

# Afghanistan in Transition: Crafting a Strategy for Enduring Stability

Edited by Beata Górka-Winter and Bartosz Wiśniewski



PISM

POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH  
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**AFGHANISTAN IN TRANSITION:  
CRAFTING A STRATEGY  
FOR ENDURING STABILITY**

**Edited by Beata Górka-Winter and Bartosz Wiśniewski**

**Warsaw 2012**

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## Preface

Afghanistan is at a critical juncture of the transformation processes that has been launched after 2001 and the overthrow of the Taliban rule. Current Afghan authorities are gradually taking over the responsibility in areas of governance and security as the international military presence winds down. After more than a decade of engagement, intervention fatigue is inevitably and not unexpectedly getting the better of the members of the NATO-ISAF coalition. Still, there is a need and expectation for sustained, focused and substantial support of the international community for these efforts, especially involving civilian strategies and capabilities as the military activities subside towards the end of 2014, as mandated during the NATO Lisbon Summit in the light of the expectations of the Afghan government. Granted, Afghanistan is bound to remain a “security consumer” well beyond this date. However, an effort to come up with a long-term, comprehensive strategy of bringing durable stability to this country and, by extension, the adjacent regions of Central and South-East Asia, cannot wait.

Expert and academic circles have a role to play in this process, too. Having recognized this, in October 2011, the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), with the generous support of the United States Embassy in Warsaw and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, launched the Afghan-Polish-American Trilateral Analytical Forum, bringing together policy-makers, scholars, civil servants and journalists from these three countries and facilitating a discussion on the challenges facing Afghanistan. The Forum succeeded in creating a unique opportunity to address a broad array of issues: political, security-related, economic, and social. The essays featured in this volume, authored by the participants of the Forum from Poland, Afghanistan and the United States, echo and build upon the debates that had taken place last autumn. Individual

contributions were submitted in the period between December 2011 and April 2012.

The decision to mold this initiative into a set of three-way exchanges requires little explanation. Since 2002 both Poland and the United States have devoted considerable resources to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, relative to their political, military and economic potential, as well as with their respective interests associated with the long-term stability of this country and the region as a whole. In fact, bearing in mind what triggered the mission in Afghanistan in the first place, i.e. the events of 9/11, Poland and the United States both recognize the stakes involved in making sure that the Afghan state will not once again become a terrorist safe haven and pose a threat to global security.

That is what makes planning for a “post-2014” Afghanistan all the more important and salient, as indicated by Bogusław Winid, Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, and Lee A. Feinstein, Ambassador of the United States to Warsaw, who offered their introductory remarks to this collection of essays. Winid underlined the significance of bolstering the structures of the Afghan state, growing the indigenous entrepreneurship, and enhancing education. Poland is active on all of these fronts, irrespective of its continued responsibility in the security domain. Feinstein reminded of the progress made by Afghanistan in civilisational terms during the past decade, but he too put special emphasis on hard security, i.e. the need to build up the Afghan National Security Forces and strengthen their operational capacity.

These remarks could not be more accurate both given the NATO Summit in Chicago, scheduled to take place in May 2012 and tasked with measuring progress on the road to meeting the goal set in Lisbon, as well as the challenges facing the Afghan authorities and the international community today and beyond 2014, enumerated in this volume. The Summit in Chicago will likely address lingering questions about the size, composition and sources of financing of the Afghan security forces, the army in particular. The centrality of the broader issue of security sector reform in Afghanistan for the ultimate success of the U.S. and NATO efforts in Afghanistan was underlined by Beata Górka-Winter, coordinator of the international security programme at PISM. Unless the reform is driven by the Afghans themselves, its long-term viability remains questionable. However, as noted by Vanda Felbab-Brown, research fellow with the Brookings Institution (Washington, DC), it is equally important to address

the problem of growing ethnic fractionalization of the Afghan National Army, while remaining cognizant of the unrelenting threat of a Taliban resurgence as the 2014 deadline draws closer. Felbab-Brown points to the merits of sticking to the process of reintegration of rank-and-file Taliban fighters into the Afghan society and upholding the prospect of high-level negotiations (reconciliation) with the Taliban commanders, yet without reducing the pace and intensity of military operations. Given that both reintegration and reconciliation have thus far yielded only limited results, and that their prospects are rather grim, as argued by Marcin A. Piotrowski, analyst with PISM, emphasis should still be put on achieving a general progress in security situation. However, what is troubling in this context is the inevitable reduction of both the number of NATO-ISAF forces and the level of economic assistance which, according to Piotrowski, could result in an “escalation of the conflict after 2014.” At the same time, the flagging resolve of the West in Afghanistan is a fact of life. According to Piotr Łukasiewicz, former advisor to the Minister of National Defence of Poland on the Polish Military Contingent in Afghanistan, it would be misguided to expect the international community to muster either resources or patience to implement an exercise in nation-building in Afghanistan. The focus of the mission in Afghanistan should be narrowed, but the process transition to Afghan responsibility for the fate of this country needs to have a prominent political component, too. Perhaps crucially, Łukasiewicz sees a chance to apply some lessons from the successful political transformation of Poland, thus echoing the claim made by Davood Moradian, advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, that contrary to a widespread belief Afghans are not reluctant or wary of adopting democratic norms, practices and institutions. Last but not least, the essays featured in this volume offer great insight into the regional context of Afghanistan’s stability. Krzysztof Strachota, Head of Caucasus and Central Asia Department in Center for Eastern Studies (Warsaw), and Marvin Weinbaum, Director of the Pakistan Studies Center at the Middle East Institute (Washington, DC), provide their independent assessment of the stakes associated with the future of Afghanistan by the key neighbouring players—Pakistan, Iran, the countries of Central Asia, and others. Their interests are often at odds, thus complicating grand, pan-regional projects such as the New Silk Road advanced by the West, and negatively impacting Afghanistan’s economic outlook.

Of course, the essays featured in this volume address these and other issues associated with the process of Afghanistan’s transition in greater detail. It would be hard, indeed impossible, to find a more accurate unifying

theme for this publication than the challenges that this process is facing, and the possible ways forward. It is the Editors' hope that this volume will contribute to a fuller understanding of the former, and to better choices in case of the latter.

*Beata Górka-Winter, Bartosz Wiśniewski*

## Introduction

By H.E. Bogusław Winid  
Undersecretary of State,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland

It is my true pleasure to welcome this valuable publication that follows the first *Trilateral: Afghan–Polish–American Analytical Forum*, that took place in Warsaw, in October 2011, and was organized with cooperation of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Forum was established as a platform for exchanging views and perspectives on international efforts undertaken with the aim of development of Afghanistan. The publication presented hereby, is a sustainable result of this in-depth exchange and I am convinced, it will contribute to the ongoing discussion on the future of security, economy and social affairs of Afghanistan.

For number of years, Poland has actively assisted the Afghans in the reconstruction of their state through participation in International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL). Poland has been also present through numerous bilateral projects especially in Ghazni province. Year 2012 marks a ten year anniversary of the Polish support to the Afghan nation.

In 2009, H.E. Hamid Karzai, the President of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, expressed his ambition to see the Afghan National Security Forces taking lead security responsibility for Afghanistan by 2014. Since then, Poland has been supportive to this process. Poland welcomes the *Intequal*, as a major development in the Afghan led and Afghan owned process aimed at achieving a fully operational state. In November 2011, Ghazni city was included in the second set of districts and provinces to start this transition. Within upcoming two years, security over other districts and

villages in the Ghazni province will be taken by the Afghan National Security Forces.

Having in mind the ongoing transition, the President of Republic of Poland, H.E. Bronisław Komorowski discussed the form of future Polish engagement with the Afghan President, H.E. Hamid Karzai during his visit in Kabul in March 2012. The Polish President reaffirmed the Poland's commitment to supporting Afghanistan.

While *Intequal* is progressing, the members of International Community remain committed to assuring an adequate transformation of the ISAF operations for post-2014 Afghanistan. The principal goal of those efforts, is to secure effectiveness and sustainability of reforms undertaken during last ten years. While considering future involvement, Poland continues its support to the Afghan society.

Poland focuses its efforts on professionalization of the Afghan public administration in order to raise institutional capacity. In addition, it invests its efforts to support small and medium enterprises and to create new jobs. The Polish involvement in sustainable development at sub-national level focuses on supporting the civil society and raising level of education.

This year, Poland commits ten million USD in development aid for Afghanistan, a sum to be hopefully sustained within next annual Polish development budgets for years to come. The money is spent for the benefit of the Afghan nation, while the transition takes place.

I recognize the need to support sustainable solutions. I therefore welcome the potential of the initiative of *Trilateral Analytical Forum on Afghanistan*, to become an annual event with participants coming from various backgrounds, sharing their views on the future of the country in development of which, Poland has a share.

## Introduction

By H.E. Lee A. Feinstein  
Ambassador of the United States to Poland

*"Throughout history, insurgencies have seldom been defeated by foreign forces. . . . In the long run, our goals can only be achieved and then secured by Afghan forces. Transition, then, is the linchpin of our strategy, not merely the 'way out.'"*

*ISAF Commander General John Allen, March 20, 2012*

On September 11, 2001, terrorists belonging to an organization harbored by the Taliban government in Afghanistan attacked the United States. While this is a well-known fact, it bears repeating. Since that day, over 2900 coalition soldiers have sacrificed their lives to assure that Afghanistan will never again provide a safe harbor for terrorists.

As we continue our mission in Afghanistan, events such as the conference memorialized in this volume become increasingly important. Whether by exploding myths surrounding the Afghan "national character," like Davood Moradian, or by enumerating the tasks facing us on the road to 2014 and beyond, these contributions help us to visualize a way toward lasting stability in Afghanistan.

While our primary goal is undeniably to provide security, we also recognize that security in Afghanistan is not sustainable without dramatic improvements in governance and continued socio-economic development. And, indeed, we have seen significant gains this past decade. In 2001, life expectancy for women in Afghanistan was just 44 years. Now it is 62 years. Back then, almost no girls went to school. Today, three million do, constituting nearly 40 percent of all primary school enrollments. Nearly 120,000 Afghan girls have graduated from high school, 15,000 are enrolled

in universities, and nearly 500 women are on university faculties. Maternal mortality, infant mortality, and under-five mortality rates have all declined significantly. More Afghan children are living past their fifth birthday today than at any time in the recent past.

As General Allen said, ultimately only the Afghan people themselves can achieve “victory” in Afghanistan, that is, dismantling the insurgency while enabling the government to govern. By the end of 2014, therefore, Afghan forces will take over primary responsibility for security operations across the country. This transition, which President Karzai requested at Kabul and which NATO endorsed at Lisbon in 2010, is a necessary and natural evolution for Afghanistan’s future.

Our clear imperative moving forward, then, is to lay the groundwork for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to be successful. Despite some tragic setbacks, the orderly transfer to the ANSF of responsibility for the fight against Taliban insurgents is on track.

As of this February, ANSF strength stood at 176,350 Afghan National Army (ANA) and over 143,000 Afghan National Police (ANP). The ANSF were on target to reach its 2012 target of 352,000 personnel ahead of schedule. Afghan forces now have the lead for nearly 40% of conventional and Special Forces missions and since the end of January 2012, the ANSF have lead security responsibility for territory comprising over 50% of the Afghan population.

Ensuring the ANSF’s longer term success will be perhaps the most critical task that the NATO allies will discuss during the upcoming Chicago NATO Summit in May 2012. This task will require the continued commitment of the entire alliance, both in the form of in-kind assistance and in financial support.

The security interest of the United States, Poland, and all NATO allies lies in preventing Afghanistan from reverting to a terrorist safe haven. Moreover, our moral obligation to our citizens who have sacrificed their lives and resources, and to the Afghan people, who are steadily regaining their human rights, demands that we do what we can to help Afghanistan achieve a lasting victory over terrorism.



Vanda Felbab-Brown

## **Security and Politics in Pre-transition Afghanistan**

More than a decade after the United States and allied countries toppled the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, Afghanistan is preparing for another major transition: this time the substantial withdrawal of many of the foreign forces that have been providing security in the country, battling the resurgent Taliban insurgency, and propping up the regime in Kabul. Arguably, the very narrow counterterrorism objectives of the mission have been accomplished. Al-Qaida has lost its safe havens in Afghanistan and much of its leadership structures, fundraising capabilities, and even popular appeal are in tatters.

But the success of the larger project of establishing a stable and legitimate national government in Afghanistan and anchoring it in a solid regional arrangement remains a huge question mark. Even as Afghans are tired of foreign presence in their country, many fear that the departure of foreign troops will once again plunge the country into greater violence. The Afghan National Army is improving as a force capable of providing security to the Afghan population and assuring Kabul's writ; though whether the improvements will be sufficient remains yet to be seen. The quality of governance in Afghanistan meanwhile continues to be poor, even if it is locally improving. Most worrisomely, political trends, including a significant rise in ethnic tensions, are increasingly generating pressures toward a civil war.

Hence even increases in security may not lead to greater stability if Afghans' confidence in the future does not increase. 2014 thus may be a year of not only a major transition when Afghans are supposed to be in charge of their country's security, even as some foreign assistance continues beyond, but potentially of a major political shake-up of the country and collapse of the existing political dispensation.

## The Post-Taliban Progress

In many ways, the conditions of millions of Afghans have considerably improved since the demise of the Taliban regime. Millions of children are back to school and have better access to health care. In many parts of Afghanistan, especially cities like Kabul, Afghan women enjoy considerably greater social opportunities. The human capital of Afghanistan, especially among its large young population, has significantly increased. And at least some ministries are developing an increasing capacity to provide administration and governance. For many, economic opportunities have expanded greatly. (In fact, well-positioned Afghans have taken advantage of the influx of foreign aid to reap unprecedented rents).<sup>1</sup>

Yet insecurity and violence persist and undermine the fragile socio-economic progress. Moreover, the scaling down of U.S. and international involvement will likely shrink much of the political and social space necessary for the expansion and consolidation of these accomplishments.

## The Complex Military Situation

The surge of U.S. military forces in 2010 and 2011 did reverse the Taliban military momentum in Afghanistan's south. Many middle-level Taliban commanders have been removed from the battlefield, disrupting the Taliban's operational capacity and logistical networks. Rank-and-file Taliban soldiers in the south are feeling the heat and many are exhausted by the fighting. Some important and some symbolic Taliban strongholds have been retaken from the Taliban. Ordinary Afghans even in areas that bore the brunt of U.S. fighting, such as Lashkar Gah and Arghandab, are wary of the handover of those areas to the Afghan national security forces (ANSF) and do not necessarily welcome the pull back of U.S. forces from their areas, fearing the return of the Taliban.

Yet it would be a mistake to interpret this success as a clear Taliban defeat in the south. While it is true that Taliban is no longer capable of mounting major military operations, it has learned that targeted assassinations of key political and tribal figures and government officials and persistent insidious intimidation accomplish many of its objectives. Some

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Dexter Filkins, "With U.S. Aid, Warlord Builds Afghan Empire," *New York Times*, June 5, 2010.

supposedly-cleared areas, such as Mallajat, an important subdistrict of Kandahar City, have seen a substantial deterioration of security already.

Moreover, the Taliban understands that the time is on its side. The June 2011 announcement by President Barack Obama of the drawdown of U.S. forces also defined the mission in increasingly narrow counterterrorism terms and indicated that the United States would be substantially leaving Afghanistan irrespective of the conditions on the ground. From the Taliban perspective, there is no need now to mount extensive military operations: all it needs to do is to maintain a persistent level of insecurity sufficient to prevent the government from delivering public goods and to discredit in the eyes of the local population the capacity of ANSF to provide adequate security. Its spate of bombing attacks in areas handed over to ANSF since June, including in Kabul, indicates these tactics are indeed two key elements of its strategy. From now through 2014 when the U.S. greatly reduces its troop deployments, it is thus not necessary for the Taliban to visibly control territory in order to maintain enough social control. In fact, the logical strategy for the Taliban now is to, at least partially, hold back.

Indeed, as the 2014 security handover to the Afghan government will be approaching, the military and political influence of the United States and NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan will be declining. The international community's ability to shape developments in Afghanistan and in the broader region will be shrinking rapidly. An agreement on a long-term U.S.-Afghanistan partnership may resurrect some of the U.S. influence. Especially if it is specific and credible, such an agreement may to some extent assure Afghans of a U.S. long-term commitment to their country.<sup>2</sup> But it is unlikely to resurrect the leverage the United States and the international community enjoyed before the drawdown decision. Nor is it likely to sufficiently reduce the Afghans' profound insecurity over the anticipated collapse of the existing political order and hence sway them away from hedging on all sides and seeking to maximize power and profit before it all comes down. Such perfectly rational individual decisions however fundamentally undermine the prospect of avoiding a major political meltdown in 2014 and the possibility of a civil war.

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<sup>2</sup> The current sticky issues in the U.S.-Afghan negotiations over the long-term strategic partnership are Afghanistan's unwillingness to continue tolerating night raids and house searches by ISAF forces and the demand that foreign forces not be allowed to hold detainees. ISAF sees both as essential counterinsurgency tools.

The quality of the Afghan national security forces, on which preserving stability hinges to a great extent, also still remains questionable. The Afghan National Police (ANP) in particular continue to suffer from many vices and deficiencies, not the least of which is an absolute lack of capacity to suppress crime—the scourge of the lives of Afghans that eviscerates their security and provides a perfect mobilization platform for the Taliban. The Afghan National Army (ANA) has made large progress: Not only has it grown in size, but also its quality has improved. The coming two years will show how much capacity to tackle the Taliban and other forms of insecurity it has. But even the ANA represents hardly a clear-cut success. Worrisomely, it appears to be deeply ethnically-factionalized.<sup>3</sup> Most of its high-level commanders continue to be northern Tajiks, and southern Pashtuns exhibit little interest in signing up for even rank-and-file positions. Thus, there is a real danger that the ANA may fracture along ethnic lines and around particular commanders when the foreigners leave.

The militias mushrooming around Afghanistan with or without the encouragement of ISAF often prove unreliable and incapable of standing up to the Taliban, yet they frequently bring other forms of insecurity to an area. Often, they undermine good governance and peaceable relations within and among Afghan communities. The Afghan Local Police (ALP), one of such militia forces, has the most stringent oversight mechanisms compared to the other militias, but even in its case, the oversight exists mainly during the vetting phase of standing it up. Even in the ALP's case, mechanisms are lacking for rolling it back should some of its units go rogue. Moreover, precisely because the absolutely necessary vetting takes time, the ALP currently numbers in the low thousands, with a growth of about 1,000 ALP fighters per half a year; thus the ALP can hardly be counted upon as a game-changer. However, sacrificing the vetting procedures and rushing to stand up the ALP faster will likely plunge it into the same abuse and unreliability problems that other militia forces have exhibited, only intensifying conflict dynamics in Afghanistan.

