

# Afghanistan in Regional Context: Insights from Regional States

Edited by Shaun Gregory

DGSi Working Paper No. 1, 2016

In memory of  
Dr Kenneth Bush

## List of Contents

List of Contributors	4
List of Figures	6
Introduction: <i>Shaun Gregory</i>	7
Chapter 1: Rethinking the Analytic Framing of Afghanistan <i>James Page</i>	12
Chapter 2: Progress and Setbacks in the Afghan Peace Process <i>Emily Winterbotham</i>	25
Chapter 3: Pakistan and the Pursuit of Influence in Afghanistan <i>Shaun Gregory</i>	36
Chapter 4: China's Big Hedge <i>Raffaello Pantucci</i>	45
Chapter 5: India and Afghanistan <i>Rahul Roy-Chaudhury</i>	52
Chapter 6: Afghanistan and Central Asia: Balancing between Russia and Iran <i>Mark Voyger</i>	59
Conclusion <i>Shaun Gregory</i>	73

## List of Contributors

**Professor Shaun Gregory** is Professor of International Security in the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University, Director of the Durham Global Security Institute (DGSi), and Director of the Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU). He has held research posts at the Institute for Strategic Studies in Islamabad (ISSI), the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) in New Delhi, at the Australian National University (where he was Sir Robert Menzies Fellow), and at IFRI, IRIS and the IEP (Sciences-Po) in Paris. Professor Gregory works mainly on Pakistan's security issues and on Pakistan's role in the South Asian region. His latest book, *Democratic Transition and Security in Pakistan* (an edited collection) was published by Routledge Press in December 2015

**Mr James Michael Page** has experience in the fields of diplomacy and international relations, as well as in policy, research, analysis, management and administration. Mr. Page joined the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in the spring of 2009 as a Political Affairs Officer, serving in Kabul (Headquarters), as Special Assistant to the Director of the Political Affairs Division. Latterly, he was lead for the Security Sector Reform, Transition and Transformation portfolio in the Mission. His engagement spanned various issues, including: political outreach and reconciliation; conflict analysis and mediation; Afghan National Security Force development, capacity building and funding; economic analysis and political economy; national and sub-national security risk assessment; policy advice, and; extensive civil-military cooperation and coordination. In July 2015 Mr. Page joined the University of Durham, U.K., to take up a senior fellowship at the Institute of Advanced Study (IAS), in concert with the School of Government and International Affairs (SGIA) and the Durham Global Security Institute (DGSi). Mr. Page holds a postgraduate Masters' degree in International Security Studies, from St. Andrews University, Scotland, UK, and an undergraduate degree in Business Studies (Finance & French) from Cass Business School, The City University, London, UK

**Ms Emily Winterbotham** is a Research Fellow in the International Security Studies Department at Royal United Services Institute [RUSI]. For the past six years she has worked in Afghanistan and Pakistan, most recently as Political Adviser for the European Union Special Representative, focusing on the Afghan peace process, violent extremism and insurgent networks in South Asia. From 2009-2011 she conducted qualitative research for the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit on conflict resolution and reconciliation processes, identifying best practice involved in de-radicalising, demobilising and reintegrating Taliban fighters. She has also conducted research on transitional justice, human rights and women's rights and social protection in Afghanistan and the region. Her work at RUSI includes extremism, insurgency and radicalisation, women in violent extremism and geopolitical relations in Asia

**Mr Raffaelo Pantucci's** research focuses on terrorism and counter-terrorism as well as China's relations with its western neighbours. Prior to coming to RUSI, Raffaelo lived for over three years in Shanghai where he was a visiting scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS). Before that, he worked in London at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington. He has also held positions at the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) and is an Associate Fellow at the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College, London. He is the author of 'We Love Death As You Love Life: Britain's Suburban Terrorists', described by the Financial Times as 'the most articulate and carefully researched account of Britain's 'suburban terrorists' to date.' He is currently completing a writing project looking at Chinese interests in Central Asia. His journal articles have appeared in *Survival*, *The National Interest*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, and *RUSI Journal* amongst others, and his journalistic writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Sunday Times*, *BBC*, *CNN*, *Guardian*, *Foreign Policy*, *South China Morning Post*, and more.

**Mr Rahul Roy-Chaudhury** is the Senior Fellow for South Asia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, where he heads its South Asia programme. Earlier, he served in the National Security Council Secretariat in the Prime Minister's Office in the previous BJP government in India. Prior to his official appointment, he was on the faculty of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in New Delhi. He has also been a Senior Research Fellow at the International Policy Institute at King's College, London. He lectures regularly at the Royal College of Defence Studies in London, the Joint Services Command & Staff College (Defence Academy) in Shrivenham, and the University of Oxford. He briefs IISS Corporate Members, ministers, senior officials and the international media on South Asian political, security and military issues. He organises several 'one-and-a-half' track meetings involving senior government and military officials in their private capacity, along with influential experts on: i) Afghanistan and regional security (uniquely bringing together high-level diplomats and senior intelligence officials from Afghanistan, India and Pakistan annually in Oman); ii) defence, deterrence and nuclear issues (with workshops held in New Delhi and Islamabad); and iii) foreign policy dialogues with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs in South Asia and London. He is writing his Adelphi Book on India's Naval Strategy. In addition, Roy-Chaudhury chairs a 'second track' India–China border management project

**Mr Mark Voyger** has been the Senior Russia Analyst and Cultural Advisor for NATO's Allied Land Command since October 2013. Prior to joining NATO he was as a US Army civilian (GS-15) and worked as a Red Teamer for USF-I HQ in Baghdad, and as a Social Scientist in Logar and Wardak provinces, Afghanistan. Mr. Voyger's professional experience includes work in Europe, the US and the Middle East. He has worked on democratization, NATO enlargement and European integration during the post-Communist transition to democracy and free market economy in Bulgaria. Mr. Voyger has done research work for the Woodrow Wilson Center, the Institute for Peace and the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., as well as for the US Naval War College. In 2011-2012 Mr. Voyger participated in Governor Mitt Romney's Presidential campaign as a member of the Russia Advisory Group. Mr. Voyger holds two US graduate degrees: a Master's degree in International Relations (MA in Law and Diplomacy/MALD) from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, where he specialized in international security with a focus on the international politics of the Middle East as well as on NATO-Russia relations; and a Master of Public Administration (MPA2) degree from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University with a concentration in American politics and national security. After earning his Master's degrees, Mr. Voyger has done PhD work in Ottoman and Middle Eastern Studies at Cambridge University, UK, with a focus on the history of US and European relations with North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. He has also studied Arabic language, history and culture at the University of Jordan. Mr. Voyger is bilingual in English and Bulgarian; fluent in Arabic, Russian, French, Spanish and Italian; and proficient in Turkish. In addition, he has a working knowledge of German, Portuguese, Ukrainian and Farsi.

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Potential Outcomes for Strategic Competition for Dominance in Afghanistan	8
Figure 2: Control and Influence of the Taliban in December 2015	28
Figure 3: Taliban Groupings	33
Figure 4: Russia's Hegemonic Strategy Model	61
Figure 5: Iran's Hegemonic Strategy in Iraq (The Model)	68
Figure 6: Tools of Iranian Influence	69

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Shaun Gregory

In the context of NATO drawdown and transition the future prospects for peace and stability in Afghanistan will, to a significant degree, depend on the regional rivalries of Afghanistan's neighbours. In recent years the main rivalry to shape Afghanistan – that between India and Pakistan – has become greatly complicated by the emergence of China as an engaged South West Asian power in the wake of the creation of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO)<sup>2</sup> in June 2001 and the growing importance of Pakistan and Afghanistan in China's trans-Asian ambitions. In a similar way Iran, liberated by the P5+1 nuclear deal, is increasing its stake in Afghanistan and deepening its interests beyond its traditional *Shia* linkages, including forging relations with important Taliban factions. In addition newly assertive Russia despite its chastisement in the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979-89, and to some extent the Central Asian States (CAS) whose respective policies are formulated in the shadow of Russian power, is also being drawn back into regional engagement by its structural interests and by a more proactive policy directed to the boundaries of the Russian Federation.

These rivalries, which could in the past perhaps have been distilled to a narrative of binary struggle between the Chinese-Pakistan- Saudi bloc and an Indian-Russian-Iranian bloc, are greatly complicated in the contemporary context by a more fluid approach to regional relations, by the US/NATO presence, and by the co-operative potential of shared economic projects – oil and gas pipelines, hydro-electric power, trade routes, communications infrastructures, and so forth – the geostrategic realities of which may yet prompt radical realignments. These complexities in turn corrode any easy assumptions about the mapping of regional states onto partner or proxy communities inside Afghanistan.

A helpful way to cut through some of this complexity in order to seek to understand the position of Afghanistan's neighbours and the role they can, and in the future might, play in assuring a stable Afghan transition may lie in game theory<sup>3</sup>. It is a cliché, but nonetheless a truth, that Afghanistan is a crossroads of history, and its neighbours have been historically drawn to seek influence within it both by a desire to utilise Afghanistan for strategic interests and by a desire to ensure that key strategic rivals do not take control of Afghanistan for their strategic interests. One could reasonably draw a straight line, for example, between 19<sup>th</sup> century rivalries for Afghanistan between British India, Imperial Russia, Qing Dynasty China, and Persia, and contemporary rivalries. Such a framing allows a simple game theorization of regional outcomes which appears to capture some of the dynamics shaping regional states' engagement with Afghanistan and, in some cases, with the US/NATO presence. This is not meant to be exhaustive, nor does it fit all Afghanistan's neighbours equally well, but rather is a means to sketch in some broad outlines as a background to the substantive analysis provided by the papers in this collection.

---

<sup>1</sup> The papers in this collection are the result of a conference on the theme of *Stability and Security in Afghanistan in Regional Context*, held in the South of England in December 2015. The author and contributors wish to thank to organisers and hosts of that conference who have chosen to remain anonymous. The views expressed in the following are entirely those of the individual authors and should not be understood as expressing the views of DGSI, SGIA, Durham University, the conference hosts, or the institutions of the respective contributors.

<sup>2</sup> The SCO's official website is at: <http://www.sectSCO.org/>

<sup>3</sup> A useful primer is: Andrew H. Kydd, *International Relations Theory: The Game-Theoretical Approach*, Cambridge University Press, 2015. On the economic dimension see: S.M. Amadae, *Prisoners of Reason: Game Theory and Neoliberal Political Economy*, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

The desire to dominate Afghanistan and the fear of one or more key strategic rivals dominating Afghanistan sets up a four element outcome model in which the axes are low and high threat to the interests of each respective regional neighbour, and positive and negative outcomes for each state. This can be conceptualised as in figure 1:

	<b>Interests: Positive Outcome</b>	<b>Interests: Negative Outcomes</b>
<b>Low Threat</b>	<p><i>Optimal Outcome:</i></p> <p>State A dominates a stable Afghanistan</p>	<p><i>Sub-Optimal Outcome I:</i></p> <p>Stable Afghanistan where interests of State A are balanced by interests of key rival(s)</p>
<b>High Threat</b>	<p><i>Sub-Optimal Outcome II:</i></p> <p>Civil War</p>	<p><i>Pessimial Outcome:</i></p> <p>Stable Afghanistan dominated by key strategic rival(s) of State A.</p>

**Figure 1: Potential Outcomes of Strategic Competition for Dominance in Afghanistan.**

A given state (State A) amongst Afghanistan’s neighbours would in an ideal (optimal) context be able to dominate a stable Afghanistan for its own strategic interests. A stable Afghanistan would itself mean little prospect of challenge to the dominance of State A. By contrast the pessimal (worst case) outcome for State A would be the mirror opposite: a stable Afghanistan dominated by one or more key strategic rivals. In reality neither of these outcomes has been practical, though regional states continue to seek to achieve their optimal outcomes and avoid their pessimal outcomes.

Afghanistan’s tragedy is that regional rivals in practice (as a result of optimal-pessimial dynamics) oscillate between the two sub-optimal outcomes. It ought to be clear that, short of the impractical goal of outright stable dominance of Afghanistan, the most desirable of the two sub-optimal outcomes illustrated is Outcome I, that is a stable Afghanistan where interests are balanced but where civil war is avoided and at least some of State A’s interests are accepted. This is the outcome to which current regional engagements are in principle committed, within frameworks like the SCO and the “Heart of Asia” (Istanbul Process)<sup>4</sup> and to which all of Afghanistan’s neighbours have given public consent. Were there to be an inclusive and unhedged regional commitment to a balanced settlement in Afghanistan the prospects for peace and stability in Afghanistan would be greatly enhanced.

These prospects are – as the papers in this collection explore – under threat from three main directions. The first is the presence of the US/NATO, and the vast international humanitarian community in Afghanistan, and the turbulence which has arisen from the counter-insurgency and counter-terror operations of the former and the assertion of Western norms and values in Afghanistan through the latter’s “stabilisation and nation-building” efforts. These are being given an

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.heartofasia-istanbulprocess.af/>



added purchase on regional dynamics by uncertainty about the level and focus of future US commitment to Afghanistan and the region, by the NATO drawdown and transition, and by ambiguity about the sustainability of the international humanitarian and state-building efforts in the context of declining internal security in Afghanistan.

In the first paper in this collection, **James Page**, in part reflecting in a personal capacity on his experience with UNAMA in Afghanistan, sheds critical light on the way the West has framed Afghanistan and the implications this has had – and is likely to continue to have - for the pursuit of stability and security in Afghanistan. His analysis, which centres in particular on the framing of intervention and security, argues that many of Afghanistan’s current and future problems flow from faulty framing and that Afghanistan holds many lessons for the reframing of international intervention from which the current international plans for Afghanistan, and future interventions more generally, ought to learn. These lessons are developed far more fully in the second DGSJ paper, published simultaneously with this one, entitled *Afghanistan: An Analytic Framing: Past, Present and into the Future*.

The second impediment to a regional accommodation is that Afghanistan is not a *tabular rasa* on which the game of regional rivalry can be played unimpeded. It is a complex multi-ethnic state with multiple internal actors – including the government and ANDSF, the various factions of the Taliban, the warlords and other militant factions (including the emergent Islamic State) - each vying with the others for national and regional agency and leverage. The ambitions of Afghanistan’s neighbours are therefore entangled in these dynamics as regional states seek proxies or partners for their objectives in Afghanistan and are drawn into Afghanistan by the actions of those partners/proxies, many seeking in turn to harness regional states for their interests.

In the second of the papers in this collection **Emily Winterbotham** looks at arguably the central element of these internal dynamics: the Afghan Peace Process which centres around, but is not confined to, the peace negotiations with the Afghan Taliban within the “4+1” quadrilateral framework which comprises China and the United States, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the Taliban. Her paper has three main elements: the first considers the trajectory of the Afghan peace process to date; the second reflects on the potential next steps in the process and the main obstacles which stand in the path to peace; and the third which concludes the paper with a tentative assessment of the prospects for the peace process in 2016.

The third impediment to regional accommodation lies in the proclivity of regional states to seek advantage and/or to seek to undermine the progress of key strategic rivals in Afghanistan. The consequences of this proclivity, particularly in the context of fluid and unmanageable internal dynamics in Afghanistan, is the undermining of any prospects for an agreed regional settlement and *in extremis* the risk of civil war. For many regional states civil war in Afghanistan – though highly undesirable – is a preferred alternative to the pessimal outcome of dominance of Afghanistan by a strategic rival.

The remaining four papers in this collection, in geostrategic terms moving outwards from the analysis of Page and Winterbotham, give consideration to the perspectives, aims and objectives, policy approaches and tools of regional states in pursuit of their interests in Afghanistan. The embedded issues within these portraits are the degree to which each of the regional states is likely to agree regional compromise in support of the Afghan peace process and wider stability or whether their pursuit of optimal outcomes will hobble such efforts, further weaken the leadership in Kabul, and risk the slide to civil war in Afghanistan. Further the juxtaposition of the viewpoints of the regional states throws into relief intense complexities in the way rivalries and partnerships at the state-level collide with intra-state dynamics in Afghanistan.

In the third paper **Shaun Gregory** provides an analysis of Pakistan's perspectives on Afghanistan. He argues that Pakistan is the most consequential of Afghanistan's neighbours and considers the way Pakistan's interests have shaped the prospects for peace and stability in Afghanistan and what this means in the near to medium term future. His paper is presented in five sections. The first briefly outlines the main lines of Pakistan's historical security policy towards Afghanistan which have remained remarkably unchanged over the decades. The second part discusses the deep and multi-faceted "reach" of Pakistan into Afghanistan to explain why Pakistan is the most important of Afghanistan's neighbours in terms of any prospect of Afghanistan reaching a stable and secure future. The third section assesses the impact of NATO's Afghan mission on Pakistan's policy-making towards Afghanistan and the implications of NATO's drawdown and transition for Pakistan. The fourth section looks at key strands of Pakistan's Afghan policy in the present context, relating this to the contemporary complexities of NATO's Resolute Support Mission and follow-on support beyond end 2016. His final section briefly looks further ahead at some of the key factors likely to inform Pakistan's policy over a longer horizon and at the policy options which are open to Pakistan as a result.

In the fourth paper **Raffaello Pantucci** considers the attitude of China towards Afghanistan in the broad context of China's ambitious trans-Asian trade and communications investments within the new "Silk Road Economic Belt" (SREB) framework, and the specific context of China's \$46billion investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He argues that Afghanistan presents something of a foreign policy conundrum for Beijing, believing on the one hand that geostrategic proximity, together with China's capacity to offer meaningful support, draws China into engagement with Afghanistan, but on the other that Afghanistan's security problems pose a threat both to China and to China's wider regional ambitions. As a result China "hedges" its policy towards Afghanistan offering some commitment to Afghanistan, *inter alia* through support for the Afghan peace process, regional fora and investments, but stopping short – for the present at least - of offering the kind of leadership on the Afghan question of which it is capable.

In the fifth paper **Rahul Roy-Chaudhury** reflects on India's relationship with Afghanistan and India's attempts to manage its difficult relationship with Pakistan (with China implicit in the background) in the Afghan context. He outlines the foundational elements of India's engagement with Afghanistan, and explores why India's commitment to Afghanistan will remain durable. He gives particular attention to the subtle shifts in Indian policy since the election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, including the hesitant supply of military hardware to Afghanistan, and to India's navigation of Afghan President Ghani's ill-starred "Pakistan pivot". While there is a recognition of the limits of Indian power in Afghanistan, there is at the same time a clear intent in India to seek to engage Pakistan on the Afghan situation not least to seek to avoid the risk of civil war.

In the final paper, **Mark Voyager**, presents two remarkable analytic frameworks as the means to understand first Russian and then Iranian policy towards Afghanistan. In the former the author relates the evolution of Russian policy to the wider context of the tensions with NATO and the West more broadly and the specifics of Russia's attempts to reassert influence in the CAS states (and in Afghanistan) in opposition to Western policy. Accessing Russian language statements at senior military and political levels the author articulates Russian strategy and its implications for Afghanistan and the West's long-term interests in Afghanistan through the model of "hegemonic strategy" being developed in Moscow. In the second element of his paper the author applies a similar approach to Iran, developing a model based on Iranian behaviour in Iraq (and elsewhere in the Middle East) and shows how Iran, faced with militarily superior Western adversaries in Afghanistan and elsewhere utilises Iranian concepts of "hybrid power" and "asymmetric power" in pursuit of its interests with potentially pernicious implications for western objectives in Afghanistan.

Collectively the six papers present a complex and multi-level analysis of Afghanistan in its regional context in early 2016 and point the way to those key tensions and issues which are likely to shape the future prospects for stability and peace in Afghanistan in the context of NATO drawdown and transition. Internally, nationally and regionally, the trends are not particularly encouraging, but nor are they entirely pessimistic. The opportunities still exist in many quarters to help Afghanistan navigate its current storm and steer it in the direction of calmer waters. Afghanistan's neighbours have a crucial role to play in supporting those actors inside Afghanistan able to contribute to stability and peace.

## Chapter 1: Rethinking the Analytic Framing of Afghanistan<sup>5</sup>

James Page

Afghanistan continues to provide a rich source of questions regarding interventions in general, many of which refer implicitly, or more explicitly, to the security situation in the country and its international implications.<sup>6</sup> As public perceptions appear to accelerate towards a view that the war in Afghanistan is ostensibly over,<sup>7</sup> the conundrum of what to do about continuing commitments *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan amid instability remains.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the threats that largely brought intervention in 2001 have not disappeared, owing much to their nature, character and resilience. Hence, the question of: 'how to understand as well as analyze Afghanistan: now and into the future?' remains especially pertinent. Since the intervention in Afghanistan of 2001, innumerable changes have occurred in and around the country. Not to mention alterations in the attitudes, approaches and application towards it in the international community. Perhaps the most notable among the more recent developments are: the formation of the National Unity Government; the shift from Transition to Transformation; the end of the ISAF mission; and, the quite rapid drawdown of international security forces in the country.<sup>9</sup> It is always wise to look ahead, but difficult to look further than you can see, as Sir Winston Churchill observed. We can, nevertheless, be proactive about being ready to better understand what may transpire. This can also be about looking at what we can see, but also considering and looking again in ways that could be fruitful. Of the temptation of keeping to presupposing ways of thinking or assumptions that may neither stand the test of time, nor be sufficiently invested with analytical rigor: this may not be a wise way of looking. It is also a personal observation that there may be a 'comprehensibility gap' between what the situation understood in Afghanistan and abroad, now, at a number of points in the past and possibly into the future. Contributing to a narrowing of this gap is a hope as part of the fabric of this paper.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> This chapter provides introductory material outlining the challenges in seeking to analytically frame security and intervention issues in Afghanistan. The ideas outlined in this chapter are developed in much greater detail in the second DGSi Report, *Afghanistan: An Analytic Framing – Past, Present and into the Future*, April 2016, Durham Global Security Institute, Durham University, UK.

<sup>6</sup> This ranges not only from the regular UN Security Council Reporting on "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security" to the original rationale for intervening in Afghanistan in 2001, but also to current rationales provided for continuing engagement there by the U.S. and other countries, including NATO. Regional countries and organisations, such as the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) have also voiced strong concern at the security situation in Afghanistan, including recently. Numerous international and national media reports also currently frequently feature stories with a substantial security content or theming.

<sup>7</sup> This is a phraseology used by U.S. President Obama in his most recent focused statement on Afghanistan and Pakistan, on 15 October 2015. See: Obama, B. (2015) 'Statement by the President on Afghanistan' *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, 15 October 2015, available: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/15/statement-president-afghanistan> accessed December 2015.

<sup>8</sup> This can be said of the U.S., the NATO coalition present in Afghanistan, regional countries and others who have interests in Afghanistan. The role of Afghans and its central importance should also not be overlooked in the field of international affairs.

<sup>9</sup> The National Unity Government in Afghanistan was inaugurated on 29 September 2014 with the deal signed on 21 September 2014; the ISAF mission formally ended at midnight 31 December, 2014; for example, according to official figures, ISAF and U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) reduced from 57,004 on 15 January 2014 (at the start of the year) to some 13,000, according to: [http://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats\\_archive/2014-01-15-ISAF-Placemat.pdf](http://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats_archive/2014-01-15-ISAF-Placemat.pdf) (accessed December 2015) and various statements by ISAF commanders; the NATO Post-2014 Resolute Support Mission (RSM) is due to number 12,800 in this period of December 2014.

<sup>10</sup> The phrase 'comprehensibility gap' was used by Sir Robert Thompson in a letter to then National Security Advisor and later U.S. Secretary of State Kissinger in early April 1971 with reference to the Vietnam war and the gap between understanding of it in the U.S. that in Vietnam, on the ground. See: Thompson, Sir Robert (1989) *Make for the Hills: Memories of Far Eastern Wars*. London: Leo & Cooper, p. 166.

The development of pertinent analytical frames with which to consider Afghanistan into the future has been undertaken in consideration of recent developments *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> The intention in this paper is therefore to further enable evolving understanding of a country, and more especially of analytically approaching it, as an extraordinary intervention draws down further.<sup>12</sup> Although the intervention is drawing down in terms of troop numbers, admittedly delayed, Afghanistan is a country, a situation and circumstances, which often seize our collective attentions and will undoubtedly continue to be salient among global political affairs for the foreseeable future. As Afghanistan's 'decade of Transformation' unfolds, the concerns of global terror groupings remain, and political, military, security and aid support do not, and are unlikely to, cease flowing from abroad in sizable sums. Consequently, manifest is the desire and determination to refine ideas about, approaches towards and analysis of Afghanistan. Moreover, Afghanistan is very likely to experience a further period of challenges, with a future to be experienced by many rather than a few with regard to our increasingly shared histories in a globalized world.

This task has been gone about intentionally pointing out at once the 'conceptual frustration' met with concerning Afghanistan in relation to the intervention, which began in October 2001.<sup>13</sup> A sense that is evident, and at times palpable, in casual discussion about Afghanistan, as well as in those with a range of international officials in capitals with Afghans at local level in Afghanistan. The frame of fundamental importance to what commenced with war in 2001 and where war rages on as 2015 comes to a close, is the triad of: policy, strategy and tactics.<sup>14</sup> Rather than applying the term (and conceptuality) of 'war' as a simple criticism or even a critique, in view of the desire in a number of countries that intervened in Afghanistan in 2001 to close that chapter, it is necessarily appropriated as a conceptual starting point. As such, the term and the triad of policy, strategy and tactics are therefore employed rather carefully due to their ongoing relevance as a frame for analysis, and into the inimitable uncertainties of the future. Given its inherent conceptual breadth and consequent coverage, this provides good potential as a starting point for developing further analytical framing, together with insights. It can also concurrently be used as a referent for consistency and possibly corrective views and activity.

Multiple applications are potentially viable with such a starting point and fundamental analytical frame. It can be utilized in order to assist analysis, and as a means for further analysis (in the paper and as a tool in itself). For example, in the discrete and often co-informing activities of: identifying, orientating, comparing, contrasting, questioning, and clarifying matters of select interest, then implicit context can be explored and explicit points made. Other context, perspective and examination of assumptions can also be undertaken with a useful reference point. This, as we shall

---

<sup>11</sup> This was the broad question given for the conference presentation for and from which this paper was developed.

<sup>12</sup> It is extraordinary in a number of ways, not least as it's the world super power' --United States' -- 'longest war', with significant on-the-ground military and other support. This is despite it not being often a well-understood intervention, or receiving the attention of other contemporary interventions, such as Iraq, which it preceded in various ways (date, thinking, trends). In addition, Afghanistan: symbolizes enduring challenges to U.S. and international political-military and coalition might; continues to be viewed as an incomparable spatiality in efforts against global terror groups and networks such as al Qaeda.

<sup>13</sup> Officially October 7 2001, as per the announcement by U.S. President George W. Bush. Bush, G.W. (2001) Address to the Nation, October 7, 2001. *The White House Office of Press Secretary*, available: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011007-8.html> accessed December 2015.

Preparatory actions were undertaken for this contingency, including the insertion of clandestine military and political-military units into Afghanistan.

<sup>14</sup> This is also synonymously referred to as: goals, aims and operations or objectives, aims and tactics, or ends, ways or means. The interchangeability of synonymous terms in these synonymous frames is also possible, e.g. goals for policy, but not goals for strategy or tactics. This is a central consistency.

see, is in order to guide, provide direction to argument and focus, as well as to introduce the development of further analytical frames of potential and pertinent use. Among the most notable are, for example: addressing the quite widespread misperceptions of Clausewitz's 'trinity' and the related notion of the instrumentality of war; clarity in comprehending threats and of identifying the enemy; political process as a dynamic thread which runs through much and many manner of analytical framings, but cannot be regarded simply as process; and, the inescapability of context and different ideas of transactionality informing political and other significant interactions and interrelations.

