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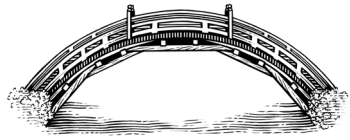
ROUNDTABLE

Afghanistan Beyond 2014: The Search for Security in the Heart of Asia



Afghanistan Beyond 2014: The Search for Security in the Heart of Asia

Michael Wills

On November 26, 2013, National Security Advisor Susan Rice left Kabul in frustration as President Hamid Karzai refused to compromise in negotiations over a bilateral security agreement that would govern U.S. military forces remaining in Afghanistan following the conclusion in late 2014 of the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission. President Karzai's intransigence—several senior Afghan political leaders and advisers had urged him to reach an accommodation on the agreement—was likely due to a misreading of the appetite within the United States for continuing to provide high levels of support for Afghanistan, despite the shortcomings of the Karzai government and its episodic intemperate outbursts toward Washington. Stephen Biddle likened the situation to a game of chicken, in which each side expected the other to swerve at the last minute to avoid a damaging collision.[1]

The U.S.-Afghan negotiations over a security agreement in the fall and winter of 2013–14, still ongoing as this roundtable went to press, have taken place against a growing chorus of voices assessing the impact of the long Afghanistan campaign on U.S. national security interests in the heart of Asia. These analyses range from discussions about how a decade-long focus on counterinsurgency operations has affected U.S. military readiness to critical assessments of the costs and benefits of the ISAF mission and whether the United States should cut its losses and seek a definitive departure from the region.[2]

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NOTE ~ The author would like to thank Allen Smith for his valuable research and editorial assistance in the production of this roundtable, as well as Rebekah Kennel and Jackson Reed for their editorial support.

1 Rod Nordland and Alissa J. Rubin, "Karzai's Bet: U.S. Is Bluffing in Warning on Security Pact," *New York Times*, November 26, 2013.

2 For a selection of arguments, see John Allen, Michèle Flournoy, and Michael O'Hanlon, "Toward a Successful Outcome in Afghanistan," Center for a New American Security, May 2013; Anthony H. Cordesman, "Afghanistan: Remembering the War We Are Still Fighting," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), CSIS Commentary, September 16, 2013; Stephen Biddle, "Ending the War in Afghanistan: How to Avoid Failure on the Installment Plan," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 5 (2013); Karl W. Eikenberry, "The Limits of Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Afghanistan: The Other Side of the COIN," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 5 (2013); and Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Uncertain Strategic Case for the Zero Option in Afghanistan," CSIS, CSIS Commentary, December 4, 2013.

A prevailing assumption in many of these assessments is that the United States is likely to shift its focus away from the region toward other security challenges in Asia, such as China's increasing assertiveness in the East and South China seas or the threat of instability in or provocations from North Korea. In this *Asia Policy* roundtable, Xenia Dormandy and Michael Keating review the history of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan and argue persuasively that other issues in the Asia-Pacific will most likely capture Washington's attention following the conclusion of the ISAF operation in 2014. Certainly there are many within the U.S. policy community who seem to agree with the notion that providing billions of dollars a year to Afghanistan, perhaps for another decade or more, is no longer feasible.

In the event that the United States does pull back, other powers will continue to vie for strategic influence in the region, and the outcome of that competition could have significant implications for broader U.S. objectives in Asia. The purpose of this roundtable, which comprises nine national and regional assessments, is to examine the range of strategic interests and priorities that Afghanistan's neighbors and other regional powers possess. Developed fully in the pages that follow, these interests can be grouped into three broad categories.

The first is the search for security, and in particular the desire to prevent a resurgence of the Taliban for fear that Afghanistan will once again provide refuge to terrorist groups such as al Qaeda. This motivation, of course, first drove the U.S. intervention in 2001, and it remains a key concern for U.S. national security managers. Security is also a primary motivation for leaders in Russia, as Mark Katz points out; in the front-line states of Central Asia (namely, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan), which Kathleen Collins argues are preparing for a "coming Afghan spillover" of conflict, refugees, Islamist extremism, and drug trafficking; and in Iran, which, as Sumitha Narayanan Kutty notes, backed the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance during the civil war of the 1990s and was one of the earliest supporters of the U.S.-led intervention. China, too, has significant concerns about Islamism, which Beijing views as a key driver of the ethnic and religious tensions it is struggling to contain in Xinjiang.[3]

A second category revolves around economic interests and the protection of investments that have been or are being made in major energy, natural resources, and transportation projects in Afghanistan.

[3] S. Enders Wimbush, "Great Games in Central Asia," in *Strategic Asia 2011–12: Asia Responds to Its Rising Powers—China and India*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis, Travis Tanner, and Jessica Keough (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2011), 262.

These interests motivate decision-makers in Beijing, Tokyo, New Delhi, and Tehran. Zhao Huasheng, for example, describes how China increasingly seeks to protect its investments in Afghanistan, while Kuniko Ashizawa ascribes similar motives to Japan, which ranks second to the United States in the provision of economic development assistance.

A third category of interests might best be described as comprising measures to protect a state's strategic reputation. C. Christine Fair offers a compelling argument that demonstrating effectiveness as a regional power in Afghanistan is almost a requirement in India's quest for emergence and recognition as a great power on the global stage. Similar considerations clearly are part of the calculus in Washington, Beijing, Tokyo, and Moscow, where success or failure in Afghanistan is seen as a test of national power and resolve. An extension of this concept is the desire to gain strategic advantage over competitors. India and Pakistan, for instance, both need to be involved in Afghanistan as part of their wider competition. Likewise, Saudi Arabia, in addition to its legacy of support for the Taliban, views the pursuit of influence in Afghanistan as an opportunity to constrain Iran, as Kristian Coates Ulrichsen notes.

Afghanistan's immediate neighbors and other powers are all driven by a varying combination of these objectives and considerations, which leads to mixed motives and conflicted choices. Pakistan, in particular, is a key front-line state that will inevitably play a major role in Afghanistan. Larry Goodson examines Pakistan's search for security in the context of the complex ties between its northwestern provinces and Afghanistan; its desire to develop energy, trade, and transportation links between its ports and China and Central Asia through Afghanistan; and its deeply held conviction of the need to build "strategic depth" vis-à-vis India.

As a result of all these factors, Afghanistan will remain an area of strategic competition and contention. Katz and Goodson both argue that one way to view this competition is as the natural successor to the earlier Great Game between the British and Russian Empires in the nineteenth century, now with Russia, Pakistan, India, China, and the United States all vying for influence. The complex mix of objectives, the divergent natures of the players, and their varied and sometimes conflicting motivations mean that strategic competition is a far more likely outcome than cooperation. Kabul's promotion of Afghanistan as the "heart of Asia," the United States' "new Silk Road" initiative, and other programs that seek to achieve regional stability through cooperative economic development are well intentioned and certainly worth pursuing. They should not, however, be followed to the

exclusion of hedging strategies to manage less optimistic outcomes, which are just as plausible.

For the United States, this requires a realistic, long-term assessment of U.S. national interests in and beyond Afghanistan, one that incorporates the effects of the United States' actions in the region on its allies, partners, and competitors and moves beyond questions of whether to cut losses or to double down and protect the investments and sacrifices that have been made. What considerations, then, should motivate the United States?

A first objective must be security. Preventing a resurgence of the Taliban as a security threat and ensuring that Afghanistan does not once again become a base for Islamist terrorism will remain prime U.S. concerns. Regardless of the outcome of negotiations for a bilateral security agreement and the size and composition of U.S. military forces that remain in Afghanistan beyond 2014, the United States will seek the ability to project sufficient power into the region to subdue any significant terrorist threat. In this endeavor, Washington will find natural partners in India, Russia (as noted in the current National Security Strategy), the front-line states of Central Asia, and, intriguingly, Iran. Competitors, to the extent that history is an effective guide, will be Pakistan (given its long support of the Taliban) and its close partners China and Saudi Arabia.

Rather than economic development, which Collins describes as a "hopeful vision presaged on multiple faulty assumptions," a second consideration instead should be understanding how developments in and around Afghanistan will influence broader changes in the balance of power in Asia, and especially U.S. concerns about the nature and goals of an authoritarian and increasingly assertive China. Ultimately, U.S. actions in Afghanistan will play into this strategic competition and influence perceptions of U.S. commitment and resolve. In this context, Washington will find that it shares concerns with India, Japan, Russia, and those Central Asian states troubled by China's growing influence in the region. Conversely, because of its close relationship with China, Pakistan seems more problematic in this regard.

Given this complex mix of considerations, as well as the critical questions of how best to honor the sacrifices of the past twelve years, protect investments, and demonstrate leadership, it is important that U.S. policy decisions be made in full awareness of broader strategic implications. Our hope is that the essays in this roundtable help inform those deliberations. ◈

The United States and Afghanistan: A Diminishing Transactional Relationship

Xenia Dormandy and Michael Keating

The United States has a long and varied history of engagement with Afghanistan. But through all the tortuous turns and ups and downs, the relationship, from the U.S. perspective, has almost always been a transactional one. Given its "front line" status, Afghanistan has usually been a pawn in a bigger strategic game, initially between the Communist bloc and the capitalist countries in the region (including Iran under the shah, Pakistan, and India) and subsequently between the secular world and radicalized Islam. Afghanistan's current status as a ward of the United States and international community is unusual and will not last.

This essay suggests that regardless of whether a bilateral security agreement (BSA) is signed between Afghanistan and the United States, and assuming Afghanistan does not again become a haven for terrorism targeting the United States, U.S. interest will diminish. So too will U.S. resources invested in the country—whether military, economic, developmental, or diplomatic. Neighboring powers, such as India, Iran, and Pakistan, who have an immediate stake in a secure, stable Afghanistan, will become more important players. Long memories, the need for strategic depth, and the fear that Afghan soil will once again become a battleground for proxy warfare will militate against the realization of the Afghan government's vision of the country as the peaceful and prosperous "heart of Asia."

The History of U.S. Engagement in Afghanistan

A brief review of the relationship between the United States and Afghanistan is instructive. Following World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union competed to maintain influence with Afghan rulers, as the British and Russian Empires had done in the previous century, using modest levels of technical, military, and development assistance—the Great Game once again played out in Afghanistan. After the invasion of

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1979, the United States sought to undermine Soviet power by supporting the *mujahideen*, using Pakistani security forces as the delivery mechanism. Once the Soviet Union left in 1989 and the Najibullah regime collapsed in 1992, Afghanistan dropped off the U.S. radar until the Taliban swept into Kabul in 1996. Then followed a period in which the United States had an ambivalent relationship with Afghanistan: not recognizing the Islamic emirate that controlled 90% of the country, but intermittently engaging with its authorities through intermediaries on specific issues; providing some humanitarian support through the United Nations and the Red Cross/Red Crescent; encouraging private-sector interest in a pipeline across the country; and expressing concern about women's rights.

All that changed with September 11. Having decisively ejected the Taliban in a lightning military campaign, the United States promoted a Western and largely multilateral agenda to stabilize and reconstruct the country and rebuild its institutions and economy. But by 2006, as the Taliban reasserted their presence and security began once again to deteriorate, the United States had moved to a counterinsurgency approach. By 2009 and the Obama administration's "surge," this had mushroomed into a full-blown military and state-building campaign with an annual price tag over $120 billion—perhaps the most ambitious the world has seen in the last 50 years.

Next Steps in U.S.-Afghanistan Relations: The Short Term

U.S. engagement in Afghanistan will continue to evolve. In the short to medium term, much depends on whether a BSA between Afghanistan and the United States is signed. As for the longer term, predictions are unwise, but the country's strategic importance to the United States is likely to diminish unless Afghanistan once again becomes an incubator for transnational terrorism.

Afghanistan with a BSA. If a BSA is signed, there is no guarantee that Afghanistan will continue to be a recipient of exceptional levels of U.S. assistance—currently higher in per capita terms than any other country excepting Israel[1]—but the prospects will be stronger that the administration will have enough political support to honor the pledges it made in Chicago and Tokyo for military and civilian support, respectively, until 2016.

With continued financial and technical support for its armed forces and levels of aid commensurate with the needs of a country of 30 million people,

[1] U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), "Foreign Assistance Fast Facts: FY2011" ~ http://gbk.eads.usaidallnet.gov/data/fast-facts.html.

which includes millions of refugees and displaced persons, Afghanistan has a good chance of being able to "muddle through." Its neo-patrimonial political system, underpinned by an elite consensus that has an interest in security, law, and order, will stay in place, and the central government is likely to reach accommodations with local and provincial powerbrokers to meet basic security needs, facilitate trade and business, and deliver services to the population.

Recovery from 35 years of conflict will be slow and uneven, and the country will continue to see diverse elements of Afghan society, from reformers and technocrats to tribal and ethnic powerbrokers, vie for power and influence. The many negative media reports often obscure the transformations that have taken place, albeit at a high price, over the last 12 years, whether in terms of infrastructure; the economy; social media and freedom of speech; access to services such as health and education, including for women and girls; and above all politics. Elections, though imperfect and limited, are now embedded as a means of transferring power and authority—a far cry from the situation 10, 20, or 30 years ago and a source of optimism for the country's future.

An uncomfortable reality for Afghans, who are fiercely proud of their independence and sovereignty, is that the state always has been, and will continue to be for a long time, dependent on foreign subsidies. Although solid progress has been made over the last few years to strengthen domestic revenue collection, 90% of the current development budget comes from Western donors.

Afghanistan without a BSA. Without a BSA, and without a status of forces agreement between NATO and the Afghan government, already dwindling political interest in Washington will likely evaporate as quickly as U.S. troops leave. If this happens, levels of financial support, whether for the country's armed forces or its development agenda, will drop steeply. Most other Western countries will take their cue from the United States and reduce their engagement accordingly. NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen has made clear that without a BSA, an agreement with NATO is not possible and the International Security Assistance Force will also pull out.

Experts warn that rapid international disengagement from Afghanistan—the likely result of failure to sign a BSA—might plunge the country back into chaos as unpaid security forces disintegrate; insurgents, warlords, and profiteers have freer rein; and the government soon finds itself unable to meet the most basic needs and expectations of

a rapidly growing, demographically young population. The argument that continued investment in Afghanistan is essential—not only to help secure the expensive political, social, and development gains and ensure a return from the sacrifices made over the last twelve years but also as an insurance policy against the resurgence of a lawless vacuum in Central Asia—will lose what potency it has. U.S. engagement is likely to shift its center of gravity in the region, with Pakistan as a source of concern and India as a source of opportunity.

In the long term, an unstable Pakistan is far more threatening to U.S. interests. Pakistan has a population at least five times that of Afghanistan; possesses nuclear weapons; is home to multiple insurgencies, some led by extremists with far more ambitious international objectives than the insurgents in Afghanistan; and has a much bigger diaspora, including in the United States. Pakistan's nuclear capacity, perennial tensions with India, political instability, and stark economic inequality make an ugly combination.