In the eastern Afghanistan, the military situation so far has been one of a stalemate but at increasing levels of violence. Since the Taliban has managed to reverse some of ISAF's gains there in 2006, the level of insecurity has increased considerably. The insurgency there—a mixture of the Haqqani

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army*, International Crisis Group, Asia Report N°190, May 12, 2010.

network and Salafi hardcore fighters from around the world—is vicious and a highly potent military force. It is willing to prosecute Pakistan’s anti-India objectives, and yet it is at the same time deeply sympathetic to the Pakistani Taliban’s objective of bringing down the Pakistani government. It is also highly motivated to strike U.S. and Western targets abroad.

As 2014 approaches, ISAF is likely to continue grappling with the difficult dilemma of how many of its forces to pull back from Afghanistan’s south and deploy to the east. A significant troop reduction in the south can jeopardize the gains there, but it may be necessary to degrade the potency of the eastern insurgency that from a counterterrorism perspective is far more dangerous to the United States than even the Kandahar-centered insurgency. Moreover, Pakistani anti-government groups, such as Tehrik-i-Taliban-Pakistan are now using eastern Afghanistan as a safe haven, giving the impression to some in the Pakistani military and intelligence services that the U.S. is using their tool of tolerating militant safe havens as a way to teach them a lesson. Pakistan wants the eastern Afghanistan safe havens the anti-Pakistan militants are using closed.

The north of Afghanistan experienced a steady decline in security even as the military surge was taking place in the south, precipitating the deployment of a U.S. brigade to the North in 2011. The Taliban has been rather effectively mobilizing among the northern Pashtuns who perceive themselves to be discriminated by the Tajiks. It has also been exploiting other ethnic tensions, such as between Tajiks and Uzbeks, as well as the popular disenchantment with some of the North’s notorious commanders cum governors. Its assassination campaign against key leaders in the North has left Kunduz, Baghlan, and even others parts deeply destabilized.

### **Poor Governance and Political Tensions**

As of the end of 2011, the political situation in Afghanistan is at its worse since 2002. Political patronage networks have been shrinking and becoming more exclusionary, including those surrounding President Hamid Karzai and the Arg Palace. Afghans are profoundly alienated from the national government and other power arrangements they face. They are deeply dissatisfied with the inability and unwillingness of Kabul to provide elemental public goods and with the pervasive corruption of country’s power elites, poignantly demonstrated by the corruption at Afghanistan’s leading financial

institution, the Kabul Bank.<sup>4</sup> Local government officials have only had a limited capacity and motivation to redress the broader governance deficiencies.

The level of inter-elite infighting, much of it along ethnic and regional lines, is also at the highest level since the overthrow of the Taliban. The result is pervasive hedging on the part of key powerbrokers, including by recreating their semi-clandestine or officially-sanctioned militias. Undertones of preparations for a civil war are sounding more strongly.

2014 will bring a triple earthquake to Afghanistan and its current political dispensation: Not only will ISAF forces be substantially reduced, but U.S. funding will also inevitably decline with the drawdown of U.S. military as well as due to U.S. domestic economic conditions. For a country that it still overwhelmingly dependent on foreign aid and illegal economies for its revenues,<sup>5</sup> the outcome is likely going to be a massive economic shrinkage, notwithstanding the efforts to create a New Silk Road through Afghanistan and exploit Afghanistan's large mineral resources.<sup>6</sup> Although various efforts are now under way to cushion the shock, there are no easy ways to generate revenues and employment in Afghanistan over the next three years.

Moreover, 2014 is also the year of another presidential election and hence of major power infighting, whether or not President Karzai will seek to remain in power. The fight over the remaining rents of the ending political dispensation and the need to consolidate one's support camps in anticipation of the shaky future, and hence to deliver spoils to them in order to assure their allegiance, will not be conducive to consensus decision making and broad-based good governance.

If the current political order in Afghanistan indeed collapses, what are the likely outcomes? One possible scenario is a civil war that will resemble less the 1990s when the Taliban line of control progressively moved north past the Shomali plain, and more a highly fractured, highly localized fighting

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<sup>4</sup> For details on the systematic and government-linked corruption at the Kabul Bank, see Dexter Filkins, "The Afghan Bank Heist," *New Yorker*, February 14, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> For details on the poppy economy in Afghanistan and the effectiveness of various counternarcotics policies, see, for example, Vanda Felbab-Brown, "War and Drugs in Afghanistan," *World Politics Review*, October 25, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> James Risen, "U.S. Identifies Vast Mineral Riches in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, June 13, 2010.

among a variety of groupings and powerbrokers, only one of which will be the Taliban and its Haqqani and other factions. Outside actors, including Iran, Pakistan, Russia, China, and India, will find it irresistible to once again cultivate their favored proxies to prosecute at least their minimal objectives in Afghanistan and the region. Their rivalries in Afghanistan will spill beyond that country and intensify their competition in other domains as well.

An alternative post-2014 political outcome is a military coup. The ANA has two more years of very intensive work to approach becoming a more professional force, and the Afghan Ministry of Defense is likely to be one of the best functioning ministries. A professional army, especially one whose leadership is heavily skewed to northern Tajiks, could well see taking power as the only alternative to civil war as the ISAF forces pull out. The pattern would be familiar to both Afghanistan and the region, including Pakistan and Turkey. Many ordinary Afghans may well prefer a military strongman or junta to a civil war. However, whether such a move could avert a civil war would depend on many factors, including the relative strength of the ANA at that time and the willingness of Kandahari Durrani who have ruled the country for centuries to put up with a diminished power in Kabul.

### **The Pakistan Troubles**

Pakistan in particular will be ensnared in Afghanistan's troubles. Ten years after 9/11 Pakistan continues to be preoccupied with India's ascendance and its perceived ambitions in Afghanistan and deeply distrustful of U.S. objectives there. This distrust has preceded the U.S. raid into Pakistan to kill Osama bin Laden: at a fundamental level, Pakistan still sees its national security objectives as at odds with those of the United States, while its polity is more anti-American than ever. It is suspect of U.S. ultimate goals in Afghanistan and fearful of a U.S. plot to seize its nuclear weapons, which it sees as the crux of its security with respect to the conventionally-superior India. Moreover, Pakistan also doubts the ability of the United States to establish a secure government in Afghanistan, especially one that will not be hostile to Pakistan. So it pursues cultivating allies in Afghanistan, mainly among the Taliban factions, as a protection policy.<sup>7</sup> Pakistan continues to see a pro-Pakistan or at least a not-pro-India

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<sup>7</sup> On Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorist groups, see, for example, Bruce Riedel, *Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America, and the Future of Global Jihad*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011.



government in Kabul as critical for its security. Consequently, it persists in its links and manipulation of the Taliban insurgencies for its purposes, whether on the battlefield or in the developing negotiations between Kabul, the United States, and the Taliban.

At the same time, the fissiparous and fraying tendencies within Pakistan are intensifying along a multitude of dimensions. Its institutions are hollowed out. Its military is struggling to beat back its internal insurgencies, including worryingly in southern Punjab. Karachi has been a civil-war-like battleground for months. Pakistan's civil government has been unable to govern in even the economic sphere and abdicated the responsibility for decision making in many other domains. And the country faces many deep long-term challenges of energy and water deficiencies, large population growth, and limited employment opportunities.<sup>8</sup>

### Negotiations with the Taliban

Until 2010, the United States was reluctant to embrace negotiations with the Taliban, even as its European allies argued that there is no military only solution to the Afghanistan predicament. Since 2010, the United States has not only embraced negotiations, but taken an active role in them, engaging not only with the Kandahar-based Taliban but also the Haqqanis. Can such negotiations provide a mechanism to avoid the collapse of the existing order in Afghanistan post-2014 and can the U.S. redline of no-support of the reconciled Taliban for Al-Qaida be assured?<sup>9</sup> It is unlikely that the Taliban would be willing to settle for anything less than a de facto, if not de jure power in Kabul while retaining the power it already has in much of the south. Elements of especially the Kandahari faction of the Taliban may well have learned that its association with Al-Qaida ultimately cost them their power, but the group also owes many debts to the global jihadist movement. The death of bin Laden may have weakened some of the networks, but reneging on these debts to their global jihadi brothers will be costly for the Taliban, no matter how locally oriented its southern and northern elements are. The Taliban's decision making on severing their links with other jihadists will be

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<sup>8</sup> On Pakistan's internal travails, see, for example, Stephen Cohen, (ed.) *The Future of Pakistan*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> For some of the best arguments for negotiations, see, for example, Michael Semple and Fotini Christia, "Flipping the Taliban," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2009.



deeply influenced by the relative power between the southern Taliban and the eastern Taliban groupings.

Similarly, the Taliban faces some tough dilemmas in agreeing to a compromise with Kabul, such as accepting the Afghan constitution. Such a promise and an overt power sharing deal with Kabul will discredit the group with respect to many of its fighters as well as with respect to the broader population to whom it appeals on the basis of Kabul's venal, predatory, and unjust behavior.

Its best negotiation strategy thus may well be akin to its best fighting strategy: engage in talks without giving up anything while waiting it out to after 2014. The shape and content of negotiations is inevitably linked to what happens on the military battlefield and each side's assessments of its military strength and prospects for achieving a better deal through military means. The Taliban thus does not need to rush to conclude negotiations or commit to substantially giving up its power, such as by disarming, before 2014.

Meanwhile, any negotiations with the Taliban are extremely worrisome to the northerners in Afghanistan. Memories of the Taliban's brutal rule of the 1990s and the Northern Alliance's fight against the Taliban loom large in their minds, and they also fear the loss of military and economic power they accumulated during the 2000s. Key northern leaders may prefer a war to a deal that they would see as compromising their security and power. All these worries were exacerbated by the September 2011 assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, a prominent Tajik northerner, Afghanistan's former president, and Karzai's key man for negotiating with the Taliban. Many took the assassination to mean that the Taliban is not interested in a negotiated outcome. More broadly, the assassination is yet another indication that there are many spoilers in Afghanistan who have the capacity to subvert new emerging conflict settlements and power arrangements.

## **The Continuing U.S. Interests in Afghanistan**

Even in an absence of an outright civil war, even the minimal counterterrorism objectives will be compromised if a stable national government is not capable of effectively ruling from Kabul. Air strikes to decapitate terrorist groups and decimate its fighters depend to some degree on human intelligence. Once ISAF's presence shrinks, local proxies in Afghanistan are likely to provide only self-servicing intelligence, such as that

which hurts their political rivals, no matter how large payoffs by outsiders they are offered.

A very unstable Afghanistan or one in an outright civil war will allow the global salafi movement to once again claim victory over a superpower and provide an important psychological fillip to jihadi terrorists at a time when their appeal in the Muslim world is waning as a result of the Arab Spring.

Moreover, an unstable Afghanistan will be like an ulcer bleeding into Pakistan, further destabilizing that country and discouraging its elites to find a *modus vivendi* with India and focus on Pakistan's massive internal problems.

### What Can Still Be Done?

With the shrinking U.S. influence and determination to significantly scale down its involvement in Afghanistan, what can be done to avert this disastrous outcome, beyond more intense training of and partnering with the Afghan National Army?

- Developing mechanisms to reduce ethnic fractionalization in the ANA will be critical, as is reducing corruption within the ANP.
- Working on removing Taliban commanders and groups from the battlefield—whether through fighting, reintegration, or strategic-level negotiations—has some potential of reducing the overall level of instability come 2014.
- It is important to try to encourage the widening of political patronage networks to give a greater number of Afghans a stake in the preservation of the current political order. Persuading President Karzai to adopt such a view, however, requires a radical improvement in the U.S. relationship with the Afghan president.
- Focusing on the most destabilizing corruption, such as in the ANSF and that which is very ethnically and tribally discriminatory, should be a key priority. So is mitigating at least the most egregious abuses by Afghan powerbrokers, including those through which ISAF prosecutes its military objectives.
- To improve governance and reduce rent-seeking incentives for perpetuating instability, the United States should significantly curtail aid flows to unstable areas and instead allocate resources to projects where

existing security and governance arrangements permit vigilant monitoring and which are sustainable in the long term.<sup>10</sup>

- Efforts to reduce political tensions also must include an early focus on providing for an acceptable political transition in Afghanistan in 2014. To reduce the intensity of the 2014 political earthquake, the transition must enjoy at least some elite consensus and some popular support. Reasonably clean elections would be an optimal mechanism, but that may be elusive at this point, given the shrinking leverage of the international community.
- Finally, reinforcing existing institutions that are performing reasonably well, such as particular ministries, may boost the administrative capacity of the state to weather the political earthquake of 2014.

a successful implementation of these steps does not guarantee that political stability in Afghanistan can be preserved beyond 2014 and that a civil war can be avoided. However, in the absence of a renewed determination to stay longer in Afghanistan with a robust military deployment, the U.S. and international influence in Afghanistan and their options for policy action have shrunk.

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<sup>10</sup> For current problems with aid projects and their effects on political stabilization, see, for example, Andrew Wilder, "A 'Weapons System' Based on Wishful Thinking," *The Boston Globe*, September 16, 2009; *Aid and Conflict in Afghanistan*, International Crisis Group, Asia Report No. 210, August 4, 2011.



## Building the Security Sector in Afghanistan: Whither the Reform?

One of the lately released issues of the *Foreign Policy* magazine is quoting an extremely optimistic conversation between general David Rodriguez, the commander of the ISAF Joint Command in Afghanistan with an officer responsible for mentoring Afghan soldiers.

“In the summer of 2011, I visited the Afghan Army’s Regional center in Helmand Province. The recruits had been there for two weeks, and they looked as strong as any group of U.S. soldiers in basic training. The Afghan drill instructors were as competent and the same cocky swagger as American ones. <Sir, look at all of our volunteers>, one drill sergeant proudly said to me. <They are great. We have already won...We just do not know it yet>.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the Afghan National Security Forces are considered a key element of the exit strategy after NATO has finally set a sort of a deadline for its engagement in Afghanistan—after 2014 the international troops are to be withdrawn from this country and the whole effort of maintaining peace and order in Afghanistan will rest on national forces. At that time, if everything goes according to the plan set by the Obama administration and accepted by the Afghan government, in 2014 around 400.000 .uniformed men in Afghanistan, both in the military and the police, should be prepared to play a leading role after the withdrawal of the coalition forces.

The official optimism expressed by general Rodriguez interlocutors does not come as a surprise since the statistics are indeed encouraging. Already in the summer of 2010 the ranks of the Afghan National Army started to

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<sup>1</sup> David M. Rodriguez, “Leaving Afghanistan to the Afghans, A Commander’s Take on Security,” *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2011.

exceed the number of soldiers which were to be recruited at that time and if the current trends continue, the ANA will also meet the 2011 goal of more than 170,000 personnel at or ahead of schedule. By the summer of 2012 Afghanistan should have more than 350,000 of Afghan soldiers and police on the ground. Moreover, as the latest U.S. Department of Defense report on *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* states, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) continued to “increase not only in quantity, but also quality, and capability, and have taken an ever-increasing role in security operations.”<sup>2</sup> Also, the polls show that there is a rise of trust in the capabilities of these forces by the local populations, especially in the south where the situation was the most tense. The number of operations the Afghan army successfully led doubled in the course of the last year and the ANSF has already taken responsibility for the security of several provinces.

These developments are encouraging, however one should not forget that the creation of the ANSF is but a part of a broader security sector reform (SSR) agenda. As such, it is not about, or not solely about numbers, statistics and ratings. It is not also so much about the quality of training and the efficiency of armed forces, even if these factors are, in the short term, decisive to win over the insurgency and assure the security of the populace.

Achieving a success in SSR is a much more challenging process, which branches out to the issues of governance, establishing proper relations between institutions from the security sector, including these providing the civilian and democratic control over the forces, implementing rules of transparency, accountability, rule of law and many other factors, which have to be considered if we dare to dream about the success of the security sector reform in such a challenging environment as Afghanistan.

### **“Local ownership”: How Feasible?**

Usually, experts consider the issue of the so called “local ownership” as the crucial factor behind the success of the SSR. It basically means that the main impetus for any decision taken in this domain should come from the government of the “host country.” Ideas and solutions cannot be driven from outside, they have to be conceived in the minds of local politicians and experts—otherwise they face a risk of being seriously contested by local

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<sup>2</sup> *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, Department of Defence, Report to Congress, November 2010, [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov).

populations. External partners are welcome to take a role of facilitators, but they cannot impose final solutions since the reform quickly loses legitimacy and risks to be rejected even at later stages of its implementation. Nevertheless, in a post-conflict environment like Afghanistan, with a traditionally weak central government and, what is even more important, scarce financial resources amidst rising security needs of the ethnically fragmented population, the issue of “local ownership” falls outside the theoretical embrace. In such circumstances, the idea of how to form security institutions, how numerous the army/police should be, what tasks are to be assigned to these formations is rather the effect of a naturally difficult compromise between host government and external donors, with the latter playing a crucial role in providing funding for activating and sustaining the reforms.

The crucial question here is, thus, to what extent the Afghan National Security Forces are shaped according to a genuinely Afghan vision and are designed to secure the authentic security needs of its society? The concept of ANSF has changed several times since 2001 along the lines of dynamically changing conditions, both internally and externally. After the Taliban regime was defeated, the United States and its allies were not particularly interested in creating security sector institutions in Afghanistan from scratch, even when faced with the fact that these institutions were practically non-existent. Instead, the Bonn agreement (December 2001) provided for putting existing mujahedeen groups, led by local commanders (the so called Afghan Military Force; the AMF) under the supervision of the Afghan MoD. In opposition to the appeals expressed by the Afghan society, anxious about the anticipated “warlord culture” resurgence, the U.S. was also initially reluctant to support the DDR process. Also, without consulting the Afghan Interim Administration, the U.S. decided to provide some of the locally recruited militias with special training to make them capable to fight the remnants of Taliban and Al-Qaida alongside coalition forces, outside the official chain of command of the AMF. As experts claim, at that time there was also no plan to integrate them into the official Afghan army. Only after some time when it became apparent that the AMF, for multiple reasons, would not be able to meet the security needs of Afghanistan, the U.S. finally agreed to build the ANSF (army and police) and accepted the role of the main sponsor of this particular segment of the reform.

However, since the very beginning the controversies have been mounting between the Afghan government and external partners about the size of the future army, its tasks, methods of training and composition. Against the

suggestions coming from the Afghan MoD, for more than seven years the international donors were reluctant to accept the fact that Afghanistan critically needs robust security forces, not a small-sized light infantry, supplemental to U.S. forces in Afghanistan in fighting Al-Qaida and other insurgents. One could have argued at that time whether that army should be composed of former mujahedeens directly incorporated into the new army or whether a “brand new” formation should be created, but this denial on part of the international community proved to be extremely damaging. Combined with a “light footprint approach,” again against the appeal of the Karzai administration, resulted in a resurgence of rebellion and finally in the necessity of an unprecedented military engagement of NATO countries in Afghanistan. Indisputably, the issue of funding was the main reason behind this reluctance (with some political reservations in the background), but ultimately the costs of such an approach proved to be almost unbearably high.

