolonging their occupation. They are doing this despite being well informed that the Kabul administration can never represent the Afghan people but still bargain with them on the future of the Afghan nation”. Online at: http://shahamat-english.com/index.php/paighamoona/28777-text-of-speech-enunciated-by-islamic-emirate-of-afghanistan-at-research-conference-in-france
important as it consists of former government people who are amenable to peace and this is a worry for Pakistan. One of the reasons for the Taliban to open an office in Qatar for negotiation was to establish their independence and demonstrate that they are not controlled by the Pakistani intelligence agency. This could be one of the reasons why Pakistan protects the Haqqani network as they can deliver strategic advantage and remain Islamabad’s best bet in the event of the Taliban reaching a compromise. In 2008, a letter purportedly written by Jallaluddin Haqqani was published in the Kabul press. It accused Mullah Omar of straying from jihad and listening to and acting at the behest of foreign intelligence agencies. It asked for a change of leadership from an illiterate and weak leadership that endangers Taliban movement. However, informal contacts between the Quetta Shura and Pakistan continue though the extent of Pakistani influence is unknown. At present it appears that the Taliban’s strategy and Pakistan’s road map to peace are at coherence.

There are reports of factionalism and discord between the Taliban leadership of the Quetta Shura and field commanders. Most of the field commanders are weary of fighting but they have to listen to the top leadership and Pakistani intelligence officials as their families are based in Pakistan. The Taliban leadership, pressured by Pakistan, have forced the mid-level commanders to cross the border and carry the insurgency to extend Pakistan’s influence in the Southern part of Afghanistan. Even those serving in the Afghan security forces and having their families in Pakistan are being intimidated and threatened. To address this problem the Afghan government proposed to ask soldiers serving in Kandahar who have their families stationed in Pakistan to shift them to Afghanistan. It is feared that the Taliban is putting pressure on the families and is indoctrinating them. In some cases, families are held as hostages of some intelligence agencies.

The Afghan government has agreed to allow nine US bases in Afghanistan, to help Afghan troops in combat operations in return for ‘security and economic guarantees.’ American presence therefore is a foregone conclusion though the two countries are yet to sign a Status of Force agreement. Pakistan has in the past proposed that Afghanistan should rely on China for its security rather than depending on the US. A decline in the US interest would help Pakistan as it thinks it is the US which has facilitated India’s robust presence in Afghanistan. Chinese presence will curtail India’s strategy in Afghanistan, which will benefit Pakistan. The US will remain an important factor in determining the future of Afghanistan.

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265 http://kabulpress.org/my/spip.php?article1926
267 Ibid.
Conclusions

Some of the immediate issues that confront the international community are, first; the training and equipping of the Afghan troops to make them combat ready. In this context it would be important to transform the Tajik-dominated Army into a multi-ethnic Army having more representation from the Pashtuns. To avoid desertion, service conditions, salary and firm commitment of the international community to the stability of Afghanistan needs to be reiterated. The fear of withdrawal has contributed to a psychosis of fear. Secondly, successful reconciliation and reintegration of the Taliban is a major concern for the international community. There is no indication of the Taliban joining a broad-based government post-2014. The most recent spring offensive and attacks on NATO and the government do not generate confidence among the Afghans regarding their future. The third issue that would impinge on peace is the need to dismantle Taliban safe havens across the border, which is easier said than done. Fourth, it would be important to find alternative trade and transit routes to lessen Afghanistan’s dependence on Pakistan. Though there are many studies that speak of the potential benefits of various routes, many of them are still at the planning stage. The instability in Afghanistan has not allowed international sources to fund any of the proposed projects.

This study indicates that a regional approach to the Afghan problem has so far not been adequately explored. Regional initiatives like the Silk Route and other bilateral and multilateral transport and communication networks, some of which are planned and some already implemented, are likely to bind Afghanistan to the region. This will bring in multiple stakeholders who would have a greater interest in stability in Afghanistan. In the past decade, Afghanistan’s neighbours have been engaged bilaterally and multilaterally in building infrastructure, establishing energy transmission lines for supply of electricity and cooperating on the issue of terrorism and drug trafficking, despite their remaining concerns regarding the future power configuration in Afghanistan. Some of the countries in the region are relying on the US presence as a guarantee for stability and want the international community to remain engaged in Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s access to multiple transport networks in the region will break its isolation and benefit it economically. At present 97 per cent of Afghanistan’s GDP comes from foreign aid and other foreign sources. Investment in Afghanistan will build regional stakes and make it self-sufficient. The intertwining of Afghanistan’s security and stability with the region is likely to defeat any zero sum game strategy. The political transition in 2014 and reconciliation efforts are likely to impinge on such a regional strategy.