The United States' principal interest in Afghanistan will be preventing further attacks like those that occurred on September 11, with a secondary concern being to curtail the country's role as an exporter of other forms of insecurity, including narcotics. One issue is what the United States needs in order to protect and advance this core interest—for example, whether a physical military presence is necessary, given the long-range and remotely controlled technological capabilities of U.S. forces. Few assert that a significant civilian presence is needed, perhaps unwisely. Experience suggests that human intelligence and cultural knowledge are essential elements of successful foreign policy in Afghanistan.

There would be wider consequences of an unstable Afghanistan, not just for the Afghans themselves but for their neighbors, and in particular Pakistanis. Instability would affect economic development; services such as education, healthcare, and law; and more broadly, local, national, and regional security. These outcomes could have a very serious and negative impact on affected populations, but they are unlikely to resonate with the American public at a level that would result in a decision to risk more American lives and money.

Other interests are unlikely to outweigh this realpolitik. Economic considerations—for example, developing Afghanistan's much-vaunted natural and mineral wealth, including oil, gas, copper, and iron ore—do not carry much weight. The country's insecurity, rugged terrain, and landlocked location do not make it the most attractive investment destination. While the United States, particularly under another Clinton

presidency, would continue to express concerns about human rights, especially for women and girls, such rhetoric would be unlikely to result in a significant application of resources.

As the tortuous negotiations around a BSA have shown, many Afghans have an unrealistic sense of how important their country is to the United States. They cannot believe that within a few years Afghanistan could go from being considered by Washington as one of the most crucially important pieces of real estate on the planet to being of marginal relevance. Moreover, they may have an inflated, even romantic, sense of how U.S. policy is fashioned. Conspiracy theories abound, but the reality is far more mundane. A recent study whose findings were based largely on interviews with current and former senior U.S. officials and their advisers describes U.S. policymaking toward Afghanistan as "system failure," characterized by the absence of a capacity for long-term strategic judgment.[2]

The Long-Term Prospects for Afghanistan and the Region

With or without a BSA, U.S. engagement with Afghanistan in the longer term will return to being largely transactional and reactive. As a nation that, like so many others, has to make significant cuts to both domestic programs and international activities—military, diplomatic, and developmental—the United States will increasingly pay less attention to Afghanistan.

This will have profound implications for the Afghans, the region, the United States, and its Western allies. On a positive note, there is a remarkable confluence of interest among the permanent five members of the UN Security Council with regard to Afghanistan—in stark contrast with other regions of the world. Russia and China have a very immediate interest, arguably even more so than the United States and the European Union, in the stability of Afghanistan and in preventing it from becoming an incubator for terrorism, drug production, and other illicit activities. Both countries are determined to contain their own militant and separatist groups, including the Uighurs and Chechens, among others. Iran and Pakistan, too, are alert to the likely consequences of having a failed state on their borders with the potential to stoke further unrest and instability within their own territories. Pakistan has already felt the consequences of the relatively free flow of armed insurgents across the Line of Control over the past decade. Moreover, India, Pakistan, and other neighboring countries

2 Matt Waldman, "System Failure: The Underlying Causes of U.S. Policy-Making Errors in Afghanistan," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013): 825–43.

would stand to benefit from Afghanistan becoming a trade and transit route for energy, food, water, and consumer goods between resource-rich and sparsely populated Central Asia and relatively resource-poor and densely populated South Asia.

Such common interests and anxieties should be the basis for collaboration to support, or at least not undermine, Afghanistan's growth and stability. The realization that neighboring countries will become more important as distant donors disengage, combined with the recognition that Afghanistan currently enjoys better relations with nearly all of its neighbors than they do with each other, helped animate the "heart of Asia" initiative. The initiative was launched by Turkey and then driven by the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

But this shared vision to contain terrorism, improve security, and exploit opportunities for trade and economic cooperation, including through oil, gas, hydroelectric infrastructure, and transit partnerships, is compromised by a number of factors. Precedents for security cooperation in the region are weak, and there are other security dynamics in play, whether between Central Asian countries or in South Asia, that limit the priority given to Afghanistan by neighboring states. These countries are compromised, too, by raw memories of recent history and by growing anxiety at the renewed prospect of Afghanistan once again becoming a proxy theater in which other battles are fought out. An unfreezing of relations between Iran and the United States could reduce these anxieties, but the perennial stand-off between India and Pakistan still looms large. This is manifested not least by the latter's support for the Taliban, which is intended to ensure some measure of control of the territory to Pakistan's west and to prevent it from becoming beholden to India.

Rightly or wrongly, many in the region see U.S. and NATO disengagement from Afghanistan as the cue for greater instability. The current Afghan government understandably does not share this view, at least not publicly. Instead, it expresses confidence in Afghans' ability to manage their own security and future, even, if necessary, without international support, which is often seen as compromising sovereignty and independence.

As has been evident in President Hamid Karzai's negotiation tactics around the BSA, the imperative for Afghan rulers to avoid the perception that they are puppets of foreign interests and to publicly and defiantly assert their independence is easily misunderstood in Washington as ingratitude for the blood and money that the United States has invested

to date. At a time when the military intervention in Afghanistan is increasingly depicted as a failure, U.S. lawmakers and the American public view "repairing" the country as a calling too remote, expensive, and unrealistic, particularly given how unwanted by the Afghan leadership and public the United States feels.

The reputational consequences of withdrawal are high but have mostly already been paid. They are outweighed not only by other priorities in the region, notably relating to Iran, Pakistan, and India, but by priorities elsewhere in Asia and the Middle East, including relationships with China, Japan, South Korea, and the Southeast Asian nations. From the perspective of many U.S. policymakers on both sides of the aisle, the Asia-Pacific region is where the greatest number of opportunities (and potential threats) lie for the coming decades.

Afghanistan and the region will continue to demand U.S. attention, not least as a potential exporter of terrorism. The United States will still want to maintain a base to stage drone or other operational strikes against those who would do it harm, whether in Pakistan, Afghanistan, or elsewhere. The United States thus will not withdraw completely from the region. But attention and resources are finite, and in the minds of many in Washington, other regions demand and deserve more. Expect, then, that in the coming years Afghanistan will receive less attention and U.S. support, with or without a BSA. ◈

Putin's Predicament: Russia and Afghanistan after 2014

Mark N. Katz

Russian press commentary during 2013 indicates that Moscow is fearful that the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan at the end of 2014 will only have negative implications for Russian security interests. Russian observers do not believe that Afghan government forces can effectively deal with a resurgent Taliban, do not see Afghanistan's current president (Hamid Karzai) as an effective leader, and do not believe that the 2014 Afghan presidential elections will lead to anything but political infighting that will only benefit the Taliban.

Russian commentators seem convinced that once ISAF withdraws, the Taliban will sooner or later reassert control over most (if not all) of Afghanistan. And once the Taliban does this (or even before), it will immediately act to support jihadist groups seeking to bring about the downfall of the post-Soviet Central Asian governments and replace them with radical Islamist ones that are hostile to Russia. Further, Russian commentators blame this state of affairs squarely on the United States for not having defeated the Taliban once and for all. But while some view the resurgence of the Taliban as being the result of U.S. incompetence, others believe that this is what Washington wants in order to weaken Russia.[1]

So what can Moscow do to prevent these negative consequences resulting from ISAF's departure? Russian commentators are certainly not advocating that ISAF be replaced by Russian, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), or Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) forces. The negative experience of the 1979–89 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan has not been forgotten in Moscow, which does not want to repeat that experience. What Russian commentators are discussing is reintroducing a Russian military presence along the Tajik-Afghan border. But despite what

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[1] For a sampling of this discussion, see Yelena Chernenko, "The Situation in Afghanistan Does Not Inspire Optimism," *Kommersant*, April 25, 2013, 7, cited in *The Current Digest of the Russian Press* 65, no. 17–18 (2013): 19; Alexander Golts, "Alone Against the Taliban," *Moscow Times*, May 14, 2013 ~ http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/alone-against-the-taliban/479917.html; Sergei Kozhemyakin, "The Afghan Debacle," *Sovetskaya Rossia*, June 27, 2013, 7, cited in *The Current Digest of the Russian Press* 65, no. 26 (2013): 18–19; and "Russia Preparing for War on Its Own Territory," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, June 27, 2013, 2, cited in *The Current Digest of the Russian Press* 65, no. 26 (2013): 20.

they see as the obvious benefits of Russian protection for Tajikistan, Russian observers see its president, Emomali Rakhmon, as demanding concessions that are unacceptable to Moscow in exchange for his cooperation.[2] Similarly, Uzbek president Islam Karimov is seen as being suspicious that the true purpose of a Russian (or even CSTO or SCO) troop presence would not be to defend Uzbekistan against the Taliban but to overthrow him.[3]

Moscow, of course, will have options in post-ISAF Afghanistan (even if Russian commentators do not see them yet). Just as the Najibullah government remained in office for over three years after the completion of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, the post-Karzai government may prove more resilient than is currently anticipated. If so, Russia—along with other nations—can improve the Karzai government's prospects for survival by providing it with arms and possibly advisers.

In addition, even if the United States and its Western allies completely depart from Afghanistan, there are other states in the region that share Russia's interest in preventing the Taliban from regaining control over Afghanistan or, if it does, from destabilizing neighboring countries. The Central Asian republics obviously share these interests with Russia, though their capacity to act in Afghanistan is limited. Iran and India are also opposed to the resurgence of the Taliban, and their capacities to act are far greater.

From 1996 to the U.S.-led intervention just after September 11, Iran and Russia both worked to help the Northern Alliance prevent the radical Sunni Taliban (which was hostile to Shia Iran as well as to Russia) from overrunning all Afghanistan. With the Taliban so closely allied to India's archrival Pakistan, New Delhi too was unhappy to see it come to power back in 1996. Without the ISAF presence in Afghanistan serving to protect Iranian and Indian security interests vis-à-vis the Taliban and Pakistan, both Iran and India may have a strong incentive to work with Russia against them.

Regarding China, Russian commentators are not pleased about how closely Beijing cooperates with Pakistan or with its seeming indifference to the Taliban. One article in the Russian press warning that Xinjiang is becoming China's Chechnya and that the United States supports jihadists based in Afghanistan and Central Asia who seek to weaken Chinese rule

2 Vladimir Mukhin, "'Pyandzh' Plan for Russian Border Troops," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 20, 2013, 1, cited in *The Current Digest of the Russian Press* 65, no. 21 (2013): 12–13.

3 Golts, "Alone Against the Taliban."

in Xinjiang appeared designed to persuade Beijing to support Moscow's anti-Taliban efforts—or at the very least, to not oppose them.[4]

Moscow views Pakistan as Russia's main enemy in Afghanistan. It was Pakistan that undermined the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan during the 1980s through directly supporting the *mujahideen* as well as allowing aid from other states to reach them. It was Pakistan that successfully promoted the Taliban's rise to power in the 1990s, and thus at least indirectly enabled it to support the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan as well as al Qaeda. It was Pakistan that, while supposedly helping the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan after September 11, continued to back the Taliban and thus both undermined ISAF's efforts to defeat it and threatened Russian security interests. And it is Pakistan that will once again support the Taliban's efforts to both gain power in Afghanistan and harm Russian interests after the departure of ISAF.

Standing behind Pakistan, as Moscow sees it, is Saudi Arabia—Russia's archenemy. Saudi Arabia supported the Afghan mujahideen in the 1980s and the Chechen rebels in the 1990s and 2000s. More recently, Moscow has accused it of seizing on the Arab Spring that began in 2011 to support jihadists in Libya and Syria and of seeking to light the fire of jihad throughout the North Caucasus, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and wherever else it can.[5] There are two factors that make Saudi Arabia more dangerous than Pakistan in the Russian view: (1) whereas Pakistan is poor, Saudi Arabia is rich and thus has greater means to support jihad; and (2) whereas the Americans have woken up to Pakistan's perfidiousness, they either refuse to recognize Saudi Arabia's or are complicit in it.

This brings us back to how Russia views the U.S. role in Afghanistan after the departure of ISAF. Some Russian commentators really do seem to believe that the United States is allied with pro-jihadist forces and that it is leaving Afghanistan a mess in order to harm Russian interests. But there are others who understand that the United States is withdrawing from Afghanistan due to budgetary as well as domestic political pressures, and that Moscow and Washington have a common interest in promoting a viable government in Kabul capable of resisting the Taliban. It is these Russian pragmatists who do not want the United States to leave Afghanistan altogether but rather to leave behind a small force to bolster the government

4 Yury Tavrovsky, "Is Xinjiang China's Chechnya?" *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, July 11, 2013, 7, cited in *The Current Digest of the Russian Press* 65, no. 28 (2013): 20.

5 For more on the tense ties between Moscow and Riyadh, see Mark N. Katz, "The Impact of the Arab Spring on Saudi-Russian Relations," *ORIENT* 53, no. 4 (2012): 27–31.

in Kabul. While President Vladimir Putin's statements often seem more supportive of the former, more paranoid view, his actions indicate that he is actually pursuing the latter, more pragmatic approach.[6]

Seen from a long-term perspective, Moscow and Islamabad have been battling each other for influence over Afghanistan since the beginning of the Cold War. From an even longer-term perspective, post-Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and Pakistan, on the other, are the inheritors of the competition over Afghanistan between tsarist Russia and the British Empire dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. While the large-scale U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan since 2001 has been the United States' longest war to date, it may prove only to have been a brief interruption in the competition that both Moscow and Islamabad appear set to resume after the withdrawal of ISAF.

The United States' role in this competition has shifted over the past few decades. During the Cold War and especially during the 1979–89 Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Washington backed Islamabad against Moscow. From 1989 to 2001, however, it lost interest and backed neither side. After September 11, the United States fought against Russia's enemies in Pakistan but was unable to do so effectively: Washington proved incapable of stopping Islamabad from supporting the Taliban because of the United States' dependence on Pakistan for logistical support in supplying the large U.S. and coalition military presence in Afghanistan.

For Moscow, the key questions about the Russo-Pakistani competition in Afghanistan that will soon re-emerge are: What role will the United States play? Will it side with Pakistan yet again? While this possibility may strike Americans and even Russian pragmatists as ridiculous, past U.S. support for Pakistan and deference to it during the U.S.-led intervention leads Russian pessimists (of whom there is no shortage) to fear that Washington will do so again. There are, though, two other courses of action open to U.S. foreign policy: (1) the United States may simply withdraw from Afghanistan altogether and allow neighboring countries to compete with one another, as it did from 1989 to 2001; or (2) the United States may retain a small military presence that can be sustained entirely via Russia and Central Asia and thus avoid the blunder of dependence on Pakistan.