To make things more complicated, one has to admit that the issue of “local ownership,” especially in relation to the Afghan army has always been a very sensitive one. Considering historical premises, since the very beginning of what can be labeled a modern Afghan army, these forces were always heavily dependent of external resources and expertise. Starting from the moment when the British laid the foundation of these forces to strengthen the pro-British central government and balance the power of tribal commanders, through the history of the 20th century, when Afghan officers and soldiers were trained and equipped by the Soviet Union. Already in 1920 Lenin’s envoys offered the Afghan government one million rubles in gold in assistance<sup>3</sup>. Around that time the Soviets also established the Afghan Air Force and supported it by creating the first Afghan Academy. After World War II there was a continuous flow of equipment, money and experts to support the Afghan Army. And when the Soviet aid was terminated in 1992, after the complete withdrawal of the intervening forces from Afghanistan (including mentors who were active on practically every level of the chain of command), the army disintegrated immediately due to the lack of resources the Soviets provided for more than seventy years.

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<sup>3</sup> More on that see Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the War Against the Taliban*, Philadelphia: Da Capo, 2002, p. 221.



## **Sustainability, Sustainability, Sustainability**

The international community should pay particular attention to the lesson offered by this experience. To avoid the paradox that the Afghan army is performing soundly only when it is not “locally owned,” the problem of sustainability of these forces should be considered in great detail. Even if the Americans and other ISAF nations are doing an excellent job with mentoring and training Afghan soldiers through OMLTs, engaging with local communities through PRTs, CIMIC and many other forms of cooperation, there are still few reasons to assume that the ANSF will be able to act independently after 2014. There are two main issues as far as sustainability is concerned: appropriate training and the access of Afghan administration to the funds required to keep up these forces after the ISAF withdrawal.

As far as the first issue is concerned, the message coming from the American and other mentors is eventually quite vague. As it was already quoted Afghan soldiers “are great”—still, a more profound insight into the opinions of people who were to some extent engaged in the process of ANA training makes things appear more ambiguous. Starting with Wikileaks revelations, where Karl W. Eikenberry, former commander of the OMC-A and the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan signaled his concerns over the new U.S. strategy from 2009. “We overestimate the ability of the Afghan security forces to take over. (...) There is also a deeper concern about dependency. The proposed counterinsurgency strategy calls for partnering in the field to quickly improve the Afghan security forces. I do not question the ability of the U.S. forces to effectively take on this mentoring mission (...). However, I am concerned that it is U.S. and other NATO-ISAF troops that will continue to do most of the fighting and take most of the casualties. Rather than reducing Afghan dependence, sending more troops, therefore, is likely to deepen it, at least in the short term.”<sup>4</sup>

The reservations expressed by K.W. Eikenberry seem to be relevant, as they are acknowledged by people engaged in mentoring ANA at the doctrinal level. As some argue “We are not collecting enough lessons learned from the field detailing and documenting how this Army truly fights, we are not asking the ANA commanders in the field what is right, nor are we involving the right people in doctrine development. We are attempting to shape the ANA through doctrine that does not take the ‘boots on the

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<sup>4</sup> More on that see: Ambassador Eikenberry’s Cables on U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan, [www.documents.nytimes.com](http://www.documents.nytimes.com), p. 4.

ground' realities fully into account."<sup>5</sup> In addition, the Canadian government reports show that the ability of the Afghan Army to take a lead in operations against insurgency is very limited or even diminishing, after the Canadians changed the mandate of their engagement from stabilization activities to mere mentoring and training. In the Kandahar province, ANA troops had already played a leadership role in around 45 % of operations, and in 2011 this level was not higher than 10%.<sup>6</sup>

Another issue related to sustainability is linked to the proposed size of the ANA, which is set at around 240,000 soldiers by 2014. As it was already mentioned, at the end of 2011 the ISAF formally managed to be ahead of schedule, but due to attrition rates, the current data published by the U.S. administration may prove to be open to doubt. As Chris Mason, another U.S. diplomat engaged in the build-up of the Afghan army stated recently: "Building this army is like pouring water in a sieve. By their own numbers, they are losing almost half the army to attrition every 12 months."<sup>7</sup> As recent figures show, around 30 to 40 % of soldiers do not decide to re-enlist after their three-year contract finishes. Moreover, even though the conditions of service (including pay and quarters) have been considerably improved during the last several years, the ANA soldiers are still simply giving up the training while still enlisted. The rate of attrition is around 32 per cent annually.<sup>8</sup> Such a situation will cause a constant challenge for the international community and for the Afghan government to keep these forces operational in spite of the constant outflow of trained staff. It is generating additional strain on the already under-resourced Afghan budget, considering also the fact that many cadets start their training with no previous skills, including literacy training.

Indeed, budgetary constraints are another issue which should loom large in the minds of the international donors. As most experts emphasize, the major weakness of the Afghan army has always originated in a severe

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Hoh, "The Problems with Afghan Army Doctrine," *Small Wars Journal*, June 17, 2008, [www.smallwarsjournal.com](http://www.smallwarsjournal.com).

<sup>6</sup> Lee Berthiaume, "Report notes backsliding in Afghan security forces," December 9, 2011, [www.canada.com](http://www.canada.com).

<sup>7</sup> Following Graeme Smith, "Canada's quest to turn Afghanistan's army of phantoms into fighters," *The Globe and Mail*, December 14, 2011, [www.theglobeandmail.com](http://www.theglobeandmail.com).

<sup>8</sup> John Wendle, "Fighting the Taliban: Afghan Army's Attrition Crisis," *Time*, March 2, 2011.

shortage of financial resources, which resulted in the internal incapacity of sufficient training for the officer corps, lack of possibility to create the local defense industry securing the basic procurement etc. That is why these “services” were more often than not “outsourced” to external partners. So if Afghan security forces are not to be dependent on foreign assistance till doomsday, the donor community must be aware that the internal financial sustainability of these forces should be secured.

As for today, budgetary predictions do not give grounds for optimism about the future Afghan ability to maintain the ANSF, even if it finally turned out to be a much smaller force than assumed now. The already-quoted DoD report, while praising the pace of evolution of the ANA, also makes it clear that there is much faster progress in building security forces than with governance and development. As many sources are pointing out, including the World Bank statistics, up to 97% of the Afghan GDP is generated by the presence of the international community, so it is more than evident that after the exit of foreign troops and civilian personnel, the country is going to face a serious recession.<sup>9</sup> With the estimates that merely maintaining the activity of the ANSF would cost the Afghan government between \$6 and \$8 billion a year, concerns over this issue cannot be easily dismissed.

All this leads to a simple conclusion—the SSR and its sustainability cannot be detached from the broader transformation agenda.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite the criticism which has arisen around the date of 2014, adopting the “exit strategy” by the U.S. administration and NATO-ISAF should be seen as a positive symptom for at least two reasons. First, it should serve as a pretext for mobilizing both the international community, the Afghan government and the Afghan society to boost the effectiveness of their efforts. Second, it is high time for the Afghans to realize that the future of their country depends on their ability to sustain the state structures which have already been put up. As historical evidence shows (with Bosnia and Herzegovina as the most recent example), a prolonged dependency on the external hold up, especially in the sphere of governance, denies the society

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<sup>9</sup> *Transition in Afghanistan: Looking Beyond 2014*, World Bank Report November 2011, [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org).

of the “host county” the possibility of learning how to govern their own country and usually has disastrous consequences when foreign assistance finally comes to an end.

With all the above mentioned indicators (slow pace of the security sector reform, incoming economic perturbations, uncertain political settlement with the Taliban) it is nonetheless unimaginable that the international community could completely withdraw its interest in sustaining the progress which has been already achieved with such a paramount military, human and financial effort. Politicians and experts agree (as it was shown by the “Bonn+10” conference in December 2011 and subsequent conference in Berlin in early 2012 which hosted the most prominent experts on Afghanistan) that external support for Afghanistan will continue to be critical to alleviate shortfalls in infrastructure, human capacity, security, and anticipated government budget revenues. However, one cannot assume that the declarations coming from the Obama administration, NATO (with the “Declaration on an Enduring Partnership” signed during the Lisbon Summit in 2010), the EU and other stakeholders will be materialized, especially in view of the economic crisis they themselves try to wrestle with.

From the SSR perspective it will be crucial to sustain the positive achievements of this process. Hence, NATO and the U.S. have to finally decide what kind of military cooperation with Afghanistan they foresee beyond 2014. The prolonged negotiations around the security agreements (NATO-GoA, U.S.-GoA) are raising political tensions and sustain the aura of uncertainty, which always has a debilitating effect on security institutions. Therefore, the following questions need to be addressed: to what extent are these two western partners going to be engaged in Afghanistan after 2014? On what kind of assistance (military, financial, political) can the Afghan administration count? And what is a long-term plan for financial assistance to support the SSR?

Additionally, in the short term, the U.S. and the NTM-A should obviously concentrate on intensified mentoring of the ANA, taking into consideration that in a two-years’ perspective they will be expected to undertake completely independent actions. Therefore, the ability of the ANA to perform in continuously adverse conditions (assuming that the level of insurgency will remain the same) must be scrutinized very carefully. It is obvious that the first challenge is to train as many troops as possible, concentrating on forces which proved to be most effective in fighting the rebellion to date. Since the Afghan National Police and other local forces

(like the Afghan Local Police) failed to create its image as a credible security provider for the Afghan society, the bulk of the effort in assuring the security in the country will rest on the Army. That is why the main priority should be training the special formations of the Afghan National Army like Afghan Commando Brigades, which, after the U.S. troops have been withdrawn, will be considered to be the main combat-able force of the ANA and ANA Special Forces, designated to apply more sophisticated methods of fighting the insurgency. Specifically, these formations should not only be able to undertake combat missions, but to plan them in every detail. As experts underline, as for now this crucial capability is lacking at every ANA level, including special forces, which are relying on the foreign mentors partnering them continuously.

Another crucial issue linked both to “local ownership” and “sustainability” is higher military education, which should be treated as another priority. Afghanistan must gain an ability to (re)create military elites by its own effort, so the well-educated officers could further mentor the ANA soldiers. To achieve this goal, not only the broad possibilities of training Afghan officers at Western military academies should be sustained, but also further investment in the already-launched project of creating the Afghan Defence University (ADU) have to be provided. This project is of extreme importance, considering that such institutions form not only military professionals but also forge national identity, which is crucial for such a highly factionalized society, where severe ethnic tensions will always persist. At the same time, the pressure on the Afghan military establishment should be exerted to keep ethnic balance and fair representation of all ethnic groups among the officer staff and cadets in the ADU.

Another challenge is to assure the ANA will stay equipped suitably to perform independent military operations beyond 2014. In this context, the program of weapon acquisition for the Air Forces will be crucial to assure the ability of taking such actions especially in the context of the fact that in 2013 the usability of many aircraft (mostly of Soviet origin) at the Afghan Air Forces’ disposal will be terminated. To alleviate the shortfalls in the area of “strategic enablers” (airlift, communications etc.) as well as to assure the coverage of other expenses the NATO-ANA Trust Fund should take a much more proactive stance when it comes to collecting the proper level of funds. Assuring accessibility to financial assistance for the Afghan government is also important when it comes to its ability to maintain the level of salaries to avert further resignations, especially in the ANA (totally, for the 40,000 strong ANSF it will cost between \$6-8 bn a year). This is especially

important in the light of the fact that if the insurgency after 2014 is still an important challenge to Afghanistan's security, some ANSF members could (re)join the ranks of the fighting opposition (or criminal groups with links to drug business) in the case when their income drops dramatically. At the same time, as the recent example of corruption revealed at the Kabul Bank (an institution responsible also for transferring funds to the ANSF) shows, donor strategies should be accompanied by the establishment of strict control mechanisms to avoid such enormous losses.

Moreover, it is worth remembering that the success of a SSR in any country strongly depends on the attitude shown by the neighbouring countries, which may appear as great supporters of regional stability but also act as major spoilers. For many years the "regional factor" was neglected and only in recent years western countries engaged in Afghanistan accepted the fact that the future of Afghanistan will be strongly dependent on political realities in the South-East Asia. In this context, Afghanistan's strained relations with Pakistan, which is proven to play a double-game in this conflict, are of crucial importance, so the international community should be focused on exerting constant political pressure on the authorities of both countries, but also assuring that the economic situation of Pakistan will not exacerbate regional instability.

Apart from this, two relatively promising partnerships—between Afghanistan and India and between Afghanistan and the Russian Federation, which are slowly emerging,—should be praised by the international community despite some obvious political reservations they may provoke. Indian specific interest in Afghanistan, based both on traditional links between the two countries and current political (rivalry with Pakistan) and economic interests, finally ended in signing the Agreement on Strategic Partnership (October 2011). In the context of the SSR, it provides for assistance to training and equipping the Afghan National Security Forces as well as building their capabilities. Only recently the Indian government has revealed its plan to train around 30,000 of the ANA soldiers, including equipping them with both small arms and heavy weapons.<sup>10</sup> India is also one of the main investors in Afghanistan, engaged in infrastructure and agriculture sector reconstruction, which also creates promising environment for the SSR, whose success is strictly linked to the realization of a broader

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<sup>10</sup> "India steps up Afghan troop training," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, November 29, 2011, [www.jdw.janes.com](http://www.jdw.janes.com).

transformation agenda.<sup>11</sup> In this context, also Russian decisions to engage in the SSR (including counternarcotics operations) should be treated as an important step towards the “regionalization” of the Afghan reconstruction effort.

Finally, the issue of timing needs to be underlined, as it is a question around which serious political controversies arose. As it is emphasized by western politicians and experts, the international community has already been engaged in Afghanistan for nearly a decade and there was ample time to assist the Afghan government in the nation-building effort. Again, numbers can be misleading in this context. If we consider how many years after the Taliban regime collapsed were lost and how many opportunities missed due to the lack of a coherent donor strategy of a security sector reform, under-resourcing or simply other priorities, obviously the real effort in this particular domain started much later than usually reported. And if we complement this picture with the fact that countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the SSR started after the cessation of hostilities in 1995 in a much more welcoming environment, are still supported by the EU and NATO, the future of western assistance to Afghanistan needs to be reviewed in a completely different light.

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<sup>11</sup> As some experts argue, the withdrawal of the military assistance may also result in a downshifting of civilian development programs. Therefore, foreign investment provided by neighbours is of extreme importance for the condition of the Afghan economy now and after 2014.





Piotr Łukasiewicz

## Afghanistan: It's the Politics Again

"I just pray for Taliban not to become the rulers of Afghanistan again" said my Afghan friend during a dinner in Kabul on my recent trip there. A well-educated journalist and an owner of a small daily newspaper, he is a very open-minded and liberally oriented person and at the same time very critical about what he calls an "American occupation," underlining the bankruptcy of elites ruling Afghanistan. Today, this sentence can be heard frequently in discussions with Afghans, at least with those who still have enough patience to talk to visitors from Europe and explain to them the intricacy of the current situation in their land.

I have heard this sentence many times, but in the tenth year of the foreign intervention it carries a special meaning. It reflects the complexity of the assessment of our successes and failures after a decade of war. It says that the Taliban was a nightmare not only for the elites in Kabul but also for the nation which had suffered under their regime in the nineties. Their possible comeback to power means a comeback of anarchy of the worst kind epitomized by the symbolic figure of a brutal warlord as master of the situation. At the same time, the above sentence blames Western societies for the fact that despite conferences, plans and promises the solution has not been found and the agony of Afghanistan is being endlessly prolonged. On the one hand my friend's words give our efforts in Afghanistan special credentials—it is a cause worth fighting for to stop a possible comeback of a brutal, anarchic regime which has a known record of cooperation with terrorist groups (post-2001), a comeback which brings the possibility of an anarchic space being created for these organisations to regroup. On the other hand, the same words reflect a different perspective: our efforts have not been able to bring about a positive change and neither have guaranteed stability to date nor can they guarantee it in the future, after 2014, when the intervention ends and Western countries redeploy their troops back home.

In a nutshell: the Taliban are still feared in Afghanistan but we have been unable to prevent them from coming closer to victory in recent years.

My friend's opinion hints at two possible outcomes for Afghanistan. Either we succeed and in 2014 we will leave the country on a relatively steady course towards a state capable of catering for the basic needs of its citizens or right after 2014 edgy leaders of Afghan factions will jump at one another's throat in a bloody struggle for power in the fragmented country. Such fragmentation can create space for yet unknown groups, possibly destabilising the neighbouring Pakistan or undermining European security.

It is worth summarising the balance of the previous ten years in order to show to the reader that Afghanistan does not only constitute an object of an "imperial game" carried out by third powers or, alternatively, a mere media flash news, but is rather a country whose fate will not be without consequences for other corners of the world.

### **The West: Flagging Resolve and Failed Policies**

The biggest failure and the hallmark of the current situation is the dramatic loss of trust in Western goals and ambitions in Afghanistan. The Afghans have noticed the fundamental aversion of our societies, politicians and soldiers to continue a hopeless struggle against the enemy who is hard to spot and too elusive to be defined clearly. Afghans have heard volumes about the possible and premature pull-out of Western soldiers from their country while everyday experience tells them that conditions for such a withdrawal are unripe and that none of those NATO's goals, which are important for Afghanistan, have been achieved. The organised pull-out resembles an escape from trouble rather than a proof of a job well done. The popular wisdom is that the so-called "transition" of responsibilities for provinces and districts in most cases does not meet minimal standards and brings no improvement in the level of deliverance of public services. At the same time Afghans understand and contend that NATO soldiers and civilians do not only provide support to president Karzai's rule but also constitute a vehicle for modernisation in Kabul, Herat and other cities. Foreign presence in Afghanistan helps to create business and maintain a growing economy as well as provide the budding state with an umbrella under which it moves to implement reforms and performs its basic functions. According to the World Bank, Afghanistan's economy in 2009/2010 reached a record real GDP growth of 22.5 per cent. It is an awesome example of things going in

the right direction even if the economy is still fuelled by the World Bank and foreign donors.

We have not defeated the Taliban nor brought them to the negotiation table. This seems rather obvious when we listen to journalists who report attacks in Afghanistan, be it on military bases or on embassies in Kabul. The mantra of negotiations has been mumbled since the first serious British attempt to deal with problems by signing a "not-so-long-lasting" truce with insurgents in the Musa Qala district of Helmand in September 2006. British soldiers and diplomats followed their own historical pattern (known from the "Great Game" period) in 2007 when they tried to create a political and organisational space for insurgents to lay down their weapons in the Helmand province. We saw efforts to organise training camps and jobs for the reconciled Taliban and serious talks between British diplomats and Afghan "wise men" on the one side and Helmand insurgents on the other. It all ended with Afghan government stepping in brutally in December of 2007, and expelling the two most skilled British representatives from the country under the accusations of conspiring against the legal authorities with their enemies. It was a visible sign that in the process called "negotiations with the Taliban" there is more at stake than simply NATO soldiers' security. Many people assess the Afghan government as weak, yet this government was still able to pursue its goals and interests on its own ground and to prevent foreign meddling.