From this analytical base, which can draw together past, present and the future as a central theme to war and continuing war in Afghanistan,<sup>15</sup> other further tailored analytical frames can be crafted and appropriated in use. This can be conducted variously through: theoretical links and adjustments; in view of on-the-ground developments deemed of importance to better discernment of Afghanistan and wider yet interrelated contexts; lessons from other situations. Allied with this is the question -- albeit explanation of -- methodology. This is present in the recognition that while the nature of war has not changed, its character does.<sup>16</sup> In so doing, relatively new developments that are germane to goals in Afghanistan, for instance the question of al Qaeda and transnational terror networks, can be explored for the new character they bring to war. In consequence, new meanings can be discovered of analytical importance and refinements to analysis can be implied and/or developed for analyzing Afghanistan past, present and future.

### **Towards Analytical Framing**

The interrelations that inform Afghanistan, for example: political, development and economic, among others, necessarily involve consideration as they are integral to security and the spectrum of apprehensions of it: from narrow to expansive.<sup>17</sup> The local, regional and global, and how these figure towards Afghanistan, and that which may emanate from it, also invest thinking; for instance the spectre of terror precipitated the most recent intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, post 9/11.

---

<sup>15</sup> This is not stated out of desire but rather owing to the rigours of analytical exactitudes and pertinent theoretical frames, most notably the relevance of Clausewitz's 'On War', which can also take reasonable account together with military intervention, counterinsurgency (to name some of the 'predominant phases' in Afghanistan) of: terror, terrorism and responses thereto such as criminal-management responses amid war.

<sup>16</sup> See in particular Strachan & Schiepers (2011) *The Changing Character of War*, Oxford: OUP. pp. 11 to 14.

<sup>17</sup> Such as security as freedom from fear in the Rooseveltian sense echoed by President G.W. Bush in key statements on the Global War On Terror prior to and just post the intervention in Afghanistan. This is arguably also has manifestations of what Beck (1992) calls de-bounded risks in the current age. This de-bounding is three-dimensional: spatial, temporal and social. Security – *Sicherheit* -- in German, Beck's native language, can mean: 'security' or 'safety' or 'certainty' Adam (2003). Security, and concepts of it can also range to be of more concrete tangible forms of physical security, such as that offered by Manunta, Giovanni (1999) 'What is Security?' *Security Journal*, Volume 12, number 3, pp. 57-66. Human security is also noteworthy as are the insights offered on the case of Afghanistan by Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou (2005). Contrasts with the U.S. Joint military definition of security are notable. In the latter, security is defined as: "security --1. Measures taken by a military unit, activity, or installation to protect itself against all acts designed to, or which may, impair its effectiveness. (JP 3-10) 2. A condition that results from the establishment and maintenance of protective measures that ensure a state of inviolability from hostile acts or influences. (JP 3-10) 3. With respect to classified matter, the condition that prevents unauthorized persons from having access to official information that is safeguarded in the interests of national security. See also national security. (JP 2-0)". Joint Publication 1-02 Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (As amended Through 15 November 2015) (2015) Joint Chiefs of Staff U.S. Department of Defense, Washington D.C., available: [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf) Accessed December 2015. On the link between President F.D. Roosevelt and the idea of 'freedom from fear' and its investment in political vision, see: Bauman, Zygmunt (2006).

Terror and the threat of it continue as a key rationale for various forms of engagement with Afghanistan by the U.S. and allies. Furthermore, concern about terrorism of terror attacks, and their use, is the *zeitgeist* (also noting the choice is terminology regarding terror and terrorism is neither always clear nor precise).<sup>18</sup> For instance, such as in perspective of the high profile attack in Paris on 13 November 2015, later claimed by (and widely attributed to) the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which has been strongly alleged to be present in Afghanistan, too.<sup>19</sup>

Although constraining prospective developments in analysis of Afghanistan to a narrow 'terror' focus is possible, such a path has not been commenced with or intended here. As in the eyes of Janus, the Roman God of beginnings and endings, whose temple doors were opened in times of war and closed in times of peace, or when armies marched out and returned again: it can be convincingly held that war in Afghanistan is not over. Accordingly, as Janus appeals: beginnings and ends -- as well as rightful doorways to these and into the future -- should be carefully observed. I would submit the same if so examined.<sup>20</sup> In recognition of this sense and spirit of seeking to establish clarity as a way of grasping what may be in and into the future, let us be frank so to yield and effect cogent analysis: combat continues to occur involving U.S. and NATO-coalition forces.<sup>21</sup> This is despite combat operations by the U.S. and NATO-led allies being formally over and under the title of another paradigm. A paradigm primarily of assistance, advising and training, however, it also has an authorization for self-defence, which enables various dimensions including combat. The paradigm of TAA and other elements of the U.S. and NATO-led Missions in Afghanistan post-2014, titled "a non-combat role" also do not account for covert activities widely known to be occurring, such as some drone operations.<sup>22</sup> In addition, well-publicized events in Kunduz city, Kunduz Province speak to a shift in the character of the earlier presented train, advise, assist (TAA) paradigm, to what sees combat exposure and engagement in combat even through it. Among other possible recent examples indicating combat, even if instigated by insurgents is the incidence of recent U.S. Special Forces casualties in Sangin, Northern Helmand Province.<sup>23,24</sup> Also, to some degree, operations

---

<sup>18</sup> The axiom that one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter is apt to mention here, as is the increasing recognition that the paths to terror are many indeed as they are to radicalization. For a useful perspective on pathways to radicalization and this important perspective that inheres a wide array of issues from the psychological to the political, ideological and economic for example, see: McCauley, Clark & Moskaleko, Sophia (2008).

<sup>19</sup> Also frequently referred to, among other names, as: Da'ish, Islamic State, and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Its presence in Afghanistan has been debated in various political, security, academic, and other circles public and private. The author's view is that ISIL do pose a significant danger and threat to and in Afghanistan. For example, the argument that there is no 'proof' of ISIL fighters from Iraq or Syria being in Afghanistan under the ISIL banner in the latter misses several substantive points regarding understanding who an enemy is and also as part of assessing threats and enemies. More will be addressed regarding this in due course in this paper.

<sup>20</sup> Arendt also uses reference to the Janus as part of, simply put, underlining the significance of appreciating beginnings and ends, close examination of these foundations and their importance for new interpretations towards the present and the future. Arendt, Hannah (1961) *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*.

<sup>21</sup> A useful article that makes poignant and salient points on why war in Afghanistan is not over, and was published before more contemporary events, see: Knefel, John (2015) 'Drone Rules in Afghanistan Go Unchanged, And Other Reasons the War Isn't Really Over: Despite the official end of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, our involvement goes on', *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 7 January 2015, available: <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/drone-rules-in-afghanistan-go-unchanged-and-other-reasons-the-war-isnt-really-over-20150107> accessed December 2015.

<sup>22</sup> This terminology of "train, advise, and assist" has gone through multiple changes, nevertheless, the meaning is understood as largely similar through these iterations. The NATO SOFA, for example, defines these terms in a legal sense.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. and NATO-led coalition forces remain in Afghanistan albeit under specific and differential mandates (the Afghanistan-U.S. Bi-lateral Security Agreement (BSA) and NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), and a UN

against ‘probably the largest’ al Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan ever destroyed.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it behooves us for reasons of actuality and the search for clarity, understanding if not wisdom to examine: how to effectively analytically frame the situation in Afghanistan, towards better discernment of it. It is not simply an exercise for ourselves, rather, it with the aspiration of making sense of a complex and enduring conflict. Afghanistan is the domain of a conflict – a war -- with ramifications for international safety and security.<sup>26 27</sup>

---

Security Council Resolution welcoming the latter NATO-led mission. Extensive international coverage of the fall of Kunduz city to Taliban and related forces exists, including intervention by U.S., U.K. and other special forces such as Germans. Although at times presented as advising, local and other sources credibly confirm combat by the aforementioned. The caveat of self-defence is not infrequently used regarding reports of combat by both U.S. and NATO troops (for example see statements by the NATO Resolute Support Mission under Transcripts, Press Releases and Casualty Reports: <http://www.rs.nato.int/news/4.html> ) even when placing such close to insurgents and militants raising the question of intent. In a number of cases the coalition member states involved in such situations are not declared, such as during the Kunduz city response. For example, see the Guardian newspaper report: “Taliban widen offensive as Nato special forces join fight for Kunduz” 30 September 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/30/taliban-widen-offensive-as-afghan-army-fails-to-retake-kunduz> accessible December 2015, and Daily Mail (2015) ‘Afghan forces recapture main areas of key city from Taliban in early hours offensive ‘assisted by British SBS commandos’ 1 October 2015, available: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3255811/Afghan-forces-recapture-main-areas-key-city-Taliban-early-hours-offensive-assisted-British-SBS-commandos.html> . Sensitivity to declarations of direct involvement in combat by nation-state’s forces since the formal announcement of the ending of the combat mission in Afghanistan by president Obama on 28 December 2015 are self-apparent. i.e. to fulfill this status of the end of war. In this context regional tensions affecting wider international relations also exist, for instance over tensions with regional countries about U.S. intentions longer-term, such as basing. For some countries, such as Germany, clear examples of issues of declaring the situation in Afghanistan involved war regarding this exist for historical reasons, which been a factor in presentations of involvement in Afghanistan. This has at times culminated in ministerial-level crises, such as that which engulfed the German defence minister regarding stating what was happening in Afghanistan was ‘war’ in 2010 a high-point in the conflict. See: Strachan (2013) p.143. Numerous media reports also exist about the reaction this created, for example: ‘It’s War, says Guttenberg’ (2010) The Local de, published: 4 April 2010. Available: <http://www.thelocal.de/20100404/26311> Accessed December 2015. The U.S., U.K and numerous other both major and minor troop contributors to the NATO-led coalition did term involvement there war, and certainly prepared troops as if it were, with some additional trainings for the theatre of operations. German sensitivities regarding the use of the term ‘war’ (*Krieg* in German) have been especially notable as the aforementioned example is indicative of. This has not changed significantly.

<sup>24</sup> On the Sangin (a district of Helmand Province) example, which is interesting for this aspect, among others, see: The Times of London (2015) ‘SAS battle to stop Taliban from taking over Helmand, 22 December 2015, available: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/asia/afghanistan/article4647203.ece> Accessed December 2015.

<sup>25</sup> This naturally poses the implicit questions of: how long has it been there, and relatedly, was it in existence before the end of ‘the combat mission’ 31 December 2014? For some more on the camp and the operation to destroy it, see: Lamothe, Dan (2015) “‘Probably the largest’ al-Qaeda training camp ever destroyed in Afghanistan”, *Washington Post*, 30 October 2015, available: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/10/30/probably-the-largest-al-qaeda-training-camp-ever-destroyed-in-afghanistan/> accessed December 2015.

<sup>26</sup> The UN Security Council is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security. Relatedly, the objective of the international community with Afghan authorities’ agreement toward (and within) Afghanistan is inherent in the structure of both UNAMA quarterly reports to the UN Security Council (UNSC) report on the situation in Afghanistan, and more formally expressed in UNAMA’s UN Security Council mandates, which have been renewed annually, with some slight variations in the annual renewal dates, since 28 March 2002. For the evolution of the vision for Afghanistan from 2002 see: <http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/28%20March%202002.pdf> paragraph 3 “Stressing the inalienable right of the Afghan people themselves freely to determine their own political future,” and most recently “to achieve a unified, peaceful and prosperous future for all the people of Afghanistan” UNSC (2015) S/RES/2210. The main change and most comprehensive expression of the objective for Afghanistan was in



Such a recognition also enables justification for concerted application of at least one of the few well established analytical frameworks with which to embark upon an analytical journey: war, policy, strategy and tactics. Crucially, al Qaeda and other terror groups active in Afghanistan - similarly the Taliban and its elements - have some if not many or most of their roots in war in Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> Terror and its use - what is widely called terrorism – is largely a symptom. It is not in and of itself the root cause or solution to terror.<sup>29</sup> The matter of insecurity in Afghanistan is more proximate to its cause and comprehension. The analytical frame of war, closely related to matters of security and insecurity is even more particular, relevant and useful to start with towards analytically framing Afghanistan apropos the past, present and into the future.

## Objective and Aims

The objective of the paper (presented its developed entirety as DGSi Report no 2), as articulated above, is to offer pertinent analytical frames with which to consider Afghanistan into the future. More precisely, this objective sees two co-informing aims arrived at in conceiving of how to go about such a matter. Firstly, to make deeper sense of the intervention, conflict, and other developments arising related to this endeavour, (and given first hand experience of it).<sup>30</sup> Secondly, of further enabling evolving appreciation of a country. In doing so, reference is made to a selection of learned literature from the proliferation of research about Afghanistan. Both aims, and the overall objective

---

2007 and the UNAMA mandate: UNSC (2006) S/RES/1662: “*Pledging* its continued support for the Government and people of Afghanistan as they build on the successful completion of the Bonn Process in rebuilding their country, strengthening the foundations of a constitutional democracy and assuming their rightful place in the community of nations”. This was after several processes inspired by liberal democratic interpretations of international norms had been asserted. (See Annex 1 for more detailed observations on the evolution of the international community’s vision for Afghanistan). Commitment to: “sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan” is the ‘anchor’ statement present in all UNAMA mandates from 2002 to the present day as an expression of the will and norms of the international community. Notably, the UNAMA mandate UNSC (2005) S/RES/1589, sees al Qaeda noted for the first time since 2001, and also Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). On the more complex matter of U.S. and U.K. goals (e.g. as the major nations involved in OEF from the outset) a detailed examination of goals in Afghanistan by the U.S. in comparison, the U.K. takes place later in this paper.

<sup>27</sup> Unique and outstanding reporting on the situation in Afghanistan has and continues to be provided by the United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA), which is mandated by the UN Security Council (UNSC) to formally report to that body quarterly. (The aforementioned qualities of the report have been positively remarked upon by numerous diplomats, military personnel and other officials and researchers it is also an excellent record and reference.) The report’s analytical content is, true to its purpose of an impartial account of quarterly developments along political, security, development and regional strands as well as others. Consequently, it is not as assertive, critical or potentially controversial as other written, primarily analytical works, such as this. The most recent UNAMA Report to the UNSC on “the Situation in Afghanistan and its implications for peace and security” was on 10 December 2015, and is available here:

[http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2015\\_942.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_942.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> For more on this there are numerous sources. Coll (2004) is one of the more exciting and detailed with focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is especially useful here. For a more philosophical and thought-provoking perspective, see: Gray, John (2003) *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern*. London: Verso.

<sup>29</sup> It may be a trigger, or a contributory cause, but seldom a root cause in the sense used, for example, in conflict analysis as taught by the UN System Staff College. This is also in keeping with various other conflict analysis definitions, methodologies and ontologies.

<sup>30</sup> The author was a political affairs officer with UNAMA for extensive periods from spring 2009 the end of June 2015.

are necessarily contingent on considering the past, due to its implications for the present and the future.<sup>31</sup> Resultantly, some frames of analysis will have different uses and or applications over time. Likely timeframes, spatialities and prospective longevities of analytical will be noted where appropriate. In so doing some analysis will inevitably be part of exploring, considering, defining and even refining analytical frames. Although the intention is to provide a fairly broad spectrum of analytical frames, given the uncertainties of the future and of war (especially so), these can be neither presented nor perceived as definitive.

As we shall see, the interconnection of policy, strategy and tactics – and clear cognizance of this as part of analysis (considering the past and present) as well as for continuing efforts (into the future) – is arguably more apposite than ever.<sup>32</sup> Certainly, the differential way in which these over-used terms have been appropriated and applied before, very much during and currently *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan is a perplexing as well as a profound problematic with practical impacts. Distinctive phases in the intervention also raise questions of deeper discernment and dynamics that can guide toward better policymaking, strategies and tactics be they military, civilian or civ-mil, humanitarian and so forth. Moreover, major challenges remain in Afghanistan, and its importance for regional and global security, stability and prosperity should not be underestimated.<sup>33 34</sup>

In hindsight, it is alarming for the over-use or under-use of concepts, terminologies and selected parts of them - whichever way one wishes to view it. It is even more concerning as decisions need to be made about what to do next. More particularly, as asserted here and as follows, is the lack of consistency, coherence and cohesion in international community efforts in Afghanistan post the 2001 intervention. This is demonstrated through analysis of major conceptual categories before and

---

<sup>31</sup> This approach values historical insights for a variety of reasons, including those asserted by Strachan & Scheipers (2011), and also based on personal experience. Both assert the indispensability of appropriate contextual analysis, which is rooted in historical sensitivity. The significance of conflicts and roots of conflict informing war remains strongly in evidence in Afghanistan and unfortunately not always grasped as effectively as it might be. Indeed, there is growing consciousness that interventions entail complexity, including pre-existing complexities of history, sociology, anthropology, economy, and politics, to name but a few. For example, see Berdal, Mats (2011) And also as in discussions with a range of academics and experienced practitioners.

<sup>32</sup> The intervention in Afghanistan (2001 to the present day) has involved predominantly military effort and is envisaged to important focus on security support to the Afghan state, including with possible training teams in addition to diplomatic staff at embassies such as the U.S. envisaged into the future. For now 'hubs' and other U.S. or NATO military bases remain in geopolitical locations in the country, such as Mazar-i-Sharif (North), Jalalabad (East), Bagram and Kabul (Central), and so on. Counterterrorism operations by the U.S. and other NATO members, in addition to and with those by the Afghan authorities, are, in the author's opinion, probable in the short, medium-term, if not the long-term. Hence, for analytical purposes use of the construction: policy, strategy and tactics is apposite, particularly as counterterrorism has arisen as a line of operation as part of military effort and the overarching condition of war. This also enables consistent analysis over the duration of the intervention and into challenging conditions in Afghanistan and the region into the future, which will likely demand military (and other) responses by the national authorities and international actors, including of a security nature. Moreover, this triad is well-established and despite contemporary complicating of its meanings through injudicious use it, it retains an inherent integrity, usefulness and clarity invaluable to analysis in this context and of this article.

<sup>33</sup> The referents of: security, stability and prosperity, will be used through this paper and in congruence with the will of the international community in UN Security Council mandates (more on this in Annex 1 and in the main body of the paper) as useful norm, but also allowing for a range of political interpretations and uses.

<sup>34</sup> For an especially thoughtful recent article including strong argument as to why Afghanistan is important and will be in the future (and why) see: Rashid, Ahmed (2015) 'While we weren't looking, the Taliban surged back in Afghanistan: Fifteen years of western intervention achieved no more than the pretense of a stable state', *The Spectator Magazine*, (London), 12 December 2015, available: <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/12/while-we-werent-looking-the-taleban-surged-back-in-afghanistan/> Accessed December 2015.

during the intervention, and their application towards Afghanistan. In turn, this provides for a greater understanding of key complexities faced, problems arising and also those pre-existing the intervention. It also draws out more useful analytical frames going forward in reflection of what may not have been fully absorbed already by some policy makers (though some of course may have), and can offer an implicit as well as at times explicit corrective of analyzing how to proceed. It is a truism that although some may wish that the intervention in Afghanistan, and what has arisen from it, is over, Afghanistan as such has not finished with us. And by us, I mean the world.<sup>35</sup>

### **Steps in Analytical Framing: Objective, Aims and Strategy**

A feature of discussions about and efforts towards Afghanistan since 2001 to the present-day are the complications caused by confusion, and not simply incoherence, about what is intended to be achieved by both the military and civilians.<sup>36 37</sup> The interaction of intentions, thinking and actions toward the situation in Afghanistan is a crucial nexus for making sense of events. Conceptual approaches are also shaped by this interaction, some of which continue to inform endeavours within and outside the country, and could be analytically useful. Yet, as with any attempt that seeks to consider the past, to inform the present and possibly the future: careful selection of subject, theme and period, etc., are requisite, and should inform the whole, not becoming convenient fits to an analytical problem.<sup>38</sup> Concomitantly, recognition is necessary that extensive reflection is a requisite constant, in order to make sense of continuities, impacts and changes.

Of the more entrenched paradigmatic issues affecting analysis of Afghanistan, past and present, relates to the lack of a presence of clear consistent terms through which to assess the intervention and recent efforts in Afghanistan in various ways (by 'recent' I mean since *circa* 2001). Although this may at first appear to be an appeal about definitions in the way a pedant may prosecute a perfunctory argument, closer inspection reveals not only effects on articulating intentions but also thinking and actions toward Afghanistan. Precision of language is key as it has meaning, meaning through and by which important ideas can be given meaning and coherence in contrast to contributing to confusion. Furthermore, in an even more practical sense, precision of language has implications beyond symptoms or perspectives of actual delivery, it also weighs heavily upon how we view what could, should and what may be deliverable.

---

<sup>35</sup> The international community's objective for Afghanistan is for it to be a safe, secure and prosperous country and full member of the international community of states As is stated in the UNAMA mandate, which necessarily provides an expression of the vision of the international community, given UNAMA's formal mandating by the UN Security Council (and agreed to by Afghanistan's sovereign government).

<sup>36</sup> The distinction between military and civilian efforts is at once important but also subject to complications for various reasons, which include the necessity of civilian oversight to military efforts and the frequent necessity to carry out roles and responsibilities – even among humanitarian actors – to consult, coordinate and de-conflict with the military. Relations between civilian and military actors have been a substantial challenge in Afghanistan for both simple and complex reasons. More precisely elements within each have, intentionally or unintentionally, overly politicized relations between them at times. This observation stems from the author's own experiences 2009-2015 and discussions with a wide range of local, civilian and military interlocutors: national and international.

<sup>37</sup> For example, of emphasis on incoherence and not as much attention to conceptual fundamentals and issues therein, see: Stapleton, Barbara, J. & Keating, Michael (2015) 'Military and Civilian Assistance to Afghanistan 2001–14: An Incoherent Approach' *Chatham House Briefing Paper, Opportunity in Crisis Series*, London. Available:

[https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field\\_document/20150722MilitaryCivilianAssistanceAfghanistanStapletonKeating.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150722MilitaryCivilianAssistanceAfghanistanStapletonKeating.pdf) accessed December 2015.

<sup>38</sup> For example, a positivist view of history is not assumed here.

Taking a step back for a few moments is an illustration of the ease of confusion, even before complex conditions are encountered and consequences ensue. This is, on the face of it, a terminological issue pertaining to one of the most central paradigms that also serves as a framework for military and civilian efforts - including in and towards Afghanistan. Indeed, it is liable to grave confusion of meaning, reception and appropriation. This is of the terms objective and aim. Implied and affected is thus strategy.

The terms objective and aim are often used in confidential policy making but also public statements of intent, in measurement and in reasoning. Each are defined by the Concise Oxford English Dictionary and the Merriam Webster Dictionary as synonyms, however, they are not always the same *or used in the same way*. Goal is another term not infrequently used interchangeably along with them. To contrast, in significant strands of civilian discourse aims are concerned with purpose and objectives with achievement.<sup>39</sup> In a political sense objectives are what are sought. Aims in military parlance can take the role of achievements to which resources are to relate. Clausewitz, the author of "On War" and a practitioner as well as theorist provides invaluable insight and precision here. As Strachan states:

Clausewitz realized the explanatory power of the role of policy, he could go on to construct a 'trinitarian' view of war that was made up not of people, army and government, but of tactics, strategy and policy – a construction that could be further development in another 'triad', that of means, aims and objectives.

Policy, strategy and tactics, or put the other way, objectives, aims and means, are distinct levels (the first of each triad being the 'highest'). Although distinct levels, in practice they do interact with each other.<sup>40</sup> What is essential is the use of clear language and the concepts, which underpin the language. From there further precision can be achieved through clear questioning and interrogation.

Independence of the civilian from the military and the military from the civilian have both been held up as important<sup>41</sup> but so is a comprehensive conception; a cohesive starting point from which policy, strategy and tactics can configure and be configured. Necessary adjustments can be crafted in respect of sensitivities, particularities, preferences and proscriptions while maintaining a necessity of clarity and consistency congruent with policy adjudged to be realistic and achievable.<sup>42</sup>

Adding to this thrust is 'strategy': a term that has for quite sometime suffered from some of the greatest depredations of casual, or some might state – careless -- use. Strategy is now used so broadly that it has been robbed of meaning.<sup>43</sup> It is also a term often used by leadership figures.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> For example in education and also business literature, though within these there can be wide variation.

<sup>40</sup> Strachan (2013) p.58.

<sup>41</sup> For instance the famous military thinking Helmuth von Moltke the elder held that the politician should fall silent when the war broke out. Politicians are often (rightly) adamant that the military should be able to deliver policy under conditions such as war and in various conflicts. Further, humanitarian principles call for independence from political and military actors (the latter in practice in particular) in order to have access to all areas where humanitarian needs may arise. Nevertheless key for both actors in the same environment to have a clear grasp of each other's perspectives and at least a similar language through which they can effectively communicate.

<sup>42</sup> This understanding needs to be developed over time, and ideally prior to engagement in war or conflict conditions, when the uncertainties – fog of war – which characterize it: passion, chance and reason, render communication of utmost importance, and learning whilst doing much more challenging and prone to errors which can be costly. Internal complications and civil-military tensions often grow during this time, too potentially strongly politicizing even terminological discussions (author's personal experience).

<sup>43</sup> As observed by Strachan (2013) p.27.

However, strategy is essential for acuity of insight and focus in numerous respects, perhaps most apt here to note: it lies at the intersection of policy and tactics, or at the intersection of objectives and means (as above). As Strachan has observed:

[B]y 2003 it [strategy] has lost its identity: part of it had been subsumed by policy and part of it had been subsumed by operational thought [tactics/means]. Because neither the politicians nor the soldiers had a clear grasp of what strategy was, they could neither put the pieces back together again nor develop a clear grasp of the nature of the wars in which they were engaged.<sup>45</sup>

The effect of terminological misapplication and its effects, as observed by Strachan, were to prevent governments from having the intellectual tools to manage war for political purposes. Instead, various political agendas (not congruent with the latter), daily political concerns and counterproductive aims were projected into strategy.<sup>46</sup> Terrorism, the instancing of which is at the roots of the rationale for the intervention in Afghanistan, is indeed the most obvious case in point.<sup>47</sup> To take the idea of the effect of unclear grasping at terminology and concepts between key actors further, the relationship between government, military and population also sees major misconception and not infrequently unclear shared conceptions of the war in Afghanistan. This can go considerable way to explaining the contentiousness in connection with the war in Afghanistan and the ends, ways and means about its continuation.

### **Triad, the Trinity and Deeper Tensions**

Much of the discourse about Afghanistan and other countries since the intervention began, but also the rationales for it, involves the relationship between civilians, the military and government, either explicitly or implicitly.<sup>48</sup> The triad of government, military and the people has been postulated as key regarding intervention and the relationship of military forces with other actors by important thinkers such as Smith (2011). This is as a result of theorization and praxis, and is in the case of Smith based on his wealth of experiences of and in major contemporary interventions (Northern Ireland, Iraq 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War, Bosnia) and through the changing character of war (from the Cold War to interventions). Major academic scholars of Clausewitz such as Paret & Howard (1976) have also come up with a similar interpretation of this triad, also identifying it as the trinity of utmost importance to Clausewitz's enormously influential and classic work "On War."<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> For example, in major announcements by President Obama on Afghanistan and Pakistan 2009 through 2015 and White Papers, such as that of 2009 on Afghanistan and Pakistan (see references for a list of these and links).

<sup>45</sup> Strachan (2013) p. 21.

<sup>46</sup> Strachan (2013) p.21 argues along the same line, although more has been added such as: various political agendas, and; counterproductive aims. These will be clarified further later in the paper.

<sup>47</sup> The significance of this will be explored in more detail later in the paper, particularly as an overarching theme in the identification of threats, risks and opportunities and in contrast to war of necessity and of purpose.

<sup>48</sup> For instance, the UNSC resolutions cited above in respect of Afghanistan, see also appendix 1 for more detail.. Also statements by leaders of countries involved in the intervention see this, for example in the invocation of inalienable rights of peoples to select their leaders and a representative government, the formation of security forces to ensure safety and the development of government institutions and development. Variations in detail on this major theme of government, the people and the military are almost infinite. This triad can also see reflections in other configurations informing approaches in the study of politics, government and governance, war, and sociology. The importance of identifying and understanding approaches to conceptions of the triad of government, the people and the military should not be underestimated in importance for clarifying agendas and indeed conceptual issues as part of them.