This second course of action is naturally what Russian pragmatists hope for, since this would mean that Washington would for the first time

6 Michael Bohm, "Why Putin Wants U.S. Bases in Afghanistan," *Moscow Times*, May 17, 2013 ~ http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/why-putin-wants-us-bases-in-afghanistan/480087.html.

unambiguously side with Moscow in its competition with Islamabad over Afghanistan. Being pragmatists, however, they understand that Russia may have little influence over whether the United States adopts this course of action (not least because of the chronically poor state of Russian-U.S. relations). Russian support for the United States retaining a military presence in Central Asia would help achieve the common goal of protecting the Kabul government against the Taliban, but it is not clear whether pragmatism extends this far in Moscow. Finally, if the United States does withdraw altogether from Afghanistan, Russia must be prepared to act with its own regional coalition of the willing (or not so willing) to contain both the Taliban and Pakistan. ◈

The Limits of Cooperation: Central Asia, Afghanistan, and the New Silk Road

Kathleen Collins

In anticipating the United States' ultimate withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Obama administration has sought to enlist Afghanistan's northern neighbors within Central Asia in an effort to stabilize and invigorate the region politically and economically. In 2011 the administration proposed a "new Silk Road" initiative linking the world to Afghanistan. The strategy is to enlist the country's Central Asian neighbors in a win-win scenario that will spur trade, energy exports, investment, and peace. The former Soviet "stan" countries, proposes the administration, will be the drivers of the new Silk Road and thereby enrich themselves while uplifting Afghanistan and ensuring regional stability. This vision is a hopeful one, yet the Central Asian states remain unpersuaded. Instead, they have preferred to paint a dark scenario of a coming Afghan "spillover"—of conflict and refugees, Islamist extremism and terrorism, and drugs—spreading not just to Pakistan and Iran but also northward to the former Soviet sphere and undermining the fragile stability of the post-Soviet stans.

The new Silk Road initiative is presaged on multiple faulty assumptions about Central Asian interests: first, that Afghanistan and Central Asia constitute a natural region sharing a common ethnic, religious, and historical identity, and that this identity will undergird a strong regional relationship; second, that the Central Asian states will not primarily treat Afghanistan as a security threat after the U.S. withdrawal; third, that they have shared economic interests in cooperation in Afghanistan; and fourth, that such economic opportunities in Afghanistan will trump the actions and interests of Russia and China. Each of the above assumptions is extremely problematic. The post-Soviet stans are unlikely to be reliable partners in the U.S. plan for Afghanistan after the withdrawal in 2014. In reality, regime survival, border security, and concrete economic incentives—coming from China, not Afghanistan—will determine the foreign policies of the Central Asian states.

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In this essay, I first provide a realistic assessment of security threats from Afghanistan. Then I shift to an explanation of how Central Asian states' insecurities will nonetheless undermine a new Silk Road by increasing their cooperation with Russia and decreasing integration with Afghanistan. Next, I demonstrate that economic incentives from Russia and China are directing the Central Asian states to the north and east, undercutting trade and energy routes through Afghanistan. Finally, I discuss the political and religious crackdowns likely to be justified in terms of the Afghan threat.

Afghanistan as Threat: Rhetoric and Reality

The Central Asian and Afghan populations do not share an identity despite their Silk Road roots and common religion. Soviet modernization policies set most Central Asian Muslims on a very different path, making them accepting of secular government and suspicious of the Islamic-leaning regimes of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Likewise, being Muslim and Central Asian, and sharing a Soviet legacy of both colonization and development, has not facilitated a sense of shared identity, much less cooperation, among the Central Asian states themselves. Since 1991, multiple external attempts at regional integration have either failed or remained hollow shells of international agreements.[1] Mistrust among Central Asian leaders has often led these countries to the brink of armed conflict on their interstate borders and rarely fostered cooperation. The Central Asian republics—with the exception of the enigmatic Turkmenistan—view Afghanistan primarily as a source of instability, refugees, Islamist militancy, and narco-trafficking. Their fears for their security are not unfounded; the U.S. withdrawal is very likely to lead to an escalation of conflict within Afghanistan and potentially even to the collapse of the Karzai regime. Yet although there will be some spillover effects, the anticipated "descent into chaos," to borrow Ahmed Rashid's term for the Afghanistan-Pakistan trajectory, is unlikely to dramatically affect the post-Soviet stans.[2] Nonetheless, several Central Asian regimes, following Russia's lead, have chosen to act as if that chaos is coming, both to ensure their security and to appease Moscow.

First, not only the Central Asian states and Russia but also the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have urged planning for a refugee

[1] Kathleen Collins, "Economic and Security Regionalism among Patrimonial Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Central Asia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 2 (2009): 249–81.

[2] Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008).

crisis. While there is some basis for their security concerns, even a return to state collapse in Afghanistan is unlikely to lead to a refugee crisis for its ex-Soviet neighbors. Refugees from Afghanistan have typically flooded east and west, not to the north. Only Tajikistan faces a serious risk in this regard, because of the cross-border ethnic Tajik population, the growth of the Taliban and other insurgent presence in northern and eastern Afghanistan, and the perceived exclusion of Tajiks from power in Afghanistan.[3]

Second, the major Islamist threat to the Central Asian states comes from within rather than from Afghanistan in general or the Taliban in particular. Both Hizb ut-Tahrir, a transnational, underground Islamic party, and Salafism, an extremely conservative practice of Islam originating in Saudi Arabia, are growing across the region, even in Kazakhstan, which once considered itself immune to Islamism. However, these trends are growing largely due to the internal political and religious repression perpetrated by the Central Asian governments. External financing and ties come from the Middle East and Russia, not from Afghanistan, although opposition to the Afghan war has been a frequent theme in Hizb ut-Tahrir's propaganda.

One Islamist element that is clearly linked to Afghanistan, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), is likely to resurface as a border challenge to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan in the wake of the 2014 withdrawal. The IMU originated from domestic political opposition to the Uzbek regime around the time of independence. After a failed uprising in 1992, its leaders fled to Tajikistan and later to northern Afghanistan, where they became intertwined with al Qaeda and were harbored by the Taliban. After years of hiding and training in Pakistan's tribal regions since 2001, the IMU may be moving back to northern Afghanistan, and from there it will likely seek to re-enter Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. There have also been reports of ethnic Uighurs, Chechens, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Tajiks fighting as jihadis in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and now Syria. While being unlikely to pose a serious military risk to the regimes, Central Asian jihadis could present periodic challenges to regional militaries, which rely on mostly outdated equipment and poorly trained and unmotivated conscripts.

Finally, because opium production in Afghanistan finds its way to markets in Russia and Europe mainly through Central Asia, the narco-trade

[3] Gilles Dorronsoro, "Waiting for the Taliban in Afghanistan," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2012 ~ http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/20/waiting-for-taliban-in-afghanistan/dvkr; and Gilles Dorronsoro, "The Taliban's Winning Strategy in Afghanistan," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2009, 15 ~ http://carnegieendowment.org/files/taliban_winning_strategy.pdf.

is probably the most serious and ongoing threat to the region's populations. It is unclear how the Central Asian states will be affected in this respect by the U.S. withdrawal. Increased conflict in Afghanistan may escalate the trade as internal control becomes even less effective; however, conflict may also decrease production if parts of the country return to Taliban control. The narco-world is one of the least understood aspects of Central Asian politics and geopolitics, but many local analysts believe that elements of the Central Asian states are heavily involved in the narco-trade, as are many wealthy businessmen in these countries.

Perceptions of Insecurity and Implications for the New Silk Road

Although the Central Asian states and many pundits clearly exaggerate the negative externalities of Afghanistan's post-2014 course, their expectations of growing insecurity will have three immediate consequences that threaten the U.S. vision for a new Silk Road and prospering Afghanistan, as well as any future U.S. political or geopolitical influence in the region. First, several Central Asian states are clearly reorienting themselves into Moscow's sphere of influence. Second, their security concerns—together with Chinese investment—will at least partially undermine the U.S. vision of a new Silk Road revitalizing Afghanistan and the region. Third, the Central Asian states will have little incentive to even pretend to appease Western concerns about political rights and economic freedoms.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan pivot toward Moscow. First, sounding the alarm of spillover effects post-2014, the Central Asian states and Russia together have created a pretext for increased Russian involvement in security affairs in the region, and potentially for a greater security role for China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as well. In an August 2013 press conference, Russian minister of defense Sergei Shoygu expressed serious concern over security on the Central Asian borders after 2014 and announced that Russia will deploy forces there.[4] President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan expressed similar concerns after talks with President Vladimir Putin,[5] and in August Tajikistan held border troop exercises that he declared were meant to maintain border readiness against Afghan threats. In September, President Putin announced that the Collective

[4] "Russia Fears for Afghan Border Security after 2014—Paper," BBC Monitoring South Asia, August 19, 2013.

[5] "Tajik President Sums Up Results of Top-Level Talks in Russia," BBC Monitoring Central Asia, August 2, 2013.

Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) would perform the Grom-2013 exercises in Kyrgyzstan to combat drug trafficking and terrorist activities,[6] and in November the Kyrgyz speaker of parliament publicly echoed Russia's concerns.[7] Despite the exaggeration of risks from Afghanistan, at least two Central Asian states are falling in line with Russia's attempt to reassert its sphere of influence.

Kyrgyzstan is most directly affected by the U.S. withdrawal, after hosting the U.S. and coalition forces at the Manas Transit Center for over a decade. President Almazbek Atambayev has recognized that the United States' exit from the region means the end of any chance of repositioning Kyrgyzstan in the U.S. sphere of influence. Unlike his predecessor, he has not sought to balance the United States and Russia or enrich the regime by provoking a new bidding game for bases. Kyrgyzstan now finds itself under new pressure from Moscow to allow Russia a more expansive, long-term presence. Not long after the announcement that the United States would depart from its air base at the Manas Transit Center, a senior Russian air force official declared that Russia would "at least double" the number of its aircraft at its own Kant base in Kyrgyzstan, just a few miles away.[8] Russia has also consolidated several bases in Kyrgyzstan—including a potential base in Batken—under one agreement that gives it basing rights through 2032, not entirely to Kyrgyzstan's satisfaction. Yet the country will receive a military assistance package from Russia worth about $1 billion, as well as potential strategic investment in hydropower. The Kyrgyz government expects that the new tranche of Russian money and military investments will boost its budget, revitalize its decrepit military, lure hydropower investment, and in doing so stabilize Kyrgyzstan's internal politics, as well as secure both its borders and a longer-term external patron.

Tajikistan is the Central Asian state at greatest risk for instability, due to its 1,400 kilometer border with Afghanistan, its history of IMU incursions, and its cross-border narco-trade. Tajikistan is also turning increasingly to Russia and the CSTO for greater military assistance, although whether this will mean more Russian troops is still unknown. Russia and the CSTO have promised "substantial aid" to the borders ahead of the U.S. withdrawal

6 Vladimir Putin, "Press Statement following the CSTO Collective Security Council Summit," President of Russia, September 23, 2013 ~ http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/6025.

7 "Developments in Afghanistan Can Take Any Turn after Coalition Forces Are Withdrawn," ITAR-TASS, November 13, 2013.

8 Joshua Kucera, "Russia to Double Presence at Kyrgyzstan Air Base," October 28, 2013 ~ http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67687.

in 2014, and Defense Minister Shoygu announced that Russia "will fully upgrade the equipment at its military base in Tajikistan ahead of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan."[9] President Rahmon is probably hoping that the increased border security will stabilize the growing internal militancy in the Pamir Mountains and the Islamic Party–leaning Garm region, both of which have seen sporadic violent conflicts against government forces in recent years.

However, not all the ex-Soviet stans are returning to the Russian fold. Turkmenistan, as usual, is maintaining its neutrality and is relatively unconcerned about the effects of Afghanistan. Uzbekistan continues to balance Russia and the United States. For example, it appeared to counter Russia's reassertion in the region by withdrawing from the CSTO in 2012 and indicating its increased interest in cooperation with the United States. These moves probably reflected Uzbekistan's desire to benefit from U.S. military hardware left behind. Kazakhstan, facing little serious risk from Afghanistan, can afford to proceed with its current multivector foreign policy. It has led regional discussions about the new Silk Road and Afghanistan but is still unlikely to answer the U.S. call for regional players to step in to stabilize and develop the country.

Borders, trade, and energy along the new Silk Road. A second consequence of U.S. troops leaving the region is that borders will become more difficult to cross and trade will be further impeded. Uzbekistan will likely rely on its own resources to guard its critical border, but this is likely to make trade and transit more difficult. Even before the U.S. exit, the Northern Distribution Network has been frequently delayed for days or weeks by bottlenecks at the border checkpoints. Moreover, Uzbekistan is more interested in exporting goods to Afghanistan than in importing them, as trade figures for the last decade illustrate.[10] The advantage, to the extent that trade continues, will be primarily in developing Uzbekistan's export market, not Afghanistan's.

Already, the stan countries rank among the most difficult places in the world for cross-border trade.[11] For Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, tougher procedures at the borders will further inhibit trade

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9 Joshua Kucera, "Russia to Upgrade Tajikistan Military Base," Eurasianet, November 13, 2013 ~ http://eurasianet.org/node/67756.

10 Brion Anderson and Yuriy Klimov, "Uzbekistan: Trade Regime and Recent Trade Developments," University of Central Asia, Working Paper, no. 4, 2012 ~ http://www.ucentralasia.org/downloads/UCA-IPPA-WP4-Uzbekistan%20and%20Regional%20Trade.pdf.

11 World Bank Group, "Trade Across Borders," Doing Business Project ~ http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploretopics/trading-across-borders.

with Afghanistan. While the aim is partly to control the flow of weapons, drugs, and insurgents, the effect will be negative for businessmen and shuttle traders, the ordinary people who might benefit from open borders and increased trade. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's security reorientation toward and reliance on Russia are accompanied by plans to complete their integration into the Moscow-led Customs Union, joining their Kazakh neighbor. The effect of that integration, as with other Russia-led institutions, will likely be to increase dependence on Moscow and to disincentivize trade with Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, for the five Central Asian states, trade with China—in goods, services, and energy—has been increasing by leaps and bounds through bilateral agreements, starting at $527 million in 1992 and reaching $40 billion in 2012.[12] Speaking in Kazakhstan, President Xi Jinping recently declared "a Silk Road economic belt" linking Central Asia and China. Chinese trade, loans, and investments in the region have already made this a reality, far eclipsing Central Asian ties to Afghanistan and South Asia, as well as north to Russia and west to the European Union. Chinese money comes without short-term security risks and devoid of rhetoric about political and economic reform.

Turkmenistan remains outside the Customs Union and is little concerned about its borders. Yet Turkmen-Chinese relations are undermining a critical piece of the United States' new Silk Road agenda. The U.S. government has made a proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI) the centerpiece of its vision. This potential pipeline, discussed since the 1990s and touted by the State Department since 2011, would carry Turkmen gas across Afghanistan to markets in Pakistan and India. But while the United States continued musing about TAPI, China signed a gas deal with Turkmenistan. In September 2013, on a sweep through Central Asia, Chinese president Xi and Turkmen president Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov jointly inaugurated operations at the new Turkmen Galkynysh gas field, estimated to be the second-largest in the world. President Xi also signed an $8 billion agreement to build a second pipeline to export Turkmen natural gas across Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to China. The deal will increase gas exports to China from the current level

12 Ding Ying, "Silk Road Revival," *Beijing Review,* September 19, 2013 ~ http://www.bjreview.com.cn/world/txt/2013-09/16/content_568045_3.htm.

of 25 billion cubic meters (bcm) per annum to 65 bcm per annum by 2020.[13] As a result, TAPI will now happen only if the Afghan security situation is resolved and China does not exhaust Turkmenistan's production capacity.

