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Towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan: Fostering Regional Consensus

WOMEN AND PUBLIC POLICY JOURNAL • VOLUME 5

MARIAM SAFI

جهاد
پژوهش و توسعه



DROPS

ORGANIZATION FOR POLICY RESEARCH
& DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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Edited by
MARIAM SAFI
BISMELLAH ALIZADA

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نهاد پژوهش و توسعه



**National Endowment
for Democracy**

Supporting freedom around the world

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Preface

The Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies' (DROPS) flagship *Women and Public Policy Journal* (WPPJ) has dedicated its fifth and current volume towards exploring the roles and relevance of regional states in building peace and stability in Afghanistan. Within the discourses that have evolved since the emergence of the term "Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative" in the U.S.'s Near East global policies at the beginning of the 21st century as well as due to the determinants of the conflict in Afghanistan, the definition of the term, 'regional countries', has garnered a degree of deficit. So, which are the states that can be considered 'regional'? What criteria deem them as being 'regional' ones?

Essays in the 2019 WPPJ focus on those states in Afghanistan's immediate and extended neighbourhood, which have a political and regional relevance to the conflict in the country. By doing so, essays in this volume of the WPPJ have considered an assortment of important regional players within Afghanistan's context.

In her essay, Marzia Azizi analyses Turkey's role and the core elements of politics in Afghanistan by Turkey, simultaneously exploring the role, relevance and prospects of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. Khadija Hussaini focuses on the efforts and the role of Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan along with its religious ideological and regional hegemony in correlation to its rivalry with Iran. Nasema Zeerak and Shughnia Ramzjo analyse central elements of Pakistan's strategies and politics *vis-a-vis* Afghanistan. Zahra Rostami explores Iran's role and prospects, while also exploring Tehran's security concerns and need for access to water, and consequent policies. Farah Elyaskhil and Sadaf Mohmand examine Russia's and Turkmenistan's roles, concerns and prospects with regard to security and stability in Afghanistan respectively. Nasria Pashtun contextualises Qatar's engagement with Afghanistan. Shugra Azizi analyses India-Afghanistan relations in conjunction

with India-Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and its relevance to security and stability in Afghanistan. Anne Jasim-Falher contextualises Afghanistan's relations with Central Asian countries, namely Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, to identify areas of cooperation on issues of mutual concern. Gulsom Mirzada examines China's concerns with regard to the security situation in Afghanistan, and explores the prospects of Beijing's role in contributing towards security and stability in Afghanistan by analysing China-Afghanistan and China-Pakistan relations as well as the potential of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Finally, Samina Ansari reviews Steve Coll's 2018 book, *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan*.

The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process did not result in the expected outcomes because it was overshadowed by the U.S.-Russia rivalry in the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis; changing power struggles and alliances in Syria, Libya and other states; and the rise of China and its global project, the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. Meanwhile, without doubt, Riyadh's security concerns in the light of al Qaeda's activities in Afghanistan and in the region, as well as the expansionist character of the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam and Saudi Arabia's engagement with Pakistan during the Afghan war against the erstwhile U.S.S.R. are all contributory to the pulls and pressures of the conflict in Afghanistan. Two other crucial states relevant to peace and stability building in Afghanistan are Pakistan and Iran. In the context of fostering regional cooperation to facilitate security and stability in Afghanistan, a deeper discussion is warranted on the ideological determinants of Pakistan's foreign policy, as well as on Shi-ism as a defining factor in Iran's foreign policy as an antidote to Wahhabism in the region, among other key elements.

China, the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan and other regional states not only play an important role given their potential to contribute to stability in Afghanistan but also due to their respective economic and security policy interests. China is especially concerned given its priorities with regard to its mega project, OBOR, as well as due to the activities of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement along its border with Afghanistan, and the potential influence of Western states in the region. Simultaneously, in the backdrop of tensions between Russia and the U.S., the former's concerns regarding security are increasing. Russia views the rise of the Islamic State in the region as a product of, and even as a planned destructive policy of, the West against it.

In a reductionist approach, it is possible to argue from Afghanistan's perspective that achieving progress and security in the country will not be feasible without regional cooperation and integration. The long war in Afghanistan is not a typical civil war or a rebellion of a dissatisfied mass against its state. To a great extent, this war has regional and international dimensions. The Afghan war is also a proxy war. Exponents of this war are conducting their rivalries and pursuing their hegemonic aspirations by force, ensuring a continuation of the war. The war in Afghanistan is a multi-causal war in which ideological justifications of the conflict are used as an excuse. This war is a 'dirty war', and a war *sans* freeing or emancipating contents.

In order to address this conflict, among other factors, regional economic, political and security cooperation is an indispensable prerequisite. The 2019 volume of the WPPJ, authored by female Afghan academics, is a valuable contribution to analysing the conflict and Afghanistan's regional relevance from the perspective of Afghan women. The high quality of the contributions is an evidence of the emancipation process of Afghan women in the past few years as well as the preparedness of the next generation of Afghan women to take on greater responsibility.

This volume is a recommended read for all and the women of Afghanistan have my best wishes.

Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former National Security Advisor of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

July 2019

Editor's Note

In the recent years, Afghanistan has experienced a dramatic increase in the numbers of terrorist related attacks, civilian casualties, and of national, regional and international terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan since 2001. The Afghan government estimates that there are over 20 terrorist groups currently fighting in Afghanistan, with the Taliban being the only Afghan group among them. To address the root causes leading to this rise in insecurity and the number of terrorist groups operating in the country, policymakers in Afghanistan have repeatedly stressed on the need to forge a regional approach for fighting terrorism both in Afghanistan and the wider region.

However, such an approach seems easier said than done. The protracted conflict in Afghanistan, which is approaching its 41st year, is one which has its roots in both complex internal factors and diverse external drivers of conflict-making. Over the years, the two have merged, creating a symbiotic relationship where one sustains the other and vice versa. Consequently, any effort to address one without addressing the other would be a fruitless endeavor.

In 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement of the new Strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia brought with it a renewed sense of commitment towards developing a regional consensus. Policymakers in Afghanistan believed they finally found strong support in its U.S. partner to help with its effort to promote a regional policy on combating terrorism. And, initially, though reluctant, regional actors too had begun to show increased signs of converging interests, which offered some hope for improved stability in Afghanistan.

In line with its renewed effort to negotiate an end to the conflict in Afghanistan, in 2018, 17 years after the international intervention in Afghanistan, the U.S. appointed Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as its Special Envoy for

Afghanistan Reconciliation. In this role, Ambassador Khalilzad has embarked on a whirlwind of diplomatic visits over the past year, holding talks with Afghanistan's regional and international partners in a bid to foster consensus on the U.S.'s efforts towards reaching a negotiated settlement, initially through a deal between the U.S. and the Taliban, and then a negotiated settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Meanwhile, in 2019, the Afghan government appointed a Special Envoy for Peace and subsequently, a State Minister for Peace Affairs. The special envoy is tasked with visiting Afghanistan's partners, including Pakistan and India, to discuss the Afghan peace process and forge mutual interest for peace.

However, these efforts have made little headway in cultivating the kind of momentum the ongoing peace process requires to be successful. Overall, on the surface, all regional countries have reiterated their support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, on a deeper level, some countries hold serious concerns related to security, while others view peace in Afghanistan as a threat to their interests. Thus, even though peace and security are two sides of the same coin and would therefore require a concerted effort to address both aspects, the paths taken to address each remained disjointed. In March 2018, Afghanistan's then National Security Advisor, Hanif Atmar, articulated the state of regional affairs on this matter, noting that while there was a regional consensus on peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, the consensus on how to fight the terrorists was broken.

Essentially, for any regional consensus on peace in Afghanistan to translate into constructive, long-term and sustainable peace, it will require a concerted vision towards regional securitization as well. Specifically, given the extent of overlap between external and internal (often conflicting) interests pertaining to Afghanistan, building a regional consensus on a comprehensive strategy to address both the internal and external drivers of the conflict in tandem will be necessary not only for reaching a resolution to the ongoing conflict but also to the durability of such a resolution. Such a strategy would essentially require primary, secondary and peripheral actors with stakes (real or perceived) in the state-of-affairs in Afghanistan to find a common ground to cooperate with each other. The inability to forge such a consensus to fight terrorism in Afghanistan has been one of the greatest failures of the Afghan government

and its partners since the international intervention in 2001 which brought with it a mix of counter-terrorism and state-building efforts.

Several multilateral fora have provided scope for international cooperation on Afghanistan. These include specifically created groupings such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Kabul Process, as well as more long-standing organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). However, due to divergent interests among state members, such groupings have had little impact towards fostering any actionable consensus towards building a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

The fundamental problem lies in three conundrums on which Afghanistan's ability to forge a consensus to drive a concerted regional approach hinges. First, its neighbors continue to distinguish between "good" and "bad" terrorists with some maintaining relations with non-state actors instead of promoting state-to-state relations. Second, while each country would benefit from stability in Afghanistan, each also views the situation in Afghanistan as secondary and peripheral to their issues. Third, advocates of Afghanistan's centrality to its region must compete with an alternative viewpoint which situates the country on the fringes of Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. Above all, the efficacy of regional engagement is contingent on the circumstances and mechanics of the political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

President Trump may have given new life to the quest for a political settlement in Afghanistan, but for any settlement to endure, apart from the core parties to the conflict, the various drivers of conflict—that are will likely persist in different degrees across the country and region—regional actors (particularly Afghanistan's close neighbors Pakistan, China, India, Russia and Iran) will need compelling reasons to agree to it as well. Any deal struck with the Taliban will mean the eventual exit of the U.S. and NATO troops from Afghanistan, and this inevitability raises several questions. These questions range from the nature of replacement to Afghanistan's current dependency on the U.S. for aid, training and equipment, to questions on the type of security and state needed in the future to convince regional countries that Afghanistan does not pose a threat to their interests. At present, there is neither a regional consensus

nor an agreed regional framework that responds to the recent series of talks with the Taliban in Doha. A degree of consensus among regional actors will be indispensable not only for a constructive settlement to be reached but also for the stabilization of Afghanistan and the region in a post-settlement period.

In other words, regional cooperation must be understood not only as a route to stability in Afghanistan, but also as a product of it. To that end, at this juncture, the fundamental question is not so much about intervening to increase security, but rather about engaging those countries that are able and likely to cultivate a political process between the government and the Taliban, either bilaterally or through an existing regional channel.

It is under this backdrop that the 2019 iteration of the Women and Public Policy Journal (WPPJ) was conceived. Aimed at exploring new opportunities for Afghanistan and its regional neighbors to develop a common approach to tackle terrorism and bring security to the country, essays in this volume delve deep into Afghanistan's political and security relations with key regional countries. In so doing, not only does each essay identify actionable policy options for Afghanistan's bilateral relations on matters of security and stability, collectively, they provide a roadmap for a concerted foreign policy framework for Afghanistan.

Mariam Safi

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Kabul, Afghanistan

July, 2019

Afghanistan and Central Asia: A Regional Approach to Counter Radical Islam

ANNE JASIM-FALHER¹

At present, as part of the ongoing peace negotiations between the US and the Taliban, the latter have indicated that they are willing to cut their ties with international terrorist groups. However, it is unlikely that groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Katibat Imam Al Bukhari (KIB), Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), Hizbut Tahrir (HuT) and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) would cease their operations in Afghanistan. In reality, a potentially full withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan might lead to further intensification of their militancy. All these groups have members in Central Asian states and are either directly involved in violence in Afghanistan or have announced their support to the Taliban. Repression in Central Asia has led to increased radicalization,² accelerating the recruitment of young nationals from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and to a lesser extent, Kyrgyzstan, in the ranks of these violent groups.³ The future stability of both Afghanistan and Central Asian states are thus intertwined. These terrorist groups attract disgruntled youth from Central Asia while gaining visibility and funding through their operations in Afghanistan.

Envisaging ways for the Afghan government to initiate meaningful regional cooperation with Central Asian states to counter the spread of radical Islam and violent extremism is therefore imperative and an urgent need. This essay

1. Anne Jasim-Falher is the Founder and Managing Director of ATR Consulting in Afghanistan.

2. Lemon, Edward; Mironova, Vera; and Tobey, William. "Jihadists from Ex-Soviet Central Asia: Where Are They? Why Did They Radicalize? What Next?" *Russia Matters*, December 2018. <https://www.russiamatters.org/sites/default/files/media/files/Jihadists%20from%20Ex-Soviet%20Central%20Asia%20Research%20Paper.pdf>

3. *Ibid.*

assesses the extent to which radicalism and violent extremism are spreading in Central Asia (specifically in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) and analyzes how Central Asian states are tackling this challenge. It then reviews existing regional cooperation initiatives that could constitute platforms for Central Asian states and Afghanistan to jointly tackle their common challenge.

Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Central Asia: A Brief Overview

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979), the collapse of the USSR (1991), the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997), and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (1996-2001) all contributed to the rise of radical Islamic groups such as the IMU in Central Asia. In her review of terrorism and religious extremism in Central Asia,⁴ Fiona Hill explains that as a direct consequence of the US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, the IMU became more discreet for a few years but rapidly restarted operations, including carrying out bombings in Tashkent and Bukhara⁵ and at the Tajik and Kyrgyz borders⁶ in 2006. The movement later gained military strength and international coverage through its engagement in the insurgency in Afghanistan,⁷ before they parted with the Taliban (2015) to join the ISKP. This shift led to a Taliban attack on the IMU leader in Afghanistan's Zabul province whose August 2015 killing preceded the decrease in the Movement's strength and visibility.⁸

Meanwhile, the KIB, which originated in Uzbekistan in October 2013, first operated in north Syria⁹ and swore allegiance to the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2014.¹⁰ The group has been actively supporting the insurgency in northern

4. Hill, Fiona. "Central Asia: Terrorism, Religious Extremism, and Regional Stability." The Brookings Institution, July 23, 2003. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/20030723-1.pdf>

5. Saidazimova, Gulnoza. "Germany: Authorities Say Uzbekistan-Based Group Behind Terrorist Plot." Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, September 06, 2007. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1078560.html>

6. Ibid.

7. Binnie, Jeremy, and Wright, Joanna. "The Evolving Role of Uzbek-led Fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan." Combating Terrorism Center, August 2019. <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-evolving-role-of-uzbek-led-fighters-in-afghanistan-and-pakistan>

8. Umarov, Dr. Akram. "Radicalization: Reasons and contemporary threats in Uzbekistan." European Eye on Radicalization, January 16, 2019. Accessed on January 13, 2019. <https://eeradicalization.com/radicalization-reasons-and-contemporary-threats-in-uzbekistan/>

9. Gunaratna, Rohan, and Kam, Steganie. "Handbook of Terrorism in the Asia-Pacific." Imperial College Press, 2016.

10. Paraszczuk, Joanna. "Main Uzbek Militant Faction in Syria swears loyalty to Taliban." Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, November 12, 2014. <https://www.rferl.org/a/islamic-state-uzbek-militant-faction-syria-taliban/26686992.html>

Afghanistan, with recorded claims of attack in 2016 and 2017. Additionally, a recent analysis in the Long War Journal argued that the KIB recently began identifying itself on social media as the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Katibat Imam al Bukhari,” a link to the official name used by the Taliban.¹¹ The KIB has also been linked to other Uzbek jihadist groups in Afghanistan, namely the IJU and the IMU.¹²

The relative success of the IMU and the KIB has been fueled by a political movement—the HuT, a global political movement which began in the UK and which has entrenched itself in Central Asia since the 1990s¹³—which has certainly laid the ground for violent extremism, even if it officially condemns violence. The movement has members across Central Asia, with estimates of numbers varying from 3,000 to 5,000 in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to 7,000 to 60,000 in Uzbekistan.¹⁴

Recent incidents involving nationals from one of the three countries considered under this study include nine attacks led by violent radicals against law enforcement agencies in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan,¹⁵ and at least three terrorist attacks in other countries, including in Russia (April 2017)¹⁶ and Turkey (June 2016¹⁷ and December 2017¹⁸), and the claimed presence of KIB fighting in Afghanistan.¹⁹ In addition, The Soufan

11. Weiss, Caleb. “Uzbek group shows spoils from Afghan base.” Long War Journal, January 25, 2018. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/01/uzbek-group-shows-ambush-in-northern-afghanistan.php>

12. Ibid.

13. Hill, Fiona. “Central Asia: Terrorism, Religious Extremism, and Regional Stability.” The Brookings Institution, July 23, 2003. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/20030723-1.pdf>

14. Baran, Zeyno. “Hizbut-Tahrir: Islam’s Political Insurgency.” The Nixon Center, December, 2004. http://www.bits.de/public/documents/US_Terrorist_Attacks/Hizbut-ahrirIslam’sPoliticalInsurgency.pdf

15. Lemon, Edward. “Kennan Cable No. 38: Talking Up Terrorism in Central Asia.” Kennan Institute, December 18, 2018. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-38-talking-terrorism-central-asia>

16. Zahid, Noor, and Jedinia, Mehdi. “Concerns Mount Over Kyrgyzstan Being Breeding Ground for Terrorists.” Voice of America News, April 04, 2017. <https://www.voanews.com/a/concerns-mount-kyrgyzstan-breeding-ground-terrorists/3796276.html>

17. Calamur, Krishnadev, and Koren, Marina. “Who Was Behind the Attack on Istanbul Airport?” The Atlantic, June 30, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/06/istanbul-airport-attack/489200/>

18. “Istanbul Reina nightclub attack suspect captured.” BBC News, January 17, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38645787>

19. Weiss, Caleb. “Uzbek group shows spoils from Afghan base.” Long War Journal, September 20, 2018. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/09/uzbek-group-shows-spoils-from-afghan-base.php>

Group²⁰ estimated that in 2018, the number of Central Asian fighters having joined the ISKP at around 4,000.²¹ While this number remains low, read in conjunction with the population of the region, it has points to a growing phenomenon.

Repression: A Perilous Approach to Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism

Barring Uzbekistan, which has recently (2016) changed its policy following a change of leadership, Central Asian states have overall opted for repression in reaction to the growing risk of radicalization and violent extremism. However, the root causes are multiple and complex, as highlighted by most analysts covering the region. Firstly, most jihadists of Central Asian origin recruited by the IS had been radicalized abroad, and more often in Russia.²² Secondly, Central Asians have increasingly been attracted back to their religious tradition—the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, a moderate interpretation of Islam. However, this renaissance of Islam has opened the doors to the spread of other interpretations of Islam as well, including the Salafist ideology.²³ The spread of radical Islam has been facilitated through the training of religious leaders (mostly from Tajikistan) in madrassas teaching extremist interpretations of Islam in Pakistan, Iran and Egypt.²⁴ Thirdly, unemployment, corruption and state repression have frustrated the youth who have, as a result, become more vulnerable to radical discourse.²⁵ Fourthly, the conflict in Afghanistan has acted as an aggravating factor,

20. “Islamist Extremism Central Asia”. The Soufan Group, April 18, 2018. <http://www.soufangroup.com/intelbrief-islamist-extremism-central-asia/>

21. Tynan, Deirdre. “Thousands from Central Asia Joining Islamic State.” International Crisis Group, January 21, 2019. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/thousands-central-asia-joining-islamic-state>

22. Umarov, Dr. Akram. “Radicalization: Reasons and contemporary threats in Uzbekistan.” European Eye on Radicalization, January 16, 2019. <https://eeradicalization.com/radicalization-reasons-and-contemporary-threats-in-uzbekistan/>

23. Evers, Frank; Klotzer, Jeannette; Seifert, Arne C., and Somfalvy, Esther. “Civilian Prevention of Radicalization in Central Asia.” CORE Center for OSCE Research Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy, April, 2018. https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/Working_Papers/CORE_WP30_en.pdf

24. Ergasheva, Zarina. “Tajikistan: Islamic Students Told to Come Home.” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, November 24, 2010. <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/tajikistan-islamic-students-told-come-home>

25. Hill, Fiona. “Central Asia: Terrorism, Religious Extremism, and Regional Stability.” The Brookings Institution, July 23, 2003. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/20030723-1.pdf>

which has allowed several groups (ISKP, IMU, KIB) to gain support from the well-organized Taliban,^{26 27} to increase funding (including through the control of drug trades routes) and gaining popularity.

Tajikistan has probably taken the most consistent and repressive approach to radicalization by simply forbidding independent exercise of religious faith. Beyond the many arrests, arbitrary detentions, cases of torture, and other human rights violations documented by Human Rights Watch,²⁸ Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon has in the name of secularism, also promoted numerous measures such as prohibiting men from sporting long beards,²⁹ and calling for the return of madrassa students studying abroad (2010).³⁰ In addition, he has forbidden the only moderate Islamic party, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), which had signed the agreements ending the Tajik civil war. The arrests of IRPT members³¹ have certainly contributed to increased radicalization³² as members are pushed to extreme alternative approaches.

Kyrgyzstan has enforced prison terms for possession of extremist materials in at least 258 cases documented by Human Rights Watch up to mid-2018.³³ Nonetheless, criminalization of the possession of extremist materials, some

26. Weiss, Caleb. "Uzbek group shows ambush in northern Afghanistan." *Long War Journal*, January 25, 2018. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/09/uzbek-group-shows-spoils-from-afghan-base.php>

27. Azamy, Hekmatullah. "Will the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) Trade the Taliban with ISIS?" *International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research*, Vol. 7, July 2015. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/CTTA-July-2015.pdf>

28. "Tajikistan Events of 2017." *Human Rights Watch*, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/tajikistan#>

29. Evers, Frank; Klotzer, Jeannette; Seifert, Arne C., and Somfalvy, Esther. "Civilian Prevention of Radicalization in Central Asia." *CORE Center for OSCE Research Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy*, April 2018. https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/Working_Papers/CORE_WP30_en.pdf

30. Ergasheva, Zarina. "Tajikistan: Islamic Students Told to Come Home." *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, November 24, 2010. <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/tajikistan-islamic-students-told-come-home>

31. "Joint Letter to the EU Regarding the Human Rights Situation in Tajikistan." *Human Rights Watch*, July 23, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/23/joint-letter-eu-regarding-human-rights-situation-tajikistan>

32. Evers, Frank; Klotzer, Jeannette; Seifert, Arne C., and Somfalvy, Esther. "Civilian Prevention of Radicalization in Central Asia." *CORE Center for OSCE Research Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy*, April 2018. https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/Working_Papers/CORE_WP30_en.pdf

33. "We Live in Constant Fear." *Human Rights Watch*, September 17, 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/17/we-live-constant-fear/possession-extremist-material-kyrgyzstan>

activists believe, constitutes an excuse to persecute ethnic Uzbeks in the country.³⁴ Thus, this approach is assessed as counterproductive, alienating local communities, and contributing to attracting youth to extremist armed groups.³⁵

Uzbekistan, one of the world's most repressive regimes under the reign of late President Islam Karimov has begun opening up with the release of a number of political opponents, the review of the charges against people detained for possessing religious or "extremist" materials, the rehabilitation of people who regretted joining unregistered Islamic movements, and the removal of over 15,000 names from a "blacklist" of those suspected of being members of unregistered religious movements.³⁶ Yet, Human Rights Watch claims that a lot remains to be done.³⁷

It is difficult to ascertain the precise impact of such approaches, but data tends to indicate that repression has been more of an instigator of violent extremism than a means to contain it. As an alternative approach, a group of scholars from three Central Asian countries (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) proposed a set of recommendations to be integrated in each country's national agenda, including the establishment of a framework regulating the relations between states and Islamic communities to be characterized by mutual respect and cooperation, as well as the modernization of religious education including through strengthening "the authority of the Hanafi School of law."³⁸

Interestingly, none of Central Asian countries have attempted to coordinate their efforts to counter radicalization (mostly emanating from internal factors) and violent extremism (fueled by a mix of internal, regional and global factors), even though all the mentioned terrorist groups have been

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. "Uzbekistan 2017/2018." Amnesty International, September 17, 2019. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/uzbekistan/report-uzbekistan/>

37. "You Can't See Them, but They're Always There." Human Rights Watch, March 28, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/03/28/you-cant-see-them-theyre-always-there/censorship-and-freedom-media-uzbekistan>

38. Evers, Frank; Klotzer, Jeannette; Seifert, Arne C., and Somfalvy, Esther. "Civilian Prevention of Radicalization in Central Asia." CORE Center for OSCE Research Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy, April 2018. https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/Working_Papers/CORE_WP30_en.pdf

moving and operating across their borders and in Afghanistan. Governments of Central Asian states are even blamed for addressing these issues “in the overly narrow context of interior security.”³⁹

Harnessing Regional Cooperation Initiatives to Mitigate the Risk of Violent Extremism Across Central Asia and Afghanistan

Regional cooperation is first and foremost the realization of the political will of the countries’ leaderships to engage in a constructive dialogue and to implement measures that can serve common interests. Central Asian countries would thus need to first recognize that the issue of radicalization and violent extremism is more of a regional problem than a solely internal issue, before designing common strategies as a group, with Afghanistan. So far, disputes, mostly over borders, have damaged the relationship between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, posing further challenges to regional cooperation. Additionally, the three Central Asian countries tend to view Afghanistan as a main source of instability, where terrorist groups have gained strength, and show more interest in holding Afghanistan responsible for violent extremism than in envisaging common strategies.⁴⁰

However, platforms for dialogue on security cooperation exist, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Heart of Asia process and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Being only a member of the Heart of Asia process from this list, Afghanistan could use this process to initiate discussion on combating radicalization and violent extremism. Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are members of all organizations (albeit Uzbekistan is not a member of the Heart of Asia process). As Russia is highly influential in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the Russian dominated CSTO is often considered by these Central Asian states as a protection against external threats.