<sup>49</sup> von Clausewitz, Carl (1950) *On war. translation* O.J. Matthijs Jolles, Washington D.C.

This, however, stems from a misunderstanding of the trinity Clausewitz identified, its role and most eruditely its inter-relationship, with ramifications for application, expectations and approaches (including of and for analysis). The 'trinity' Smith identifies is one of the people, government and military, which: "is crucial to all forms of war, to this very day";<sup>50</sup> "is a useful tool with which to analyse the actor's purpose and activities";<sup>51</sup> can be held in "harmony";<sup>52</sup> can be "strengthened"<sup>53</sup> or be broken;<sup>54</sup> and in his "experience in both national and international operations...without all three elements of the trinity – state, military and the people – it is not possible to conduct a successful military operation, especially not over time."<sup>55</sup>

As Strachan (2013) notes: the trinity's "three elements are not the people, the army and the government, but passion, chance and reason." And that although "Clausewitz went on to associate each of these three elements more particularly with the feelings of the people, the exercise of military command and the political direction of the government"<sup>56</sup> they are not synonymous. This is not to imply that the relevance of Clausewitz is found in a state-centric analysis of war as others have done, and for different reasons or as a result of a variety of influences.<sup>57</sup> To do so moves from the 'trinity' itself to its application; rendering what for Clausewitz was the primordial trinity the secondary one: in so doing the components of the state are put in front of the attributes which comprise war. Indeed, "the army and the government are elements of the state, not of war."<sup>58</sup>

I would submit here, for example, 'the people' could be conceived of, understood and appropriated in many different ways. For instance, in three major manifestations (and to continue the pattern of 'threes'): (a) within the (intervening) state; (b) as part of the 'enemy'; and (c) as the populace of the country intervened in. Yet there are many potential combinations and permutations. Privileging one association of people with passion, chance or reason, over another, substantially misses the point befuddling the interaction of ends, ways and means and threatening the effective conduct of war where not all aspects are under control or controllable. Similarly, such an approach makes it analytically complicated to isolate a discrete element such as 'the people' towards sustaining it as part of a triad or series of triads -- in the context of war. To do so, particularly with the aim of holding such an element in this triad in harmony, or for it to be strengthened, or indeed broken in an instrumental fashion amid deeper complexity misses the goal.

---

<sup>50</sup> Smith, Rupert (2005) *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, London: Allen & Lane, Kindle edition location 1138.

<sup>51</sup> Smith (2005) Kindle edition location 5174.

<sup>52</sup> Smith (2005) Kindle edition location 3173.

<sup>53</sup> Smith (2005) Kindle edition location 3964.

<sup>54</sup> Smith (2005) Kindle edition location 4089.

<sup>55</sup> Smith (2005) Kindle edition location 1138.

<sup>56</sup> Strachan (2013) p. 46.

<sup>57</sup> This has occurred at different points, notable among which are the influence of: the crisis of the Vietnam War, and calls for a state-centric view to guard against perceived distraction on insurgency, see for example: Summers, Harry G. jr., (1982) *On strategy: a critical analysis of the Vietnam War*, Novato, CA. Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) and the 'system of systems' approach has also informed network-centric warfare with inconclusive results in areas such as targeted killings of insurgent and designated terrorist group leadership. For RMA regarding this period and the situation of Clausewitz, see for example: Shimko, Keith, L. (2010) *The Iraq wars and America's military revolution*, New York. Regarding the New Wars thesis, see: Van Creveld, Martin (1991) *The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz*, Free Press. And also: Kaldor, Mary (1999) *New and old wars: organized violence in a global era*, Cambridge, Mass.. On misunderstanding Clausewitz more generally see: Keegan, John (1993) *A history of warfare*, London, and also Bassford, Christopher (1994) 'John Keegan and the grand tradition of trashing Clausewitz: a polemic', *War in history*, 1, pp. 319-36.

<sup>58</sup> Strachan (2013) p. 46.

Moreover, the trinity Clausewitz identifies is not on three levels of: the government, military and people, as ventured by Smith and others.<sup>59</sup> That would be a triad. The Clausewitzian trinity is a true trinity; it is three in one (in the Christian sense) with the connotations this has.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Clausewitz was clear that the relationship of the three elements of the trinity was akin to magnets: alternately attracting and rejecting each other, so never forming a fixed relationship and of a more dynamic nature as is war.<sup>61</sup>

Smith does, however, identify a useful triad for analysis despite his problematic expectations of it and erroneous attribution to Clausewitz (as others have done). Other expectations of the use of the triad of government, military and the people -- and its instrumentalization to promote political change for ideological reasons can be seen in numerous policies, 'strategies' and decisions relating to Afghanistan and further afield.<sup>62</sup> This has been done without due accord with and respect for the trinity Clausewitz in fact identifies (passion, chance and reason). Our analytical assumptions, practices and expectations have also likely been affected by this conceptual manifestation. Smith is nevertheless correct in his underlining that the claim is erroneous that "there is a point at which policy as politics and diplomacy is stopped and war commences". Although his contention these are "parallel activities" is not quite the case. It is more that "political and military *objectives* are...definitely separate but wholly related."<sup>63</sup> (Italics my emphasis.)

Using war as an instrument is therefore less straightforward than some have supposed or argued in favour of in contrast to earlier typologies of war (e.g. mass-industrialized warfare) and contradictory to Clausewitz's wisdom; more specifically his famous and enduring trinity. The latter is in essence not consistent with instrumentalizing the triad of the state, people and military as war and its object. Despite the aforementioned erroneous observations and concepts developed arising out of them (with a general evolution in related footnotes) some muddling pertaining to the trinity appears to be more inadvertent in some cases more than others (for example, contrast Smith (2005) with Kaldor (1999)). Unfortunately, the wrong conclusions can be arrived at both by misinterpretation and incorrect rationalization of war with far-ranging ramifications for policy, strategy and operations, be they civil, military and other kinds.

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Strachan (2013) p. 50.

<sup>61</sup> Clausewitz stated: "A theory which insisted on leaving one of them out of account, or on fixing an arbitrary relationship between them, would immediately fall into such contradiction with reality that through this alone it would forthwith necessarily be regarded as destroyed." Carl von Clausewitz (1950) *On war*, trans. O.J. Matthijs Jolles, Washington D.C., p. 18.

<sup>62</sup> More on this in relation to the Global War on Terror – a major frame of analysis – later in this paper.

<sup>63</sup> Smith (2005) Kindle edition location 1146.

## **Chapter 2: Progress and Setbacks in the Afghan Peace Process**

*Emily Winterbotham*

In 2015 the conditions for peace in Afghanistan appeared more conducive than ever before and there were tentative hopes that a peace process might finally be emerging. The announcement of the death of Mullah Omar soon dashed these expectations. In the wake of the announcement, the second round of peace talks was cancelled and there were fears that the Taliban could fragment. As violence escalates across Afghanistan, inflicting heavy casualties on civilians, the prospect for peace seems as elusive as ever. This paper aims, firstly, to provide an overview of the various developments in the Afghan peace process and, secondly, to reflect on the potential next steps and the prevailing obstacles in the path of peace. It concludes with a tentative assessment of what the expectations are for the peace process in 2016.



## Looking back: progress and setbacks in 2015

The near-complete departure of US troops, the transfer of Taliban leaders from Guantanamo and the handover of responsibility for all detainees in Afghanistan to the Afghan government helped to remove the main reasons the Taliban had given for its refusal to meet the government. Hamid Karzai, who the Taliban had consistently refused to negotiate with, was out of office and the election of Ashraf Ghani as president provided an opportunity for progress. Ghani made peace a top priority of his presidency while his predecessor was widely perceived to give the rhetoric of peace but lack a coherent approach to back it up.

From the outset, Ghani's vision was to regionalise the peace process and reduce foreign sources of support and financing in order to force the Taliban to the negotiation table. This involved attempts to reach out to China (which he believes can influence its ally, Pakistan), at least three visits to Saudi Arabia, and constructive engagement with Pakistan itself (particularly on economic matters). The most controversial aspect of the strategy was that Ghani appeared to have concluded that cooperation with Pakistan was the only way to bring peace. Ghani's aim was to persuade Pakistan – with the help of regional and international actors – that it could achieve important national objectives without the use of proxy forces, emphasising that these could ultimately destroy Pakistan itself. This was based on two key assumptions: firstly, that the military campaign of the Taliban was dependent on access to Pakistan's territory. Secondly, that Pakistan's calculus, based on the strategic logic of building a bulwark against increased Indian influence in Afghanistan, had changed. The hope was that Pakistan's growing concern about the Tehrik-e Taiyba (TTP) after a series of attacks, the most devastating of which was the December 2014 Peshawar school attack, had finally convinced Pakistan of the dangers of engaging in proxy warfare and the need to improve security on both sides of the border.

The strategy was backed up by engaging with China in the hope it would use its historically strong links with Pakistan to put pressure on the country in regards to the peace process and its continued use of proxies. During the Heart of Asia ministerial (Ghani's first formal official foreign trip) at the end of October 2014 he lobbied China to use its links to Islamabad to help his country. For its part, Beijing appeared finally ready to demonstrate it was willing to play a peace-broker role in Afghanistan including by offering to host a meeting between the Taliban and the Afghan government during a Taliban visit to Beijing after the Heart of Asia conference. This was surprising for a nation that continues to profess non-interference in other countries internal affairs as the core of its foreign policy credo.<sup>64</sup> In the short-term, Chinese interests are to make Afghanistan stable to enable economic investment. In the long-term their interests are in creating a transit trade region (the Chinese Silk Road Belt) and undertake mineral exploitation in Afghanistan to enable long lasting stability in the country and the region.<sup>65</sup> Also part of the calculation is hedging against a persistent Chinese concern that permanent American bases in Afghanistan might be part of a strategy to encircle China.

Any strategy with Pakistan at its centre is politically risky in Afghanistan given the widespread domestic suspicion of Pakistan. As Ghani's strategy unfolded, Afghan officials came out in public opposition. The former head of the National Security Council, Rangin Dadfar Spanta, called the approach 'absolute appeasement' while Karzai warned against falling back 'under Pakistan's thumb.' Critics perceived that this was the latest stage in Pakistan's game to retain strategic depth in Afghanistan. Moves to curb military ties with India in an attempt to appease Pakistan were also widely criticised.

---

<sup>64</sup> Raffaello Pantucci, "Will China Bring Peace to Afghanistan?" *RUSI Newsbrief*, (RUSI: London, 27 Feb 2015).

<sup>65</sup> Pantucci, "Will China Bring Peace to Afghanistan."

Challenges were seen from the outset. Though never publicly announced, in private Ghani - during his first visit to Pakistan in November 2014 - had let it be known that the strategy included a deadline by which he expected to see progress.<sup>66</sup> This was driven by the hope of avoiding the annual spike in violence during the spring. In the event, the Taliban officially launched their spring campaign on the 24 April and by early summer it seemed that the Afghan government position had shifted to accepting that the fighting season would follow the normal course even if talks were under way.

At the same time, there were positive signs that things were finally moving in the right direction. During a visit to Kabul on 17 February, Army Chief Raheel Sharif announced that the 'enemies of Afghanistan are also enemies of Pakistan;' allegedly during the same visit, he communicated a message from the Taliban of their willingness to talk to the Afghan government.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, in February news sources started reporting that the Taliban were apparently undertaking a round of discussions in Pakistan as part of a reconciliation effort with the Kabul government in part aided by China.<sup>68</sup> Some sources<sup>69</sup> also reported that Pakistan was also prepared to threaten to end the group's sanctuary. Meetings also took place in Urumqui, China, and in Abu Dhabi in May between the Taliban and Afghan government representatives. Though these meetings were denied, in the first instance, or downplayed as unofficial in the second, there appeared to be growing pressure on the Taliban from a number of sources, which was leading to their willingness for talks. Indeed, vigour in the peace process appeared to be the result of evolving regional relationships, especially between Afghanistan, Pakistan and China.

The strongest evidence that the Afghan peace process had finally started to take shape was on 7 July in Murree, Pakistan, which marked the first ever official meeting between the two warring sides. The Afghan delegation, led by the Deputy Foreign Minister and a senior member of the High Peace Council (HPC), was representative of the National Unity Government (NUG) while the Taliban delegation included members of "such seniority and authority that the conclusion was that the meeting was endorsed by the leadership".<sup>70</sup> In the wake of the meeting the NUG called the meeting 'the start of the first ever official peace talks,' while Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif proclaimed it a 'breakthrough.' Though the meeting produced little of tangible value aside from the decision to meet again, it was subsequently endorsed by Mullah Omar in his Eid message, a further sign of its legitimacy (at least for the time being).<sup>71</sup> For the embattled Afghan president facing a worsening security situation any sign of progress in the peace process was timely and welcome. It was also vindication for President Ghani regarding his policy of outreach to Pakistan.

What no observer had anticipated was that the announcement of the long rumoured death of Mullah Omar would have presented the first obstacle in the peace process. On 30 July 2015, the media started leaking reports of the demise of the reclusive leader followed by an admission from the Taliban that they had covered up the death for more than two years. The timing of the

---

<sup>66</sup> Interviews with Afghan and international diplomats, Kabul, February 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Jon Boone and Sune Engel Rasmussen, "Talks Could Begin Between Taliban and Afghan Government after 13 Years of War," *Guardian*, 19 February, 2015.

<sup>68</sup> Pantucci, "Will China Bring Peace to Afghanistan."

<sup>69</sup> Interviews with international diplomats, Kabul, February 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Theo Farrell and Michael Semple, "Making Peace with the Taliban," *Survival*, Vol. 57: 6 (December 2015 – January 2016), pp. 79 – 110.

<sup>71</sup> "Taliban Leader Mullah Omar hails peace talks to end Afghanistan war," *Guardian*, 15 July 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/15/taliban-leader-mullah-omar-hails-peace-talks-to-end-afghanistan-war>

announcement- coming after the first round of peace talks and just before the much anticipated second round it appeared an attempt by spoilers to derail the nascent process. Accusations about who leaked the news were heard on all sides; Pakistan notoriously blaming Afghan and Indian intelligence services, however, it is more likely that the anti-peace talk's faction of the Taliban was to blame. The Taliban faces an internal power struggle, in part over budding Pakistan-brokered peace talks with the Afghan Government and, in the event, the first casualty of the announcement was the peace process. The second round of peace talks, scheduled for later that week, was cancelled while the revelation that Mullah Omar could not have given the process his backing likely undermined the legitimacy of the first round.

Amid concerns that the Taliban could splinter, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour was announced as the new Supreme Leader of the Taliban on the same day as Omar's death. As deputy leader - who from early 2013 – July 2015 had the consent of the movement's two top religious scholars, members of the leadership council and two male relatives of Mullah Omar to keep the death secret and to act as de facto leader<sup>72</sup> - he assumed the top role from a relative position of strength. The transition was not without challenge and there were reports of dissent at the top. Though, for the time being, the national structures and military command have declared their loyalty to Mansour, including potential rival contenders such as military commander Abdul Qayum Zakir and Mullah Omar's 26-year old son, Mullah Yuqub. Moreover, operationally, Mullah Omar had been absent for many years; a fact clearly demonstrated by the Taliban military campaign, which continued undeterred. That being said, it is important not to ignore the symbolic power of Omar not only for Taliban unity but also for the peace process, which will be discussed in the second section of this report.

### **Backdrop to the peace process: Taliban steps up its military campaign**

The Taliban's spring campaign aimed for the 'complete liberation of our homeland,' reflecting their intent to test the strength of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF). Throughout 2015 the Taliban secured gains in Helmand, Uruzgan and Kandahar in the South and Kunduz, Faryab, Badakhshan in the North. In the taking of Kunduz City, in particular, the Taliban sent a clear message that most Afghan cities are vulnerable (Winterbotham and Giustozzi, 2015).

These trends should be interpreted carefully. They do not mean that the Taliban are winning in the sense of being able to recapture and hold several population centres across the country. Though the capture of Kunduz city was a significant propaganda coup, and the fulfilment of a key Taliban stated objective of 2015, it was also reflective of the fault lines in the National Unity Government and the ethnic geography of the area.<sup>73</sup> The success has also not yet been replicated elsewhere. According to data compiled by the Long War Journal, only thirty-seven of Afghanistan's 398 districts are under Taliban control – involving open administration of the area – and another thirty-nine are contested (9 December)<sup>74</sup>.

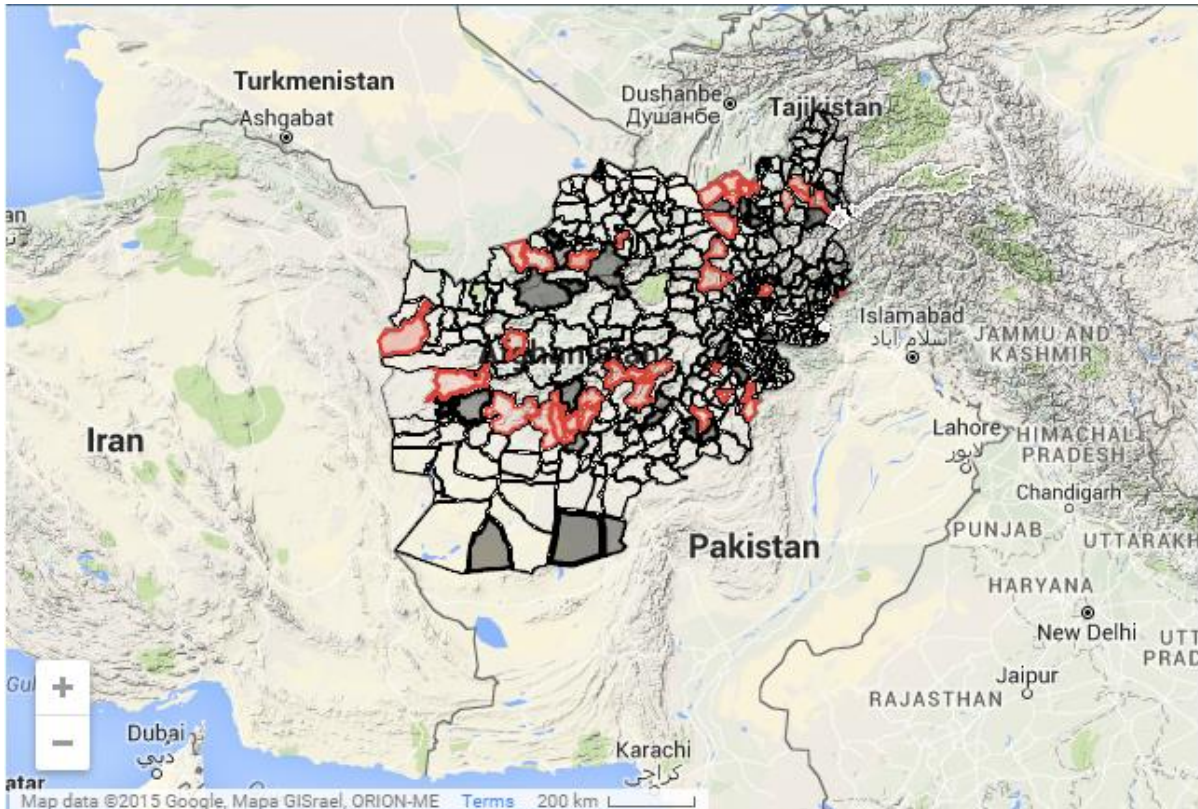
---

<sup>72</sup> Farrell and Semple, "Making Peace with the Taliban."

<sup>73</sup> See Farrell and Semple, "Making Peace with the Taliban" for more information regarding the context to the Kunduz attacks and Emily Winterbotham and Antonio Giustozzi, "The Fall of Kunduz and the Resurgent Taliban," *RUSI Newsbrief*, November 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Threat Matrix, blog of the Long War Journal, 9 December 2015

<http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/12/taliban-overruns-district-in-southern-afghanistan.php>



**Figure 2: Control and Influence of Taliban in December 2015.**

Source: Based on an analysis by *The Long War Journal*, 35 of Afghanistan’s 398 districts are under Taliban control, and another 38 districts are contested. Map created by Bill Roggio, Caleb Weiss, and Patrick Megahan.

That said, even taking into account the fact that the precise figures are debated – NATO for example refers to far lower numbers - and the control of districts rapidly fluctuates, it is clear that more districts are under Taliban control now than they were six months ago, a fact recognised by the United Nations. A routine, but non-public report released by the UN<sup>75</sup> revealed that the Taliban insurgency had spread through more of Afghanistan than at any point since their downfall in 2001 with over half of the districts in Afghanistan rated by as having either a substantial, high or extreme level of risk. As an analyst from the International Crisis Group stated:

*“The insurgency is breaking all previous records, reaching a ferocity that we haven't seen at any point since 2001. This is reflected in the number of attacks by the Taliban and other militant groups, in the death and injury rates among Afghan security forces, and in the recent territorial gains by insurgents. All of these indicators suggest a conflict that is now bigger than ever, and continuing to worsen.”<sup>76</sup>*

Clearly emboldened by the departure of NATO and keen to test the new government in Kabul, an intense fighting season had always been anticipated despite some hope that progress with peace talks might lead to a ceasefire. At least for the time being, the Taliban clearly remains committed to continuing their military campaign. There are some among the movement who still believe they can win militarily while the more pragmatic see the advantage in improving their negotiation position to

<sup>75</sup> “UN Data Finds Insurgency More Widespread Than Ever” *Tolo News*, 12 October 2015, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/21842-un-data-finds-insurgency-more-widespread-than-ever>

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Graeme Smith, International Crisis Group, May 2015.

obtain more concessions from the Afghan government and also remain sensitive of the need to retain followers. Any hope that the Taliban might be weakened by a leadership struggle after the news of Omar's death were dashed by the wave of deadly attacks on Kabul in the summer, which were widely perceived as a message of intent from the Taliban.

In 2014, the ANDSF reportedly suffered the highest number of casualties in one year, though no accurate figures exist, these are believed to have increased in 2015. How long the ANDSF can keep sustaining these losses and the subsequent impact on their morale is unclear. For the time being, however, the ANSDF appears able to withstand Taliban offensives though with limited international military support: US plans to reduce forces in Afghanistan from 9800 to 5500 by the end 2015 was scrapped in face of increasing concerns in Washington about the ability of the ANDSF to check the Taliban's resurgence. NATO Allies have also agreed to sustain their presence during 2016. While the Taliban may claim they are winning and recent events do little to disprove that, the reality is that there is a military stalemate, which is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

### **Where next for the Afghan peace process?**

After such a strong start at the beginning of his presidency, Ghani's regional strategy appears to be floundering. Tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan hit a new all time low following the attacks in Kabul, which the Afghan government attributed to Haqqani. Ahead of the UN General Assembly in September, reflecting a dramatic shift, Ghani stated the two countries were in an 'undeclared' war.<sup>77</sup> Recently relations have started to thaw - reflected by Ghani's late in the day decision to attend the Heart of Asia meeting in Islamabad in December. However, the belief on Pakistan's side, particularly among the military, is still that the ball is in Afghanistan's court. Meanwhile, Ghani's narrative is that he has fulfilled all that was expected of him and needs Pakistan to take action in return.

The latest answer to Afghanistan's security dilemma and relationship with Pakistan that has emerged from the Heart of Asia conference is to offer incentives to Pakistan to act. The TAPI pipeline, which will pass from Turkmenistan to India through Afghanistan and Pakistan, was inaugurated on 13 December. The pipeline will give Pakistan desperately-needed energy, and transit revenues from gas headed to India — but construction work in Afghanistan can only begin if there's relative peace.

The reality is that the goal of the military, which are still controlling Pakistan's Afghanistan policy (and most other significant issues to an increasing degree), remains having a client regime in Kabul, particularly in light of the heightened tensions with India on the one hand and the ongoing struggles of the National Unity Government (both politically and militarily) on the other. The leverage of China over Pakistan and, particularly over its military, will therefore remain significant. Though China is perhaps somewhat more cautious, and privately expresses concerns about Mansour's ability to bring the Taliban behind a peace process, the recent visit of the Vice President to Afghanistan (though producing nothing tangible) was a signal of China's continued willingness to engage in Afghanistan, which likely extends the support for the peace process.

However, while many observers believe that Pakistan could have made life significantly more difficult for the Taliban, it is difficult not to agree with the conclusion that the Murree talks show that "[Pakistan] may be able to lead the Taliban to the negotiating table but this does not mean they can make them negotiate."<sup>78</sup> Although the Afghan security establishment clings to the belief that the

---

<sup>77</sup> Eltaf Najafizada, "Afghan Leader Blasts Pakistan 'Undeclared War' After Deaths," *Bloomberg*, 10 August 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-08-10/pakistan-has-an-undeclared-war-on-in-afghanistan-ghani>

<sup>78</sup> Farrell and Semple, *Making Peace with the Taliban*.

Taliban is dependent on the Pakistani army and is not autonomous, it should be recognised that Pakistan cannot simply deliver the Taliban: the latter is by no means controlled entirely or exclusively by Pakistan, nor is it monolithic. There are Taliban groupings now in Doha, Qatar, and a fourth office in Mashad, Iran, which are no longer under Pakistan's control.

The stalemate situation with Pakistan could prompt the Afghan government to step up its engagement with other regional actors, notably, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkmenistan. Saudi Arabia is another component of Ghani's regional strategy due to the country's relationship with Pakistan, its (largely religious) influence over the Taliban as a result of its funding of madrassas in Pakistan<sup>79</sup> and alleged funding of militant groups in the region by private businessmen. However, Saudi Arabia's attention is focused elsewhere, at least for the time being. Qatar, as the host of the Taliban's Doha Office, responsible for external political affairs, could also apply some leverage over at least this faction of the Taliban. Though its history of applying this leverage is unclear and its influence over the Taliban's military commanders is reportedly limited.

Another track tentatively gaining traction again is the role of Turkmenistan with rumours of a Track I event in Ashgabat. The prospect of the engagement of Ashgabat has been on the horizon for a number of years with the idea of a Taliban consulate being formed there discussed prior to the opening of the Doha Office in 2013. Apparently, Ashgabat hopes that by playing the role of mediator, it can secure some protection for Turkmenistan from further direct involvement in the Afghan conflict, especially if it begins to spill over the border to surrounding states. Such fears are clearly genuine and explain why, perhaps as a secondary precaution, Ashgabat has simultaneously taken measures to increase its border protection capabilities. The launch of TAPI means Turkmenistan has more at stake now in promoting Afghanistan's stability while it has also gained leverage over Pakistan. Until the project is up and running, it will be difficult to ascertain whether this will significantly change the status quo.

Another actor not to ignore is the role and influence of Iran. As Iran opens up, it is likely to attempt to increase its influence in Afghanistan, both via economic relations and political ties. In recent years, Iran has reached out to the Taliban; a fourth grouping of the movement, akin to an office, is based in Mashad. Iran also provides support to Zakir and, more recently, to a dissident Taliban group, discussed further below. Initially, Iran's main goal was to counter the American presence in neighbouring Afghanistan and, possibly, in the long-term, to secure a seat at the table in the event of any Afghan peace process. More recently, Iran is preoccupied by countering ISIS inside Afghanistan. Iran could therefore step up its engagement with the Central Asian countries to establish some form of security cooperation to avoid a spill-over resulting from ISIL militants' infiltration in the region, and the Afghan government could be included as part of the process. The reality is that while expectations about Pakistan perhaps need to be reassessed, continued engagement and outreach towards Pakistan, will remain key to the Afghan peace process.