Finally, hydropower is another linchpin in the new Silk Road strategy. But the United States has continued to underestimate the intransigence of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz-Tajik conflict over sharing water resources. It is not yet clear that building additional hydropower plants to export energy to Afghanistan can be done without triggering cross-border conflict. Electricity exports may also trigger internal unrest in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, whose populations face frequent electricity and gas shortages and are unlikely to support exporting power to Afghans. Such trading schemes typically bring wealth to elites close to the government while the population remains in the dark.

Domestic consequences: Further degradation of freedom. Finally, the Central Asian regimes and their populations are increasingly convinced that the U.S. presence in the region was short-term and self-serving, while Russia and China remain for the long-haul. U.S. base closures are thus a signal to them that they must accept and rely on the partial reconstitution of Russia's sphere of influence, a potentially greater security role for China, and severely diminished U.S. influence in Central Asia. Indeed, over the past decade the regimes across the region have generally preferred the Russian and Chinese approach. The CSTO and SCO provide some counterterrorism assistance and a pretext for cracking down on unregistered religious groups as well as other political opposition. Meanwhile, Russia and China voice no demands for democratization, respect for human rights, or economic reform. A complete U.S. military withdrawal from the Central Asian republics, together with the drawdown in Afghanistan, will no doubt be followed by a further retrenchment in political freedoms and human rights in those countries. Kazakhstan has already escalated crackdowns on religious groups and is drafting a new counterterrorism program. Likewise, in the past six to nine months, Kyrgyzstan's political reforms have appeared increasingly at risk from executive abuses.

Although the threat of spillover is clearly exaggerated, in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan the Central Asian regimes will act to maximize their stability. For most states, this will mean a combination of tighter borders, a pivot toward Russia, and a crackdown on internal dissent,

[13] "Growth Picture Strong, but Risks on Eastern Focus," Emerging Europe Monitor, October 16, 2013.

branded as Islamist extremism. Washington's idea of a new Silk Road lifting Afghanistan out of poverty and bringing stability to the region is appealing, but it may be a pipedream. Any U.S. plan for stabilizing Afghanistan presaged on a shared identity and regional cooperation in Central Asia, while ignoring either security considerations or Chinese economic interests and alternatives to Afghanistan, is unlikely to succeed. ◈

Securing Indian Interests in Afghanistan Beyond 2014

C. Christine Fair

Few countries are as motivated to stay the course with Afghanistan as is India, whose interests there are numerous and enduring. Over the last decade, India has largely used its amicable relations with President Hamid Karzai and the U.S.- and NATO-provided security umbrella to pursue its varied objectives in Afghanistan. However, as the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force in 2014 looms, India must now craft its future policy amid numerous sources of uncertainty. No one knows who will govern a post-Karzai Afghanistan or what role, if any, the Taliban will have at the central and subnational levels of governance. No one knows how the United States will disengage and what security forces, if any, will remain for modest operational support or sustained training of Afghanistan's fledgling security force. Equally worrisome, no one can say whether the United States or other members of the international community will continue their financial support for a bloated Afghan government that has no ability to pay for itself, and if they do, for how long. Worse yet, will the United States again outsource its Afghanistan policy to Pakistan? These are all pressing questions for India. This essay seeks to briefly outline India's policy preferences, the means it has to execute these preferences, and the domestic and international alliances that will likely shape India's ability to stay the course in Afghanistan after 2014.

Indian Interests in Afghanistan

While it has long been recognized as the preeminent power in South Asia, in recent years India has projected itself as a rising power in the international system. In the past, India largely reacted to events within its extended strategic environment, which it sees as comprising the entire Indian Ocean basin and much of central and southwest Asia. Increasingly, however, India wants to play a decisive role in determining regional security throughout its near and extended strategic environment. Consistent with this goal, New Delhi has become more interested in proactively employing its formidable and growing economic and political influence to prevent developments that undermine its strategic interests.

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India's current and future interests in Afghanistan should be viewed through the lens of India's emergence as an extraregional power and an aspiring global actor. It hopes that Afghanistan will not revert once more to a sanctuary for Islamist terrorism taking diktat from Pakistan. Through continued investment and support in Afghanistan, India aims to mitigate Pakistan's tenacious efforts to cultivate Afghanistan as a client state. Most importantly, Afghanistan, along with Iran, is an important corridor through which India can project power and influence throughout Central Asia and beyond. By pursuing its varied interests in Afghanistan, New Delhi can demonstrate that its foreign policies are not driven solely or even primarily by Pakistan. Over the last decade, India has succeeded in some measure by cultivating a suite of sophisticated diplomatic relations with an astonishing array of countries in Southwest, Central, and Southeast Asia. Afghanistan and Iran are of particular import for India because they are its only gateways for the transport of goods into and out of Central Asia and beyond, particularly as Pakistan is not likely to ever offer India access to its ground lines of control.

Above and beyond using engagement with Afghanistan to advance its position as an aspirant to global power, India needs to address significant and persistent security concerns that emanate from Afghanistan, as well as from Pakistan. Most of the militant groups that have terrorized India since the early 1990s—e.g., Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami (HuJI), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Harkat-ul-Mujahideen/Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuM/HuA), and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)—have trained in Afghanistan, with varying degrees of connection to the Afghan Taliban and, by extension, al Qaeda.[1] Most of these groups (i.e., HuJI, HuM/HuA, and JeM) are also of the Deobandi school of Islamic thought, as are the Afghan Taliban. These Deobandi groups all share enduring and complicated personal and organizational ties through a network of Deobandi madrasas, mosques, and Islamic scholars; they have benefited from the protection of various factions associated with the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, a Pakistan-based Islamist political party representing the interests of the Deobandi *ulema* (religious scholars). LeT, in contrast, is tied to the Ahl-e-Hadith interpretative tradition, which never co-located with the Taliban and instead operated its own training facilities in Afghanistan. Despite the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan, these groups continue to operate from sanctuaries in Pakistan, where most still enjoy sustained patronage from Pakistan's intelligence agencies, which

[1] LeT is a notable exception.

employ them against India. India dreads Afghanistan again becoming a terrorist safe haven.

India also seeks to secure and retain Afghanistan as a friendly state from which it has the capacity to monitor Pakistan and possibly even influence events there. Pakistan, for example, has long alleged that India has worked with the Afghans to destabilize Balochistan by supporting Baloch rebels. Pakistan also alleges that India is supporting the Islamist terrorists operating throughout Pakistan. New Delhi denies these accusations as vigorously as Islamabad makes them. While Pakistan's maximalist allegations are most certainly false, India's insistence on complete innocence is also unlikely to be true. This puts the two sides in indirect conflict in Afghanistan, which has become increasingly bloody. Pakistan's terrorist and insurgent proxies have attacked Indian workers, diplomats, soldiers, and intelligence personnel in an effort to increase the cost of India's presence in the country.

Additionally, the future of Afghanistan has a number of important domestic impacts on India, which motivate New Delhi's apprehensions about Islamist militants based in Afghanistan and Pakistan. First and foremost, militant groups are actively recruiting disaffected Indian Muslims throughout India, even going as far as establishing franchises in the country that are increasingly distant from their parent institutions in Pakistan. Second, Islamist militancy in India coexists in devastating synergy with a growing Hindu nationalist movement. Proponents of Hindu nationalism seek to reshape India as a Hindu state, and Hindu extremists have used Islamist violence in India to justify their anti-Muslim violence. In turn, Islamist militants justify their own actions on the basis of "Hindu" oppression. In the process, India's ostensibly secular fabric is at risk with increasing communal polarization that worries moderates of all faiths.

Securing These Interests without the U.S. Security Umbrella

India and Afghanistan have enjoyed cordial relations since the early days of Indian independence, including signing a friendship treaty in 1950. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–90), India's presence in the country was restricted due to the U.S. decision to work almost exclusively with Pakistan to create thousands of *mujahideen* (with Saudi funding) to fight the Soviet Union. In the post-Soviet era, New Delhi supported whatever government was in place, provided that it was opposed by Pakistan. Once the Taliban consolidated power in 1996, India was again marginalized and forced to pursue very modest goals. Working with Iran, Tajikistan, and

Russia, India chose to support the Panjshir-based Northern Alliance, which was led by Ahmad Shah Massoud and posed the only significant challenge to the Taliban. Following the routing of the Taliban after September 11 and the expanding presence of the United States and the International Security Assistance Force, India was able to reopen its consulates in Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Mazar-e-Sharif, in addition to its embassy in Kabul. New Delhi has pursued a variety of development and humanitarian projects as well as made a long-term commitment to help rebuild Afghanistan's institutions and infrastructure. In October 2011, India and Afghanistan signed a security pact according to which both states agreed to expand their cooperation in counterterrorism operations, the training of various Afghan security forces, and trade. Pakistan, understanding that it is the mostly likely object of expanded counterterrorism ties, was appropriately disquieted by these developments. Islamabad already sees Afghanistan's security forces as being deeply anti-Pakistan without the addition of direct Indian influence.

India has been caught off guard by recent developments in Afghanistan. Despite being Washington's most important South Asian partner, New Delhi was not informed of U.S. intentions to engage the Afghan Taliban in "peace talks." India rejects the notion that there can be a disaggregation of the Taliban into "good" and "bad" factions that the United States can variously engage and isolate. It views such efforts as a U.S.-Pakistan condominium to find some means of allowing the United States to disengage in Afghanistan while again outsourcing parts of its Afghanistan policy to Pakistan, as it did during the 1990s. After Washington's announcement of its intentions to pursue a negotiated settlement with the Taliban, India understood that it will have to develop its own policy options in Afghanistan under the assumption that the United States may not support the Indian agenda in the future. Consequently, India will have to find the means of pursuing these interests without the U.S.- and NATO-provided security umbrella.

India has long felt the brunt of deteriorating security conditions in Afghanistan, which have adversely affected its ability to execute projects and ensure the safety of its institutions and personnel. New Delhi understands that the future operating environment is uncertain. There are very real limits to its ability to project power in Afghanistan, despite the fact that Afghans are generally very well disposed toward India and Indians. First and foremost, Pakistan retains the advantage of geography. Second, and equally important, many Pakistani citizens are consanguineal and co-ethnic with Afghans across the border. Third, Pakistan has demonstrated that it is highly motivated to accept more risks than India. Because Pakistan is so

risk acceptant, it will continue to support groups like the Haqqani network, LeT, and the Afghan Taliban. Indeed, because these groups have been so effective in checking India's influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan has refused to even marginally curb their operational capacity.

Taken together, the Indian public seems divided about the relative costs and benefits of its country's investments in Afghanistan. For many Indians, corruption, economic stagnation, and chronic internal insecurity seem more pressing concerns than the fate of Afghanistan. Some Indians have also grown wary of India maintaining its current presence, much less expanding its activities, in Afghanistan. Others see New Delhi's ability to shape events in Afghanistan as a litmus test for the aspiring international power. After all, if India cannot influence events in Afghanistan to advance its own interests, how can it credibly claim the mantle of a global power?

Navigating a Post-Karzai Afghanistan: Butter or Guns?

In 2014, Karzai will cease to be the president of Afghanistan. Even though presidential elections loom, no obvious front-runner has emerged. Moreover, it is more likely than not that some Taliban presence will be ensconced in subnational, as well as national, offices. India, like other actors, must plan its future position in Afghanistan under considerable uncertainty. In this environment, New Delhi will need to continue to engage actors from across Afghanistan's political spectrum. This will come easily to India, which has long sustained ties with Afghan political elites—many of whom have family and educational ties to India.

The course of action that India will pursue in Afghanistan may also be influenced by its own general elections, which are scheduled for spring 2014. The incumbent Congress-led coalition has come under sustained attacks from the Hindu-nationalist opposition party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and its ideologically aligned allies. The BJP has lambasted the Congress Party for failing to assert a more aggressive Indian role in the Afghan endgame but has not offered its own way forward.

With the unpredictable course of the United States, India will redouble its efforts to engage Afghanistan's other neighbors. Iran, in particular, is likely to become ever more important to India. The two countries have long worked together both to build an important north-south trade corridor and to invest in the logistical infrastructure to permit the movement of goods and people through Iran and Afghanistan. Iran is the only corridor through which India can project its interests

in Central Asia. Despite warming ties with the United States, India has largely maintained its controversial relationship with Iran. However, the various sanction regimes targeting Iran and its nuclear program have hindered Indo-Iranian cooperation, principally by depriving Iran of capital and by increasing the cost of some kinds of Indian cooperation with the regime. The recent diplomatic breakthrough between Iran and the United States, should it endure, could eventually pave the way for more effective Indo-Iranian cooperation in Afghanistan and the broader region. After all, both countries prefer that Afghanistan not come under the influence of an extremist Islamist regime, even though they have very different relationships with the United States.

Amid speculation that it may step up its security ties with Afghanistan, India seems most steadfastly committed to maintaining an assistance program focused on economic investment, human capital development, and the rebuilding of Afghan institutions. India is unlikely to retrench from this commitment irrespective of whether a BJP-led or a Congress-led government emerges after the spring 2014 elections, though a BJP-led government may pursue India's interests even more aggressively. While there is some uncertainty about the specific course that India's future government will stake out, there is near certitude that Pakistan will interpret these activities in the most dangerous terms possible and will redouble its efforts to ensure that Indian attempts to stay the course will be neither easy nor inexpensive. ◈

The New Great Game: Pakistan's Approach to Afghanistan after 2014

Larry P. Goodson

A modern day Great Game is playing out in Inner Asia once again. Like the Great Game of the nineteenth century, it centers on Afghanistan, a land that falls outside every state's sphere of influence and has always been intensely hostile to foreigners, making it a perfect playing field. China, India, Russia, and the United States are the major powers embroiled in competition in and around Afghanistan, but Pakistan is also very much in the game. As the most significant front-line state, as well as the country of first asylum to the largest number of Afghan refugees (and largest refugee population in the world from 1982 to 1997), Pakistan correctly saw itself as having invested much in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. This investment cost Islamabad a great deal, however, even as it provided a great opportunity. Afghan *mujahideen* operated from Pakistani soil to attack Afghanistan, causing retaliatory attacks by the Soviet and Afghan governments that accompanied all the ills that millions of refugees can inflict on a poor state. At the same time, Pakistan's Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) used the Afghan war of the 1980s to refine its strategy of leveraging asymmetric actors to influence events in hostile or less-governed spaces in the country's immediate neighborhood. This goes to the heart of the security dilemma facing Pakistan today, which also helps explain its problem with India and how Afghanistan after 2014 fits into that relationship.

The Great Game construct offers much to our understanding of post-2014 Afghanistan and the factors that will likely drive the competition there. This essay articulates Pakistan's primary national interests in Afghanistan and how those interests can be expected to play out in the context of the interests of the other major actors that are also engaged there. It will conclude with some predictions about Pakistan's post-2014 approach to Afghanistan.

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NOTE ~ The views expressed in this essay do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or U.S. government.