Since the new U.S. administration took over in 2008/2009 we have observed a new mood amongst the international coalition in Afghanistan when it comes to dealing with armed opposition. In August 2009, the then-commander of the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), gen. Stanley McChrystal, announced his strategic assessment, claiming that the ISAF was improperly resourced and fitted to do its job and in particular that the ISAF could not meet the requirements to interact with Afghan people and understand the complexity of the Afghan society. He proposed changing the goal of the ISAF from "fighting the insurgency by all means possible" to "protecting the population from the insurgency" and implementing principles of counter-insurgency doctrine (known as "COIN") in Afghanistan. From that point on, the ISAF was to become more population-oriented and less alienated from Afghan realities. The new ISAF doctrine reflected president Obama's renewed Afghanistan policy which brought such terms as "reconciliation" and "reintegration" into broad daylight and made the need for a political solution one of the main issues.

Such a change in ISAF posture also brought a new approach to dealing with the insurgency and new assumptions about its possible role or position in any future political setup in Afghanistan. The need for finding a political solution in 2009 and 2010 evolved from secret talks between the Afghan government and Taliban representatives, followed by the creation of official government bodies oriented to maintain links and talks with armed opposition.

The first publicly known contacts were made in the past under the patronage of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in 2008 (during the Ramadan in Mecca). The series of meetings between negotiations-oriented members of Quetta Shura (the leading body of the Taliban) and representatives of the Afghan government (including the highest ranks of the Afghan National Army) were the first attempts to clarify the intentions of the Taliban-led insurgency. One issue was particularly interesting at that time and that was the question whether the Taliban had cut their links with more aggressively oriented Al-Qaida supporters (like the Haqqani family or mullah Dadullah's organisation in Kandahar).

Such attempts at bringing the Taliban to the negotiations table were undermined from the beginning by one of the leading factors behind their movement: Pakistan's position on the future of Afghanistan. Simply speaking, this position assumes that the Taliban may have a political role in Afghanistan under the condition that it will take into account Pakistani interests. This stance of Pakistan was revealed in February 2010 when the ISI secret service arrested one of the top leaders of the Taliban Shura, mullah Abdul Ghani "Beradar." Mullah Beradar was a very prominent figure among insurgent ranks and according to several Afghan politicians (including Karzai's brother) favoured negotiations with the Afghan government without Pakistani oversight. This arrest and the series of following captures in Pakistan were reported and interpreted as a strong signal from the ISI that there will be no talks without taking them into account.

Another serious blow to the idea of reconciliation with the Taliban came in September 2011 with the killing of the chief of the High Peace Council, the former Afghanistan president Barnahuddin Rabbani. Assumed killers came from the Haqqani organisation which is loosely associated with the Taliban and remains a link between the Taliban and Al-Qaida. The former Northern Alliance leader fought the Taliban in the nineties with his Tajik supporters. The Tajiks still oppose the idea of including the Taliban in the Afghan political life and Professor Rabbani was unable to show for significant

successes from his time in office. couldn't present any positive results of his function. His death (later accredited to the Haqqani network) raised doubts whether the insurgents would ever be ready to become politically meaningful in the course of the peace process, although it is still not clear whether "the pure" Taliban gave its consent to carry out this assassination. Again suspicions have been raised about the alleged support given to Haqqanis by the ISI. Rabbani's death could be a sign that the ISI does not allow negotiations without their concord and without assurance that the future political scene in Afghanistan will not favour those who oppose closer ties with Pakistan.

The whole peace-talks process is further complicated and blurred by several other factors, internal and external: the Pashtun support for central government (the Pashtunis being the main constituency of the ruling Karzai's circle), the rejection of the process by former Northern Alliance leaders, who in the recent history opposed any Pashtun idea of unity, as well as lack of a proper interlocutor—an issue that deserves extra attention.

The mantra of negotiations and reconciliation is being repeated over and over by almost every member of the anti-Taliban coalition but the question remains open of who should be the one to talk to them? We, the people of the West, simply do not know the language. This does not simply boil down to our problem with the difficult Pashto or Dari pronunciation. It is rather the question of having trouble finding convincing arguments for such conversation to be held when the only thing that Westerners are sure of is the urgent need to go back home and stop worrying about Afghanistan. It is not the best hand at any table. So we chose rather to send Afghan negotiators—but they need a strong legitimation on a national scale, they must truly represent reconciled legal political and ethnic factions. The Taliban is not merely a group of criminals and religion-driven thugs (at least they evolved from such a pitiful state), they constitute a political force aspiring to seize power and sometimes presenting camouflaged political strategy for a country that they also consider to be their homeland. As such, the Taliban should be engaged with the tools from the portfolio of the political system. Meanwhile, we are dealing with the absence of a legitimation-granting system in Afghanistan, where there are no parties in the parliament, there is no political screening of the internal and external policy of the government by the parliament and the role of Loya Jirgah—a traditional form of representative democracy older than many European parliaments—has become an ethnographic curiosity for foreign observers rather than a body

able to elect a national representation for talks with the coalition of insurgents.

Maybe the biggest mistake of the West in Afghanistan lies in failing to exert a consistent and unified pressure on Afghan authorities to mould their state in a way allowing it to survive in modern and difficult 21<sup>st</sup> century conditions in a region of extreme challenges. The slogan of "building democracy in Afghanistan" has been compromised many times and has become a symbol of failure, but nobody, including the US or Europe, not mentioning NATO as a military organisation, is able to present an alternative that would give hope for survival and be in accord with local tradition. Historically, this tradition consisted feeble central power ("a weak king") and a plethora of smaller parties, who were able to come to terms with each other and exert considerable influence on the state policies.

And yet my personal experience tells me that such values and ideas as democracy, political parties and a parliamentary cabinet system are at least tolerated and sometimes desired by many Afghans—including my friend quoted at the beginning. The issue is that while these are concepts dreamed of by many Afghans, the day-to-day practice makes them tolerate injustice and abuses of power on almost every level of the social structure. This reality is to blame for the failures of the attempts to reform the country, and is invoked as a reason for tolerating the institution of *qadi*—brutal Taliban-affiliated judges that move on bicycles from village to village and deliver swift and ruthless quasi-justice with no chance of satisfying people's need for real justice.

For a long time, the international community has had its favourable champion of the changes—president Hamid Karzai who came to be perceived as a person with an apparently good understanding of our "goals" and who guaranteed their accomplishment. He was also a fluent English speaker—a fact not without significance in the reception of his Anglo-Saxon partners. With the lapse of time and when the West realised its own failures and mistakes, president Karzai started to be held responsible for all the ills of the situation and would even be accused of sabotaging our mission, when he or his family did not live up to certain Western expectations. But one has to realise that Karzai long time ago had evolved from what we blindly thought him to be, i.e. a Western protégé, and became powerful in his own right, the most able of Afghan politicians, skilfully navigating among various factions and pulling many strings from his palace in Kabul. He has it all but for one thing: he is still missing the pan-ethnic Afghan legitimation to negotiate with

the Taliban in the fashion I described above. He represents himself and maybe some of various Pashtun minorities but his government and his appointees lack necessary political support and oversight of major political groupings. The fault is in the system not in Karzai himself or his political entourage.

We had an opportunity twice—during the 2009 presidential and the 2010 parliamentary elections sponsored by the West—to convince president Karzai to change the current political setup without giving up his political position. And twice we failed to do so in the name of our falsely recognised desire to keep as far as possible from Afghan politics. It was 2009 when international community spent hundreds of millions of dollars to organise and conduct presidential elections whose outcome could hardly be assessed as fair and yet we were unable to promote or implement an Afghan-style system of political parties which would balance out Karzai's strengthening position. Consecutive elections in 2010 were just a sorrowful sign of the international community's impotence when we all observed in shocked disbelief the mass rigging and systematic physical violence directed at polling stations employees who did not want to fill ballot boxes with forged voting cards. What was also cruelly thrashed in the process was our sense of decency and conviction of still doing the right job in Afghanistan. Of course we should not claim that voting for parties or a new electoral law could have prevented fraud but at least we could have had a new political power in the form of a parliament able to oversee what the government is doing and thus achieve necessary balance.

### **What Went Right?**

There are obviously some positive changes and combined Afghan and Western efforts in the last ten years have brought meaningful results. One is pretty evident: the original cause of the intervention—the Al-Qaida—lost its former status of being the strong arm of fundamentalism capable of punishing the West for its alleged or true sins against the Muslim world. The origins of the so-called Arab spring will surely be analysed thoroughly, and the intervention in Afghanistan (and Iraq) will likely be featured in this analysis. Both the intervention and the current developments in Afghanistan have shown that violent jihad in its twisted sense will not prevail and is not able to remould Muslim societies to its liking in isolation from the rest of the world. Even if the Taliban in any shape return, be it as the only power or just as a part of the power structure in the future setup, it is clear how hard they



would find to make alliances with extremists in the likes of Bin Ladin. The recent letter by the leader of the Taliban, mullah Omar, shows that they will rather stay away from extremism that has brought misfortune on their country and forced them into exile and miserable life in the shadow of the Predator.

Another achievement is the change in the mentality of the Afghan people, mostly those living in the urban areas. For them, the war is all but over: they study at universities, open new businesses and build the service sector on their own. It is hard to imagine cities like Kabul, Herat or Mazar-e-Sharif to become completely blacked-out (it is even more improbable to assume that the Taliban would ever be able to ensure the supply electricity) or silent again (we do not know whether the Taliban would allow music or not).

There are external signs of democracy developing: the freedom of speech is being exercised by a growing number of media outlets (around 20 daily newspapers in Kabul alone, countless radio stations, several TV stations). Of course freedom of speech and journalists' security is abused by various powers, be it from governmental circles or criminal underworld. Sometimes they pay an ultimate price for the pursuit of their aspirations and dedication to the job. But the media sector development gives hope for a gradual change in the mentality of this otherwise peaceful society. It is an important observation that Afghan wars are being fought mostly in rural, not urban, areas, which gives the cities a chance to develop and to live a very different climate to the insurgency-linked anarchy prevailing elsewhere.

### **The Way Forward: Politics is Key**

What needs to be done? The most obvious and most urgent task for the ISAF countries is to finish the process of transition as planned, i.e. in the 2014 timeframe, without giving up prematurely. The underlying military focus may raise justified anxiety that we concentrate only on the military foundations of the Afghan state and thus build a kind of a "junta state." Such a scenario should be avoided at all costs, yet one needs to bear in mind that the international community does not have resources or patience to exercise the proper "nation and state building" anymore. The experiences of the 2001-2009 period have shown that such nation-building cannot be done based solely on the military component, while civilian engagement has proved to be time-consuming and requires far more resources. Afghanistan demands immediate solutions and the countries of the ISAF are presently



more preoccupied with tidying up their own economies, regulations and systemic failures. What we are left with is the building of the Afghan Security Forces, training them to match the tasks ahead and providing assurance that post-2014 they can still count on us, both financially and in terms of training.

It appears that the military process can and should be accompanied by a political one. The real political process, as distinguished from its fashionable ersatz coming with labels such as "the Bonn process," "the Kabul process" or "the Washington process," should aim at transforming the ineffective presidential system into a more dispersed arrangement, i.e. a cabinet system with strong parliamentary involvement. Also an administration reform should be implemented as soon as possible to give provinces more power and resources. The present Afghanistan resembles more a centralised communist country with a distinct oriental touch, where the central authorities (visibly ineffective and corrupt) with an almost regal demeanour bestow resources on the provinces, and by maintaining a close grip on decision-making alienate them from the state. The famous call of Adam Michnik in Poland in 1989: "Your president, our prime minister" can also be put into practice in Afghanistan, naturally retaining due consideration to a different Afghan ethnic and historic heritage. President Karzai's position and his base of support appear to be strong and with good prospects to be maintained in a new setup. But power should also be given to a renewed government constituted by a new parliament and elected through a vote of confidence. The next elections are coming 3 years from now so there is enough time to write a new electoral law, amend the constitution and give parties a preferential political position.

One controversial issue remains: whether the crimes of the past committed by various groups and persons should be subject to judicial investigation and prosecuted. The bill of 2007 that secures amnesty for all crimes does not seem to have solved this issue as it was adopted by a parliament with dubious legitimacy and composition. We cannot say that a simple call either for bringing criminals to justice or for declaring universal amnesty would be appropriate and possible in the current situation, yet some kind of legitimate national discussion is needed nonetheless. Such discussion can be conducted by a representative parliament, not one serving as shelter for former warlords.

There is also a question of how to convince the Afghans to implement the proposed changes. A possible response lies in national identity: it is necessary

to find one strong unifying factor that could be shared by all Afghan citizens. One such factor could be a pan-national sentiment of regional exceptionalism, intended to boost the Afghan pride and offset the current indifference of regional powers vis-a-vis Afghanistan's aspirations for greater stability and security. This exceptionalism could consist a recognition of Afghanistan's prominent role in the region, and be supported with strong armed forces. Such idea may sound pitiful now but its meaning is coherent both with Afghan history and its relatively recent tradition ("the graveyard of empires"). Such position can only be achieved with assistance from other countries and assured by means of strategic partnership treaties like the one recently signed with India in October 2011. In the complicated regional situation where Afghanistan's neighbours represent various and often contradictory agendas, only bilateral relations provide the means to strengthen Afghanistan's position.

The war has been going on for ten years now and we can safely assume that it will last another three with its intensity hopefully spinning down. It would have lasted shorter if the international community had known in advance what it was hoping to achieve and had been able to calculate the necessary resources to match those aspirations, having similarly predicted and accepted the costs. It is a war where politics was moved to the backburner right at the beginning, leaving all political goals for soldiers to achieve and creating a situation where Afghans did not feel truly empowered. Hopefully the atmosphere of serious responsibility for Afghanistan will be shared in the future by international and Afghan leaders alike.

Davood Moradian

## **Afghan Cultural War and Cross Cultural Dialogue**

Creed is a predominant driving force in many wars, alongside greed and grievances. Culture, value system, national identity and historical narratives are the objects as well as the battlegrounds of warring parties. The Afghan conflict is partly a cultural war, intermingled with other domestic, regional and international factors. This war is waged on the place of religion in private and public spheres; the status of women; the type of state; the basis for entitlement and participation in political life; the competition of civic and ethnic discourses; the troubling relations between Islam and the west; and the compatibility of Islam with universal values and democratic form of political organization. As with any war, it is imperative to seek an appropriate “conflict resolution” strategy for the cultural pillar of the Afghan war.

The discourse of cross-cultural dialogue is a rich field which can facilitate the transformation of the present violent cultural war into a civic dialogue, mutual understanding and accommodation. This will also help bring the Afghans and their international partners closer together and reverse the growing mutual misunderstanding, disappointment and blame game. Acknowledging the primacy of universal values over cultural, national and socially-constructed norms will also be an important way in addressing not only the Afghan conflict but also many present global challenges.

### **Premises of Cross-cultural Dialogue**

In discussing cross-cultural dialogue a number of issues are presented. One is whether certain norms and values are universal or unique to a specific nation, culture, geography and religion. Can we speak of “Ethnic Norms/

Values” similar to “Ethnic Foods”? Can we extend certain cultural prejudices to include certain fundamental questions and principles? Cultural and behavioral prejudices and stereotypes such as English cooking, German sense of humor, French humility, Greek prudence, Scottish generosity, American subtlety, Pakistani honesty and Afghan punctuality. Can we exclusively associate certain principles, fundamental norms and values with certain social groups and communities? Can we extend copyrights and intellectual property rights to ethical values? And relate the Greeks with the invention of rationality and freedom, Spartans with warrior virtue, Persians with despotism, or uniquely associate Christianity with love and forgiveness, Islam with violence and intolerance, the Orient with order, and the Occident with decadence? Addressing the tendency to reduce fundamental ethical values to a specific group, geography, culture and religion is an important issue for cross-cultural dialogue. No single group can claim a monopoly or be excluded from sharing and contributing to articulating and developing universal values such as justice, freedom, equality, fairness and solidarity as well as vices such as aggression, intolerance and despotism.

Another tendency is compartmentalization and a binary mind set: a mindset that sees and forces us to choose between perceived conflicting norms and values: justice, order, law, freedom, peace, equality, stability, individual autonomy, communal interest, national security, human security, global responsibility and fraternity, accountability, reconciliation, national sovereignty, universal norms, religious imperatives, secular norms and so on and so forth. The perceived conflict and competition between fundamental norms is more problematic and visible at the policy-level as many recent global challenges such as the establishment of the International Criminal Court, interventions in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq and the terrorism discourse demonstrate. In the ongoing debate on Afghanistan, one can see such a dichotomous mindset in discussions over the utility of politics over military. An important task for both the cross-cultural dialogue and the holistic approach to security must be addressing such a perceived conflict and the resolution and reconciliation between competing norms and values. We can learn from other traditions and cultures by looking at how they have addressed such conflicts and resolutions. The concept of “Unity/Oneness,” which is the foundational principle of Sufism, has successfully addressed the interconnected nature of all living creatures as well as social norms and precepts. For Immanuel Kant, there was no clash of conceptualizations between order and justice. Law and right were unified. In his *Rechtslehre* (doctrine of right) legality and morality were seamless. The South African

concept of *ubuntu* is a manifestation of the Sufi concept of Unity and Kant's *Rechtslehre*. *Ubuntu* refers to the interconnectedness of people and the responsibility people have towards each other, emphasizing compassion, justice, reciprocity, harmony and humanity. Gandhi's ideal state, *Ramrajya*, is another example. Such a state is with no communal connotations—a state where values of justice, equality, idealism, renunciation and sacrifice are practiced. Gandhi emphasized, "Let no one commit the mistake of thinking that Ramrajya means a rule of Hindus. My Ram is another name for Khuda or God. I want Khuda Raj which is the same thing as the Kingdom of God on Earth."

Cross-cultural dialogue is not only an avenue to reach "them," but it also helps understand "us." We all have the tendency to compare "our" theories with "their" practices, putting ourselves on Mars and "them" on Venus. It is through dialogue that we can learn more about "our" practices and "their" theories as well as the convergence of mutual practices and theories. Dialogue does not necessarily entail moving from one extreme to another, from hubris and dogmatism to total surrender and defeatism. It is about the courage and ability to subject one's values to other assessments and an open-mindedness to listen.

## The Myths of Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been a laboratory and battleground not only for warring nations and competing interests but also concepts, prejudices and ideologies. Since 2001, we have seen the manifestation of many conceptual battles, prejudices and de-mystification of some myths about Afghans and their international partners. Despite propaganda waged by Islamist ideologues, Afghanistan has shown that the West is not at war with Islam, owing to conscious and genuine efforts of Western nations in showing sensitivity towards Islamic norms. Moreover, contrary to Orientalist ideology, the supposedly xenophobic and backward Afghans have embraced democratic forms of political organization and are yearning for good governance and justice.