These organizations have offered little evidence that they could achieve anything beyond sharing their members’ differing views. Experts agree that

39. Ibid.

40. “Study on Security Cooperation in the Heart of Asia Region.” The Asia Foundation, November 07, 2016. <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/study-security-cooperation-heart-asia-region/>

conflicting geopolitical interests paralyze decision-making processes.⁴¹ Yet, the SCO appears as the only organization with the potential to address the issue of radicalization. First, this is the only organization that regularly bring the issue of religious extremism, on its agenda. Second, with Beijing's One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, it is likely that the SCO might gain more political clout under Chinese leadership. Third, it has set up a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) which is aimed at facilitating cooperation on countering terrorism and violent extremism. RATS includes Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan among its members, and Afghanistan as an observer member.

Considering the difficulties of working through regional organizations where decision-making processes require consensus of all members, bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral formats can be more efficient for the present objective. Indeed, considering the approach used by Central Asian states so far, analyzing radicalization as an internal issue, Afghanistan should engage with any of these countries which are the most interested in cooperation, through bilateral discussions, before expanding it to the sub-regional level.

Conclusion

During his term as Afghanistan's President, Ashraf Ghani has placed a considerable emphasis on developing stronger diplomatic ties with neighboring countries, including the ones in Central Asia, and has succeeded in opening trade routes with vast potential between Afghanistan and its other neighbors as an alternative to trade with its eastern neighbor Pakistan, which regularly closes its borders to Afghanistan. These agreements should serve as confidence building measures to open dialogue on more sensitive issues including security cooperation with a focus on radicalization and violent extremism. Such cooperation could initially remain traditional through the sharing of information on terrorists, the exchange of intelligence or the co-management of borders. Such activities could be organized with the support of the OSCE, through platforms such as CSTO or during through bilateral or multilateral agreements.

The four countries, if they focus on their common heritage, could also develop some more innovative measures to foster security cooperation, including

41. Ibid.

through the strengthening of the Hanafi school of Islam, by organizing regional discussions and religious events with religious scholars. Finally, universities and think-tanks in the region could also join hands, through regional level research, to better understand the channels and the tools used for radicalization of youth in the region, and on the funding sources of groups that promote violence and extreme interpretations of Islam. Scholars could then organize policy relevant discussions to raise awareness among policymakers and devise common solutions.

Policy Recommendations

- Afghanistan should articulate objectives and a plan to tackle the influence and presence of radical groups in Afghanistan, not only by adopting a national approach but also integrating a regional perspective.
- Considering how the approach taken by most regional countries to tackle radicalization is mostly through repression, Afghanistan has a role to play in presenting a new paradigm which is yet to be developed but one that could build on studying Afghanistan's efforts to control radical religious education.
- Afghanistan should explore Central Asian countries' interests in cooperating on the issue of radicalization through bilateral, trilateral or quadrilateral formats. If such interest is confirmed and articulated, it is recommended that the group then build on the work done by RATS and contribute to shaping the RATS agenda, and ultimately the SCO's.
- Afghanistan should set up initiatives to promote dialogue and research on the issue of violent extremism, with universities and civil society organizations, including religious groups, in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The product of such cultural and academic cooperation should in turn feed into the agenda of the RATS and/or bilateral, trilateral or quadrilateral foras.

Pakistan’s Role in Shaping the Character of Security in Afghanistan

NASEMA ZEERAK¹

Now in its 18th year, the post-2001 conflict in Afghanistan is considered the U.S.’s longest war. The renewed peace negotiations with the Taliban, which began in September 2018 with the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad as the U.S.’s Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation, has witnessed six rounds of talks between the US and the Taliban as of the first week of May 2019. Of these six rounds of talks, two were highly crucial as they resulted in an “agreement in principle” and an “agreement in draft” in January and March 2019, respectively. The January 2019 talks between the U.S. and the Taliban ended in an “agreement in principle” and generated optimism regarding the prospects of a successful peace negotiation. Equally, it triggered widespread debate on the implications of a hasty U.S. withdrawal and concerns regarding the prospects of the security situation in Afghanistan in the aftermath of a U.S. withdrawal. The fifth round of peace talks between Taliban Deputy Chief, Mullah Baradar, and the U.S. diplomats, ended up in an “agreement in draft” on the withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan and assurances from the Taliban that Afghanistan will not be used by terrorist groups against the U.S.² So far, the Afghan government has not been part of these talks and has, at times, complained that the details of these talks are not shared with it.

Given the momentum in the efforts for a political solution to the Afghan conflict, this essay attempts to analyze the role Pakistan plays in shaping

1. Nasema Zeerak is a Rotary Peace Scholar at the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego.

2. “US ‘agreed in draft’ with Taliban on Afghanistan troop withdrawal – envoy.” RT, March 12, 2019. <https://www.rt.com/news/453652-us-withdrawal-afghanistan-taliban/>

Afghanistan's security dynamics and the current peace process. The essay discusses the Pakistan-India rivalry, Pakistan's security concerns *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan, and the potential role of multilateral frameworks to bring Pakistan on board towards ensuring security and peace in Afghanistan.

Pakistan and the Current Peace Process in Afghanistan

Among other stakeholders in the region, Pakistan as a strategic neighbor has always had great interest and influence over Afghanistan. Pakistan's policies with regard to security in Afghanistan has varied with broader geopolitical trends, at times in close alignment with the government in power in Afghanistan (such as when the Taliban was ruling Afghanistan) and at other times supporting rival factions (such as the mujahideen), always prioritizing its own strategic interests in the region. In the early 1980s, Pakistan supported the mujahideen in their fight against the Soviet forces, while they were funded by the U.S. and its Western allies. In the 1990s, Pakistan supported the Taliban regime, opposing the mujahideen government. Post 9/11, Pakistan joined the U.S. led coalition in the 'Global War on Terror', and since then, Pakistan's interests and influence in Afghanistan have been swaying depending on geopolitical trends, regional order, and its economic situation. In March 2019, Pakistan's newly elected Prime Minister, Imran Khan, was heavily criticized by the Afghan government when he suggested that an interim government setup would help break the deadlock in the ongoing peace talks with the Taliban.³ Since an interim government set up has been a staunch demand of the Taliban, this statement indicated Pakistan continuing support for the Taliban's position during peace talks instead of that the Afghan government. Many feel these statements by Pakistan signal its promotion of a peace agreement in which the Taliban gain a heavy footprint in the affairs of the Afghan state, and by extension, an attempt to secure its influence in Kabul while increasingly restricting India's role.

In the past 18 years, Pakistan's support for the Taliban has been cited as one of the major impediments to peace in Afghanistan. By cultivating and supporting militant groups as proxy actors, Pakistan has been able to maintain influence over Afghanistan to keep its rival (India) at bay. When asked if Pakistan has a constructive role to play in the Afghan peace process during an interview

3. Noori, Hikmat. "Pakistan PM's remarks on Afghan peace process stir diplomatic row." Aljazeera English. March 29, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/pakistan-pm-remarks-afghan-peace-process-stir-diplomatic-row-190328115121755.html>

with the BBC on in January 2019, Afghanistan's former Minister of Interior and former Chief of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Amrullah Saleh, referenced Trump's South Asia Strategy, which lists Pakistan as a deceptive system that supports terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Saleh stated that Pakistan's influence over Afghanistan must be legitimized (maintained through a legitimate means) and acknowledged in order to move forward with the peace process.⁴

Today Pakistan as a fragile state, fearing an attack from India, and in light of its withering relationship with the U.S.,⁵ appears to be continuing to cultivate and support proxy actors in the country, which can be detrimental to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan and the region.⁶ The prospects and success of a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict depends on Pakistan putting end to harboring and employing its proxies against Afghanistan. Parallel to the talks between U.S. diplomats and the Taliban leadership, Pakistan has constantly undermined the peace process.⁷

In 2018, in what was considered as a positive step forward, Afghanistan and Pakistan drew up and agreed to the implementation of, the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS). The APAPPS articulates Pakistan's support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. It identifies measures for the two countries to undertake effective actions against fugitives and the irreconcilable elements posing security threats to either of the two countries. It also includes commitment to deny the use of their respective territories, networks, group or individuals for anti-state activities against either country. Additionally, the APAPPS calls for the creation of a joint supervision, coordination, and confirmation mechanisms

4. Amrullah Saleh, former General Director of National Security, interview by Shaun Ley. BBC Hardtalk, January 30, 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/n3ct4fb5>

5. Khokhar, Riaz. "What Pakistan Will Gain from Peace in Afghanistan." *The National Interest* February 10, 2019. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/what-pakistan-will-gain-peace-afghanistan-43922>

6. Pandey, Shubhangi. "Exploring the prospects for a negotiated political settlement with the Taliban: Afghanistan's long road to peace." *Observer Research Foundation*, February 22, 2019. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/exploring-the-prospects-for-a-negotiated-political-settlement-with-the-taliban-afghanistans-long-road-to-peace-48411/>

7. "Afghanistan writes to UNSC on violations by Pakistani military." *Tolo News*, February 23, 2019. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-writes-unsce-violations-pakistani-military?fbclid=IwAR3V0r2H8g0N0mh12ND5-OjYSHjFYldf8fJBbYQFrUIrI2m6cOoP4vY00>

by designating Liaison Officers to implement the agreements.⁸ The two sides also operationalized five working groups on politico-diplomatic, military, intelligence, economic and trade and refugees issues, under this action plan to oversee the full implementation of the APAPPS.⁹

For Afghanistan, the implementation of the APAPPS is essential for pursuing the peace process and bringing about overall stability to the region. In September 2018, Afghanistan's then Permanent Representative to the UN, Mahmoud Saikal, told the UN Security Council that advancing the peace process was a key element of APAPPS and that the "key determinant in validating that commitment will be the full and effective implementation" of the APAPPS.¹⁰ However, the principles of the Plan, much like those of others in the past, have not yet been fully implemented. Addressing the Asia Society in New York in March 2019, Afghanistan's National Security Advisor, Hamdullah Mohib, said, "APAPPS which was agreed by the governments of the two countries for peace has not been implemented by the current administration in Islamabad."¹¹ The lack of implementation of the APAPPS has allowed room for continued mistrust and impediments to peace efforts in Afghanistan.

Fearing Close Afghanistan-India Ties

It has been argued by many researchers of and in Afghanistan and South Asia that Afghanistan has been a battleground for India and Pakistan since Pakistan's formation in 1947.^{12 13} The beginning of the hostility between these two countries dates back to 1947, when Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali

8. "Joint Statement inaugural session of the APAPPS working groups." Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, July 22, 2018. <https://www.mfa.gov.af/press-releases/joint-statement-inaugural-session-of-the-apapps-working-groups.html>

9. Ibid.

10. Statement of Mahmoud Saikal Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Security Council Debate on the Situation in Afghanistan. Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the United Nations, September 19, 2018. <http://afghanistan-un.org/2018/09/security-council-debate-on-the-situation-in-afghanistan-23/>

11. Chaudhury, Dipanjan Roy, "Pakistan speaks brotherhood but sends terrorists: Afghanistan." The Economic Times, March 13, 2019. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/pakistan-speaks-brotherhood-but-sends-terrorists-afghanistan/articleshow/68388393.cms>

12. Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbaou. "South Asia and Afghanistan: The Robust India-Pakistan Rivalry." Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 2011. [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/133496/Tadjbakhsh,%20S%20\(2011\)%20South%20Asia%20and%20Afghanistan.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/133496/Tadjbakhsh,%20S%20(2011)%20South%20Asia%20and%20Afghanistan.pdf)

13. Nicholas Howenstein and Sumit Ganguly, "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan." Journal of International Relations, University of Columbia, March 25, 2010. <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/india-pakistan-rivalry-afghanistan>

Jinnah, believed India sought the collapse of the now separated and newly created nation, a conviction that laid the foundation for Pakistan's foreign policy in the region.¹⁴ Since then, there have been claims that the two rivals are using the same proxy violence strategy against one another with Afghanistan becoming their battleground.¹⁵

When the erstwhile Soviet Union withdrew its troops from Afghanistan in 1989, Pakistan's military establishment and intelligence agencies began sponsoring, recruiting, training, and sheltering groups like the Taliban and the Haqqani Network as foreign policy tools in the years to come.¹⁶ By supporting these groups by providing safe havens, arms, and intelligence, Pakistan made sure that India remained largely outside of Afghanistan and had limited influence on the country's affairs compared to Pakistan. All this changed in 2001, when the Taliban were toppled by the U.S. and the Northern Alliance forces and a democratically sponsored Afghan government emerged from the rubble. As a member of the international community engaged with Afghanistan, India began to assert its soft power as a key development partner and donor in the democratization process in the country. Since 2001, India has pledged approximately USD 3 billion in assistance to Afghanistan, allocated towards four areas-humanitarian assistance, major infrastructure projects, small and community-development projects, and education and capacity development-becoming the biggest regional donor.¹⁷ Islamabad, fearing India's gradually increasing influence in Afghanistan, interpreted this as an encirclement of Pakistan (which shares a border with an India friendly Afghanistan to its west, an India friendly Iran to its south-west, and its rival India to its east) and began claiming that India was supporting anti-Pakistan militant groups such as the Baloch separatists and the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) using Afghan soil.

Over the years Pakistan has furthered instability in Afghanistan in order to

14. Pervaiz, Faizal. "In Afghanistan, the U.S and Pakistan fight a conflict of interests." Stratfor, November 21, 2017. <https://www.stratfor.com/article/afghanistan-us-and-pakistan-fight-conflict-interests>

15. Azhar, Aman. "Experts warn: India- Pakistan proxy war detrimental to Afghan peace." VOA News. April 06, 2018. <https://www.voanews.com/a/experts-warn-india-pakistan-proxy-war-detrimental-afghan-peace/4336623.html>

16. Howenstein, Nicholas and Ganguly, Sumit. "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan." Journal of International Affairs, Columbia University, March 25, 2010. <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/india-pakistan-rivalry-afghanistan>

17. Palrecha, Nandita, and Tourangbam, Monish. "India's Development Aid to Afghanistan: does Afghanistan need what India gives?" The Diplomat. November 24, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/indias-development-aid-to-afghanistan-does-afghanistan-need-what-india-gives/>

prevent the state from becoming India's strong ally. At present, as the U.S. explores ways to facilitate its troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, a factor linked to a successful peace agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan state, leaving behind a stable Afghanistan would require both India and Pakistan to play constructive roles in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan has expressed disagreement with "the US view that India has a role to play in bringing peace to Afghanistan."¹⁸

The Doctrine of Strategic Depth

The concept of 'strategic depth' was first articulated by the Pakistan Army in the 1980s after the U.S. left Afghanistan at the end of the Cold War. However, Afghanistan, still grappling with civil war, saw Pakistan support different mujahideen groups in the country with the help of the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. It was in this backdrop, that Pakistan's then Chief of Army Staff, Mirza Aslam Baig, articulated the term 'strategic depth'. Strategic depth, in military terms, refers to the internal distance within a state from the frontline to its center of gravity or heartland, its core population areas or important cities or industrial installations.¹⁹ Given its sense of insecurity pertaining to Indian influence in Afghanistan, Pakistan adopted the doctrine of strategic depth to allow its army to regroup in Afghanistan for defense in case of an all-out attack from their nemesis, India.

Pakistan has long denied that it seeks strategic depth in Afghanistan. Time and again, government officials from Pakistan have rejected claims that Islamabad is implementing strategic depth as a policy and have claimed that the option of strategic depth is irrelevant since Pakistan developed nuclear weapons.²⁰ However, the long-standing animosity, cross-border skirmishes, and attacks on military bases on both sides of the border since the creation of both countries have pushed Pakistan to resort to relying on seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan.²¹

18. "What's Behind Baloch Insurgency in Pakistan?" TRT World, April 18, 2019. <https://www.trtworld.com/asia/what-s-behind-the-baloch-insurgency-in-pakistan-259821>

19. Siddique, Qandeel. "Pakistan's future policy towards Afghanistan." Danish Institute for International Studies, August 2011. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/59843/1/66870022X.pdf>

20. Jamil, Mohammad. "Strategic Depth is a misnomer." Daily Times, October 05, 2017. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/113937/strategic-depth-is-a-misnomer/>

21. Haque, Raheem. "Strategic Depth: Does it Promote Pakistan's Strategic Interests?" Centre for Public Policy and Governance, April 2011. <http://cppg.fccollege.edu.pk/strategic-depth-does-it-promote-pakistans-strategic-interests/>

For instance, recently, as a gesture of goodwill and as a confidence building measure, Pakistan released Taliban Co-founder, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, in late 2018. However, this came at the behest of U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, whereas Kabul's repeated calls for his release had not resulted in this outcome over the years. Pakistan was praised for this effort by both the U.S. and the Afghan government as having taken a genuine step towards bringing peace to Afghanistan. The reality, however, shows that Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan has not changed significantly, at least not in a substantial manner. Despite denying influence over the Taliban, Pakistan admittedly still maintains influence and close ties with the Taliban,²² providing them with financial and medical support. More importantly, the enmity between India and Pakistan continues to prevail. After the recent attacks by Pakistan supported militant groups in Indian administered Kashmir, Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan claimed that any retaliation from India would impact the Afghan peace process significantly, risking squandering of the peace efforts.²³

The India Factor in Pakistan's Foreign and Military Policy Towards Afghanistan

The Afghan conflict is closely monitored in India, and New Delhi has been investing heavily towards developmental assistance in the country in the post-Taliban era. India as the biggest bilateral donor in the democratization process in the country has advocated for an Afghan-owned, Afghan-led and 'Afghan-controlled' reconciliation process. The current trajectory of U.S.-Taliban peace talks which prioritizes troop withdrawal over a ceasefire agreement has not been well received in India and adds to the anxiety as India would not want the Taliban to revive the Islamic Emirate the group established in the 1990s. Meanwhile, as strategic partners in the subcontinent, the U.S. and India have maintained a close relationship over the years. In his new South Asia Strategy which was announced in 2017, U.S. President, Donald Trump, urged India for additional economic, medical and civic support, referring to India as Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner and largest contributor of development assistance.

22. Panda, Ankit. "Afghanistan rebukes Pakistan ambassador for linking India and Taliban talks." *The Diplomat*, February 21, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/afghanistan-rebukes-pakistan-ambassador-for-linking-india-and-taliban-talks/>

23. *Ibid.*

India's influence in Afghanistan comes from soft power while remaining non-interventionist. This is manifest in India's signature investments towards constructing the Afghan parliament complex and Salma Dam, and other development projects. Furthermore, India does not benefit from an unsafe and unstable Afghanistan. India, despite not intervening as a major player in the peace process, opposes the return of a fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan for it fears internal insecurity and anti-government insurgency outbreaks in Kashmir. On the other hand, despite India's limited role in the peace process and security matters, Pakistan has repeatedly accused India of using the war-torn country as a base to undermine Pakistan using the government as its proxy.²⁴ In 2018, Pakistan's former military ruler, General (Retd) Pervez Musharraf, warned that upon the departure of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the country will once again become a battleground for the two nuclear armed neighbors. Additionally, he had previously admitted that while he was in the office, Pakistan's military had used proxy warfare in Afghanistan against India.²⁵

Pakistan's Role in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group

The Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) comprised of Afghanistan, Pakistan, US, and China, was formed to revive the peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban to find a political solution to the protracted Afghan conflict. The purpose of the QCG was to bring the "reconcilable" Taliban to the negotiating table with the Afghan government to work towards lasting peace. The four countries pledged their commitments to facilitate an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process with a focus on adopting a clear and realistic assessment of the opportunities for peace and reconciliation. Though six rounds of talks were held under this framework (with the last meeting in October 2017 in Muscat, Oman), the framework hit its first major roadblock when the news that Taliban's founding Chief, Mullah Omar, had been dead since 2013 surfaced in the media, shortly after the round of talks in Murree, Pakistan. The final nail in the coffin for this process was the

24. Riedel, Bruce. "The 3 Wars in Afghanistan." Brookings, August 30, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/08/30/the-3-wars-in-afghanistan/>

25. Kay, Chris. "Pakistan's Musharraf warns of proxy war in Afghanistan if U.S. departs" Bloomberg, October 04, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-04/musharraf-warns-of-proxy-war-in-afghanistan-if-u-s-departs>

killing of the Taliban's new Chief, Mullah Akhtar Mansour (who was formally appointed to the post after the news of Mullah Omar's death became public) in a U.S. drone strike in Balochistan, Pakistan. The Afghan government's invitation to the Taliban's "authoritative" representatives, which sounded like an ultimatum, was not welcomed, and the group refused to hold talks before its principal demands were met. The Taliban's demands included the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan; official recognition of the group's Doha office; the removal of the Taliban members' names from the UN sanctions list; a halt to the "arrest and elimination" of Taliban fighters; the release of Taliban inmates from prisons; and a stop to what they call "anti-Taliban propaganda," including labelling them as "terrorists." The Taliban continued to harden their position, eventually sealing the QCG's fate.

Given its ties with and influence over the Taliban, Pakistan's role in facilitating peace talks in Afghanistan has always been pivotal. Despite the initial apparent effort of bringing the Taliban to the table and facilitating talks under the aegis of the QCG format, Pakistan was not inclined to play a constructive role expected of it. In fact, the death of Mullah Mansour was viewed as having been orchestrated by Pakistan to sabotage the talks. Additionally, excluding India from the talks was also another step by Pakistan in deceitfully maneuvering their strategic interest by keeping India out and limiting its influence in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity

The APAPPS is a bilateral framework between Afghanistan and Pakistan aimed at enhancing cooperation and coordination between the two countries, including reducing hostility and violence by employing working groups on both sides. The framework became operational after the fourth meeting in Kabul attended by Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Tehmina Janjua, and Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, Hekmat Khalil Karzai. It is important to note that this framework is supported by the U.S. and China, based on their shared interest of bringing an end to the conflict in Afghan and preventing the country from becoming a haven for terrorist groups.

The effectiveness of the framework is under serious scrutiny in the wake of recent statements from the leaderships in Kabul and Islamabad. In a recent

statement, Afghanistan's President, Ashraf Ghani, said "the undeclared war between Afghanistan and Pakistan must end," and asked for Pakistan's support for facilitating direct talks between Taliban and Afghanistan.²⁶ In line with what APAPPS has put forward as mechanisms for reinforcing trust and deepening interaction, Ghani stated the two countries must move forward from talking to action. His statement, which argued that there has not been a sense of urgency from Pakistan's Prime Minister, Imran Khan, revealed a sense of continued mistrust that could affect the implementation of the framework.

In the meantime, Afghanistan has been accused of harboring anti-Pakistan militant groups in the recent months.²⁷ There have been reports of several cross-border attacks carried out by Afghanistan-based terrorists. Pakistan views these attacks as the Afghan government's failure to prevent such incidents and carry out efficient border management. Contrary to what had been deemed constructive in advancing peace talks in Afghanistan, despite the backing of U.S. and China as "overarching authority" influencing regional stakeholders, the APPAPS has failed to deliver on its core objectives even as intensive negotiations between U.S. officials and the Taliban carry on.