Pakistan and Afghanistan: Historical Context

Even before the partition of 1947, Pakistan's security consciousness has been dominated by the perceived threat posed by its larger neighbor India, with which it has fought four wars and numerous smaller conflicts. India's sheer size has helped it prevail in all these military exchanges, prompting Pakistan to invest more and more in its military over time. Today, Pakistan has a large and very professional military with a poor track record against India's military, a large nuclear arsenal with robust delivery systems (postured against India's Cold Start conventional strategic doctrine), and an active use of asymmetric actors (guerrillas, insurgents, irregulars, and terrorists), especially in the contested area of Kashmir. This "strategic triad" both reflects and reinforces the fixation of the Pakistani military on India, motivates Pakistan's spending and strategic doctrines, and causes it to focus increasingly on building, funding, training, and running asymmetric actors outside Pakistan.

In the 1990s, after the Soviet Union collapsed and the United States extricated itself from Afghanistan, only Pakistan remained deeply engaged there. Russia, the United States, China, and India all had other priorities: modern Russia was a weakened successor to the Soviet Union, the United States was focused on the Persian Gulf and Eastern Europe, China was reeling from the Tiananmen Square uprising, and India was set adrift from its treaty arrangement with the Soviet Union in the wake of the latter's collapse. The United States left Afghanistan largely in the hands of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, with a decade of increasingly virulent Islamism and destructive civil war as the result. In the latter half of the 1990s, Iran also became engaged in supporting its clients in western, central, and northern Afghanistan, deepening the civil war into ethnic-sectarian cleansing.

The Afghan war that erupted after September 11, 2001, changed the regional equation. Today, the United States plays the dominant role, but a rising China, emerging India, re-emerging Russia, troubled Iran, and other regional players all are actively involved in Afghanistan, as are multilateral and nongovernmental organizations. Naturally, national interests vary and in some cases are divergent. Pakistan views each country's involvement in Afghanistan through the lens of its own interests.

Pakistan's National Interests in Afghanistan

Pakistan has four major national interests in Afghanistan. First, Pakistan is home to over half of the world's 50 million Pashtuns, who

are primarily divided between Pakistan and Afghanistan by the Durand Line. As the Pashtun people are famously tribal in organization and straddle the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, they provide a mechanism by which both governments can meddle in the other's affairs. In the nineteenth-century Great Game, this resulted in "war by proxy," whereby the major contenders, Great Britain and Russia, kept costs down on the far-flung edges of their empires by using local levies. Today, Pakistan views elements of the Afghan Pashtuns as possible proxies, just as it used the mujahideen in the 1980s and Taliban in the 1990s. Primarily because of the Pashtun factor, Pakistan and Afghanistan have shared a tumultuous history since Pakistan's creation in 1947. As the larger and stronger country, Pakistan sees itself as having a stake in Afghanistan's internal affairs. And as the country that took in the most Afghan refugees during the dark days of the 1980s, with significant deleterious effects on its economy and society, Pakistan sees itself as being owed a favorable outcome in Afghanistan today.

Second, as the Afghan war of the 1980s was winding down, Pakistan's military leadership began to propagate a strategic doctrinal shift in approach that came to be known as "strategic depth." The concept was that Afghanistan could provide some territorial depth for Pakistani forces in a conventional struggle with India. (After all, Islamabad is less than 80 miles from the border with India.) Pakistan still sees Afghanistan—especially the Pashtun tribal belt along the border—as an area of influence. Since 2002, however, India's Kautilyan "mandala strategy" of befriending the Afghan government to eliminate Pakistan's strategic depth has directly threatened this national security interest and will undoubtedly lead to more bloodshed as the United States reduces its presence in the region.

Third, Afghanistan's natural resources and transit corridors also have attracted Pakistan's interest. Afghanistan is a linchpin of regional trade, as it connects Central Asia, China, Iran, and Pakistan. Whether by pipelines, power lines, road networks, or railroads, raw materials and consumer goods alike must cross Afghanistan if regional trade is to function. Pakistan has a growing need for the resources of Afghanistan and Central Asia, as do its regional rivals. The recent discovery of substantial and varied mineral deposits in Afghanistan has only made the country more attractive to outside powers as a source of valuable raw materials. Since 1950, the Pakistan-Afghanistan Transit Trade Treaty—subsequently renegotiated on several occasions, most recently in 2010—has provided landlocked Afghanistan with access to a port (Karachi). Yet despite the

treaty, Afghanistan has been a source of many illegally smuggled goods into Pakistan, typically into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas that abut the Durand Line.

Fourth, Pakistan fears the other regional powers and recognizes that if there is a new, zero-sum Great Game in the region, it could lose everything as it faces off against India. Thus, Islamabad intends or at least hopes to control the transition in Kabul in 2014 by placing its own preferred candidate on the throne (applying another traditional Great Game technique, diplomacy by intrigue).

Pakistan's Relations with Other Regional Actors: Prospects for a New Great Game

In the modern-day Great Game emerging in and around Afghanistan, regional actors are following the paramount rule of the traditional Great Game, which is "never play to win—always play not to lose." Afghanistan is too remote and rugged for major countries to commit their primary military assets or national resources to defeating their rivals there. When these countries have attempted to do so, they have often lost (Great Britain twice in the nineteenth century), and sometimes lost with disastrous consequences (the Soviet Union). As was evident in the nineteenth-century Great Game, Afghanistan can provide a useful arena for regional or global competitors to play out their rivalries.

India. Pakistan and India have been engaged in a long-running rivalry that will continue to play out in Afghanistan. India now has a broader and deeper relationship with Afghanistan, having signed a strategic partnership in 2011 and sponsored Afghanistan's membership in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) since 2006. It has also built roads in Afghanistan and Iran, as well as the Chabahar port in Iran, to weaken Afghan dependence on Pakistan for access to the outside world. Indian companies have invested more than $2 billion in Afghanistan, most notably the successful bid for the bulk of the Hajigak iron ore in Bamiyan. The deal stands as the centerpiece of an expected $10.7 billion in Indian investment over the next 30 years as well as more than $1 billion in aid since 2002.[1]

Pakistan has neither the resources that India possesses nor the same strategic approach toward Afghanistan. Islamabad wants a government in

[1] Bhashyam Kasturi, "India's Role in Afghanistan," State of Pakistan, web log, February 20, 2012 ~ http://www.stateofpakistan.org/indias-role-in-afghanistan.

Kabul that will not pursue policies that it considers inimical to its interests, and it definitely considers a government engaged in a strategic partnership with India to be counter to its interests. As discussed above, Pakistan cannot fight India directly, as India's large army is postured so close to the Pakistan border, especially in Kashmir, and its readiness to deploy rapidly under Cold Start can only be countered through the threat of nuclear deterrence. The 2008 Mumbai attacks by the Pakistani terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba, which turned out to have been supported by the ISI, are a classic example of the asymmetric actor leg of Pakistan's strategic triad. Realistically, asymmetric actors are the only offensive tool for confronting India that is available to Pakistan's national security establishment. The Mumbai attacks, however, pushed India to the edge of a military response, meaning that similarly spectacular attacks by ISI-sponsored actors on Indian territory (with the exception of Jammu and Kashmir) will almost certainly not be allowed to take place again without Indian retribution. Pakistan will thus likely continue to employ ISI-directed asymmetric actors to achieve its ends inside Afghanistan and hopefully keep its conflict with India to a simmering or even lower level.

The United States. The United States has had a long on-again, off-again transactional relationship with Pakistan, aligning with Islamabad when it could advance U.S. interests, such as during the 1980s, and turning elsewhere when those interests had been achieved or abandoned. In September 2001 the United States was in off-again mode, having imposed sanctions on Pakistan following its nuclear tests in 1998. All of that changed with the events of September 11. The United States convinced Pakistan to abandon the Taliban, at least somewhat, and made it a "major non-NATO ally" in return for the ability to use Pakistani territory for the primary supply routes to sustain U.S. and other troops in Afghanistan. However, a trust deficit exists between Washington and Islamabad. Pakistan has continued to support various Taliban and Islamist factions, most notably by harboring Osama Bin Laden. The United States, for its part, has pursued a strategic dialogue with India over the past decade that has included both the U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement in 2008 and a deepening strategic partnership that Pakistan views as directly threatening its interests.

China. If the United States has been Pakistan's "far away, fair weather" friend, China has always claimed to be Pakistan's "all weather" friend. Islamabad and Beijing developed a close strategic partnership in the early 1950s, and since the 1960s China has been engaged in clear competition with India. In the 1970s, China and Pakistan built a highway through Pakistan's

Karakoram Mountains to directly link the two countries, and in the 1980s China helped Pakistan develop its nuclear program. In this century, China has built the Pakistani port of Gwadar (which it also manages), engaged in joint production of fighter aircraft and tanks, and established a free trade agreement with Pakistan. China has also invested at least $3.5 billion in Afghanistan to date, primarily in the Aynak copper mine and in winning bids to develop oil tracts in Faryab and Sar-i-Pul, where its commercial presence provides a counterweight to India's growing investments there.[2]

Other regional states. Similar to Islamabad's interests in the areas of Afghanistan that border Pakistan, Iran wants to preserve its influence in western Afghanistan, a region that was culturally and historically part of greater Persia. Many Afghans from the Herat area are closer to Tehran than Kabul, and there is not a strong enough warlord in Herat to contend for power or power-sharing in Kabul. As mentioned above, Iran has helped develop its own route into Afghanistan in concert with India to offset Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan's southern and eastern Pashtun belt. Russia has less direct influence in Afghanistan but fears that another resurgence of militant Islamism there could affect its extensive investments in the oil and gas infrastructure in the Central Asian states north of Afghanistan. Russia also fears the expansion of Chinese influence in Central Asia. Thus, both in response to the present-day Islamist threat and because Pakistan and China are aligned, Russia's interests in Afghanistan diverge from Pakistan's.

Conclusion: A Threatened Pakistan Must Play the New Great Game in Afghanistan

Pakistan views all of this regional activity in and around Afghanistan as distinctly threatening to its own national interests. It would be bad enough if a China-Pakistan-Saudi Arabia nexus were to square off against an India-Russia-Iran nexus of like-minded countries, but the situation is not nearly that simple. Thus, Pakistan has had to present itself to Afghanistan as a friend that is committed to peace and stability there, while continuing to support proxy warriors who directly undermine that peace and development. Pakistan wants an Afghan government that is favorably disposed toward Islamabad and cool toward New Delhi. Although the Pakistani leadership does not wish for an open war against India, especially in Afghanistan, it

[2] Nicklas Norling, "The Emerging China-Afghanistan Relationship," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, May 14, 2008 ~ http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4858.

will not accept stability on Indian terms. Thus, we can expect a continuing insurgency in Afghanistan, directed by the hidden hand of the ISI, to allow Pakistan to thwart Indian advances. If the post-Karzai government continues to pursue a strategic partnership or deeper relationship with India, or if the United States leverages India to be its regional partner in Afghanistan, then Pakistan will continue to utilize asymmetric actors inside Afghanistan in pursuit of its national interests there.

In 2001, I published a book entitled *Afghanistan's Endless War*. I intended it as a history and primer for the situation in Afghanistan at the time. I did not realize that its title would describe the country's long-term future as well. ◈

Iran and Afghanistan: The Urgent Need for Inclusive Regional Diplomacy

Sumitha Narayanan Kutty

Iran wants a stable Afghanistan and has meticulously worked to protect its interests before and after 2001 to this end. Prior to 2001, Iran was the primary backer of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, and after September 2011 it was one of the earliest supporters of the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan to rout the Taliban. Since then, the country has established considerable political and economic presence in its eastern neighbor—both overt and covert—through generous cash payments to the Afghan government and essential development aid delivered through religious and charitable organizations. Tehran also seeks long-term political stability in Afghanistan, though it is no stickler for liberal democracy. In the short term, Iran appears to be fairly satisfied with the status quo as long as Afghanistan is not used as a base for attacks against it.

Tehran would like its vision for a stable Afghanistan to be realized within a context of zero U.S. troops on the ground after 2014. Consequently, it is keeping a very close eye on developments in the country, specifically the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). This essay examines Iran's enduring interests in Afghanistan and their implications for relations with the United States and other regional players beyond 2014.

Iran's Interests in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has always been strategically significant to Iran. The landlocked country shares a 582-mile border with Iran to its west, and the two neighbors have no unsettled territorial disputes, which is a rarity in the region. They also share linguistic, cultural, and religious links—one-fifth of Afghanistan's population is Shia—owing to their common history under consecutive Persian empires.

Iran has four long-standing strategic objectives vis-à-vis Afghanistan. First, Tehran wants an administration in Kabul that will not only distance itself from the United States but also remain wary of the Taliban and its state sponsors, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Such being the case today, Iran

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will continue its policy of supporting the Afghan presidency. It will not object to the 2014 elections producing a Pashtun majority as long as ethnic minorities, such as the Tajiks and Hazaras, obtain fair representation in the new government. Iran has previously demonstrated such tolerance in the Bonn conference of 2001 and in the 2004 and 2009 elections. This willingness ties into Iran's second non-negotiable interest: leveraging the Shiite Dari/Persian-speaking non-Pashtun population. The country has protected the interests of its traditional Afghan allies—the Farsiwan Heratis, the Shia Hazara, and Tajiks—and cultivated relations with as many factions as possible, including those supporting the incumbent president Hamid Karzai. Iran has also built and maintained close ties with key players in the Afghan political landscape, including Abdullah Abdullah, presidential candidate and leading opposition figure; Ismail Khan, vice presidential candidate and former governor of Herat; and Mohammad Yunus Qanooni, the lower house speaker and political and military heir of Ahmad Shah Massoud. This political clout will help Tehran advance its goals in Afghanistan after 2014. In addition, Iran has preserved relationships with the militias it helped train during the Soviet invasion.

Iran's third priority is safeguarding on-the-ground investments and personnel, particularly in western Afghanistan. The killings of Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998 serve as a stark reminder of the threats that Iranians engaged in commerce can face from a resurgent Taliban. Such personnel are at the forefront of Iran's strategic vision of playing a powerful role in Afghanistan beyond the political and security realms. Preserving an economic sphere of influence in Afghanistan is Iran's fourth strategic objective. The country pledged a total of $900 million in aid for reconstruction projects during 2002–13, with about $500 million disbursed at the time of writing.[1] Iran accounts for roughly 35%–40% of exports to Afghanistan, and annual bilateral trade stands at around $2 billion.[2] In terms of private investment, an estimated two thousand private Iranian firms operate in Afghanistan.[3]

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1 See Lydia Poole, "Afghanistan: Tracking Major Resource Flows 2002–2010," Global Humanitarian Assistance, Briefing Paper, January 2011, 4 ~ http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/gha-Afghanistan-2011-major-resource-flows.pdf; and Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, RL30588, October 23, 2013, 51 ~ http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf.

2 F. Milad, "Official: Tehran-Kabul Trade to Hit $3 Billion," Trend News Agency, September 8, 2012 ~ http://en.trend.az/regions/iran/2063182.html.

3 Hazifullah Gardesh, "Afghans Fear Fallout from Iran Sanctions," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Afghan Recovery Report, October 3, 2006 ~ http://iwpr.net/report-news/afghans-fear-fallout-iran-sanctions.