### **The Taliban's strategy.**

Neither the Afghan government nor the Taliban can win militarily. The strategic reality is that there is a stalemate, which creates a compelling logic for peace talks. However, Taliban military advancements make the task of peace negotiation more difficult, because many insurgent commanders still believe they can make greater progress on the battlefield than at the negotiating table. High-profile gains like Kunduz mean that the Taliban is likely to anticipate that its bargaining

---

<sup>79</sup> Akhilesh Pillalamarri, "The Radicalization of South Asian Islam: Saudi Money and the Spread of Wahhabism", George Town Security Studies Review, 20 December, 2014, <http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2014/12/20/the-radicalization-of-south-asian-islam-saudi-money-and-the-spread-of-wahhabism/>

position is improving over time, while that of the government is falling. The military assessment of each side vis-a-vis the other at end of fighting season could therefore have a significant impact on the peace process in 2016. If the Taliban do feel they have been winning, they are unlikely to re-enter peace talks unless significant conditions are offered. This does not necessarily preclude the prospect of peace talks. Within the Taliban, different actors with different aims continue to coexist. While there are those who may be more convinced than ever that they can win militarily, Mansour may be even more interested in engaging in talks with the government if he believes he can carry more members of the Taliban with him from a newfound position of strength.<sup>80</sup>

There are signs of hope. Although Mansour has demonstrated his determination to continue to wage conflict, he tends to be seen as a pragmatist in favour of a negotiated political settlement. It is of note that the period of the Mullah Omar cover-up coincided with key developments in peace process, with Mansour clearly involved. Most recently, the Taliban have introduced Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai (deputy health minister and later deputy foreign minister under the Taliban) and Abdul Salam Hanafi, an Uzbek, (deputy minister for education under the Taliban) as the head and deputy head of Qatar office respectively. This is the first time that the Taliban leadership has appointed key senior members who are not from Kandahar or related to Durani branch of Pashtuns, suggesting an attempt to broaden Mansour's support base.<sup>81</sup> Both men are also believed to be supportive of peace and Stanikzai has participated in several unofficial peace discussions, including in Iran and Pakistan.

### **Prevailing obstacles**

Despite some openings for the peace process, the reality is that there are many obstacles in the way. Without entering too deeply into the debate over the unity of the Taliban (see Giustozzi versus Semple), the Taliban is by no means monolithic and there are serious divisions among the Taliban leadership over the question of engaging in peace talks. These divisions appear to extend to a certain degree to the three shuras, Quetta, Peshawar and Miranshah, and the Mashad office. Not all leaders are happy about being pressured to negotiate before they are ready, opposing the Bilateral Security Agreement with the US and fearing that peace talks could drive the rank-and-file towards rival groups, such as Daesh.

The announcement of Mullah Omar's death therefore brought to the surface existing fault lines that had been haunting the movement for some years. This has implications for the peace process. While some analysts perceive opportunities resulting from Taliban fragmentation based on the hope that the breakaway factions could be negotiated with, in reality these splinter groups are not likely to be in a significant number to alter the course of the conflict nor is it guaranteed that they can be negotiated with. Fragmentation carries significant dangers. On the one hand there is an emerging alternative in ISIS, discussed further down, but on the other the loss of chain of command can escalate violence as groups seek to engage in "outbidding." The position expressed here is that a unified leadership able to command the majority support of the movement will make it easier when comes to peace talks with the Afghan government. It is hard not to agree with the conclusion of the former ambassador for Pakistan to Afghanistan Rustam Shah Mohmand:

*"They will never be the same again in terms of policy, integrity and their moves...there is a danger; if the Taliban was to split into five or six branches, peace talks will become even more difficult, and therefore immediate action is required."<sup>82</sup>*

---

<sup>80</sup> Winterbotham and Giustozzi, "The Fall of Kunduz and the Resurgent Taliban."

<sup>81</sup> Interview, national expert on the peace process, November 2015.

<sup>82</sup> "Post Mullah Omar: Experts discuss future of peace talks," *The Express Tribune, Pakistan*, 23 August 2015.

For the time being, the national structures and military command have backed Mansour. However, in early November a dissident faction publicly broke away due to discontent with Mansour. The group announced Mohammad Rasul as their new leader of the Higher Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, going so far as to declare a rival amir. This angered the Taliban and led to a major operation against dissidents in Zabul. The fighting left dozens of renegade fighters dead including deputy leader Mansour Dadullah during clashes between Taliban factions in Zabul. The public nature of these, and subsequent clashes, reflects the deepening divisions within the movement. This is not the only opposition to Mansour. The Head of the Doha Office, Tayyeb Agha, was the first to resign on 3 August because Mansour's appointment had been made outside Afghanistan and because Mansour had concealed Mullah Omar's death while Nek Muhammad and Aziz Rahman, founding members of the political commission's office in Qatar in 2013, also subsequently resigned.<sup>83</sup>

Even with Omar alive, it was far from certain that the bulk of Taliban cadres or ulema would abide by any settlement with Kabul that does not meet some key demands for the "Islamisation" of the Afghan state. This includes the fulfilment of longstanding demands that foreign military forces leave Afghanistan, UN sanctions be lifted, Taliban prisoners be freed, and the Afghan Constitution amended- conditions that were reiterated at the Pugwash conference in May.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, as Farrell and Semple have noted, the Taliban have strong doctrinal attachment to hierarchy, and are therefore averse to power sharing, which would be necessary for a sustainable peace.<sup>85</sup> Here, the more pragmatic Taliban leaders face big hurdles since these conditions are unlikely to be moderate enough for any negotiating counterpart in Kabul to accept and would likely be strongly resisted by the Afghan public, reflecting that intractable problems still divide the two sides.

This may make military campaign more attractive and there are divisions between military and political leaders over the peace process. According to a senior Taliban military figure interviewed by Farrell and Semple, the political group is against war while the military group is against the political group and think progress will be made through war. Military commanders are perhaps the most important internal constituency and "The easiest way for the leadership to patronise the military to date is to sustain armed campaign, which provides pretext for channelling resources to military."<sup>86</sup> The political leadership will therefore need to find something to offer the military in the event of a peace deal. The situation is further complicated by the military cooperation between the Taliban and a range of militant groups including deep links to Haqqani and Al Qaida, which remain opposed to any form of settlement. Collaboration with Haqqani has been strengthened with the appointment of Sarajuddin Haqqani, de facto leader of the Haqqani network, as a deputy to Mansour. Haqqani still have operational and financial semi-autonomy, but have now cemented their bond with the 'centre'.<sup>87</sup> Al Qaida also recently located its media arm, As-Sahab to Afghanistan from Pakistan where it had operated since 2002, then after almost a year of silence Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al Qaida's 64 year old leader proclaimed loyalty to Mansour.

While these rifts are currently not large enough to amount to a serious threat to the overall operational capabilities and organisational structure of the Taliban movement, they do pose serious challenges to reaching any potential peace deal. Even if a peace deal could be reached, it is unlikely that the leadership would be able to bring any more than two thirds of the movement behind the deal.

---

<sup>83</sup> Farrell and Semple, "Making Peace with the Taliban."

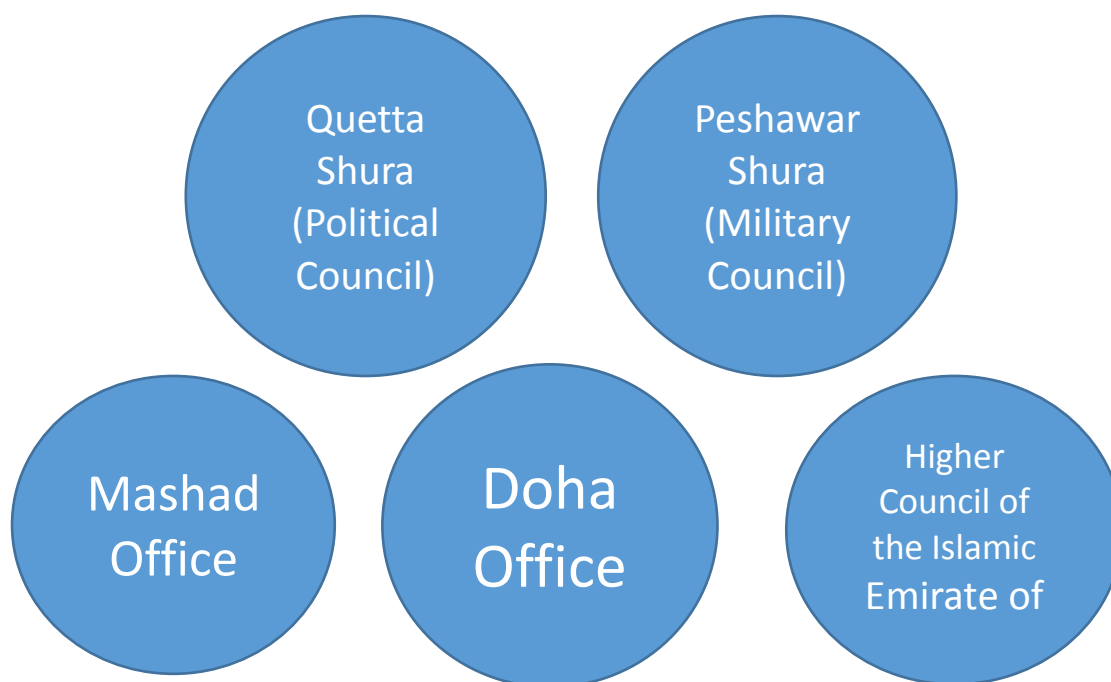
<sup>84</sup> Report of 2 Day Pugwash Meeting on Security in Afghanistan, Qatar, 2-3 May 2015, [https://pugwashconferences.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/20150503\\_doha\\_notes\\_pcr\\_fin.pdf](https://pugwashconferences.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/20150503_doha_notes_pcr_fin.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> Semple and Farrell "Making Peace with the Taliban."

<sup>86</sup> Farrell and Semple, "Making Peace with the Taliban."

<sup>87</sup> Farrell and Semple, "Making Peace with the Taliban."





**Figure 3: Taliban groupings**

The emergence of ISIS is a new complication. The extent of Islamic State’s presence in Afghanistan is difficult to gauge and appears to largely consist of the same old Taliban under a new black flag and foreign fighters, largely Central Asians, reportedly mostly Uzbeks from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.<sup>88</sup> ISIS has, however, made major inroads in turf battles against Taliban commanders, particularly in places in Nangahar Province. According to Afghan government sources, there are reports of sightings of groups with some form of ISIL branding or sympathy reported in 25 out of 34 provinces in Afghanistan.<sup>89</sup> In four districts south of Jalalabad, ISIS is ruling with the same ruthlessness that characterises the group’s regime in Syria and Iraq: public beheadings, strict adherence to Koranic teachings foreign to Afghanistan, and extortion.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, while there is still limited coordination with the main leadership in Iraq and Syria this could change. The ISIS brand offers an alternative to disaffected Taliban figures and evidence of money flowing from the core into Afghanistan including rumours that ISIS is paying a signing bonus of \$400 to \$500, a persuasive offer in a country with a lack of job prospects,<sup>91</sup> means the ISIS factor cannot be ignored not least by the Taliban leadership.

A further obstacle is that the Taliban’s fragmentation is mirrored to some degree on the Afghan side. There are powerbrokers that benefit from the current system and stand to lose if the Taliban are brought into the government. The recent alliance between Vice President Dostum’s Junbish-e Milli

<sup>88</sup> UN Security Council, Sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions

Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2160 (2014) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan, 1 June 2015, [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2015\\_648.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_648.pdf)

<sup>89</sup> UN Security Council, Sixth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team.

<sup>90</sup> Antony Lloyd, ISIS Invades Afghanistan, *The Times*, 5 December 2015. <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/asia/afghanistan/article4633105.ece>

<sup>91</sup> Farrell and Semple, “Making Peace with the Taliban.”

party and his long-term rival Atta Mohammad Noor, governor of Balkh, bringing together large bands of anti-Taliban militia reflects an increasingly aggressive approach. "General Dostum has a PhD in eliminating the Taliban" the ex warlord said about himself earlier this year.<sup>92</sup> This could have a polarising effect with repercussions for the peace process.

### **Expectations for 2016**

Speaking at a news conference in Kabul on the 11 December Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said "serious" reconciliation talks with pro-peace Taliban factions will begin very soon with the goal of reaching an agreement. This development was apparently reached during meetings in Islamabad on the sidelines of the Heart of Asia regional ministerial involving Pakistani, U.S. and Chinese officials.<sup>93</sup> Ghani's statement was followed hours later by attacks in Kabul city claimed by the Taliban, an indication of the Taliban's determination to continue their military offensive, at least for now.

The prospects for peace therefore appear bleak. The Taliban is likely to continue to fight to gain a stronger negotiating position and Mansour will be more aware than ever of the need to retain the support of his followers in the face of internal dissent. However, it is possible that Mansour will engage with renewed efforts in 2016 to kick-start the peace process. The rumours about an Ashgabat track have revived hopes of some kind of Track I process but it is far more likely that we will see a Track II Pugwash-style conversation emerging once again. The best hope perhaps lies in the big political tent that Mansour is building, by aggressively hitting rogue Taliban factions while simultaneously playing nice with the NGOs and certain Afghan ministries to offer a softer face. This, if successful, should preserve Taliban unity while maintaining engagement with the Afghan government. At the same time, it will be important to continue dialogue outside the main negotiation track and include, as Farrell and Semple advocate, work with prisoners (who have a stake), pro jihad ulema and communities in Afghanistan where Taliban operate.<sup>94</sup>

The reality is that it is not known how much leverage Pakistan has applied on the Taliban and how successful the Taliban leadership is at withstanding the leverage. It is unlikely that Pakistan will undergo a major shift approach in 2016 without a significant game changer. TAPI could be one game changer. Pakistan's Defence Minister, Khwaja Mohammad Asif, has said his country will use its influence on the Taliban for the security of the pipeline, the success of which will be seen in the coming months. ISIS could be another: the need to counter the greater threat of ISIS could inspire greater cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan and create regional incentives to resist the use of proxies in Afghanistan. The statement coming out of the Heart of Asia ministerial on 9 December expressed the resolve of participating countries to bring all factions and the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table and called for blocking financial assistance to terrorists. They also committed to take the steps necessary to counter and eliminate the menace of terrorism, all terrorist organisations, in particular al-Qaeda, Daesh (ISIL) and their affiliates, and any support to them and their enabling networks in the region. Positive rhetoric, but whether promises will translate into action will likely be tested in the coming year. Ultimately, stability will depend on whether a regional consensus can emerge on an end state of peace in Afghanistan.

---

<sup>92</sup> This was reported in a number of local news outlets.

<sup>93</sup> <http://m.voanews.com/a/afghan-president-says-he-expects-results-oriented-talks-with-taliban/3098847.html>

<sup>94</sup> Farrell and Semple, "Making Peace with the Taliban."

## **Chapter 3: Pakistan's Pursuit of Influence in Afghanistan**

*Shaun Gregory*

### **Introduction**

To a significant degree Pakistan inherited the British view of Afghanistan, both in terms of the strategic problematics posed by the country and in terms of the primacy of the military in dealing

with those strategic challenges. NATO's presence in the Afghan theatre has posed a particular set of problems for Pakistan, and NATO's drawdown and transition has recast those problems creating both opportunities and risks for Pakistan. In a regional context Pakistan is unarguably Afghanistan's most consequential neighbour and thus key to any prospect of future stability in the country<sup>95</sup>. This chapter seeks to capture the view from Islamabad, in particular that of the military and intelligence agency which dominate Afghan policy. It argues that whilst Pakistan seeks stability in Afghanistan in order to mitigate its own regional, bilateral and internal problems, its fears of Indian influence in Afghanistan, of Afghan irredentism and support for secessionist movements in Pakistan, and its anxieties about rising Iranian influence and entryism, mean Pakistan is likely to continue to take risks with stability in Afghanistan in order to curb the influence of the Afghan state and Pakistan's regional rivals.

The discussion which follows is presented in five parts. The first briefly outlines the main lines of Pakistan's historical security policy towards Afghanistan which have remained remarkably unchanged over the decades, reflecting both the consistency of the perceived strategic challenges posed by Afghanistan and the success of the Pakistan military and intelligence agencies in transmitting its particular construct of Afghanistan down the decades<sup>96</sup>. Whether that construct has served the best interests of Pakistan is an important corollary. The second part discusses the deep and multi-faceted "reach" of Pakistan into Afghanistan and explains why Pakistan is the most important of Afghanistan's neighbours in terms of any prospect of Afghanistan reaching a stable and secure future.

The third section assesses the impact of NATO's Afghan mission on Pakistan's policy-making towards Afghanistan and the implications of NATO's drawdown and transition for Pakistan. The fourth section looks at key strands of Pakistan's Afghan policy in the present context, relating the broader themes discussed in the foregoing to the contemporary complexities of NATO's Resolute Support Mission and follow-on support beyond end 2016. The last section briefly looks further ahead at some of the key factors likely to inform Pakistan's policy out to 2025 and at the policy options which are open to Pakistan as a result. In sum the paper seeks to explore and explain Pakistan's Afghan policy and what this means for the prospects of regional stability in the wake of NATO's declining presence.

### **The Consistency of Pakistan's Afghan Policy**

Afghanistan can be helpfully understood as a "buffer state" which sits between three important regional security complexes – South Asia, Central Asia and the Gulf/Middle East – and functions either to insulate the security dynamics of those regions from each other, or to serve as a conduit transmitting those dynamics between regions<sup>97</sup>. The age-old dilemma for any of Afghanistan's neighbours is thus whether to seal one's border against the intrusion of unwanted security problems through Afghanistan or to intervene in Afghanistan to seek to manage those problems at one remove. The British in India oscillated between these choices, interspersing a series of expeditionary wars (18-39-42, 1878-80, 1919) which attempted to assert direct British influence in Afghanistan to the exclusion of regional rivals, with long periods of strategic neglect in which the turbulent Afghan-

---

<sup>95</sup> For more see: Shaun Gregory, "Pakistan: Security Perspectives on Afghanistan", In: Aglaya Snetkov and Stephen Aris, *Regional Dimensions to Security: The Other Sides of Afghanistan*, Palgrave Press, 2013, pp 61-82; and, Shaun Gregory, "The View Across the Durand Line: Pakistan's Perspectives on Afghanistan, NATO Drawdown and the Prospects for a Post-Transition Peace", *Central Asian Affairs*, 2014, pp 90-107.

<sup>96</sup> The standard Pakistani text on Pakistan-Afghan history and relations is: Riaz Mohammed Khan, *Afghanistan and Pakistan: Conflict, Extremism and Resistance to Modernity*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.

<sup>97</sup> This conception draws on regional security complex theory (RSCT) though has much earlier antecedents. See,

Indian border region served to insulate British India from strategic challenge through Afghanistan. At the birth of the state in 1947 Pakistan inherited this British construct of Afghanistan and through Pakistan's Army, the main institutional inheritance of the "Raj", a military-centric approach to the Afghanistan "problem".

These dynamics were overlaid down the decades by a series of other structural challenges. Amongst these, and overarching all others, the geostrategic conflict with India. Pakistan's mortal rivalry with India, evidenced through four wars (1947/8, 1965, 1971, 1999) and neo-realist tensions and arms-racing, dominates Pakistan's Afghan policy. The centrepiece of this is Pakistan's struggle to limit and if possible exclude Indian influence in Afghanistan in order to avoid being trapped between two belligerent neighbours, and failing that to at least exclude India from those, largely Pashtun, areas in Afghanistan which border Pakistan.

Reflecting this Pakistan is antagonistic to leadership in Kabul which is supportive or permissive of Indian influence, and antagonistic also to external interventions – the Soviet Union in the 1970s/80s; NATO in the 2000s – which supports a government in Kabul that is supportive or permissive of India. Further the Pakistan state is hypersensitive to the issues of irredentism and secessionism which pose a territorial - many in Pakistan would argue existential - threat to the country. The trauma of partition in 1947, the struggle to accrete a viable state from Muslim majority areas, and the break-away of Eastern Pakistan/Bangladesh in 1971, have seared into the Pakistan state the importance of ensuring against further territorial loss. Afghanistan embodies just such a challenge in at least two respects: first it has long-standing claims on territory to the East of the Durand Line, the long border separating Afghanistan and Pakistan, claims which found an expression at one point in September 1950, in an incursion of Afghan tribesmen and, allegedly regular troops, into Pakistan's Pashtun belt, and thereafter formed an important element of tensions between the two<sup>98</sup>. Afghanistan's policy, greatly simplified, is linked to the issue of *Pashtunistan* (an envisaged independent Pashtun state, which exists in numerous theoretical geographic forms), which Afghanistan has supported as a means to wrest Pashtun tribal lands from Pakistan<sup>99</sup>.

Second, Afghanistan is accused by Pakistan of supporting secessionist movements which seek a break-away from Pakistan and which, *inter alia*, conduct violent terrorist operations against the Pakistan state. Of these the most important in the contemporary context are rebel movements in Pakistan's Balochistan province<sup>100</sup> and alleged Afghan support for Pashtun tribal groups – most notably the Pakistan Taliban – and other indigenous militant organisations in Pakistan making war against the Pakistan state. Afghan apologists for this support point to Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban as justifying reciprocal Afghan activity.

Reflecting these major strands of policy, Pakistan's main objectives in Afghanistan can be distilled to the following: the exclusion or minimisation of Indian influence; the pursuit of a pro-Islamabad leadership in Kabul, the denial of Afghan's Durand Line borderlands to irredentist and secessionist movements and those states which back them; the denial of Afghanistan as a route for unwanted security and criminal dynamics to impact Pakistan (terrorism, refugees, drugs, arms and people-trafficking, etc); and the pursuit of stability in Afghanistan *on Pakistan's terms* to enable Pakistan's trade and other forms of economic partnership with Afghanistan and Pakistan's use of Afghanistan as a gateway to Central Asia and beyond. Moreover, this combination of interests means for

---

<sup>98</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, D and Vassefi, T., "The Forgotten History of Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations", *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, March 2012, pp 38-45

<sup>99</sup> See: Abubakar Siddique, *The Pashtun Question: The Unresolved Key to the Future of Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Hurst Press, May 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Frederic Grare, *Balochistan: The State Versus the Nation*, Carnegie Papers, CEIP, April 2013, available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/balochistan.pdf>

practical purposes that Pakistan does not have the option of sealing its borders with Afghanistan but rather sees itself as compelled to exercise influence in Afghanistan in defence of its own interests.

### **Pakistan's "Reach" into Afghanistan**

It ought to be no surprise that, as a state with so many key strategic interests located in Afghanistan, Pakistan has, over the decades, developed extensive "reach" inside Afghanistan (by which is meant the capacity to exercise meaningful influence inside the country if not always to achieve desired policy outcomes). The reason Pakistan is the most consequential of Afghanistan's neighbours lies in the scope of this influence and the latent capacity of Pakistan to escalate its intervention in the country, a scope and capacity matched by no other regional state.

While it would be difficult and of limited utility to calculate the relative importance of different vectors of Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan, which in any case rise and fall respective to each other as circumstances change, it is nevertheless possible to identify the most pertinent of these for the current discussion.

Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan flows in large measure through the Pashtun ethnic community<sup>101</sup>. Pashtuns number perhaps 45-50 million globally, with around 30 million in Pakistan, around 14 million in Afghanistan, and the remainder dispersed in uncertain refugee populations and global diasporas. Thus of Afghanistan's diverse ethnic groups Pashtuns make up a plurality, perhaps 40-45% of the Afghan population inside Afghanistan. Pakistan's influence within this community is exercised firstly through bonds of familial and patronage networks, networks which operate largely unencumbered across the Durand line and link powerful elites on both sides of the border and provide a context for Pakistan to provide resources to favoured groups and exploit rivalries between tribes.

Afghanistan's Pashtun community has also been Pakistan's key reservoir of non-state violent actors (NSVAs) which it has supported inside Afghanistan against leaderships in Kabul unfavourable to Islamabad. The use of these particular NSVAs has a forty-plus year history in Afghan-Pakistan relations dating back to their first use in 1974 by the Bhutto government in opposing the pro-Soviet (and thus pro-Indian) Daoud Khan regime in Kabul<sup>102</sup>, a full half-decade before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent US and Saudi-backed ISI<sup>103</sup> support for the Afghan *mujahideen*. It is this lineage of Pashtun militancy which underpins Pakistan's current support for the Afghan Taliban.

Pakistan also promoted *Deobandi* forms of Islam in Afghanistan as a way to challenge traditional *Barelvi* forms and promulgate a pro-Pakistan message through *Deobandis* to the Afghan population. This exploits the nature of *Deobandism* as a school of Islam which is expansive in building mosques and madrassas (often with overseas financial support) through which to reach communities *inter alia* through faith, education, and food, and didactic in the use of *fatwa* to promote ideas and shape

---

<sup>101</sup> In fact there is a high degree of tribal heterogeneity amongst Pashtun tribal groups and referring to them here as a single community is intended only as an analytic short-hand for the sake of brevity.

<sup>102</sup> See C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly, "Five Dangerous Myths about Pakistan", *Washington Quarterly*, 38(4), Winter 2016, pp 73-97.

<sup>103</sup> Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan's leading intelligence agency. For more see: Shaun Gregory, "The ISI and the War on Terrorism", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 30(12), December 2007, pp 1013-1031.

behaviours. It was thus, and remains, a significant vehicle through which pro-Islamabad narratives might be carried<sup>104</sup>.

In parallel with this Pakistan has strong linkages to key Islamist religious groups in Afghanistan, particularly the *Jamiat-e-Islami* and *Hezb-e-Islami*, both of which in turn have strong ties to *Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan* (JIP). Through *Jamiat-i-Islami* Pakistan has reach to ethnic Tajiks in Afghanistan's north and west, while the main faction of *Hezb-e-Islami* is of Pashtun ethnicity, a major armed group, and is an important adjunct to Pakistan's relations with the main Afghan Taliban groups (notably the Quetta shura and the Haqqani network).

A further value of Islamist groups, violent and non-violent, is that a number have expressions as political parties inside the Afghanistan parliament and thus can carry a pro-Pakistani narrative into that forum. Important amongst these are the *Hezb-e-Islami* party and the *Dawa-Islami*. It needs to be noted however that the Afghan parliament is weak and the exercise of pro-Islamabad influence within it is of limited utility to Pakistan.

A further corollary relating to all Afghan Islamist groups sympathetic to Pakistan or susceptible to Pakistani influence, is that Pakistan's relationship with these groups is not wholly directive. Pakistan has important avenues of leverage over many of these groups including the provision of resource and downward pressure on their presence and assets inside or through Pakistan (for example the threat of the denial of sanction space provided to the Afghan Taliban or the arrest of Afghan Taliban leaders resident in Pakistan) but Pakistan must maintain positions broadly aligned with the political and religious aspirations of these groups or risk their withdrawal of support. This is one reason, of many, why the Pakistan state cannot rush the political and social reforms in Pakistan desired by the West and Pakistan's liberals<sup>105</sup>. It needs also to be added that Afghan nationalism and widespread general antipathy to Pakistan in Afghanistan, erodes any easy assumptions about Pashtun support for Pakistan.

These interconnected networks of trans-border Pashtun (and to a lesser degree Tajik) communities, Islamist religious groups, violent militant groups (NSVAs), and (religious) political parties, provide pathways through which Pakistan's ISI, which with the Army dominates Afghan policy, can pursue Pakistan's interests to a degree unmatched by any of Afghanistan's other neighbours.

Beyond this the Pakistan state has a variety of tools to put direct pressure on the Afghan state, including state-level contacts, the exploitation of landlocked Afghanistan's economic and trade dependence on transit routes through Pakistan (notably the Torkham and Chaman crossing points), and the manipulation of Afghan refugees which – like refugees everywhere – are becoming “weaponised”<sup>106</sup>.

In the present context however it is the Afghan Taliban, or rather the two main groups linked to Pakistan, which provide the main tools to deliver Pakistan's security outcomes in Afghanistan. These groups attack Indian targets in Afghanistan, challenge the efforts of Afghan government, NATO, and the international community to achieve a stable peace in Afghanistan, and position Pakistan as the

---

<sup>104</sup> Mohammed Moj, *The Deobandi Madrassah Movement: Countercultural Trends and Tendencies*, Anthem Press, March 2015. Always useful also is the work of Akbar Ahmed, see for example his: *Religion and Politics in Muslim Society: Order and Conflict in Pakistan*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

<sup>105</sup> For an interesting insight into these issues see: Haroon K. Ullah, *Vying for Allah's Vote: Understanding Islamic Parties, Political Violence and Extremism in Pakistan*, Georgetown University Press, 2014.