Nevertheless, despite significant investment and sacrifice, we could have been in a better position today if both the Afghans and their international partners had refrained from the tendency to succumb to their prejudices and uninformed reading of Afghan history and society. One myth is the myth of democratization of Afghanistan and the Afghans' resistance and rejection of democratic norms, practices and institutions, because of their cultural and

religious character. In reality, neither democratization nor nation-building was the priority of the West in Afghanistan. They were/are accessories to an anti-terror-based military campaign. There was no desire or plan to create a Jeffersonian democracy in Afghanistan from the very beginning to today. A mainly military campaign, plus prejudiced views about the West's superiority and democratic credentials and Afghans' inherent backward and tribal character resulted in a "warlord democracy." This was further compounded by the false choice between justice and stability, which was advocated by the first UN envoy and its ensuing acceptance by many Western nations. Another manifested example of cultural prejudices was resource allocation. Based on the view that Afghans are inherently corrupt and corrupting in contrast to the professionalism and law-abiding nature of Westerners, nearly 2/3 of reconstruction projects and resources were given to Western firms and companies. However the reality was quite different.

The different view of the Taliban and Al-Qaida was and is another manifestation of a cultural prejudice and a form of culturally-oriented racism. Western nations rightly treat Al-Qaida as a radical and terrorist entity, whereas they remain confused about the Taliban. Despite the Taliban's record of human rights violations and continuing brutalities, some Western nations, particularly Great Britain are ready to allow them to share power and/or sovereignty as long as they do not play host to the enemies of the West. In other words, the West does not care what the Taliban have done and would do to the Afghan people as long as they merely sever their link with the West's enemies. Call it *realpolitik*, defeat, hypocrisy, moral decadence, utter selfishness or strategic naivety. Furthermore, despite its active support of terrorism, particularly by its security establishment, Pakistanis still treated as a strategic partner and a spoiled child by many Western nations. On the Afghan side, many of us hide ourselves behind the shield of wars and blaming foreigners. And some of us have been engaging in national looting. The Afghan people are sandwiched between two morally bankrupt entities: the narco-mafia and the Taliban's naked violence and brutality. In the absence of a sincere commitment to certain normative principles such as accountability, mutual responsibility, and justice for victims many interpret the current "peace process" as an attempt to reconcile the Taliban's terrorism and Pakistan's hegemony with Kabul's corruption.

## **A Renewed Compact**

The prospect for the resolution of the Afghan conflict, including its cultural component is premised on certain principles and appropriate implementing mechanisms. (Re) initiating social and political compacts between the main stakeholders is one way towards this end. This includes mutually inclusive compacts among the Afghan political community, between the Afghan government and people, between Afghanistan and Pakistan, between Afghanistan and its neighbours and between Afghanistan and its international partners.

As with any social and political compact, the renewed compact between Afghanistan and the international community needs to be founded on certain mutually agreed norms and principles. The most important principle is the principle of solidarity. Afghans who have endured almost four decades of persistent conflicts and violence are entitled to continuing solidarity of the community of nations. Afghanistan is a just and humanitarian cause as well as an imperative for regional stability and global peace. It is a rare example of the alignment of universal values, global stability, and regional and national security imperatives. Another important principle is the principle of mutual accountability both for the past as well as the future. We should not forget that the Soviet invasion and ensuing support for the Mujahedeen paved the ground for the destruction of Afghanistan and the radicalization of Afghan and Pakistani societies. One could also hark back to the colonial era, where the seeds of many present problems were sown by the colonial powers or recall numerous strategic blunders since 2001. The Afghans need to grow up and assume responsibility for their country as well. Finally, there is the principle of consistency between preaching and practice, between ends and means. To this end, we must reject the notion of good and bad terrorism, or the belief that we can create a democratic and responsible Afghanistan by co-opting and empowering warlords and war criminals.

## **Mediating Concepts & Indigenous Institutions**

For the implementation of such a social and political compact, we need to be more creative and courageous. Identifying indigenous institutions and mediating concepts is the way forward. To this end, one can give two examples which are also relevant to the discourse of inter-cultural dialogue. The most important principle and norm in Islam is justice, not only in its retributive form, but more importantly in its inclusivity and wholeness. For

Western audiences and policy-makers, corruption is mainly understood in the form of rule of law, whereas for an Islamic discourse corruption is a form of injustice. We can tackle more effectively our endemic corruption by articulating it as a form of injustice and thus un-Islamic, in addition to strengthening the institutions of the rule of law. Another mediating concept is the notion of forgiveness. Once again Islam, particularly Sufism, as well as social institutions such as *Pashtonwali* are imbued with the notion of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the reconciliation between demands of retributive justice, accountability, national reconciliation and peace.

The discourse of inter-cultural dialogue must empower and facilitate all communities and backgrounds towards a conceptual articulation of a moral community, founded upon fundamental principles. Such a community needs, however, to be generous and inclusive in allowing all communities to participate and contribute to creating and sustaining a global moral community. There are certainly different ways and approaches to the realization of principles of justice, equality, freedom, and self-determination. However, different manifestations and approaches should not become a justification to pursue hierarchical understanding and partial implementation of universal values and principles. Denying human dignity and human rights to women in the name of Asian values and Islamic Sharia must be denounced as they clash with the fundamental principles of justice and equality. By utilizing indigenous and mediating concepts such as Islamic principles of justice, our cause will be more effective and receptive to Islamic audiences.

### **Afghanistan: A New Greco-Bactrian Civilization**

Our success in Afghanistan will be an important step towards such an end. Afghanistan is the natural candidate for demonstrating the possibility of co-existence, mutual accommodation and interaction of different cultures and a bridge between the Islamic world and the West. Such a vision and status is not new to us in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is the home for the first ever successful model of East and West hybrid political organization. The Greco-Bactrian civilization was established in Balkh, in today's northern and western Afghanistan following Alexander the Great's adventure to the region. In contemporary Afghanistan, we are struggling to come up with a new version of Greco-Bactrian paradigm by becoming the cross-roads for regional cooperation and integration, an Islamic democracy and a strategic partner with our Western partners. Our cultural heritage is rich and diverse, comprising the pre-Islamic era, Khurasan, modern Afghan nation-state



period, the inter-factional war after Soviet's withdrawal era and the dark period of the Taliban and its deep radicalization legacies . Our national identity has also been enriched by our unique geographical position, recent migration and interaction with the Middle-East, Central Asia and the Sub-continent and recently with the Western world. Our religious identity has also been pluralistic and moderate. Prior to the invasion of the Arabs in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, today's Afghanistan was a leading Buddhist centre as well as the birthplace of the prophet Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism. There used to be Jewish neighbourhoods in some Afghan cities, particularly in Herat, as late as the 1960's and an Armenian Christian community as well. An important part of our cultural war is about the identity of Afghans as a nation and our historical narratives and legacies. The Taliban's vision of Afghan national identity is a totalitarian-Arabized/Islamist prescription, whereas some ethno-political entrepreneurs reject the pre-modern nation-state cultural heritage and identity of Afghanistan. This is indicative of their hostility towards Persian/Khurasani culture and heritage, ignoring the fact that today's Afghanistan was one of the main centres of Persian culture and civilization, or overlooking the Pashtun and Turkic heritages. The new Afghan national identity must celebrate all positive aspects of Afghan history and heritages from Zoroaster, Avicenna, Ghoharshad, Jalal-Al-Din Mohammed Balkhi-Rumi to Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the Frontier Gandhi Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan or Badsha (Pacha) Khan and our enlightened King Amanullah. Undoubtedly it is a Herculean task but not an impossible one.



Marcin Andrzej Piotrowski

## **Stabilization of Afghanistan: Internal Problems and Regional Dimension**

Afghanistan has just reached the tenth anniversary of military intervention by the U.S. and its allies. Although Osama bin-Laden, who was the main reason for this intervention met his fate in May 2011 in his hide-out in Pakistan, the situation in Afghanistan is still difficult and complex. It is easy to voice pessimistic opinions about Afghanistan, but it is far from easy to analyze the current situation in this country, or to light the way amidst uncertainty about the future. The present paper focuses on the problems with arguably the strongest impact on Afghanistan: the U.S. and European plans as of winter 2011–2012, the complexity of security situation, the progress of Afghan reconciliation and reintegration initiatives, the security and geopolitical calculations of Afghanistan's key neighbours, as well as their impact on the future of Afghan infrastructure and resources base.

### **Western Plans for Afghanistan**

The "Bonn+10" meeting in early December 2011 marked the tenth anniversary of the first Bonn International Conference on Afghanistan. "Bonn+10" focused on the prospects for international engagement in Afghanistan till 2014. It was attended by representatives of the Afghan government, legal opposition and NGO delegations from Afghanistan as well as NATO–ISAF countries and the International Contact Group. In addition, the NATO summit in Chicago (May 2012) is expected to decide on further support for Afghan authorities beyond 2014 and the completion of the transition of responsibility for security (the "Afghanization" of the conflict, officially called "transition").

Since 2009, the U.S., along with Germany, has been emphasizing the importance of the International Contact Group. This forum brings together more than 50 countries and international organizations to coordinate the activities of NATO, the EU, the UN and the IMF. In July 2011, aiming at strengthening diplomatic and economic cooperation around Afghanistan, the International Contact Group launched the Working Group on Regional Cooperation, which is co-chaired by Turkey and the UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan). At the same time, the International Contact Group also launched the Working Group for Afghan Reconciliation and Reintegration, which is co-chaired by Japan and United Kingdom.

The current U.S. strategy in Afghanistan assumes reciprocal and positive links between the NATO-ISAF military campaign (the so-called “military surge”) and intense development assistance activities as well as economic and diplomatic cooperation (the so-called “diplomatic surge”). Barack Obama’s administration put emphasis on the fact that Afghanistan’s neighbours are united by common interests (based on the threats from transnational terrorism and drug trafficking) and opportunities arising from the economic potential and transit location of the country. Those interests should in principle translate into their willingness to compromise and cooperate with each other.

There are growing doubts among Afghans about both the essence and the scope of the future U.S.–Afghan and NATO–Afghan “strategic partnership.” Additional concerns among Afghans were raised by the U.S. administration plans for a reduction in the number of U.S. forces to 68,000 troops by September 2012. Non-military aspects of “Afghanization” are also under closer scrutiny, such as the unresolved political and administrative problems and difficulties with future funds earmarked for the quick expansion of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Other factors influencing American plans are also put in question by financial constraints in the Department of Defence budget as well as the start and uncertain outcome of the presidential campaign in the U.S. Although there is still broad political, military and economic assistance coming to Afghanistan from Europe, all the problems with American leadership in the ISAF mission might raise doubts among the Europeans concerning the rationale for this type of engagement after 2014.

## **The Military and Security Context**

NATO's counter-insurgency strategy implemented over 2009–2011, has brought many successes. Still, the ISAF command admits that these gains are “fragile and reversible.” So far, the ANSF has formally taken over responsibility for geographic areas inhabited by 25% of the Afghan population. The U.S. administration claims that the security situation has improved, but this is mainly due to a change in the Taliban's priorities and tactics. Taliban-led insurgency has lost momentum in some of its traditional strongholds, but those are areas where U.S. “surge” forces were deployed. The Taliban remains a serious irregular military and terrorist force in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan.

The Taliban now tends to focus on spectacular terrorist attacks and the elimination of members of the Afghan administration and is paying much less attention to clashes with ISAF and ANSF units. ISAF's response has been to escalate special forces' raids to eliminate or capture as many Taliban as possible. According to the UN, in the period of July–August 2011, the total number of armed incidents and attacks was about 39% higher than in the same period of 2010. These figures differ from the statistics drawn up by the ISAF, which take into account only Taliban attacks against ISAF and ANSF units, but overlooks other violent incidents in Afghanistan. The winter season of 2011-2012 will reduce the violence indicators in the statistics of both the ISAF and the UN, but this will not be tantamount to the disappearance of the key instigators of conflict and instability in Afghanistan.

A visible progress of the mission will depend on the capabilities of the ANSF units, the Afghan government and administration as well as in the future strategy of Pakistan, other neighbouring countries and NATO members. To further complicate the stabilization of Afghanistan, there is an unsolved bunch of issues related to Afghan drug production and trade. After decade-long western intervention Afghanistan is still the largest supplier of illicit opiates. Afghan opiates have dominated this market and are produced at levels still fulfilling the global annual demand. Opiates have a profoundly negative impact on the health of Afghans and ANSF members, the corruption of legal authorities and funding of the Taliban and other local militias in Afghanistan.

## Afghan Reconciliation

The process of reconciliation with the leaders of the armed opposition is yet another attempt at reaching a political solution to the Afghan conflict since 2001. Previous efforts in this domain have not produced the desired results. In 2003–2008, the Afghan National Security Council implemented the Program for Strengthening Peace and Reconciliation, which was designed both for the reconciliation with the Taliban and their reintegration. According to the government of Afghanistan, this program resulted in the handover of more than 9,000 weapons by local and rank-and-file members of the armed opposition, mainly the Taliban. As part of the initiatives undertaken since 2009, the government of Afghanistan has requested the UN Security Council remove to 50 names from the list of 140 sanctioned leaders of the Taliban. So far, the UN Security Council has decided to remove the names of 14 Taliban leaders, some of whom have entered into talks with the government of Afghanistan.

The scale of difficulties with Afghan reconciliation in the last decade has also been reflected in the complete fiasco of all attempts by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan to support it. The slow progress of reconciliation spurred the ISAF command to go as far as to set up meetings with Said Tayeb Agha, who is believed to be a close associate of Mullah Omar and Quetta Shura Taliban. The fact that the Taliban is not interested in real peace talks is evidenced by their demands: the withdrawal of all U.S. and ISAF forces and the introduction of Sharia law to the Afghan constitution. The assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former president and head of the High Council of Peace (supervising reconciliation in several provinces), was a serious blow to the modest achievements of this body. The Taliban also stepped up killings of Afghan government officials, influential tribal and religious leaders and security commanders. According to the UN, in the summer of 2011 alone there were 183 political assassinations, mainly in central Afghanistan. Among the victims of the assassinations were many key politicians in south Afghanistan, among them Ahmed Wali Karzai, the mayor of Kandahar and chairman of the Council of Islamic Scholars. As a result, the Taliban have very strongly hit the pillars of Afghan administration, as borne out by the mass resignations of civil servants in Kandahar.

It is also unlikely that the U.S. attitude to the Taliban's highest ranks will change soon. The most dangerous Taliban faction, the so-called Haqqani Network, is personally, operationally and financially tied to Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups from South and Central Asia. Meanwhile, the United

States demands the suspension of Taliban ties to Al-Qaida, the laying down of arms and recognition of the constitution of Afghanistan. Any concessions to the Taliban are also controversial for a majority of Afghans, who fear a reversal of the rights and freedoms which have been reinstated after 2001. The government of Afghanistan is also emphasizing the ambiguous role of Pakistan, which is accused of shielding Omar and manipulating his confidants. The Pakistani military leadership is unwilling and unable to eliminate Afghan insurgency safe-havens on its territory, especially in tribal areas and around Quetta, close to eastern and southern provinces of Afghanistan. There are also many other factors in Pakistan that contribute to the generally pessimistic assessment of the future of Afghanistan and its big southern neighbour.

### **Reintegration of the Taliban**

Since 2001 the reintegration of former Taliban militants with the Afghan society has been correctly seen as one of the pre-conditions of stability in Afghanistan. In 2005, the government of Afghanistan implemented the DIAG (Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups) program, directed to the disarmament of militias often associated with the Taliban. DIAG was overseen by Vice President Khalil Abdul-Karim, but it was dumped as a failed initiative because of lack of funds. Otherwise it might have created economic alternatives for the now disarmed insurgents and criminals.

The latest initiative was launched in autumn 2010. The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) is aimed at ranf-and-file members and local commanders of the Taliban. APRP is dedicated to the reintegration of former Taliban with local communities, through amnesty and the creation of homes and jobs. To September 2011, the APRP had reintegrated 2,800 Taliban in 22 provinces, mainly in the north and west of Afghanistan. The U.S. commanders are expecting another 2,000 Taliban interested in the benefits of the APRP to join the program.

However, the new program is even less effective in the traditional strongholds of the Taliban, i.e. in Kandahar and the eastern provinces. Armed opposition forces are still estimated at 30,000 insurgents. In addition, former Afghan insurgents fear retaliation at the hands of their former comrades from the Taliban, stressing that protection is guaranteed only in certain provinces of Afghanistan. Finally, although APRP is run by central and local Afghan authorities, its material dimension is totally dependent on Western aid (so far \$134 million have been transferred).

## Regional Security Considerations

Hamid Karzai's administration is in a difficult position because it is uncertain of the scale of U.S. military and economic involvement after 2014. From Afghanistan's point of view, the ideal solution would be to have formal security guarantees from the U.S. and a permanent presence through military bases on Afghan soil. The prospect for this kind of partnership was the foundation of Karzai's relationship with the administration of George W. Bush. Unfortunately, the Alliance's Lisbon summit (December 2010) did not clarify these issues when it adopted the "Declaration of the NATO–Afghanistan Strategic Partnership."

The uncertainty of Afghan authorities about future U.S. plans and potential reactions of neighbouring powers explains the prolonged negotiations on a draft of a new "Declaration on the U.S.–Afghanistan Strategic Partnership" (which started in May 2010 with the last round held in September 2011). After the success of the U.S. commando raid against Osama bin Laden, the Afghan authorities became even more doubtful about the extent of Western support after 2014 and, therefore, are willing to accommodate the interests of their neighbours in Afghanistan's strategic calculations. For instance, Afghanistan might be willing to step up bilateral cooperation with India because of its fear of a strengthened Taliban and the possible influence of Pakistan on the terms of Afghan reconciliation. This direction in Afghan thinking was evident in October 2011, with the fast finalization of Afghanistan-India Strategic Partnership Agreement. In this context, it also seems that for Karzai's administration multilateral security guarantees (e.g. coming from the UN) for Afghanistan are not attractive alternatives.

The Western countries' approach contrasts with the strategic calculations of Pakistan, Iran, India, China and Russia, which perceive Afghanistan as part of their national security strategies and through the prism of balancing the influence of their rivals. For Pakistan, its northern neighbour is still a space for "strategic depth" in case of a conflict with India. In recent years, Russia, Iran and China benefited from reduced U.S. military capabilities in "hot spots" outside Afghanistan (such as Georgia, the Persian Gulf and Taiwan Straits). Although a majority of these countries also benefited from a decade of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, in the long run only India and some Central Asian countries might be interested in a continued American military presence there. In the last decade, the neighbouring countries were not able to start serious talks about the possible status of Afghanistan as a



neutral country. It is also hard to resist the impression that Afghanistan is steadily becoming not only a crucial area of Indian-Pakistani geopolitical rivalry but also the future front of a renewed "proxy war" between both countries.