Conclusion

While Afghanistan is often referred to as the "graveyard of empires," Pakistan has been called the "graveyard of U.S. strategies" in Afghanistan. Unless there is a fundamental change in how Pakistan deals with militant groups, no framework will result in lasting peace. Despite demonstrated cooperation and efforts towards peace in Afghanistan by Pakistan, there has been no guarantee of an end to Pakistan's support to militant groups in Afghanistan now or in the future. While the Taliban are currently participating in peace related talks, Pakistan has taken credit for their influence in bringing the group to the negotiating table. However, regardless of where the peace process ends, there is a need for a strategic shift on Pakistan's part towards viewing Afghanistan as an ally, and an independent modern country. As senior Afghan officials have stated on several occasions, Pakistan's "flawed" policy of proxy warfare

26. "Undeclared war" between Afghanistan, Pakistan must end: Ashraf Ghani." *The Economics Times*, November 15, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/undeclared-war-between-afghanistan-pakistan-must-end-ashraf-ghani/articleshow/66630756.cms>

27. F.Z. Khan. "APAPPS and cross-border attacks." *Daily Times*, October 05, 2018. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/306362/apapps-and-cross-border-attacks/>

with regard to Afghanistan must end and Pakistan must tangibly and credibly assure the Afghan government that they will have an independent Afghan policy separate from their enduring rivalry with India. Much like other frameworks in the past such as the QCG, the APAPPS too will fail to deliver on its purpose if Pakistan is not held accountable for its destructive role in the peace process.

Policy Recommendations

- Pakistan's destructive policy towards Afghanistan's security must be countered through building a strong national consensus across all parties on key national interests, priorities and threats to the peace process. In order to move forward towards a common narrative of peace, Afghans must come together to discuss the pre-conditions to the peace talks, power sharing arrangement, and post-agreement implementation mechanisms.
- For the Afghan government to gain leverage in the talks, the Afghan government representatives, opposition groups, women's groups, and educational, religious and cultural institutions must be engaged to form a national level coherent message of what a political settlement with the Taliban would look like. This will also send a message to Pakistan, which has been acting as a spoiler, to alter its policy towards Afghanistan and understand that they must stop granting political legitimacy to the Taliban to counter India in Afghanistan.
- India has always advocated for an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led reconciliation process with the Afghan government present. India was kept out of both the APAPPS and QCG due to Pakistan's maneuvering. The two key instances where India was present were the preliminary consultations in 2017, and during the Moscow talks in November 2018. India has described the latter as "non-official" engagement.
- The current momentum towards a peace deal, brought about via the talks between U.S. and the Taliban is considered unprecedented. Engaging regional countries who have strategic interests in Afghanistan's stability is vital and they should be engaged in an effective manner to ensure stability in exchange for safeguarding their national interests. As mentioned above, engaging China and the U.S. and international authorities is important for oversight of the implementation of any agreement.

- The India-Pakistan contestation and conflict in Kashmir is not only hurting Afghanistan's economy, but also India and Pakistan. This state-of-affairs points to an additional reason to actively engage India and Pakistan in the Afghan reconciliation process. Afghanistan's trade access to India through Pakistan can be negotiated in exchange for Pakistan's access to Central Asia through Afghanistan.

Addressing Saudi Arabia's Concerns to Facilitate Security in Afghanistan

KHADIJA HUSSAINI¹

The key to peace in Afghanistan does not lie with the U.S., but it might be in the hands of the regional powers and those who have an interest in this region. While one cannot overlook the significance of U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East and how it has affected Afghanistan and continues to do so, a sustainable and durable solution to the situation in Afghanistan can be achieved through a regionally determined consensus. With peace talks gaining momentum, the Afghan government is seeking all the alliances it can garner to face the looming prospect of what an impending U.S. withdrawal from the country might hold. When Riyadh began mediating between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban in 2008, it reflected a call for a more regional approach to address the Afghan war.² Indeed, other regional players like Pakistan, Iran, India, and Russia have a significant influence on peace and security in the region, and Afghanistan in particular.

In this context, this essay seeks to articulate Saudi Arabia's role in shaping security in Afghanistan. Questions it attempts to answer include: What role does Saudi Arabia currently play? How constructive can this role be? How can Afghanistan harness Saudi Arabia's motivations concerning its leadership and power in South Asia, relationship with Pakistan and Iran, and Riyadh's public image among the Muslims living in the region, to utilize Saudi Arabia's regional influence to Afghanistan's advantage with regard to the country's security?

1. Khadija Hussaini is a Program Coordinator at the Norwegian Refugee Council in Afghanistan.

2. Irichsen, Kristian Coates. "The Persian Gulf States and Afghanistan: regional geopolitics and competing interests." National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), January, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24905253>

The first section of the essay aims to identify the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's view on security in Afghanistan. The second section explores the Kingdom's security concerns pertaining to Afghanistan. The third section examines Saudi Arabia's relations with Pakistan and its consequences for Afghanistan. Finally, the fourth section outlines policy recommendations for the government of Afghanistan to harness Saudi Arabia's role in the peace process more optimally.

Saudi Arabia's Perspective on Peace and Security in Afghanistan

Understanding Saudi Arabia's policy is highly important for Afghanistan's security, not because it can or has the ability to help ensure security in Afghanistan, but also because it can spoil any progress if its interests are not taken into account. Saudi Arabia asserts itself as the champion of Islamic countries and proclaims itself to be the political and ideological center of the Islamic world. Therefore, due to its regional political as well as ideological context, it is one of the crucial stakeholders concerning peace and security in Afghanistan, especially in managing its relations with its neighbors, Pakistan and Iran.

Saudi policy towards Afghanistan is shaped and continues to be influenced by three main factors: its ideological ally, the Taliban; its regional rival, Iran; and its strategic partner, the U.S. Saudi Arabia is one of the U.S.'s closest allies in the Middle East and has backed the Taliban since the 1980s. Along with Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia was among the only three countries that recognized the Taliban regime in the 1990s.³ Maintaining a foot on either side of the political fence has allowed the Kingdom to maintain a significant role during peace negotiations with the Taliban.

However, the image of the Kingdom is changing slowly as it is demonstrating closer ties with the U.S. and is welcoming change in both ideological and political visions in its national and foreign policy⁴. While the Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman (MbS), is introducing new perspectives into the ultra-conservative Kingdom with a series of reforms, the Kingdom and

3. "Who Are the Taliban?" BBC News, 26 May 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-11451718>

4. Alyas, Fatimah. "U.S.-Saudi Arabia Relations." Council on Foreign Relations, December 07, 2018. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-saudi-arabia-relations>

the U.S. are now closer than ever.⁵ This might mean that both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia want their preferred regime governing Afghanistan, to counter their common adversary, Iran.⁶

Saudi activities in Afghanistan since the 1980s have had a strong ideological component,⁷ expanding its influence in Afghanistan as a leading Sunni state in the Islamic world. On the other hand, Iran has laid claim as being the center of the Shia Islamic world and is feeding its political power by influencing Shia communities in Islamic societies. The clash of the two in Afghanistan was palpable during the civil war of the 1990s and in the democratic period since 2001. This can explain one of the reasons why Saudi Arabia continues to maintain closer ties with the U.S. while also supporting and allowing private funds to be channeled to the Taliban, a group that aligns with its ideological ambitions in Afghanistan.⁸ Carlotta Gall of The New York Times described this dual policy as “the conflicting needs within the kingdom,” and argued that “the dual tracks allow Saudi officials plausibly to deny official support for the Taliban, even as they have turned a blind eye to private funding of the Taliban and other hardline Sunni groups.”⁹

Hence, peace and security of Saudi Arabia is made contingent on its gains and losses in Afghanistan specifically, and the Islamic world in general. Essentially, Riyadh views the Taliban as a leverage to be used against Washington DC (and Tehran), while maintaining close ties with the U.S. to ensure that it is on the same page when it comes to their common enemy-Iran.

Saudi Arabia’s Security Concerns *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan

Saudi Arabia’s security concerns in Afghanistan revolve around the legitimacy of its leadership in the Arab world, and its economic, geopolitical and ideological rivalry with Iran. As Shahrbanou Tajdbakhsh explains, the Persian Gulf security complex is something to be concerned about when attempting to

5. Ibid.

6. Tajdbakhsh, Shahrbanou. “The Persian Gulf and Afghanistan: Iran and Saudi Arabia’s Rivalry Projected.” Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2013. <https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=5850>

7. Bruno, Greg. “Saudi Arabia and the Future of Afghanistan.” The Foreign Policy, December 10, 2008. <https://www.cfr.org/background/saudi-arabia-and-future-afghanistan>

8. Gall, Carlotta. “Saudis bankroll Taliban, even as king officially supports Afghan Government.” The New York Times, December, 06, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/06/world/asia/saudi-arabia-afghanistan.html>

9. Ibid.

solve the long-lasting security disaster in Afghanistan.¹⁰ Since Saudi Arabia is seeking security dominance in the Middle East, it is compelled to be involved in the politics of all the countries that can impact regional security dynamics.¹¹

In this regard, Saudi Arabia's most aggressive rival is not Israel but Iran, because of Iran's dramatic gains in terms of influence and attention as a strong political player in the Islamic world. Thus, the Kingdom tries to contain and counter Iran's expansion in the Middle East and Afghanistan. For instance, Saudi Arabia intends to build an Islamic educational and cultural complex in Kabul with an estimated cost of approximately USD 100 million, to rival the Khatam Al-Nabyyeen religious site and Islamic University established by a Shia/Iran influenced cleric.¹² The Saudi established complex will serve as a seminary and a grand mosque. This demonstrates the continuance of the rivalry between the two regional powers even as the U.S. and NATO troop withdrawal from Afghanistan looms. Some argue that this state-of-affairs has the potential to sow the seeds of another civil war arising for the two countries' desire to ensure that their interests and investments in the region remain intact, and secure.

The Iran–Saudi Arabia contestation in Afghanistan has multi-layered dimensions with deep roots in politics, religion and geopolitical rivalries. If not addressed through long-term effective policies, this contestation can prove more detrimental to peace, development and security in the region. While the ideological rivalry with Iran is a legitimate concern for Saudi Arabia, there are more security threats from Iran that causes Riyadh to become more involved in Afghanistan. Iran has recently forged a closer relationship with the Taliban, which after years of covert operations finally came to light in 2016,¹³ and again in 2017.¹⁴ In May 2018, U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, allegedly asked Iran to suspend its relationship with the Taliban after declaring that Tehran has been supporting Taliban to destabilize

10. Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou. "The Persian Gulf and Afghanistan: Iran and Saudi Arabia's Rivalry Projected." Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2013. <https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=5850>

11. Salama, Vivian. "Saudi Arabia and Iran Battle for Power in the Middle East." NBC News, November 10, 2017. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/mideast/saudi-arabia-iran-battle-power-middle-east-n819041>

12. Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou. "The Persian Gulf and Afghanistan: Iran and Saudi Arabia's Rivalry Projected." Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2013. <https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=5850>

13. Izazullah. "Iran supports, funds Taliban: officials." Central Asia News, August 29, 2016. http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2016/08/29/feature-02

14. Basiri, Amir. "How Iran aides the Afghan Taliban under America's nose?" The Hill, June 01, 2017. <https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/313100-how-iran-aides-the-afghan-taliban-under-americas-nose>

Afghanistan's security.¹⁵ This is a concern for Saudi Arabia because it threatens the influence of the Kingdom over the Taliban, and consequently, Saudi Arabia's influence in Afghanistan.

Another concern for Saudi Arabia is its rivalry with some other Arab countries over political leadership and influence. The recent shift of policy and attitude towards the Taliban has shown that Saudi Arabia wants to isolate Doha and gain key alliances in the Arab world through the Afghan peace negotiations. While Qatar's engagement in Afghanistan's peace negotiations has provided Doha with global recognition as a peace facilitator, Saudi Arabia has focused on damaging Doha's reputation by insinuating that the Qatar-Taliban relationship is, in fact, leaning towards state-sponsored terrorism.¹⁶

Recent statements by high-level Saudi officials that bear an aggressive anti-Taliban tone are aimed at clearly differentiating between Doha and Riyadh's policies towards terrorism. This seeming change of attitude towards Taliban is not unique to Saudi Arabia. It has also been witnessed in the Taliban's relations with Egypt, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, for in the past two years, the communication between these countries and the Taliban has been increasingly strained and limited.¹⁷ In his September 2017 commentary,¹⁸ Samuel Ramani argued that "Saudi Arabia's aggressive anti-Taliban rhetoric aims to highlight a distinction between its policies and those of Doha's," adding that "[a]s the Taliban's relationships with Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkey have become increasingly strained in recent months, Saudi Arabia's resolute anti-Taliban stance helps Riyadh consolidate its vital regional alliances and isolate Qatar's position on Afghanistan from the Middle East consensus."

The Saudi Arabia–Pakistan Relationship and its Impact on Afghanistan

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have sought to develop extensive economic, cultural, ideological, political and military-security relations since Pakistan's founding. The

15. Ramani, Samuel. "Managed Instability: Iran, the Taliban, and Afghanistan." *The Diplomat*, November 14, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/managed-instability-iran-the-taliban-and-afghanistan/>

16. *Ibid.*

17. Ramani, Samuel. "What's behind Saudi Arabia's turn away from the Taliban?" *The Diplomat*, September 07, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/whats-behind-saudi-arabias-turn-away-from-the-taliban/>

18. *Ibid.*

two countries' joint involvement in Afghanistan goes back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the mujahideen era when the Kingdom and the U.S. backed Islamist militants through Pakistan and against the communist governments during 1980s.¹⁹ Additionally, Pakistan, with its strong military, has been working closely with Saudi Arabia, providing military assistance and training. The recent Saudi-led Islamic anti-terrorism coalition is headed by Pakistan's former Chief of Army Staff, General (Retd) Raheel Sharif.²⁰ The Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC), which was initially formed with strong commitments of both countries, now comprises 41 members and has pledged its commitment to counter terrorism in the Islamic world.

Pakistan has been also receiving large volumes of aid from Saudi Arabia. While there is no concrete record of the full extent of this aid, it has been estimated that "Saudi Arabia delivered perhaps half of the multi-billion-dollar stream channeled through Pakistan to the anti-Soviet Mujahedeen" during the 1980s.²¹ Most recently, Saudi Arabia has agreed to provide Pakistan with USD 3 billion support for a year and an additional loan worth USD 3 billion in deferred payments for oil imports to help address the economic crisis Pakistan is currently experiencing.²² During MbS' recent visit to Pakistan, the two countries agreed on investments worth USD 20 billion and deals were signed to improve the South Asian country's ailing economy.²³

What Saudi Arabia is attempting here is a two-pronged strategy: firstly, Riyadh is creating a major power in Tehran's neighborhood to counter the extent of the latter's influence. Secondly, Saudi Arabia is aiming to influence the Islamic world through its support for Pakistan, a country that has steadily strived to create an Islamic identity for its state. Hence, Saudi Arabia's investments in

19. Kenner, David. "Saudi Arabia's Shadow War." *Foreign Policy*, November 06, 2013. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/11/06/saudi-arabias-shadow-war/>

20. Boone, Jon. "Former Pakistan army chief Raheel Sharif to lead "Muslim Nato." *The Guardian*, January 08, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/08/former-pakistan-army-chief-raheel-sharif-lead-muslim-nato>

21. Blank, Jonah. "Defining the Relationship: What Pakistan and Saudi Arabia Want from Each Other." *Foreign Affairs*, June 16, 2015. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/pakistan/2015-06-16/defining-relationship>

22. Johnson, Kay, and Shahzad, Asif. "Saudis offer Pakistan \$6 billion rescue package to ease economic Crisis." *Reuters*, October 23, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-saudi/saudis-offer-pakistan-6-billion-rescue-package-to-ease-economic-crisis-idUSKCN1MX2FA>

23. "Mohammed Bin Salman Arrives in Pakistan". *Aljazeera English*, February 17, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/saudi-crown-prince-mohammed-bin-salman-arrives-pakistan-190217061720354.html>

its relationship with Pakistan provide the Kingdom with a conducive diving board to achieve its foreign policy objectives.

Afghanistan–Saudi Arabia Security Cooperation

The security cooperation between Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia could entail three possibilities: utilizing Saudi Arabia's influence on Pakistan; harnessing Saudi Arabia's assistance to dry out the Taliban's financial resources and encouraging them to join the peace process; enlisting the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) platform; and working towards international cooperation on countering terrorism in the region through platforms such as the Kabul Process.

Additionally, Saudi Arabia evidently enjoys considerable influence over Pakistan. How this influence can help Afghanistan is contingent on how Saudi Arabia wields it to facilitate consensus among the two. Additionally, the benefits it would hold for Saudi Arabia would again be conditional on how the Kingdom manages to remain a close ally of Pakistan's while simultaneously keeping Iran out of the picture, with Tehran unable (or considerably limited in its ability) to influence politico–security changes in the region. More importantly, it depends on how Afghanistan can convince Saudi Arabia to assume such a role.

Financial resources that the Taliban receive from private sources in Saudi Arabia are crucial for the group's operations and activities. Seemingly, Saudi Arabia has turned a blind eye to the issue. Measures by the Kingdom to curb the flow of resources could be effective in applying pressure on the Taliban to join the peace process. Even if the group refuses to do so, it will be an effective measure to weaken them. However, bringing about this turn of events is dependent on the Afghan government and its allies convincing the Kingdom to use this card. That being said, there are two other alternatives for Afghanistan to use in this regard.

First is to convince Riyadh to seek a regional solution for the situation in Afghanistan, using the OIC platform effectively. The OIC is a common platform for all the Islamic counties, and Afghanistan could try to secure Saudi Arabia's support for encouraging the OIC to induce a regional consensus towards bringing peace and security in Afghanistan. In this regard,

the OIC provides a common platform for all the key regional stakeholders-Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar.

Second, Kabul can take advantage of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation in Afghanistan-where Saudi Arabia is a participating member-as a common platform. The declaration issued at the conclusion of the second meeting of the Kabul Process held in February 2019 explicitly calls for such security cooperation among participating countries.²⁴

Conclusion

Due to its regional political as well as ideological identity, Saudi Arabia is and will remain one of the most crucial stakeholders in peace and security in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia's role in Afghanistan is directly intertwined with the roles of Pakistan and Iran in Afghanistan and how Afghanistan engages with the three. Therefore, the prospects of Afghanistan's peace and security depend on how Kabul harnesses relations with and among these regional countries to its advantage. Moreover, the relationship between Iran and the Kingdom also affects the security in Afghanistan. Iran-Saudi Arabia contestation in Afghanistan has multi-layered dimensions-political, sectarian and geopolitical-which, if not addressed strategically and deftly through long-term policies, could prove detrimental to peace and security in Afghanistan and the region.

For Afghanistan to ensure regional cooperation towards furthering its security, the only sound policy would be to disentangle itself from the rivalries between Saudi Arabia and Iran by remaining neutral in these rivalries. This may be possible only by disallowing proxy groups tied to any of these countries from operating in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Afghanistan can use two existing platforms, i.e. the OIC and the Kabul Process, in its attempts to secure Saudi Arabia's cooperation in enhancing security and peace in Afghanistan. Though indeed a complicated undertaking, given the tensions within Afghanistan and in the region, the two platforms present some possibilities to that end.

24. "The Kabul Process for Peace & Security Cooperation in Afghanistan Declaration." U.S. Embassy Kabul, March 01, 2018. <https://af.usembassy.gov/kabul-process-peace-security-cooperation-afghanistan-declaration/>

Policy Recommendations

- Peace in Afghanistan is imaginable when the regional stakeholders are willing to come to an agreement. While Afghanistan does not have any strong leverage over Pakistan, Iran or Saudi Arabia, Kabul can make effective use of the OIC and the Kabul Process to bring them to the same negotiation table.
- Kabul could influence Pakistan through the IMCTC which enjoys the membership of 41 countries in the Islamic world, such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Turkey. If engaged deftly, it could be an effective platform for advocacy and political influence for Afghanistan. Kabul could utilize this platform to convince Saudi Arabia to leverage its influence over Pakistan, another member country, to cease support for the Taliban and to prevent financial resources from flowing to the Taliban.
- For Afghanistan, a stronger national policy with neutral stances on regional rivalries could pave an alternative path towards peace and security in the country and region. If Kabul can untangle itself from the different foreign influences and remain a neutral state, Afghanistan might have more successes in restraining and ending proxies of foreign players in the country.
- Kabul can work to utilize the OIC and the Kabul Process as common platforms for security cooperation.

China's Engagement with Afghan Security

GULSOM MIRZADA¹

The key priorities of China's investments in Afghanistan concern the political and economic spheres, and over the years, Beijing has emphasized more on a stable Afghanistan that poses no threat to China's internal security.² Moreover, the South and Central Asian regions-both of which Afghanistan straddles-are vital for China's diplomatic and geo-economic advancement and, therefore, ensuring stability and security in this region, particularly in Afghanistan, is a priority for Beijing. Additionally, a stable and secure Afghanistan is necessary for China to ensure its own internal security, especially in its restive Xinjiang province.

This essay discusses Beijing's security concerns with regard to Afghanistan, examines the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) with regard to Afghanistan's security, and analyses China's influence on Pakistan's policies towards Afghanistan.

China's Primary Security Concerns Pertaining to Afghanistan

Terrorism and insecurity in the region, especially in Afghanistan, is one of Beijing's main security concerns, because China requires a stable, secure neighbourhood to advance its economic plans, particularly its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Specifically, China is concerned about the security of its western Xinjiang province,³ which shares a short border with Afghanistan's

1. Gulsom Mirzada is a GIS Research Assistant at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

2. Ali, Samran. "China Factor in Afghan Peace." *The Nation*. April 16, 2018. <https://nation.com.pk/16-Apr-2018/china-factor-in-afghan-peace>

3. Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Crackdown on Uighurs in Xinjiang." *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 11, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-crackdown-ughurs-xinjiang>

northeastern Badakshan province as well as longer borders with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Several of Beijing's connectivity projects and BRI energy and other infrastructure straddle these regions, rendering stability and security in these areas as one of China's top priorities. In this regard, one of China's concerns is to ensure that violent Uyghur armed groups and other radical militant groups active in the region do not pose a security threat to its mega projects.

In an interview for this essay, Dr. Nishank Motwani, a Senior Research and Communication Manager at the Kabul-based Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), argued that "China is quite predictably investing in a place (Pakistan), where it can shape and influence outcomes, where it can use its money to buy influence and use that influence to promote economic and security interest."⁴ It can be inferred that the U.S.'s influence over policies in Afghanistan is a concern for China in its neighbourhood. Meanwhile, in another interview for this essay, Dr. Davood Moradian, the Director General of the Kabul-based Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS), noted that "the new Silk Road initiative is Beijing's quest to expand its economic influence westward toward Europe by increasing trade and development in Central Asia. Afghanistan could play an important part in China's plan."⁵ This encapsulates the reasons why China has an economic interest in Afghanistan and why Afghanistan's security has become an important matter for Beijing.

Fearing insecurity in the Wakhan Corridor area along the Afghanistan-China frontier, Beijing undertook actions in 2018 which were interpreted by many as its building of a military training camp on Afghan soil. Chinese officials refuted this claim and stated that Beijing was helping Afghanistan set up a mountain brigade, and that this was part of the counterterrorism cooperation between the two countries.⁶

For the most part, China has remained cautious and has avoided getting

4. Motwani, Nishank, Senior Research and Communication Manager at Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Interview by Author. Kabul, Afghanistan. February 10, 2019.

5. Wong, Edward, and Jolly, David. "China considers larger role in Afghanistan peace process." *The New York Times*, January 24, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/25/world/asia/china-considers-larger-role-in-afghanistan-peace-process.html>

6. Chan, Minnie. "China is helping Afghanistan set up mountain brigade to fight terrorism." *South China Morning Post*. August 28, 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2161745/china-building-training-camp-afghanistan-fight>

directly involved in Afghanistan militarily, and does not wish to be forced into a direct war against terrorism. So, one of the critical questions here pertains to whether China can be an adequate replacement for the U.S. in terms of security and political support for Afghanistan. In an interview for this study, AISS Researcher, Dr. Omar Sadr, argued that Afghanistan needs to be financially supported in order to ensure that the government can administer its affairs well by itself. He added that given how Afghanistan is reliant on extensive financial aid from the U.S. for running its military, in an event of a departure of the U.S., China and the other countries do not have the political commitment and economical capability to support Afghanistan's military forces financially.⁷ This would mean the security situation in Afghanistan would become more unstable, and maintaining the Afghan armed forces would become unviable. Dr. Sadr argued that as a result, China and other countries in the region do not have a capacity to fulfil the security and political vacuum in Afghanistan post U.S. withdrawal.⁸ Dr. Motwani's observations too reflected this line of thought, and he emphasized that, "neither China nor other countries can fill the political and security vacuum in Afghanistan after U.S. troop withdrawal. They would compete with each other, support different factions-but not fill up the gaps."⁹ This suggests that a U.S. withdrawal and an absence of a viable replacement could result in political instability and heightened insecurity in Afghanistan.