<sup>106</sup> For deep insight into this trend see: Kelly Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy*, Cornell University Press, 2011.

key broker in peace negotiations. Without them Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan would be greatly diminished<sup>107</sup>.

Pakistan's role in the Afghanistan peace negotiations is addressed elsewhere in this collection by Emily Winterbotham, but to understand the role Pakistan plays, and may in the future be harnessed to play, in NATO's Afghanistan transition and post-NATO stabilisation it is important to understand how Pakistan views the NATO mission.

### **Pakistan's Perspectives on the NATO ISAF and Resolute Support Missions**

Pakistan has from the outset understood the US and NATO intervention in Afghanistan as a transitory deployment and has consequently positioned itself to cope with NATO disengagement and avoid the problems it encountered in the wake of the strategic withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan in 1989 and the subsequent US regional pull out. In various ways the NATO mission has been on balance detrimental to Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan. While Pakistan has undoubtedly benefitted from the lifting of US sanctions which presaged the NATO mission and benefitted from military aid, CSF, and related aid and has valued US (and to a lesser degree NATO) attention to Pakistan's interests it has also found its room for manoeuvre in Afghanistan severely curtailed by the NATO mission.

In Pakistani terms NATO has propped up a succession of unfriendly leaderships in Kabul and directly and indirectly been permissive of rising Indian influence in Afghanistan. NATO's presence, together with that of the US, has generated a lot of regional conflict in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, creating pathways of radicalisation amongst Afghan and Pakistani youth and empowering violent extremist groups. Further the COIN operations in Afghanistan have pushed militancy across the border into Pakistan generating further frictions and destabilising the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands and undermining the wider stability of Pakistan itself. In the same way the NATO mission has also generated a massive refugee crisis for Pakistan which has hosted on average around 2-3 million Afghan refugees through the years of the NATO missions<sup>108</sup>.

An often overlooked additional point is that Pakistan's support for the NATO missions in providing logistic transit routes, overflights, and some intelligence co-operation, has been deeply politically and religiously unpopular inside Pakistan, generating considerable internal political and religious friction for Pakistan and weakening Pakistan's influence with its key Islamist sympathisers (violent and non-violent) inside Afghanistan.

Finally, many Pakistanis in the security establishment have been nervous about the US and NATO presence in the region believing it a cover for wider Western objectives against Pakistan. These have included conspiracy theories, with a remarkable degree of traction inside Pakistan, that the US/NATO seeks to weaken Pakistan, de-nuclearize it, or even break up the state.

It follows from all this that NATO drawdown and eventual disengagement is seen as generally welcome in Pakistan provided it is smoothly managed and not accompanied by a severing of Western (mainly US) military and civil aid to Pakistan. Afghan Taliban ascendancy, or a peace deal favourable to Pakistan's interests and Pakistan's sympathisers in Afghanistan, is seen as more likely without NATO and likely to deliver a leadership in Kabul less antipathetic to Islamabad and less

---

<sup>107</sup> Christina Lamb, *Farewell Kabul: How the West Ignored Pakistan and Lost Afghanistan*, William Collins, March 2016. See also: Matt Waldman, *The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents*, Discussion Paper 18, Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 2010, available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/crisisStates/download/dp/dp18%20incl%20Dari.pdf>

<sup>108</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e487016.html>



permissive of Indian influence. In the same vein, NATO's withdrawal would potentially ease frictions in the region, weakening pathways of radicalisation, reducing the drivers of violent extremism, and allowing Pakistan to progress the return of Afghan refugees and reduce the militancy being pushed across its border by counter-insurgency (the ANSF not being seen as capable of sustaining COIN operations against the TB in the borderlands or outside the main roads and urban centres).

It is also argued that an end to the requirement for Pakistan's overt support for the NATO mission would also reduce political and religious frictions inside Pakistan and strengthen the Pakistani state's (not least the Army/ISI's) relations with its Islamist and political interlocutors inside Afghanistan.

### **The Pakistan Army/ISI's Afghan Policy 2015-17**

In the context of the *Zarb-e-Azb* military operations in the FATA which began in June 2014, and gained further traction and public support in the wake of the Pakistan Taliban's attack on the Peshawar Army Public School in December 2014, the Pakistan Army/ISI has been confirmed in the view that it is turning the tide against Islamic militancy inside Pakistan and thus that its support for the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan carries fewer risks for the state.

Pakistan has positioned itself as the lead state in facilitating direct peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the main factions of the Afghan Taliban through the "Murree Process" which opened on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2015 within the quadrilateral "4+1" framework of China, the USA, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban, and subsequently stalled with the announcement of the prior death of Mullah Omar and the succession struggle which followed<sup>109</sup>.

The process is viewed in some quarters as a central element in Pakistan's strategy to offer Kabul a negotiated pathway forward with the Afghan Taliban in the exchange for concessions to Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan and a commensurate role for the Afghan Taliban. In parallel Pakistan is also argued to be supporting the progress of the Taliban on the ground in Afghanistan as a way of stepping up pressure on Kabul to negotiate concessions and as a means to co-opt the US and China for Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan. Such a strategy may indeed be Pakistan's preference, but it is making slow progress along three of its four contributory axes.

Firstly, the main Afghan Taliban factions closest to Pakistan, to say nothing of those factions hostile or beyond the reach of Pakistan and opposed to talks, have been unwilling – as Emily Winterbotham explains in greater detail – to come back into the process, in part believing that gains on the ground are rapidly eroding the capacity of Kabul to deliver anything of value to the Taliban<sup>110</sup>. Secondly, the early accommodation of the Ghani government to Pakistan's interests (for example delaying Indian military deals and sending cadet officers to Pakistan for training) appears not to have yielded substantive reciprocal benefits to Afghanistan (such as an easing or end to Taliban operations) and thus have made the internal political costs, including criticism from former President Karzai<sup>111</sup>, of accommodating Pakistan's interests too high for President Ghani, resulting in a switch away from the "Pakistan pivot" back to India<sup>112</sup>. Thirdly, both the US and China (at least rhetorically) are seeking to

---

<sup>109</sup> <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-murree-process-divisive-peace-talks-further-complicated-by-mullah-omars-death/>

<sup>110</sup> It needs to be added that the situation is fluid with some media sources indicating a Taliban willingness to talk, and some sources in the Pakistan media portraying Pakistan as leaning on the Taliban to resolve their factionalism as a precondition of restarting talks. See: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1169317>

<sup>111</sup> Jon Boone, "Hamid Karzai: Afghanistan in danger of sliding 'under thumb' of Pakistan", *The Guardian*, 9 March 2015, p 1.

<sup>112</sup> Shawn Snow, "Ghani's Pivot Away From Pakistan", *Foreign Policy: The South Asia Channel*, 25 November 2015, available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/25/ghanis-pivot-away-from-pakistan/>

curb Pakistan's behaviour in order to avoid Pakistani dominance of a post-NATO Afghanistan, an outcome seen as destabilising and a likely precursor of Afghan civil war.

While these pathways are ever more fraught for Pakistan's pursuit of its interests, along the fourth Pakistan's support for the Taliban continue to make meaningful gains on the ground in Afghanistan, squeezing the ANDSF from the rural space, pinning government control back to the main roads and urban centres, and menacing many district centres<sup>113</sup>. For the moment these gains serve Pakistan's interests, not least because the territory of Afghanistan has been an important theatre for the management of Pakistan's internal militancy through directing Pakistan militants into the Afghan theatre rather than risking those fighters turning their ire on the Pakistani state. A degree of "churn" in cross-border operations into Afghanistan therefore has been an important element of Pakistan's own internal counter-terrorism strategy and is likely to remain so<sup>114</sup>.

Afghan Taliban gains also empower Pakistan, as the state perceived to be most influential with them, *vis-a-vis* the Afghan government and the regional and international states which wish to see stability and a negotiated peace in Afghanistan.

The emergence of Islamic State in South Asia (broadly *Khorosan* province in IS parlance) has introduced an additional factor of uncertainty. The author has argued in detail elsewhere that there are important reasons why Islamic State has to date failed to gain significant traction in Pakistan and why it is unlikely to do so<sup>115</sup>. At the same time Islamic State has made significant gains in Afghanistan<sup>116</sup>, particularly in drawing fighters from those militant groups unwilling to compromise with the main Afghan Taliban leaderships, unwilling to accommodate pressure from the key regional brokers (notably Pakistan and Iran), or fighters who see in Islamic State the means to draw the US and NATO back into regional engagement (*pace* Iraq, Libya) to continue the great *jihad* with the West.

The Islamic State may indeed continue to gain some limited ground in Afghanistan, and its presence is already causing US and Western hesitation, but the short to medium term trends would appear to be against it. The upswing in Taliban operational fortunes and Taliban actions against IS in Afghanistan seem likely to curb its appeal to militant fighters and contain its military effectiveness and expansion in the country. Further the strategic reversals suffered by IS in Syria at the hands of Russia, the Assad regime, Shia militia, western air power, and rival militant groups, and the turn of the tide against IS in Iraq at the hands in particular of the Iraqi Army, Kurdish militia and western airpower and special forces<sup>117</sup>, seem likely to continue to the effective defeat of IS precipitating is already undermining its narrative of divinely inspired military success. With downward pressure on IS's finances and financial backers in the Middle East and a belated hardening of Western attitudes to IS social media and western recruitment to IS it is difficult to see anything other than a steep decline in its fortunes in Afghanistan.

---

<sup>113</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/16/world/asia/a-5th-district-in-helmand-province-falls-to-the-taliban.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/16/world/asia/a-5th-district-in-helmand-province-falls-to-the-taliban.html?_r=0), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-34377565>, and [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/massive-truck-bomb-most-powerful-in-years-explodes-outside-military-base/2015/08/07/557797ca-3cdf-11e5-b3ac-8a79bc44e5e2\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/massive-truck-bomb-most-powerful-in-years-explodes-outside-military-base/2015/08/07/557797ca-3cdf-11e5-b3ac-8a79bc44e5e2_story.html)

<sup>114</sup> C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly, "An Unworthy Ally: Time for Washington to Cut Pakistan Loose", *Foreign Affairs*, 94(5), September/October 2015.

<sup>115</sup> See: *Explaining the Limits of IS Traction in Pakistan*, PSRU Briefing number 74, available at: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/psru>

<sup>116</sup> See Simon Ross-Valentine, *The Emergence of Islamic State in Pakistan*, PSRU Briefing Paper no 73, 14 October 2015, available at: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/psru/PSRUBriefing73.pdf>

<sup>117</sup> Liz Sly, "In Syria and Iraq the Islamic State is in Retreat on Multiple Fronts", *Washington Post*, March 24, 2016 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/in-syria-and-iraq-the-islamic-state-is-in-retreat-on-multiple-fronts/2016/03/24/a0e33774-f101-11e5-a2a3-d4e9697917d1\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/in-syria-and-iraq-the-islamic-state-is-in-retreat-on-multiple-fronts/2016/03/24/a0e33774-f101-11e5-a2a3-d4e9697917d1_story.html)

## Conclusion and Outlook

Pakistan has successfully positioned itself to play a decisive role in Afghanistan, during and beyond the NATO transition. It has the ear of the United States and China on the Afghan question, and some influence with key elements of the Taliban, and is ultimately the indispensable state for Afghanistan without which Kabul has no prospects for national stability. Pakistan seems moreover to have avoided the risk of US disengagement from the region, partly because the US continues to have active counter-terrorism and regional stability interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan in a way it felt it did not in 1989, and partly because there seems little sign, despite the raising of serious voices to the contrary, of policy-makers in Washington questioning their belief that military and civilian aid to Pakistan buys influence in Pakistan and its denial forces Pakistan into even worse policy choices. Pakistan will continue to feed this narrative but in practice the US has little meaningful influence with Pakistan for its money and can't expect to significantly condition Pakistan's engagement with either the Taliban or the Afghan government.

China on the other hand does have a greater degree of influence with Pakistan. China's emergence as a trans-regional power in South West Asia, its long-standing geostrategic friendship with Pakistan, its place as Pakistan's main arms supplier, and its massive \$46billion dollar investment in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative will ensure it has considerable sway over Pakistan in the decades ahead and thus Pakistan is likely to curb its excesses if China indicates its opposition to particular Pakistani behaviours. As is explored in Raffaello Pantucci's chapter, China has a profound interest in regional stability in South (West) Asia and consequently seeks stability in Pakistan *and* Afghanistan as part of its transcontinental ambitions. It has articulated support for an Afghan-led peace process in Afghanistan, has been instrumental in nudging Afghanistan and Pakistan to find a joint accommodation as a framework within which also to accommodate the Afghan Taliban and China has also been willing to work with the US and regional fora (SCO, Heart of Asia, etc) in pursuit of multilateral regional responses to manage potential Afghan instability.

Pakistan will thus pursue its interests in Afghanistan with one eye on China but with a clear sense also of how much it can get away with without decisively antagonising Beijing. The old adage that "if you owe the bank a hundred thousand pounds you're in trouble, but if you owe the bank a hundred million pounds the bank's in trouble" may come to haunt China. A \$46billion dollar gamble on Pakistan, even as Nawaz Sharif appears to be weakened further by the Panama papers revelations<sup>118</sup> and as internal rivalries open up inside Pakistan between provinces and families about the precise routes of the CPEC<sup>119</sup>, provides vast economic opportunities for Pakistan but also gives Pakistan huge leverage over China's investment.

In this context Pakistan may, if trends appear to be moving against it, feel the pull of its natural inclination to continue on its historical Afghan policy pathways and step up its efforts to destabilise Afghanistan as a means to weaken Kabul further and thereby constrain India. Instability in Afghanistan also has other potential virtues for Pakistan: it dissuades the Chinese and other international investors from looking at alternative energy routes through Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iran (via the port of Chabahar) and threatens India's use of those to routes to bypass Pakistan. It further prevents Afghanistan being dominated by any of Pakistan's strategic rivals (India, Iran, Russia, US, even China just possibly), and maintains the theatre for Pakistan "churn" of its own militants. The risk of civil war – which parties inside and outside Afghanistan may not be able to prevent anyway – rests lighter on Army and ISI minds than the prospects of Indian ascendancy in Afghanistan.

---

<sup>118</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-36092356>

<sup>119</sup> <http://www.4-traders.com/news/Politicking-may-hurt-46-billion-CPEC-World-Bank--22158625/>

In a deteriorating security situation or civil war in Afghanistan it would be unwise to rule out either the future possibility of a decisive intervention by Pakistan, breaking out of regional constraints, to secure a degree of stability and order in Afghanistan as it did between 1992-96 in supporting the victory of the Taliban. Such a move, subject to certain caveats, could find favour in Beijing, Moscow, and perhaps even in the dark corners of Washington.

## Chapter 4: China's Big Hedge

Raffaello Pantucci

In November of last year, Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao visited Kabul to celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and China.<sup>120</sup> The most senior level visit to Kabul by a Chinese official since the now-defenestrated former Politburo member and security minister Zhou Yongkang visited in 2012<sup>121</sup> the visit showed China's continuing commitment to Afghanistan, whilst also highlighting its limits. Sitting awkwardly in President Xi Jinping's 'Belt and Road' vision, Afghanistan remains a foreign policy conundrum to China who continues to see the potential risks from the neighbouring country, but that Beijing understands it has a particularly central potential role to play and whose proximity negates a completely detached approach. The result has been a hedging policy in which China continues to show some level of commitment towards Afghanistan whilst not going so far as to taking on the mantle of leadership.

### The Belt and Road

One of the central topics of conversation during Vice President Li's visit to Kabul was the 'Belt and Road' concept. In official read-outs from the meetings, both sides agreed to work on cooperatively to help develop Afghanistan's role in the vision and thereby deepen the link between China and Afghanistan.<sup>122</sup> 'Belt and Road' is the term used to describe the vision laid out by President Xi Jinping that is on its way to becoming his defining foreign policy legacy. First publicly raised during a visit to Astana, Kazakhstan in September 2013 when President Xi coined the term 'Silk Road Economic Belt' to describe the trade, infrastructure and economic corridor emanating from China's westernmost region of Xinjiang through Central Asia ultimately to European markets.<sup>123</sup> The next month during a speech at the Indonesian Parliament he built on this characterization to announce the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road that recreated the land model advanced across Eurasia out from China's ports to the seas.<sup>124</sup> Over the next few months these trade corridors proliferated as a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) corridor, China-Mongolia-Russia corridor and a New Eurasian Landbridge were all subsumed under the broader umbrella vision. In fact, the Pakistan corridor was one that had been agreed prior to the September speech and had been raised during a visit by Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Pakistan in May 2013 and signed in

---

<sup>120</sup> 'Li Yuanchao Attends Reception for the 60th Anniversary of China-Afghanistan Diplomatic Ties,' *Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, November 4, 2015

[http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1311792.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1311792.shtml) ; 'China promises to continue to playing constructive role in Afghan peace process,' *Xinhua*, November 4, 2015  
[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-11/04/c\\_134780948.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-11/04/c_134780948.htm)

<sup>121</sup> 'Top Chinese security official makes surprise visit to Afghanistan,' *Xinhua*, September 23, 2012  
[http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-09/23/content\\_15776032.htm](http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-09/23/content_15776032.htm) ; Rob Taylor, 'Top Official visits Afghanistan, signs security deal,' *Reuters*, September 23, 2012 <http://in.reuters.com/article/afghanistan-china-idINDEE88M03620120923>

<sup>122</sup> 'Afghan President Ashraf Ghani met with Li Yuanchao,' *Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, November 4, 2015 [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1311790.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1311790.shtml)

<sup>123</sup> 'Chinese President delivers speech at Nazarbayev University,' *Xinhua*, September 8, 2013  
[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/photo/2013-09/08/c\\_132701546.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/photo/2013-09/08/c_132701546.htm)

<sup>124</sup> 'Speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Indonesian Parliament,' October 3, 2015 [http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c\\_133062675.htm](http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2013-10/03/c_133062675.htm)

MoU form on a return visit by President Nawaz Sharif in July 2013.<sup>125</sup> But the corridor was only later identified and absorbed under the logic of the grander vision. Similarly, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar corridor is one that has been mooted a number of times in the past, but never quite moved forwards. The logic of these various routes was largely the same and drew from the same structure as the Silk Road Economic Belt laid out in Astana, but over time was increasingly all captured under the rubric of the 'One Belt and One Road' (OBOR) and is now abbreviated to the 'Belt and Road.'

By announcing the initiative in Central Asia President Xi was adding his stamp onto something that had in fact been taking place for over a decade.<sup>126</sup> Since 2001 and the formal founding of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) China has increasingly been developing its presence in Central Asia, something that was spurred on even further in the wake of riots in China's westernmost region of Xinjiang in July 2009.<sup>127</sup> The rioting took place as a result of deep tensions between the minority Uighur population (a community that is close in language, culture and ethnicity to the Turkic speaking populations of Central Asia) in the region and the growing Han Chinese population who have moved west over the past century. These two populations have lived uncomfortably next to each other for some time, with Uighurs increasingly feeling alienated from their own country. This has led to a push back which has expressed itself in a number of forms: people lashing out against the state in anger for real or perceived individual slights or in more organized fashion through terrorist groups and plots. In the first instance much of the violence was isolated in Xinjiang, and in particular in the southern predominantly Uighur corridor. But over time, it has increasingly spread around the country with violent incidents in Kunming and Beijing, an attack outside the country in Bangkok, Thailand and a persistent minority of Uighurs leaving China to seek to connect with extremist groups in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Southeast Asia.<sup>128</sup>

For China, the key to ameliorating the situation in Xinjiang is an economic solution.<sup>129</sup> Seeing economic development as the answer to these problems means a great deal of internal investment, but for this investment to work, Xinjiang needs to have partners to do trade with. Sitting in landlocked Xinjiang, it is easier to look across the Eurasian landmass to Europe and see a quicker route to markets than going to China's eastern seaboard ports. Consequently, this investment has to spill into Central Asia where Chinese infrastructure companies, banks, and traders have all worked to develop trade corridors to open up Central Asian markets and routes to Xinjiang and Chinese traders. This has happened at every level with small time shuttle traders going back and forth with

---

<sup>125</sup> 'Chinese premier raises five-point proposal for boosting cooperation with Pakistan,' *Xinhua*, May 23, 2013 [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-05/23/c\\_124750134.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-05/23/c_124750134.htm); 'Pakistan, China sign eight agreements, MoUs,' *The News*, July 6, 2013 [http://www.awaztoday.tv/News\\_Pakistan-China-sign-eight-agreements-MoUs\\_1\\_34980\\_Political-News.aspx](http://www.awaztoday.tv/News_Pakistan-China-sign-eight-agreements-MoUs_1_34980_Political-News.aspx)

<sup>126</sup> For a good book summarizing the history of China's relations with Central Asia, please see Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse *The Chinese Question in Central Asia: Domestic Order, Social Change, and the Chinese Factor*, (UK: Hurst, October 2012; US: Oxford University Press, December 2012)

<sup>127</sup> Edward Wong, 'Riots in Western China amid ethnic tension,' *New York Times*, July 5, 2009 [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/06/world/asia/06china.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/06/world/asia/06china.html?_r=0)

<sup>128</sup> It is worth also pointing out that a great deal more Uighurs leave the country in unhappiness at their situation there. Seeking a better life abroad, they are economic migrants or people fleeing persecution who are simply trying to build new lives outside China. The majority appear to gravitate towards Turkey, with substantial diaspora communities also found in parts of Europe, as well as across Central Asia. The point being not every Uighur who leaves China unhappy becomes involved in terrorist activity. According to one prominent Chinese expert spoken to in early 2016, about 9 out of 10 Uighurs who left were seeking better lives. Author interview Beijing, January 2016.

<sup>129</sup> Most clearly laid out in 2010 at a work conference held in the wake of the riots. 'Chinese central authorities outline roadmap for Xinjiang's leapfrog development, lasting stability,' *Xinhua*, May 20, 2010 [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-05/20/c\\_13306534.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-05/20/c_13306534.htm)

bags of goods, as well as more entrepreneurial individuals establishing brands and opening factories. Over time, this has led to a steady increase in Chinese presence in the region which has led to not only a re-wiring of the regions infrastructure so that all roads lead to Urumqi (Xinjiang's capital), but also meant that increasingly China has displaced Russia to become the most consequential actor on the ground.

But all of this has been taking place now for over a decade. Meaning that the nomenclature of the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) is a case of President Xi placing his stamp of authority on something that was already underway – the development of an economic and trade corridor sweeping out from China's west through Central Asia, ultimately to European markets. Seeing it as a successful model deploying foreign policy tools that Beijing could understand how to control (the deployment of capital through linked loans for Chinese firms to go forth and implement infrastructure projects), and based on some theoretical assumptions that are comprehensible. It also has the effect of helping keep the Chinese economy moving as the domestic economy slows down.<sup>130</sup>

But the important thing to remember about the SREB is that it is not a single path, but rather a latticework of routes out of China across Eurasia. There are roads going from Urumqi through Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and onwards through other Central Asian countries, across the Caspian, Russia or Iran to Europe. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) essentially turns Pakistan into a corridor for goods to travel through Pakistan from the ports of Gwadar and Karachi to Kashgar, Xinjiang.<sup>131</sup> Whilst identified under a slightly different nomenclature, the CPEC is very much considered a part of the SREB vision, something exemplified by the fact that one of the first projects taken on by the specially created \$40 billion Silk Road Fund established by Beijing was an energy project associated with the CPEC vision.<sup>132</sup> In total, billions have been promised and poured into these two routes (the SREB and CPEC) – with Pakistan alone attracting promises of around \$46 billion over a number of years,<sup>133</sup> while President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan announced some \$23 billion worth of deals during his last visit to Beijing in September 2015.<sup>134</sup>

### **Afghanistan in the Middle**

Problematically for Afghanistan, however, it is not entirely clear how the country fits into these 'Belt and Road' visions for the Eurasian continent. Whilst the central planning authority of China, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), has not actually published a formal route for the 'Belt and Road' vision, numerous maps have been printed in the Chinese state press. One thing that is common to most of these is that when they show routes emanating from China going westwards into Central or South Asia, they tend to go around Afghanistan. The SREB and the CPEC are clear corridors of investment and potential trade that China is pushing but they do not need in their current incarnations to necessarily touch down in Afghanistan. In fact, they can for the most part quite comfortably go around the country, following the natural regional geography that favours such routes. From Kashgar through Tashkurgan, down the Khunjerab Pass through Pakistan to Gwadar or Karachi ports, or through the Irkeshtam or Torugart crossings into Kyrgyzstan or the

---

<sup>130</sup> 'China eyes 'Belt and Road' to reverse trade slowdown,' *Global Times*, May 28, 2015

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/924034.shtml>

<sup>131</sup> For the most recent maps showing the ambition and routes of the CPEC, please see the Pakistani Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms dedicated webpage: [http://www.pc.gov.pk/?page\\_id=2731](http://www.pc.gov.pk/?page_id=2731)

<sup>132</sup> 'Silk Road Fund's debut investment in \$1.65b Pakistan power project,' *People's Bank of China press release*, April 21, 2015 <http://www.pbc.gov.cn/english/130721/2811777/index.html>

<sup>133</sup> 'China's Xi Jinping agrees \$46bn superhighway to Pakistan,' *BBC News*, April 20, 2015 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-32377088>

<sup>134</sup> 'Kazakh leader says \$23 billion in economic deals agreed with China,' *Reuters*, September 1, 2015 <http://www.reuters.com/article/kazakhstan-china-idUSL5N1172H620150901>

Dzungarian Pass or Khorogos into Kazakhstan and onto Central Asia. Even trains from China to Iran can go around the country, going through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan before going into Iran. Sitting at the end of the Wakhan Corridor, the China-Afghan border is small and surrounded by mountainous areas meaning that the direct link to the 'Belt and Road's is not going to be the same as the one in neighbouring Central and South Asia, unless a very specific corridor is developed which requires a considerable new set of infrastructure built.

And while this navigation around Afghanistan has not been acknowledged by Beijing – and in some ways is contradicted by the repeated references to the 'Belt and Road' during VP Li and other formal China-Afghan interactions – it is visible in the on-the-ground investments and projects undertaken by China in Afghanistan. Currently, China's projects in Afghanistan are dominated by a series of aid contributions, like the \$79 million that VP Li offered during his visit to Afghanistan to build housing in the capital,<sup>135</sup> some similar contributions to Afghanistan's security through equipment and training (most recently in declarations during a visit by Fang Fenghui, PLA Chief of General Staff<sup>136</sup>), and a few state owned enterprise (SOE) projects. Some smaller Chinese enterprises have sought to invest in the country, but find themselves hamstrung by a hesitant government and a difficult operating environment.

At the SOE level, the two main extractive projects being undertaken by Chinese firms are the exploitation of copper mines at Mes Aynak in Logar province and CNPC's oil extraction project in Amu Darya.<sup>137</sup> The Mes Aynak project in particular is one that has become something of an epigram for Chinese efforts in Afghanistan – with a pair of Chinese companies, MCC and Jiangxi Copper, outbidding a number of others to win the contract in 2007, only for them to then sit on the project since then. Underestimating the security costs and overpromising in terms of additional infrastructure that they would produce around the site, the mine has been left unexploited and the company is now attempting to renegotiate the contract as well as backing away from some of the earlier promised infrastructure (that made the bid so attractive to Kabul in the first place<sup>138</sup>). The company head has met with senior Afghan officials and have been reported as complaining to others that it was pressured into undertaking the project by the central authorities in Beijing. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that the security situation around the area of the mine has gotten worse over time (and global copper prices have dropped), the project has nevertheless become hugely symbolic to many Afghans showing the high levels of Chinese promises that have gone unfulfilled.