Iran has worked to expand and consolidate its economic presence, particularly in the western province of Herat. The bulk of Iranian investment since 2001 lies in this region and is spread across infrastructure projects such as road and bridge construction, telecommunication projects, education, and agriculture. Iran is also a major player in Afghanistan's energy sector: it provides about 50% of the country's oil imports and has invested in power-generation projects.[4] A vocal proponent of regional integration, Iran has touted the guaranteed land and sea access it offers landlocked Afghanistan as essential to the country's trade prospects. For its part, Afghanistan has shown a willingness to negotiate an agreement that would increase trade with Iran, as well as with India, Central Asia, and Europe, via the Iranian port of Chabahar, which is being financed by India. Among other development projects, Iran is working to improve the "golden transit route," a 125-kilometer road running from Iran's Dougharoun region to Herat, at a cost of $43 million; is building a 176-kilometer railroad to Herat; and has announced plans to invest $75 million in the construction of the Afghan part of the Khaf-Herat railway that aims to connect Afghanistan to eastern Iran.

Apart from the above strategic objectives, Iran has three short-term, flexible goals in Afghanistan. The first is cross-border stability. Tehran expects Kabul's cooperation in fighting the Baluchi separatist group Jundullah and its network. Iran would also like to see a reduction in the flow of narcotics into and through its territory. The country has lost hundreds of members of its security forces in clashes with traffickers, though the government is always careful to not blame Karzai directly. A second short-term goal is the repatriation of the 2.4 million Afghan refugees in Iran, of which only 1 million are there legally. The Iranian government under former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad often threatened to expel them if Kabul signed a strategic security agreement with the United States. This unresolved situation has constantly strained bilateral relations with Afghanistan, and sanctions have only further exacerbated discrimination against Afghan refugees. Iran's third short-term goal is related to an old bilateral dispute involving the Helmand River. The river serves as both the main source of water for Hamoun Lake in Iran's southeastern Sistan and Baluchestan Province and an economic resource for the region. Iran would like to see Afghanistan abandon its policy of using the river as a political tool.

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4 Viola Gienger, "Afghanistan Needs Leeway on Iran Sanctions, Minister Says," Bloomberg News, April 3, 2012 ~ http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-04-03/afghanistan-needs-leeway-on-iran-sanctions-minister-says.html.

With an eye toward balancing U.S. military influence after 2014, the two governments inked a strategic cooperation agreement in August 2013. The cooperation extends to military training, counterterrorism, organized crime, joint military exercises (including counternarcotics), and intelligence-sharing on "developments in the field of threats for national security…including in Central, West and South Asia."[5] Iran's alliance of convenience in the past with certain elements of the Taliban was primarily intended to undermine U.S. interests in Afghanistan. Moreover, the volume of arms and money that Iran supplied was trivial compared with that provided by Pakistan. Given the impending withdrawal or reduction in foreign troops, the possibility of extending cooperation with Afghanistan after 2014 potentially outweighs any benefits for Iran of a dangerous dalliance with the Taliban.

A policy of continuity should be expected with regard to the above interests in the near term. Factors in Afghanistan that could alter Iran's calculations are the conduct and outcome of the 2014 presidential elections, the ideological leanings of the new president, an escalation of the Taliban insurgency, and further undesirable impacts for Afghanistan of the sanctions on Iran. Iran's involvement in Afghanistan also depends on extraneous factors such as its rivalry with the Persian Gulf states and increasingly its nuclear agreement with the P5+1, which has a direct impact on Iran-U.S. relations and the two sides' interaction vis-a-vis Afghanistan.[6]

Iran-U.S. Relations and Afghanistan

For all the animosity that defines Iran-U.S. relations, the two countries have shared interests in Afghanistan. Unlike Pakistan, Iran and the United States both find the current Afghan political dispensation quite acceptable and aim to support the upcoming presidential elections. They also recognize the need to engage the Taliban, though each has done so on its own, separate terms. Both Iran and the United States thus value stability in Afghanistan; where they differ is on the issue of whether a U.S. presence, however small, is needed to realize this stability. Iran views U.S. troops in its backyard as a threat, and in 2007 this insecurity prompted Tehran to change its

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5 Thomas Ruttig, "Can Kabul Carry Two Melons in One Hand? Afghanistan and Iran Sign Strategic Cooperation Document," Afghanistan Analysts Network, August 6, 2013 ~ http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/can-kabul-carry-two-melons-in-one-hand-afghanistan-and-iran-sign-strategic-cooperation-document.

6 The P5+1 comprises the permanent five members of the UN Security Council (the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France) plus Germany.

policy of restraint to one of retaliation in Afghanistan if the United States attacked Iran. Iran believes that residual foreign troops after 2014 will be a destabilizing factor because their presence is a major cause for the continuing insurgency in Afghanistan. Tehran has traditionally opposed a bilateral security agreement (BSA) between Washington and Kabul. The version of the document endorsed by the loya jirga (an assembly of Afghan tribal elders) in November 2013, though stonewalled by President Karzai at the time of writing, favored a U.S. troop presence after 2014. This raised concerns in Tehran despite Washington's pledge in the BSA to "not use Afghan territory as a launching point for attacks against other countries."[7]

Signs of a thaw in Iran-U.S. relations would only prove beneficial to Afghanistan's future stability. The historic nuclear deal struck in November 2013 between Iran and the P5+1 has created a critical window of opportunity that must be seized. These negotiations included direct engagement between Iranian and U.S. diplomats—the first of its kind in roughly 30 years. Furthermore, the Rouhani administration has voiced its preference to create political space for dialogue on Afghanistan if significant progress is made on the nuclear issue. It would be unwise to deny one of Afghanistan's largest and most influential neighbors a seat at the table, given Iran's past tendency to be disruptive and thus possibly undermine U.S. goals in the country.

Iran's Relations with Key Regional Players

Iran has repeatedly called for a regional solution to instability in Afghanistan. In recent years, rising tensions with the West have prompted Tehran to increase political coordination with regional states and in particular India. Iran clearly views India as a worthwhile partner in Afghanistan, and they have discussed cooperation on terrorism and drug trafficking since 2003. India views Iran as its gateway to Central Asia and has signed a trilateral agreement with Iran and Afghanistan on trade and transit cooperation. Both countries have also been greatly active in socioeconomic development in Afghanistan, particularly in developing transport and power infrastructure. The relationship has, however, been characterized more by talk and less by action. The countries disagree over the presence of foreign troops: India wants ISAF to remain involved in the region, whereas Iran clearly does not. Other factors that will continue to

[7] Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Afghanistan), "Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," November 20, 2013 ~ http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/bsa.

constrain Indo-Iranian cooperation include New Delhi's unwillingness to engage further in Afghanistan given the deteriorating security environment, its proclivity toward the United States, the sanctions that hamper doing business with Iran, and the emergence of the Persian Gulf states and Israel as viable strategic alternatives for India.

Pakistan, by contrast, has a testy relationship with Iran. Islamabad has long preferred an Islamist Sunni regime in Kabul that would pander to its strategic interests. This vision conflicts with Tehran's push for a political settlement that is inclusive of non-Pashtun minorities and could destabilize Sunni areas on Iran's border with Afghanistan if it were to come to fruition. Tehran's friendly ties with New Delhi are yet another sore point with Islamabad. A rise in attacks against Iranian border guards by Pakistani Sunni groups has further strained ties, even as Iran keeps a close eye on rising Shia-Sunni sectarian violence across the border in Pakistan.

Iran and China share common concerns about the situation in Afghanistan. In particular, they believe that Kabul should be less dependent on Washington, with both Iran and China endorsing the need for a regional solution. Economic cooperation remains the cornerstone of Beijing's Afghan policy. China has made key investments in Afghanistan's mining sector and worked to develop transit infrastructure with the goal of linking China and Iran by rail via Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Iran approves of all these development projects. China, however, primarily views its relationship with Afghanistan through the prism of its ally Pakistan and, when push comes to shove, could choose supporting the latter's interests over those of Iran.

Given its controversial past in Afghanistan, Russia has kept a safe distance from the reconstruction efforts and resisted any form of direct military engagement. Though not thrilled by the possibility of a long-term U.S. presence in Central Asia, Moscow has constantly promoted the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a key regional partner, an idea that has received much pushback from NATO. Iran plays a critical role in Russia's vision for the region and is an important partner in the energy sector. Russia views Iran as a stabilizing factor in western Afghanistan and an ally in the fight against drug trafficking. It also favors an Afghan peace process based on power-sharing and political reconciliation.

The Central Asian states and Saudi Arabia are other critical players in Afghanistan's future. The five Central Asian states are particularly fearful of the rise of Islamist militancy as a result of ISAF's withdrawal. Many of them have forged closer ties with Iran to promote regional integration in

the form of joint hydroelectric projects and transportation infrastructure across Afghanistan. With regard to Saudi Arabia, sharp bilateral differences—ranging from the Syrian crisis to developments in Bahrain and Palestine—have only further strained ties between Riyadh and Tehran in the last year. Saudi Arabia has engaged and advanced its religious agenda in Afghanistan primarily through Pakistan and, in the past, the Taliban. In the event that a political vacuum arises in Kabul after 2014, the prospect of Saudi-Iranian rivalry playing out in Afghanistan cannot be dismissed.

The Case for Inclusive Regional Diplomacy

Iran has a lot at stake in Afghanistan's future. The interests explored in this essay—both long- and short-term—are here to stay, and a policy of continuity, expansion, and preservation of these goals should be expected beyond 2014. In contrast with Islamabad, Tehran exercises influence in Afghanistan today that perhaps even surpasses its own ambitions in the region.

However stark a picture one may paint of Afghanistan's future, it is important to acknowledge that there is broader consensus and cooperation among the Afghan political elite now than has ever been seen before. To effectively leverage this consensus, the United States must adopt an inclusive diplomatic strategy. The discontinuation of selective engagement and the inclusion of a critical stakeholder such as Iran can only prove beneficial to Afghanistan's future after ISAF's withdrawal. ◈

The Persian Gulf States and Afghanistan: Regional Geopolitics and Competing Interests

Kristian Coates Ulrichsen

The three Persian Gulf states of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar have dominated the Middle East's engagement with Afghanistan over the past three decades. This is unlikely to change as Afghanistan faces twin security and political challenges arising from the pullback of foreign troops and a presidential election in 2014. Buffeted by three years of upheaval across the Arab world, the primary objective of Saudi and Emirati officials in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi after the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will be to prevent Afghanistan from unraveling in ways that could threaten the balance of power in the broader regional neighborhood. This reflects the fact that the Iranian shadow looms large over foreign policy formulation in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as does a feeling of incomprehension at recent U.S. decisions on Syria and nuclear negotiations with Iran. Together, these two trends have triggered a more assertive regional policy as leaders in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have increasingly made unilateral decisions to secure national interests. Qatari policy, by contrast, is likely to become more introspective as the new emir focuses on domestic issues and repairing diplomatic relationships damaged by his father's foreign policy adventurism.

The Persian Gulf States and Afghanistan

In different ways, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have long records of involvement in Afghanistan, particularly in the post-1979 era. During the 1980s, Saudi Arabia was a key financier of the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation, both through official state channels and informal contributions from private citizens and charities. This occurred as the al-Saud responded to the 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Islamist militants by placing greater emphasis on what Thomas

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Hegghammer has labelled "alarmist pan-Islamism."[1] Although Saudi Arabia was one of three countries (along with the UAE and Pakistan) to recognize the Taliban regime after it took power in 1996, relations frayed in 1998 when the Taliban rebuffed Saudi requests to return Osama bin Laden to the kingdom. Nevertheless, it was only after the September 11 terrorist attacks that ties were broken altogether, whereupon Riyadh gave its backing to the new Afghan government of Hamid Karzai and supported it with reconstruction assistance and direct foreign aid.[2]

As mentioned above, the UAE also extended diplomatic recognition to the Taliban regime prior to September 11. Steve Coll has recounted how, shortly after the African embassy bombings in August 1998, a U.S. retaliatory strike against a hunting camp in western Afghanistan where bin Laden was believed to be taking refuge had to be aborted after surveillance imagery indicated that high-level UAE officials, possibly including members of the ruling family, might be present.[3] A post–September 11 investigation by U.S. Treasury officials led to accusations that Dubai was a conduit for Taliban gold reserves, and small aircraft reportedly laden with gold were allegedly permitted to depart Dubai and Sharjah for Kabul and Kandahar in the days following the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001.[4] Similar to Saudi Arabia, the UAE quickly switched its support to the Karzai government and by 2009 was providing 14% of its total foreign aid budget to Afghanistan.[5] Less promisingly, the collapse of the real-estate bubble in Dubai in 2008 led in part to the failure of the Da Kabul bank two years later amid persistent allegations of widespread corruption at the heart of the Karzai government (and family) that saw over $3 billion in cash being flown out of Afghanistan. Much of the money was believed to end up in Dubai either as luxury investments that subsequently turned sour during the financial crisis or to benefit from its tight banking secrecy laws.[6]

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1 Thomas Hegghammer, "Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia," *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 704.

2 Guido Steinberg and Nils Woermer, "Exploring Iran & Saudi Arabia's Interests in Afghanistan & Pakistan: Stakeholders or Spoilers—A Zero Sum Game?" Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, April 2013, 3 ⇝ http://www.cidob.org/es/publicaciones/stap_rp/policy_research_papers/exploring_iran_saudi_arabia_s_interests_in_afghanistan_pakistan_stakeholders_or_spoilers_a_zero_sum_game_part_2_iran.

3 Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 447–49.

4 Christopher Davidson, "Dubai: The Security Dimensions of the Region's Premier Free Port," *Middle East Policy* 15, no. 2 (2008): 145.

5 "UAE Has Done Exemplary Work in Afghanistan," *Gulf News*, August 25, 2011.

6 Matthew Rosenberg, "Corruption Suspected in Airlift of Billions in Cash from Kabul," *Wall Street Journal*, June 25, 2010.

Qatar has less of a backstory in Afghanistan, but in 2012 a delegation of eight senior Taliban representatives arrived in Doha to set up an office in preparation for mediation talks with members of the Afghan High Peace Council. The envoy included Tayeb Agha, the former chief of staff to Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, as well as the Taliban-era ministers of health and planning and the Taliban's former ambassadors to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, in a sign of how seriously the Taliban initially took the meeting.[7] However, an attempt in June 2013 to open talks among Taliban, Afghan government, and U.S. officials ended in failure before discussions even started when Afghan officials withdrew in fury after the Taliban erected signs and flags referring to their Doha office by the pre-2001 label of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.[8]

On balance, the assistance extended by the three gulf states to post-conflict reconstruction and recovery in Afghanistan has been positive. In addition to a small number of troops provided by the UAE to ISAF, Saudi Arabia co-chaired the January 2002 donors' conference in Tokyo and pledged more than $220 million for humanitarian and infrastructure projects, which included a $30 million road-construction program to link together the northern and western regions of Afghanistan.[9] The UAE also gave generously, and it is likely that Saudi and Emirati donations were in part intended to signal their support for the U.S.-led political transition following their earlier and, in the context of September 11, highly problematic ties with the Taliban.[10]

As Afghanistan moves uncertainly toward a post-ISAF and post-Karzai era, the way that Persian Gulf states evaluate developments in Kabul will change. In a climate of disappointment over the Obama administration's Middle East policies, Saudi Arabia and the UAE recently have become more assertive in taking unilateral action to safeguard their interests. This proactivity could extend to Afghanistan if officials in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi feel that other regional states may make political gains or fill any potential security vacuum at the expense of Saudi Arabia or the UAE. Yet the conflict in Syria, where Qatar and Saudi Arabia have backed rival

7 Rod Nordland, "Peace Envoys from Taliban at Loose End in Qatar," *New York Times*, April 9, 2013.

8 Rod Nordland and Alissa J. Rubin, "Taliban Flag Is Gone in Qatar, But Talks Remain in Doubt," *New York Times*, June 23, 2013.

