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Beyond the Great Game: Towards a National Political Process in Afghanistan Post-2014

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BEYOND THE GREAT GAME: TOWARDS A NATIONAL POLITICAL PROCESS IN AFGHANISTAN POST-2014

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As the end of the drawdown of international forces approaches in Afghanistan, concerns are mounting about its potential impact on regional stability. By the end of 2014, all Western combat forces will have left the country. Yet despite official rhetoric, twelve years of war and billions of dollars spent in Afghanistan have neither eliminated the country's insurgency nor dealt effectively with any of the regional irritants that have historically motivated Afghanistan's neighbors to lend their support to various actors in the conflict.

Regional involvement in Afghanistan has been pervasive since the end of the 1970s and the Soviet invasion of the country. For more than 30 years, India and Pakistan, in different ways, have projected their fierce rivalry into Afghanistan; Pakistan and Iran have done the same. China, Russia, and a number of states in Central Asia observe the evolution of the US presence in the country and the resurgence of the insurgency with equal anxiety.

The nature of these rivalries is essentially political and geostrategic. India and Pakistan are not competing in Afghanistan over the country's resources, but to prevent each other from using Afghanistan as a tool in their respective grand strategies, although there is, of course, a significant difference in the way India and Pakistan have projected these strategies in the last few years. Similarly, although Iran has undoubtedly developed an economic sphere of influence in Afghanistan's west, it primarily aims at preventing Afghan soil from becoming a launchpad for anti-Iranian attacks. Despite the much-publicised investment of China in the Aynak copper deposit, Beijing's main motivation seems to be to insulate its Xinjiang province from an Islamist contagion from Afghanistan.¹

Yet, despite—or because of—the scale of the regional involvement in Afghanistan, the conflict is unlikely to be resolved through a regional approach alone. Neither bilateral negotiations between the actors involved nor any regional cooperation mechanism will end regional interference in Afghanistan. The Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan, launched in November 2011, or the New Silk Road initiative, can be effective and useful means of promoting cooperation on a wide range of technical and economic issues, but they are unlikely to result in a political settlement in Afghanistan or beyond.

The level of mistrust between the regional actors is so great that it is impossible to expect them suddenly to abandon their respective games in Afghanistan unless they have striking new incentives to do so of a kind that are not currently on the



horizon; such an expectation would be akin to asking them for a conversion to non-interference. Indeed, all past attempts to solve Afghanistan's problems from the outside have failed. Any future policy based on a regional approach is likely to encounter the same fate unless the Afghan state is strong enough to impose a minimal degree of respect for its sovereignty.

This paper argues, therefore, that the political consolidation of Afghanistan is the only way to avoid a return to the proxy wars of the 1990s and to preserve regional stability. Only the creation of a sustainable political system capable of resisting outside political interference and pressures can mitigate the risk for the region. Given the current configuration of the regional system and the domestic evolution of the security situation of most regional actors, such political consolidation is a prerequisite to resisting outside interference.

The paper also argues that a sovereign and relatively stable and potentially neutral Afghanistan, is essential to mitigate the consequences of all pending regional issues. Its alternative—chaos—would deprive regional actors of the possibility of capitalising politically on their eventual gains and would therefore defeat their very purpose.

As a consequence, a broadly-inclusive Afghan political process is not only acceptable but desirable for all regional actors, without exception. Such a process would include representatives from the government, but also from the opposition operating within the constitution, from civil society, and eventually from the insurgency. It would focus mainly on the definition of a political system better equipped to secure support from a wide range of Afghans than the post-2001 neo-patrimonial system has proved to be².

This process should be disconnected from regional issues, which should be left to bilateral negotiations between the concerned parties or the existing regional forums. No regional solution, whatever the status of the future Afghanistan and no matter how desirable, will ever be implementable without an Afghan government capable of ensuring respect for its own sovereignty. At the same time, the injection in the Afghan political process of regional issues which are only indirectly linked to Afghanistan would unnecessarily complicate the negotiations and lead to a failure. It is inevitable that Afghanistan, even after the withdrawal is complete this year, and a new president has been elected, will remain an issue will remain an issue for regional security. Equally inevitable is the decline, already perceptible, in international interest in the issue. In these conditions, the United Nations could play a facilitating role. Finally the authors believe that such a process should start immediately after the election to delink it from any immediate electoral stake.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first examines the likely consequences of the Western withdrawal from Afghanistan and identifies potential scenarios. The second analyses the interests and priorities of the regional actors in post-2014 Afghanistan and the consequences of the latter's developing objectives and policies. In its final section, the paper proposes a mechanism to avoid the chaos likely to prevail in Afghanistan should events continue on their current trajectory. It advocates a standing 'inclusive national conference,' organised under the auspices of the United Nations, and examines its potential roles.



POST-2014 SCENARIOS

When US President Barack Obama announced his plan for the withdrawal from Afghanistan from June 2011, he claimed that American forces would leave the country from a position of strength. Three years later, however, the insurgency has not been eliminated, and the debate on the most likely outcome of the US withdrawal, regardless of whether any residual forces remain behind, is ongoing. An accurate evaluation of the on-the-ground reality is complicated by the domestic political need for the United States and all members of the coalition to claim that the drawdown is the consequence of the genuine (if imperfect) success of the mission in Afghanistan.

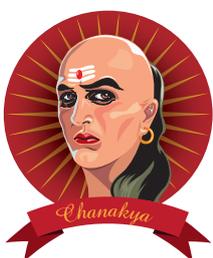
On December 28, 2013, an article in *The Washington Post* reported the release within the administration of a recent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on the Afghan war, predicting that the gains made by the United States and its allies in the three years since the beginning of the troop surge were likely to be 'significantly eroded by 2017, even if Washington leaves behind a few thousand troops and continues bankrolling the impoverished nation.' The NIE added that 'in the absence of a continuing presence and continuing financial support ... the situation would deteriorate very rapidly.'³

The Washington Post also reported on the debate the NIE generated within the administration. Because it contrasted with the prevailing official narrative of a complicated yet positive transition process in which the Afghan side's growing capabilities enabled it to take greater responsibility, the NIE was bound to generate disagreements regarding the Afghan armed forces' readiness levels and capacity to prevent a reemergence of al-Qaeda. Inevitably, the Post article also prompted reactions within the broader policy community denouncing the excessive pessimism of the NIE and underlining all the reasons to believe in a relatively smooth transition in 2014.⁴

The public debate⁵ on the future of Afghanistan had started long before newspapers started mentioning the NIE, although the intelligence estimate condoned the most pessimistic views about the future of Afghanistan at a time when the administration was trying to instil a sense of 'mission accomplished' to justify its withdrawal. The debate centres on two questions: the 2014 presidential election, and the readiness of the Afghan forces to assume responsibility for Afghanistan's security.

What can the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) achieve?

Optimists, both within and outside government, often complain that the development of the ANSF has been under-reported by the Western media, stressing what one group of former US civilian and military officials called the 'impressive progress of the Afghan security forces'.⁶ Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, onetime chairman of the Afghan Transition Co-ordination Commission, has repeated on several occasions his confidence in the capacity of the Afghan forces to fill the vacuum that the departure of the international forces will create in Afghanistan. Even though he admits that problems persist, Ahmadzai maintains that the ANSF has shown its capabilities in terms of assuming their security responsibilities, claiming that 'the



ANSF, particularly the Special Forces, has no parallel in the region.⁷ Most Afghan and American officials publicly concur with that view, which, irrespective of the actual level of readiness of the ANSF, both Afghanistan and the United States (and, to some extent, all the members of the international coalition) feel they must present as the logical consequence of an accomplished mission. In reality, although the preparedness of the ANSF has undoubtedly improved, its capacity to face its post-2014 responsibilities remains an open question.

The challenge is both qualitative and quantitative. The quality of the Afghan military remains poor and its operational independence more limited than publicly acknowledged by ISAF officials. But personnel levels also remain a major concern. In order to facilitate the exit of Western forces, the ANSF should increase the number of troops up to 352,000 in 2014 before reducing this number to 230,500 in 2015⁸ should the security situation allow. A substantial part of the difference will not have to be demobilised as attrition amounts to 63,000 every year,⁹ but the danger is real that demobilised troops may join insurgent militias. The policy of diminishing the number of troops by simply letting attrition continue, moreover, harms the institutional stability required to develop the Afghan army into a professional body and is therefore hardly compatible with the objective of a sustainable force.

Moreover, even if the ANSF has made real and significant progress, its capabilities are not yet sustainable. It lacks air power, fire support, intelligence, and logistical capacity, remaining dependent upon ISAF in many of these areas and others.¹⁰ The erosion of medical evacuation capabilities as Western forces withdraw is something that Afghan soldiers particularly fear. According to the Afghan Analyst Network (AAN), 'the coalition has exaggerated the current capabilities of the Afghan air force ... and failed to prepare the Afghan security forces in time for the withdrawal of coalition air assets ... creating a fatal capability gap that the Afghan air force is currently unable to fill.'¹¹

However, these limitations have to be measured against the ANSF performance in actual military operations. According to the US Department of Defense, as of November 2013, the ANSF conducted 95 percent of conventional operations and 98 percent of special operations. However, casualties have increased by 79 percent over the past twelve months, despite significant advising and support from ISAF.¹² While the AAN report concludes that 'with assistance ... the ANSF will remain on the path towards an enduring ability to overmatch the Taliban,'¹³ it also observes that Afghan forces will have difficulties in replacing ISAF's enabling support after 2014.