With all clear differences between Afghanistan and Iraq, there are some regional lessons from the former intervention, relevant also to the ISAF mission. In the case of Iraq, strong opinions about the necessity for the cooperation of neighbouring countries in the settlement of the conflict also have been common in debates about how to stabilize it. However, rather than diplomatic assistance from outside Iraq, it was achieved by improving the internal security situation, steady growth and professionalization of Iraqi Security Forces and progress in Sunni–Shia reconciliation. The diplomacy of the U.S. and Iraq coalition had no effect on the main internal forces of the Iraqi conflict as well as on changes in the regional strategies of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

### **Regional Integration and Trade**

The documents adopted at international conferences on Afghanistan (for instance, Bonn in 2001, Kabul in 2010 and Bonn in 2011) declare support for multilateral cooperation on projects that might help with the development of regional trade, land transport and railroads as well as pipeline construction in and around Afghanistan. Afghan authorities also have increasingly used the term "New Silk Road," which envisioned several benefits to Afghanistan and its neighbours. However, a closer look at the majority of projects indicates that these initiatives are primarily used by the Afghan administration as a way to strengthen bilateral relations with stronger neighbours.

A clash of interests and a lack of common funds are obstacles to regional economic integration under the auspices of such forums as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Despite the signing in January 2011 of an agreement on the free transit of goods from India through Pakistan to Afghanistan, the latter two states cannot agree on Afghan cargo fees and insurance. Poor climate in official Afghan–Pakistani relations resulted in the application of Pakistani procedures that were unfavourable to Afghan shipments in transit. For Afghanistan, which has no direct sea access it is more favourable to increase transit through ports in Iran. This option is

supported by a well-developed Iranian infrastructure and duty exemptions for many Afghan goods imported by India.

### **Afghanistan's Infrastructure and Resources**

Afghanistan is still almost absent from the railroad maps of South and Central Asia and the Middle East. This situation began to change in 2009 with the launch of the so-called "Northern Distribution Network" between Central Asia and Afghanistan, but transit there is limited to military supplies for ISAF troops and is dependent on U.S.–Russia relations. Moreover, there is only one operating railway line in Afghanistan (from Mazar-i-Sharif to the border with Uzbekistan) and no visible progress on the construction of new railroads from Herat to Iran or from Kunduz to Tajikistan.

Equally problematic are the prospects for the creation of pipelines from Central Asia to South Asia via Afghanistan. There have been two decades of fruitless discussions about the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) natural-gas pipeline project, which would connect gas fields in Turkmenistan with the growing markets of South Asia. Governments of the U.S. and Pakistan are still promoting TAPI as an element of regional economic cooperation and a confidence-building measure between Pakistan and India. The U.S. has also seen TAPI as a possible alternative for the IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline project. Both have little chance for success, especially since the lack of security in Afghanistan prevents investment in TAPI. It is also clear that the government of India has a growing preference for routes that might bypass Pakistan or for the possibility to import LNG from Persian Gulf countries.

In 2010, it was announced that Afghanistan is rich with huge mineral and natural resource deposits, estimated at the time at \$3 trillion in market value. They are seen as a pillar of the future economic sovereignty of Afghanistan and the main source of funding for the Afghanistan National Security Forces in the next several decades. Particularly promising are deposits of iron, zinc and cobalt (worth more than \$900 billion), along with lithium, oil and gas (worth more than \$200 billion). The lack of security in Afghanistan and the subsequent concerns of Western investors also constitute barriers to the exploitation of this potentially huge resource base. Almost entirely state-owned companies from China and India are active in Afghanistan and racing for tenders for the extraction of mineral deposits.

## Outlook

In the past decade, both the government of Afghanistan and the international community have launched a number of initiatives focused on the peaceful neutralization of the ranks and leadership of the Taliban. However, the majority of these initiatives have been limited in scope and have failed to prevent the reconstitution of the Taliban as an armed opposition to the nation's legal authorities and ISAF forces. The progress in the reintegration of the average Taliban has been possible because of the regaining of military momentum and control over particular areas by the ISAF and ANSF. Military advances and the progress in security have always created favourable conditions for Afghan reintegration and reconciliation.

Reductions in ISAF forces and in the level of economic aid for Afghanistan may weaken these positive trends, leading to a further escalation of the conflict after 2014. The conditions put forward by the parties to the conflict prevent any comprehensive agreement between the government of Afghanistan and Taliban leaders. In this context, the "Bonn+10" conference did not deliver a clear breakthrough (and was boycotted by Pakistan). There is also need for caution in analysing the latest news about possible contacts and negotiations between Taliban leadership and the U.S. and NATO side. Still, the ISAF forces should continue to support the reintegration of rank-and-file members of the Taliban. One way to do this would be to increase coordination with Japan as the leader of the working group on reintegration in the framework of the International Contact Group for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Since spring 2009, the United States have promoted multilateral diplomatic cooperation between countries neighbouring Afghanistan as one of the most important dimensions of the stabilization of the country. However, the experience of the past decade (including lessons from Iraq) suggest that this approach will not lead to the desired results. Therefore, it is hard to expect that multilateral diplomacy will lead to an acceleration in the process of reconciliation in Afghanistan or to the development of economic cooperation around Afghanistan.

The International Contact Group has no impact on the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan (although the Group was a useful forum to coordinate aid after the floods in Pakistan in 2010). It should be stressed that for the neighbours of Afghanistan all potential economic opportunities are secondary to their national security interests. In this context, members of the EU and NATO should focus on clarifying the shape and horizon of its

political, military and economic situation in Afghanistan after 2014. With the scenario of a withdrawal of the majority of the NATO–ISAF force from Afghanistan by 2014 and the country's further destabilization, it should be taken into account that control over mineral deposits will become the focal point for rivalries between the warring Afghan factions and their patrons in neighbouring countries.

Krzysztof Strachota

## Central Asia and the Challenge of Afghan Stability

During the last two centuries years the policies of neighbours and regional powers were one of the most important factors affecting the situation inside Afghanistan. Compared with its surroundings, Afghanistan traditionally is a state which is poorly consolidated, relatively isolated and distrustful towards its neighbours. The most serious internal tensions in Afghanistan (up to civil wars level), as well as impulses reviving political, social and economic life were closely knitted to outside players. For the last 200 years Afghanistan has been subject to external pressure from one of the neighbouring countries, aimed at subordinating Afghanistan, as well as attempts to block such efforts by other countries of the region. None of the attempts to build a lasting control over Afghanistan undertaken during this period succeeded, yet all of them had a strong impact on developments in Afghanistan. Those included: unsuccessful Persian expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russo-British rivalry, Soviet expansion, especially during the Cold War (with occupation at its peak in the 1980's), Pakistan's power play (with its peak during the Taliban rule in the 1990's), the proxy war of the 1990's and non-state actors' activity, especially Al-Qaida and others.

Since 2001 the United States and NATO set the tone to changes in Afghanistan, which is the result of global war on terrorism and the decision to secure grounds for the stability and development of Afghanistan (which in broad terms reflects both the model and the interests of the West. The United States, together with NATO allies and partners, remain the inspirers, as well as the main donors and warrantors of the security of this process. What is the main alteration in the current situation compared to traditional tendencies is the fact that the main broker in Afghanistan is a force from outside of the region—foreign and temporary in its nature. It

makes it necessary to cooperate with Afghanistan's neighbours (even for logistic reasons) and to acknowledge their interests in Afghanistan. This problem gains particular prominence in the context of the anticipated end (or substantial limitation) of the U.S. and NATO mission in Afghanistan as 2014. The key issues associated with the "problem of 2014" are: the possibility of an end of the mission as planned, the stability of Afghanistan in the timeframe preceding 2014, and even more so—the ability to hold and build upon the gains of the last decade. There is also the question regarding the assessment of the strategic goals of the Afghan mission, i.e. whether the permanent elimination of threats associated with Afghanistan prior to 2001 (terrorism in particular) and broader stabilization of the entire Middle East have been achieved. There are unanswered questions about Afghanistan's neighbours: are they going to be a facilitating or threatening factor for the goals of U.S./NATO mission? Are they now, and will they be in the future, a stabilizing element in Afghanistan, or are they going to traditionally inspire conflicts in this country?

### **Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran: Enduring Interests and Ambiguous Motives**

Strong ethnic, economic, political and other ties that link Afghanistan and Pakistan, put the latter in a much privileged position. Pakistan was the key player both at the moment of fighting off Soviet troops in the 1980's, and in the period of civil wars of the 1990's, and remains as such even currently being the most important partner for the U.S. and NATO in the context of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF). Afghanistan remains firmly on the security policy priority list of Islamabad: both as a factor for the instability of Pakistan's western provinces, and a country questioning the border placement, an important front in the fight against India (and its potential allies—Iran and Russia), and finally as a necessary "strategic depth," which needs to be kept under control. Pakistan's official activity is interconnected with that of non-state players affiliated with Pakistan: tribes, radical Muslim circles and terrorist organizations. Support for OEF and ISAF missions is conditional (and was questioned on multiple occasion) and is based on accommodation to geopolitical reality and acknowledgement of the power that American political, military and economic instruments bear, rather than on common interests. Generally, the role that Afghanistan plays in Pakistan's policy and perseverance with which Pakistan protects its interests there, guarantee

Pakistan's strong engagement in this country beyond 2014. Simultaneously, the strengthening and growing independence of Afghanistan, as well as actions aimed at the elimination of tribal actors and radical (also terrorist) organizations from the political life of Afghanistan, is not only beyond the capabilities of internally unstable Pakistan, but it literally goes against cogent and consistent policy of playing out internal tensions in Afghanistan that Islamabad has pursued in recent years. The strength of local factors positions Pakistan, at best, as a tactical ally of Kabul and Washington, both currently and in the future.

Afghanistan's second key neighbour is Iran. Historical and civilizational ties between these countries are at least as strong as in the case of Pakistan. In the past decades, which were difficult for Afghanistan, Iran has at numerous times showed its readiness for cooperation and help for Afghans and Afghanistan: from giving asylum to refugees during the Soviet intervention to nursing economic contacts, including the development of communication infrastructure. Compared with Pakistan, Iran has taken a defensive posture towards conflicts in Afghanistan, for example it viewed the Soviet intervention negatively, built its own political camp (mainly through Shia Hazars, and to a lesser extent thanks to Tajiks) and helped combat the Taliban (and in a broader sense Pakistan's proxies). From Tehran's perspective Afghanistan played a minor role, compared to, for example, the Middle East—Iran has never had the ambition nor instruments to wage a fight for supremacy in Afghanistan. Relatively defensive and moderate approach to Afghanistan as such is corrected by Iran's relations with the United States, i.e. regular tensions bordering on an open conflict. Despite Iran's initial efforts to use Afghanistan as an instrument to improve the relations with the U.S. (the Iranian offer of cooperation in 2001), Afghanistan, similarly as until recently Iraq, is a potential platform for anti-Iranian operations (for example armed intervention or support for the Baluji opposition in Iran), therefore U.S. sponsored Afghanistan's stability is dangerous for Iran. Iran, because of the latter, consistently supports not only forces which traditionally look up to Tehran, but also organizations and circles which while anti-Iranian, are to an even greater extent anti-American. This state of matter in the context of both another flare-up in relations between Iran and the U.S. (end of 2011, beginning of 2012) and in the perspective of the end of the American presence in 2014, amplifies the threat from Iran towards Afghanistan, rather than neutralizes it.

Summing up, both Pakistan and Iran see their security directly related to the developments of situation in Afghanistan; they also treat Afghanistan as a

bargaining chip in building their own regional and global position (mainly in vis-a-vis the U.S.). These countries are expected to proceed with traditional activities, de facto going against Afghanistan's stability, and de facto threatening the strategic goals of the OEF/ISAF missions. The balance of positive and negative consequences of Islamabad's and Tehran's policies towards Kabul is at best ambiguous, and for the West, the possibilities of effective and long term cooperation after 2014 – minimal.

### **Central Asia: Expect the Unexpected**

The third and collective neighbour of Afghanistan is the post-Soviet Central Asia. The direct influence of northern neighbours on Afghanistan is almost unnoticeable, especially when compared with that of Iran and Pakistan, and northern neighbours are marginalized in calculations regarding Afghanistan, OEF/ISAF missions, and the problem of 2014. This approach first of all ignores the scale of changes which took place and are still taking place along the northern border of Afghanistan, and secondly does not include the potential of uncertainty related to the region.

The first and most important alteration regarding contemporary Central Asia with respect to Afghanistan is the radical change in geopolitical conditions. For the past two centuries the region was conquered and controlled by Russia, and was used as a platform for Russian expansion into Afghanistan, which was one of the most important obstacles for the independence and stability of Afghanistan. An example of the strongest (but not the only one) case of Russian expansion, was the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980's. With the dissolution of the USSR, Russia's political boundaries shifted to the north; Russia was forced to focus on the defense of bridgeheads in Central Asia, the newly created countries (those bordering with Afghanistan: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and those separated from Afghanistan: Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan) concentrated on their internal problems and relations with Russia. In the 1990's Russia, and regional heirs to the USSR allied with Iran and India, and supported the Northern Alliance, which had hard times holding 10% of the country's territory. After September 11, 2001, the United States became the main orientation point for the Northern Alliance, with both ambitions and real capabilities of Russia and the countries of the region dropping to minimum. Therefore Central Asia (and indirectly Russia) does not pose a direct threat for Afghanistan, which is definitely a positive circumstance for Kabul.



It is a paradox that in the post-Soviet area over the course of the last two decades there has been a radical shift of expectations from Afghanistan. In the Cold War settings, tensions in Afghanistan were a good occasion for the promotion of Moscow's interests, while now, especially for the newly independent countries of the region, Afghanistan's instability is viewed as a direct threat. A notable example of that were, and are, worries about the activity of radical and terrorist organizations based in Afghanistan. Part of this pattern were: the Afghan support for the Tajik opposition during the civil war (1992–97) and later the support for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (especially during the extensive military campaigns of 1999 and 2000) and other radical groups seeking refuge in Afghanistan (some of such groups did make incursions into Tajikistan in 2009–2010); or groups acting from there (the latest example being Jund al-Khalifa, active in Kazakhstan since 2011). Threats originating in Afghanistan are treated as an extraordinarily serious challenge by Tashkent, Dushanbe and others. Simultaneously, threats associated with Afghanistan (in a broader sense with instability of Central Asia itself) in the 1990's served as a basis for increased cooperation between countries of the region and Russia. This country served as a protector and guarantor of stability, a fact which facilitated Russian dominance in the region. In this context what the prospect of stabilization of Afghanistan by the West meant for Central Asia was both the neutralization of the main threats and a decrease of dependence on Russia. This was exemplified by the cooperation with the United States and NATO and the support for OEF/ISAF missions by giving access to transit hubs (mainly Kirgizstan, partially Uzbekistan) and communication routes for the needs of these operations. In this context, Central Asia is the main external beneficiary of the last decade and should be interested in the promotion and consolidation of OEF/ISAF activities in Afghanistan.

The degree of Central Asia's independence and sovereignty (and the independence and sovereignty of the particular countries of the region) is actually growing stronger every year. This does not alter the fact that particular countries of the region, and Central Asia as a whole, are areas prone to instability, and the processes of creating and consolidating the new political order are far from over. The above was visible in the Tajik civil war (1990's), two power takeovers in Kirgizstan (2005, 2010) and in a broader sense also in the growing challenges regarding the succession leaders in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

The fundamental fact of the emergence and strengthening of new countries in Central Asia does not imply their complete autonomy. Russia

holds claims to dominance in the region, backed by a set of political, economic and other instruments, the region is also a field for a clash of interests of the West (mainly the United States) and China, which has grown stronger over the course of the last couple of years. Afghanistan is an important factor of both Chinese and Russian policy towards Central Asia, regardless of their global ambitions. In this field there is a rivalry between two sets of views. The first one puts emphasis on the positive spill-over for Central Asia from the OEF/ISAF missions: the objective growth of stability in Central Asia, taking the burden away from Russia and China, and giving a chance, especially to Beijing, for a development of economic ties necessary for the utilization of Central Asian communication lines running to South Asia and the Middle East. For Russia, which allows the transit of supplies for OEF/ISAF, it means a chance to improve its standing with vis-a-vis the West and draw measurable financial benefits, as well as in a broader sense, create a perception of Western forces being tied down by its commitments in Afghanistan. The second perspective puts emphasis on negative consequences: American presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and especially the possibility of prolonging it without Russia's and China's approval, creates a threat of undermining their position in the region by the main geopolitical opponent. During the last decade Russia and China, both on the level of political declarations and real actions, attempted to weaken the position of the Western coalition, indirectly creating a threat for the security of the mission in Afghanistan. The question of balance of these two perspectives is still open, similarly as future actions that Russia and China will undertake. With the assumption that the stability of Central Asia and Afghanistan itself should be a priority for these countries (none of them seems interested in or capable of direct active participation in an open conflict in Afghanistan), and that fears of strong and permanent American presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan are unsound (which is proven by the declaration of withdrawal and the example of Iraq), and finally that limited cooperation with the West improves Russia's position, it can be expected that the perception aimed at support for the U.S.-initiated processes inside Afghanistan (including the stabilization of the current political system) and the facilitation of the end of the mission in Afghanistan, will prevail. Such a scenario would probably be associated with the promotion of regional organizations: the Collective Security Treaty Organization by Russia, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization by China (all Central Asian states except Turkmenistan are members of both), as partners for the West and Afghanistan itself.

In general, in the analysis of the regional situation around Afghanistan, the parceled Central Asia, while admittedly being a field for Sino—Russian rivalry, seems to be Afghanistan's only "safe" neighbour, when compared to Iran and Pakistan. This leaves a relatively large space for political maneuver and development of economic ties with this region for both Kabul as well as Washington and Brussels. In a more distant perspective (depending on the continuation of the current direction and rate of growth by China, and its policy towards Central Asia) it offers Afghanistan a possibility of de facto forging new (though with historical analogues, such as the Silk Road) and attractive ties with a strong Chinese market, and in a broader sense of opening Afghanistan to civilizational impulses from outside of the presently prevailing South Asian and Middle Eastern influences, with all the positive and negative consequences it may bring.

Both in Afghanistan and Central Asia, the situation is developing exceptionally dynamically. It remains a fact that the depth of political changes which took place in both of these areas during the course of the last couple of years shows substantial positive potential, yet also creates a set of challenges. It is difficult to judge the effects it will bring in the course of the next few years, even more so decades. It is necessary to make a concise summary of the existing relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia. It is somewhat of a balance of achievements at the dawn of a new era—the post-2014.