However, while China and the U.S. endorse two diverse strategic approaches to bring security to Afghanistan, both countries do seek a secure Afghanistan. In this regard, China's strategy stems more from its own domestic security concerns rather than international security issues per se. As Dr. Zhao Hong noted in his analysis in 2013, China's approach is more on economic development, providing job opportunities, and infrastructure development.¹⁰ In his analysis, Dr Zhao added that while Chinese leaders do not oppose Afghanistan developing its own type of regime according to their internal

7. Sadr, Omar, Researcher at the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies. Interview by Author. Kabul, Afghanistan. December 28, 2018.

8. Ibid.

9. Motwani, Nishank, Senior Research and Communication Manager at Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Interview by Author. Kabul, Afghanistan. February 10, 2019.

10. Hong, Zhao. "China's AFGHAN Policy: Toward a "march west" Strategy?" Institute for National Security Strategy. August 15, 2013. <http://www.eai.nus.edu.sg/publications/files/BB842.pdf>

conditions, the U.S.'s approach concentrates more on establishing a Western style of democracy in Afghanistan.¹¹

Facilitating Security and Stability in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of China's priority areas for economic and security reasons.¹² While China is a major economic power in the region, it professes a policy of non-interference in the political and security spheres of other states, thus obviating the scenario that it will be a major actor in providing security in the region. This view was also shared by Dr. Motwani, who noted that China does have some political and security interests in Afghanistan but that it is not interested in engaging directly to provide security.¹³ He argued that instead, Beijing is more of a "free rider of U.S. efforts" towards security and peace. It means China has tended to piggyback on the security efforts of the U.S. and NATO to further its economic objectives with regard to Afghanistan. This begs the question as to whether and how Beijing can contribute to security in Afghanistan. There exist several possibilities in this regard.

China has been providing security related support to Afghanistan by providing training for Afghan security forces.¹⁴ China would contribute towards the strengthening of Afghanistan's military forces in a more effective way by providing such facilities rather than by intervening militarily in Afghanistan. However, China seems reluctant to play a bigger role that in the military and security sector in Afghanistan. In his 2018 analysis, Dirk van der Kley argues that multiple factors influence China's reluctance.¹⁵ He argues that Chinese policymakers fear a backlash from rebel groups, including Uyghur armed groups, as a potential side effect of militarily intervening in Afghanistan. Indeed, a military intervention in Afghanistan by China would be interpreted by the armed groups as a war against Muslims in Afghanistan. While noting

11. Ibid.

12. Ruttig, Thomas. "Climbing on China's Priority List: Views on Afghanistan from Beijing." Afghanistan Analysts Network, April 10, 2018. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/climbing-on-chinas-priority-list-views-on-afghanistan-from-beijing/>

13. Motwani, Nishank, Senior Research and Communication Manager at Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Interview by Author. Kabul, Afghanistan. February 10, 2019.

14. Chan, Minnie. "China is Helping Afghanistan Set up mountain bridge to fight terrorism." South China Morning Post, August 28, 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2161745/china-building-training-camp-afghanistan-fight>

15. Dirk van der Kley. "China's Foreign Policy in Afghanistan." Lowy Institute for International Policy. October, 2014. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/185021/chinas-foreign-policy-in-afghanistan_0.pdf

that China would be unwilling to deploy its military in Afghanistan, van der Kley adds that it is a matter of China's military capability and asks whether it would be able to handle Afghanistan's situation with its military prowess.¹⁶

Furthermore, China can harness its influence in Pakistan and Afghanistan to facilitate bilateral cooperation in security sector and to help promote a regional consensus with regard to security in Afghanistan. China enjoys immense influence over Pakistan due to its military, economic and diplomatic support for the latter.¹⁷ This influence can present an effective leverage for China to bring Pakistan on board on the issue of security cooperation in Afghanistan, but this would require effective diplomacy and initiatives from Afghanistan to convince China to do so.

To that end, the declaration of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation in Afghanistan, issued in Kabul on February 28, 2018, provides the necessary platform and framework for security cooperation.¹⁸ Since China was a participant and has signed the declaration, Afghanistan could harness it to encourage Beijing to use its influence over Pakistan to secure the latter's cooperation in security in Afghanistan. Kabul can also harness the SCO platform in which Afghanistan is an observer member. Another framework that could be utilised is the trilateral understanding signed between Afghanistan, Pakistan and China in December 2018 to enhance counterterrorism and security cooperation.¹⁹

China can also play a constructive role in the Afghan peace process as a prelude to security in Afghanistan. Beijing occupies a position that enables it to play a key role in the Quadrilateral Cooperation Group (QCG) framework (comprising Pakistan, China, Afghanistan and U.S.) which was established to negotiate with the Taliban. This platform was a significant opportunity for China to utilise its influence. In a 2018 essay, Dr. Vinay Kaura highlighted that in the backdrop of weak internal peace overture in Afghanistan, the QCG

16. Ibid.

17. Sareen, Sushant. "For Pakistan, China is the new America." Observer Research Foundation. February 20, 2019. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/pakistan-china-new-america-48305/>

18. "The Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation in Afghanistan Declaration." U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan. March 01, 2018. <https://af.usembassy.gov/kabul-process-peace-security-cooperation-afghanistan-declaration/>

19. Ayaz Gul. "Afghanistan, China and Pakistan Ink Deal to Enhance Counterterror Cooperation". South & Central Asia. 15.December 2018. <https://www.voanews.com/a/afghanistan-china-and-pakistan-ink-deal-to-enhance-counterterror-cooperation-4702178.html>

was designed to discuss prospects for peace talks between Afghan government and the Taliban, and should be activated to play a more significant role.²⁰ Furthermore, another way in which China can become more involved in securing Afghanistan would be through support for economic and military development in Afghanistan. In an interview, Dr. Sadr noted that every kind of support for peace and security in Afghanistan, including one by China, should respect democratic structures and be aligned with sustainable development priorities and growth in military and political sectors.²¹

China and Regional Consensus Towards Security in Afghanistan

China can play multiple roles in bringing about a regional consensus with Pakistan, Russia and the Central Asian states on security issues in Afghanistan. Firstly, as explained above, China can use its influence over Pakistan to bring the latter on board with regard to security cooperation in Afghanistan. Additionally, given China's stewardship of the SCO, Beijing can harness the platform to convince SCO members to cooperate towards ensuring security in Afghanistan based on the SCO mandate, which includes ensuring peace and security in the region.²² The term "region" here encompasses all eight SCO member states and four observer states.

Afghanistan is an observer member in the SCO, and major players in the region that can play constructive (or obstructive) roles in Afghanistan's security are also part of the platform: Pakistan, India, China, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are full members, while Iran is an observer member. With such an assorted membership, the SCO possesses a unique potential for shaping a regional consensus and ensuring regional cooperation with regard to security in Afghanistan. China as a lead member, of course, can play a significant role in making this happen. Furthermore, all SCO members have some form of an interest in Afghanistan, with some of those interests being shared and some others, conflicting. With regard to Afghanistan, an SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group has existed since 2005, and recently, China proposed another similar

20. Kaura, Vinay. "China, US differ on road to peace in Afghanistan." Middle East Institute. January 9, 2018. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/china-us-differ-road-peace-afghanistan>

21. Sadr, Omar, Researcher at the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies. Interview by Author. Kabul, Afghanistan. December 28, 2018.

22. "About Shanghai Cooperation Organization." January 09, 2017. http://eng.sectsco.org/about_sco/

one focused on the Afghan peace process.²³

At present, prevailing trends indicate that China's political role in Afghanistan could become more active than it has been so far. In this backdrop, China can harness its influence among SCO members to mobilize them to play an active role in fighting terrorism in Afghanistan and the peace process in the country. However, it would be imperative that China and the other actors involve the Afghan government in any peace talks and negotiations with the Taliban, if any.

China can also play the role of a mediator between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Taliban as it has done previously through the QCG mechanism. The China-Pakistan relationship has been steadily becoming stronger over the years, particularly so in the recent times given how Pakistan is gradually becoming more dependent on China's military, economic, political, and diplomatic support. The U.S. and other actors believe that China is in a better position to exercise its influence over Pakistan to secure Islamabad's cooperation in the peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. As Dr. Sadr also stated, the biggest factor in this framework is Pakistan's economic dependence on China and Beijing is becoming one of the biggest investors in Pakistan, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

That said, there are some limitations to the extent of China's influence over Pakistan to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. In this regard, Dr. Motwani noted that China cannot exert too much pressure over Pakistan because there are tremendous strategic and political interests, such as countering the U.S.'s presence in Afghanistan, between these two countries.

Conclusion

Evidently, there exist several initiatives aimed at achieving peace and ensuring security in Afghanistan. In this regard, China has a key role to play both directly as well as in bringing about regional consensus to that effect. China can use its influence over Pakistan to bring the latter on board for security cooperation and peace talks in Afghanistan. Also, as a founding and lead member of the SCO, China can play a significant role in mobilizing SCO members towards security cooperation for Afghanistan under the SCO mandate.

23. "SCO-Afghanistan: Meeting of the Contact Group Held in Moscow." InfoSCO, October 10, 2017. <http://infoshos.ru/en/?idn=17289>

Policy Recommendations

- The government of Afghanistan should be directly involved in any peace talks with the Taliban, because a third party will be unable to represent the Afghan government and people in a manner that the Afghan government can.
- If China genuinely desires to bring peace and security in Afghanistan, Beijing should also play an active, constructive role in the security and political spheres, and avoid basing its calculations and engagement primarily on economic benefits its actions could deliver to China.
- China should cooperate with the Afghan government directly and robustly with regard to Afghanistan related matters rather than relying more on Pakistan's government.

Contextualizing Qatar’s Role and Relevance in Afghanistan’s Quest for Peace

NASRIA PASHTUN¹

In 1988, the Soviet Union was losing ground in Afghanistan due to heavy casualties, and the high costs of war forced it to withdraw its troops from the country. The Geneva Accords, which laid out the terms for the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, were signed between Afghanistan and Pakistan, with the Soviet Union and the U.S. serving as guarantors. The Geneva Accords included a timeline for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, resulting in an end to the nine-year long Soviet occupation of the country. However, the mujahideen who were not included in the negotiations and decision-making processes, did not accept the terms of the agreement,² and not long after the withdrawal, a civil war broke out, which ultimately culminated in the Taliban seizing control over Afghanistan.

Three decades on, Afghanistan finds itself in a similar situation. The U.S., after 17 years of counter-terrorism efforts, continues to struggle to counter and defeat the Taliban insurgency and other regional and international terrorist groups. According to the report of U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), at present, the Afghan government controls only 55.5% of the country’s 387 districts.³ After several unsuccessful attempts to negotiate with the Taliban since 2007, in 2018, the U.S. appointed Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as its Special Representative for Afghanistan

1. Nasria Pashtun is the International and Diplomatic Coordinator at the Office of the Former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai.

2. Soviets to Withdraw from Afghanistan.” History.com, February 09, 2010. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/soviets-to-withdraw-from-afghanistan>

3. Fox, Kara. “Taliban Control of Afghanistan on the Rise, US Inspector Says.” CNN, November 08, 2018. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/01/middleeast/afghanistan-report-taliban-gains-control-intl/index.html>

Reconciliation to facilitate dialogue and negotiation with the Taliban in Qatar, aimed at ending the conflict in Afghanistan. Soon after his appointment in September 2018, peace talks were expedited on various levels.

Given how the Taliban's political office is located in Doha, Qatar, it is necessary to understand Qatar's role in the peace talks with the Taliban. These talks are ultimately aimed at bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan, but would Qatar remain only a facilitator in these peace talks or could it also directly influence the process? This essay explores Qatar's role in the peace talks; its ties with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia; what Qatar would gain or lose from peace in Afghanistan; and what Afghanistan can do to bring Qatar on board to ensure the success of peace talks. An additional question this essay explores pertains to other fora that can play an effective role in facilitating peace talks and an end to terrorism in Afghanistan.

Qatar enjoyed good relations with the neighboring states and regions until very recently. Over the past two years, Qatar's relations with Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain soured due to allegations leveled by Riyadh and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Some regional players, such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran, are significant and it is essential to explore their relationships with Qatar and the impact of those relations on Afghanistan and the country's peace related efforts.

Qatar–Afghanistan Relations and Prospects of Security Cooperation

Afghanistan and Qatar share very limited diplomatic ties. Though Afghanistan has an embassy in Doha, for reasons unclear yet, Qatar does not have one in Kabul. In 2015, Qatar announced that it would open an embassy in Kabul but whether and when the embassy will be opened remains unclear. However, the leaders of both countries do share cordial relations.⁴ Official delegations from Qatar are always well-received in Afghanistan, and Qatar reciprocates the same hospitality for Afghan diplomats and officials.

However, the Gulf country, plays an important role in Afghanistan's security and peace. It maintained "cordial relations" with the Taliban during the

4. "Qatar to Open Embassy in Kabul." Gulf News, October 29, 2018. <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/qatar/qatar-to-open-embassy-in-kabul-1.1578871>

latter's rule in Afghanistan, hosted Taliban leaders after their regime was toppled in 2001,⁵ and has hosted the Taliban's office since June 2013.⁶ Qatar has also provided financial support to Taliban.⁷ Therefore, this longstanding and strong relations between the Taliban as one of the parties to the conflict in Afghanistan, and Qatar, presents an effective leverage on the latter that can be harnessed to encourage the Taliban to join peace talks. This potential has been taken advantage of recently, as Qatar has facilitated multiple rounds of talks between the Taliban and the US.

Qatar has also been an important ally of NATO and the U.S. in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. In January 2018, Qatar signed an agreement with NATO which allows NATO personnel to enter and transit Qatar and to use the Al-Udeid Air Base.⁸ Moreover, Qatar is a member of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation in Afghanistan. The declaration of the second meeting of the Kabul Process held in February 2019,⁹ provides a useful platform and framework for security, peace and counter-terrorism cooperation.

Qatar-Pakistan Relations

Pakistan has close relations with the Arab world. Food items and minerals comprise a bulk of the goods they trade bilaterally. As of July 2017, Pakistan's exports to Qatar stood at USD 5.66 million, which increased to USD 8.74 million in January 2018. This increased marked the first time since May 2012 that bilateral trade between the two countries crossed the USD 8 million mark.¹⁰ In December 2015, Qatar agreed to supply Pakistan with

5. "How Qatar Came to Host the Taliban." BBC News. June 22, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23007401>

6. Maclean, William. "Afghan Taliban Opens Qatar Office, Says Seeks Political Solution." Reuters, June 18, 2013. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-taliban-opening/afghan-taliban-opens-qatar-office-says-seeks-political-solution-idUSBRE95H0NU20130618>

7. "In response to Pakistan request Saudi Qatar admit supporting Taliban." Afghanistan Times, December 23, 2018. <http://www.afghanistantimes.af/in-response-to-pakistan-request-saudi-qatar-admit-supporting-taliban/>

8. "Qatar's Strategic Role within NATO's Resolution Support Mission | Qatar-America Institute." Qatar-America Institute, November 07, 2018. <https://qataramerica.org/qatars-strategic-role-within-natos-resolution-support-mission/>

9. "The Kabul Process for Peace & Security Cooperation in Afghanistan Declaration." U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan, March 01, 2018. <https://af.usembassy.gov/kabul-process-peace-security-cooperation-afghanistan-declaration/>

10. "Pakistan: 64% Growth in Exports to Qatar." FreshPlaza.com, March 02, 2018. <https://www.freshplaza.com/article/2190381/pakistan-64-growth-in-exports-to-qatar/>

USD 16 billion worth Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG).¹¹ Moreover, thousands of Pakistani nationals are employed in Qatar and both countries are working to provide more job opportunities to Pakistani citizens in the Gulf country. Approximately 150,000 Pakistani workers are already employed in Qatar in all sectors, and in 2019, the government of Qatar announced that it would recruit an additional 100,000 Pakistani workers.¹²

For years, Pakistan has maintained strong ties with the GCC states. On matters such as regional and global affairs, Pakistan aligns its policies with those of the GCC states. The foundations of this relationship are based on common faith and culture. However, Pakistan chose to remain neutral when the relationship between Qatar and Saudi began to deteriorate. In 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE cut ties with Qatar, claiming that Doha supported Islamist groups and that it had relations with Iran. Some argue that Pakistan's stance was based on the Qatar's contribution to the Pakistani economy, specifically its extensive engagements in Pakistan's energy sector. Another reason could be the Qatari royal family's relationship with former Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif.¹³

Qatar-Iran Relations

Qatar-Iran relations have had their ups and downs. Both countries share diplomatic relations but after the attack on the Saudi diplomatic mission in Iran, bilateral ties soured. Qatar condemned that attack as well as ended diplomatic ties with Iran. However, when the diplomatic crisis between Saudi Arabia and other GCC states with Qatar began, Tehran provided economic and diplomatic support to Doha. Tehran opened its airspace to Qatar Airways when Riyadh and the others closed theirs, and Qatar restored full diplomatic relations with Iran.¹⁴

Moreover, Qatar and Iran share the gas field under the Persian Gulf waters

11. Haq, Riaz. "Assessing Qatar-Pakistan LNG Deal." South Asia Investor's review, February 22, 2016. <https://www.southasiainvestor.com/2016/02/assessing-qatar-pakistan-lng-deal.html>

12. Khan, Gohar Ali. "Qatar Plans to Recruit 100,000 Pakistanis, Says Consul General." dawn.com, January 31, 2019. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1460800>

13. Cafiero, Giorgio. "Where Does Pakistan Fit into the Qatar Crisis?" TRT World, December 20, 2017. <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/where-does-pakistan-fit-into-the-qatar-crisis--13473>

14. "How Qatar Came to Host the Taliban." BBC News, June 22, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23007401>

(referred to as North Field by Doha and as South Pars by Tehran), the world's largest natural gas field, and this factor has a great influence on their relationship. In late 2013, Qatar offered to help Iran develop its side of South Pars, a development which has also been interpreted as being driven more out of a fear that sloppy work by Iranian firms might damage the gas field and hurt Qatari revenues and not altruism, as well as being possibly driven by a desire in Doha to keep tabs on Iranian activity in the field.¹⁵ A large chunk of Qatar's revenue is based on petroleum and natural gas exports. Therefore, it is important for Qatar to maintain good ties with Iran for cooperation in the field of gas extraction. This is especially so because the natural gas reserves are unevenly distributed, and Qatar extracts three times the amount of natural gas from the field compared to Iran.

Qatar-Saudi Arabia Relations

Saudi Arabia and Qatar shared warm and friendly relations until it soured two years ago. Previously, both countries had synchronicities in their foreign policies, especially with regard to Iran. However, bilateral relations began deteriorating when the Qatari state-owned television network, Al Jazeera, began criticizing the Saudi Royal family. Qatar was also accused by Saudi Arabia of serving as an ally to the Ansar Allah (an Islamic religious political armed movement, also called the Houthi movement), a group Saudi Arabia's monarchy views as a major threat.¹⁶ This, in addition to other previous disagreements such as on Qatar establishing ties with Iran and Israel, and Doha's backing of Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, enraged Riyadh, which, along with other GCC states, cut diplomatic ties with Doha.¹⁷ All these developments took place even as the Taliban maintained a political office in Doha, which too was questioned in media and by the GCC states given how Taliban leaders were residing in Doha, living a lavish life financed by the Qatari royal family. However, while Saudi Arabia and some other GCC states imposed a blockade on Qatar, the latter's security was ultimately guaranteed due to the fact that Qatar hosts the biggest U.S. air base abroad,

15. "Qatar offers to help Iran get out its gas." *Iran Times*, January 03, 2014. <http://iran-times.com/qatar-offers-to-help-iran-get-out-its-gas/>

16. Harb, Malak. "Al-Jazeera a Target in Gulf Confrontation with Qatar." *AP News*, June 09, 2017. <https://apnews.com/854b5ce82eb9467db8298d37e110d44d>

17. "Qatar Row: Saudi and Egypt among Countries to Cut Doha Links", *BBC News*, June 05, 2017. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-40155829>

a factor which prevented any possible military interventions by Saudi Arabia and its allies.¹⁸

Peace Talks with the Taliban

If Qatar's foreign policy is closely studied, what emerges is that Doha's strategy focuses on either maintaining cordial relations with everyone or choosing to stay neutral in case of a conflict. Qatar is also known for balancing its relationship with countries that are rivals. For example, Qatari lobbyists are reaching out to individuals close to U.S. President Donald Trump and lobbying on Capitol Hill while simultaneously improving its diplomatic ties with Iran. Moreover, being a GCC state, Qatar faces many restrictions to maintaining a healthy relationship with Iran, but Doha managed to avoid the tension with regard to Iran. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are essentially displeased about the small but rich Gulf nation's outsized role in regional affairs, sponsoring factions in revolts and civil wars and brokering peace deals across the Middle East.¹⁹

When Doha was criticized for supporting Islamist groups or for opening an office for Taliban, the Qatari Foreign Minister's Special Envoy on Counterterrorism, Mutlaq Al Qahtani, clearly stated that it did so "by request of the US government" and as part of Qatar's "open-door policy, to facilitate talks, to mediate and to bring peace."²⁰

At present, though the ongoing U.S.-Taliban peace negotiation has witnessed forward movement, the Taliban have been largely unwilling to negotiate with Afghan government officials/representatives. This aspect is the biggest drawback of this phase of talks. Not involving the Afghan government has created obstacles for the success of the peace talks. This is further compounded by developments that suggest that the U.S.-Afghanistan relationship is also souring.²¹

18. Fisher, Max. "How the Saudi-Qatar Rivalry, Now Combusting, Reshaped the Middle East." *The New York Times*, June 13, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/13/world/middleeast/how-the-saudi-qatar-rivalry-now-combusting-reshaped-the-middle-east.html>

19. "Qatar Hosted Taliban at Request of US Government." *Al Jazeera News*, June 11, 2017. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/qatar-hosted-taliban-request-government-17061114833584.html>

20. Qatar Hosted Taliban "at Request of US Government." *Al Jazeera News*, June 11, 2017. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/qatar-hosted-taliban-request-government-17061114833584.html>

21. Landler, Mark. "U.S. Diplomat Is focus of Afghan leaders' anger over peace talks with Taliban." *The New York Times*, March 15, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/15/us/politics/zalmay-khalilzad-afghanistan-taliban-talks.html>

Conclusion

Qatar does not have a direct role in the peace talks, and neither has it signed any security cooperation agreement with Afghanistan. However, Qatar came into the limelight in matters related to Afghanistan when the Taliban established their political office in Doha and continued as Qatar facilitated the talks between the U.S. and Taliban in its territory.

In addition to peace talks in Doha, other fora too can be harnessed to ensure that the Taliban (and other terrorist groups) genuinely seek peace and prove their willingness to join the Afghan government in the peace process. It is important to note that peace is possible only if Afghans are united and if the peace process is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. The recently launched ‘intra-Afghan dialogue’ process in Moscow is a good example because it was an occasion in which Afghan and Taliban leaders exchanged views and arrived at a consensus that peace is the need of every Afghan, and drafted a Joint Resolution, where some ground rules were articulated, emphasizing national unity, withdrawal of troops, and women’s rights.

However, while insofar Qatar’s role in the Afghan peace process has been only to facilitate the process, recent events (such as pertaining to the preparation of the preliminary list of participants for the Doha talks) shows that at times, Qatar seems to play a relatively bolder role as well. The Taliban chose to have the group’s office in the Qatar, and the country agreed to host the group’s office on the U.S.’s request as well as to maintain its image as a state that promotes peace. Qatar did not have anything to lose by hosting the office, but by being actively involved in the peace talks, it can earn a higher status and join big powers in the world in their efforts in the war against terrorism.