Psychological factors should also be taken into consideration. The behaviour and morale of the ANSF after the departure of the Western forces is not entirely predictable. Having to fight on its own may be an additional motivation, or a deeply disheartening experience that further diminishes the armed forces' capacities. Furthermore, the withdrawal of Western forces may lead some Afghan actors, fearing the return of the Taliban, to re-position themselves as Taliban 'supporters', even if they feel no sympathy for the Taliban and their agenda.



What the ANSF will be able to achieve after 2014 remains, in any case, uncertain. Despite ISAF support, the insurgency has been able to consolidate its positions in some of the rural areas where it has historically been strongest. It seems doubtful that the ANSF will be able to reverse this trend. Large parts of Afghanistan's territory are thus likely to remain outside the Afghan state's control.

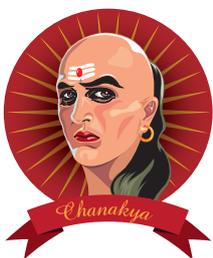
Are the elections a guarantee of stability?

Afghanistan's security problem is not limited to the military realm. Even a strong ANSF will be meaningful only to the extent that it serves a relatively functional and legitimate Afghan government. The legitimacy of the post-Karzai government will therefore be central to the evolution of Afghanistan after the US drawdown. The question is open, however, as to whether the current electoral process can or will lead to such an outcome.

The 2009 presidential election was massively rigged, despite a strong international presence and security apparatus.¹⁴ Subsequently, President Karzai was able to weaken the Independent Electoral Commission and, thanks to his repeated assertion of the need to 'Afghanise' the electoral process and to respect Afghan sovereignty, did much to undermine oversight of electoral integrity through the Electoral Complaints Commission.¹⁵ There are also suspicions that Karzai engineered selection procedures to support his preferred candidates in both legislative chambers,¹⁶ and even allegations that his circle made deals with the Taliban in order to allow the stuffing of ballot boxes.¹⁷

The 2014 scenario will be different due to Karzai's constitutional inability to run for a third term. Yet the prospect that the election will deliver a reasonably representative government is slim. Politically, Afghanistan remains divided, with a crescendo of wheeling and dealing marking the run-up to the elections. Given the experience of 2009, the fact that Karzai demanded that the United States stay out of the electoral process as a precondition for his agreeing to a residual American presence does not augur well for the process.¹⁸ Moreover, problems exist irrespective of Karzai's intentions. These include fraud; manipulation and the intimidation of voters by strongmen; and general insecurity, in particular in Taliban-controlled areas. If the threat of violence prevents people in these areas from voting, it could produce the perception that Pashtuns are at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* other ethnic groups and affect the legitimacy of the outcome in the eyes of a substantial part of the population.¹⁹ But the problem goes deeper still. One need not go as far as Sarah Chayes when she asserts that 'Afghanistan fits a pattern of transitioning countries that have rushed to elections before their polities were sufficiently constituted',²⁰ but the reality is that, in large parts of the Afghan population, there is no minimum consensus on the integrity of electoral mechanisms, even though there is evidence that ordinary Afghans support the idea of democracy, probably more strongly than some of their leaders. It is therefore unlikely that all contenders will accept the election's results – which casts doubts on their willingness to compromise in order to form a government or make policy.

Ultimately, the elections themselves may fuel insecurity if the results are seen as illegitimate by key elements of the elite or population. Unless they are cleanly run and accompanied by considerable statesmanship on the part of the main contenders, they are unlikely to be a watershed in Afghanistan's evolution or to help the regime



move decisively forward. But because they represent a vital part of the international narrative about a successful mission in Afghanistan, the elections will take place despite their many obstacles and limited potential for a meaningful impact.

The political cost of the economic transition

The potential political cost of the transition from an assisted to a self-sustained economy is also uncertain. Whatever the intentions of the Afghan government that emerges from the elections, it will have to implement them in a context of diminishing economic growth. Although from a low base, Afghanistan has enjoyed exceptional growth since the fall of the Taliban: from 2003–04 to 2010, real GDP grew at an annual average of 9.1 per cent.²¹

However, this level of growth resulted primarily from massive investments by the international community. According to the World Bank, ‘foreign aid disbursements (security-related and civilian) were equivalent to nearly 100 percent of GDP in 2010–2011.’²² It is therefore likely to decrease substantially with the departure of foreign forces, irrespective of promises made at the 2012 Tokyo conference on Afghanistan. Indeed, the World Bank predicts that, ‘depending on future aid flows, GDP growth will drop from 9 per cent in 2010–11 to close to 5 per cent on average until 2018, and will likely be lower in the long term.’²³ This means that the importance of agriculture in the economy will increase, and with it the level of volatility due to the uncertainties linked to the weather and its impact on the harvest. Overall, with a population growth rate of 2.8 per cent a year, economic growth will be too low to reduce the percentage of the population living below the poverty level.

True, the impact of slower growth will not be equally felt across the country and some provinces will suffer more. Conflict-afflicted provinces, which have received more assistance and benefited more in employment from the foreign presence than peaceful regions, will obviously be more affected, diminishing further the incentives for their inhabitants to support the government. From a purely economic perspective, the reduction of aid will reduce distortions over time and eventually put the economy on a healthier path. But it also means that the transition will be much harder for the next government, whatever its economic orientation, as it will be structurally unable to deliver as much as key segments of the population may expect.

Mining and the exploitation of mineral resources are often portrayed as a potential source of revenue for Afghanistan.²⁴ The economic viability of such resources is most of the time still to be established. Even the much-discussed copper deposit in Aynak and ore deposit in Hajigak—the only two projects considered potentially profitable at this stage—are not yet being exploited. Moreover, since the potential contribution of mining to Afghanistan revenue is estimated to be between 2 and 2.5 per cent of GDP, its direct impact on employment is expected to be very limited.²⁵ Indeed, there is a risk that revenue from resource sales may simply activate the notorious ‘resource curse’, with state accountability to the citizenry being undermined by the state’s ready access to rentier income.



Other possible mitigating factors for the diminishing of foreign aid are likely to emerge in the informal and/or illegal sectors—drug trafficking being the most obvious example—and outside state control, possibly reinforcing rogue actors. This raises further questions about the next government’s ability to survive in an already unstable environment.

Scenarios

With so many imponderable or unknown factors, building scenarios is potentially futile. Nonetheless, a set of broad scenarios can help to frame the possible contours of Afghanistan’s evolution in coming years. The following four scenarios provide such a framework, though they should be considered with the caveat that the situation will be dynamic, with the potential to evolve in different directions.

- 1) **Best-case scenario.** The new Afghan regime would establish state authority, consolidate and restore public confidence in state institutions, gradually extend its reach throughout the entire country, and provide security. Given the massive range of challenges described above, such a scenario is the most improbable. As the former political advisor to the EU Special Representative in Afghanistan, Barbara Stapleton, succinctly observed, ‘what has been impossible to achieve over the last ten years will not be miraculously transformed by Afghan ownership, especially with overall security and economic indicators trending downwards.’²⁶
- 2) **Muddling through.** In this more realistic scenario, a partly dysfunctional Afghan state would manage to survive, but would consolidate itself only imperfectly. Only a portion of the population would accept the legitimacy of the government. Much of Afghanistan would remain outside state control; although the ANSF and any remaining international forces would provide relative security in major cities, the insurgency would make its presence felt in large areas. A substantial number of grey areas would remain, controlled neither by the state nor by the insurgency. Institutions would improve only marginally and public confidence in them would be limited.

Such a scenario, which is likely to emerge from the election, could take two forms. It could either be a Karzai-style presidency in which a coalition would succeed narrowly in bringing a candidate to power through the electoral process by manipulating the election and buying the short-term loyalty of key regional and ethnic actors. Alternatively, it could resemble a coalition government, which would emerge if a deal were brokered as part of electoral manoeuvring.

- 3) **Taliban takeover.** Although unlikely in the short term because of the significant bolstering of the ANSF and local militias in the north, a Taliban takeover remains a possibility. It is far more likely to result from a cascade in which local Afghan actors switch sides than from a coordinated military thrust against Kabul. Potential permutations of this scenario could produce a single Taliban government, an alliance with other militant groups, a partnership with a regional ally, or the natural result of state collapse in Afghanistan.



- 4) **Chaos.** This could result from a collapse of state authority in circumstances where none of the belligerent groups is strong enough to constitute an alternative and seize power alone. The situation would be characterised by an indefinite number of local militias controlling parts of the Afghan territory and surviving through a series of *ad hoc*, short-lived, fluctuating alliances strong enough to keep their opponents at bay but too narrow to seize power at the centre and impose their authority.

These scenarios are not mutually exclusive and it is probable that one would lead to another. Although the ‘muddle through’ scenario could last for some time, it would most likely lead to eventual chaos unless the new Afghan government proved capable of strengthening its own authority and building up its legitimacy. Although this outcome is not totally impossible, it is not the most probable given the series of constraints enumerated and the fact that the current government was unable to achieve such results despite much more favorable circumstances.

If the future leadership of the country is unable to establish its authority over Afghan institutions, they will be more likely to weaken and collapse, accelerating Afghanistan’s trajectory towards the chaos scenario. With this in mind, it is worth noting that none of the presidential candidates has both a national constituency and solid leadership qualities. Therefore, the question of how Afghanistan fares after 2014 may not be whether or not the state collapses, but merely how fast it does so.

Can the United States be a game changer?

It is necessary in this context to examine the role of the United States. Although the US drawdown is a fact, uncertainty persists regarding the presence of a residual US and international force in Afghanistan after 2014. On May 2, 2012, Afghanistan and the United States signed the Enduring Strategic Partnership Security Agreement, establishing a framework for the future US role in Afghanistan, including social and economic development, institution building, regional cooperation, and security.²⁷ At the time of this writing however, the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) defining the status of US troops and the details of operations in Afghanistan has been approved by Afghanistan’s parliament and an ad hoc *Loya Jirga*, but President Karzai has refused to sign it.