The US approach has been to follow a dual strategy, which includes a military strategy as well as promoting dialogue with the Taliban. Its talks with the Taliban are not successful and remain unapproved by Karzai who is facing a crisis of legitimacy with the expanding Taliban influence and charges of corruptions against his regime launched by various international agencies. Afghanistan has tried to take the help of Islamabad to facilitate talks with the Taliban, without much success. The historical animosity and distrust has not helped the situation either. The Afghan situation would require a rebalancing of the

internal power equation, and the formation of an inclusive government comprising of all the ethnic groups, as well as reconciliation and reintegration of the Taliban into the Afghan society and politics. Internal stability and peace in Afghanistan is intertwined with larger regional security issues.

While a regional framework for Afghanistan would be important, for long-term peace it is equally significant to encourage inter-ethnic dialogue. There are arguments that the Pashtuns, being the majority community, should have a larger share of power. It is also necessary that all ethnic groups are proportionately represented. Providing more autonomy to the regions would address the power imbalance between the ethnic groups.

Renunciation of violence would be an essential pre-requisite for any ethnic peace. It will take years to establish trust between various communities that have remained fragmented for the past thirty years. However, this task would be difficult as most of the groups are armed through various schemes of the government that has relied on building paramilitary, police and other temporary auxiliary forces. The desertion rate is also high. Given the uncertainty of the situation, each of the warlords wants to protect his turf and most of them are piling arms to face an uncertain future as civil war remains a possibility. This situation would be dangerous given the security dilemma, and the diverse and competing interests of the regional countries. It is likely that some warlords would be patronised to protect the interests of the countries of the region.

Pakistan is crucial for peace in Afghanistan as it controls the groups that can perpetuate violence and instability. Though at present Pakistan is considered as central to the future stability in Afghanistan, historically stability in Afghanistan has not depended on Pakistan. The capacity of Pakistan to perpetuate terrorism and fundamentalism in Afghanistan through the Taliban has made it central to peace in that country. In the 1990s, Pakistan’s Afghan policy had three dimensions: the economic dimension that aimed at opening routes to Central Asia, the strategic dimension of having strategic depth against India, and the security dimension that involved installing a pliable government amenable to Islamabad’s influence that would not question the Durand line or raise the issue of Pashtunistan. Three key issues figure prominently in Pakistan’s strategic calculus: the Afghanistan-Pakistan problem, the India-Pakistan problem and Afghanistan-India relations. During the Taliban rule, these problems were unconnected. Given the fact that stability in Afghanistan impinges on their security, a zero-sum game would not help. Therefore it is necessary that these three countries – India, Pakistan and Afghanistan need to have a dialogue along with other regional initiatives. As one of the former Foreign Secretaries of Pakistan argued “In fact, Pakistan should not fight shy of opening a direct conversation about Afghanistan’s future with New Delhi as neither India nor Pakistan can eliminate the other from the Afghan scene. Pakistan’s reservations about giving India overland transit are not eternal and should remain on the India-Pakistan agenda.”

It is evident that the US is keen to reduce its footprint in Afghanistan and confine its role to strategic oversight of the security. President Karzai has been demanding that the US

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needs to pay at least US$ 2 billion a year to help Afghanistan to deal with the post-withdrawal security situation. Some scholars have argued that any financing to the Afghan government should logically include international oversight on how the money is spent.\textsuperscript{272} Funds to sustain the Afghan security forces after 2014 and ensure their ability to fight off the Taliban are estimated at US$ 4.1 billion a year.\textsuperscript{273} NATO expects the Afghan forces to grow to 352,000 soldiers and police this year, but the US has proposed to reduce Afghan forces to 228,500 in 2017.\textsuperscript{274} Concerns are being raised regarding the future of demobilised troops. There are fears that they may join the Taliban. The donor conference held in Tokyo pledged a sum of US$ 16 billion to Afghanistan over a period of time. This is conditional on Afghanistan’s commitment to reduce corruption under the framework of mutual accountability.