9 Sultan Barakat and Steven Zyck, "Gulf State Assistance to Conflict-Affected Environments," London School of Economics and Political Science, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, Research Paper, no. 10, July 2010, 21–24.

10 Barakat and Zyck, "Gulf State Assistance to Conflict-Affected Environments."

militias and competing political groups, highlights the challenge to stability posed by such unilateral decisions.[11]

Areas of Engagement

In addition to the issues outlined above, there are three areas that could form the backbone of Persian Gulf states' future engagement with Afghanistan. First, these states could serve as mediators between the warring parties, particularly given that gulf officials can utilize a wider range of contacts than is available to Western interlocutors. In addition to the abovementioned Qatari effort to host peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government in 2013, Saudi Arabia also sponsored two rounds of secret negotiations in late 2008 and early 2009.[12] Although both initiatives proved unsuccessful, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE could underpin any offer of dialogue with material incentives to the participants through promises of aid and investment. Such inducements have been prominent hallmarks of their engagement with states in transition in the Middle East and North Africa in the post–Arab Spring period, particularly in the case of Qatari mediatory initiatives. The intensity of Qatar's diplomatic outreach, nevertheless, is expected to diminish under the new leadership in Doha.[13]

Aid and investment therefore constitute the second area of likely engagement with Afghanistan. As high-income developing countries, the three gulf states have historically prioritized quick-impact interventions into conflict-affected states, mostly (but not exclusively) in the Arab and Islamic world. Humanitarian and religious motivations underpin much of this aid, but its effectiveness is undermined by the absence of credible monitoring and assessment mechanisms or a longer-term commitment to sustainable development. Further challenges associated with gulf assistance programs include a paucity of data on the amounts and types of aid provided, the relative lack of transparency in both the aid-tracking process and the eventual use of funds in recipient countries, and often a lack of concern for the results or impact of interventions.[14]

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11 Rania Abouzeid, "Syria's Secular and Islamist Rebels: Who Are the Saudis and the Qataris Arming?" *Time*, September 18, 2012.

12 Steinberg and Woermer, "Exploring Iran & Saudi Arabia's Interests in Afghanistan & Pakistan," 3.

13 Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Foreign Policy Implications of the New Emir's Succession in Qatar," Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center (NOREF), Policy Brief, September 2013, 1.

14 Barakat and Zyck, "Gulf State Assistance to Conflict-Affected Environments," 42.

A major barrier to foreign investment in Afghanistan is the real or perceived lack of security in many areas, coupled with uncertainty regarding the post-2014 transition. Thus, a third avenue of potential gulf engagement with Kabul is the growing reputation of the UAE as a regional leader in security-sector reform. The UAE and Afghanistan signed a long-term strategic partnership in August 2013, and Dubai is set to host the inaugural Afghanistan Security & Stability Summit in January 2014.[15] With a thriving private security sector, the UAE is well-placed to take the lead on internal and external issues such as border control, reorganization of the police and security service, and the physical protection of critical infrastructure. Meaningful and sustained progress on stabilizing Afghanistan is essential in order to reverse the current flight of capital from Afghanistan to the Persian Gulf.

Regional and Strategic Concerns

Gulf states' policy options in Afghanistan inevitably fall into a wider context of regional and strategic concerns. The weakness of the central government in Kabul has for twenty years provided opportunities for neighboring states to develop close links with proxy groups within Afghanistan. Although they do not share borders with Afghanistan and cannot be considered "front-line" states, Saudi and Emirati approaches to Afghanistan are influenced heavily by their diverging relationships with two of the most active external actors, Pakistan and Iran. Regional considerations will likely increase in importance once the degree of predictability granted by the presence of ISAF forces in Afghanistan is removed and a new presidential administration is in place in Kabul.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE enjoy very close political, economic, and security ties with Pakistan. Connections between the General Intelligence Directorate in Riyadh and the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate in Islamabad have constituted a cornerstone of Saudi-Pakistani relations since the 1980s. These form part of a broader security arrangement that may also encompass a "nuclear pact," whereby Saudi Arabia is believed to have invested in Pakistani nuclear projects in return for the right to acquire or deploy nuclear devices in a time of crisis.[16] For its part, the UAE is one of the largest investors in Pakistan through a combination of both public and

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15 Embassy of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan and UAE Sign Agreements on Security Cooperation and Transfer of Sentenced Persons," August 4, 2013 ~ http://afghanistanembassy.org.uk/more80.html.

16 Mark Urban, "Saudi Nuclear Weapons 'On Order' from Pakistan," BBC News, November 6, 2013.

private capital flows across sectors ranging from defense to agriculture and finance by way of renewable energy and infrastructure projects. Together, these projects made the UAE the largest foreign investor in Pakistan in 2012, with additional multibillion-dollar agreements in construction adding to the total in 2013.[17]

Saudi Arabia's relationship with Iran is very different. Since the Iranian revolution that ousted the shah in 1979, the two countries have emerged as bitter rivals for regional ascendancy in the Persian Gulf, with Saudi Arabia providing large-scale support to Saddam Hussein's Iraq during the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq War. Disputes between Riyadh and Tehran, as leading proponents respectively of Sunni and Shia Islam, frequently take on a sectarian dimension that has raised tensions sharply across the Middle East over the past decade. In an atmosphere of mutual mistrust and acrimony, this rivalry extends into Afghanistan. For example, Saudi Arabia's 2012 announcement that it will construct a large Islamic complex in Kabul featuring a university, hospital, and mosque with a 15,000-person capacity was seen as a response to the massive Iranian-built Khatam al-Nabyeen Islamic University, which opened in the capital in 2006.[18]

Given that Iran has been a high-profile supporter of the Karzai government both politically and economically and also enjoys close trading and cultural links with western provinces and cities, the election of a new Afghan president in April 2014 may trigger a competition among regional states for access to and influence over the new incumbent.[19] It is probable that the Saudi (and, to a lesser extent, the Emirati) rivalry with Iran will be the most contentious, as each of the protagonists attempts to preserve its existing leverage and develop new networks of patronage within the successor government to President Karzai. In such an environment, actions will likely be as reactive as they are proactive, depending on the degree to which the Afghan political transition unfolds smoothly.

In their responses to the Arab Spring, the Persian Gulf states have become more forceful in projecting their interests abroad. The undermining of prevailing assumptions about the United States' policies in support of regional geopolitical interests and regime stability among its allies in the Middle East has induced feelings of deep ambivalence in

17 Sanaya Pavri, "UAE Leads Investment in Pakistani Business," *Gulf News*, August 14, 2013.

18 Frud Bezhan, "Saudi Arabia Positions Itself for Larger Afghan Role," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 5, 2012.

19 Stina Torjesen, "Afghanistan and the Regional Powers: History Not Repeating Itself?" NOREF, Policy Brief, October 2013, 3–4.

Gulf capitals about whether they can still rely on their foremost external ally. As the United States prepares to downgrade its military presence in Afghanistan and transition toward a new political order in Kabul, external actors will be evaluating developments with a mixture of nervousness and opportunism. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as regional powers with an international reach, possess both the capability and the intent to play an important role in post-Karzai Afghanistan. Whether this proves to be stabilizing or not will depend largely on the trajectory of events in Afghanistan in 2014, as well as on how the triangular U.S.-Gulf-Iran nexus unfolds from Geneva to Syria. ◈

Chinese Views of Post-2014 Afghanistan

Zhao Huasheng

As 2014 begins, the U.S. and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force is preparing to withdraw from Afghanistan. Whether one considers how China is seen by Afghanistan or how Afghanistan is seen by China, both countries' views of each other have undergone great changes since the beginning of the war in 2001.

During the past half century, China has played a secondary role in Afghanistan. From the 1950s until the 1980s, the Soviet Union was Afghanistan's largest trading partner, its greatest source of aid, and a close friend; as a result, Afghanistan was drawn into the Soviet sphere of influence. The Soviet Union had a monopoly on influence in Afghanistan until 1989, when it was compelled to withdraw its troops. Since the new outbreak of war in Afghanistan beginning in 2001, the United States has performed the role the Soviet Union once played. It has stationed large numbers of troops on Afghan soil, has played a crucial part in the Afghan government, and continues to oversee the country's security and politics. During both periods, China certainly played a role in Afghanistan's affairs, but not a particularly decisive one.

The situation today is quite different. As Afghanistan enters a period of transformation, international society, as well as the Afghan government itself, will generally expect China to assume a larger role in Afghanistan and participate more proactively. This includes providing more investment, aid, and other development assistance, as well as taking on more responsibility for the country's stability. During a visit to Beijing in September 2013, Afghan president Hamid Karzai said that he hopes China will continue to help bring about peace, security, and stability in Afghanistan, in addition to playing a constructive role in improving the relations with neighboring states.[1] He also expressed a desire for the two countries to strengthen their trade and cultural cooperation and a hope that China will help Afghanistan boost its capacities, develop its economy, and improve the lives of its people.

Afghanistan has also changed in the eyes of China. Previously, the country was seen solely as an external threat to security. While Afghanistan

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[1] Li Xiaokun, "Afghanistan Seeks Active Beijing Role," *China Daily,* September 28, 2013.

remains a contributing factor to external instability, it has become a partner that offers many potential benefits to the Chinese economy, as well as opportunities for China to further develop its influence on the periphery. China already has economic interests in Afghanistan that should not be overlooked. In 2008, for example, a Chinese company won rights to the Aynak copper mine project. In 2011, China National Petroleum Corporation signed a contract to acquire the oil fields of the northeastern provinces of Sar-i-Pul and Faryab. Both projects required China to make a huge investment. When they begin operation, the minerals, oil, and gas produced will need to be exported, requiring further investment in the construction of railroads and pipelines. Through these projects, China hopes to acquire the resources needed to sustain its economic growth and simultaneously contribute to the reconstruction of Afghanistan's economy by providing the country with capital, technology, and employment opportunities, as well as considerable profits and tax revenue.

Yet as China increases its investment in Afghanistan, it also must address the problem of how to protect its economic interests. The largest risk arises from instability. Chinese investors are powerless in the face of Afghanistan's political, social, and religious conflicts, and China is incapable of solving these political and security problems on its own. In the face of such challenges, Chinese investors and political leaders must work with the international community to stabilize Afghanistan and establish good relations among all the country's factions and clans. For China, this is particularly important in the areas in which Chinese companies are located. In September 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed a vision to build a "Silk Road economic zone," which has been seen as proof of China's strategy of developing its western provinces.[2] Due to its position as the crossroads of Central, South, and West Asia, Afghanistan has an important role in this plan.

Because of these economic and security developments, both countries are becoming increasingly important to each other. As China emerges as one of the countries with the largest influence in Afghanistan, its once straightforward interests have already become more complex. Afghanistan, for example, shares a border with the Chinese province of Xinjiang and therefore has a lasting influence on Xinjiang's periphery. Afghanistan also remains an observer state in the Shanghai Cooperation

[2] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PRC), "President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries," Press Release, September 7, 2013 ~ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t1076334.shtml.

Organisation (SCO), and the success or failure of its transformation will have an effect on the SCO.

As a result, although it has no intention of competing with other countries in Afghanistan and is not attempting to fill a power vacuum, China realizes that the current state of affairs requires it to take on more responsibility. Since 2012, China has become more active on Afghan issues in two major directions: one is the strengthening of bilateral relations; the other is consulting with neighboring countries on the situation in Afghanistan. With respect to the first direction, in June 2012, China and Afghanistan declared a strategic partnership. As Afghanistan faces a turning point and international public opinion on its state of affairs remains pessimistic, this move reflects China's firm support of the Afghan government. Soon thereafter, in September 2012, China's state councilor and security czar Zhou Yongkang became the first Chinese leader to visit Afghanistan, which was an indication of Afghanistan's growing importance to China.

At the same time, China has engaged in special consultations on the situation in Afghanistan with Pakistan, India, and Russia; in 2013, for example, two consultations were held between China and Pakistan. China further supports strengthening cooperation with Afghanistan within the framework of the SCO and wants the organization to play a larger role in the country. China is also scheduled to host the fourth Foreign Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process on Afghanistan in Tianjin in 2014. These actions collectively show that Beijing is willing to make greater contributions to the peace and development of Afghanistan.

In the big picture, China and the United States share common goals in Afghanistan: both countries oppose terrorism, hope that Afghanistan's takeover of all administrative and security functions goes smoothly, and wish to see a stable state. The two countries also have engaged in a few concrete cooperative projects, such as the joint training of Afghan diplomats. However, this does not mean that Beijing and Washington cooperate on all issues—for example, China does not participate in U.S. military actions on Afghan soil.

U.S. goals in Afghanistan are more complex than just antiterrorism. Geopolitical interests are unquestionably also an important part of the United States' strategic decision-making. As discussed earlier, Afghanistan is situated in a very unique location between South, Central, and West Asia. The country occupies a key point in the region from which it is possible to overlook Iran, Russia, Central Asia, China, Pakistan, and India. It is thus

difficult to see why the United States would completely give up such a strategically important country if it were not compelled to do so.

Although China opposes terrorism, it did not participate in the Afghan war and did not fight against the Taliban. In contrast with the United States, China believes that the Taliban is a political faction. The Taliban has existed in Afghanistan for some time and to eliminate it through military force is impossible. Moreover, because China and Afghanistan are neighbors, no matter how chaotic the situation becomes, China cannot merely walk away, unlike the United States. Its plans for Afghanistan and the Taliban are thus long-term and based on the consideration that China will have enduring interactions with the Taliban. Ultimately, China is not opposed to the organization but is instead opposed to terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

Under these circumstances, China's primary objectives are to strengthen cooperation with Afghanistan; provide more aid and investment; play a constructive role in Afghanistan's relations with neighboring countries, particularly with Pakistan; consult and coordinate with these neighboring countries; and prepare for changes in the area. To support these objectives, China elevated its relationship with Afghanistan to the level of a strategic partnership in 2012 and initiated both a trilateral dialogue between China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan and a bilateral consultation with Pakistan on the Afghanistan issue in 2012 and 2013, respectively. China's aid to Afghanistan has also increased in recent years. In 2011 and 2012, China provided $150 million of aid, and in 2013 this figure rose to $200 million.[3]

As noted above, it is beyond China's abilities to solve the problems within Afghanistan. One of the most important factors in the country's future stability is the relationship between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Another is the relationship between the factions within the government. In both cases, the core issue is the distribution of power. These are all domestic issues that neither China nor any other outside country can solve. At present, according to Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, China and other external players should be concerned with addressing three issues: "first, to ensure the smooth conduct of elections in Afghanistan and achieve a smooth transition; second, to support the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political reconciliation process; third,

[3] Embassy of the PRC in Afghanistan, "Zhong-A jingmao guanxi ji Zhongguo dui A yuanzhu" [China-Afghanistan Economic and Trade Relations and China's Aid to Afghanistan], November 10, 2013 ~ http://af.china-embassy.org/chn/zagx/ztgk/t1097560.htm.

to support the United Nations to play an important role in coordinating international efforts on assistance to Afghanistan."[4]

Future policies, however, must adjust to shifting circumstances. Significant changes are expected with the upcoming post-2014 transition in Afghanistan, although it is still unclear precisely what kinds of changes will occur. Because the fact that China and Afghanistan are neighbors will not change, it is extremely important for China to safeguard its security by maintaining non-hostile relations with all the major Afghan factions. Beijing does not want to make any enemies in Afghanistan and therefore will be careful not to directly intervene in its domestic affairs, particularly militarily. Although the challenge is great, China hopes that the post-2014 transition will open the door to a successful solution to the Afghanistan problem. As this process unfolds, China will have a new role to play, one that is more significant and multifunctional than before. ◈

[4] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, "Wang Yi: Three Issues Should Be Properly Handled to Address the Afghan Situation," November 11, 2013 ~ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t1098115.shtml.