The signature of the BSA by the Afghan president would undoubtedly be a positive development for Afghanistan, and on the whole is likely to follow swiftly the installation of a new Afghan president. In addition to its tangible benefits, it would provide a morale boost to the ANSF and, more broadly, to the Afghan government, which would not feel abandoned after 2014. In that sense, it can be argued that the BSA could help prevent the collapse of the regime. The BSA once completed is likely to ensure international assistance to Afghanistan continues, which would mitigate the effect of the transition and help the government consolidate its position.. The \$16 billion contribution promised at the Tokyo conference is unlikely to be disbursed unless international donors have the guarantee of at least a minimally-functional state. Because of its effect on the various branches of the Afghan executive, the BSA



will provide such a guarantee for some time, lessening the economic shock of the transition and ensuring the viability of the Afghan state in the new circumstances. Last but not least, the signature would send a signal to both Afghanistan and its neighbours that the United States is unwilling to let inter-state relations degenerate, thereby preventing inter-state conflict and contributing to regional stability. For that reason, all Afghanistan constituencies (with the exception of the Taliban and its allies) and neighbours (including Iran, which initially opposed it) are supporting the BSA.

There are, however, limits to what the BSA can achieve. It will not automatically guarantee security; even the 150,000 troops that occupied Afghanistan at the war's height could not do that, so there is no reason to think a small residual force will fare better. US forces will keep training the ANSF and thereby will help slow the progress of the insurgency. They will also be capable of conducting anti-terrorist operations. It is unclear, however, whether they will be able to prevent the return of al-Qaeda or even the development of its affiliates in Afghanistan, should the state's reach and authority decay further.

Ideology matters here much less than that the dynamics of the internal conflict in Afghanistan. The Afghan experience of the 1990s shows that operational solidarities—not ideological common ground—tend to become the primary unifying factor when groups are under pressure and need support against a common opponent.²⁸ Moreover, jihadist movements are in search of space to conduct military and doctrinal training, or plan operations. They also tend to fill whatever political vacuum exists. A limited US military presence is therefore unlikely to enable the Afghan state to exercise the territorial control necessary to prevent the resurgence of sanctuaries.

In summary, a US presence in Afghanistan after 2014 will be important and will effectively slow the erosion of the authority of the Afghan state and the progress of the insurgency, but it is unlikely on its own to reverse the trend.



CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REGIONAL ACTORS

The consequences of these scenarios need to be analysed with regional state actors' national perceptions and interests in mind. Afghanistan's neighbours have historically exploited its ethnic cleavages in order to offset their perceived weaknesses in the region and/or promote their own national interests. In this context, the India-Pakistan rivalry is central. Afghanistan's other neighbours, including Iran, China, and the Central Asian states, are also influential to varying degrees.

As the military drawdown enters its final stage, these actors are re-evaluating their strategic environment and have begun planning for the future. No regional country is in a position to impose its own will in Afghanistan, but they all have the capacity to spoil any progress achieved in the country should they perceive it as contrary to their national interests.

Pakistan's contradictory strategic shift

Pakistan is by far the most active regional player in Afghanistan and the one whose policies are likely to have the most destabilising effect.²⁹ In many ways, Pakistan is still pursuing in Afghanistan the objectives it set out at the beginning of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Islamabad is still trying to prevent the involvement of Afghan refugees in Pakistani politics and to promote a friendly government in Kabul to diminish Indian influence.

Pakistan's pursuit of these objectives in spite of its deteriorating internal security and tarnished international image has left it relatively isolated diplomatically. As a result, Pakistan has to weigh the benefits of each possible move against its potential impact on its domestic security situation, as well as on the larger regional and international dynamic. In that context, it cannot ignore, for example, that (rightly or wrongly) the India-Pakistan rivalry will increasingly be the prism through which Afghanistan is considered internationally as the United States reduces its role.

Pakistan's policy has been to strengthen its non-state assets as a way of securing political leverage in Afghanistan, and to use them, on occasion, to attack Indian assets or to target those seen as not advancing Islamabad's interests. But in early 2012, Pakistan's Foreign Office publicly declared a 'strategic shift' in its thinking on Afghanistan and announced a new policy, promoting its own version of an inclusive reconciliation process and actively reaching out to elements of the Northern Alliance.³⁰ This has not, however, been reflected in a diminution of violent activities in Afghanistan by groups close to the Pakistan military such as the Haqqani network.³¹ Domestic factors nonetheless play an increasing role in Pakistan's Afghan policy and partly explain its declared strategic shift. The Indian monitoring website South Asia Terrorism Portal estimates that terrorist attacks killed 50,379 people in Pakistan between 2003 and 2013, peaking in 2009 when 11,704 people were killed.³² The September 11, 2001 attacks marked a quantitative and qualitative change in the terrorist attacks that affected Pakistan. Under pressure in Afghanistan, Islamist movements began to seek refuge in Pakistan and started operating from lawless or less controlled parts of the country, with or without the complicity of the state security apparatus. Furthermore, parts of Pakistan provided fertile soil for the kind of messages that the *Afghan* Taliban had been preaching in the 1990s.³³



The Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, TTP) and other militant groups had started targeting federal and local political institutions in the early 2000s. But anti-state organisations only began to coalesce after the Red Mosque incident, a July 2007 standoff between militants and Pakistani security forces. For months leading up to the incident, radical militant organisations had accumulated weapons in the compound of an Islamabad mosque, a few hundred metres away from the headquarters of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's premier military intelligence agency. After months of equivocation, the army finally intervened, killing about 100 militants in its assault. Attacks against the army, the ISI, and other sections of the military—a phenomenon never observed before—began almost immediately. The ensuing cycle of attacks and retaliations became even more acute in 2009, when some militant movements (TTP and TNSM) captured a substantial part of the Swat Valley in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The army was able to push back the militants, who sought refuge in Afghanistan and have operated from there ever since.

Today Islamabad seems to fear two kinds of developments regarding Afghanistan.

- The manipulation of the Pakistani Taliban by Afghan intelligence agencies. The link between the Afghan security apparatus and the TTP was apparently confirmed on October 11, 2013, when Latif Mehsud, a leader of the Pakistani anti-state Islamist militia, was captured in Afghanistan by US forces while allegedly in the custody of the Afghan army.³⁴
- Collusion between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban:³⁵ Such apprehension has justified a paradoxical attitude *vis-à-vis* the Afghan Taliban, whom Pakistan is willing to use, but does not trust.

As a result, Pakistan's conception of a friendly Afghan government has evolved. A friendly Afghanistan remains an Afghanistan under close Pakistani control, but Pakistan's security establishment is too pragmatic to ignore the possibility that, at least for the time being, the Taliban may not be capable of seizing power alone. As a result, Pakistan no longer officially supports the idea that the Taliban should form the Afghan government alone. This strategic shift reflects Pakistan's perception that the Taliban are no longer a reliable proxy, although Islamabad still believes that the Afghan Taliban would most likely secure Pakistani interests in Kabul.³⁶

Renouncing exclusive support for the Taliban is also Pakistan's attempt to redefine a 'strategic Afghanistan' by brokering a power-sharing agreement in which its proxies would dominate the east and the south of Afghanistan in exchange for their non-interference in the areas dominated by other ethnic groups. The 'national unity government' that would emerge from such an agreement would be not be strong enough to preclude some space for Pakistani manoeuvring.

But this new approach, even if it is not just for show, is not without risk for Pakistan and could exacerbate the threats it is trying to eliminate. If the Afghan Taliban is frustrated in its aspirations to gain power in Kabul, it could join hands with its Pakistani counterparts to seek a limited version of 'Pashtunistan' based on an ideological version of Pashtun nationalism. This scenario is rather unlikely in the present context, but the fact remains that an operational alliance between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban would create a serious challenge for Islamabad and, as a result, a real risk of war between Afghanistan and Pakistan.



Pakistan has thus trapped itself in a situation from which it will struggle to exit. The current policy³⁷ *vis-à-vis* the Pakistani Taliban, is sustainable only as long as the Afghan Taliban is preoccupied with the war in Afghanistan. Similarly, a power-sharing agreement as promoted by Islamabad makes sense only if Pakistan is capable of preventing an alliance between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. This seems so far to be the case, but cannot be taken for granted should the Afghan Taliban regain its autonomy or should the security situation deteriorate further on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border. Given Pakistan's current policy in and discourse on Afghanistan, and despite the official rhetoric, the continuation of a low-intensity conflict in Afghanistan is an insufficient but necessary condition for Pakistan's security.

India's dilemma

India's anxieties about political developments in Afghanistan have deep historical roots. As India's former ambassador to Kabul, Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, remarked, 'the territory of modern-day Afghanistan has historically been a staging ground for almost every overland military expedition into India.'³⁸

According to Mukhopadhyaya, today's security concerns revolve around two specific issues:

- The prospect of a return of the Taliban and its likely impact on militant Islamic fundamentalism in the region in general and Pakistan in particular
- What [India] perceives to be the Taliban symbiotic relationship with a revanchist military nexus in Pakistan that India holds responsible for a series of security challenges, political reversals and terrorist incidents that (involving Afghanistan alone) include the use of jihadi forces nurtured in the region by Pakistan against India.³⁹

These two considerations have long informed Indian policies in Afghanistan. New Delhi has supported the international coalition's military intervention in Afghanistan as a way of preventing the Taliban from returning to power. It has also backed the inclusion of other external actors, such as Iran, Central Asia, and Russia, to prevent the further expansion of Pakistan's influence in the country. India has also committed around \$2 billion in development aid to Afghanistan and generated goodwill for itself in all segments of Afghan society. In 2011, Kabul and New Delhi signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement in which India committed to train and equip Afghan security forces.