After prolonged negotiation, Afghanistan and the US signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) on 1 May 2012. In the press release after the signing of the agreement, the White House stated that: “US commitments to support Afghanistan’s social and economic development, security, institutions, regional cooperation, are matched by Afghan commitments to strengthen accountability, transparency, oversight and to protect the human rights of all Afghans – men and women”. The statement further clarifies that the SPA does not determine the level of troop presence or the level of funding to Afghanistan which would later be decided in consultation with the Congress. While denying that the US is seeking a permanent base in Afghanistan, the statement made it clear that it makes it mandatory for Afghanistan to provide US personnel access to and use of Afghan facilities beyond 2014 and also US commitment to train the Afghan forces.\textsuperscript{275} The Taliban has rejected the US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement. There is also disagreement on who would have control over the troops stationed there and give operational direction. To quote Foreign Minister Spanta, “There should be no parallel decision-making structures [...] All has to be in accordance with our sovereignty and constitution”.\textsuperscript{276}

The US has also declared Afghanistan as a major non-NATO ally which would mean that Afghanistan can purchase and finance acquisition of US defence equipment along with other benefits. This makes it evident that the situation post-2014 withdrawal is going to be different than the post-Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

It is reported that 6 per cent of casualties of the NATO forces are caused by the Afghan Army. Infiltration of Taliban sympathisers into the Afghan security force poses a danger to the emerging security scenario. Afghan popular support to the Western troops has diminished over time, due to a variety of reasons such as the killing of civilians, night raids and desecration of the Koran. The Taliban has taken advantage of this dissatisfaction.

\textsuperscript{273} “NATO Allies Thrash out US Troop withdrawal”, \textit{Daily Times}, 20 April 2012.
\textsuperscript{274} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{275} After green-on-blue attacks, the US has suspended the training and are reviewing the process and rechecking the background of Afghan security forces before the training is resumed.
Taliban presence has been strengthened with spectacular high-profile killings that include that of Burhanuddin Rabbani, Karzai’s half-brother Ahmad Wali Karzai, Jan Mohammad Khan and other top leaders. The Taliban has also been able to establish informal parallel administrative structures, or a shadow government to consolidate its presence.\(^\text{277}\) It has some popular support and according to some sources, Taliban fighters number up to 25,000 while the Haqqani group has 3,000 fighters and Hizb-e-Islami boasts of 1,000 fighters.\(^\text{278}\) There are other smaller militant groups like the Tora Bora Nizami Mahaz. It is likely that negotiations with the Taliban may fail to result in cessation of violence.

For the Taliban to decisively engage the Afghan troops, they would need to take over Kabul. The ANSF is dominated by other ethnic minorities and also have Pashtuns, but not proportionate to their population. What would happen in the event of a disintegration of the Afghan security forces? Would the Ghilzai Pashtuns join hands with the Taliban presently dominated by the Ghilzais? It is likely that the ethnic minorities would remain united in the interest of self-preservation. Some of the future scenarios may appear as follows:

(i) The warlords who continue to have some of their private forces intact may try to induce some of the ethnic minorities into their fold.

(ii) The war will be fuelled by drug money and warlordism will fragment different groups while the ideologically cogent Taliban with their foreign supporters would remain as a formidable force.

(iii) It is likely that the US would act to prevent civil war in cooperation with the regional countries.

(iv) Countries of the region are unlikely to allow a repetition of the post-Soviet situation and the world community is likely to act decisively against any such contingency.

(v) Exploration of minerals and investment is likely to build stakes in Afghanistan and would contribute to stability.

(vi) Despite the Taliban’s show of strength, a decisive victory of the group is unlikely. Some elements of the Taliban may join the government under a power-sharing agreement monitored by the international community.

Suicide attacks on NATO forces, green-on-blue attacks, and the beheading of seventeen young Afghans for dancing in a marriage party last year are part of the Taliban’s strategy to inflict psychological damage, and signal that the Taliban continues to have an upper hand. Such acts enable them to coerce people to support them. Without alternative guarantees to their security, many Afghans have no choice but to accept the insurgents as a fait accompli. If not fire power, the Taliban has already scored a mental victory. This may put psychological pressure and fragment the Afghan security forces. As described by one commentator, “In today’s violent atmosphere, between the anvil of the Karzai government and the hammer of the Taleban, there are no viable political alternatives for


It is likely that Kabul will conserve itself even if the Taliban expands their control, with the support of an international community that has invested in Afghanistan since 2001.