The project in Amu Darya has faced fewer difficulties and actually been able to extract some hydrocarbons from the ground, though by choosing a partner in the Watan Group, CNPC failed to engage with the proper local actors when they invested in the project. This led to some difficulties with other power brokers in the north, and led to the project's delay. Beyond this, CNPC had promised to build a refinery in the north of the country, but this has not been undertaken yet and it remains unclear to what degree the project has actually managed to move forwards.<sup>139</sup> Always seen as a relatively small investment for the company, the belief was that CNPC's greater interest was to

---

<sup>135</sup> Michael Martina and Mirwais Harooni, 'China's vice president pledges support in rare Afghanistan visit,' November 3, 2015 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-china-idUSKCN0SS1MN20151103>

<sup>136</sup> 'Afghanistan to give China military equipment wish list,' *Khaama News*, March 4, 2016 <https://www.khaama.com/afghanistan-to-give-china-military-equipment-wish-list-0241>

<sup>137</sup> Raffaello Pantucci, 'Guest Post: China in Afghanistan: A Tale of Two Mines,' *Financial Times Beyond BRICS*, December 4, 2012 <http://blogs.ft.com/beyond-brics/2012/12/04/guest-post-china-in-afghanistan-a-tale-of-two-mines/>

<sup>138</sup> There have also been rumours of corruption around the deal that have not been publicly verified.

<sup>139</sup> The most recently publicly accessible report from July 2014 indicated the project was suspended. Jessica Donati, 'From New York heroin dealer to Afghanistan's biggest oil man,' *Reuters*, July 9, 2014 [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2014-07-09/news/sns-rt-us-afghanistan-energy-20140707\\_1\\_cnpc-security-firm-afghanistan](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2014-07-09/news/sns-rt-us-afghanistan-energy-20140707_1_cnpc-security-firm-afghanistan)



establish a foothold in the north of Afghanistan so that when future fields in the region were to open up they would be in an optimal position to win the contracts. CNPC is particularly bullish about these prospects given its substantial investment across the border in Turkmenistan in what is the same hydrocarbon basin. It has now reportedly been exploring other opportunities in the north of the country as well.

Looking beyond extractives, Chinese firms have also bid and won contracts to undertake infrastructure development in Afghanistan. In particular, Xinjiang Beixin won a contract from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to undertake the rehabilitation of a part of the road from Kabul to Jalalabad. However, the company has encountered difficulties in doing the project and it is unclear at what stage they are at the moment. The company is one that is active across the region implementing ADB projects in difficult environments, but it is unclear they still have an appetite to complete the Afghan project.<sup>140</sup> Atop all of these difficulties at a state owned enterprise level, smaller traders and businessmen spoken to speak of lower level issues, from problems around visa issuances to Afghan businessmen wanting to travel to China, to standards imposed by China to the exports of Afghan goods, to a reticence by China to actively support its traders to go to Afghanistan. And none of this is to speak of the security situation in the country which intimidates even the most fearless Chinese traders.

### **China the Peacebroker**

Amid much fanfare in July 2014 China created its first Special Envoy for Afghanistan appointing a prominent and popular former Ambassador to Kabul, Sun Yuxi, to the role.<sup>141</sup> Coming at a time when the west was clarifying its decreasing role in Afghanistan, the appointment was one that reflected an effort by Beijing to show its commitment to the country. As time progressed, it also became clear that one of Ambassador Sun's key roles was to help facilitate a ramping up of China's efforts to act as a peacebroker between the Taliban and the government in Kabul. With the election of President Ghani in October 2014, he immediately signalled the importance he placed on the relationship with China by making Beijing the first capital he visited in his new role on a formal trip.<sup>142</sup> During this visit he not only attended the 'Heart of Asia' process meeting hosted by China, but also laid the groundwork for the formal peace talk negotiations with the Taliban at a behind closed doors meeting hosted by the Chinese government.

By early the next year stories emerged that China was playing a more forward role in brokering peace talks and in conversations in Beijing, and officials spoken to at the time highlighted that they were willing to act as hosts for any future peace talks.<sup>143</sup> By May 2015, senior Taliban figures were meeting with representatives from the Afghan High Peace Council in Urumqi.<sup>144</sup> In July another

---

<sup>140</sup> Michael Martina and Mirwais Harooni, 'Slow road from Kabul highlights China's challenge in Afghanistan,' *Reuters*, November 22, 2015 <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-afghanistan-china-road-idUKKBN0TBOX720151122>

<sup>141</sup> 'Ministry appoints special envoy for Afghan affairs,' *Xinhua*, July 18, 2014 [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-07/18/c\\_133494661.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-07/18/c_133494661.htm)

<sup>142</sup> 'Afghanistan's new president starts landmark China visit,' *BBC News*, October 28, 2014 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-29803768>

<sup>143</sup> Nathan Hodge, Habib Khan Totakhil & Josh Chin, 'China Creates New Avenue for Afghan Peace Talks,' *Wall Street Journal*, January 6, 2015 <http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-creates-new-avenue-for-afghan-peace-talks-1420564492>; further confirmed by author interviews in Beijing. 'China favours role in Afghan peace talks, appreciates Pakistan's efforts,' *Dawn*, August 15, 2015 <http://www.dawn.com/news/1200627>

<sup>144</sup> Edward Wong and Mujib Mashal, 'Taliban and Afghan Peace Officials Have Secret Talks in China,' *New York Times*, May 25, 2015 <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/26/world/asia/taliban-and-afghan-peace-officials-have-secret-talks-in-china.html>

round of talks was held in Pakistan at which Chinese participants also played a role.<sup>145</sup> A further multilateral track two engagement took place in Norway in which both Afghan representatives and Taliban counterparts attended.<sup>146</sup>

In sum, it appeared as though the Chinese supported peace track was one that was bearing fruit, until abruptly in late July 2015 the news was leaked that the Taliban leader Mullah Omar had in fact died back in 2013. This action immediately scuttled the discussions as it set the Taliban in disarray as an internal leadership struggle surfaced as to who would be Mullah Omar's successor. It also complicated China's contribution as it abruptly meant it was not clear who exactly the relevant partner to engage with on the Taliban side would be and so therefore where China could play a role. Accusations of blame were passed between Islamabad and Kabul, but the net result was an uptick in violence that made it harder for the Afghan official side to negotiate in full confidence.

Chinese experts and officials spoken to at this time almost immediately fell back into pointing that it was up to the United States to step up and play a stronger role in supporting the Afghan government and national security forces.<sup>147</sup> They further pointed to the fact that until there was greater clarity on the Taliban side about who was being negotiated with, it was unlikely that talks were going to bear immediate fruit. This did not stop Chinese efforts, and while Special Envoy Sun Yuxi stepped down from his role, he was replaced by the recent former Ambassador to Kabul Deng Xijun who seemed set to continue to play a key supporting role in any peace talks.

### **Keeping Options Open**

Beijing has managed to continue to play this role by maintaining contacts with all sides. Its longstanding contact with the Taliban are believed to continue behind closed doors, while Vice President Li's public calls in Kabul on President Ghani, Chief Executive Office Abdullah and former President Karzai show that they are eager to maintain links to all of the key official players in Afghanistan's future. This is further reflected on the international stage where China has not only engaged with Afghanistan on a bilateral basis, but also through multilateral vehicles like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (where China has played a championing role for the country. It was during Chinese Presidency's that the Afghan contact group was created and later the country was made into an Observer), as well as through multilateral formats like an India-China bilateral where Afghanistan is discussed, an Afghan-Pakistan-China trilateral, and a willingness to engage with the United States to undertake joint training projects in Afghanistan. Most recently, during PLA Chief Fang Fenghui's visit to Kabul, he spoke about the creation of a sub-regional security discussion between China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan to create a regional alliance against terrorism.<sup>148</sup>

China is choosing not to take sides and using this as a way to guarantee its interests. While it is not clear that Afghanistan needs to fit into the 'Belt and Road' vision, it is also equally clear that an unstable Afghanistan has the potential to be a major spoiler for the routes through Central Asia and Pakistan. Instability in Afghanistan is likely to have an impact and cause trouble across the border in both directions and this will have a clearer impact on China's larger project, and ultimately on

---

<sup>145</sup> Jon Boone, 'Afghanistan and Taliban peace talks end with promise to meet again,' *Guardian*, July 8, 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/08/afghanistan-and-taliban-peace-talks-end-with-promise-to-meet-again>

<sup>146</sup> 'Afghan, Taliban delegates attend Oslo talks on ending conflicts,' *Reuters*, June 16, 2015 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-norway-afghanistan-idUSKBN0OW17B20150616>

<sup>147</sup> Author interview in Beijing, July 2015

<sup>148</sup> Ibrahim Nasar and Jafar Haand, 'Afghanistan welcomes Chinese anti-terror proposal,' *Voice of America*, March 1, 2016 <http://www.voanews.com/content/afghanistan-welcomes-chinese-anti-terror-proposal/3215160.html>

Xinjiang. Consequently, China has an interest in stability in Afghanistan and this helps explain its substantial and multifaceted approach towards the country, though at the same time it is not taking the bold steps forwards to guide any resolution on the current situation in Afghanistan.

In many ways, this is reflective of China's broader approach in the 'Belt and Road' vision where as a result of the increased external economic push Beijing is finding itself playing an ever more influential role in its immediate neighbourhood. Yet Beijing policymakers have not yet apparently entirely understood what exactly what this means for their larger political role in these countries. Nowhere is this more than in Afghanistan where they are finding themselves drawn into an ever more significant role, but are instead electing to hedge. President Ghani's open lobbying of Beijing from early in his administration shows Kabul's eagerness to engage with Beijing, something that is being done with Western agreement and support (the US has undertaken joint training programmes with China in Afghanistan, and European capitals are working to engage with China to encourage greater efforts in Afghanistan). But while Beijing is continuing to play a positive role, it is not demonstrating a willingness to step into a strong leadership role, choosing to instead play a significant support role.

This is ultimately unfortunate for Kabul as China has many significant cards to play in Afghanistan – be this in terms of their strong relationship with Islamabad, the massive investment they could pour in and the industry they could mobilize to rebuild the country, or the potential opening up of Iran that they could take advantage of across Afghanistan. Whilst security remains something that China is not able to provide in adequate measure outside its borders, across Central Asia, China's security presence and efforts are growing highlighting that this is an evolving reaction from Beijing. China's recently passed counter-terrorism legislation offers a formal framework for Chinese security forces to go deploy outside the country to counter terrorist threats. But Beijing remains a hesitant player in Afghanistan, willing to play a significant role, but continuing to make sure that it has kept its cards close to its chest and left itself a deniable exit in the case of things going in a negative direction. China continues to be Kabul's closest hesitant friend.

## Chapter 5: India and Afghanistan

*Rahul Roy-Chaudhury*

This paper explains why Afghanistan will continue to be a priority for India's foreign and security policy, analyses the Indian security establishment's perspective on key issues of stability and security in Afghanistan, and examines significant policy developments of the near two-year old Indian Modi government towards Afghanistan.

### India's involvement in Afghanistan

India does not have a contiguous land border with Afghanistan nor does it have substantive trade or investment links with Kabul, nor are there a large number of Indian nationals' resident in the country. Therefore, it is not immediately obvious why India should have such high stakes in Afghanistan's future. But, the reason for this is two-fold:

First, to ensure there is no export of terrorism/extremism from Afghanistan.<sup>149</sup> The Indian security establishment fears this could take place if Pakistan-based anti-India terror groups are provided safe haven for training and operations in Taliban-controlled territory in Afghanistan. This could seek to provide some deniability to elements in the Pakistani security establishment, often believed to be responsible for attacks against Indian entities, that they had no role in such attacks. But, the deployment of these terror groups to India from Afghanistan, without traversing Pakistani territory, would present a logistical challenge.

Yet, anti-India terror camps have been known to operate in Afghanistan. One of these, with members of Pakistan-based terror groups such as the Hizbul Mujahadeen, the Harkat-ul-Mujahadeen and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), was destroyed by U.S. missile attacks in Khost province in 1998.<sup>150</sup> The LeT, responsible for the Mumbai terror attacks in 2008, and other Pakistan-based militant groups, have carried out terror attacks against Indian diplomatic missions and Indian nationals in Afghanistan. The worst such attack, the July 2008 car bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul, was carried out by the Haqqani terror group killing 54 people including two senior Indian diplomats and two Indian security personnel. The second major terror attack against the Indian embassy in October 2009, killing 17 Afghan civilians, was carried out by the LeT. The Indian security establishment believes these terror groups acted at the behest of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency, which planned the attacks. In February 2010, the Afghan Taliban, along with the LeT, carried out coordinated suicide bombings and a gun attack in Kabul, targeting and killing several Indian nationals. In addition, the four Indian consulates in Afghanistan have faced multiple

---

<sup>149</sup> Satinder K Lambah, "The US Needs to Change its Attitude Towards Indo-Afghan Relations", *The Wire*, 11 December 2015, at <http://thewire.in/2015/12/11/the-us-must-change-its-attitude-towards-indo-afghan-relations-17014/>.

<sup>150</sup> Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, "India" in in Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman (eds.), *Afghanistan to 2015 and Beyond* (Routledge, December 2011, London), p.232.

terror attacks in the past decade, the most recent in the northern city of Mazhar-e-Sharif on 3 January 2016.

Second, to promote a stable and independent Afghanistan with minimal external interference. This essentially requires the building up of Afghan capacities in infrastructure and human resource development to strengthen governance. It also helps India counter Pakistani interference in Afghanistan that seeks to marginalise Indian influence in the country. The focus of India's involvement in Afghanistan therefore is primarily developmental through financial assistance, construction of major infrastructure projects and promotion of education.

India has provided over \$2 billion for civil reconstruction and development to Afghanistan in the last twelve years, making it the second largest recipient of Indian aid after Bhutan. Its major projects include the construction of the Zaranj-Delaram road, the installation of power transmission lines from northern Afghanistan to Kabul, the construction of the Afghan parliament building in Kabul and the building of the Salma Dam in Herat province in western Afghanistan, the latter still to be completed. Indeed, when I was in Kabul a few years ago, the Chief of Afghanistan's intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), told me that India builds everything in Afghanistan from "toilets to transmission lines".<sup>151</sup> The Indian government also provides nearly 2,000 scholarships annually to educate and train Afghans in India, including 500 Afghan civil servants. This has had a massive impact in building, as former Afghan President Hamid Karzai recently noted, "a critical mass of students, the middle class and the workforce of Afghanistan".<sup>152</sup>

It helped that India had also developed a strong political relationship with then Afghan President Hamid Karzai, educated partly in northern India. This relationship continued even after the U.S. and other western countries became disillusioned with him. India also maintained close links with the then long-serving and powerful NDS Chief Amrullah Saleh.

India also has historical and strong cultural and people-to-people relations with Afghanistan. Indeed, India is very popular among ordinary Afghans. In several opinion polls Afghans favoured India's role in reconstruction and development efforts over that of the UN, NATO, Iran and Pakistan.

### **Key Issues for Afghanistan's Stability and Security**

First, Supporting NATO-ISAF force presence. Although India did not join NATO-ISAF forces in Afghanistan, it strongly supported its presence in the country after some initial hesitation in the early years. This was seen by New Delhi as the most effective way to counter the Afghan Taliban, which was being provided covert support and safe haven by the Pakistan security establishment. India also took advantage of the multinational force presence to ensure the secure and safe delivery of its own economic development assistance to the country, without significant cost to itself.

As a result, India continues to remain concerned over the impact of NATO-ISAF force 'drawdown' on Afghanistan's stability. India's security establishment is of the view that NATO erred in announcing a

---

<sup>151</sup> Dipankar de Sarkar, "India's Afghan role is hot topic at London Meet", *The New Indian Express*, 26 January 2010 at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/article226775.ece>

<sup>152</sup> Suhasini Haidar, "Controversial Afghan-Pak intelligence MoU 'does not remain', says Hamid Karzai", *The Hindu*, 4 September 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/interview/interview-with-former-afghanistan-president-hamid-karzai/article7612242.ece>

'drawdown' date, its combat forces are departing too quickly, and that international forces should continue to remain in Afghanistan in an active role over the next few years. But, of course, this appears increasingly unlikely. New Delhi has also raised concern over the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) being left ill-equipped to fight insurgent and terrorist threats that remain entrenched in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas.

While there were some in the west who felt that India was a 'free-rider' in this situation, most western officials were reluctant to encourage India to take on a security role in Afghanistan for fear of upsetting the Pakistani security establishment which would have strongly opposed it. However, in the last two or three years some of these western officials have felt India could and should support the strengthening of the ANSF, at a time when their own national forces were withdrawing from Afghanistan.

Second, Countering Pakistani interference in Afghanistan. As mentioned earlier, India has traditionally sought to counter Pakistani interference in Afghanistan through the strengthening of Afghan governance and the building up of Afghan capacities in infrastructure and human resource development. The Indian security establishment has traditionally been concerned over the role of elements of Pakistan's security establishment in terror attacks against Indian diplomats and nationals. It is also concerned over the possibility of Pakistan engineering a political solution to Afghanistan's conflict, in which Taliban hardliners play a part in any future peace process or enter government, as this would also serve to marginalise any Indian role in Afghanistan.<sup>153</sup>

At the same time, Pakistan remains wary of India perceiving its policy in Afghanistan as a deliberate attempt to 'encircle' Pakistan. India's embassy in Kabul and its four consulates are often accused by the Pakistan government of carrying out clandestine operations against Pakistan in the restive province of Baluchistan and the tribal areas. Through its missions in Afghanistan, India is alleged to have provided training, arms and funds to Baluchi rebels, as well as funds, arms and ammunition to the Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP) in the tribal areas, as well as to various groups in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi. Recently, Pakistan gave two dossiers of alleged Indian involvement in Pakistan's internal affairs to the UN Secretary General as well as to the US government. These claims are strongly rejected by India.

India and Pakistan's mutual suspicions over each other's alleged activities in Afghanistan are exacerbated by bilateral tensions, leading to conflicting priorities and competition for influence in Afghanistan. For the past three years, the India-Pakistan bilateral peace process has stalled. Tensions have been heightened by intensified exchanges of firing across both the LoC and the IB. Government rhetoric has sharpened by both sides. Although claims of an India-Pakistan 'proxy' war in Afghanistan are exaggerated, the competition for influence in the country and their fierce rivalry has often been at odds with their stated development goals.

### **Significant developments in the Modi government's policy towards Afghanistan**

Far more than others, Modi's government has made India's South Asian neighbourhood a priority for its foreign and security policy. This is based on, what I call, "ruthless pragmatism", to be able to simultaneously take 'hard decisions' and provide 'soft policy options' to get the results Modi requires to ensure regional stability and security.<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>153</sup> Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, op.cit. "India", p. 233.

<sup>154</sup> Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, Text of Lecture, "India's new Modi government - what to expect on foreign and security policy", 20 June 2014, at *IISS Voices*, <http://www.iiss.org/en/iiss%20voices/blogsections/iiss-voices-2014-b4d9/june-4703/new-modi-government-foreign-policy-09c2>.

In this context, prime minister Modi issued an unprecedented invitation to SAARC (the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation) heads of government, as well as Mauritius, for his swearing-in ceremony in Delhi on 26 May 2014. His first foreign visit was to Bhutan, followed shortly afterwards by a visit to Nepal, surprisingly, the first bilateral visit by an Indian prime minister in nearly two decades! In Modi's first 20 months in office he has visited all South Asian countries with the exception of the Maldives. With Modi's visit to Kabul on 25 December 2015, three key developments in his government's policy towards Afghanistan are clear.

First, Concern over Closer Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's well-documented outreach to Pakistan, especially to its General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi, resulted in a sulk by Modi's government. Clearly, India's lack of geographical contiguity with Afghanistan curtailed its own policy options with regard to Afghanistan, with far lesser stakes for India than Pakistan in Afghanistan. The Indian security establishment was also aware that it could not deliver to Ghani what he was looking for from Pakistan, in view of Rawalpindi's influence over the Afghan Taliban; namely, bringing the Afghan Taliban to the table for peace talks and seeking the end of violence through ending Pakistan's covert support and safe haven to the Afghan Taliban.

Yet, the nadir in the India-Afghanistan relationship took place with the draft MoU between the ISI and the NDS in May 2015. Although its content was not been made public, it was reported to be an 8-point agreement about neutralising common threats, swapping professional experiences and jointly taking on separatists. The Indian security establishment privately perceived the MoU as 'hostile' with elements perceived to 'target India'. Publicly, India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval opposed it as it was based "on the faulty assumption that India probably uses Afghan soil or Afghan nationals, for its security purposes".<sup>155</sup> Following a surge in Afghan public and parliamentary opposition, the draft MoU was abandoned, although it may still be developed into a broader strategic document.

As a result, India delayed Ghani's first official visit to New Delhi till April 2015, eight months after he had been sworn in as president. Although Modi had first met Ghani at the SAARC summit in Kathmandu in November 2014, Ghani's interest in transiting through Delhi was also refused. Ghani's first visit to India therefore largely focused on economic and trade issues. The Modi government ignored Kabul's requests to hold a second meeting on the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) and refused to send a Minister to the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan held in Kabul in September 2015.

But towards the end of 2015, it was clear that Pakistan had not been able to deliver to the expectations of Ghani and his team. Partly as a result of this, there was an outreach to Delhi by Kabul. Afghanistan made strong representation to Pakistan that it should be able to conduct transit trade with India through Pakistan; if not, it would deny transit of Pakistani goods to Central Asia. The prospect of trilateral cooperation among Afghanistan, India and Iran through India's participation in the development of Chahbahar port in Iran was discussed. A flurry of diplomatic visits took place between India and Afghanistan, including the first stand-alone visit of the powerful Afghan National Security Adviser Hanif Atmar to Delhi in early November 2015, followed by that of the influential Deputy Foreign Minister Hekmat Karzai. These visits also laid the ground for Modi's first visit to Kabul on 25 December 2015. While it was ostensibly made for inaugurating the new parliament building financed and built by India, it also signified renewed Indian engagement with Afghanistan after a gap of over a year.

---

<sup>155</sup>"ISI, NDS working on wrong assumptions: Security advisor Ajit Doval", *The Nation*, 23 May 2015, at <http://nation.com.pk/national/23-May-2015/nsa-doval-finds-faults-with-pak-afghan-spy-agencies-deal>

Second, qualified support to the reconciliation process in Afghanistan. After some initial hesitation, India first expressed support publicly for Karzai's peace plan for reconciliation with the Afghan Taliban in May 2011 when prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh stated in Kabul that "we strongly support the Afghan people's quest for peace and reconciliation".<sup>156</sup> Prime minister Modi continued this policy when he told the Afghan parliament in December 2015 that "Those waging war from outside must seek a path to this building and this hall. Those seeking territory through gun must seek power through ballot. Those who have destroyed homes must now rebuild their nation. For, this is your land and these are your people".<sup>157</sup> But, he was also quick to add "And, it must be on your terms, on your genius, through your own process and your own spirit of brotherhood. Not driven by the calculations or ambitions of others".<sup>158</sup> This was, in essence, an expression of concern over the possibility of a Pakistan-brokered peace deal, preferring one which was 'Afghan-led' and 'Afghan-owned'. This was amplified in the subsequent joint statement which noted that Modi "strongly supported Afghan government-led reconciliation process which respects the redlines drawn by the people of Afghanistan and the international community, i.e., the groups and individuals to be reconciled must give up violence and abide by the Constitution of Afghanistan".<sup>159</sup>

At the same time India has, so far, publicly resisted an outreach to the Afghan Taliban even though several mid-level leaders and their families have sought and received medical assistance in hospitals and educational establishments in India. Although there has been no evidence of Afghan Taliban involvement in terror attacks in Kashmir or elsewhere in India in the past, the Taliban's facilitation of the Pakistani hijackers of Indian Airlines flight IC-814 in Kandahar in December 1999 remains an emotive issue. During the hijacking an Indian passenger was also killed. The Taliban also attacked, along with the LeT, a guest house in Kabul in February 2010 killing Indian nationals.

In any case, the appointment of Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour as the new chief of the Afghan Taliban complicates any such outreach by India's external intelligence agency, the Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW). Mansour, as the then Taliban civil aviation minister, may have played a key role in handling the hijacking of IC-814 in Kandahar. And, the new first deputy chief of the Taliban, Haqqani network leader Sirajuddin Haqqani, was involved in the 2008 Indian embassy attack in Kabul.<sup>160</sup>

Third, enhanced security cooperation and arms supply. India's has had a long-standing role in the provision of training and mobility to the Afghan security forces. This began in July 2002 with the training of 250 Afghan police officers and cadets in India. India has also provided 150 training scholarships annually to Afghan army personnel in its various staff and training facilities. To date, virtually all this training has taken place in India. India has also given some 300 vehicles to the Afghan army, including troop carriers, field ambulances and jeeps.

---

<sup>156</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), "India's Role in Afghanistan", *Strategic Comments*, June 2011.

<sup>157</sup> Text of Modi's speech to the Afghan parliament, *The Hindu*, 25 December 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/resources/text-of-modis-speech-to-afghan-parliament/article8029269.ece>

<sup>158</sup> Ibid

<sup>159</sup> Ministry of External Affairs (India), Text of India-Afghanistan Joint Statement, 25 December 2015 at <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral/documents.htm?dtl/26247/Joint+Statement+between+India+and+Afghanistan+December+25+2015>

<sup>160</sup> Nirupama Subramanian, "IC-814 hijacking: New Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansour escorted Maulana Masood Azhar, says Ex-RAW officer", *Indian Express*, 3 August 2015, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/new-taliban-chief-mullah-akhtar-mansour-escorted-maulana-masood-azhar-ex-raw-officer/#sthash.aMch7igX.dpuf>



On 4 October 2011 India signed an SPA with Afghanistan, the first of several for Afghanistan. In effect, India agreed to assist “as mutually determined”, in the training, equipping and capacity-building of the Afghan National Security Forces.<sup>161</sup> As a result, it expanded training of Afghan army officers in Indian establishments to over 1,000 annually. After a long delay, India also transferred three light utility multi-role helicopters to Afghanistan in late April 2015.

Yet, India’s support to the Afghan security forces had, till a few weeks ago, not included lethal offensive weaponry or equipment, despite repeated requests to do so by the Afghan government. The most notable request was made by president Karzai in May 2013. An advisor to Karzai, who accompanied him on that visit to Delhi, recalls that Karzai “presented a “wish-list” to New Delhi asking for lethal and non-lethal weaponry including military helicopters, medium-lift aircraft, tanks, 105 mm howitzer artillery etc”.<sup>162</sup>

But, then Indian defence minister A.K. Antony was believed to be opposed to the transfer of offensive arms to Afghanistan on the basis that i) they could fall into the hands of the Afghan Taliban during operations and be used against Afghan security forces, and ii) with fast-approaching national elections in Afghanistan it was prudent to wait till a new government had taken charge in Kabul. The Indian government may also have been wary of a Pakistani reprisal as well as an unsupportive U.S. reaction.<sup>163</sup> By May 2014, it was reported that Delhi was considering seeking financing from Russia of the Karzai-proposed arms package. But, with India’s general elections taking place then this was further delayed. Soon after Ghani took over, Karzai’s arms request to India was suspended.

But, in a major policy shift, the Modi government has supplied offensive arms to Afghanistan for the first time.<sup>164</sup> In late December 2015, India transferred, with Russia’s agreement, three ex-Russian Mi-25 ground attack helicopters to Kabul, with the fourth expected shortly, and their maintenance facility.

Due to their limited number, these helicopters are not expected to have a major impact on anti-Taliban operations. But, their transfer is significant as it marks the start of India’s arms transfers to Afghanistan. As these helicopters were part of Karzai’s arms request, they could be followed by other arms and equipment. Pakistan’s official reaction to this arms transfer has been muted. The Afghan Taliban’s reaction is awaited.

## Conclusion

With the Modi government’s foreign and security policy priority towards India’s neighbourhood, and the impact of Afghanistan’s future scenarios on India’s security, India will continue to be involved in Afghanistan. There is no exit strategy for India from Afghanistan.