The US drawdown is, however, generating anxieties in New Delhi. It will deprive India of an important guarantee in Afghanistan and could over time create a security vacuum there. In order to mitigate the withdrawal's impact, India has encouraged Karzai to sign the BSA with the United States.

The risk of a political vacuum is also real. With the exception of the Taliban regime, India has always supported whatever government was in place in Kabul and is unlikely to change this posture, no matter who wins the elections in 2014. But New Delhi cannot ignore the flaws of the existing political system and understands that the international presence, more than anything else, has preserved its existence so far.



India knows that its political and economic support can only slow the erosion of the Afghan state's authority, not stop it.

The deterioration of Pakistan's domestic security creates a new problem for India. The relative congruence of the Taliban and Pakistan's security establishment had led India to support anti-Taliban elements, mostly represented by the so-called Northern Alliance, and thereby contain Pakistan indirectly in the 1990s. Pakistan's weakness is, however, as much a problem for India as it is for Pakistan. New Delhi's policy could reinforce in Pakistan the elements it is trying to eliminate.

As a consequence, India seems content with a low level of tension on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Similarly, it maintains its own pressure on Pakistan and ensures a low level of violence in Jammu and Kashmir, but refuses Afghan requests for combat aircraft and other heavy equipment to avoid provoking a direct confrontation between Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁴⁰ India does struggle, though, to move beyond an essentially tactical approach to managing Afghanistan.

Iran's quiet Taliban diplomacy

Iran's policy in Afghanistan has long been shaped by the ideology of the 1978 Islamic revolution. Throughout the period of the Soviet invasion from 1979 to 1989, Tehran sought to empower the Shia community. Since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, however, which came just months after the Soviet withdrawal, relations between Iran and Afghanistan have been a story of pragmatism and adaptability, a function of the geopolitical changes in the region as well as in Iran's relation with the United States.

After the Soviet withdrawal, Iranian interests clashed with those of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, both of which sought to undermine the Najibullah government in order to extend their influence and, in the Saudi case, spread a Wahhabi perspective across Central Asia. Iran responded by exploiting language to unify the Persian-speaking non-Pashtun communities as a counterforce against the Pashtuns supported by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. It also consistently called for national reconciliation in Afghanistan and the formation of an inclusive, multi-ethnic government.⁴¹ With the advent of the Taliban, Iran intensified its political and military engagement with both Shia Islamist groups and the Northern Alliance. In 1998, the murder of eight Iranian consular officials by Pakistani extremists associated with the Taliban in Mazar-i-Sharif almost precipitated an Iranian military intervention.⁴² After the overthrow of the Taliban regime in November 2001, Iran found itself in a favorable position to expand its influence in Afghanistan. In the wake of the September 11 attacks and at the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom, Tehran provided extensive intelligence and logistical cooperation to the United States in an effort to oust the Taliban. But Iran's inclusion in the 'Axis of Evil' by the Bush administration in January 2002 ended all Iranian attempts to cooperate explicitly with the United States in Afghanistan.

Iran today pursues two partly contradictory objectives in Afghanistan:

- To prevent Afghanistan from being controlled by a radical Sunni movement, be it the Taliban or another extremist militia or group of militias
- To prevent Afghanistan from being used as a launchpad for the United States or any regional power (for example Saudi Arabia or Pakistan) to attack or undermine Iran.



To prevent Afghanistan from being used as an anti-Iranian platform, the Islamic Republic has over the years formed relationships with Afghan actors capable of and willing to keep anti-Shia and anti-Iranian elements—in particular the Taliban—at bay. But Iran's main concern during the Karzai administration, has been the presence of foreign military bases, especially American ones. This concern was magnified by the signing of the joint declaration on a long-term security partnership between Afghanistan and the United States. These two concerns have produced a contradictory policy in which Iran simultaneously supports the Karzai regime and provides some military hardware to selected insurgents in order to drain US resources and limit the possibility of a US military intervention against Iran from Afghanistan.⁴³

Tehran strongly supports the Karzai-backed reconciliation process initiated in Afghanistan under the auspices of the High Peace Council. Its gradual realisation that durable peace in Afghanistan and Iran's own security could be achieved only if all Afghan groups could find a way to share power led to a further rapprochement with the Taliban.⁴⁴ This last Iranian move signals a lack of confidence regarding the future of Afghanistan after the Western drawdown, but could take a new significance in the coming months. Should the pragmatism demonstrated by the new Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, lead to an agreement on the nuclear issue, the anti-US component of Iran's Afghan policy could be significantly diminished.

The new political and diplomatic situation—in which the antagonism between the international community and Iran would be reduced following an agreement with Iran on nuclear power—would not necessarily lead Iran to a change of its multiple alliances strategy, but would affect its impact and significance. The dialogue with the Taliban and the support for reconciliation in Afghanistan serve more as insurance against Sunni extremism and potential instability along Iran's eastern border. Cultivating sympathetic figures among the Taliban may also be a hedging strategy should the situation further deteriorate in Afghanistan after 2014.⁴⁵ Fears of a potential intervention will persist, however, if some US troops remain in Afghanistan. Relations between Iran and the United States are therefore likely to remain the main driver of Iran's policy in Afghanistan.

Central Asia: In search of a policy

The risk posed by the drawdown in Afghanistan to its Central Asian neighbours is more difficult to assess, as is their potential role in the future of Afghanistan. The post-2001 expectations of the Central Asian countries that a successful US intervention in Afghanistan would 'lead to an economic recovery that would advance the development of all the states in the region' have undoubtedly been frustrated.⁴⁶ The security impact of the drawdown is, however, more questionable.

The worst-case scenario that the 'elements of Afghan chaos spread across borders to the weak, corrupt and poorly governed Central Asian states, whose populations share religious and ethnic ties with groups fighting in Afghanistan [leading to] a wide conflagration, collapsing states, widespread violence, Islamic extremism [and], rising drug trafficking,'⁴⁷ —a nightmare for U.S. strategists—seems to have little connection with reality. For the analysts Scott Radnitz and Marlene Laruelle, the three factors that could lead to a spillover with disastrous consequences would be the infiltration of militants, refugees, and ideological inspiration. They conclude, however, that the



Western drawdown is unlikely to change existing circumstances. NATO is currently unable to prevent Afghan militants from slipping into neighbouring Uzbekistan or Tajikistan. Yet Central Asia has not seen any massive inflow of militants pouring across its borders. Nor is it clear that Afghan militants are willing to target Central Asia. All indications so far suggest that the Taliban are unwilling to go beyond Afghanistan's borders. Similarly, Central Asian governments have so far not accepted and seem unlikely to accept massive flows of refugees in the foreseeable future.⁴⁸ As for the supposed ideological sympathy, it has had little opportunity to develop because Central Asian governments have relatively successfully imposed their own 'official, national and ethnic interpretation of Islam to bolster a sense of national identity' while repressing jihadist movements.⁴⁹

The risk of becoming the victim of an Islamist spillover is in fact for Afghanistan, not Central Asia. In the 1990s, most jihadist movements active in Central Asia took refuge in Afghanistan after they were expelled from their countries of origin. Once in Afghanistan, they joined the local Islamist movements and participated in the civil war. Such a movement is unlikely to happen after 2014, since most of the existing jihadist groups have already been pushed out of Central Asia⁵⁰ and the local conditions for their resurgence are conditioned essentially by the capacity of these states to prevent civil unrest.

Central Asian Islamist groups will indeed continue to operate from Afghanistan and Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where they no longer enjoy the same freedom as they did a decade ago, thanks to US drone attacks and Pakistani pressures. There is therefore a risk that the Central Asian states, especially Uzbekistan, may be tempted to develop spheres of influence of their own in the Afghan provinces adjacent to their respective borders in order to prevent penetration by such groups. It remains to be seen whether they will do so in cooperation with or in opposition to the Afghan insurgency. But the number and nuisance capabilities of Islamist groups that could potentially threaten the Central Asian states are limited. The risk of Central Asian interference in Afghanistan is much greater than a risk of instability spreading from Afghanistan to Central Asia.⁵¹

China: from non-involvement to containment

Although increasingly presented as a major actor in Afghanistan, it is unclear how China will be affected by the drawdown. China's interests in Afghanistan are essentially negative—preventing instability from spreading to Xinjiang—and its policies have been so far remarkably cautious. Beijing has essentially tried to remain on good terms with all relevant stakeholders. As the China expert Michael Swaine asserts, 'Beijing has positioned itself as supportive of Afghanistan's long-term stability and prosperity though limited political, economic and diplomatic assistance.'⁵²

Moreover, China's Afghan policy is essentially a function of foreign-policy objectives unrelated to Afghanistan. It aims at preventing Afghanistan from upsetting its relations with the larger regional environment in Central and South Asia. China will take care not to let its Afghanistan policy publicly strain its relations with Pakistan, which it still sees as a hedge against hegemony in the subcontinent. At the same time, Beijing will want to ensure that these dynamics do not threaten the dialogue that it is trying to develop with India. Nor does China want Afghanistan to increase its



own domestic insurgent threat. China balks at the prospect of a sizable US military presence in Afghanistan for the long term, but it is equally apprehensive about the United States failing in a way that would radicalise the entire region.⁵³ Finally, China also has economic interests in Afghanistan, including the \$3.5 billion Aynak copper mine project and the associated transport and electricity generating facilities.⁵⁴

It is fair to say that despite its criticism of Western policies in Afghanistan, China's actions have by and large helped advance international goals. To manage the complex set of apparently contradictory interests discussed above, Beijing has adopted a series of policies aimed at supporting the global international effort while avoiding involvement in any military operation. Likewise, it has taken care to remain on good terms with the Karzai regime by offering infrastructure, financial, and humanitarian assistance or political support in the UN, without offending the Taliban.⁵⁵ The US drawdown is unlikely to open any window of opportunity for China in Afghanistan, but it could possibly exacerbate some of the existing tensions in Chinese policy. Beijing may be relieved that at most a small number of US forces are likely to remain in Afghanistan, but every other aspect of its strategy in the country may suffer from the US exit.