### **Central Asia and Afghanistan: Politics and Security**

Political relations between Afghanistan and Central Asian states range from truly satisfactory to almost cordial (in the case of Tajikistan). Currently there are no serious tensions and political disputes. In reality, however, the cooperation is concentrated on the level of political declarations and actions aimed at an increase in economic cooperation. It is impossible to credit any of the sides with an active and multidimensional policy on a state level. There is however, a real development and deepening of relations in the broadly defined border area (especially in the case of Afghanistan, in which case it means all the areas north of the Hindu Kush range), in which ethnic questions play a major role—the kinship of Afghan Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmens with their brethren in the north has been strengthened by both positive and adverse impulses, such as the traditional cooperation from the times of the Afghan civil war in the 1990's, the growing economic cooperation and finally the growing marginalization of the non-Pashtun

groups in Afghanistan. This latter aspect, today almost unnoticeable, could gain prominence in the case of the black scenario for Afghanistan playing out, i.e. its disintegration and escalation of ethnic conflicts, and potentially the strengthening of forces associated with the Taliban and Pakistan (and therefore associated with increased pressure from radical Islam) in Afghanistan.

Both the relative political weakness and geopolitical conditions of the region make Central Asian states' stance towards Afghanistan strictly correlated to that of Russia and China. Despite the fact that during the last decade particular countries had the will of pursuing a policy autonomous from Moscow and Beijing, and on numerous occasions successfully played out the tensions between Russia, the U.S. and China to their benefit, it can be assumed that in the case of Afghanistan they will not act against Russia's and China's policies, and that the latter two will not openly compete. In reality it would mean a rise in the activity and political stature of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which quite successfully channels, compensates and coordinated the interests of its Central Asian member states. Keeping in mind the effects of the SCO's previous work, what is expected is not a set of active and ambitious actions, but rather a formula for smoothing out the different stances and the neutralization of threats regarding Afghanistan.

In the military-political dimension, there are no signs that Central Asia is willing to militarily influence the situation in Afghanistan. In Central Asia only Uzbekistan possesses the nominal forces and ambitions which would give a possibility to have influence on Afghanistan. Russia, despite its declared ambitions of dominance in Central Asia and the overall military potential of the state, has only very limited forces in Central Asia (bases in Tajikistan and Kirgizstan) and a non-effective military alliance (Organization of Treaty on Collective Security) at its disposal. Russia has not conducted military operations in the region since the end of the civil war in Tajikistan, and at times (for example during the coup in Kirgizstan in 2010 and the bloody ethnic conflict between the Kirgiz and the Uzbeks that followed) seemed even incapable of direct intervention. It does not change the fact that Russia has a set of instruments for balancing and playing out internal conflicts inside the elites in Central Asia (and to a lesser extent in Afghanistan). However, as shown by the coup in Kirgizstan in 2010, despite having the possibility to initiate crises and to play them out in the initial phase, even in a "weak" Kirgizstan Russia cannot hope to gain control over the whole process and has to take into account risks associated with it.

China's position in the security sphere is even weaker—they do not possess any hard instrument necessary for reaction to threats. It allows to assume that the argument of force should not show up as an element of policy towards Afghanistan from the Central Asian states, or states aspiring for domination in the region. On the fringes of the mainstream of events, it is noteworthy to mention the systematic efforts by India, aimed at opening an airbase in Tajikistan (rumors of this emerged for the last time in the second half of 2011), which are being successfully blocked, against the will of Dushanbe, by Russia and probably China, and also Iranian efforts, again directed at Tajikistan, to increase military cooperation (a symbolic achievement was the surprise participation of Iranian troops at a parade on Tajik Independence Day in September 2011). Both of these cases (and even more so the American activity in the region) show a large margin for a possible revision of the dominating trends, however the influence on Afghanistan would be rather a byproduct of geopolitical rivalry between the main powers.

A separate question is the long list of problems in the area of soft security. It includes threats associated with transit of drugs from Afghanistan through the territory of Central Asia, threats from the activity of terrorist organizations (groups active in Afghanistan and Pakistan, first of all the Islamic Union of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Jihad Union and the Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan) and criminal groups, having links to drug mafias or dissident movements. These problems unite Afghanistan and particular countries of Central Asia (especially Tajikistan, Kirgizstan and Turkmenistan): the threat of erosion of state structures, real on both sides of the border, would mean further escalation of the problem and destabilization of all the countries of the region.

### **Central Asia and Afghanistan: Economics**

Changes in Afghanistan after 2001, along with changes in Central Asia itself, which took place during the last two decades, and finally the U.S. (and Chinese) engagement, have created a completely new quality in the sphere of economic ties between Central Asia and Afghanistan. They marked the overthrow of the Taliban and the end of the civil war, and opened a chance for the development and diversification of economic cooperation. In the case of Central Asia it is the next level of deconstruction of Russia's (until recently) monopolistic position. In the case of Afghanistan the development of economic ties with the outside world is a prerequisite for the creation of

an independent state in the perspective of substantial cuts in the international aid, from which the Afghan state has de facto lived off during the course of the last decade.

The new situation is manifested in the construction of communication routes (financed mainly by international financial institutions and the United States). They include roads and bridges whose construction has improved the level of life in the border regions; communication routes through Afghanistan linking China, Iran and Pakistan via Central Asia and Afghanistan, the railway linking Uzbek Termez with Mazar-i-Sharif—a revolutionary progress by Afghan standards, the rapid development of transit infrastructure of electricity (with Afghanistan being currently the only recipient, and plans to include Pakistan and potentially India) and natural gas (with the constantly reappearing project of transit gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India). These actions address head-on Afghanistan's chronic problem—being cut off from the world's markets and internal fragmentation of the country caused by poor communicational infrastructure.

At present a key development is the project designed in Washington of an alternative northern transportation route (Northern Distribution Network), which is aimed at both delivering supplies for the OEF/ISAF missions, as well as the activation of Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan in the process. The direct beneficiary of this idea is Uzbekistan (and to a lesser extent Tajikistan), however due to its economic potential, further activation of Kazakhstan can be expected. In the long term, the key role can be played by Chinese ambitions to use Central Asia as a trade route linking China with Europe, Middle East and South Asia, omitting the troublesome route currently linking China and Pakistan (the road connection through the Karakorum Highway). A separate question are Chinese ambitions to make use of natural resources in Central Asia (already taking place) and Afghanistan (in process). The above-described Chinese political and military weakness combined with its modus operandi of gaining influence through economic cooperation, de facto create new impulses for Afghanistan's economic development and limit the current dependence on Pakistan.

### **Central Asia, ISAF and OEF: A Mixed Blessing?**

Central Asia, compared with Pakistan, was always a secondary element from the viewpoint of OEF/ISAF commanders. It was so because of several circumstances: close relations between the United States and Pakistan,

availability and low costs of Pakistan's transit routes, concentration of political and military problems facing the stabilization mission in the south and east of Afghanistan and on the borderline with Pakistan. Russia's assumed resistance towards the U.S. and NATO presence in the region (which turned out to be vindicated) also played against Central Asia.

This does not change the fact that Central Asia states (especially Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan and Tajikistan) from 2001 on, have actively supported the OEF/ISAF missions from the logistical point of view, allowing for transit bases to be located on their territories (with serious alterations in the case of Uzbekistan). It is symptomatic that most of the troops enter Afghanistan through the Manas airport in Kirgizstan, and from 2008/09 (when serious obstacles for the utilization of Pakistani routes appeared) a Central Asia based logistic network is being systematically developed (currently processing about 60% of the non-lethal cargo for the mission).

There is a paradox regarding the use of Central Asia as a logistical background for the mission in Afghanistan. On the one hand, the participation in the project was regarded by Central Asian states as a way to neutralize threats coming from Afghanistan and strengthen their positions vis-a-vis to Russia. Both the countries of the region and Russia viewed it as a chance to improve their position in relations with the U.S. and NATO, also as a chance for additional income and development of infrastructure. On the other hand, however, Russia (and also Uzbekistan and Kirgizstan) fear the political consequences of American presence in the region, especially the dismantling of the political order (the 2005 coup in Kirgizstan and the massacre in the Uzbek town of Andijan the same year were viewed through exactly this prism). The breach of the Uzbek—American treaty on the lease of the Karshi-Khanabad base (2005), and the 2010 coup in Kirgizstan (it went against American interests and strengthened Russia's position) only reinforced this trend. A paradox is still in force today: the pursuit of increased cooperation with the United States (as in the case of Kirgizstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) is threatened by a counteraction from Russia. American presence in Afghanistan and its vicinity in the perspective of 2014 remains an open question. The real issue is the level of reduction of the western engagement. None of the options should be written off, and the scenarios range from full withdrawal (the case of Iraq in 2011), through limited presence in the shape of training mission (much less dependent on the logistic background) and limited, but permanent U.S. presence in the region (for example the scenario of building a "security corridor" around Afghanistan). In the case of the mission ending until 2014, support, even its



increase, from Central Asia and Russia seems certain. Northern route should then be considered a main route for evacuation of forces and equipment. In the case of a change of the mission, but not its end, the situation gets more complicated. For the Central Asian states it is a chance to increase their significance and widen the political turf, especially with regard to Russia and China, which is a risky option, since for exactly the same reasons it is hard to accept by Moscow and Beijing. The final effect is hard to foresee, however it does not change the heart of the matter: the significance of Central Asia as a logistical background for the OEF/ISAF missions has been growing steadily; and all the risks associated with Central Asia (and more broadly Russia and China) from Washington's and Brussels' perspective are minimal compared with alternative risks associated with Pakistan (and Iran).

## Conclusions

The regional situation has a direct influence on the situation in Afghanistan and the course of the ISAF/OEF stabilization mission; its significance increases with the prospect of the end/limitation of mission in 2014. The post-Soviet Central Asia is a relatively marginal region, yet the only one which does not create direct threats, and is almost unconditionally interested in the success of the processes which began in 2001. Evidence of that can be the potential which is created from a growing role as a logistical background for OEF/ISAF missions and also as an economic partner and intermediary for Afghanistan.

Central Asia's main challenge (and Afghanistan's too) is internal stability and the creation of conditions necessary for socio-economic development. In this respect Central Asia and Afghanistan (as well as OEF/ISAF missions) are closely linked. It seems impossible to maintain stability of one side in the case of instability of the other. This is exceptionally noteworthy in charting different scenarios for Afghanistan itself, especially in the context of 2014. Similarly, the utilization of the existing potential for economic cooperation between Central Asia and Afghanistan, and its development, is a prerequisite for the development of both sides.

Relations between Afghanistan and Central Asia reveal extremely important geopolitical processes taking place in Asia. Central Asia should be currently treated as an important platform of Chinese policy towards the Middle East, the South Asia, Russia and the United States. In a broader sense Central Asia and Afghanistan should be treated as the most important plane of intersection of Chinese, Russian and U.S. interests. In other words,



the relations between these countries and their perceptions of each other will strongly depend on their political practice on the Pianj line, where political and military interests of the great powers converge and where prestige considerations are at play. The stability of Afghanistan and Central Asia will depend on the ability of the stakeholders to reach a compromise.



Marvin G. Weinbaum

## The Regional Dimension in Afghan Stability

If Afghanistan is to have a peaceful future, there is a broad consensus that it would need to forge regional economic and political links rather than embrace its historical insularity as a buffer state. This envisions Afghanistan becoming a bridging state, able to build the foundations for greater self-sufficiency and stability through cooperation with neighboring and near neighboring countries. It also posits that Afghanistan's likely regional partners are able to recognize the potential mutual benefits of a prospering Afghanistan and a peaceful, sovereign country. Various organisational means to promote regional support and nonintervention in Afghanistan have been proposed. Yet most of the neighbors in fact remain competitive with one another and continue to meddle in Afghan affairs. Moreover, the infrastructural and security impediments needed for Afghanistan to assume its bridging role have still to be overcome. So too must the prevailing legal and bureaucratic barriers.

Afghanistan, it is often said, lives a difficult neighbourhood. Usually described as the crossroads of South Central Asia, Afghanistan has found this a mixed blessing. Until the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, when the legendary Silk Road passed through what is now northern Afghanistan, it was a center of Islamic civilization and culture. But more often Afghanistan has paid a bloody price as armies from Alexander the Great through the Mogul, Persian to Czarist Russian and British empires overran and strategized over Afghan lands. While spared actual colonisation, Afghanistan also received none of its more positive legacies. Afghanistan's location, enabling it to become at first a beneficiary of Cold War competition, turned the country in the 1980s into a battlefield. Afghans had then in the 1990s to cope with a neighbour seeking strategic depth, and for the last decade have suffered in the ongoing war on global terrorism.

## The New Silk Road

For some time, Afghanistan has received attention for its potential as a crossroads focused mainly on commerce. Lately, this has been given a name, the New Silk Road. The idea envisions Afghanistan emerging as a trade, transportation, and energy hub serving as an unfettered gateway connecting Central Asia with South Asia, China and the Middle East. The New Silk Road concept has also fired the aspirations of government planners and the imagination of private investors. Ideally, it will bring the kind of synergies that are only possible through cooperation among neighbouring states. For those concerned about Afghan security and sustainable economic development, a recreated Silk Road would appear to provide the way forward.

The potential benefits that could accrue to the region from the territory of a non-threatening, peaceful Afghanistan are generally understood by its neighbours. But because none of these states is very confident that Afghanistan will not again become a battleground, they have pursued policies that are more defensive than cooperative. Their suspicions of one another have led them to pursue strategies designed to assure that no other country in the region or outside it will exploit Afghanistan's weakness and use its territory and assets to their own disadvantage. Most have cultivated Afghan clients as insurance against a disintegrating country. Discarding these strategies is critical to any realization of a New Silk Road. Having the possible payoffs of a Silk Road spelled out can provide the needed incentives for these countries to take the risks required in committing to a cooperative approach.

The promises of a New Silk Road that supports Afghanistan and regional economic cooperation lie in the progress toward building a regional transportation infrastructure, harnessing untapped trading energy, and breaking down border restrictions. It is possible to identify development sectors involving building roads and rail lines, and new dams to meet power needs. Afghanistan looks for additional electricity to be delivered from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and to Turkmenistan for natural gas. China, Iran and India among others can provide infrastructural investment and skilled labor, and Iran and Pakistan access to port facilities.

By providing a crossroads, Afghanistan also gains access to foreign markets for Afghan agricultural products and minerals and a revenue stream through duties and tariffs. The transit of natural gas from Central to South Asia is usually cited as the best example of Afghanistan as a crossroad

bringing benefits that are shared region-wide. The political will currently exists for a Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI). More promising still is the identification by the U.S. Geological Survey of more than \$1 trillion worth of minerals in Afghanistan. These possibilities have captured the attention of Afghans anxious for a long-term revenue sources for the country, and outside investors hoping to cash in on future mining operations mainly for copper, iron ore and gems.

The possible gains of greater cooperation go further. Common approaches also offer the means to deal with threats to Afghanistan and its neighbors that are posed by drug trafficking, smuggling and other criminal activities. The concept also implies a better sharing of labor and water resources. As such, the New Silk Road acts as a metaphor for a region linked and interdependent along multiple dimensions. More than a blueprint for the region, the Silk Road concept provides a vision and direction for a more self-reliant Afghanistan in a difficult and uncertain period of transition.

But Afghanistan cannot realize a return on its assets and regional aspirations without a more stable security environment than exists today. Much is on hold while an insurgency rages. A proxy civil war that many fear occurring as international forces withdraw would set the country back for decades. Security issues aside, the economic hurdles are formidable. TAPI may run as high as \$8 billion in upfront investment costs that have not been secured. Turkmenistan and Pakistan have recently settled on the price of natural gas exports but separate pricing agreements have yet to be reached with Afghanistan and India. Ultimately, the feasibility of this route will be determined by the market competitiveness of the gas from Turkmenistan's fields. Similarly, the greatly touted promise for Afghanistan from mineral wealth will depend on whether these mineral deposits can be commercially extracted. As a landlocked country, the promise from minerals and gas revenues rests heavily on an Afghan transit infrastructure that does not currently exist.

What greater cooperation cannot be expected to do is to provide a key to unlocking a political solution to the Afghan conflict. It cannot offer a panacea for many of the difficult challenges that Afghanistan currently confronts. A Silk Road is more likely to be the end product of having made progress toward a reasonably stabilized, peaceful country. We should also not overestimate its economic potential for Afghanistan. While the country's trade with Central Asia is growing steadily, the most flourishing traffic is in drugs. Afghanistan can never recover the centrality it held when caravans

crisscrossed the region. The old Silk Road died out when the Portuguese and other European traders opened sea-lanes to South Asia and points East. Today, some of the most economically attractive routes across Central and South Asia are ones that avoid Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's governance will shape its performance as a centerpiece for regional economic unity and cooperation. Endemic corrupt practices diminish its attractiveness as a reliable partner. A government that is unable to enforce the rule of law creates an imposing obstacle to drawing critical private sector investment. A promising regional future for Afghanistan is, moreover, going to have to be compatible with a politically decentralized country and a central government with a disappointing leadership that continues to struggle for legitimacy. The way Afghans sort out their domestic political differences may also affect cooperation, especially those differences involving the country's enduring ethnic based grievances. What they surely do is to enable Afghanistan's neighbors, working through their proxy ethnic groups, to undermine regional agreements.

### **A Political Framework**

Afghan stability and the promise of economic gains very likely require a supportive regional political architecture. A consultative mechanism, perhaps in the form of a multilateral forum that introduces confidence-building measures, can serve as means of allaying doubts and suspicions among regional and other concerned states. Ideally, it can promote economic integration initiatives that improve region-wide security and cooperation, such as are envisioned by the Silk Road project. There are already several regional organizations concerned with economic cooperation, namely the six-member Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in which Afghanistan is an observer along with Pakistan and India, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) composed of ten Central and West Asian countries. However, none are explicitly dedicated to Afghanistan's transition to a post-conflict state ready to assume its full potential as an economic partner.

In a New Silk Road the United States sees an opportunity of improving the chances that the Kabul regime can manage to survive following the U.S. military's exit. If U.S. efforts to facilitate a political agreement with the Taliban fail, as seems increasingly likely, a regional buy into Afghanistan's economic and political viability could ensure a softer post-2014 landing. It

was with this in mind that American officials were eager to have participants in a regional conference on Afghanistan—held in Istanbul in November 2011—agree on a coordinated effort to further Afghan stability and development, and pledge non-interference in the country's affairs. The United States had hoped that the Istanbul conference would lead to the creation of a multilateral forum that would provide a continuing focus on long-term security safeguards and support for economic stability and investment opportunities in post-2014 Afghanistan. The idea was to have a broad membership of countries in a forum that would by exchanging views identify common goals, develop rules of engagement with Afghanistan, and perhaps agree on the means to monitor members' compliance. The plan was that this inclusive informal body also would tacitly acknowledge the pivotal role that the United States along with Pakistan would have in charting Afghanistan's future.

The Istanbul conference demonstrated that delegates from fourteen countries were open to support a set of principles and projects. They concurred on the need to respect Afghan sovereignty and territorial integrity, and on the importance of cooperation in fighting terrorism and the drug trade. In the spirit of confidence building they also agreed to discuss future joint projects involving reconstruction and health. What they were not ready to approve was a structured approach to address Afghanistan's future. It was apparent in Istanbul that most countries were manoeuvring for position with an eye on what would follow after the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces in 2014. Absent at the conference was approval of any measures or binding commitments that could implement lofty principles and then verify members' behaviour. There was little at Istanbul to satisfy the Kabul government's desire that the meeting directly address the issue of terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan and the use of radical groups as proxies.