---

<sup>161</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Afghanistan), *Text of Agreement on Strategic Partnership between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Republic of India*, 4 October 2011, at <http://mfa.gov.af/content/files/agreement%20on%20strategic%20partnership%20between%20afghanistan%20and%20india%20-%20english.pdf>

<sup>162</sup> Aimal Faizi, “How an active Indian military in Afghanistan will make New Delhi stronger”, Pajhwok news agency, 11 November 2015, at <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/opinions/how-active-indian-military-afghanistan-will-make-new-delhi-stronger>

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Suhasini Haidar, “Afghanistan may get attack helicopters”, *The Hindu*, 3 November 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/facing-a-security-crisis-afghan-nsa-hanif-atmar-reaches-out-to-india/article7838630.ece>

Yet, India's involvement in Afghanistan will be carefully calibrated. In the absence of an improvement in the domestic security environment it is not expected to re-engage in major construction projects as it did in the past. A notable expansion in trade will depend on the access India is provided through the land route transiting Pakistan. The number of Indian nationals in Afghanistan will remain limited.

Nonetheless, a new dimension of India's relationship has recently emerged, the supply of offensive weaponry to Afghanistan. The provision of three-four ground attack helicopters will not make much of an impact on the fight against the Taliban. However, this transfer is significant as it overcomes, for the first time, India's traditional hesitance to supply arms to Afghanistan. This is a significant step-up from India's traditional security cooperation with Afghanistan, focusing on training and the mobility of its forces. It is likely these armed helicopters will gradually be followed by other arms transfers, depending on the requirements and wishes of the Ghani government and India's ability to provide the arms. But, at the same time, India will not extend this to providing military trainers or military boots on the ground in Afghanistan.

At the same time, there are no official bilateral India-Pakistan talks on Afghanistan. Although the Indian government has been inclined towards such talks, the Pakistan side has refused. This is believed to be due to the Pakistan army's reluctance to raise India's role any further in Afghanistan by discussing it bilaterally. Yet, it is not inevitable that India and Pakistan will be locked into an unending cycle of rivalry and competition in Afghanistan. The risk of a civil war is a 'worst-case' scenario with negative implications for both. Both countries have an interest in discussing stability in Afghanistan, and share the objective of enhancing economic and trade links to help Afghanistan emerge as an economic hub linking south and central Asia. The start of bilateral talks on Afghanistan, at least whether between the two foreign ministries or the two intelligence agencies, India's R&AW and Pakistan's ISI, should be seriously considered.

## **Chapter 6: Afghanistan and Central Asia: Balancing Between Russia and Iran**

*Mark Voyger*

### **The Russia – NATO Crisis and its Impact on Afghanistan**

The continued Russian aggression in Ukraine, the current Russian military involvement in Syria, and the multiple structural challenges to the stability of the Middle East and North Africa – from those posed by non-state actors, such as DAESH and Al-Qaeda, to those originating from failed states, such as the massive political and economic migration flow into Europe, have forced NATO to divert much of its attention toward the urgent requirements of assurance and deterrence along its eastern and southern “flanks”, or NATO’s Strategic Directions East and South. In this dynamic strategic environment, however, the challenges to the success of the ongoing “Resolute Support” mission in Afghanistan have far from diminished, as many of them are of similar structural nature to those facing NATO along the borders of Europe – from the hegemonic expansion of resurgent regional powers, to corruption, poor governance and economic stagnation, sectarian strife and the proliferation of transnational extremist and criminal networks. All of those factors have a negative impact on the security of the broader region of Central Asia, but also on that of the European continent, as the flow of refugees and economic migrants from Afghanistan increases amidst the renewed attempts of the Taliban to exploit the vacuums of security in parts of Afghanistan, coupled with the survival of the Al-Qaeda structures and the rise of the regional franchise of DAESH that clashes with its other extremist competitors in an attempt to expand its influence within and without Afghanistan.

### **Afghanistan and Central Asia in the Strategic Calculus of Russia and Iran**

In that overall unstable context, the strategic confrontation between NATO and the West with Russia has not spared Afghanistan, as it has provided ample opportunities for Russia to exploit the deteriorating security and other structural challenges there by creating a strong-worded narrative of the failures of the West, and primarily of NATO led by the US, to establish security, as well as political, social and economic stability in that country. Russia’s efforts over the last year, however, have not been limited by anti-NATO and anti-US propaganda only, but have included also specific high-level diplomatic and military efforts to enlist the regional countries in Central Asia, as well as the member-states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) under a Russia-led strategic initiative, whose medium-term goal is to exclude NATO and the US/West from the security equation of Central Asia and Afghanistan, and entrust the area security only to the neighboring states with direct interest in it.

These renewed Russian ambitions portend to relegate Afghanistan to becoming again, in a fashion resembling the Cold War, an area of strategic competition between the West with its North Atlantic Alliance, and Russia and the circles of security and economic allies that it has been attracting throughout Eurasia over the last couple of years. Along with this increased Russian interest, Afghanistan has also witnessed the long-term strategic involvement of Iran that is currently re-asserting its imperial ambitions on a wider regional scale – from the Arab Middle East to Central Asia. This paper, therefore, aims to throw additional light on the Russian and Iranian ambitions in Afghanistan, based on proposed models of Russian and Iranian regional hegemonies, as well as on published Russian strategic statements and stabilization plans, their potential impact on Central Asia and the future stability of Afghanistan; and the observed patterns of Iranian attempts to dominate Afghanistan through non-military (hybrid) means.

## **Russia's Hegemonic Strategy in the 'Near Abroad'**

Russian strategic behaviour in its perceived 'Near Abroad' (broadly defined as the post-Soviet space in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia) has become the focal point of analytical efforts and concern following Russia's invasion and partition of Ukraine in 2014 and the crisis in the relations between Russia and the West that ensued. Russia's rationale in this confrontation can only be understood if seen the prism of its hegemonic strategy vis-à-vis its former Soviet constituent republics. What the crisis with Georgia (2004 – 2008) and Ukraine (2004 – 2010 and then since 2013) have taught Russia is that governments can fall and change overnight, but state cohesion (political and social); state power (military and economic), and strategic orientation (popular attitudes, cultural preferences for EU or Eurasian integration models) are built over many year, if not decades. This axiom determines the single most desired outcome for Russia's position in the 'Near Abroad' and that is uncontested hegemony over the former Soviet space, achieved by influencing two target audiences – the elites and the populations of Russia's "peripheral" states by means of three levels of pressure: domestic, regional and international levels, thus yielding four correlations of those countries' relative power and foreign policy orientation, ultimately leading to five strategic outcomes in the relative power and foreign policy orientation of those states, as per the Russian Hegemonic Strategy Model featured below. The preferred strategic outcome for Russia would be having weaker and dependent former Soviet states as neighbours, that are controllable through a pro-Russian strongman ('satrap'). This 'Satrap' model is also related to the Soviet concept of "limited sovereignty" for the former Eastern European satellite states postulated and imposed by force during the Brezhnev years, in particular Czechoslovakia in 1968. If that model becomes unsustainable, as in Georgia post-2004, and Ukraine post-2013, Russia resorts to playing the 'spoiler' in a game of contested sovereignty, in which the "unruly" neighbouring state is gradually partitioned and constantly harassed, if it displays a preference for a pro-Western course independent of Russia. Under both outcomes the West is denied strategic access to the former Soviet space by stalling or limiting the expansion of the Western political institution and security architecture eastward.

# RUS Hegemonic Strategy Model

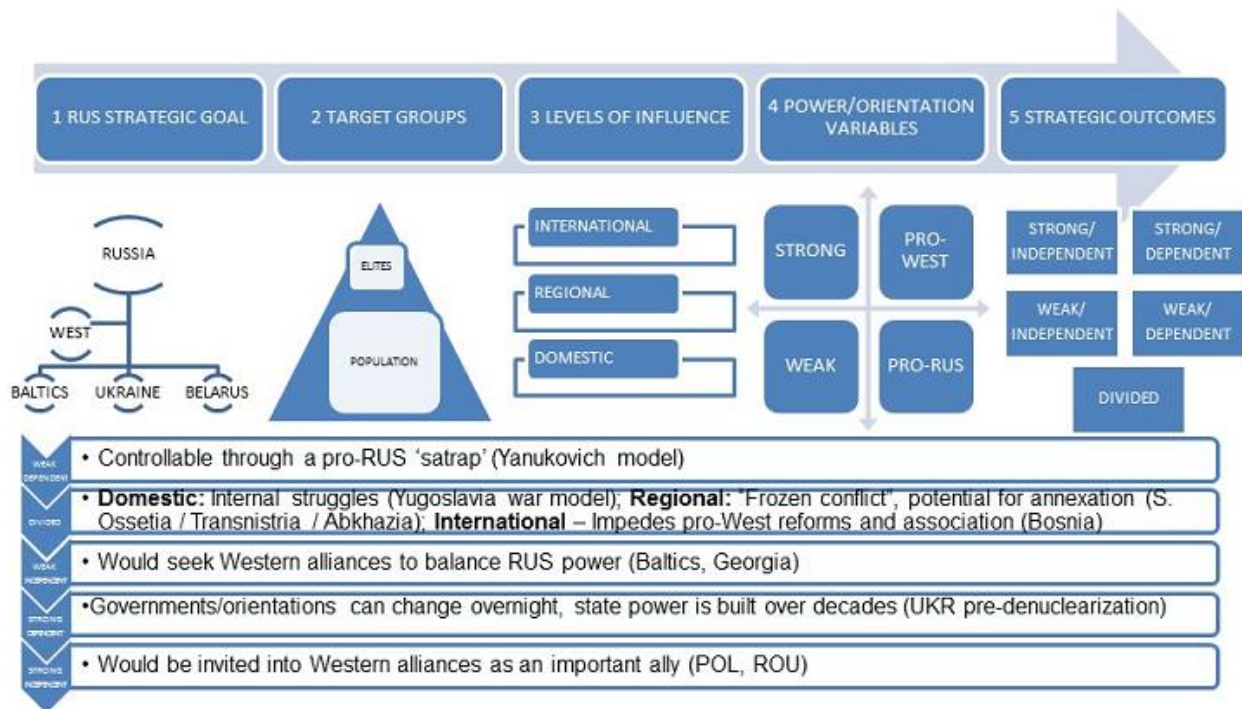


Figure 4: Russia's Hegemonic Strategy Model [source author].

## Central Asia in Russia's Strategic Calculus

Russia's strategic calculus for Afghanistan cannot be understood without taking into consideration the Russian perceptions of the political orientation and security of the Central Asia states that currently serve as a regional buffer zone for Russia against threats emanating from Afghanistan and South Asia. The Central Asian region of Russia's "Near Abroad" is very different from the Baltic States and the "Slavic Core" formed by Ukraine and Belarus, ethno-linguistically and culturally, as it consists of Turkic and Iranian-speaking Muslim nations. The more important critical differences, however, are the political and socio-economic ones, since Central Asia currently features no attractive political or economic governance models that differ substantially from, and could compete with the current Russian centralized statist one that has evolved under Vladimir Putin since 1999. Although Russia is interested in preserving its uncontested hegemony over the former Soviet republics in the region, it is content to tolerate local leaders who, even when displaying anti-Russian attitudes (Turkmenistan), still keep their countries on a strategic course that does not lead them too close to the West politically or economically. Under the Russian hegemonic model, therefore, the shared autocratic culture that Russia shares with the Central Asian states generally offers better prospects for a future gradual re-integration of those states within a Eurasian framework without the need for Russia to partition or re-conquer them in order to control them directly as it did in Czarist and Soviet times.

The challenges to the stability of Central Asia perceived by Russia are, among other: the infiltration of militants from Afghanistan; religious extremism and drug trafficking; the potential for domestic protests and socio-economic discontent; and economic issues that are exacerbated by the economic crisis in RUS. The long-term Russian strategic objectives include the keeping of Central Asia within

Russia's political and economic orbit; further deeper re-integration of those countries within the CSTO and Eurasian Economic Union led by Russia; limiting the presence and influence of NATO and the US in the region; countering radical religious ideologies, as well as suppressing domestic pro-democracy protests and movements. In that regard, the interests of Russia and the security-related objectives of the Central Asian republics coincide, as Russia promotes joint security engagements, such as establishing a CSTO Rapid Reaction Force; and having the CARs participate in Russian strategic exercises, such as "TSENTR 2015".

### **Russia's Threat Perceptions vis-à-vis NATO**

Since the eruption of the crisis with the West over Ukraine, the Russian leadership has been displaying overtly an ever deepening hostility toward the Euro-Atlantic Alliance. NATO's increased defense and deterrence measures have received a strongly critical official assessment in the latest version of Russia's National Security Strategy published on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015. According to it, "The strengthening of Russia occurs at the backdrop of new threats for the national security that are of complex interconnected nature. The Russian Federation's following of independent foreign and domestic politics are causing the counteraction on the part of the USA and its allies that are trying to preserve their domination in world affairs. The policy of containing Russia that they carry out envisages putting political, economic, military and information pressure on it."<sup>165</sup>

According to Provision 14, "The principles of equal and indivisible security are not observed in the Euro-Atlantic, Eurasian and Asia-Pacific regions. The processes of militarization and arms race develop in regions neighboring Russia."<sup>166</sup> Provision 15 states that: "The increasing of the force potential of the Organization of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) and its adoption of global functions that are exercised in violation of the norms of international law, the increased military activity of the bloc's countries, the further expansion of the alliance, the approaching of its military infrastructure to the borders of Russia, create a national security threat."<sup>167</sup> Provision 17 asserts that the position of the West aimed at countering the integration processes and creating hotbeds of instability in the Eurasian region, is impacting negatively the realization of the Russian national interests.<sup>168</sup> Last, but not least, according to Provision 18, "The emergence of the terrorist organization that has proclaimed itself to be "The Islamic State" and the strengthening of influence, are the result of the politics of double standards to which certain states adhere in the area of the fight against terrorism."<sup>169</sup>

The prominent mentioning of the US and NATO in Russia's latest National Security Strategy is a noticeable departure from the 2009 version, which was not as explicit in naming them as direct threats to the political stability and socio-economic well-being of Russia. This is due to a great extent to the dominant worldview of the current leadership in Kremlin that the West headed by the US is involved in organizing 'Color Revolutions' to subvert and topple governments that do not follow a pro-Western strategic course. Those views were reflected in President Putin's statements on Afghanistan and the role of the CSTO made on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. There he

---

<sup>165</sup> "National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation", 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015, Provision 12 p. 4, Russian language original available from: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/40391>

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 5

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> "National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation", p. 5

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 6

repeated the call he made before the UN SC on the need for a global coalition against terrorism and ISIL, as he also rejected what he called “double standards and color revolutions”. His assessment of the security situation in Afghanistan was bleak, based on perceived threats, such as the potential return of Russian ISIL fighters; the deteriorating security situation in AFG with ISIL increasing its foothold; the increase of drug trafficking and the potential for infiltration of militants into Central Asian states. Putin stated that Tajikistan is Russia’s strategic partner and ally and can count on Russian support to counter what he described as “de-stabilization attempts”. In adhering to his rhetoric opposed to perceived ‘Color Revolutions’, Putin also called for steps to strengthen the CSTO and proposed that legally binding security guarantees are provided for the Euro-Atlantic space to prevent any coups attempts and any outside support for radical forces.<sup>170</sup>

### **The official views of Russia’s MOFA on NATO and Afghanistan**

In accordance with the well-developed Russian “whole of government” approach, the Russian President’s ideas and statements have been reiterated by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) that has become a major source of Russian strategic messaging and anti-NATO/anti-US propaganda on Afghanistan, with strong-worded official critical statements made by high ranking Russian diplomats in charge of that region. Following them is critical for the Western understanding of Russia’s rationale revealed by its shifting viewpoints and narrative on Afghanistan and the future of the Taliban. Given that few of those statements have been reflected in the Western media or analyses when they were made between September and December 2015, critical excerpts have been included below, translated by the author.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2015, Zamir Kabulov, President Putin's Special Representative for Afghanistan made an official statement on the alignment of the interests of Russia and the Taliban in the struggle against ISIL, as follows: "The interests of the Taliban objectively align with ours even without stimulation". He also stated before the Russian media Interfax that Moscow and representatives of the Taliban have established channels for information exchange. Kabulov also stated that RUS is preparing to provide weapons systems to the official government of Afghanistan, but that it will be done “carefully and mainly on a commercial basis”.<sup>171</sup>

Zamir Kabulov is a high-ranking official in the Russian MOFA – the Director of the Second Asian Department, and he also serves as President Putin's Special Representative for Afghanistan. Since the fall of 2015 he has been making regular official statements and has given detailed interviews on a monthly basis published officially by the Russian MOFA, in which he has consistently described the NATO and US efforts in Afghanistan as a failure on all accounts that have resulted in the rise of instability, drug trade, a flow of refugees and the rise of ISIL as the latest most serious security challenges for Afghanistan and the region. In his official interview on 09 Oct 2015 he even made the following egregious statements: "it seems that someone's invisible hand, and it is easy to figure out whose, has been pushing ISIL to concentrate along the northern Afghanistan border areas after their training".<sup>172</sup> When asked whom he meant by that, he replied: "You can figure it out for yourself. Just look at the website of the Russian Foreign Affairs Council. It features a photo of the US Senator John McCain embracing ISIL fighters". Following that, on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015, in an interview for the

---

<sup>170</sup> Russian President Putin’s speech to the CSTO Forum, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015, available from: [www.tass.ru](http://www.tass.ru)

<sup>171</sup> Original RUS language communique from Interfax available from: <http://www.interfax.ru/world/486749>

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Kabulov for the “Izvestiya” newspaper, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2015, re-published by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at: [http://www.mid.ru/maps/af/-/asset\\_publisher/gehUa6O4gSTV/content/id/1838286](http://www.mid.ru/maps/af/-/asset_publisher/gehUa6O4gSTV/content/id/1838286)

journal "Profile" also re-published by the Russian MOFA, Kabulov provided a detailed assessment of the relationship between ISIL and the Taliban, saying "The Taliban have been feeling uncomfortable after the emergence of "Islamic State", as the ideology of IS is similar to the earlier ideological viewpoints of the Taliban. In 1994 they also spoke about a Caliphate and about the export of Islamic revolution, but after that life made them more reasonable, as they realized that they had become the bargaining chip in "the Great Game". Nowadays the Taliban in their majority behave, let's say, as a "national-liberation movement".<sup>173</sup> When asked who the Taliban are trying to liberate Afghanistan from, Kabulov replied: "From the Americans and NATO. They think that their country is occupied by the West, and regard this as a Christian aggression against Islam. And the current leadership of the Taliban, at least in the past few years, has definitely stated clearly that their movement has no international designs, and they are limited exclusively to the territory of Afghanistan." He also went further in developing his earlier theme of 9<sup>th</sup> October of the presumed US support for ISIL in Afghanistan by suggesting that "everything works well for field commanders who cooperate with IS – they receive additional funding, weapons, if necessary, and such. Those who are opposed to such cooperation face problems, as they are told: "well then [sic], then you will no longer receive aid from Pakistan. Apart from that, when the American UAVs and aviation bomb Taliban units, then for some reason the air strikes are launched against exactly those units that refuse to cooperate with IS, and not those that agree. The press even wrote about unmarked "Chinook" helicopters who have transferred IS fighters from the eastern to the northern areas of Afghanistan. The Afghan army doesn't have such helicopters". Asked about the logical of such claimed support, Kabulov stated: "The Great Game was never over in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is an excellent, well-prepared beachhead, from which one could exert geopolitical influence by force on Central Asia. Russia, China, Pakistan, and of course, Iran are also nearby. It is a very convenient position from the military geopolitical point of view." On the question of whether this is not a risky game, Kabulov replied: "Our colleagues are not squeamish about anything, as the experience in Syria and Iraq has demonstrated".<sup>174</sup>

It must be noted when considering the relative weight of such egregious statements that Kabulov is not a sensationalist journalist or an independent political commentator, but a high-ranking Russian diplomat and President Putin's official representative for Afghanistan, whose views are published officially by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that also re-publishes his media interviews on its official website. Given his rank and position, it would be unacceptable for him to make statements of this nature that are not coordinated with Russia's political and diplomatic leadership and that do not represent their viewpoints.

### **The Russian General Staff's Plan for Stabilizing Afghanistan Through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization**

The statements by Ambassador Kabulov and other officials from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Russian Ministry of Defense delineate a steady course of systematic denigration of the Western efforts in Afghanistan in order to not only portray them as a failure, but also to convince the government of Afghanistan, the Central Asian republics and member-states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that the NATO and US presence poses a major threat to the security of their regimes, and the region, as a whole, which necessitates the creation of an

---

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Kabulov for the journal "Profile", 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015, re-published by the Russian MOFA at: [http://www.mid.ru/maps/af/-/asset\\_publisher/gehUa6O4gSTV/content/id/1930468](http://www.mid.ru/maps/af/-/asset_publisher/gehUa6O4gSTV/content/id/1930468)

<sup>174</sup> Kabulov's interview on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2015, link above.



alternative security architecture spearheaded by the RUS Minister of Defense and Chief of General Staff.

Furthermore, in the context of the ongoing crisis between Russia and the West/NATO over the Russian military involvement in Ukraine and Syria, the Russian political and military leadership has moved from purely political statements on Afghanistan to the phase of specific military planning. During the session of the Council of the Ministers of Defense of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Moscow on 30th June 2015, the Russian Minister of Defense Army General Sergey Shoygu, proposed to convene a conference of the SCO member-states dedicated to Afghanistan and the security in Central Asia. According to Minister Shoygu: "The increased regional security is possible if all interested states joint their efforts. In particular, the coordination of activities within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization could bring about positive changes in Afghanistan". Shoygu's views have also found an official reflection in the new National Security Strategy of the RF, which postulates that: "In response to the increased international instability, states more often assume the responsibility for their regional affairs".<sup>175</sup>

On 9 – 11 Oct 2015, the Russian Ministry of Defense convened an International Conference on the problems of Afghanistan with the participation of the Chiefs of Staff of the member-states and observers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Most of the Central Asian states, with the exception of Turkmenistan, are members of the SCO, which also includes China, with Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, India, Mongolia and Pakistan having observer status. Russia has been trying over the years, to portray the SCO as the Eurasian alternative of NATO, through joint exercises involving Russia, China and the Central Asian states, usually framed as counter-terrorism training. Both the RUS MD Sergey Shoygu, and the Chief of General Staff of the RF Armed Forces, Army General Valeriy Gerasimov, addressed the conference participants and guests, as their speeches and specific proposals provide direct insights into the thinking of the RUS top military leadership on the situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a whole, and of the activities of NATO and the US there in the context of Russia's regional and global threat perceptions.

Gen. Gerasimov speech is critical in many respects, first and foremost by his official call for the creation of a new system of regional security for Afghanistan and Central Asia under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as he stated that, "The collective security in the region can be provided only based on the joint efforts of geographically close states that share common interests."<sup>176</sup> He used the geopolitical narrative of the Kremlin that has become the norm since the eruption of the RUS-West crisis over UKR - by accusing the Western powers of triumphalism after the Cold War, of disregarding the principles of international law, of challenging the legitimacy of governments opposed by the West by dubbing them non-democratic, and by removing them through 'color revolutions'. He went even further, by linking historically the creation of the Taliban movement with the rise of ISIL, and even by claiming that the Taliban were created to fight the Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

Gen. Gerasimov also gave a strongly negative assessment of the NATO and US efforts in Afghanistan by elaborating on the rise of extremist groups there, the increase of civilian casualties, refugees,

---

<sup>175</sup> "National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation", Provision 25, p. 7., reference above.

<sup>176</sup> "ISIL Started with the Taliban", speech of Army General Valeriy Gerasimov, Chief of General Staff of the RFAF at the International Conference on Afghanistan of the Chiefs of Staff of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 9 - 11 Oct 2015; published by *The Military-industrial Courier*, Issue No 39 (605), 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015, Russian original from: <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/27521>

drug trafficking and the deteriorating socio-economic situation. “Over the course of the last year we have witnessed the rise of the activity of the international terrorist organization “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant”, which is assuming control over more and more areas with the goal of expanding its sphere of interest and building “an Islamic Caliphate”. By our assessment, there are between two to three thousand ISIL militants in Afghanistan, as their number is constantly rising.”<sup>177</sup>

He assessed as insufficient the training and equipment of Afghan security forces there, and proposed a plan of several points to stabilize the situation in the country and the region, effectively laying out a ‘Gerasimov Plan’ for employing the SCO to stabilize Afghanistan and Central Asia, as follows: “It is necessary to think of including the SCO and its partner-nations in the joint efforts in supporting the Afghan leadership and in developing actionable measure for the stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan”.<sup>178</sup> The specific proposals of the ‘Gerasimov Plan’ for the stabilization of Afghanistan and Central Asia, included: provide assistance to the leadership of Afghanistan and the other Central Asian states in supplying and training their security forces in order to improve the effectiveness of their actions against extremists; activate to the maximum extent possible all institutions that could assist the socio-economic development of the countries of the region, and provide humanitarian aid to the population of Afghanistan; cut the sources of funding, the channels for the supply of arms and materiel to the extremist organizations acting in Afghanistan; counter the rise of extremist ideology. Gen. Gerasimov finished laying out his plan by effectively proposing a new system of regional security in Afghanistan and Central Asia: “Only dedicated joint work would enable the stabilization of the situation in Central Asia, and will not allow the spread of the influence of extremist organizations to other countries and regions.”<sup>179</sup>

Following Army General Gerasimov’s speech, Col.-Gen. Sergey Istrakov, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the RF Armed Forces gave a presentation on the joint work of the defense agencies of the SCO countries in stabilizing AFG and Central Asia. Gen. Istrakov’s presentation is also important as it provided valuable details into the initial strategic design promoted by his boss, Gen. Gerasimov. His presentation was titled: “Methods of Exclusion: How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Plans to Solve the Afghan Problem”.<sup>180</sup>

According to Gen. Istrakov, “The attempts of the countries of the West to intervene in the internal affairs of the Central Asian states are also among the main threats to regional and international security there, along with the primary threat of the terrorist activities of the Taliban, the spread of ISIL; the export of instability, and the rise of drug trafficking.”<sup>181</sup> According to him, the primary task regarding Afghanistan is to not allow it to be used as the ‘spoiler’ of the situation in the SCO countries”, and while “the SCO member-states are trying individually to neutralize the regional security threats by undertaking unilateral measures for the economic, political, social and humanitarian nature”, those attempts do not allow them to counter efficiently the new threats. He invoked the Syrian crisis, which he said “clearly demonstrates that the efforts of the Western anti-

---

<sup>177</sup> Gerasimov, Valeriy, “ISIL Started with the Taliban”, 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015, reference above.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Presentation of Col-Gen. Sergey Istrakov, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the RFAF, “Methods of Exclusion: How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Plans to Solve the Afghan Issue”, published by the *Military-Industrial Courier*, Issue No 40 (606), 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2015, Russian original from: <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/27615>

<sup>181</sup> Col-Gen. Istrakov, Sergey “Methods of Exclusion”, 20th October 2015, reference above.

terrorist coalition do not yield results in the struggle against ISIL namely because its participants have different goals, and their actions diverge.”<sup>182</sup>

Ultimately, in Gen. Istrakov’s views, the security of AFG must be provided only by its citizens, as no armed intervention from abroad can solve the problem; secondly, providing security requires outside help of multi-layered nature – from economic development to military-technical cooperation, and thirdly, eradicating terrorism would be impossible without destroying drug trafficking. Last, but not least, according to him, the SCO provides a universal mechanism that is capable of coordinating the activity of all participants and of the AFG government aimed at providing for the security of the region.<sup>183</sup>

Based on Istrakov’s plan, the current military-political situation requires coordinated SCO efforts to counter emerging threats in several directions. The first direction includes blocking the spread of terrorism to the countries of Central Asia; increasing the cohesion of the SCO armed forces, strengthening mutual understanding and confidence-building measures. The second direction involves perfecting the mechanism of information exchange between the armed forces of the SCO member-states in assessing regional security threats; forming a body of national military advisors within the SCO secretariat for coordination between the national armed forces, as well as with the SCO regional anti-terrorist structure, the CSTO, and the CIS anti-terrorism center. The third direction would be to share experience in the training and employment of military contingents in antiterrorist operations; and expand military-technical cooperation between the SCO countries. Other elements of the plan would include countering Afghanistan drug trafficking, the funding, supply of weapons and material to the extremist organizations active in Afghanistan; creating a universal center based on the SCO regional anti-terrorist structure; countering extremist ideology through focused efforts in the information sphere to counter extremist recruitment and support of the local population; supporting the AFG authorities with national reconciliation by using the political, economic and social potential of the CIS and the EEU.