The degree to which Afghanistan actually threatens China's security is unclear. The risk for China, as for most of Afghanistan neighbours, is not a post-2014 Islamist offensive, in which hordes of Taliban fighters suddenly cross the border to Xinjiang to transform it into an Islamic state. Rather, the danger is that Uighur nationalists may cross over to Afghanistan to get shelter and training before returning to Xinjiang. The risk is therefore real and limited in number, but concerns about conflict spillover ought to be minimal. Beijing has so far been unable to eradicate Uighur nationalism but has proven relatively capable of controlling its border with Afghanistan and has dealt successfully with the Taliban regime before 9/11 and the Karzai government since the end of 2001.

Pakistan's fate, not Afghanistan's, will be central for China's standing in South Asia. Only 'a stable, independent, friendly and influential Pakistan [can] prevent Indian domination of South Asia, weaken Indian influence in Central Asia, and confound any Indian desire to focus primarily on strategic rivalry with China.'⁵⁶ China also needs Pakistan's intelligence cooperation to suppress domestic Muslim terrorism in Xinjiang.⁵⁷ Therefore, although China's relationship with Pakistan is evolving as its confidence in Islamabad's capacity to master its own destiny erodes, Beijing is unlikely to do anything in Afghanistan that may harm Pakistani interests. Yet China's posture is also unlikely to let Pakistan's policy derail its other objectives in South Asia. It is significant that Chinese officials, who had long refused to discuss Afghanistan with India, referring their Indian counterparts to Pakistan, have now agreed to discuss the matter directly with New Delhi.



China will support the international effort in Afghanistan as long as it respects what Chinese officials call the 'five supports' that China sees as being the duty of the international community:

'First, support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process of peace and reconstruction; Second, support Afghanistan's capacity building, so that it can take over the responsibility of safeguarding national peace and stability as early as possible; Third, support Afghanistan in advancing national reconciliation through its own efforts; Fourth, support Afghanistan in developing the economy during the transition and beyond 2014; Fifth, support Afghanistan in developing external relations on the basis of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit, especially enhancing good neighbourly relations and mutual policy trust with other countries of the region.'⁵⁸

After 2014, China is unlikely to deviate in any fundamental way from its cautious approach to the Afghanistan problem. Nonetheless, given its investment in the country, the extent to which China will be able to maintain the low profile it has kept for the past decade is questionable.⁵⁹ Besides its own direct economic involvement in Afghanistan, it will probably act mostly through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which shares the Chinese position on Afghanistan: politically neutral and convinced that the Afghan conflict cannot be resolved solely through military means, but focused primarily on socioeconomic issues.

Potential impact of Afghanistan's stability scenarios on its neighbours' geostrategic interests

All of Afghanistan's neighbours perceive themselves as potential victims of the conflict. All are actors in the conflict in varying degrees, and all will continue to vie for influence in Afghanistan after 2014. Their policies will depend on the Afghan security situation, which they will in turn continue to define in contradictory and sometimes conflicting ways. However, their publicly-projected fears may be part of their strategy as much as reflections of actual concerns, or even of their own contradictory interests and possible confusion about the strategy.

A Taliban takeover would be considered differently by all of Afghanistan's neighbours. All would probably consider it a negative outcome, but would be willing to tolerate it under certain conditions. The perspective of each of Afghanistan's neighbours would most likely depend on the Taliban's posture.

The perception of the Central Asian states, for example, would probably depend on the Taliban's readiness to accept the spheres of influence that they would be tempted to establish in Afghanistan after 2014. There is no reason to believe today that even a victorious Taliban would be eager to expand its influence outside Afghanistan. The need to consolidate power internally would most likely discourage any foreign adventurism. Similarly, the need to provide sanctuary to foreign militants to help the Taliban fight their Afghan opponents, as in the 1990s, would greatly diminish if not disappear, as the potential cost of sheltering them would exceed the benefits of doing so. As a matter of fact, the Taliban has already declared that it is no longer willing to support any foreign militant organisation. This may be nothing more than a tactical ploy, but it is undeniable that the need to support such foreign militant organisations should disappear were the Taliban to seize complete control of Afghanistan.



The position of the Central Asian states would be different should the Taliban refuse to accommodate their protégés and/or if the Taliban reached the borders of the Central Asian republics. Should such a scenario obtain, however, there is little that the threatened states could do beyond tightening their border security. The Central Asian states, Iran, and most importantly China would most likely negotiate with the Taliban to prevent it from providing support to anti-state movements in each of these countries. There is also a good chance that China, which has negotiated similar deals with the Taliban in the past, and Iran, which has provided the Taliban with limited support in the recent past, would get their own way.

Pakistan, conversely, claims that it does not want a Taliban government, due to its experience of the 1990s, when Islamabad fully supported the Islamist militia but lost control once the Taliban seized power. It is true that the Taliban's support for al-Qaeda created a major problem for Islamabad by introducing a fundamental tension into Pakistan's foreign policy. Islamabad found itself supporting both the international coalition and the insurgency, which inevitably led to significant problems in US-Pakistan relations in subsequent years. There is no evidence, however, that Pakistan ever tried to discourage the Taliban's use of proxies, including al-Qaeda, before 9/11. Other issues that emerged from its relationship with the Taliban, such as the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, were additional irritants for Islamabad but remained manageable.

After 2014, the relationship between Pakistan and a Taliban that refused to support foreign militants would be equally manageable, irrespective of how much obedience the Taliban were willing to show to Islamabad. Moreover, the potential support of the Pakistani Taliban by their Afghan brothers should they control Kabul would not be fundamentally different if the Afghan Taliban controlled the South and the East of the country as a result of some power-sharing agreement. This is one reason why a number of influential Afghans do not find Pakistan's new 'official' policy on Afghanistan to be credible.

India would potentially be the most affected by a Taliban takeover unless it managed to establish some presence or cooperation with the Taliban. Such an outcome should not be considered impossible, given the historical links between New Delhi and the Pashtuns. It would, however, most likely lead to a conflict between Indian- and Pakistani-aligned factions of the Taliban. Chances are, however, that India would find itself isolated and would lose the political benefits of its development assistance to Afghanistan.

The 'muddle through' scenario that is most likely to emerge from the election would only perpetuate the existing situation and change nothing in the calculations of each of Afghanistan's neighbours. With the exception of Pakistan, the main question would be the capacity of each of them to keep the newly elected government in power. Such a scenario would, however, present a major advantage as it would allow all parties involved more time to refine their strategies.



The chaos scenario would likely prove to be the worst possible case for every regional actor. It would create power vacuums in which the dynamics that prevailed in the 1990s would almost inevitably re-emerge. The various movements trying to seize power in Kabul or in their own provinces would be tempted to use the help of outside forces. It would be difficult for any of Afghanistan's neighbours to negotiate deals to prevent such connections from being used against them. Even Pakistan, because of its problem with the TTP, would find such a situation very difficult to deal with. It would still be able to support some groups against India, but could also be hurt by militants operating out of Afghanistan.

Interestingly, proxy wars would at the same time lose a great deal of their relevance, as the situation in Afghanistan would prevent their political exploitation. No country could get any benefit from whatever success might be achieved by its proxies on the ground. None would be in a position to broker a deal with its opponent, as its lack of control in Afghanistan would preclude it from confidently implementing any agreement. The risk would therefore be greater than ever that any interference by one of the actors would be detrimental to all—including the instigator. Finally, no scenario offers any insurance against the reemergence of international terrorism based in the region, with or without state sponsors.

A stable Afghanistan is therefore a necessity for all regional actors, even though not always for the reasons alleged by the regional actors. In theory at least all are committed to peace in Afghanistan and to some form of reconciliation. The term obviously means something different for each actor. Yet, this agreement of principle opens at least a diplomatic space which ought to be explored.



A WAY OUT? THE CASE FOR AN INCLUSIVE POLITICAL PROCESS

No magic policy can guarantee that chaos, leading to the resurgence of terrorism or even a limited regional conflict taking place in Afghanistan itself, can be prevented. All of Afghanistan's neighbours view the post-2014 outlook with apprehension. They are preparing to mitigate its potential impact by strengthening existing regional alliances; reinforcing border control; and entering into or strengthening intelligence-sharing agreements in configurations that largely reflect, but go sometimes beyond, traditional regional alignments. China, which until recently refused to discuss Afghanistan with India and always deferred to Pakistan, now addresses the issue with New Delhi. Similarly, the ongoing negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program have the potential, if successful, to facilitate such a containment of Afghanistan. Countries such as India, which maintained working relations with Tehran for this very purpose, will be able to develop full-scale cooperation with the Islamic Republic. But regardless of the nuances in play, every actor's fallback strategy is to try to contain the Afghan problem to Afghanistan.