Japanese Assistance in Afghanistan: Helping the United States, Acting Globally, and Making a Friend

Kuniko Ashizawa

Although Japan has rarely been mentioned in regular international or U.S. news coverage on Afghanistan, the Japanese government has been a major player in international assistance for Afghanistan over the past decade. In early 2002, just a few months after the fall of the Taliban, it hosted the first major international conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan, effectively setting up the prototype of the so-called pledging conference for Afghan reconstruction that has been subsequently held in other major capitals at two-year intervals. Ten years later, Tokyo convened another major conference that critically coordinated international assistance for Afghanistan through the 2014 transition period and beyond until 2016.

This essay provides a brief overview of Japan's major engagements in Afghanistan, identifies the key motivations behind them, and assesses their impact in terms of Tokyo's foreign policy objectives. Given that Japan has conducted its Afghan policymaking largely, though not exclusively, in the context of U.S.-Japan alliance management, the winding down of this signature decade-long foreign policy commitment is inevitable after 2014, when most of the U.S. and wider NATO forces withdraw from Afghanistan.

Japanese Engagement in Afghanistan

Japan assumed the "lead country" role for one of the five major security-sector reform programs—the so-called DDR program to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate former combatants into Afghan society—that were introduced as the main pillars of Afghan reconstruction and stabilization. The assumption of this role effectively positioned Japan as a principal player in international assistance in Afghanistan, alongside the United States (which assumed the lead-country role for re-establishing the Afghan military), Germany (for police reform), the United Kingdom (for counternarcotics), and Italy (for judicial reform). Although constitutional and other domestic political constraints prevented Japan from participating in the U.S.-led counterterrorism military operation (Operation Enduring

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Freedom) and the NATO-led security assistance mission (the International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF), Tokyo came up with a creative way to enable its military to contribute. From late 2001 until the beginning of 2010, naval ships from the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) were deployed in the Indian Ocean to refuel U.S. and other international naval vessels engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom. The total operation cost amounted to $800 million, with around $250 million spent on supplying fuel and water to coalition forces.[1]

Besides such diplomatic activism and unprecedented operations by the SDF, the most significant element of Japan's involvement in Afghanistan has been its substantial financial contribution to help stabilize and reconstruct this war-torn society. Since late 2001, Japan has spent almost $5 billion on various reconstruction and stabilization projects in Afghanistan. Overall, Japan ranks second, after only the United States, in financial assistance to the country, with its pledges totaling about $8 billion.[2] Close to half of Japanese aid was disbursed for reconstruction assistance, such as infrastructure building, agriculture and rural development, and health and education improvement, while one-third was directed toward security-related programs, most notably supporting the salary of Afghan police and the aforementioned DDR projects. The rest—somewhere between 20% and 25%—was spent on projects to improve governance and on humanitarian assistance. A conspicuously large amount of Japanese financial assistance—more than 60%—was channeled through international organizations, such as the UN Development Programme, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the World Food Programme, while about one-third was disbursed as direct bilateral grants to the Afghan government or NGOs providing official development assistance. Japan's own NGO, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), has handled only 9% of

1 Based on data from National Diet Library, Foreign and Defense Policy Division, "Tero tokusoho no kigenencho o meguru ronten: Dai 168-kai rinji kokkai no shingi no tameni" [Issues Concerning the Extension of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law: For the 168th Special Diet Session], Chousa to Jouho [Issue Brief], no. 594 , September 20, 2007, 12; and Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Terotaisaku kaijosohikatsudo nitaisuru hokyushienkatsudo no jisshi ni kansuru tokubestusochiho nimotozuku hokyushienkatsudo no kekka* [Report on SDF's Refueling Operation in support of Operation Enduring Freedom–Maritime Interdiction Operation under the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures] (Tokyo, 2010), appendix 1-2.

2 Ministry of Finance (Aghanistan), "Development Cooperation Report 2011" (Kabul, 2012), 48; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), *Nihon no Ahuganisutan eno shien: Jiritsushita Ahuganisutan ni mukete* [Japan's Assistance in Afghanistan: Toward Self-Reliance] (Tokyo, 2013), 2.

Japanese financial aid (in the form of technical assistance for the Afghan government's development projects).[3]

Japan's Goals in Afghanistan

What motivated Japan to make such a major diplomatic, security, and financial commitment to Afghanistan? The Japanese government has viewed its active involvement in the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan in terms of three separate yet interrelated goals. First, Japan's high-profile engagement was expected to help manage and strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance. Given that Afghanistan had become a top priority for the United States' national security and foreign policy after September 11, the Japanese government clearly recognized the need to get involved in Afghanistan in order to serve as a responsible ally. The concern over growing instability in Northeast Asia, thanks to both an increasingly erratic North Korea and the rise of China, compelled then prime minister Junichiro Koizumi to take prompt and decisive actions in support of the United States in its global war on terrorism. Furthermore, when the newly elected Democratic Party of Japan, in late 2009, sought to reverse the relocation agreement covering U.S. bases in Okinawa, Japanese policymakers attempted to further beef up the country's Afghan assistance by pledging to boost aid by $5 billion over the next five years in the hope that it would help mitigate the unusually high level of tension with Washington.

Second, Tokyo's participation in international assistance to Afghanistan was also driven by its long-standing desire to demonstrate Japan's capacity to contribute to a major international peace and security operation. The embarrassment that the Japanese government endured during the first Gulf War, when its financial contribution of $13 billion was criticized as too slow and derided as checkbook diplomacy, had not yet faded in the minds of Japanese policymakers when the U.S.-led military operation began in Afghanistan in late 2001. This memory spurred Japanese policymakers to seek timely and appropriate measures at the outset of the Afghan intervention. Japan's constitutional inability to participate directly in either Operation Enduring Freedom or the ISAF operation provided a

[3] These figures are based on statistics and data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), "ODA kunibestu deta bukku: Afuganisutan" [ODA Data by Country: Afghanistan], 2002, 2004–12; Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), *Nihon no Ahuganisutan eno shien: Jiritsushita Ahuganisutan ni mukete* [Japan's Assistance in Afghanistan: Toward Self-Reliance] (Tokyo, 2012).

further inducement for Tokyo to maintain a high level of commitment to Afghanistan, though primarily via financial measures.

The third and final objective of the Japanese government's support for Afghan reconstruction and stabilization was forging a good relationship with a newly reborn Afghanistan. Situated at the edge of greater Asia, Afghanistan has been considered a distant Asian country. Tokyo and Kabul historically enjoyed positive diplomatic interactions, primarily through Japan's decent level of economic assistance, until the rise of the Taliban regime. The widespread perception in Afghanistan of Japan as a politically and strategically neutral actor compared with other major donor countries—most notably, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia—was regarded by Japanese policymakers as a major advantage for reviving the amicable relationship in order to secure a new friend in a place of geostrategic significance at the opposite end of Asia.

Given that multiple actors were involved in Japan's assistance to Afghanistan, these three separate objectives were not necessarily shared in equal weight by all Japanese policymakers and practitioners. Political leaders and Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials in Tokyo often focused on the first and second objectives, whereas Japanese diplomats at the embassy in Kabul and JICA officials and practitioners in Afghanistan tended to place more emphasis on the third goal. Nonetheless, there is a general consensus in the Japanese government that these three objectives provided the overarching rationale for making major commitments to Afghanistan's reconstruction and stabilization.

Assessing Japanese Assistance

From the perspective of these three foreign policy objectives, it can be safely said that the Japanese government has achieved reasonable success. Japan's Afghan assistance has served as a major, and at times the only, positive subject in Washington-Tokyo political dialogue over the past decade. As the second-largest financial contributor to Afghan stabilization and reconstruction, Tokyo has been able to play an indispensable role in a major global security operation, while its assistance activities have been, on balance, well appreciated by both the Afghan government and general population—thanks, to an extent, to the lack of a Japanese military presence on the ground. Yet if considered in terms of Afghan stabilization and reconstruction, which is presumably the common goal committed to by all international actors, the success of Japan's assistance is by no means

obvious. This is partly because it is quite difficult to properly—and in a relatively short time period—assess the impact of assistance from any one donor on the overall stabilization and reconstruction of such a highly unstable and underdeveloped country as Afghanistan. This is also because, like many other donors, Japan has not been free from criticism for its handling of assistance funds and projects. For instance, Japanese projects, especially JICA's technical assistance, were often viewed as lacking flexibility and dynamism and as incapable of providing the timely and quick-impact assistance necessary for effective stabilization and reconstruction efforts in a country like Afghanistan.

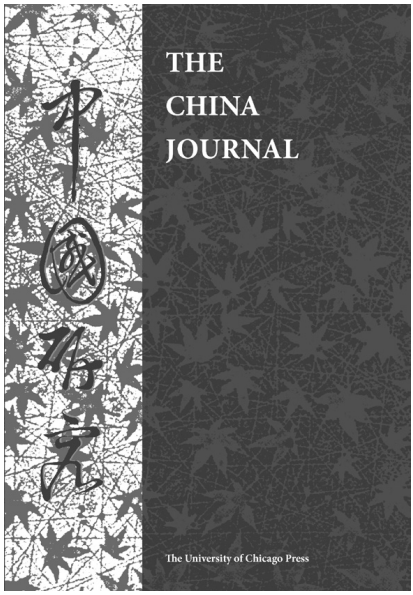
A noteworthy but not widely known aspect of Japan's Afghan assistance that can be viewed as a positive development in the country's overall diplomacy is the sudden growth of bilateral cooperation between Japan and other donor countries in coordinating and implementing programs in Afghanistan. Japan has set up unique arrangements with several NATO members to provide financial support for their reconstruction projects as part of the NATO-led stabilization and counterinsurgency operations. These countries formed relatively small military-command units, consisting of military officers and soldiers, diplomats, and reconstruction and development experts, which are termed provincial reconstruction teams (PRT). Japan has financed more than 140 reconstruction and development projects undertaken by sixteen PRTs, led by specific NATO member countries, including Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Sweden, and most importantly the United States. In addition to providing financial support, Japan dispatched a handful of development practitioners to help a Lithuanian-led PRT in a central province of Afghanistan.

Furthermore, Japan has been collaborating with other non-Western donors, such as South Korea, Turkey, Russia, Singapore, and even Iran, in the area of capacity-building assistance that provides administrative training to Afghan government officials. For instance, JICA and its Korean counterpart, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), collaborated on training programs for Afghan officials at a newly established (and Korean-funded) vocational training center in Kabul. Likewise, since 2011, Japan has provided financial support for an annual six-month training program for Afghan police officers at a Turkish police training center in Sivas, Turkey. Japan has similar arrangements with Russia (training Afghan police officials in the area of counternarcotics), Iran (supporting Afghan officials in charge of agriculture, border control management, and vocational training), and Indonesia and Cambodia (training officials on health administration).

Such cooperation with a range of donors has been partly born out of practical necessity. The deteriorating security environment in Afghanistan has increasingly constrained JICA's field activities, which has led Japanese officials to seek new measures to meet the assistance goals Japan set and keep its pledge. At the same time, Tokyo has sought to strengthen political and strategic ties with particular donor counterparts, especially NATO member countries, with which Japan's bilateral interactions had hitherto been modest. The government has also collaborated with European multilateral organizations like the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in areas such as border-control management in Afghanistan and its neighboring countries. Furthermore, over the past several years, Japan has sought similar kinds of bilateral collaboration with India, which is now the fifth-largest donor country for Afghan reconstruction and stabilization. Indeed, Afghan assistance has been a regular item on the agenda at high-level meetings between Japan and India since the mid-2000s, as well as in new trilateral consultations among senior officials from India, Japan, and the United States, which were established in late 2011.

On balance, the Japanese government has been able to manage its major involvement in Afghanistan reasonably well, especially in terms of achieving its foreign policy objectives. Despite the substantial amount of taxpayer money spent on a faraway country, assistance to Afghanistan has not yet generated significant controversy in Japanese domestic politics, in sharp contrast with the situation in the United States. Such relatively favorable circumstances notwithstanding, with the 2014 deadline looming large for a major, and possibly full, reduction of the U.S. and wider NATO military engagement in Afghanistan, Japanese policymakers now appear to be preparing for a winding down of the country's signature foreign policy commitment over the past decade. Since September 2012, two months after the second Tokyo conference on Afghan reconstruction, the Japanese government no longer has assigned a high-ranking diplomat to serve exclusively as a special envoy to Afghanistan (and Pakistan), functioning as the counterpart of the U.S. special representative for those countries; instead, the head of the Middle Eastern and African Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs now concurrently holds the portfolio for this position. In addition, since coming to power, the current Japanese leadership, under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of the Liberal Democratic Party, has made few public remarks on assistance to Afghanistan.

Given that Japan's engagement with Afghanistan occurred in large part in the context of U.S.-Japan alliance management, this is hardly surprising. When the United States' interest wanes, so does Japan's. In this regard, although Japanese officials involved in Afghan assistance invariably have stressed their commitment to fulfilling Japan's latest pledge of another $3 billion toward the end of 2016, there is a tacit agreement in the government that maintaining this level of financial aid after 2016 is simply not an option. Thus, a major change in Japan's assistance for the reconstruction and stabilization of Afghanistan will be inevitable. At the same time, however, Japan's complete withdrawal from the country is highly unlikely. Most Japanese policymakers and officials expect that Tokyo will continue providing a certain level of financial assistance to Kabul. This is partly because Japan's two other foreign policy goals—demonstrating its contribution to global security and forging a good relationship with Afghanistan as a distant Asian friend—will still have some validity. This expectation also reflects a sentiment shared by many Japanese officials that all the efforts and investments their country has made in Afghanistan should not end in vain. Given the real risk that Afghanistan will slide back into chaos after the 2014 transition, only sustained international support can prevent Japan's significant contributions over the past decade from going to waste. ◈



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