Policy Recommendations

- In order to further enhance its their bilateral relationship, Qatar and Afghanistan should work on developing deeper diplomatic ties. For instance, there should be a Qatari embassy in Kabul, and exchange programs and trainings for the young diplomats should be promoted. If necessary, the Afghan ministry of aviation should consider allowing Qatar Airways to fly in and out of Kabul.

- Qatar and Afghanistan have not signed a security cooperation agreement, but the former has signed a security agreement with NATO.²² Upon an invitation from NATO in July 2018, it also joined the NATO-led Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan, under the aegis of which Doha will deploy ground forces in Afghanistan and assist in training and advisory missions.²³ By focusing on training and advising Afghan forces as part of its engagement under the aegis of its security cooperation arrangement with NATO, Qatar can contribute to the efforts aimed at eradicating terrorism and ending the longest war in U.S. history.
- Qatar should concentrate on the ongoing peace talks between U.S. and Taliban. If these peace talks end on a positive note and the Taliban agreed to negotiate with the current Afghan government, agree to a ceasefire and end their malicious activities in Afghanistan, that will be a great achievement for Qatar. Doha should also ensure that it does not undermine and/or embitter its own relationship with the Afghan government and should ensure that the Afghan government is included in the negotiations. Doha's efforts to bring the Taliban and the Afghan government to the negotiation table failed terribly because the Taliban had issues with the list of participants that the Afghan government proposed. Qatar should work as a mediator and resolve this issue. Doing so will improve its relationship with Afghanistan and the intra-Afghan dialogue too will gain momentum.

22. Stocker, Joanne. "Qatar Signs Security Agreement with NATO." *The Defense Post*. January 18, 2018. <https://thedefensepost.com/2018/01/17/qatar-nato-security-agreement/>

23. Muñoz, Carlo. "Regional Rivals Qatar, UAE to Officially Join U.S.-led Coalition in Afghanistan." *The Washington Times*. July 06, 2018. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/jul/6/regional-rivals-qatar-uae-officially-join-us-led-c/>

Russia's Concerns and Engagement in Afghanistan

FARAH ELYASKHIL¹

Russia has been a major actor in the region since the 19th century. The confrontation between Russia and Britain in the 19th century and the faceoff between the Soviet Union and the US in the 20th century have left an indelible footprint in the contemporary history of Afghanistan. Since the dawn of the 21st century, too, Russia has emerged as a key actor in the region and continues to play a crucial role in Afghanistan's security.

Afghanistan shares no borders with Russia but it shares borders with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which were formerly the territories of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Given how these countries share borders with Russia, Moscow views these Central Asian countries as its backyard, and thus its focus on regional stability includes the security of their borders with Afghanistan along its northern flank.² In this regard, Russia also maintains military presence in the Central Asian countries that share borders with Afghanistan.³

In the 18 years since the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan has been insecure initially because of the Taliban's resurgence and recently because of the presence and activities of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) militants. As of 2016, there are approximately 2,500 ISKP combatants in Afghanistan, and while Russia's engagement with Afghanistan has a long

1. Farah Elyaskhil has worked in various capacities at Afghanistan's Independent Directorate of Local Governance.

2. Rauf, Sarwat. "Changing Geopolitical Dynamics in Central Asia: Causes and Effects." Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, September 01, 2018. http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/9-SS_Sarwat_Rauf_No-4_2017.pdf

3. Putz, Catherine. "Russia's Bulwark on the Afghan Border: Tajikistan." *The Diplomat*, May 30, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/russias-bulwark-tajikistan-on-the-afghan-border/>

history, the rise of the Islamic State's activity in Afghanistan has further prompted Russia to become more concerned about stability in the region.⁴ Although the precise numbers of ISKP combatants is unclear, official Russian estimates⁵ have pitted it at approximately 5000 in northern Afghanistan, in 2019, and according to the 2019 High-Risk List report by the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the group poses a greater threat to the Afghan people than it did in 2016.⁶

In this context, this essay contextualizes Russia's concerns regarding insecurity in Afghanistan. The first section explores Moscow's interests in Afghanistan's security and peace in the recent years. The second section discusses the rationale of its engagement with the Taliban. The final section elaborates on the role Russia can play towards bringing about a regional consensus on peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan-Russia Relations Post 2001

When the US invaded Afghanistan in 2001, Russia supported the US in Afghanistan because "their interests were largely aligned,"⁷ and both countries wanted "to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a haven for terrorists."⁸ After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Russia resumed its diplomatic mission with the subsequent Afghan government in 2001. In 2002, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov visited Afghanistan and pledged to help Afghanistan with arms and other military equipment, as well as to help train officers of the nascent Afghan army.⁹ Between 2002 and 2009, Russia delivered free military hardware, training and logistical services totaling USD 109 million.¹⁰

4. "Rise of ISIS in Afghanistan is threat to Russia – Moscow." September 13, 2016. <https://www.rt.com/news/359220-russia-afghanistan-us-isis/>

5. "FSB chief warns that 5,000 terrorists concentrated by CIS borders with Afghanistan." Russian News Agency, May 21, 2019. <https://tass.com/politics/1059207>

6. "2019 High-Risk List". SIGAR, 2019. https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/spotlight/2019_High-Risk_List.pdf

7. Julia, Gurganus. "Russia's Afghanistan Strategy." Foreign Affairs, January 02, 2018. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2018-01-02/russias-afghanistan-strategy>

8. Ibid.

9. "Russia Defense Minister Arrives in Kabul." VOA News, September 06, 2002. <https://www.darivoo.com/a/a-48-a-2002-09-06-2-1-94057264/1420514.html>

10. Brattvoll, Joakim. "Is Russia back in Afghanistan?" Peace Research Institute Oslo, April, 2016. <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/resources/docs/PRIO-%20Is%20Russia%20Back%20in%20Afghanistan.pdf>

After 2006, when the Taliban increased their military activities, Russia gradually began to seek ways to respond to the looming threat to the security of Central Asia from an unsecure Afghanistan. Hinting a divergence of interests with the US in Afghanistan, Russia supported Afghan President Hamid Karzai while condemning the US and NATO for their failure to counter the Taliban and curb drug trafficking.¹¹ As US–Afghanistan relations soured after the 2009 presidential elections in Afghanistan and the then Afghan President Karzai grew critical of US policies in Afghanistan, the relations between Afghanistan and Russia began to strengthen.¹² Some of the key milestones that dot this trajectory of relations include the Karzai-Dmitry Medvedev letters which became public in January 2010,¹³ as well as Karzai’s attendance of the Sochi Olympics in February 2014 which many other countries had boycotted.¹⁴

Relations between Russia and Afghanistan continued strengthen post the Karzai administration and during the tenure of the incumbent National Unity Government (NUG) (2014-2019). Soon after taking office, Afghanistan’s President Ashraf Ghani met his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, during the 2015 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit and discussed stabilization of Afghanistan and fighting terrorism.¹⁵ Later, the same year, reports revealed that President Ghani had requested Russia military assistance including artillery, small arms and Mi-35 choppers.¹⁶ Subsequently, in April 2017, it was reported that Afghanistan had asked Russia for military supplies and training for the military and police.¹⁷

11. Menkiszak, Marek. “Russia’s Afghan Problem: The Russian Federation and the Afghanistan Problem Since 2001.” Centre for Eastern Studies, September, 2011. http://aei.pitt.edu/58389/1/prace_38_en_0.pdf

12. Brattvoll, Joakim. “Is Russia back in Afghanistan?” Peace Research Institute Oslo, April, 2016. <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/resources/docs/PRIO-%20Is%20Russia%20Back%20in%20Afghanistan.pdf>

13. Ruttig, Thomas. “From Point Zero to ‘New Warmth’: Russian-Afghan relations since 1989.” Afghanistan Analysts Network, August 08, 2014. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/from-point-zero-to-new-warmth-russian-afghan-relations-since-1989/>

14. Brattvoll, Joakim. “Is Russia back in Afghanistan?” Peace Research Institute Oslo, April, 2016. <https://www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=21&type=publicationfile>

15. Ibid.

16. Sonawane, Vishakha. “Afghanistan Seeking Artillery, Mi-35 Helicopters from Russia amid growing insurgency: report.” International Business Times, October 26, 2015. <https://www.ibtimes.com/afghanistan-seeking-artillery-mi-35-helicopters-russia-amid-growing-insurgency-report-2155655>

17. “Afghanistan asks Russia for support in supplies and training for military.” Russia Beyond, April 16, 2017. https://www.rbth.com/news/2017/04/16/afghanistan-asks-russia-for-support-in-supplies-and-training-for-military_743721

Russia's Primary Concerns Pertaining to Afghanistan

With an increase in the presence of the ISKP in Afghanistan during 2015 and 2016, Moscow grew concerned about potential spillover effects as it shares borders with Central Asian countries. In this regard, Russia approached the Taliban to join forces against the ISKP.¹⁸ On the other hand, severe apprehensions regarding extremism also exist in Uzbekistan, and the links between these extremist groups such as the Islamic Jihad Union¹⁹ and ISKP in Afghanistan also feed into Russia's fears.²⁰ Some have argued that such threats are "overblown" by Russia to trouble the US in Afghanistan.²¹ The implication of those arguments is that Afghanistan does not pose any direct short or long term security threat to Russia.²²

Another concern Russia has often raised is that of drug trafficking in Central Asia, originating from Afghanistan. Moscow views it as a threat to its national security on the grounds that it fuels terrorism in Central Asia.²³ Moreover, Afghan drugs reach Russian markets through Central Asian countries.²⁴ According to reports, consumption of illicit drugs kills 70,000 people in Russia each year.²⁵ Afghanistan produces 90% of the world's opium,²⁶ most of which is cultivated in Taliban controlled/dominated areas. In this regard, Russia has criticized NATO's efforts towards combating narcotics

18. Scott Worden. "How to Stabilize Afghanistan: What Russia, Iran and the United States Can Do." *Foreign Affairs*, April 26, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2017-04-26/how-stabilize-afghanistan>

19. Ali, Obaid. "New Confusion About ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul." *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, September 07, 2018. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/new-confusion-about-iskp-a-case-study-from-sar-e-pul/>

20. Shlapentokh, Dmitry. "The ISIS threat and Moscow's influence in Central Asia and the Middle East." *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, November 06, 2015. <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13297-the-isis-threat-and-moscows-influence-in-central-asia-and-the-middle-east.html>

21. Scott Worden. "How to Stabilize Afghanistan: What Russia, Iran and the United States Can Do." *Foreign Affairs*, April 26, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2017-04-26/how-stabilize-afghanistan>

22. Ramani, Samuel. "Russia's Anti-Drug Crusade in Afghanistan." *The Diplomat*, December 28, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/russias-anti-drug-crusade-in-afghanistan/>

23. *Ibid.*

24. Trenin, Dmitri; Kulakov, Oleg; Malashenko, Alexey; and Topychkanov, Petr. "A Russian strategy for Afghanistan after the coalition troop withdrawal." *Carnegie Moscow Center*, May 2014. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMC_Article_Afghanistan_Eng14.pdf

25. *Ibid.*

26. Bjelica, Jelena. "AAN Q&A: An established industry-Basic facts about Afghanistan's opium-driver economy." *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, July 11, 2017. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/aan-qa-an-established-industry-basic-facts-about-afghanistans-opium-driven-economy/>

production and trafficking in Afghanistan as being inadequate.²⁷

Russia's Engagement with the Taliban

Moscow's first contact with the Taliban was established in 1995 when a Russian helicopter carrying armaments was forced to land in Kandahar by the Taliban. Russia's representative, Zamir Kabulov—who is currently the Russian president's special envoy to Afghanistan—met the then chief of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, to discuss the release of the seven Russian pilots.²⁸

In 2007, Moscow initiated communications with the Taliban leadership to discuss, among other issues, drug trafficking through Central Asian countries which share borders with Afghanistan. In the recent years, however, Russia's contacts with the Taliban have not been limited to addressing drug trafficking. Nonetheless, Russian diplomats have maintained that their contacts with the Taliban are limited to peace negotiations, containing the ISKP's threat to Russia's stability, and to address Russia's concerns that Afghanistan will become another Iraq since the U.S. has failed in Afghanistan.²⁹

Since late 2016, there have been accusations that Russia has been providing arms to the Taliban in northern Afghanistan.³⁰ In July 2016, CNN quoted two Taliban representatives claiming that Russia supplied the group with guns via Iran.³¹ While Russia strongly rejected the claims in this news report,³² in December 2016, Russia's Ambassador to Afghanistan, Alexander Mantytskiy, confirmed that his country maintained ties with the Taliban but that it was only to ensure protection of Russia's political offices in Afghanistan.³³ He

27. Ramani, Samuel. "Russia's Anti-Drug Crusade in Afghanistan." *The Diplomat*, December 28, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/russias-anti-drug-crusade-in-afghanistan/>

28. Wahdatyar, Hashim. "4 Reasons Russia Increasingly Favors the Taliban in Afghanistan." *The Diplomat*, February 14, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/02/4-reasons-russia-increasingly-favors-the-taliban-in-afghanistan/>

29. Saifullah, Masood. "Why is Russia so interested in Afghanistan all of a sudden?" *Deutsche Welle*, March 01, 2017. <https://www.dw.com/en/why-is-russia-so-interested-in-afghanistan-all-of-a-sudden/a-36989680>

30. Worden, Scott. "How to Stabilize Afghanistan: What Russia, Iran and the United States can do." *Foreign Affairs*, April 26, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2017-04-26/how-stabilize-afghanistan>

31. Ramani Samuel, "Understanding the Russia-Taliban Connection." *The Diplomat*, August 04, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/understanding-the-russia-taliban-connection/>

32. *Ibid.*

33. Ahmadi, Shabir. "Envoy Confirms Russia Has Relations with Taliban." *Tolo News*, December 8, 2016. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/envoy-confirms-russia-has-relations-taliban>

also voiced Russia's deep concerns about terrorist groups like ISKP in Afghanistan.³⁴ It is also reported that Russian representatives have met the Taliban in Moscow and Tajikistan, and have held discussions regarding helping the Taliban with Pakistan and Iran.³⁵ There are several reports indicating that Russia and the Taliban shared intelligence in the fight against ISKP.³⁶ Such relations between Russia and the Taliban send a strong message to the U.S. and its allies, reminding them that Moscow is still interested in Afghanistan and the region. Moreover, Russia intends to strengthen its role and counter the NATO and U.S. interests in the region.

Russia and a Regional Consensus for Peace and Stability in Afghanistan

Russia has the potential to play a constructive role towards fostering peace and stability in Afghanistan. The possibilities that can be harnessed in this regard include Russia's influence among regional countries playing a crucial role in the Afghan conflict; Russia's relations with the Taliban; and multilateral platforms including the SCO, the Kabul Process for Peace and Stability in Afghanistan, and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

Firstly, Russia enjoys influence over some of the primary parties to the Afghan conflict: Iran, Pakistan and India. In February 2017, Moscow organized a trilateral meeting on Afghanistan which was attended by Russia, China and Pakistan, and which later gained Iran's support. Moscow has also hosted two meetings involving Pakistan and China to discuss settlement to the Afghan issue. At the first peace conference in Moscow in 2018, Russia invited India. All these indicate that Russia is undertaking efforts to play a bolder role in Afghanistan's peace.³⁷ Such efforts, however, have not been concerted and regular, and have been largely hued by the rivalry between the U.S. and Russia.³⁸

34. Ibid.

35. Worden, Scott. "How to Stabilize Afghanistan: What Russia, Iran and the United States can do." *Foreign Affairs*, April 26, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2017-04-26/how-stabilize-afghanistan>

36. Todd, Brian, and Almas, Steve. "Russia, Taliban share intelligence in fight against ISIS." *CNN*, December 25, 2015. <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/24/europe/putin-taliban-isis/>

37. Saber, Zenat, and Qazi, Sheerana. "Afghan peace conference: India shares table with Taliban." *Al Jazeera English*, November 09, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/afghan-peace-conference-india-shares-table-taliban-181109092419577.html>

38. "Afghan politicians, Taliban representatives to hold peace talks in Moscow." *TASS*, February 05, 2019. <http://tass.com/world/1043226>

Russia is of the opinion that the US intends to “monopolize” the talks with the Taliban and conduct it in secrecy, keeping the regional countries “in the dark.”³⁹ To take stock of Russia’s influence in the region and to direct it towards a regional consensus for security in Afghanistan, the Afghan government needs to ensure that its interests remain independent of the global rivalries between the US and Russia.

Second, Russia can use its links and influence with the Taliban to convince them to engage in a constructive political settlement with the Afghan government. There are indications that Russia intends to play such a role. It hosted the Moscow talks with the Taliban in November 2018. At this interaction, the Taliban sent five representatives who were joined by representatives from Iran, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, China, India and the US. The Afghan government, however, did not participate in the conference as the Taliban refused to hold direct talks with the Afghan government.⁴⁰ In February 2019, Russia hosted another meeting attended by a Taliban delegation and influential political figures from Afghanistan in the absence of representatives from the Afghan government. In response, the Afghan government announced that the Afghan participants did not have the executive authority and no decision will be taken without the consent of the Afghan people.⁴¹

Third, multilateral platforms including the SCO, the Kabul Process and the Istanbul Process provide solid grounds for bilateral security cooperation between Afghanistan and Russia and for multilateral security cooperation between the regional countries with regard to Afghanistan’s security. Russia is one of the founding and powerful members of the SCO, and can therefore play a constructive role in bringing about a regional consensus aimed at security cooperation in Afghanistan among the SCO members. The Kabul Process for Peace and Security in Afghanistan is another such platform. The declaration of the second meeting of the Kabul Process, held in Kabul on in

39. Bezhan, Frud. “Explainer: why there are two competing tracks for Afghan peace.” Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, February 07, 2019. <https://www.rferl.org/a/explainer-afghan-peace-process-two-tracks/29757472.html>

40. Kiselyova, Maria. “Taliban attends peace talks in Moscow for first time, no progress reported.” Reuters, November 09, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-afghanistan-taliban-idUSKCN1NE159>

41. “Taliban hold rare talks with senior Afghan politicians in Moscow.” PressTV, February 06, 2019. <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2019/02/06/587796/Taliban-hold-rare-talks-with-senior-Afghan-politicians-in-Moscow>

February 2018, stressed on the resolve of the participating members to jointly address the threats posed by Transnational Terrorist Networks (TTNs), as well as Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs). All the participating members, including Russia, have committed to security cooperation and counter-terrorism.⁴² The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process is the third multilateral platform for security cooperation between Afghanistan, Russia and regional countries. As a participating country, Russia can advance motions for regional security cooperation under this framework, and simultaneously strengthen its security cooperation bilaterally with Afghanistan under the same framework. All declarations of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process place significance on security and counterterrorism cooperation in Afghanistan.⁴³

Conclusion

After the fall of Taliban following the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, Russia cooperated in securing Afghanistan. This cooperation was in the form of supporting the fight against terrorism and military assistance to Afghanistan. Nonetheless, as the Taliban re-emerged and steadily gained power, Russia began to recalculate its mission in Afghanistan. When U.S.–Afghanistan relations soured in the wake of the 2009 presidential elections in Afghanistan, the Russia–Afghanistan relationship began to expand. After the emergence of ISKP in Afghanistan in 2015, Russia again re-examined its engagement in Afghanistan and sought to partner with the Taliban to counter the new security threat to Central Asia.

All the while, Russia's main concerns with regard to the situation in Afghanistan have been the potential spillover effect of terrorism and insecurity into Central Asia, as well as the drug trafficking and cross-border crimes related issues. Although Moscow regularly highlights these threats, it is also argued that Russia exaggerates the scale of the threat with an aim to prepare the ground to enable it to play a more assertive role in the region.

Russia can play a constructive role in Afghanistan's security by using its influence on regional countries that play a crucial role in the Afghan conflict;

42. The US Embassy in Afghanistan. The Kabul Process for Peace & Security Cooperation in Afghanistan Declaration. 01 March 2018. <https://af.usembassy.gov/kabul-process-peace-security-cooperation-afghanistan-declaration/>

43. Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process official website. <http://www.hoa.gov.af/library/declarations.html>

its relations with the Taliban; and the existing multilateral platforms including the SCO, the Kabul Process for Peace and Stability in Afghanistan; and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. However, it is important to note that the prospects of these possibilities are grim due to the U.S.-Russia rivalry in the region.

Policy Recommendations

- Given how the US and Russia have played key roles in shaping the nature of peace and stability in Afghanistan, especially with the latest phase of the peace related negotiations, it is essential that Washington and Moscow unite in this regard and work together in this direction to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan.
- As Russia is concerned about the stability of regional countries because of the increasing presence of the ISKP and other jihadi groups based and/or operating in Afghanistan, Russia should utilize its contacts with the Taliban and work on comprehensive strategy to prepare the Taliban for peace talks with the Afghan government.
- Russia should also develop a comprehensive plan and engage all regional countries so that all the relevant countries contribute constructively towards bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Kabul-New Delhi Relations and the Future of Security in Afghanistan

SUGHRA AZIZI¹

Security in Afghanistan is getting worse steadily as terrorist groups are growing in numbers in the region. The growth of insurgent clusters is not only a threat to Afghanistan but also a menace for all countries in the region. However, security in Afghanistan is greatly affected by the strategies and policies of its neighbors and others in the regional sphere. India's policies as a friendly nation, both in the past and present, have had great impact on the security situation in Afghanistan, and India's political ties, financial investments and development activities in Afghanistan have grown in the recent years. In this backdrop, this essay explores the role India can play towards ensuring security in Afghanistan. To do so, this essay assesses India's role as a friendly country in the development sectors and helping the security process in Afghanistan; the impact of the contentious India-Pakistan bilateral ties on the security situation in Afghanistan; Afghanistan's measurable efforts towards inviting India's cooperation; India's views regarding peace and stability in Afghanistan; and India's constructive contributions towards achieving regional consensus on peace and stability in Afghanistan.

India-Afghanistan Engagement and Security Related Developments in Afghanistan

To discuss India's role in ensuring security in Afghanistan, it is essential to trace the history of the Afghanistan-India relationship over the past decades. India has helped Afghanistan in different sectors and development projects

1. Sughra Azizi is an Independent Consultant with Qara Consultancy in Afghanistan.

such as in industry, irrigation, hydroelectric projects as well as in defense and military support. India-Afghanistan relations have been friendly since the early years of Indian independence and the partition of British India into India and Pakistan. For instance, the bilateral “Friendship Treaty” was signed in 1950.² In the later years, India supported Afghanistan in its fight against the Taliban regime in the late 1990s. Anti-Taliban groups such as the Northern Alliance were reinforced by India to reduce Pakistan’s influence in the country. In the recent years, India has invested in developmental projects in Afghanistan, and has also indicated that it intends to increase its trainings for Afghan defense forces fighting insurgents.³

India has also invested in numerous developmental projects in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime and has pledged USD 3.1 billion in assistance between 2001 and 2017 for Afghanistan.⁴ The construction of Afghanistan’s parliament building in Kabul; the construction of Salma dam (now known as the Afghan-India Friendship Dam); the establishment of an electricity transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul; the construction of the Chimtala power substation in Kabul; and the donation of 285 military vehicles for the Afghan National Army are some examples of India’s engagement with Afghanistan since 2001.⁵

India’s developmental activities have helped Afghanistan improve its economy and contributed towards reduced dependence on its neighbors, especially Pakistan. For example, building dams on Kabul River opens the possibility for Afghanistan to use those waters to generate its own electricity. The effective use of dams not only benefits the country for its own use of water for hydro-electricity projects but also helps the economy by eventually exporting power to neighbors. Another example is India’s investment in Iran’s Chabahar Port, which has helped Afghanistan reduce its dependence on transit trade via Pakistan. As of February 2018, Afghanistan has redirected 80% of

2. Fair, C. Christine. “India in Afghanistan, Part I: Strategic Interests, Regional Concerns.” *Foreign Policy*, October 26, 2010. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/10/26/india-in-afghanistan-part-i-strategic-interests-regional-concerns/>

3. Roche, Elizabeth. “India to Help Afghanistan on Development Projects, Security.” *Livemint Newspaper*, September 12, 2017. <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/QOCF3XhuJ1GVkSEoVKTeAL/India-agrees-to-give-Afghanistan-more-defence-aid-to-in-war.html>

4. *Ibid.*

5. Iwanek, Krzysztof. “36 Things India Has Done for Afghanistan.” *The Diplomat*, January 08, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/36-things-india-has-done-for-afghanistan/>

its cargo traffic from the Karachi port to Iran's Chabahar and Bandar Abbas ports.⁶

India-Pakistan Relationship and the Security Situation in Afghanistan

The contentious relationship between India and Pakistan is an important issue to consider while analyzing India's role in facilitating security in Afghanistan. Since Afghanistan shares cultural and political relationships with Pakistan and shares friendly and political ties with India, any development in the India-Pakistan relationship affects security in Afghanistan.