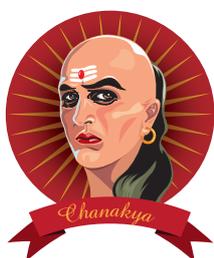
Containment measures, no matter how concrete and commendable, will at best partially mitigate the problem. Their efficacy will depend on the actual degree of control exercised by the Afghan state as well as its neighbours on their respective borders. In such a context, the initiation of a fresh political process in Afghanistan itself is highly desirable and urgent. After more than 30 years of conflict, no side can expect a military victory in the short term. This assertion needs to be qualified, since the departure of international forces may create the impression among members of the Taliban they may be able to seize power in the foreseeable future. This would only be a temporary phenomenon if the ANSF are able to hold their own. In this regard, the signature of the BSA would certainly help. There is little doubt that, with or without the BSA, the ANSF will be able to control the major cities for some time and therefore ensure the survival of the regime.

In any case, the initiation of a political process would entail no additional risk for the country. Its failure would simply leave Afghanistan's neighbours with only a containment strategy.

Objectives and content of the political process

In the view of the authors, the political process should aim almost exclusively at defining a political order with stronger claims to legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary Afghans. It may require alterations of the current political system and the constitution.

The authors are fully aware that this consideration breaks a taboo. The integrity of the existing constitution has been so far a pre-condition for all those who advocate reconciliation. As the drawdown has loomed, the more necessary the negotiations have appeared, and so the more vociferous these advocates have become in their defence of a constitution few Afghans regard as sacred. The point of the alternative process proposed here is not, however, to discard the content of the existing constitution—in particular with regard to human rights and fundamental freedoms—but simply to admit that constitutions are in all political systems living documents that evolve as circumstances alter.



Although one cannot anticipate the exact content of the negotiation, chances are that they will focus on how Afghanistan will translate its commitment to Islam as a basic value of the state into political institutions and concrete policies. In this respect, human rights and the rights of women are likely to be complicated issues, and the fears of Afghan activists that the gains of the last decade may be traded away for the sake of an illusory peace are legitimate. But this should not preclude a genuine discussion as to how the political system might be improved.

The structure of the justice system is likely to present difficulties of the same kind. Past attempts to introduce a justice system disconnected from traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms have largely failed,⁶⁰ doomed not by questions of principle but by inefficiency and corruption. By contrast, the parallel Taliban justice system was seen as expedient and relatively free of corruption. Although, once again, one cannot preempt the outcome of these contentious proposed negotiations, they might explore the distinction between civil and penal justice. The former requires fast resolution and is a condition of social stability. Traditional norms in adjudicating conflicts do not seem to be an issue for Afghan society. The traditional justice system could therefore be acceptable to resolve such disputes while penal justice could operate according to existing norms.⁶¹

Other political issues such as presidential powers, democracy, administrative authority, and the allocation of power along both geographic and institutional lines will be more difficult to address. These are issues where the temptation to turn the political process into a power-sharing agreement will be the greatest, but it is essential that that trap be avoided. Power-sharing agreements tend to be unstable because they reflect the balance of power at the time of the agreement without taking into account the possibility that circumstances may change in the future. As a result, they inevitably generate frustration for parties that feel marginalised, and such aggrieved stakeholders may solicit the intervention of external powers on their behalf. An example is the Peace Process Roadmap to 2015 officially proposed by the High Peace Council in November 2012.⁶² The document clearly favored the Taliban and Pakistan, and it was suspected that it had been written at the instigation of the latter with the help of a foreign hand.⁶³ As a result, it was rejected before negotiations even started.

Avoiding a power-sharing agreement while keeping the Afghan government open to all stakeholders will depend on the democratic bona fides of the future government. But measures such as a larger degree of decentralisation would also help bypass the contradiction between a power-sharing agreement and a national political settlement based on the capacity of the parties to represent the will of their constituents. For instance, direct elections for provincial governors might be a step in the right direction—rather than allowing the president to appoint them. A more extreme measure would be to turn the Afghan political system into a parliamentary regime.

None of these measures would provide absolute guarantees of stability, but they would help diminish the political significance of ethnic factors without ignoring the reality of ethnic demography. An issue as important as the control of the armed forces for example, takes on a different meaning in a democratic context—where it reflects, at least indirectly, the popular will as expressed in the election—from its meaning in a non-democratic context—where there is always a risk that control of the armed forces will benefit one of the contending parties or a specific interest group.



Finally, technical issues related to state-building capacities (that is the building and reinforcement of an efficient administration) should be left out of the negotiation. Such a capacity-building effort is essential to good governance and the viability of the future Afghan state, but it is distinct from the political process. It is aimed at reinforcing the civil service, irrespective of who is in power. It is essential to ensure that this capacity-building effort is not affected by the fate of the negotiations, particularly their eventual failure. It should therefore be left to separate negotiations between the Afghan government and specialised international agencies.

The participants

Above all, the process must be broadly inclusive. In order to be a truly national conference, it should eventually include representatives from all components of the insurgency (the Taliban and the Hezb-i-Islami in particular), the government, the 'loyal' opposition, and civil society, including women.

The need for inclusion inevitably raises the question of the Taliban delegates and who exactly they represent. It should be observed in this regard that despite the relative opacity of the movement, a number of bilateral conversations are taking place regularly between Afghan officials and representatives of other bodies on one side and the Taliban on the other. A number of potential Taliban interlocutors are therefore identified. It is however likely that the Taliban representation will evolve to include representatives closer to the movement's centre of power of as the latter gradually recognises the validity of the process.

Such a truly inclusive process would offer the best guarantee that the principles on which the new constitution will be based will not depart fundamentally from those at the heart of the current document. To that end, it bears noting that the discourse of the Taliban on issues such as women's rights and education has evolved considerably. Critics will rightly object that the Taliban would not necessarily act according to these principles once in power, but the new discourse reflects at least a better understanding of the expectations of Afghan society. This opens some space for negotiations.

Critics will also rightly observe that an agreement, even if apparently consensual, is not a guarantee that its terms will be respected. This is indeed undeniable and applies to every actor. However a party which violated an agreement to which it was a signatory would inevitably lose legitimacy, and thereby complicate its own struggle.

The mechanism: A standing national conference

By definition, this process must be owned and led by Afghans themselves, and so the authors' suggestions are just that, suggestions. This does not, however, preclude a facilitating role for the international community. A 2011 report by the Century Foundation suggested the creation of a standing international conference,⁶⁴ and listed a number of key sets of issues to be negotiated to reach a peace agreement. The authors of this report believe that a similar mechanism, limited to only Afghan national actors, could be adapted to the purpose of the process. It is important to underline that the political process must be allowed to continue for as long as



necessary. Setting deadlines would be a recipe for failure, as it would provide any party interested in sabotaging the process with the means to do so by simply stalling. A standing national conference would have the distinct advantage of being at arms' length from the process by which the 2004 constitution can be altered, allowing creative discussion without the fear that the process could easily be hijacked by extremists keen to do away with the current Constitution's positive features. Initially a standing national conference would bring together members of the government, the 'loyal' opposition, and civil society groups, but with a view to its membership being widened over time.

New ideas and proposals would need time to mature before being eventually accepted by all parties. It would take time also for the relevant actors to acknowledge the need for compromise, especially since at the beginning of the process high levels of distrust might be expected. Moreover, authoritative interlocutors from the insurgency are likely to be identified and accepted only gradually as the process evolved. It should be expected that the insurgency would first test the process using figures such as reconciled former Taliban leaders before being prepared to send representatives closer to the present leadership. The political process should therefore be open-ended and a standing national conference would be the right framework for the proposed negotiation. It would provide a regular diplomatic venue for Afghan negotiators, in whatever format they and the facilitator (see below) might decide suited the specific object of negotiations at any given time.

In order to ensure the legitimacy and security of the debates, the standing national conference would need to be organised outside the country in a location agreeable to the Afghan parties, under the auspices of the United Nations, and with a clear mandate from the Security Council.

A facilitator

The United Nations should also name a facilitator, backed by a UN team, whose broad task would be to establish a procedural framework and set the terms of the negotiations with all parties. This would include identifying the stumbling blocks of the negotiation and organising the sessions of the standing national conference according to the agreed agenda.

The facilitator, who should be somebody with the confidence of all Afghan parties but also vast diplomatic and UN experience, would establish channels of communications, prepare the sessions of the standing national conference, and keep all regional and international actors informed.

The timing

The Karzai government insists that the High Peace Council was meant to be such a mechanism and that its composition reflected all components of Afghan society. But the High Peace Council, chaired first by former President Burhanuddin Rabbani and then, following his assassination, by his son, was never recognised as an inclusive mechanism and was widely considered to be sympathetic to Karzai's interests. In effect, the regime blocked all negotiations or attempts at negotiations in which it was not the sole interlocutor of the insurgency, earning the scepticism of civil society groups and opposition figures not associated with the Rabbani family.



It would make the most sense to launch this new political process immediately after the presidential election is complete. Such timing will help decouple the process from any immediate political deadline and any power stake. Moreover, the existence of a new government would help disentangle daily governance issues from broader negotiations on the institutions.

Keeping the dialogue national

The political process should focus primarily on national issues. But given the nature of the conflict in Afghanistan, it will be impossible to achieve peace without some participation by regional actors. We argue, however, that this role should be essentially passive. Regional actors ought to facilitate the process by refraining from objecting to the participation of Afghans who operate from their territory. Three considerations should be taken into account in this regard:

- 1) From a regional perspective, the Afghan conflict is a series of proxy wars. As such, each regional state will somehow be represented in the inclusive dialogue by its proxies.
- 2) It would unnecessarily complicate the process to include regional considerations in a discussion on Afghanistan's political system. It would introduce a zero-sum element which would inevitably lead to the failure of the process.
- 3) The political process would not exist in a diplomatic vacuum. There is already a series of bilateral exchanges and regional fora in which Afghanistan is discussed.