American officials have tried to make the best of the Istanbul conference by characterising it as a good first step. It succeeded in defining areas for common goals even if it fell well short of developing a set of rules of engagement for Afghanistan among its neighbours. The United States had not expected to assume a highly visible role in Istanbul. Rather, it hoped to steer the meeting from behind the scenes. But the decision by conference members to deny the Americans observer status—limiting the United States along with other Western nations in attendance to being designated merely as “supportive countries”—reflected a determination to distance the West from the regional dialogue. Washington's efforts to encourage cooperation on stabilising Afghanistan were no doubt interpreted by many conference

participants as motivated by a U.S. desire to remain geo-strategically positioned to cast its influence in the region well beyond 2014.

As a follow-up to Istanbul, the December Bonn conference was designed to attract broader international commitment to a secure, developing Afghanistan. With more than a hundred countries and international organisations attending, the conference was also intended to reaffirm past financial commitments. Participants were charged with trying to plan for a future for Afghanistan without the prevailing levels of military and economic assistance from Western nations. Washington was anxious to elicit support from other countries and organisations to help in strengthening Afghan governance and, in particular, to share the costs for a large projected Afghan national security force. But whatever hopes existed that the meeting could meaningfully address the issue of terrorism and advance possibilities for reconciliation were dampened by Pakistan's decision—in response to NATO's lethal attack on a Pakistani military border post—not to take part in the deliberations in Bonn. No steps were taken to revise blocked attempts at the Istanbul conference to create a mechanism that could assure Afghanistan of non-interference. At best the conference shared recognition that the mission to rebuild Afghanistan remained unfinished.

### **The Regional Actors**

Each of the regional and near-regional powers has both reasons for preferring Afghan stability and motives for hedging against being disadvantaged in the event that Afghanistan becomes a focal point of competition among them. A regional framework will be contingent on the regional actors setting new priorities and overcoming their bitter differences, most of which have been enduring. Those between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and Pakistan and India are only the most obvious. An improvement of Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan is indispensable to any plans for regional cooperation.

Pakistan has the most at stake in Afghanistan's future. It shares with its Afghan neighbour a population of ethnic Pashtuns and closely linked economies, but also a 65-year history of animosity traceable to a never resolved dispute over their British-drawn common border. An underlying premise of Islamabad's foreign policy is that it be assured that Afghanistan's governments are not unfriendly. To ensure this, Islamabad has sought to have compliant regimes in Afghanistan. Pakistan is unlikely to revise its objectives as long as it looks at Afghanistan through the lens of its long-standing adversarial relations with India—which is seen as establishing a



foothold in Afghanistan that threatens Pakistan strategically. Only progress toward a rapprochement between Pakistan and India seems likely to induce Pakistan to reassess its policies toward Afghanistan.

Pakistan's belief in the primacy of its interests in Afghanistan makes it a reluctant participant in any new regional political and economic framework to enhance Afghan stability and security. Pakistan holds that the mechanism for achieving cooperation would be better achieved through SAARC and its Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)—to which Afghanistan is a signatory. Pakistan would also favor having regional development projects undertaken by the geographically broader ECO, an organization that includes Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan and all of the former Soviet Central Asian Republics. Pakistan, along with Afghanistan and India holds observer status in SCO, and Islamabad has apparently won Russian support in its bid for full membership. The SCO, initially an organization to facilitate security cooperation among China, Russia and four of the Central Asia states, has increasingly moved toward becoming an economically oriented body. Of late, many of SCO proposals visualising a broad regional transport infrastructure and the connectivity of energy projects closely echo ideas being advanced by the advocates of a New Silk Road.

Iran, which until the 1990s paid relatively little attention to its Afghan neighbor, views any U.S.-backed effort to stabilize Afghanistan with great suspicion. Tehran most fears that a long-term American military presence would position it to use Afghan soil to mount an attack on Iran's strategic assets. Iran's leaders also have concern over the reemergence of an extremist Sunni regime in Kabul, such as existed during the 1990s. The prospect of Pakistan dominating Afghan foreign policy, and Saudi Arabia and anti-Shiite institutions asserting their influence in the country raises alarms in Tehran. Yet for all of its qualms about a Taliban resurgence, Iran's greater concern is for the perceived American threat and the opportunity to bleed U.S. and NATO forces fighting in Afghanistan. This is believed to have induced Iran to supply light weapons to Taliban insurgents. Sensing an eventual Taliban victory, the Iranian leadership may also be seeking to build good will with the Taliban in hopes of restraining them later.

For the time being, Iran finds good reason to continue support of the Karzai government and not contribute to destabilizing Afghanistan. It needs a more effective Kabul partner to interdict the flow of opiate drugs that transits Iran from Afghanistan headed for foreign markets but that also supplies the needs of Iran's own large addict population. Often overwhelmed,

Iran's security forces have suffered heavy casualties in battling drug traffickers. Iranian businessmen find Afghanistan a large and growing export market for consumer goods. Tehran continues to offer generous support toward major reconstruction projects. Its security services have spread money freely among Afghan government officials, journalists and others, mostly in the Western provinces where the local populations are culturally and economically linked to Iran. This currying of favor is not limited to Afghan Shiites; nor is it only targeted at non-Pashtuns. Iran's efforts are intended as a hedge against the time when it might need to create a sphere of influence in a divided Afghanistan or arm friendly forces in an Afghanistan caught up in a civil war.

Russia criticizes American proposals for a Silk Road and other initiatives aimed at regional development as "outside interference." Along with its former Central Asian republics, Russia would prefer to deal with a strong central government in Afghanistan, one able to fend off an Afghan Taliban re-emergence. For their part, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan seek secure, reliable customers for their electricity and a corridor to the Indian Ocean for gas and other exports throughout South Asia. Afghanistan offers a potential opening to the south that would lessen their normally heavy dependence on Russia. But the chief worry is that with an Islamist regime firmly planted in Kabul, militant Islamist groups would again be able to use Afghan territory to mount insurgencies in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Both countries confronted serious challenges from Islamic groups in the 1990s. The sanctuary provided to The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and later among Afghan insurgents in Pakistan has largely sustained the militant organization. Russia has 6,000 troops stationed in Tajikistan that stand ready to protect the country from the contagion of Islamic radicalism while also being deployed to stem the flow of drugs from Afghanistan moving to lucrative markets in Russia and Western Europe. This drug trafficking is held directly responsible for widespread crime and corruption throughout the region. In the event that Afghanistan dissolves into civil war, Russia and several Central Asian states are again likely, as in the 1990s, to provide arms to Afghan Tajik and Uzbek fighters resisting the Taliban.

India has long enjoyed a special relationship with Afghanistan. Since 2001 India has spent or pledged as much as \$2 billion on roads, hospitals, and several high profile construction projects, including a new Afghan parliament building. As early as the 1950s, India took on the role of providing Afghanistan a desired regional strategic counterbalance to a larger,

overbearing Pakistan. This New Delhi-Kabul axis led as well to strong economic and cultural interchanges. Afghanistan has offered India an opportunity to distract Pakistan strategically and provide payback for the Pakistan army's support for militants in Indian Kashmir through aid to Pakistan's Baluch insurgency. In recent years, the danger that an ungoverned Afghanistan might again offer hospitable space to Al-Qaida and other extremist groups has India concerned about the spread of Islamic militancy across the Asian subcontinent. In the event of an Afghan civil war, India seems almost certain to again come to the assistance of northern militias opposing the Taliban rule, possibly with military advisors as well as arms. India's tactical options have expanded with its acquiring of landing privileges at an airbase in Tajikistan. It also has access to Afghanistan through a road it constructed from the Iranian port of Chabahar.

Turkey's active diplomacy to ensure its inclusion in any new regional order is reflected in its decision to host the Istanbul security and cooperation meeting. As a Muslim-majority country with no obvious political clients in Afghanistan, and on reasonably good terms with all of the region's states, the Ankara government feels especially equipped to play a mediating role. Since 2007, Turkey has hosted six Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral forums that have led to agreements to cooperate in education, banking and other areas. In 2011, armies from all three countries held a joint military exercise. It has participated in numerous humanitarian and infrastructural projects in Afghanistan and, as a member of NATO, has deployed a provincial reconstruction team in Afghanistan.

China's increasingly economic interests in Central and South Asia have made it more inclined to become involved in efforts to coordinate security and development across these regions. While China continues to avoid interference in the domestic politics of regional states, it promotes itself as a reliable and generous benefactor to most of the region's regimes. Until fairly recently China was an absentee power in Afghanistan but that changed with its \$3.5 billion promised investment in copper mining in Afghanistan's Logar Province. This was the largest single investment in Afghanistan until India won contracts in November 2011 worth \$10.3 billion to extract iron ore at three mine sites in central Afghanistan. Many wonder whether these developments could spark a new "Great Game" as the two countries compete for control of Afghanistan's mineral resources. China like India requires a stable Afghanistan in order to exploit its interests. A restored Taliban regime in Kabul raises the possibility that militants from China's Uighur separatist movement might again receive training and safe haven in

Afghanistan. China shows little interest in a new regional body to coordinate security and development in Afghanistan and envisions the SCO as an already available forum to address those issues and concerns.

Saudi Arabia is anxious to be included in a regional dialogue about Afghanistan's future. For decades the Saudis have invested in Pakistan's mosques and madressahs and in stabilizing its economy. They have also succeeded through surrogates in spreading Wahabi beliefs within Afghanistan and the region's other Sunni-dominated countries. Defensively, Saudi Arabia is determined to contain Iranian influence in Afghanistan and Pakistan and throughout Central Asia. A stable, regionally integrated Afghanistan is seen as a barrier against Iranian designs to propagate Shiite doctrines. Although the Saudis recognized the Taliban diplomatically during the 1990s they eventually soured on the regime. A strengthened Kabul government is favored over a Taliban return that could help revive Al-Qaida and its threat to the Gulf states.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

A good case can be made that post-2014 Afghanistan will be more secure and better able to enjoy the fruits of regional economic cooperation if it is convincingly nonaligned. This status has little in common with the classic Great Game in which Afghanistan, as a buffer to Russian and British empires, was expected to be a passive player in face of maneuvering by major powers. At a minimum, it commits Afghanistan to denying to any power use of its territory against a third country. It presumes that Afghanistan is able to pursue an independent foreign policy and that its close neighbours will respect its neutrality. This may require agreement among the neighbors on some set of restraints to govern their relations with Afghanistan, best achieved through a mechanism providing consultation and monitoring that can discourage violations of Afghan sovereignty. Less clear is whether in exchange the neighboring powers would demand limits on the size and capacity of its military. In light of their enduring border dispute, Pakistan is most likely to seek this concession.

Whether non-aligned status for Afghanistan can be congruent with its signing bilateral strategic agreements is an open question. An agreement signed with India in October 2011 that allows for the training of the Afghan military is certainly problematic. So too is a strategic accord being negotiated between Afghanistan and the United States that is expected to invite a residual American military presence in a training capacity and probably lock

Afghanistan into a long-term dependence on the Americans for security financing and weaponry. In order to legitimize a deal that has mixed public support, President Karzai has had to seek the approval of a Loya Jirgah. Pakistan, Iran, and Russia among others have raised objections to any transition plan that might include long-term American military bases in Afghanistan. The United States must do more to allay the suspicions of the neighboring powers that a strategic agreement poses no threat to them but is solely meant to ensure that Afghanistan can defend itself after 2014 and avoid becoming once again the epicenter of terrorist activity.

A regional approach is likely to be more successful if it emphasizes the opportunities that lie in greater cooperation among countries than if used as a means to fix long-standing differences between countries. Although greater stability and especially the increased integration of economies can improve the climate for resolving disputes, these differences are more likely to be resolved bilaterally. In view of the obstacles to forging a comprehensive regional trade regime, Afghanistan and other countries in the region are for the foreseeable future going to get more mileage out of limited agreements with individual countries willing to cooperate. Several bilateral trade and transit arrangements between Afghanistan and its neighbours have contributed to the Afghan economy and helped in normalizing relations. Trade pacts such as the recently concluded one between Afghanistan and Pakistan, even if incompletely implemented, offer a tangible basis for progress in other areas. Getting Pakistan to approve India's transit rights to Afghanistan remains to be done. Most of all, bilateral agreements and mechanisms are best able to produce the needed assistance to Afghanistan in governance, institutional building and the delivery of services.

The envisioned integration and cooperation hinges strongly on the outcome of the current struggle with the Taliban. Most plans for a regional approach to secure Afghanistan's future are probably inconsistent with a Taliban military victory or even a negotiated power-sharing formula. A large regional and international role in laying the foundation for a sustainable economic growth in Afghanistan would seem to run counter to the ideological agenda that insurgent leaders have regularly espoused. While the Taliban would probably welcome international financial assistance their priority would likely be to implement restrictive Islamist policies, some of which would be anathema for much of the international community. Reversal of gains in education and social policy would cut off the financing that any ambitious regional infrastructural undertakings would require. The likelihood is that the Taliban would give sustenance to regional Islamist

groups like the IMU, be aligned with anti-Shia militants, and be unwilling or unable to separate themselves from extremist groups with global ambitions.

Very likely the strongest motive for regional agreements that bolster Afghan stability is their shared determination to avoid an Afghanistan that is failing, a country given over to volatility and disintegration. It demands that the international community join the regional states in a commitment to a viable, undivided Afghanistan. To this end, the major donor countries must be prepared to sustain their non-military assistance programs well beyond 2014. Recognizing that the country is bound to remain a *rentier* state for some time, an international community must stand by its pledges to continue to assist in financing Afghan development. While aid priorities focus on development and strengthened governance, plans should also include strategies for weaning Afghanistan off its dependencies. To the extent possible, external actors should seek to preserve the gains that were made since 2001, particularly in education and women's rights.

For all their difficulties, plans that aspire to Afghanistan's being nested in a regional framework held together by economic cooperation and interdependence are worth pursuing. Even if still a distant goal, the vision of a New Silk Road serves as a beacon providing direction and motivation to economic planners and national leaders. Plans to secure Afghanistan's future can also help mitigate regional as well as great power rivalries and check the growth of political extremism. For the international community, a concert of regional nations committed to Afghan peace and stability is a valuable ally against global terrorism.

## About the Authors

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**Krzysztof Strachota** has been the head of the Caucasus and Central Asia Department at the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) since 2001. He was a graduate of the University of Warsaw in anthropology. His main research topics include the politics and security of Southern Caucasus and Central Asia and he is the coordinator of OSW projects on Islam and the Greater Middle East (since 2001). As well, Mr. Strachota is a lecturer at the university, the Diplomatic Academy and other institutions. His publications include *Future Scenarios for The Conflict in Afghanistan: A Regional Perspective—Central Asia; Jihad vs. The New Great Game. Paradoxes of militant Islamic threats in Central Asia; Kurds. Towards independence in the 20th century; Armed Conflicts in the Post-soviet Region. Present Situation, Prospects for Settlement. Consequences; Islam in the post-Soviet space*, and others available at [www.osw.waw.pl](http://www.osw.waw.pl).

**Marvin G. Weinbaum** is professor emeritus of political science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and served as analyst for Pakistan and Afghanistan in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research from 1999 to 2003. He is currently a scholar-in-residence and Director of the Pakistan Studies Center at the Middle East Institute in Washington DC. Professor Weinbaum has his doctorate from Columbia University in 1965, and he joined the Illinois faculty in the same year. At Illinois, he served for fifteen years as the director of the Program in South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Dr. Weinbaum was awarded Fulbright Research Fellowships for Egypt in 1981–82 and Afghanistan in 1989–90, and was a senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in 1996–97. Additionally, Dr. Weinbaum has been the recipient of research awards from the Social Science Research Council, the Ford Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, IREX, the American Political Science Association, and other granting agencies. After retiring at Illinois, Professor Weinbaum has held adjunct professorships at Georgetown and George Washington universities, and lectures regularly at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute. At the State Department he was a recipient of its Superior Honors Award. Since leaving the Department, he has assumed numerous consultancies, both with government agencies and the private sector. Dr. Weinbaum’s research, teaching, and consultancies have focused on the issues of national security, state building, democratization, and political economy. He is the author or editor of six books,

including *South Asia Approaches the Millennium: Reexamining National Security*, co-edited with Chetan Kumar in 1995, and *Afghanistan and Pakistan: Resistance and Reconstruction* in 1994.

**Bogusław Winid** was appointed Under-Secretary of State for Security Policy on November 17, 2011. He began his professional career in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1991 in the Department of North and South America. Between August 1992 and September 1997 he served as First Secretary and later Counsellor at the Polish Embassy in Washington, DC. In October 1997, he returned to Warsaw and was appointed Deputy Director of the Department of North and South America. In September 1998 he got promoted to the position of the Director of this Department. On August 25, 2001, he was appointed Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Poland in Washington, DC. In August 2006, after return from Washington, he was designated to the position of the Undersecretary of State for International Relations at the Ministry of National Defense of Poland. From September 2007 to November 2011 he served as the Permanent Representative of Poland to NATO in Brussel. Bogusław Winid graduated from History Institute of Warsaw University having written his M.A. thesis on the Crimean War. In years 1988-1989 he studied at Indiana University, Bloomington and in 1991 at the Hoover Institute in Stanford. In 1991 he got from University of Warsaw his Ph.D. Doctoral thesis analyzed Polish-American relations from 1919 till 1939. It was published and awarded by the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Bogusław Winid has written three books and several articles published in Poland, the United States and Great Britain. He speaks English and Russian.

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These contributions help us to visualize a way toward lasting stability in Afghanistan (...). This task will require the continued commitment of the entire alliance, both in the form of in-kind assistance and in financial support. The security interest of the United States, Poland, and all NATO allies lies in preventing Afghanistan from reverting to a terrorist safe haven. Moreover, our moral obligation to our citizens who have sacrificed their lives and resources, and to the Afghan people, who are steadily regaining their human rights, demands that we do what we can to help Afghanistan achieve a lasting victory over terrorism.

Introduction by Lee A. Feinstein,  
Ambassador of the United States to Poland

It is my true pleasure to welcome this valuable publication that follows the first Trilateral: Afghan–Polish–American Analytical Forum (...) I am convinced that it will contribute to the ongoing discussion on the future of security, economy and social affairs of Afghanistan (...) I welcome the potential of the initiative of Trilateral Analytical Forum on Afghanistan to become an annual event, with participants coming from various backgrounds, presenting their perspective on the future of the country in development of which, Poland has a share.

Introduction by Bogusław Winid,  
Undersecretary of State,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland

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**PISM** | POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH  
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The Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) is a leading Central European think tank that positions itself between the world of politics and independent analysis. PISM provides analytical support to decision-makers and diplomats, initiates public debate and disseminates expert knowledge about contemporary international relations. The work of PISM is guided by the conviction that the decision-making process in international relations should be based on knowledge that comes from reliable and valid research.



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