India has sought closer relations with Afghanistan since 2001 for several reasons. One such reason is its conflict with Pakistan. Most recently, a U.S. Congressional Report highlighted India's efforts towards strengthening its political relationships with Afghanistan and Central Asia is because of its conflict with Pakistan.⁷ In addition, access to energy-rich Central Asia and broader commercial relations with that region serves as another reason why India pursues friendly ties with Afghanistan.

While the expansion of India's presence in Afghanistan benefits Afghanistan, it also raises serious concerns in Pakistan. Pakistan considers any Indian influence in Afghanistan a threat to itself. In the past, India cooperated with Afghanistan on several occasions to limit Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan.⁸ Investing in Iran's Chabahar Port to reduce Afghanistan's trade and commerce dependence on Pakistan is a major example. Meanwhile, Pakistan not only supports the Taliban in Afghanistan but has also trained some other terrorist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen/Harkat-ul-Ansar, and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islamiin Afghanistan to fight against India.⁹ Therefore, one should not turn a blind eye to the impact of the India-Pakistan contestation on security and peace in Afghanistan.

6. "Afghanistan looks to reduce dependence on Pakistan via Chabahar Port." Pakistan Today Profit, February 04, 2018. <https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/02/04/afghanistan-looks-to-reduce-dependence-on-pakistan-via-chabahar-port/>

7. "Pakistan may prefer weak and destabilised Afghanistan to a stronger and unified state: US Congressional report," Reporterly, January 19, 2019. <http://reporterly.net/latest-stories/pakistan-may-prefer-weak-and-destabilised-afghanistan-to-a-stronger-and-unified-state-us-congressional-report/>

8. Ibid.

9. Fair, C. Christine. "India in Afghanistan, Part I: Strategic Interests, Regional Concerns." Foreign Policy, October 26, 2010. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/10/26/india-in-afghanistan-part-i-strategic-interests-regional-concerns/>

Nonetheless, cultural, ethnic and religious relations connect Pakistan with Afghanistan. Hence, Pakistan is interested, more than any country, in strengthening its political relations with the Afghan government because of these commonalities, as well as to restrain India's presence in Afghanistan. For example, the construction of the Shahtoot dam on Kabul River by India can be a major driver of conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan because the dam may hinder Pakistan's access to transboundary rivers waters.¹⁰ It is a huge concern for Pakistan as it has the potential to cause water shortage and harm Pakistan's economic development which is dependent on agriculture. Thus, the issue could spur water-related conflict/tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan if not addressed effectively. However, this issue could also be resolved by means of a fair distribution of water with Pakistan, without turning it into a zero sum game. However, this would require political wisdom and ethical leadership, both of which unfortunately seem to be in very short supply in Kabul as well as Islamabad.

India's Perspectives on Peace and Stability in Afghanistan

Security and peace in Afghanistan can help security in the region as Afghanistan will cease to be a safe haven for terrorist groups. Moreover, security in Afghanistan provides opportunities for investment and commerce for India, and this can serve as an incentive for the latter to cooperate in this regard. According to Shaharзад Akbar, an adjunct professor at the American University in Afghanistan (AUAF), India is interested in peace and stability in Afghanistan because they do not want Afghanistan to be a safe haven for terrorists. She stated that since India has economic investments in Afghanistan, New Delhi seeks to develop a strong relationship with a stable state in Afghanistan so that it can benefit from this relationship economically in long term.¹¹ In terms of India's assessment of peace talks with the Taliban, Akbar added that for India, the biggest concern is that the Taliban are under Pakistan's influence, and that therefore they do not want to see another Taliban government in Afghanistan. India is concerned about Afghanistan being used as a safe haven for terrorists to operate and carry out attacks against India

10. Iwanek, Krzysztof. "36 Things India Has Done for Afghanistan." *The Diplomat*, January 08, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/36-things-india-has-done-for-afghanistan/>

11. Shaharзад Akbar, adjunct professor at the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF), interview by author. Kabul, Afghanistan. January 20, 2019.

and pose challenges to its security as has been witnessed several times in the past. However, there is no other way for India but to help bring Taliban to the negotiation table because advances of insurgents in Afghanistan also threaten India's security.

There are, however, indications¹² that the Taliban are interested in developing a good relationship with India, because the Taliban's leadership wish for the group to be recognized internationally, and not merely as being under the influence of Pakistan.¹³

India's Potential Role in Fostering Regional Consensus on Peace and Stability in Afghanistan

As a commentary on Hasht-e-Sobh published on 23 January, 2019, highlighted, without a stable Afghanistan, economic growth in Central Asia and South Asian countries, including Pakistan, is not possible. Given how Afghanistan can be a good transit route between South and Central Asia countries, a stable Afghanistan is also in the interest of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project as well as Central Asia's development. With an unstable Afghanistan, economic development in the region and the improvement in the lives of people in these countries are not possible.¹⁴ To help secure Afghanistan, India can play a crucial role to contribute towards regional consensus on security and peace in Afghanistan. One approach India can take towards contributing to facilitating regional consensus on the matter is to harness its ties with China. India can ask China to utilize its leverage with Pakistan and encourage Pakistan to deliver tangible results on peace and security in Afghanistan.¹⁵ India has showed interest in stabilizing Afghanistan several times and with effective strategies and the correct support-such as by means of helping empower the Afghan armed forces to become self-sufficient and reduce dependence on foreign support-it can do so.

12. Dubey, Pratyush. "Talking with the Enemy: Why India Needs to Engage the Taliban." *The Diplomat*, December 19, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/talking-with-the-enemy-why-india-needs-to-engage-the-taliban/>

13. *Ibid.*

14. "Pakistan Economic Growth without a Stable Afghanistan is not Possible(Persian)." *Hasht-e-Sobh Daily*, January 23, 2019. <https://8am.af/pakistani-economic-growth-is-unlikely-to-stabilize-afghanistan/>

15. Haidari, M. Ashraf, "How China and India can help secure peace in Afghanistan." *Observer Research Foundation*, August 8, 2018. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/43120-how-china-and-india-can-help-secure-peace-in-afghanistan/>

With its support and influence/power in the region, and as a member of several multilateral platforms, India can encourage countries in the Central Asia and South Asia region to cooperate with Afghanistan in this regard. There are three such platforms whose potential India and Afghanistan can harness to this effect. First, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) provides an effective platform for cooperation in this regard as its membership and associations comprise major players who have stakes in security in Afghanistan, including China, Pakistan, and Russia. Second, the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is another such platform that India can utilize towards facilitating a regional consensus on security and peace in Afghanistan. SAARC is important because it can provide a joint platform for Pakistan and India, the two major actors in the case of Afghanistan, with regard to Afghanistan's security. While the effectiveness of SAARC has been limited (largely also due to the tense New Delhi-Islamabad relationship), the platform does offer an alternative platform for India and Pakistan to engage on key issues in their bilateral. While the prospects of this platform's efficacy in addressing issues related to Afghanistan are low, the existence of the platform does offer an additional avenue for discussions. Third, the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation is another platform that primarily focuses on cooperation among participating countries, including Pakistan and India, for security and peace in Afghanistan.

Moreover, India can contribute to regional consensus on security and peace in Afghanistan by assuring Pakistan that India's presence in Afghanistan will not pose a threat to them. This can be done through engaging in talks with Pakistan on this topic, and providing viable guarantees in this regard. A trilateral forum of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan can be an effective step to this end. Pakistan feels threatened by India's growing presence in Afghanistan, and therefore, it focuses on limiting India's relationship with Afghanistan instead of contributing constructively to help stabilize Afghanistan.¹⁶ A trilateral format could prove useful to could thus help reduce mistrust, and for confidence building among the three countries.

Moreover, India can help Afghanistan ease the peace process by changing its policy and strategy towards Taliban. India views the Taliban through the

16. Ibid.

lens of its rivalry with Pakistan, whereas there is a possibility for cooperation with the Taliban. As explained above, the Taliban is interested in developing a better relationship with India. India can make use of this opportunity and encourage the group to make peace with the Afghan government as it would benefit India and Afghanistan and can also secure India's development projects in the country.¹⁷

Conclusion

India has played a significant role in Afghanistan since 2001 through its economic support and development projects. India's projects, however, have been a source of concern for Pakistan, the former's regional rival with whom it has deep rooted conflicts such as on Kashmir. This conflict between the two countries with whom Afghanistan has extensive relations, has affected security and peace in Afghanistan and continues to do so. However, there are possibilities for India's cooperation in Afghanistan's security and peace. As explained above, one such possibility could be through India providing viable assurances that its presence in Afghanistan remains benign and does not harm Pakistan. Moreover, there are multilateral platforms where which India is a member, which can serve as possible avenues for fostering cooperation aimed at regional consensus on security in Afghanistan. These platforms include the SCO, SAARC and the Kabul Process.

Via a clear and effective policy and strategy focused on preventing major powers from investing in proxy wars in Afghanistan and by handing over the leadership of the peace process to the Afghans, Afghanistan can lead regional efforts towards peace and stability. International military related support is not permanent; and therefore, Afghanistan needs to develop a strong military to secure itself. Meanwhile, India can be a good partner in propelling the country further on the path to economic growth and development because it has demonstrated its potential for making lasting investments in different sectors. Moreover, Afghanistan must demonstrate-perhaps through the clauses and/or terms of contracts signed-that India-Afghanistan relations do not harm Pakistan. Being pro-Indian or pro-Pakistan is not helpful for

17. "India Criticises UN for Failing to Curtail Taliban in Afghanistan Reaffirms Support for Afghan-led and Owned Peace Process". Reporterly, December 08, 2018. <http://reporterly.net/latest-stories/india-criticises-un-for-failing-to-curtail-taliban-in-afghanistan-reaffirms-support-for-afghan-led-and-owned-peace-process/>

Afghanistan. Afghanistan needs to maintain a balance while engaging with the rival countries and developing good relations with the two so that it is not used as a tool by competitors. Afghan government officials have stated at different times that the conflict in Afghanistan is a result of regional conflicts and Afghanistan is being used as a battlefield.¹⁸ Therefore, there is also a need for addressing the much wider regional and global factors instead of merely focusing on issues in bilateral and/or trilateral relations in silos.

Policy Recommendations

- Over the past years, India has assisted Afghanistan in different sectors such as infrastructure, health, education, defense and military. However, India's willingness to strengthen its political and economic relations with Afghanistan is viewed with suspicion by Pakistan. Therefore, India should work towards helping Afghanistan with a focus on the bilateral economic benefits for Afghanistan and India.
- Since instability in Afghanistan is partly because of the Pakistan-India contestation, Afghanistan should maintain a balance in its relationships with India and Pakistan, by developing new balanced policies and strategies towards both countries, which are viewed neither as pro-India nor as pro-Pakistan.
- India can use its influence on other regional countries such as China to encourage Pakistan to apply pressure on the Taliban for direct talks with the Afghan government, and Afghanistan should support and use the available platforms to make this happen by convincing India to do so.

18. "Daoudzai: Expecting Pakistan Help for Peace in Afghanistan is Wasting Time (Persian)." BBC Persian, December 04, 2014. http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2014/12/141204_k04_omar_daoudzai_speech?fbclid=IwAR2IM-MnmgEHsRqWnxCHj3oPKZVdCSps-RnCTH6_RnhsgI55P6eAoM84d1c

Invigorating Tehran-Kabul Relations

ZAHRA ROSTAMI¹

In 2001, Iran helped the U.S. unseat the Taliban from power.² In the wake of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, Iran remained supportive of the Afghan government and maintained a distance from the Taliban. But as the tensions between Iran and the U.S. grew over the former's nuclear program, Iran gradually distanced itself from cooperation with the U.S. in Afghanistan's security. For instance, it has provided safe havens for the Taliban's Mashhad Shura and had provided financial and military support to the group in recent years.³ More recently, Iran held direct talks with Taliban in December 2018.⁴

This paper delves into Iran's role in shaping peace and stability in Afghanistan and argues that Tehran's role has a lot to do with its concerns regarding its own security and the actors in Afghanistan, particularly the U.S., which have the potential to pose threats to it.

Iran's Concerns Regarding Security in Afghanistan

Two factors are responsible for Iran's concerns regarding insecurity in Afghanistan. First, a less stable and insecure Afghanistan will prevent Iran from developing strategic ties with Afghanistan for two reasons: if Afghanistan is not stable enough, Iran's priorities and concerns—such as those pertaining to

1. Zahra Rostami is a Senior Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment Officer at Afghanistan's Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee.

2. Sadat, Mir H., and Hughes, James P. "U.S.-Iran Engagement Through Afghanistan." Middle East Policy Council. <https://www.mepc.org/us-iran-engagement-through-afghanistan>

3. Giustozzi, Dr. Antonio. "Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure." LandInfoCountry of Origin Information Centre, August 23, 2017. https://landinfo.no/asset/3589/1/3589_1.pdf

4. "Iran Hosts Taliban Peace Talks, Eying Opening after US Draw Down." The Telegraph, January 01, 2019. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/01/iran-hosts-taliban-peace-talks-eyeing-opening-us-drawdown/>

water sharing, illicit narcotics trade, and refugee issues-will not be addressed comprehensively. Resolving some of the cross-border social problems and crime such as trafficking of drugs and humans requires commitment and strong governance on both sides. A dependent, insecure and weak government in Afghanistan will find it difficult to maintain a robust relationship with its neighbors and resolve bilateral issues peacefully and sustainably. Besides, Iran has cultural and linguistic affiliations with some ethnic groups in Afghanistan such as the Tajiks and the Hazaras whose rights will be preserved in a secure and stable Afghanistan.⁵

Second, the presence of the U.S.-Iran's ideological adversary-in its eastern neighbor's territory is perceived as a threat by Iran.⁶ Tehran's assumption is that greater peace and stability in Afghanistan would result in a U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, and that it would reduce the latter's security concerns emanating from the U.S. presence that is deemed by Iran to be a threat to the Islamic Republic.⁷ Iran views the U.S.'s presence in Afghanistan as the latter's pretext to develop capabilities to mount a strategic attack on Iran and effect a regime change. If the U.S. pulls out of Afghanistan, Iran has a better chance of developing a more productive relationship with Afghanistan to resolve some mutual issues.⁸ Likewise, as long as Afghanistan remains under direct protection and support of the U.S. security wise, it will be extremely difficult for Iran to expand and strengthen its relations with Afghanistan. Thus, Iran's engagement in bilateral negotiations with Afghanistan remains tricky, even on matters where the two neighbors need to solve cross-border issues among themselves.⁹

Additionally, the presence of the Islamic State (IS/Daesh) is an additional threat that Iran senses along its eastern borders. Iran believes that the emergence of Daesh in Afghanistan is a Western plot similar to the case in Syria where

5. Jafari, Dr. Mossa, Lecturer at the Kateb University, interview by author, Kabul, Afghanistan. January 13, 2019.

6. Nader, Alireza; Scotten Ali G.; Rahmani, Ahmad Idrees; Stewart, Robert, and Mahnad, Leila. "Iran's Influence in Afghanistan." Rand Corporation, 2014. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR600/RR616/RAND_RR616.pdf

7. Jafari, Dr. Mossa, Lecturer at the Kateb University, interview by author, Kabul, Afghanistan. January 13, 2019.

8. Khavati, Dr. Shafaq. lecturer at Avicenna University, interview by author. Kabul Afghanistan. January 10, 2019.

9. Ibid.

Iran worked closely with Russia to defeat the IS. Iran believes that Daesh is a phenomenon expandable to other states. There are many anti-Iranian government Baloch insurgent groups operating along Iran's eastern borders. According to Iran, Daesh's rise in Afghanistan combined with the existence of Baloch insurgent groups will exacerbate the security situation along its eastern borders and would eventually permeate into other parts of Iran. Thus, overall, Iran's primary concerns regarding insecurity in Afghanistan relates to the potential of the insecurity in Afghanistan for impacting Iranian security.¹⁰

The Trajectory of Iran's Engagement with Peace and Security Issues in Afghanistan

The friction between Iran and the U.S. over the latter's nuclear activities and the former's rivalry with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan has, to an extent, served as factor discouraging Iran from security cooperation with Afghanistan. This has manifested itself partly in Iran's attitude towards the peace process in Afghanistan. Although Iran has participated in several frameworks and platforms aimed at peace and stability in Afghanistan, it has never been the key actor running the process.¹¹

U.S.-Iran tensions have contributed to shaping Tehran's relations with the Taliban. Iran has always been in favor of a stable government in Afghanistan, at least after 2001. It assisted the U.S. in overthrowing the Taliban despite the fact that it was not an ally of the U.S., and in the early years of the post-2001 period, Iran maintained a distance from the Taliban. However, this has not continued in the recent years. Although it is unclear as to precisely when Iran's rapprochement with the Taliban began, Tehran has been sanctioned by the U.S. and its Gulf allies over accusations of providing financial and military support to the terrorist group at least from October 2018.¹² Moreover, Iran provides safe havens for the Taliban's Mashhad Shura, which, according to some estimates, commands over 10% of the Taliban manpower, and is based in Mashhad, Iran.¹³

At present, the latest phase of the attempt to negotiate peace with the Taliban, led

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ramani, Samuel. "Managed Instability: Iran, the Taliban, and Afghanistan." *The Diplomat*, November 14, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/managed-instability-iran-the-taliban-and-afghanistan/>

13. Kaura, Vinay. "Understanding the complexities of the Afghan peace process." *Observer Research Foundation*, April 26, 2018. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/understanding-the-complexities-of-the-afghan-peace-process/>

by the U.S., is becoming increasingly complex because multiple regional countries—all of whom have different perspectives and calculations regarding peace and the implications of the Taliban coming to power, and want their concerns addressed—are getting involved in the process.¹⁴ For obvious reasons, Iran is undoubtedly one of those countries.

In this regard, Tehran has consistently participated in the Moscow format talks on Afghanistan.¹⁵ Moreover, in December, 2018 it hosted Taliban representatives in Tehran for discussions concerning Afghan peace talks.¹⁶ These actions demonstrate that Iran remains open to, and interested in, engaging with the Taliban. It is worth mentioning that Iran's engagement with the Taliban sends two messages: firstly, it is attempting to secure good relations with Afghanistan in a potential future scenario where the Taliban plays a key role in a future government in Afghanistan; and secondly, it is trying to demonstrate to the U.S. that it has an open hand in the negotiations with the group and plays a role in the peace process. Eventually Iranian officials want the U.S. to realize Iran's significance and power in Afghanistan and the region.¹⁷

Harnessing Iran's Priorities for Ensuring Security and Peace in Afghanistan

As Iran seeks to ensure that there is no direct threat to it from the Afghan government, Tehran maintains good relations with Afghanistan notwithstanding the fact that Afghanistan enjoys good relations with Iran's opponents like the U.S. Therefore, Afghanistan should seek Iran's support in this regard by formulating policies in such a way that nothing in its foreign policy endeavors threatens Iran's national security or is perceived as a danger to Iran's existence.¹⁸ As Kateb University's Professor Musa Jafari argued during an interview for this essay, it is vital for Afghanistan to “make a

14. Khavati, Dr. Shafaq. Lecturer at Avicenna University, interview by author. Kabul Afghanistan, January 10, 2019.

15. Ramani, Samuel “Managed Instability: Iran, the Taliban, and Afghanistan.” *The Diplomat*, November 14, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/managed-instability-iran-the-taliban-and-afghanistan/>

16. “Iran says Afghan Taliban arrived in Tehran, held peace talks.” *Reuters*, December 31, 2018. <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-iran-afghanistan-taliban/iran-says-afghan-taliban-arrived-in-tehran-held-peace-talks-idUKKCNI0U0B6>

17. Rahimi, Sardar Mohammad. Deputy Minister of Literacy, Ministry of Education, interview by author, Kabul Afghanistan. December 30, 2018.

18. *Ibid.*

strategic deal with its neighbors in accepting Afghanistan's sovereignty and independence in a way that the countries in the region, including Iran, avoid their rivalries to affect Afghanistan."¹⁹ Nonetheless, given the complex nature of security in Afghanistan, and the relations between the actors involved, it remains extremely difficult-if not impossible-for Afghanistan to navigate this.

On the other hand, as Avicenna University's Professor Sardar Mohammad Rahimi stated during an interview for this essay, that "Iran does not have much potential to steer regional consensus for peace and stability in Afghanistan."²⁰ However, Rahimi added that "it is likely that Iran would remain involved and relevant to influence regional sentiments about security and peace in Afghanistan through other countries like Russia."²¹ This line of thought was also reiterated by Avicenna University's Professor Shafaq Khawati during an interview for this essay, who argued that "the rivalries Iran has with other countries make it difficult for Iran to be able to play a proactive role that in a way that would reduce tensions."²²

Despite the limitations in the scope and ability of Iran's facilitation of security and peace in Afghanistan, there do exist opportunities for such cooperation via multilateral frameworks in which Iran is involved. One such framework is the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation. The declaration of the second meeting of the Kabul Process, which was released in February 2018, focuses primarily on cooperation among its participating members in areas of security, counter-terrorism and peace.²³ Another such platform is the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, in which Iran is a participating country. The main goals of the Process is "to build regional consensus on how we can achieve our shared goals," mainly through political consultation and confidence building measures.²⁴ This provides a cooperation framework for Iran and Afghanistan

19. Jafari, Dr. Mossa, Lecturer at the Kateb University, interview by author, Kabul, Afghanistan. January 13, 2019.

20. Rahimi, Sardar Mohammad. Deputy Minister of Literacy, Ministry of Education, interview by author, Kabul Afghanistan. December 30, 2018.

21. Ibid.

22. Khavati, Dr. Shafaq. lecturer at Avicenna University, interview by author. Kabul Afghanistan, January 10, 2019.

23. "The Kabul Process for Peace & Security Cooperation in Afghanistan Declaration." U.S. Embassy Kabul, March 01, 2018. <https://af.usembassy.gov/kabul-process-peace-security-cooperation-afghanistan-declaration/>

24. Hear of Asia-Istanbul Process official website. <http://hoa.gov.af/293/pillars>

to take advantage of, despite the fact that it would be difficult to bring Iran on the same page.

A third platform is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), where both Iran and Afghanistan are observer members. “Making joint efforts to maintain, and ensure peace, security and stability in the region,” and “strengthening mutual trust and neighborliness among member states” are among the main goals of the SCO, providing a common and suitable platform for Iran and Afghanistan to strive to achieve a consensus in the broader region on security and peace in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Iran’s concerns regarding threats to its national security emanating from Afghanistan are rooted mainly in the presence of the U.S. and its Gulf allies in Afghanistan, given how Tehran shares tense relations with those countries. Additionally, Iran has voiced concerns regarding terrorism in Afghanistan as far as the overall security of the region and cross-border crimes, including drug trafficking, is concerned.

However, Iran’s role in Afghanistan remains dubious as it has undertaken measures to provide financial and military training to the Taliban in recent years, and more recently, has engaged in direct talks with the Taliban on the issue of peace in Afghanistan. Moreover, its frictions with the U.S. and its Gulf allies, and its close ties with Russia and China, has put Iran on the opposite bloc of the current direct peace talks with the Taliban led by the U.S.

In this backdrop, securing Iran’s cooperation for security and peace in Afghanistan remains extremely difficult given the prevailing complexities with regard to security and peace in Afghanistan and the ambitions and interests of all actors involved. Nonetheless, existing multilateral platforms in which Iran is a participant provide possibilities for exploring and expanding Iran-Afghanistan cooperation. These platforms include the Kabul Process, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the SCO.

Policy Recommendations

- For Iran to contribute more constructively towards peace and stability in Afghanistan, Tehran can take more active part and engage existing

multilateral frameworks.