We therefore argue that the regional aspects of the conflict should be left to the regional actors, and that their negotiations be kept parallel to the Afghan political process without interfering with it.

Other factors further emphasise the need to disconnect the Afghan domestic political process from regional diplomatic negotiations. Regional diplomatic processes are likely to evolve over time, leading to changing configurations. They will influence to some extent the positioning of the Afghan actors. Making regional issues a stumbling block of the Afghan negotiations would therefore risk distracting Afghan stakeholders from their main objectives.

It is essential, however, that regional actors be kept informed by the UN facilitator about the evolution of the political process. In a regional environment characterised by mistrust and rivalry, opacity would provide an incentive for regional countries to sabotage the process.

Can Afghanistan be neutralised?

One of the questions which could be discussed in the Afghan negotiation is the country's international status. As external actors are a key component of Afghanistan's problems, it makes sense to examine the possibility of neutralising Afghanistan. Neutralisation is a 'reciprocal agreement between a small, strategically located weak state and two or more major powers at odds with each other. It is an interest-based tool designed to keep enemies from directly confronting each other over territories whose strategic significance affects them all.'⁶⁵



A neutral Afghanistan has been proposed on several past occasions. After the 1979 Soviet invasion, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the establishment of a neutral Afghanistan, a proposal adopted by the European Union and endorsed by US President Jimmy Carter but rejected by Moscow. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev proposed the idea, but the United States rejected it.⁶⁶

More recently, although he did not employ the term ‘neutrality’, the US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, James Dobbins, made a similar proposal in a RAND report co-written with James Shinn. The authors suggested a series of measures amounting to neutrality. These included among others:

- the guarantee by Afghanistan’s neighbours and interested parties of Afghanistan’s non-alignment and territorial integrity
- a declaration by Afghanistan to be non-aligned and an agreement by all parties to respect and not seek to undermine that non-alignment
- an undertaking by Afghanistan to prevent its territory being used against the interests of any of its neighbours, and an undertaking by Afghanistan’s neighbours to prevent their territory from being used against the interests of Afghanistan
- an agreement by the United States and its NATO allies, along with all Afghanistan’s neighbours, not to supply weapons or other material to any parties in Afghanistan other than as may be specified elsewhere in the accord.⁶⁷

Subsequent US and NATO military withdrawals would make neutrality complete.

A similar proposal has been made by two former Indian diplomats, Chinmaya Gharekhan and Hamid Ansari. Ansari is currently the Vice President of India.⁶⁸ They argue that a possible model for Afghanistan probably exists in the shape of the International Agreement on the Neutrality of Laos that was signed in Geneva on July 23, 1962, by 14 states including the five permanent members of the Security Council (P5), the neighbours of Laos, as well as India and Canada. The agreement spelt out the reciprocal commitments of the Laotian government on the one side and of the 14 co-signatories on the other. The Laotian part of the commitments, it said, ‘shall be promulgated constitutionally and shall have the force of law.’ The other signatories pledged to respect Laotian neutrality, to refrain from interference—direct or indirect—in the internal affairs of Laos, and to refrain from drawing Laos into military alliances or to establish military bases in Laotian territory.

This format, suitably adapted, could include:

- a formal Afghan proclamation of neutrality
- its endorsement by the UN Security Council
- the acceptance of reciprocal obligations by the Afghan state on one side and Afghanistan’s neighbours and other relevant countries on the other.

These elements could provide the framework for a comprehensive arrangement. A settlement of the Pakistan-Afghan border, and a commitment for the structured reduction and eventual elimination of foreign forces now in Afghanistan would need to be incorporated in the package.



At least in theory, neutrality would indeed provide a legal structure that would help minimise the threat emanating from the region. Unlike previous failed regional approaches to the problem, it would not aim to solve the series of bilateral issues affecting the region, but would it prevent them from impacting post-2014 Afghanistan.

However, neutrality cannot be effective unless both Afghanistan and its neighbours are willing to commit themselves to it. Similarly, Afghanistan's factions must be ready not to call upon or be used by external actors. The process would also require verification and enforcement capabilities. In the current climate of both internal and external distrust and suspicion, to neutralise Afghanistan without also establishing such capabilities would be to expect all actors to change their habitual behavior overnight to non-interference. Whatever they may say, such a change is unlikely. Neither the Afghan parties nor the regional actors are likely to be restrained by 'a reasonable prospect of a peaceful Afghanistan'.⁶⁹

As desirable as it may be, neutralising Afghanistan can therefore make sense only if and when a relatively functional state is been established and consolidated in the country. Such a relatively functional state presupposes a minimum consensus among the Afghan parties. Such a consensus can find roots only in the definition of a common political will, a process which may or may not require adjustments to the constitution but which will have to be decided by the Afghan themselves.⁷⁰ In other words, the decision to neutralise Afghanistan would be a logical and desirable outcome of a successful political process. It cannot, however, be postulated as an integral part of it and discussion about it should be kept separate from the process itself.



CONCLUSIONS

It follows from the preceding considerations that the consolidation of the Afghan regime should be a priority for every regional actor. But it is no less obvious that, whatever the political settlement that the parties may agree upon in Afghanistan, it will somehow have to accommodate the interests and security requirements of these same actors.

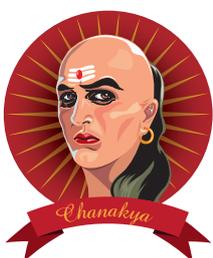
The zero-sum character of regional interests and perceptions makes it almost impossible to expect peace in the current climate to result from a change of policies by Afghanistan's neighbours. The authors believe therefore that it is necessary to disconnect the Afghan peace process from any bilateral or multilateral regional effort to settle regional issues. The proxy game that regional and Afghan actors have been playing for years guarantees, however, that all interests will be somehow be represented in a negotiation. The difference, however, is that the outside parties will not hold the negotiation hostage.

We also argue that there is room for an inclusive Afghan political process to define the contours of a common political will and translate it into institutions that support a political system acceptable to all. To achieve this, all sides must acknowledge that a truly inclusive national dialogue characterised by compromise is the only way to preserve the gains made through international interventions and the existing constitution.

With this in mind, we also advocate a disconnect between the support provided to the existing Afghan state—which aims at strengthening the Afghan civil service—and the political process. On the one hand, it is essential that the state machinery be able to survive and better serve the Afghan state and people, irrespective of who is in power. On the other hand, there must be a vibrant political debate on what Afghanistan should be. The current chaotic and uncertain situation after more than 12 years of international presence is due, among other factors, to the fact that governance has systematically been privileged at the expense of politics, leading to a failure of both.

Finally, we argue that although neutralisation would be the best possible international status for Afghanistan given both its extreme domestic fragility and the regional configuration of powers, such an outcome is possible only if the state can guarantee its effectiveness by being able to limit outside interferences. An inclusive Afghan political process is the first step towards achieving a government with the capacity to impose those limits.

There is, of course, no guarantee of success. But even a failure would not happen in a political and strategic vacuum. All regional actors are today preparing for the worst case scenario: chaos. All concur, one way or another, in the same strategy: containment. The fallback strategy is thus already in place, although with many flaws and weaknesses. An Afghan political process entails, therefore, no additional risk for the region. Every gain realised for Afghanistan under this framework will be a gain for regional stability.



Endnotes

¹ The predominance of political, security and strategic calculations does not mean of course that economic considerations are absent from the regional actors' calculations, nor that they are unimportant, but simply that there are not the main drivers of their respective policies in Afghanistan. It does not mean either that regional support—or at least tacit acceptance—is not necessary for a political settlement of the conflict to be achieved, but suggests that neither Afghanistan's stability nor security can be attained primarily through economic development.

² See William Maley, "Statebuilding in Afghanistan: challenges and pathologies", *Central Asian Survey*, vol.32, no.3, 2013, pp.255-270.

³ Ernesto Londono, Karen de Young and Greg Miller, "Afghanistan gains will be lost quickly after drawdown, U.S. intelligence estimate warns", *The Washington Post*, December 28, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/...intelligence-estimate-warns/2013/12/28/ac609f90-6f32-11e3-85cb037b7236_print.html

⁴ See in particular Michael O'Hanlon, "The intelligence assessment is too pessimistic about Afghanistan", *The Washington Post*, January 2, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/...mistic-about-afghanistan/2014/01/02/eacde5a6-719b-11e3-9389-09ef994065e_print.html

⁵ The National Intelligence Estimate on which the Washington Post reported was not itself made public.

⁶ General John Allen, USMC (Ret.), Michèle Flournoy and Michael O'Hanlon, *Toward a Successful Outcome in Afghanistan* (Washington DC: Center for American Progress, May 2013).

⁷ Hasan Khan, "Afghan security forces ready for 2014 transition: Ghani", *Central Asia Online*, April 24, 2013. http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/pakistan/main/2013/04/24/feature-01

⁸ the evolution of the ground situation, not the date, will be the decisive factor for the decrease of the ANSF

⁹ Brian Brady, Jonathan Owen, "NATO alarm over Afghan army crisis: loss of recruits threatens security as handover looms", *The Independent*, 15 October 2013.

¹⁰ Department of Defense, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan: Report to Congress* (Washington DC: November 2013) p.35.