Gen. Istakov made a final recommendation reiterating the rationale of Russian Minister of Defense Shoygu and Gen. Gerasimov’s rationale, that only the joint efforts of all countries from the Central Asian region could help fight terrorism and prevent the spread of extremism; thus effectively excluding the West and NATO from playing an active role in the regional security architecture.<sup>184</sup>

The Russian statements on Afghanistan in the context of Russia’s exacerbating crisis with NATO – reflected in Russia’s new Russian National Security Strategy, as wells in the official statements of Russian President Putin, the Russian Minister of Defense and the Russian General Staff, and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – all display a coherent strategy of portraying NATO and the US as threats to Russia and ultimately – as negative factors of security in Afghanistan and Central Asia, that must be substituted by Russia-led initiatives within the ongoing integration processes in Eurasia.

---

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

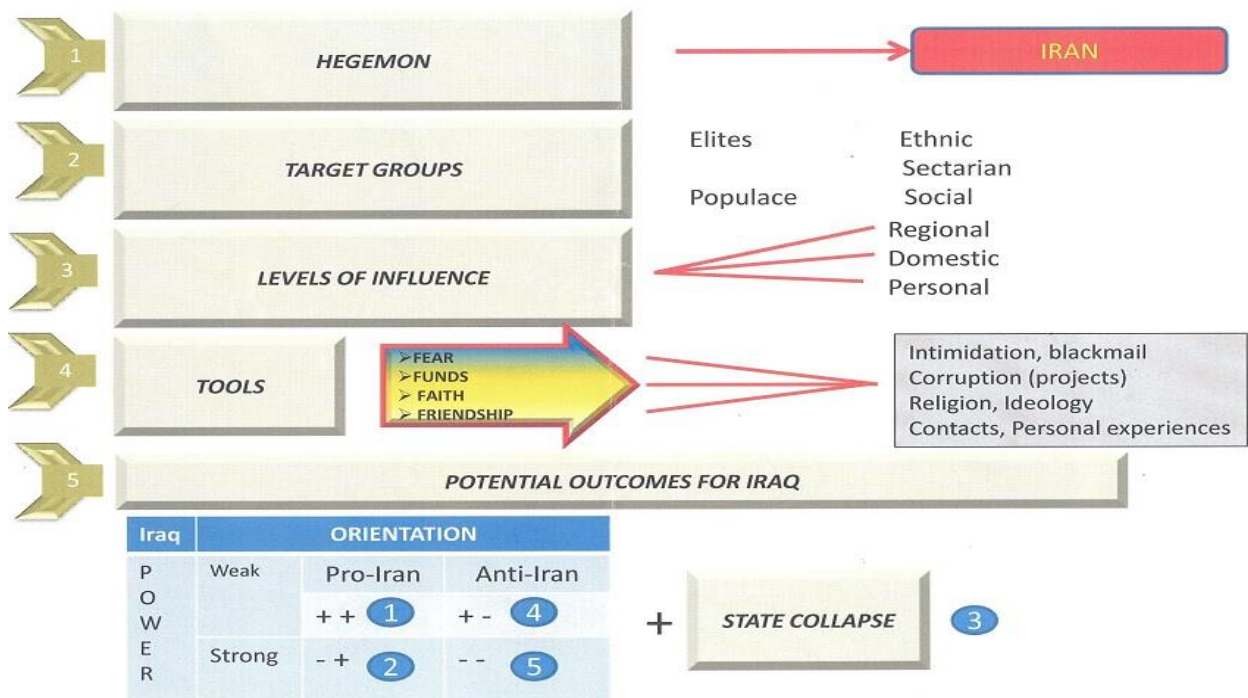
<sup>184</sup> Col-Gen. Istrakov, Sergey “Methods of Exclusion”, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015, reference above.

## Iranian Strategic Culture and Hybrid Warfare: “Jang-e-Narm” (‘Soft War’)

Given its current inability to compete with the West in conventional warfare, Iran has resorted to its own version of Hybrid Warfare - ‘Soft War’ (‘jang-e-narm’) in response to its perceived challenge by Western “soft power”.<sup>185</sup> This Iranian-style Hybrid Warfare is an element of Iranian strategic culture of gradual, but constant expansionism by dividing the adversaries surrounding Iran until another strong regional power pushes back. In that regard it is structurally similar to the Russian Hybrid Warfare as displayed during the Russian incursion into Ukraine, as it uses similar elements – from historical, to socio-cultural, legal, diplomatic and covert.

The strands of Iranian Hybrid Warfare can be identified, as follows: historical - the Iranian imperial ambitions in Arab Middle East; religious - the exploitation of the Sunni-Shi’a sectarian divide in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Bahrein, Yemen); geopolitical - the threatening of strategic maritime chokepoints (the Straits of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb); military – Iran’ nuclear ambitions and military support to its allies in Iraq and Syria; diplomatic – Iran’s support for Shi’a governments in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria; economic – the economic penetration of Iraq and the support for the Syrian regime (through oil supplies and funding); and last, but not least – covert, the most prominent examples being the IRGC’s support and training of Shi’a militias in Iraq, the support for Houthi rebels in Yemen, and Iran’s sponsorship of Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Figure 5: Iran’s Hegemonic Strategy in Iraq: The Model [Source: author]



The patterns, by which Iran has established a hegemonic presence in Iraq offer a classical example of Iranian penetration of a neighbouring state that has historically been its primary

<sup>185</sup> See Ahmed S. Hashim, “Gulf Roundtable: The Evolution of Iran’s Military Doctrine”, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2013, available at: <http://csis.org/event/evolution-irans-military-doctrine>

strategic competitor in the Middle East. The featured model was developed by the author in the spring of 2011 for the Competing Strategies (Red) Team assessment of Iranian influence over Iraq, as it was used by the US military leadership in their key leader engagements with their Iraqi counterparts. Unlike the dominant emotionally-charged narrative of a “malign Iranian influence” that did not resonate well with the Iraqi Shi’a leadership at the time, this model offers an unemotional assessment of Iranian penetration of Iraq, from its ultimate objective of being the stronger player in the neighbourhood (the hegemon), through its target groups – the elites and the population and the ethnic, religious and social groups that could best promote the interests of Iran in Iraq at the personal, domestic and regional levels of influence, through a set of tools, called “Fear, Funds, Faith and Friendship”, whose darker dimensions involve intimidation, corruption of government officials and community leaders, bound to Iran by sectarian linkages or personal bonds.

**Figure 6: Tools of Iranian Influence [Source: author]**

IRANIAN TOOLBOX IN IRAQ: A "4F" APPROACH		TOOLS OF IRANIAN INFLUENCE:			
TARGET GROUPS:	Levels of influence:	FEAR	FUNDS	FAITH	FRIENDSHIP
ELITES	Personal	Intimidation, Blackmail, Violent examples	Corruption, Financial issues, Financial needs	Shi'ism, Mahdism marjaya	Contacts, Families, Personal stories
	Domestic	Exposure, Loss of position, Ba'ath return	Projects, Joint ventures, Investment	Islamism versus secularism	Iran – a safe haven from domestic persecution
	Regional	Rise of Iran, American presence,	Iran-Iraq trade balance	Wilayat-ul-umma vs. velayet-e-faqih	Transborder cooperation, Smuggling of weapons
PEOPLE	Personal	Personal safety	Job creation, Militia funding	Marjaya	Contacts, Families
	Domestic	SEG violence	Social services, Charities	Pilgrimage	Public campaigns
	Regional	Iranian takeover, US	Iranian competition	Shi'ism vs. Arabism	Arab vs. Persian

The ongoing Iranian attempts to achieve hegemony throughout the Arab Middle East exploit and inevitably exacerbate the sectarian divide in the Middle East.<sup>186</sup> Iran’s expansionism is defined by Iran’s cultural affiliations with the Shi’a populations in the region, and the sectarianism promoted by Iran ultimately has a strong destabilizing effect on the entire region and triggers strong opposition from the dominant Sunni powers in the region represented by Saudi Arabia and the Arab League.<sup>187</sup>

<sup>186</sup> See the statement by Dr. Ray Takeyh on “Iran’s Destabilizing Role in the Middle East”, hearing before the U.S. Congress Committee on Foreign Affairs, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2014, available from: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-113hrg88732/html/CHRG-113hrg88732.htm>

<sup>187</sup> See the joint statement of the Arab League condemning the sectarian nature of Iran’s activities in the Middle East, “Arab League ministers back Saudi Arabia, condemn Iran”, BBC News, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2016, available from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35276270>

## Iran in Afghanistan: The Art of Playing Both Sides

In Afghanistan Iran is faced with a different “human terrain” compared to Iraq – one based on linguistic and cultural affiliations along with the traditionally exploited Shi’a sectarian element. While Iraq is dominated by Arab-speaking populations, both its Shi’a majority and Sunni minority, the groups in Afghanistan that share direct linkages with Iran’s ethno-religious characteristics are the predominantly Sunni Persian-speaking community (the Tajiks) and the Persian-speaking Shi’a minority (the Hazaras).

Iran’s long-term objectives in Afghanistan are defined by what it views as systemic threats posed by non-Shi’a extremist groups – the Taliban and AQ; to structural ones based on deeply rooted economic issues, such as the flow of drugs and migrants originating from AFG. Iran traditionally views itself as the dominant player in its relationship with Afghanistan, and inevitably tries to shape the future political and cultural outlook of Afghanistan, especially its post-Coalition future. In that regard, despite of its long-term goal of maintaining a modicum of stability in Afghanistan to the extent that it allows it to maintain predictable and manageable relations with its agents of influence in the country; Iran is simultaneously pursuing a set of short-term goals that run contrary to stability through its attempts to subvert Coalition efforts. Iran is playing both sides in Afghanistan by maintaining friendly ties to officials in Kabul, and by the IRGC clandestine provision of weapons to Taliban groups in order to undermine NATO-led stabilization and speed up Coalition troops’ withdrawal. Afghan and US officials have long accused Iran of supporting the Taliban and AQ, especially Iran’s Quds Force and its Ansar Corps, based out of Mashhad.<sup>188</sup> The fact that by doing so Iran is seemingly crossing the Shi’a-Sunni divide should not be viewed as a leap of faith, as Iran has proven through its support for Hamas and other radical and Jihadist groups in the Middle East, that it can successfully cooperate with radical Sunni groups that share its anti-Western agenda.<sup>189</sup>

In Afghanistan Iran is able to apply extensive tools combining hard and soft power – both its “Soft War” (“jang-e-narm”); and Asymmetric War (“jang-e-na-monazzam”) across the entire PMESII spectrum. Iran’s religious and socio-cultural influence is manifested by the promotion of Shi’a Islam along with Iranian culture, especially among the Shi’a Hazaras; by the numerous Afghan students in Iran; and by promoting the Persian language culture that both Iran and Afghanistan share. Cultural influence, just like in Iraq, often translates into political influence, as Iran uses corruption to influence Afghan politicians, along with exerting diplomatic pressure to have anti-Coalition statements pushed through the Afghan Parliament.<sup>190</sup> Iran also benefits from strong economic influence over Afghanistan based on Iranian investment and commercial engagement, which feature an imbalanced economic relationship in favor of Iran, and where Iranian supply of oil and gas are used as political

---

<sup>188</sup> See Kagan, Frederick and all, “Iranian Influence in the Levant, Egypt, Iraq and Afghanistan”, American Enterprise Institute, Institute for the Study of War, 2012, pp. 82-83.

<sup>189</sup> See Takeyh, US Congress Hearing on Iran, reference above.

<sup>190</sup> AEI/ISW Report on Iranian influence, pp. 85-86, reference above.

tools. Last, but not least, Iran uses extensively to its advantage the issue of AFG migrants in Iran (over 2.5 million; of which nearly 1 million refugees) as a powerful tool for exerting pressure based on threats of mass deportations, that when followed on could trigger humanitarian and political crises in Afghanistan.

The Iranian hegemonic model that is used extensively in the Arab Middle East is, therefore partially replicated in Afghanistan, based on structurally similar tools and primary agents of influence. From the Iranian point of view its rationale is twofold - the protection of traditionally marginalized groups, such as the Shi'a in Afghanistan, and using them to promote and expand Iran's interests. Iran, however, has been known to also play a perilous opportunistic game that ultimately contributes to the destabilization of the country by also supporting non-status quo actors, such as the Taliban, which is unlikely to promote stability in the long-run. Iran and Afghanistan, thus, share an uneasy relationship derived from Iran's attempts to play a dominant role. The combination of Iran's ongoing pressure and destabilization attempts depending on Afghanistan's response in the context of the continued Coalition presence there poses strategic challenges for the stability of the country.

### **Conclusion: The Alignment of the Strategic Objectives of Russia and Iran in Afghanistan**

In the period between Sep 2015 and Mar 2016, Russia has announced prominently its intent to play an active role in the Afghanistan security equation. The statements of high-ranking Russian officials – political and military – clearly demonstrate that Russia regards Afghanistan and the Central Asian states as areas of not only strategic competition, but even confrontation with NATO and the US. Russia has consistently portrayed the NATO efforts there as a total failure, whether by incompetence or design, and the US presence as intentionally destabilizing for the region as a whole. This propaganda effort is based on the well-developed Russian narrative of a perceived encirclement of Russia by US forces that plan to turn the NATO member and partner-states into 'beachheads' to be used for a potential US invasion of Russia in the future in support of a 'Color Revolution' aimed at triggering a pro-Western regime change in Moscow.

Over the last six month Russia has been pushing for a strong regional approach toward the issues of stability and security in Afghanistan, by using the SCO and the CSTO as regional security organizations to replace NATO and the US and establish an alternative regional security architecture for Afghanistan. The ideas of using the SCO have been present in the Russian MOFA thinking and statements since at least 2014, and were codified in the updated National Security Strategy of the RF of Dec2015. The Russian military has also reinforced that conceptual framework by unveiling and promoting a detailed plan developed by the RFAF General Staff for stabilizing Afghanistan through the SCO, and presented to the Chiefs of Staff of the SCO member-states in Oct 2015.

Along with those doctrinal developments, Russia has been making practical inroads into both the Afghan government, by providing small arms as a gift, and offering to sell it Russian helicopters; as well as by effectively endorsing the agenda of the Taliban with regard to both IS/DAESH and NATO, as even by reportedly providing small arms to Taliban group affiliated with Iran through the mediation of the Quds Force's Mashhad office, according to (still unconfirmed) open sources.

Given the global scope of Russian Hybrid Warfare, as the 21<sup>st</sup> century style of warfare favored by the current Russian political and military leadership, Afghanistan should be regarded as one of its emerging theaters, where Russia is applying political, diplomatic, legal, economic, socio-cultural and information pressure against NATO, along with attempting to gain military influence over the NUG, boosted by intelligence collection against the US and NATO, and covert support for militant groups. The RUS strategic rationale is to use the rise of threats emanating from Afghanistan and the concerns of the Central Asian states and their leaderships, in order to discredit NATO, deny it strategic access, and re-assert more firmly the traditional Russian hegemony over the region by preventing any further expansion of the Western political and economic models, and military presence there.

In this regard, the Russian strategic interests are aligned with those of Iran, as it also opposes long-term US and NATO presence in Afghanistan, and has developed and implemented a strategy of playing both sides – the NUG and some Taliban groups - by using a similar multi-pronged approach of exerting non-military overt and covert pressure in order to attain its hegemonic goals over Afghanistan.

In the current global security context, therefore, Russia and Iran share the similar objective of limiting the influence of the West, and in particular of the US and NATO, over what they view as their areas of strategic interests, such as the Central Asian states, and Afghanistan. The Russian and Iranian attempts at discrediting and excluding the Euro-Atlantic Alliance from the security equation of Afghanistan will ultimately prove short-sighted and will inevitably have a strong destabilizing effect in the long-run, as they are incompatible with the lofty goals of achieving stability and prosperity for the region officially proclaimed by Russia.



## Conclusions

The six papers in this collection, two of which focus on Afghanistan and four of which focus on Afghanistan's most five substantive neighbours – Pakistan, China, India, Russia and Iran – collectively paint a troubling picture of the deteriorating internal security situation in Afghanistan, of an international community at risk of repeating policy prescriptions of declining utility in Afghanistan and in urgent need of a rethink, and of a peace process that is stalling and failing to engage the key non-state violent actors (NSVAs) whose participation and inclusion will be a *sine qua non* of any durable prospect of peace and stability in Afghanistan. Those papers dealing with Afghanistan's neighbours point to key areas of shared interest and to efforts to use multilateral fora (SCO, "Heart of Asia") and regional diplomacy (including extensive bilateral diplomacy), and in some cases to strategic investment, to promote Afghan and regional stability and security in which there is to be found some ground for optimism, but equally highlight key tensions and rivalries which threaten to undermine constructive regional diplomatic efforts and reinforce – intentionally or otherwise – negative trends inside Afghanistan, nudging the country towards deeper conflict and instability.

In his opening paper James Page explains the ongoing salience of Afghanistan for regional and international affairs and argues that it is very likely to experience a further period of difficult challenges, particularly amid uncertainties about security, economic development, and regional dynamics. He offers the reformulation that what began as a war of purpose in Afghanistan in 2001 currently appears to be characterizable more as a war of risk, arguing consequently that risk and consequence management could well prove insufficient approaches in addressing Afghanistan's immediate challenges, in particular a range of actors with renewed purpose; an environment of growing instability and uncertainty; and, signs of strengthening determination of proxy actors, supporters and related dynamics. Perhaps more worryingly, as outlined in Obama's 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015 speech, those issues which drew the United States into Afghanistan remain and to some extent have mutated into a wider range of security challenges including: al Qaeda and various affiliates; extremists; state-sponsored networks; local militias or extremists interested in seizing territory; and regional networks launching periodic attacks against western diplomats, companies, and other soft targets, or resorting to kidnapping and other criminal enterprises to fund their operations.

In all this Page sees tensions having opened up between reality, and analytical-cum-decision making frames (and within these). This he argues is reflective of the not infrequent conflation of goals and strategy and especially strategy and operations. Possible/potential correctives to analytical framing appear too often to be a threat to the wider narrative, or undermine the idea that goals are achievable through decisive will and the application of resources, and may be resisted for those reasons. As noted above having raised these questions Page then explores them more fully, both conceptually and in terms of their policy implications, in the second DGSi paper.

In her consideration of the state of play in the Afghan peace process, Emily Winterbotham, argues that, at the time of writing, the prospects for peace appear bleak. The Taliban is likely to continue to fight to gain a stronger negotiating position and Omar's successor, Mullah Mansour, is more aware than ever of the need to retain the support of his followers in the face of internal dissent. That said the peace process is not dead, both because Mansour is leading efforts to build a big political tent within which disaffected factions might be persuaded to return to the fold (thereby simplifying and strengthening the position of the Taliban should it opt to return to talks) and soften the Taliban approach towards elements of the Afghan state and international community, and because simultaneously there remains interest in a peace process in the core states involved – Afghanistan and Pakistan – and in those states (the US and China) best positioned to shepherd these states towards an accommodation.

Winterbotham concludes that there remain hopes of some kind of Track I process but that it is far more likely that we will see a Track II Pugwash-style conversation emerging once again. At the same time, she argues it will be important to continue dialogue outside the main negotiation tracks and include, as Farrell and Semple advocate, work with prisoners (who have a stake), pro jihad *ulema* and communities in Afghanistan where Taliban operate.

One of the main imponderables overshadowing the prospects for the peace process is that it is not known how much leverage Pakistan has applied (or indeed can apply) on the Taliban and how successful the Taliban leadership is at withstanding the leverage. Winterbotham argues that a major shift in Pakistan's analysis and policy preferences in Afghanistan is unlikely but that a number of issues – including the TAPI pipeline and the emergence of Islamic State in South Asia – could prompt change in Pakistan's thinking. She sees in Pakistan's rhetoric, as in that of other regional states, some optimism but argues 2016 will be a critical year in determining whether promises will translate into action. The failure to date of the key states – and for that matter the Taliban – to forge even an approach to a regional consensus on an end state of peace in Afghanistan does not augur well.

Shaun Gregory picks up the subject of Pakistan and argues that it is unlikely to navigate far from its traditional policies towards Afghanistan and has successfully positioned itself to play a decisive role in Afghanistan, during and beyond the NATO transition. It has the ear of the United States and China on the Afghan question, and some influence with key elements of the Taliban, and is ultimately the indispensable state for Afghanistan without which Kabul has no prospects for national stability. Pakistan seems moreover to have avoided the risk of US disengagement from the region, partly because the US continues to have active counter-terrorism and regional stability interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan in a way it felt it did not in 1989, and partly because there seems little sign, despite the raising of serious voices to the contrary, of policy-makers in Washington questioning their belief that military and civilian aid to Pakistan buys influence in Pakistan and its denial forces Pakistan into even worse policy choices. Pakistan will continue to feed this narrative but in practice the US has little meaningful influence with Pakistan for its money and can't expect to significantly condition Pakistan's engagement with either the Taliban or the Afghan government.

Gregory argues that China, on the other hand, has a greater degree of influence with Pakistan. China's emergence as a trans-regional power in South West Asia, its long-standing geostrategic friendship with Pakistan, its place as Pakistan's main arms supplier, and its massive \$46billion dollar investment in Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative will ensure it has considerable sway over Pakistan in the decades ahead and thus Pakistan is likely to curb its excesses if China indicates its opposition to particular Pakistani behaviours in Afghanistan. However, Gregory argues there are limits to China's influence with Pakistan, and that the latter will thus pursue its interests in Afghanistan with a clear sense also of how much it can get away with without decisively antagonising Beijing.

In this context Gregory argues, Pakistan may, if trends appear to be moving against it, step up its efforts to destabilise Afghanistan as a means to weaken Kabul further and thereby constrain India. He suggests that instability in Afghanistan, while holding risks for Pakistan, also has additional potential virtues: it dissuades the Chinese and other international investors from looking at alternative energy routes through Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iran and strikes at India's use of those routes to bypass Pakistan. It further prevents Afghanistan being dominated by any of Pakistan's strategic rivals (India, Iran, Russia, US), and maintains the theatre for Pakistan's management of its own militant problem.

Raffaello Pantucci sees in China a hesitant power in relation to Afghanistan: drawn to the country by geostrategic proximity and a meaningful capacity to help the stabilisation and progress of Afghanistan, yet reluctant to engage too deeply for fear of being entangled in Afghanistan's problems, not least those of terrorism and drugs. One expression of this dichotomy being found in the marginality of Afghanistan in China's "Belt and Road" vision but Afghanistan's capacity to function if neglected as a spoiler for that vision. China fears in particular the risks posed from Afghanistan to the CPEC investment and the risks of pernicious dynamics through Xinjiang province.

But while Beijing is continuing to play a positive role, it is not demonstrating a willingness to step into a leadership role, despite strong calls for such a role from Afghanistan, choosing instead to play a significant support role. Inside Afghanistan China has managed to balance its position by maintaining contacts with all sides. Its longstanding contact with the Taliban are believed to continue behind closed doors, while Vice President Li's public calls in Kabul on President Ghani, Chief Executive Office Abdullah and former President Karzai show that the Chinese are eager to maintain links to all of the key official players in Afghanistan's future.

On the international stage China has not only engaged with Afghanistan on a bilateral basis, but also through multilateral vehicles like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (where China has played a championing role for the country. It was during Chinese Presidency's that the Afghan contact group was created and later the country was made into an Observer), as well as through multilateral formats like an India-China bilateral, the Afghan-Pakistan-China trilateral, and engagement with the United States.

China's hesitation is ultimately unfortunate for Kabul as Beijing has many significant cards to play in Afghanistan – be this in terms of their strong relationship with Islamabad, the massive investment they could pour in and the industry they could mobilize to rebuild the country, or the potential opening up of Iran that they could take advantage of across Afghanistan. Whilst security remains something that China is not able to provide in adequate measure outside its borders, across Central Asia, China's security presence and efforts are growing highlighting that this is an evolving area for Beijing and one which may yet be consequential for Afghanistan.

With regards to India Rahul Roy-Chaudhury centres his analysis on the nature and durability of the Indian-Afghanistan relationship and on the Modi government's foreign and security policy priority towards India's neighbourhood, within which the question of Afghanistan looms large. He argues pointedly that there is no exit strategy for India from Afghanistan, yet also that India's involvement in Afghanistan will continue to be carefully calibrated. In terms of security assistance he argues, there are limits to India's reach into Afghanistan but nonetheless that a new dimension of India's relationship has recently emerged: the supply of offensive weaponry to Afghanistan. This is seen as a significant step-up from India's traditional security cooperation with Afghanistan, focusing on training and the mobility of its forces. It is likely the ground-breaking supply of armed helicopters will gradually be followed by other arms transfers, but, at the same time, India will not extend this to providing military trainers or military boots on the ground in Afghanistan.

In the absence of an improvement in the domestic security environment in Afghanistan, a tacit expression of India's limited role in that regard, Roy-Chaudhury argues that India is not expected to re-engage in major construction projects as it did in the past. Any notable expansion in trade therefore would have to depend on the access India is provided through the land route transiting Pakistan.

For India, therefore, the Afghanistan issue turns on its relations with Pakistan. Roy-Chaudhury observes that there are at present no official bilateral India-Pakistan talks on Afghanistan, noting

that although the Indian government has been inclined towards such talks, the Pakistan side has refused. Nevertheless he argues it is not inevitable that India and Pakistan will be locked into an unending cycle of rivalry and competition in Afghanistan: the risk of a civil war has negative implications for both India and Pakistan, both countries have an interest in discussing stability in Afghanistan, and both share the objective of enhancing economic and trade links to help Afghanistan emerge as an economic hub linking south and central Asia. He concludes that bilateral talks on Afghanistan, at least between the two foreign ministries or the two intelligence agencies, India's R&AW and Pakistan's ISI, should be seriously considered.

In his final chapter Mark Voyger presents two complex models which give deep insight into policy-making by both Russia and Iran in broad strategic terms and in terms of specific policy towards Afghanistan. The focus, he argues, in the current global security context, for both Russia and Iran is the strategic objective of limiting the influence of the West, and in particular the US and NATO in what the two states view as their strategic areas of interest, in particular their Central Asian "neighbourhood", and South West Asia, including Afghanistan. He argues that this Western-centric policy, which is itself further complicated as NATO transitions in Afghanistan, and as the US is poised with autumn elections to reappraise its strategy, is corrosive of security and stability in Afghanistan and that as *de facto* spoilers Russia and Iran – whose alignment in policy terms in antipathy to the West have drawn them together - have as a consequence little to contribute to the stability and security of Afghanistan at least while the West retains a substantial presence.

Taken together the interests of Afghanistan's neighbours, their relations with each other, and their positions towards the US/NATO presence in theatre are undoubtedly varied and in many cases conflict-prone. Those with arguably the most positive contributions to make seem either to be fixated on narrow exclusionary conceptions of Afghanistan or to be hesitant to step up to roles commensurate with their potential. It remains to be seen whether Afghanistan's neighbours can set aside these narrow conceptions of national interest in Afghanistan in pursuit of a shared accommodation with Afghanistan and with each other which, in the end, offers the best hope for all.