- For Iran to enjoy greater security via Afghanistan and to feel less threatened by the presence and influence of the U.S., Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan, Tehran should meet the others and discuss ways to foster a kind of peace in Afghanistan that benefits all. Since it might be difficult for Iran to even begin negotiations with its adversaries/rivals, a third-party representative whom all sides trust could be tapped.
- Afghanistan should be extremely clear about its foreign policy towards neighboring countries. The Afghan government should make it clear to its neighbors that in order to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan and in the region, countries should set their rivalries and hostilities aside.
- Iran should be clear about its strategy, i.e. either aim for peace in Afghanistan or support the Taliban. If Iran truly seeks security and peace in Afghanistan, it should cease its support to the Taliban rather continue negotiating with them.

Harnessing Pakistan's Priorities to Encourage Constructive Engagement with Afghanistan

SHUGHNIA RAMZJO¹

Afghanistan and Pakistan share a long history of political contestation—including on the Durand Line issue—which has evolved along with (and due to) the trajectory of their foreign policies toward each other in the recent decades. Indeed, there has been some forward movement in the recent years, such as in the form of the establishment of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS), and attempts by Afghanistan to acknowledge that Pakistan is one of the important players in bringing security and peace in Afghanistan. However, as Afghanistan's President, Ashraf Ghani, stated, the relationship between the two countries remains in a state of “undeclared war” by Pakistan.²

Given this context in the backdrop of the U.S.-Taliban talks towards a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan, this paper attempts to address the following questions: What does Pakistan gain from providing sanctuaries to terrorists? How can Afghanistan balance its relations with Pakistan and India to encourage Pakistan's cooperation towards security and peace in Afghanistan? What options can Afghanistan consider to bring Pakistan on board to resolve security issues in the country?

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2. “Undeclared war between Afghanistan, Pakistan must end: Ashraf Ghani.” *Economic Times*, November 15, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/undeclared-war-between-afghanistan-pakistan-must-end-ashraf-ghani/articleshow/66630756.cms>

Pakistan's Support/Sanctuary to the Taliban and other Terrorist Groups

Regional peace and stability in Afghanistan's neighborhood depend largely on a stable, secure and peaceful Afghanistan. For years, Pakistan has provided the Taliban and the Haqqani Network with sanctuary, military and intelligence aid, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Afghan civilians, security personnel, and foreign forces based in Afghanistan. The history of insurgencies demonstrates that external sanctuaries play a crucial role in determining the success or failure of insurgent groups. With external sanctuaries, a group can plot, recruit, proselytize, contact supporters around the world, raise funds, resupply, and—perhaps most importantly—enjoy respite from counter-insurgency efforts.³ In the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. intervention in 2001 killed dozens of Taliban leaders, but many of them fled to Pakistan seeking safe havens. The Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and many other terrorist groups enjoy sanctuary in Pakistan, sponsored by the government of Pakistan and its intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

According to the Center of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Pakistan provides sanctuary and support to the Taliban, including for high-level Taliban leaders like incumbent Taliban Chief, Haibatullah Akhunzada, his deputies, Sirajuddin Haqqani and Mullah Yaqoob, as well as for a range of senior leaders like Abdul Qayyum Zakir, Ahmadullah Nanai, Abdul Latif Mansur, and Noor Mohammad Saqib.⁴ They reside in Pakistan and on a daily basis, coordinate the insurgency against the Afghan government whom they consider illegitimate and corrupt. These groups benefit Pakistan by sustaining instability in Afghanistan, and facilitate Islamabad's pursuit of its national security interest in Afghanistan and the region.

3. Byman, Daniel. "Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism" (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 53-78.

4. Jones, Seth G., "The Insurgents Sanctuary in Pakistan." Center for Strategic and International Studies, September, 2018. https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180911_Insurgent_Sanctuary_0.pdf?Di93wTOJ_ZpqMO38OTutzRXqaub.4.Dw

The Relevance of a Stable, Secure Afghanistan for Pakistan

Although Islamabad has rejected all allegations of supporting terrorist groups, there is credible evidence to the contrary, which the Afghan government has provided to the international community.⁵ Most recently, U.S. President, Donald Trump's, administration reduced its security and military aid to Pakistan as a warning, and has added Pakistan to an intergovernmental watchlist for terrorism financing.⁶ There is little doubt that Pakistan is supporting and financing terrorism. This essay argues that Pakistan has nothing to lose from a stable, sovereign and prosperous Afghanistan. On the contrary, a secure neighbor could offer good opportunities for cooperation in the areas of trade, transit, energy supply and cross-border water management-all of which are in Pakistan's interest.

A secure Afghanistan will offer better opportunities for trade, transit and energy cooperation with Pakistan, contrary to the notion that cooperation between Afghanistan and India poses a national security risk to Pakistan. Since the collapse of Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the Indian government has assisted Afghanistan in developmental projects. When Pakistan sought to regularly close the transit route for Afghan goods to India, Afghanistan sought alternative routes for trade and India helped in the process. As a result, in 2018, Afghanistan, India and Iran signed a trilateral agreement pertaining to the Chabahar Port project in Iran, which opened a new transit and transport corridor in the region. India's economic development projects in Afghanistan have caused apprehension among Pakistan's policymakers and some of the country's economists. They perceive economic development and initiative projects in Afghanistan as being potentially harmful to Pakistan's economy and trade markets in the region if Afghan goods and products reach regional and international markets by bypassing Pakistan.⁷ However, the Chabahar Port project, for instance, demonstrates that regional cooperation will continue even if Pakistan refuses to become part of it, and Pakistan may be losing an

5. Tellis, Ashley J. "Reconciling with Taliban." Carnegie Endowment for international Peace, 2009. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/reconciling_with_taliban.pdf

6. Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia." White House, August 21, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia/>

7. Sahar Khan. "Double Game: Why Pakistan Supports Militants and Resists U.S. Pressure to Stop." CATO Institute, September 20, 2018. <https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa849.pdf>

opportunity for improving its economic strength by refusing to partake in it.

Moreover, Pakistan fears that a stable Afghanistan will have the opportunity to develop its capacities in different sectors including infrastructure-especially of dam construction on transboundary rivers that Pakistan and Afghanistan share, such as the Kabul River. However, it is more logical to consider that a peaceful and secure Afghanistan will have the opportunity to enter into a more formal and binding agreements with regard to transboundary river watersharing with Pakistan, resulting in a more consistent and predictable flow of water into Pakistan. Such a development will secure agricultural growth and Pakistan's economic well-being.

The Significance of Afghanistan's Balanced Relations with Pakistan and India

Afghanistan's foreign policy is anchored and focused on economic cooperation and regional integration to maximize its interests. The government of Pakistan, however, is concerned about Afghanistan's cooperative diplomatic relations with India. They perceive Afghanistan's positive relations with India as a national security threat for Pakistan given their contentious relations with New Delhi because of the Kashmir issue, among others. Given Pakistan's geostrategic location between Afghanistan and India, cooperative relations between Afghanistan and India is viewed by Pakistan as being detrimental to its interest.⁸ Therefore, it is necessary for Afghanistan to try to strike a balanced foreign policy with Pakistan to persuade Islamabad to pursue constructive security cooperation with Afghanistan.

From a realistic point of view, Afghanistan is a weak state with considerable domestic economic and security problems. Therefore, a balanced foreign policy towards India and Pakistan will serves Afghanistan's economic and security interests more optimally rather than favoring closer ties with either of the two. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the country's security is closely linked to its foreign policy with India and Pakistan as well as other states.

For Afghanistan to strike a balance in its foreign policy in the region, Kabul should balance its economic and diplomatic relations with both India and Pakistan. In so doing, it is important to understand that in addition to perceptions on the India

8. Noorzai, Najibullah. "Afghanistan, Between India and Pakistan." *The Diplomat*, August 19, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/afghanistan-between-india-and-pakistan/>

angle, various perceptions exist among Pakistani military leaders, policymakers, and diplomats with regard to bilateral relations with Afghanistan, such as on the Durand Line and the Pashtunistan issues. These perceptions need to be addressed, and for that, there is a need for a joint platform involving all the three countries. Therefore, it would be useful if Afghanistan initiates a trilateral dialogue aimed at facilitating cooperation and counter-terrorism by both India and Pakistan.

Possible Platforms for Security Cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan

There are several bilateral and multilateral initiatives and platforms in place that can facilitate security cooperation between the two countries. Some of these initiatives and platforms have been used to some extent, while some others have not been harnessed adequately yet. However, there is a potential for security cooperation in all of these initiatives and platforms, including the APAPPS, the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

During a bilateral meeting in Kabul in September 2017, Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to develop an action plan to improve border security.⁹ This initial meeting was followed by several other meetings which ultimately culminated in the establishment of the APAPPS.¹⁰ In April 2018, the two countries agreed on seven key principles for the action plan, three of which focused on security and peace cooperation, including on Pakistan's commitment towards supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process, as well as the two countries' commitment to undertake effective action against fugitives and irreconcilable elements posing security threats to either of the two countries.¹¹ In mid-May 2018, the joint action plan was finalized between the two countries, which included the seven principles.¹² Although progress on the APAPPS' implementation slowed

9. Siddiqui, Naveed. "Pakistani, Afghan officials agree to form 'action plan' for improved border security: ISPR." Dawn, September 14, 2017. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1357650>

10. "Afghanistan Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity." Who is who in Afghanistan, June 26, 2018. http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=3967&task=view&total=4028&start=152&Itemid=2

11. "Ghani, Abbasi agree to 7 key principles for Action Plan." Tolo News, April 9, 2017. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/7-principles-agreed-afghanistan-pakistan-action-plan>

12. "Afghanistan-Pakistan Finalize Joint Action Plan for Peace." Tolo News, May 15, 2018. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-pakistan-finalize-joint-action-plan-peace>

down after that and it is unclear as to what it has achieved since then, it provides a framework for the two countries to engage towards cooperation aimed at security and peace in Afghanistan.

In addition to the abovementioned bilateral framework for security cooperation, there are several multilateral platforms in place that focus on cooperation for security and peace. The most prominent one is the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation, which is an Afghan initiative in which Pakistan has been a participant and has co-signed a declaration that calls for cooperation in areas of security, peace and counter terrorism.¹³ This provides another platform for Afghanistan to use build on the consensus among the participating countries to convince Pakistan to rectify its prevailing policies. Moreover, the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process is another initiative in which Pakistan is a participating country, and its pillars of activities include political consultations and confidence building measures towards building regional consensus on achieving shared goals.¹⁴ This also provides a useful opportunity and possibilities for Afghanistan to harness in this regard.

Another multilateral platform with potential in this regard is the SCO, in which too Pakistan is a full member and Afghanistan is an observer member.¹⁵ Strengthening mutual trust and good neighborliness, and undertaking joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region are among the SCO's main goals. Finally, SAARC provides a framework for cooperation between the two countries since both are its members and security cooperation falls in the domain of cooperation under SAARC framework.

All these bilateral and multilateral platforms and frameworks possess the potential for securing cooperation for security and peace in Afghanistan. Politicians in Afghanistan can tap into this wide range of options and their potential for the purpose of building regional

13. "The Kabul Process for Peace & Security Cooperation in Afghanistan Declaration." The U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan, March 01, 2018. <https://af.usembassy.gov/kabul-process-peace-security-cooperation-afghanistan-declaration/>

14. Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, official website. Accessed July 13, 2019. <http://hoa.gov.af/293/pillars>

15. "About the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation." Official website of SCO, September 01, 2017. http://eng.sectsco.org/about_sco/

consensus towards such cooperation. Although there are limitations and difficulties, the potential of these platforms do also exist and can be harnessed.

Conclusion

Pakistan is one of the most relevant countries when it comes to security and peace in Afghanistan, due to a multitude of factors including its support of terrorism, and its disputes with Afghanistan over the Durand Line, among others. However, these are not among the major reasons driving much of Pakistan's Afghanistan policies since its creation and especially since the 1978 coup in Afghanistan and subsequent wars. Pakistan's policies stem from its concerns regarding India's influence in Afghanistan, and its concerns about water sharing of transboundary rivers that Afghanistan and Pakistan share.

While Pakistan has relied on proxies such as the Taliban to further its interests over the past years, there is much that Pakistan stands to gain from a secure and peaceful Afghanistan rather than from an insecure and unstable one. Therefore, it is beneficial for both if Pakistan and Afghanistan move towards cooperation for security and peace in Afghanistan. To that end, there exist feasible and effective platforms and frameworks. Such platforms include the APAPPS, the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, the Kabul Process, the SCO and the SAARC. Although there are limitations and difficulties in tapping into these possibilities to ensure security and peace related cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the frameworks do offer harnessable potential.

Policy Recommendations

- The Taliban has been fueled and sponsored by Pakistan's government over the course of decades. Although the administration in Pakistan has been one of the most important players in Afghanistan's peace talks with Taliban, it is believed by Kabul that Pakistan is mostly promoting their own set of goals and strategies by using Taliban as leverage. Therefore, if Pakistan succeeds in bringing and convincing the Taliban to negotiate with Kabul towards peace, it will deliver Pakistan with major benefits in the region and improve the country's reputation in the region and around the world.

- The volume of trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been declining in the recent years. Recent reports have indicated that Pakistan's trade sector is facing challenges due to insufficient cooperation between the two countries. To overcome Pakistan's closure of its transit routes for Afghanistan's goods meant for export to India, Afghan and Indian businesses switched over to use Iran's Chabahar port. According to recent reports, the Afghan government has shifted the transit of over 70% of its trade through Iran, India and China. Thus, rebuilding a warm and amicable relationship with Afghanistan could benefit Pakistan's trade and economy.

The Need and Relevance of Enhanced Security Cooperation between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan

SADAF MOHMAND¹

Afghanistan's location makes it a land bridge between Central Asia and South Asia. A stable and secure Afghanistan can play a vital role in facilitating robust economic development in both regions. To its north and northeast, Afghanistan borders Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (which are all oil and gas rich countries). To its east, southeast and south, it borders Pakistan. And, to its west, south, and southwest, it borders Iran. Turkmenistan, a Central Asian country, is the world's fifth largest producer of gas. And a Turkmenistan will require a stable and peaceful Afghanistan for establishing and expanding its economic ties with South Asian countries and beyond.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Turkmenistan's foreign policy was anchored on its own domestic nation-building priorities and the principle of positive neutrality.² Turkmenistan's first engagement with Afghanistan was in February 1992, for the purpose of establishing economic ties by building trade ports along the Amu Darya River.³

In 2002, Turkmenistan further expanded its relations with Afghanistan by establishing its embassy in Kabul. In 2007, the first summit between Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow and Afghan President Hamid Karzai took place.⁴ This resulted in a series of summits in multilateral formats in all

1. Sadaf Mohmand is a Senior Research Associate at BRAC in Afghanistan.

2. Sir Jan, and Horák, Slavomír. "Turkmenistan's Afghan border conundrum." Social Science Open Access Repository (SSOAR), 2016. https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/47082/ssoar-2016-sir_et_al-Turkmenistans_Afghan_border_conundrum.pdf?sequence=1

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

spheres, ranging from business to people-to-people contacts.⁵ On matters of security too, Turkmenistan has undertaken some initiatives both bilaterally and multilaterally, through strategic partnership and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

This essay examines Turkmenistan's role with regard to peace and security in Afghanistan. To do so, it explores Turkmenistan's security concerns vis-à-vis Afghanistan; assesses whether Turkmenistan's economic relations have an impact on security issues in Afghanistan; and identifies some actions that Turkmenistan can take to facilitate regional cooperation and bilateral relations towards bringing stability in Afghanistan.

Turkmenistan's Security Concerns Regarding Afghanistan

In an interview for this paper, the Spokesperson of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, Ehsan Taheri, said "Mohammad Umar Daudzai the special representative of the country in peace talks is assigned to be in contact with the countries of the region to understand their concerns regarding insecurity in the country. One of the concerns shared by Turkmenistan is continuous war and insecurity in Afghanistan that may spill over Afghanistan's borders."⁶ The issue of potential spillover effects is one of the main security concerns in Turkmenistan and other Central Asian countries with regard to the security situation in Afghanistan. Other concerns that Turkmenistan and other Central Asian countries share include cross-border terrorism and drug trafficking. Turkmenistan and Afghanistan share borders along the Afghan provinces of Faryab, Jowzjan, Badghis and Herat-all of which have consistently experienced insurgent attacks. In fact, several areas in these provinces are under Taliban control or influence.⁷ In 2014 and 2015, the Taliban made at least three attempts to attack Turkmen border guards in order to steal weapons.⁸ In 2018, between January and August alone, Badghis and Faryab were among the seven

5. Ibid.

6. Taheri, Ehsan. Spokesperson for Afghanistan High Peace Council. Interview by Author. Kabul, Afghanistan. January 22, 2019.

7. Pannier, Bruce. "Is there a terror threat in Turkmenistan?" Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, August 01, 2017. <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-turkmenistan-terror-threat-afghanistan-islamic-state/28653368.html>

8. "Turkmenistan: Moscow Courts Ashgabat for Security Support." Risk Advisory Group, July 16, 2016. <https://www.riskadvisory.com/news/turkmenistan-moscow-courts-ashgabat-for-security-support/>

provinces which were mostly affected by insurgent attacks,⁹ making border security the key security concern between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Since 2013 in particular, the border security issue between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan has intensified. In fact, as recently as early 2019, tens of Afghan security forces were forced to make a strategic retreat into Turkmen territory following heavy clashes with the Taliban in Badghis province, in which the Taliban also captured over 50 Afghan soldiers (who were later released).

Cross-border security is further complicated by the fact that an estimated 1.5 million ethnic Turkmen population live along the Turkmen border in Afghanistan's Faryab and Jowzjan provinces. Due to the Taliban's presence in these two provinces, Afghan Turkmen residing in these areas have set up local militias-led by Gurbandurdy and Emir Karyad, both of whom had previously fought the Soviet troops in Afghanistan-to protect the Turkmen population.¹⁰ Since 2013, the Taliban have inched towards the Turkmen border, posing serious security threats to Turkmenistan.¹¹ In February 2014, the first of the violent clashes took place between the Taliban and Turkmen border guards, which resulted in the killing of three Turkmen border guards and several Taliban militants.¹² The militias linking themselves to Islamist groups too pose a dire security threat to the secular regime in Turkmenistan.¹³ As a response, Turkmenistan initiated a new plan under which male Turkmen citizens under the age of 50 are required to enlist for military service.¹⁴ The security threats have also prompted Turkmenistan to consider changing its policy of neutrality and to engage in the Collective Security Treaty Organization with Russia.

Another key concern for Turkmenistan is drug trafficking, which is one of the

9. Putz, Catherine. "How Concerned is Turkmenistan about its Afghan border?" *The Diplomat*, January 17, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/how-concerned-is-turkmenistan-about-its-afghan-border/>

10. Indeo, Fabio. "Turkmenistan 2015: existing challenges to the permanent neutrality and the strategic development of the multivector energy policy." *Asia Mair*, 2015. <https://www.asiamaior.org/the-journal/asia-maior-vol-xxvi-2015/turkmenistan-2015-existing-challenges-to-the-permanent-neutrality-and-the-strategic-development-of-the-multivector-energy-policy.html>

11. Ali, Obaid. "Moving East in the North: Transitioned Faryab and the Taliban." *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, May 17, 2013. <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/moving-east-in-the-north-transitioned-faryab-and-the-taleban/>

12. Sir Jan. "Turkmenistan's Afghan border conundrum." *Open Access Repository* (2016): 124. https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/47082/ssoar-2016-sir_et_al-Turkmenistans_Afghan_border_conundrum.pdf?sequence=1

13. *Ibid.*

14. Putz, Catherine. "How Concerned is Turkmenistan about its Afghan border?" *The Diplomat*, January 17, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/how-concerned-is-turkmenistan-about-its-afghan-border/>

main sources of revenue for terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan. A wide range of narcotics are smuggled through Central Asian borders. At present, Afghanistan produces around 75-80% of the world's opiates, and Kandahar, Helmand, Nangarhar, and Herat are among the major provinces where opium cultivation and production take place. Opiates produced in these regions are trafficked through Central Asia via several routes, which include the northern route along the Afghan-Turkmen border.¹⁵ Meanwhile, drug trafficking has become one of the main sources of corruption in Turkmenistan,¹⁶ making it a source of concern for the Turkmen government for its own functioning.

Economic Relations and Afghanistan's Security

In the contemporary world, a country's role in world politics is based on soft power and a strong economy. For a resource-rich country like Turkmenistan, robust economic linkages with other countries, especially those in South Asia, is vital. Undoubtedly, security in Afghanistan is important for Turkmenistan to establish such ties and to enhance economic development.

Afghanistan's economic relations with Turkmenistan encompass three key areas. Foremost of them is the cooperation in Afghanistan's electricity sector in north and northwest, which includes Herat and Balkh provinces. Since 2011, major projects led by Turkmen investments are involved in increasing hydroelectricity generation capacity in Afghanistan.¹⁷ The second area of cooperation between the two countries is communication and transportation projects. These projects can link Afghanistan to the global markets through Central Asia, particularly through Turkmenistan. One example is the recently launched Lapis Lazuli corridor. The third area of cooperation is the oil and gas industry.¹⁸ One of the examples in this regard is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project. Optimal implementation of all initiatives and projects in these sectors as well as advancement and expansion of economic ties between Turkmenistan and

15. Golunov, Sargey. "Border security in Central Asia: before and after September 11." Ministry of Defense, Austria, http://www.bundesheer.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/10_wg_ftc_40.pdf

16. Ibid.

17. Sir Jan, and Horák, Slavomír. "Turkmenistan's Afghan border conundrum." Social Science Open Access Repository (SSOAR), 2016. Open Access Repository (2016): 111-114. https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/47082/ssoar-2016-sir_et_al-Turkmenistans_Afghan_border_conundrum.pdf?sequence=1

18. Ibid.

Afghanistan can only take place when the latter is secure. The TAPI project is a prominent example of a project with immense potential whose prospects have been hampered by insecurity for a long time. The gas pipeline project was conceptualized in 1995 but due to civil war and insecurity, progress on it was stalled for several years, before moving forward. At present, the TAPI pipeline is proceeding, albeit slowly, and is set to pass through three Afghan provinces—Helmand, Kandahar and Herat. Both Turkmenistan and Afghanistan have concerns regarding the security of the pipeline,¹⁹ and in 2011, the Afghan government deployed 5000 to 7000 security personnel to guard the pipeline.²⁰

Meanwhile, Turkmenistan has signaled its readiness for security cooperation to activate the three areas of cooperation and trade. For instance, in its 2017 document, titled, “Concept of the foreign policy line of Turkmenistan for 2017-2023”, Ashgabat emphasizes that “Cooperation with the states in the region on the principles of mutual understanding and mutual trust is the main condition for maintaining and strengthening peace and security in Central Asia.”²¹ In this regard, projects like TAPI can also play a significant role in facilitating security and development in the country. It can contribute towards development by creating job opportunities, and also aid in reducing corruption which too is among the key sources of insecurity and instability.

Turkmenistan’s Role in Regional Cooperation Initiatives for Afghanistan’s Security

Security cooperation between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan can be pursued through both bilateral and multilateral frameworks in this regard. The recent “Strategic Partnership Agreement” between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, which was signed in February 2019, is an example of a bilateral framework. This agreement entails security cooperation and

19. Foster, John. “Afghanistan the TAPI pipeline, and Energy Geopolitics.” *Journal of Energy Security*, March 23, 2010. http://www.ensec.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=233:afghanistan-the-tapi-pipeline-and-energy-geopolitics

20. Sadat, Sayed Masood. “TAPI and Casa-1000: Win-Win Trade between Central Asia and South Asia.” Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, May, 2015. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311716684_TAPI_AND_CASA-1000_WIN-WIN_TRADE_BETWEEN_CENTRAL_ASIA_AND_SOUTH_ASIA

21. “Turkmen-Afghan relations: the example of good-neighborliness and regional integration policy.” *Turkmenistan Today*, April 13, 2017. <http://tdh.gov.tm/news/en/articles.aspx&article6210&cat35>

joint efforts towards countering terrorism, among others.²² Although this bilateral arrangement is a relatively new agreement and it will be tested over time for efficacy, it does offer a solid platform for security cooperation between the two countries.