¹¹ Gary Owen, *Another Post-2014 Capability Gap: Spin and reality of the Afghan air force's readiness (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 11 July 2013)* <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/another-post-2014-capability-gap-spin-and-reality-of-the-afghan-air-forces-readiness>

¹² Department of Defense, *op. cit.*, p. 1

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Nils B. Weidmann, and Michael Callen, "Violence and Election Fraud: Evidence from Afghanistan", *British Journal of Political Science*, vol.43, no.1, 2013, pp.53-75.

¹⁵ See Timur Sharan, "The dynamics of informal political networks and statehood in post-2001 Afghanistan: a case study of the 2010-2011 Special Election Court crisis", *Central Asian Survey*, vol.32,



no.3, 2013, pp.336-352.

¹⁶ Sarah Chayes, "Afghanistan is not ready to vote" Bloomberg, October 20, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/print/2-13-10-20/afghanistan-isn-t-ready-to-vote.html>

¹⁷ Sarah Chayes, *Prospect for Afghanistan's 2014 Elections, Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Affairs, May 21, 2013.*

¹⁸ Stephen J. Hadley, "In Afghanistan, an alternate approach to a security pact", *The Washington Post, January 14, 2014*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/in-afghanistan-an-alternate-approach-to-a-security-pact/2014/01/14/2be7dd50-7d34-11e3-93c1-0e888170b723_print.html

¹⁹ See Michael Keating, "Afghanistan Elections: Keep Calm and Carry on", *Expert Comment (London: Chatham House, 9 October 2013)* <http://www.chathamhouse.org/media/comment/view/194717>

²⁰ Sarah Chayes, "Afghanistan isn't ready to vote", *op. cit.*

²¹ The World Bank, *Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014 (Washington DC: The World Bank, May 2012)* Vol.2, p.22.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Afghanistan's soil is said to contain gold, copper, iron ore, gemstone, oil and natural gas.

²⁵ The World Bank, *op. cit.*, pp.26-27.

²⁶ Barbara J. Stapleton, *Beating a Retreat: Prospects for the Transition Process in Afghanistan (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, May 2012).*

²⁷ "Enduring Strategic Security Partnership between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America", 2 May 2012.

²⁸ See Fontini Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)* pp.57-100.

²⁹ For a strong statement of this case, see Carlotta Gall, *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan, 2001-2014 (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014)*. See also William Maley, "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations", in Michael Clarke and Ashutosh Misra (eds), *Pakistan's Stability Paradox: Domestic, regional and international dimensions (New York: Routledge, 2011)* pp.121-136.

³⁰ Moeed Yusuf, *Decoding Pakistan's 'Strategic Shift' in Afghanistan (Stockholm: SIPRI, May 2013)* p.17.

³¹ See Vahid Brown and Don Rassler, *Fountainhead of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus, 1973-2012 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).*

³² As of December 15, 2013. "Fatalities in Terrorist Violence 2003-2013", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/casualties.html>

³³ See William Maley, 'Talibanisation and Pakistan', in *Talibanisation: Extremism and Regional Instability in South and Central Asia (Berlin: Conflict Prevention Network: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2001)* pp.53-74.

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³⁵ The elimination, on November 11, 2013, of Nasiruddin Haqqani, main financier of the Haqqani network was, according to some newspapers, motivated by its contact with the TTP: *Le Monde*, November 11, 2013.

³⁶ Moeed Yusuf, Huma Yusuf and Salaman Zaidi, "Pakistan, the United States, and the Endgame in Afghanistan: Perceptions of Pakistan's Foreign Policy Elite", in Scott Smith, Moeed Yusuf and Colin Cookman (eds.), *Getting it Right in Afghanistan (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2013)* p.127.

³⁷ Yusuf, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³⁸ Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, "India", in Ashley Tellis and Aroop Mukharji (eds.), *Is a Regional Strategy*



Viable in Afghanistan? (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010) p.28.

³⁹ *Ibid.* pp.27-28.

⁴⁰ Shantie Mariet D'Souza, "President Karzai's Visit to India: Setting Policy Markers for post-2014 Afghanistan", *ISAS Insights* (Singapore), no.207, 3 June 2013.

⁴¹ Mohsen M. Milani, "Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan", *Middle East Journal*, vol.60, no.2, 2006, pp.235-256.

⁴² 200,000 soldiers were mobilised instead, on Iran's eastern border, as a show of force. Bruce Koepke, *Iran's Policy on Afghanistan: The Evolution of Strategic Pragmatism* (Stockholm: SIPRI, September 2013).

⁴³ Michael Rubin, "Understanding Iranian Strategy in Afghanistan", Presentation to the Royal Danish Defence College and RAND, Copenhagen, Denmark, June 14, 2007.

⁴⁴ By mid-2013, two Taliban delegations had been invited in the Iranian capital: Koepke, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Chris Zambelis, "The Day After: Iran's Quiet Taliban Diplomacy Reflects Preparations for a Post-US Afghanistan", *Terrorism Monitor*, vol.11, no.21, 14 November 2013.

⁴⁶ See Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia: Living in Afghanistan's Shadow* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre, Noref Policy Brief no.1, November 2009).

⁴⁷ Scott Radnitz and Marlene Laruelle, "Will Afghanistan Take Central Asia Down", *The National Interest*, August 1, 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/will-afghanistan-take-central-asia-down-it>

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ See Bayram Balci, "The Myth of Rising Radical Islamism in Post-2014 Central Asia", *World Politics Review*, December 30, 2013. <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/print/13459>

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*

⁵¹ Russia has indeed understood the problem. Although it fears the resurgence of a Taliban Afghanistan which could offer training camps to its own Islamist rebels (Chechen and others), as well as the persistence and intensification of drug trafficking through its borders, it seems to fear much more a long-term US military presence: Ariel Cohen, "How the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan Will Affect Russia and Eurasia", in Stephen Blank (ed.), *Central Asia after 2014* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), United States Army War College, November 2013) pp.13-32. This is likely to be accentuated following the 2014 Ukraine crisis.

⁵² Michael Swaine and Tiffany P. Ng, "China" in Ashley Tellis and Aroop Mukharji (eds), *Is A Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?* (Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), p.66.

⁵³ *Ibid* pp.61-65.

⁵⁴ The China Metallurgical Group Corporation (CMCG), the company that signed the deal for the exploitation of the Aynak copper deposits, has undertaken, in cooperation with the Chinese government, to construct a 400 megawatt, coal-fired power plant and a freight railroad that will connect Xinjiang with Pakistan via Tajikistan and Afghanistan. In 2011, the Chinese company CNPC also secured the rights to explore the Amu Daria basin for oil and natural gas: Michael Clarke, "China Strategy in 'Greater Central Asia': Is Afghanistan the Missing Link?" *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, vol.40., no.1, 2013, pp.11-19.

⁵⁵ China participated in the construction of the 2,700 kilometer circular highway connecting Kabul to other major cities in Afghanistan.

⁵⁶ Swaine and Ng, *op. cit.*, p.61

⁵⁷ Pakistan has been so far happy to oblige and has extradited any Uighurs that China claims were part of terrorist groups, against the objections of international human rights organisations.

⁵⁸ "Yang Jiechi waizhang fuhuan wenti boen huiyi shang de jianghua", Remarks by H.E. Yang Jiechi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China at the International Afghanistan Conference, Bonn, December 5, 2011, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/ziliao/zt/dnzt/yjcwzbfhwtwdwzh/t884414.htm>, quoted in Zao Huasheng, *China and Afghanistan: China's Interests, Stances, and Perspectives* (Washington



DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2012).

⁵⁹ See Elizabeth Wishnick, « There Goes the Neighborhood : Afghanistan's Challenge to China's Regional Security Goals », *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol.19, no.1, 2012, pp.83-100 at p.84.

⁶⁰ See Whit Mason (ed.), *The Rule of Law in Afghanistan: Missing in Inaction?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁶¹ See John Braithwaite and Ali Wardak, "Crime and War in Afghanistan. Part I: The Hobbesian Solution", *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2013, pp. 179-196; Ali Wardak and John Braithwaite, "Crime and War in Afghanistan. Part II: A Jeffersonian Alternative?", *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2013, pp. 197-214.

⁶² High Peace Council, *Peace Process Roadmap to 2015*, November 2012.

⁶³ See Sarah Chayes, *Afghanistan Roadmap to the Past* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 31, 2012). <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/12/31/afghanistn-s-roadmap-to-past/ey47>

⁶⁴ Lakhdar Brahimi and Thomas R. Pickering, *Afghanistan: Negotiating Peace. The Report of The Century Foundation, International Task Force on Afghanistan in its Regional and Multilateral Dimensions* (Washington DC: The Century Foundation, 2011). *Ambassadors Brahimi and Pickering were Co-Chairs of the Task Force.*

⁶⁵ Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Thinking Long on Afghanistan: Could it be Neutralized", *The Washington Quarterly*, vol.36, no.1, 2013, pp.55-72 at p.56.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.55-56.

⁶⁷ James Shinn and James Dobbins, *Afghan Peace Talks: A Primer* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2011) pp.96-97.

⁶⁸ <http://hindu.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=2003122401601000.htm&date=2003/12/24/&prd=th&>

⁶⁹ Astri Suhrke, *Toward 2014 and beyond: NATO, Afghanistan and the "Heart of Asia"*, NOREF, August 2012, p. 6

⁷⁰ To be fair to James Shinn and James Dobbins, they implicitly recognise this fact when they put as one of the necessary commitments to their version of neutrality the need for Afghanistan to "undertake to form a government of national reconciliation", supported by the neighbouring states, the United States and NATO and facilitated by the UN. James Shinn and James Dobbins, *op. cit.*, p.96.



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