The US presence in Afghanistan is likely to frustrate Pakistani efforts to play a domineering role post-2014. Efforts are on to see a plural government in Afghanistan. While the regional countries may be engaged bilaterally or trilaterally, efforts need to be made to ensure that they do not work at cross purposes. The following factors would be important determinants while analysing the future of Afghanistan. First, the countries of the region would like stability for the sake of their regime’s survival and thus have a stake in a plural Afghanistan. Second, Afghanistan would remain in the international focus for some more time. With nine US bases in the region, the situation may not be allowed to deteriorate and reach the stage of a civil war. Third, there is now a greater involvement of regional countries in Afghanistan as compared to the past. Fourth, Afghanistan has been successful in engaging all the countries of the region in economically viable projects. Investments in mines and energy would result in these countries having greater stakes in Afghanistan, which would force them to ensure stability for resource exploitation. Fifth, some members of the Taliban may be amenable to a power-sharing formula in the absence of other alternatives. Sixth, Pakistan is increasingly being challenged by militants who have linkages with groups in Afghanistan. Afghanistan also provides safe havens to TTP who cross the Durand line at ease. Given the internal security challenges, Pakistan may change its tack and work within a regional framework. Such existential threats to its security were absent in the early 1990s. Finally, the last few years’ development has produced young Afghans and elites yearning for peace. For regional peace, the UN may be asked to monitor the situation in Afghanistan to deter meddling by the regional countries. The High Peace Council has also come up with a road map that consists of four steps which provides a role for Saudi Arabia and Pakistan forming the core of this strategy.

As the situation post-2014 continues to be a matter of speculation, the Taliban has been allowed to win the war of the mind. With the people of Afghanistan unwilling to partake in a civil war and ready for power-sharing it is likely that Afghanistan may slowly emerge from the shadow of the Taliban threat. The continuous engagement of the international community and regional players would be important. This is because instability in Afghanistan would be perilous for the region and beyond. As 9/11 has demonstrated, geographical distance is immaterial to terrorist attacks. A fragmented Afghanistan would have a destabilising effect. Unlike the past, this time it would draw even more countries into the vortex of conflict, with far-reaching security implications.

While security is the main driving force behind India’s engagement with Afghanistan, other countries in the region are equally concerned about issues of terrorism and drug trafficking, with Afghanistan acting as a major hub for such activities. Like India, most of these countries would like to see a multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan. Without targeting any country and especially not Pakistan, India should emphatically argue in...
each and every forum for the need to act concertedly to prevent Afghanistan from turning into a security nightmare for India and the region. This entails recognising terrorism and drugs in Afghanistan as major sources of instability in the region and funds for the Taliban war machine. On the basis of these issues, India should form a group of likeminded countries in a joint effort to deny terrorists any space to act as spoilers. It is necessary for India to play a role in facilitating the new regional security architecture.
Major Initiatives between Afghanistan and its Neighbours

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<td>New Silk Route</td>
<td>multilateral group</td>
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Afghanistan and Its Neighbourhood

In Search of a Stable Future

Afghanistan has the potential to emerge as a major regional hub of connectivity and energy trade. At present, the countries of the region each look at Afghanistan from their own security perspective. Building economic stakes in Afghanistan for these countries would motivate them to ensure the security and stability of Afghanistan as well as the region as a whole. This could recast Afghanistan as a facilitator and convert the zero-sum game currently played by its neighbours into a positive-sum game.

Despite their bilateral rivalry, even India and Pakistan could jointly engage in Afghanistan. The broader agenda of both India and Pakistan to improve their contacts with Central Asia can be facilitated by Kabul, which would also give both countries a greater stake in a stable Afghanistan. Regional organisations could further enable the three regional security complexes (RSCs) South Asia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf to interact with each other. Finally, the strengthening of Afghan troops, reintegration of Taliban fighters and a credible power-sharing arrangement that protects the interests of ethnic minorities could together form a strategy that would help in the emergence of Afghanistan as a stable state.

This strategy needs to be complemented by a consensual approach by the regional countries to protect their genuine interests. Stability in Afghanistan is thus intertwined with the interests of the other countries in the region.

This working paper is an output of the institutional cooperation between PRIO and the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in New Delhi. The cooperation was started in early 2006 and furthers joint research, networking and scholarly exchange. The objective of the cooperation is the development of new knowledge and expertise on topics of mutual academic interest, within the fields of conflict management, mediation, peacebuilding and non-traditional security.

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