At the 2014 UN General Assembly Meeting, the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Rashid Meredov, stated that Turkmenistan had, under the auspices of the UN, hosted a broad-based dialogue among various political parties of Afghanistan.²³ Furthermore, in June 2015, Turkmenistan hosted a workshop organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe international co-operation in criminal matters between the law enforcement agencies, prosecutorial and central authorities of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, in Ashgabat.²⁴ This is another example of Turkmenistan's willingness to engage with Afghanistan on security issues.

Additionally, the Kabul Process for Peace and Security in Afghanistan is among the various multilateral platforms that provide avenues for security cooperation. In the declaration issued post the second meeting of the Kabul Process held in February 2018, the participating members, including Turkmenistan, committed to security cooperation and counter-terrorism.²⁵ The declaration also stresses on the resolve among the participating members to jointly address the threats posed by Transnational Terrorist Networks, as well as Transnational Criminal Organizations. It is important to note that these two issues are among Turkmenistan's major concerns with regard to Afghanistan and consequently, provide potent avenues for bilateral cooperation.

22. Amanat, Hayatullah. "Afghanistan-Turkmenistan Sign Strategic Partnership Agreement." Tolo News. February 21, 2019. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-turkmenistan-sign-strategic-partnership-agreement>

23. "The Fasten Seat Belt Light is Illuminated", Warns Secretary-General, Summoning World Leaders at Start of Annual Debate to 'Find and Nurture Seeds of Hope.' United Nations, September 24, 2014. <https://www.un.org/en/ga/69/meetings/gadebate/24sep/turkmenistan.shtml>

24. OSCE workshop aims to enhance co-operation between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan in fighting terrorism and organized crime." Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe., June 15, 2015. <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/164286>

25. "The Kabul Process for Peace & Security Cooperation in Afghanistan Declaration." U.S. Embassy Kabul, March 01, 2018. <https://af.usembassy.gov/kabul-process-peace-security-cooperation-afghanistan-declaration/>

Another multilateral framework which provides avenues for security cooperation between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan is the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, which was initiated by Afghanistan in November 2011, and in which Turkmenistan is a member.²⁶ The first declaration of this multilateral process, titled ‘Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan’, was issued in November 2011,²⁷ and Clause 13 of the declaration states that “We declare our readiness to engage in sincere, result-oriented cooperation at all levels, which will not just help Afghanistan, but will also be beneficial to security and prosperity in the region as a whole.”²⁸ Other declarations of the process that emphasize on security and counter-terrorism cooperation include the Beijing Declaration, titled ‘Deepening Cooperation for Sustainable Security and Prosperity of the “Heart of Asia”’ (October 2014); the Islamabad Declaration, titled ‘Emphasising Enhanced Cooperation for Countering Security Threats and Promoting Regional Connectivity’ (December 2015); the Amritsar Declaration, titled, ‘Addressing Challenges, Achieving Prosperity’ (December 2016); and the Baku Declaration, titled, ‘Security & Economic Connectivity Towards A Strengthened Heart of Asia Region’, (December 2017).²⁹

Moreover, Turkmenistan has also demonstrated its interest in playing a role in the Afghan peace process in an effort towards facilitating security in the country, and has announced its support for Afghan-led peace talks.³⁰ In 2011, when the issue of peace talks with the Taliban was being discussed, Turkmenistan was one of the countries that offered to host such talks.³¹ More recently, in March 2018, Turkmenistan participated in the Tashkent Conference, which was a key multilateral gathering aimed at fostering consensus towards peace and security in Afghanistan. The declaration of the Conference emphasized on cooperation in the areas of

26. The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process official website. <http://hoa.gov.af>

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Erfanyar, Ahmad Shah. “Turkmenistan reaffirms support for Afghan peace process, mega projects.” Pajhwok, November 07, 2018. <https://www.pajhwok.com/en/2018/11/07/turkmenistan-reaffirm-support-afghan-peace-process-mega-projects>

31. Muhammad Tahir. “Peace talks with the Taliban in Turkmenistan?” Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. May 27, 2011. https://www.rferl.org/a/peace_talks_taliban_turkmenistan/24207460.html

peace and reconciliation, counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics.³²

Conclusion

Turkmenistan has always had a keen interest in developing economic relations with Afghanistan. However, the seemingly never ending conflict and terrorism in Afghanistan has resulted in apprehensions in Turkmenistan with regard to two key issues: cross-border terrorism and cross-border narcotics trafficking. However, this state of insecurity also provides an arena for cooperation among the two countries, such as through joint efforts to secure common interests pertaining to economic ties, stability and security.

For various reasons, Turkmenistan can play a vital role in contributing towards security and stability in Afghanistan. The existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks provide solid anchors for security cooperation between the two neighbors. The February 2019 “Strategic Partnership Agreement” provides a framework for security cooperation and joint efforts for fighting terrorism; and multilateral platforms including the Kabul Process for Peace and Security in Afghanistan, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, and declaration of the 2018 Tashkent Conference, provide additional avenues and opportunities for security cooperation between the two neighbors.

Policy Recommendations

- Sustainable and inclusive development is an important factor in preventing and ending conflict and then sustaining peace. As an immediate and energy rich neighbor, Turkmenistan can play a significant role in Afghanistan in this regard, and for that regional cooperation initiatives must be given utmost priority.
- The geographical, historical and cultural linkages between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan offer enormous potential for mutually beneficial joint projects, trade and exchanges. Turkmenistan should ease visa provisions for Afghans, especially for merchants; this will pave the way for robust cultural exchanges as well.

32. “Declaration of the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan: Peace Process, Security Cooperation & Regional Connectivity.” The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Uzbekistan to the United Nations, March 30, 2018. <https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/news/declaration-tashkent-conference-afghanistan-peace-process-security-cooperation-regional>

- Poverty and lack of job opportunities are among the factors that enable drug production and drug-trafficking. Thus, the Turkmen government along with the Afghan government should provide support to aid programs to develop alternative crops. This would help weaning poppy cultivators away from poppy production and towards licit crops that also generate sufficient revenue.

Turkey's Potential for Facilitating Regional Cooperation and Peace in Afghanistan

MARZIA AZIZI¹

Eighteen years after the fall of the Taliban and the international community's efforts in Afghanistan, the country is still one of the most insecure places in the world. The situation deteriorated further, especially after the drawdown of U.S. and NATO troops and the transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghan government in 2014. Several attempts have been made, both military and diplomatic, to end the long running insurgency in the country, but none have succeeded so far.

Given this backdrop, this essay examines Turkey's role and potential to facilitate regional initiatives conducive for fostering security and stability in Afghanistan. The essay provides a brief overview of Turkey's engagement with the Afghan conflict; examines the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process (HoA-IP); assesses Ankara's ability to facilitate regional cooperation; and finally, evaluates whether Turkey can help bring the Taliban to the negotiation table with the Afghan government.

Afghanistan-Turkey Relations: An Overview

Friendly relations and diplomatic engagement between Afghanistan and Turkey began in 1921 when Afghanistan became the second country to recognize the Turkish Republic and signed a Treaty of Friendship with the country,² also known as Turkey-Afghanistan Alliance Agreement.³ Turkey sent 212 citizens to Afghanistan as teachers, doctors, officers and experts in support of Afghanistan's modernization

1. Marzia Azizi is a Researcher at ATR Consulting in Afghanistan.

2. Karacasulu, Nilufer. "Reconstruction of Afghanistan and the Role of Turkey." USAK, 2010. <http://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex-1423910525.pdf>

3. "Turkey-Afghanistan Bilateral Political Relations." Official website of Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_afghanistan-bilateral-political-relations.en.mfa

efforts between 1932 and 1960.⁴ Turkey's support to Afghanistan went through an interregnum during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but resumed in the 1990s.⁵

Post 2001, Turkey's engagement with Afghanistan continued in the form of security cooperation and developmental assistance. Turkey sent troops as part of the NATO mission to Afghanistan. Turkey's development assistance program began in 2004, and since its inception, Ankara has provided nearly USD 1.1 billion in this regard.⁶ Although Turkey avoided partaking in direct counter-insurgency operations, it actively contributed to training and equipping the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP).⁷ As part of a cooperation agreement between the two countries, Turkey has trained 3,353 Afghan cadets as of January 2019.⁸

In addition to security related contributions, Turkey has also adopted non-military, civilian-based approaches to towards trust building in Afghanistan. For example, Turkey established two civilian-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in Wardak and Jowzjan provinces in 2006 and 2010 respectively.⁹ Given Ankara's military, social and economic contributions, Turkey has been one of the closest allies of Afghanistan in the post 2001 period.

In an attempt to build regional consensus towards peace and stability in Afghanistan, the HoA-IP was officially launched on 2 November 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey.¹⁰ Turkey played a significant role in establishing the process.¹¹ The main objective of the HoA-IP is to facilitate peace and stability in Afghanistan and investment for quicker reconstruction of the country.¹² As its initiator, Afghanistan is the permanent chair of the HoA-IP and is

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Karacasulu, Nilufer. "Reconstruction of Afghanistan and the Role of Turkey." *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian studies*, 2010. <http://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex-1423910525.pdf>

8. "168 Afghan women police candidates being trained in Turkey's Sivas." January 24, 2019. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/168-afghan-women-police-candidates-being-trained-in-turkeys-sivas-140745>

9. Kaya, Karen. "Turkey's role in Afghanistan and Afghan Stabilization." *Military Review*, July-August 2013. https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20130831_art007.pdf

10. Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, official website. www.hoa.gov.af

11. Ibid.

12. Ranjan Das, Nihar; Zafar, Athar and Tiwary Smita. "Assessing Istanbul Process as Regional Initiative on Afghanistan & Way Forward." *Indian Council of World Affairs*, March 24, 2017. <https://icwa.in/pdfs/IB/2014/IPRIAfghanistanIB24032017.pdf>

voluntarily accompanied by one of the 14 participating countries every year as a co-chair. Additionally, the Process has 17 supporting countries, including Turkey, as members, and 12 supporting organizations including the UN.¹³ The HoA-IP is comprised of three types of dialogues or fora: 1) the Ministerial Conference (MC), which is the highest decision-making forum within HoA-IP and takes place once every year; 2) the Senior Officials Meetings (SOMs), which take place three or four times a year; and 3) Ambassadorial Meetings (AMs), which are mostly held in Kabul when it is deemed necessary by the Afghan government.¹⁴ Since the launch of the Process, 18 MCs have been held where Turkey has accompanied Afghanistan as co-chair twice (2011 and 2018).¹⁵ According to the HoA-IP website, the three main pillars of the Process are Political Consultation; Confidence Building Measures (CBMs); and Cooperation with Regional Organizations.¹⁶ The MCs have established six CBMs, which are specialized frameworks and designed to address regional issues. There have been six agreed upon areas relevant to the CBM sphere. They include Counter Narcotics, Counter Terrorism, Disaster Management, Education, Regional Infrastructure, and Trade and Commerce and Investment Opportunities.

HoA-IP and Peace and Stability in Afghanistan

Despite its crucial role as a platform for cooperation in the region, the HoA-IP has been less successful in terms of addressing current regional security challenges compared to the potential it holds, given how it enjoys membership of almost all regional countries. According to a study on security cooperation in the Heart of Asia Region by Assess-Transform-Research Consulting (ATR), the existing regional security mechanism of HoA-IP has not been able to address the ongoing regional security challenges.¹⁷ The study argues that security cooperation in the HoA-IP framework has not been very effective due to the existing conflict of geopolitical interests of some regional states such as for instance those involving Afghanistan

13. Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, official website. www.hoa.gov.af

14. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate General of Regional Cooperation. The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process: Progress Assessment 2011-2015. Kabul: Afghan Government, September 2016.

15. Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs' official website: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_afghanistan-bilateral-political-relations.en.mfa

16. Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process official website. www.hoa.gov.af

17. "Study on Security Cooperation in the Heart of Asia Region". The Asia Foundation, November 07, 2016. <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/study-security-cooperation-heart-asia-region/>

and Pakistan, and Iran, U.S. and Saudi Arabia to name a few.¹⁸ Similarly, Marissa Quie, a professor of political science at Cambridge University, has argued that though there has been some degree of consensus among regional actors about the shared security threat, multilateral cooperation to address these threats have been difficult to achieve.¹⁹ In her 2014 essay, she elaborates that certain local, national and regional disputes, such as the dispute between India and Pakistan and Afghanistan and Pakistan, hold the potential to complicate the already difficult path towards achieving peace.²⁰

Moreover, geopolitical rivalries distract the focus of the Heart of Asia countries from Afghanistan. For example, while Saudi Arabia could play a stronger role in facilitating talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan, in reality, it focuses on its war in Yemen and on its rivalry with Iran.²¹ The ATR study identified two main opportunities that could intensify security cooperation in the region: firstly, allowing broader economic integration among the regional countries; and secondly, joint patrol of borders (towards transforming borders into points of connectivity and not separation), and countering money laundering.²²

Despite its shortcomings, the HoA–IP holds great potential for fostering cooperation among its members to facilitate positive transformation and towards peace and stability in Afghanistan. This is particularly important because the HoA–IP is the only regional initiative which has almost all the regional actors as members²³ and holistically works towards political, security and economic cooperation, unlike the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA), Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), each of which focus only on one of the above-mentioned regional aspects.²⁴

18. Ibid.

19. Quie, Marissa. “The Istanbul Process: prospects for regional connectivity in the heart of Asia”. *Asia Europe Journal*, April 13, 2014. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10308-014-0385-7>

20. Ibid.

21. Study on Security Cooperation in the Heart of Asia Region”. The Asia Foundation, November 07, 2016. <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/study-security-cooperation-heart-asia-region/>

22. Ibid.

23. HoA–IP members: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan.

24. RECCA aims to improve regional economic cooperation among the regional countries; the QCG is a four country grouping (Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the U.S.) which is aimed at initiating a reconciliation process between the civilian government of Afghanistan and the Taliban; the SCO is a China led Eurasian political, economic and security alliance comprised of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and India where Afghanistan is an observer member.

Facilitating Talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan

As a member of the HoA-IP initiative, Turkey can play a constructive role in facilitating talks between Afghanistan and its immediate neighbors, particularly Pakistan. Ankara has recently attempted to do so by offering to host a trilateral summit between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey on Afghan peace. In the past, too, Turkey has facilitated communication between Kabul and Islamabad, and Afghanistan can tap into the existing potential to actionalise the recent offer, and proactively engage Turkey to play such a role more actively. Given the shared historical, religious and cultural linkages, Turkey has enjoyed good relations with both Afghanistan and Pakistan. In this regard, Turkey has some precedence on which it can build. Since 2007, Turkey has been hosting and facilitating direct communications between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan.²⁵ Each of these meetings had a specific theme, such as economic cooperation, security issues and education activities.²⁶ Ankara has played a crucial role in encouraging the two countries to at least directly communicate and share their concerns and perspectives. As Karen Kaya flags in her 2013 analysis, at the 2009 security summit, military and intelligence chiefs from Afghanistan and Pakistan met for the very first time at the same table.²⁷

Meanwhile, of the trilateral summits that have taken place so far, the fifth summit (2010) has been the most successful achievement where both countries agreed to conduct joint military operations to fight against terrorism in urban terrain.²⁸ Consequently, both countries expressed their gratitude to Turkey's contributions as a mediator. Recently, on 4 January 2019, after the first visit of Pakistan's newly elected Prime Minister, Imran Khan, to Ankara, where he met Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the two countries agreed to hold a trilateral summit in Istanbul with the Afghan government in an

25. Kardas, Saban. "Turkey's regional approach in Afghanistan: A civilian power in action". Center for Strategic Research, April, 2013. http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/SAM_paper_ing_06_int.pdf

26. Karacasulu, Nilufer. "Reconstruction of Afghanistan and the Role of Turkey". Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian studies, 2010. <http://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex-1423910525.pdf>

27. Kaya, Karen. "Turkey's role in Afghanistan and Afghan Stabilization." Military Review, July-August, 2013. https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/Military_Review_20130831_art007.pdf

28. Ibid.

effort of bring peace and stability in Afghanistan.²⁹ However, there is no guarantee that the upcoming summit would produce tangible, measurable results towards addressing the ongoing conflict between the neighbors.

Turkey's Role in the Afghan Peace Process

Along with its efforts to encourage talks between the Afghan and Pakistani governments, Turkey also possesses a potential ability to facilitate peace talks between the Taliban and Afghan government. In so doing, Turkey can use its ties with the Taliban; the joint platforms in which Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan are members; as well as its diverse and strategic relationship with Pakistan which includes arms supplies (Turkey is one of Pakistan's biggest arms suppliers).

With regard to the Ankara-Taliban relationship, two events, among others, suggest that Turkey enjoys good relations with the Taliban. First, when Motasim Agha Jan, a senior Taliban leader, was wounded in an assassination attack in Pakistan in 2010, Turkey offered him refuge and the Taliban leader accepted the offer.³⁰ In 2012, Turkey announced that it was ready to host a Taliban office in Ankara.³¹ Therefore, Turkey can use these channels and existing relations with the Taliban to support the Afghan peace process. Why Ankara has not yet done so remains unclear, but nonetheless, the Afghan government can harness this potential.

In so far, the Taliban have repeatedly refused to negotiate directly with the Afghan government because they view it as a foreign-imposed regime.³² However, though direct negotiations between the Taliban and the U.S. have been ongoing since July 2018, one cannot expect that these talks will convince the Taliban to accept the legitimacy of the Afghan government.

29. "Turkey to Host Trilateral Meeting on Afghan Peace." Tolo News January 5, 2019. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/turkey-host-trilateral-meeting-afghan-peace>

30. Sayed Sallahuddin. "Senior Taliban leader Motasim freed by UAE, returns to Kabul to help Afghan negotiations." The Washington Post, April 21, 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/senior-taliban-leader-motasim-freed-by-uae-returns-to-kabul-to-help-afghan-negotiations/2014/04/21/e270268c-c982-11e3-93eb-6c0037dde2ad_story.html?utm_term=.3112210a0ee2

31. "Turkey to Allow Taliban Office in Ankara." Tolo News, December 12, 2012. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/turkey-allow-taliban-office-ankara>

32. Extended US-Taliban peace talks in Qatar raise Afghan hopes." Aljazeera English, January 24, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/extended-taliban-peace-talks-qatar-raise-afghan-hopes-190124144710617.html>

Given Turkey's close relations with Pakistan and its ability to contribute towards preparing the ground for peaceful and direct talks between both countries, Ankara could encourage Pakistan to place pressure on the Taliban for peace talks with the Afghan government. In doing so, Turkey can use three platforms that Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan are members of: the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), the HoA–IP, and the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation.

It is worth mentioning that Turkey is the second largest arms supplier to Pakistan after China,³³ and this gives Turkey a degree of leverage over Pakistan. Additionally, Turkey could also play a role similar to that of Qatar's by offering a political office for the Taliban in Ankara as it offered during a meeting with former Afghan President, Hamid Karzai, in 2012.³⁴

Conclusion

In short, Turkey has always been a friendly political ally of Afghanistan since the early years of the 20th century and has made remarkable contributions towards Afghanistan's security and stability through its educational, military, economic and mediatory support in the 21st century. Turkey's training of Afghan cadets and its development assistance to Afghanistan are clear examples. Turkey is also host to a large number of Afghans studying in Turkish universities and a substantial number of laborers and both Afghan immigrants (legal and illegal) and asylum seekers live in the country.

At present, the Afghan peace process is in dire need of regional and international support and cooperation. In this regard, Turkey occupies an interesting position and holds a potential to support the process for three reasons. It is member to at least three regional platforms, i.e. OIC, the HoA–IP and the Kabul Process, and these platforms can be used to facilitate cooperation and consensus on the Afghan peace process. Moreover, Turkey enjoys good relations with the Taliban and Pakistan,

33. Sabena Siddiqui. "Turkey, Pakistan upgrade strategic partnership." *Asia Times*, May 17, 2019. <https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/05/opinion/turkey-pakistan-upgrade-strategic-partnership/>

34. "Turkey to Allow Taliban Office in Ankara." *Tolo News*, December 12, 2012. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/turkey-allow-taliban-office-ankara>

two important parties to the Afghan conflict. Furthermore, Turkey's effort in facilitating direct talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan and seeking opportunities for encouraging Taliban for negotiations with Afghan government is essential at the moment when Afghanistan is feverishly pursuing its quest for peace and stability in the country.

Policy Recommendations

- As explained above, the HoA-IP has been less successful, mainly in terms of building a regional consensus for bringing peace in Afghanistan. As highlighted, the conflicting geopolitical interests of some participant states have been the main reason behind this failure. However, the HoA-IP can also be used as a platform for discussion and negotiations on geopolitical issues. For example, the Durand Line issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan can only get resolved once a discussion on the matter becomes possible between the two states. Using its good relations with both countries, Turkey can encourage the two to at least begin initial talks and conversations on the Durand Line issue in order to facilitate exchange of perspectives, demands and sentiments.
- The government of Turkey announced that the country will host a trilateral summit for bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan. This was set to take place after the March 2019 election in Turkey. However, as of June 2019, the interaction has not taken place. For the two countries to establish a good relationship, such direct talks are essential. Therefore, Kabul must engage closely with Ankara to ensure that more active efforts are taken towards making such interactions possible.
- The government of Afghanistan should enhance its existing good relations with Turkey. However, there exists a view that although Turkey and Afghanistan share friendly relations, Ankara's relationship with Islamabad is closer than that of Kabul and Ankara. In order to empower the prevailing friendliness in Kabul-Ankara bilateral relations, the government of Afghanistan should increase its interactions with Turkey. For example, the Afghan government can

increase its diplomatic visits to Ankara and invite investments from Turkish companies in varied sectors in Afghanistan.

- Given Turkey's close relations with Pakistan and its ability to prepare the ground for peaceful and direct talks between both countries, Ankara should, in consultation with the Afghan government, encourage Pakistan to place pressure on the Taliban for peace talks with the Afghan government. In doing so, Turkey can use three platforms that Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan are members to: the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), the HoA–IP, and the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation.

BOOK REVIEW

‘An Essential Primer on the Afghan War Post 11 September 2001’

SAMINA ANSARI¹

Title: Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America’s Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001-2016

Author: Steve Coll

Publisher: Penguin Press

Year: 2018

Steve Coll’s *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America’s Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001–2016* attempts to cover every national, regional, and international actor and their role in systematic and unsystematic events in Afghanistan and its neighborhood, leading up to the peace process currently underway with Taliban. This book is a follow up to Coll’s *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (2004) which won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction.

Directorate S begins with the death of Afghanistan’s national hero, Ahmad Shah Massoud, and the events that followed in the aftermath of his assassination. The title of this book, *Directorate S*, refers to the bureaucracy of Pakistan’s apex spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). As the book progresses, the author guides the reader through Afghanistan, Pakistan,

1. Samina Ansari is the Head of the Silk Road Cultural Initiative at Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Afghanistan.

and regional countries' missions in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as those of the U.S. and European states, deftly ensuring that the reader does not lose track of the actors and events.

In Afghanistan, the CIA did not act in a one-sided manner in intelligence collection. Actors from Pakistan and Afghanistan were partly encouraged, and some volunteered, to collaborate on intelligence gathering and network contribution from Afghan and Pakistani soil post the 9/11 attacks in the U.S.; and a majority of these actors had little or no background in the trade they became involved in.

The author has been generous and meticulous with details, and the reader can easily become engrossed in conversations between CIA agents, American, Afghan and Pakistani government officials as well as local actors in Kabul. In fact, the extent of details Coll puts forth could cause an uninitiated reader to wonder whether Coll himself had been part of the CIA. For instance, his descriptions of top-secret conversations at the Pentagon in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks among national security agency officials deciding between prioritizing human security and national security – in which the officials leaned towards the latter – are vivid and engaging. Other instances, among the many, which stand out, include U.S. President, George Bush's, phone conversation as he discusses Pakistan's role in the Afghan conflict with the U.S.'s ambassador to Pakistan, Wendy Chamberlin.

It is highly impressive how every 'person of interest' in the Afghan war has a dedicated character sketch in the book, and in every such chapter, the main characters are presented with the charisma and voice of their own as the author takes us from the 2001 to 2016. Today, some of those very persons are present at roundtable discussions on the current peace process with the Taliban as well as in the upcoming Afghan presidential election. It prompts one surmise that actors of war do not change, and that power has and will always have the same name, how much ever longer the hair or greyer the beard.

One such character sketch is that of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad's or 'Mr. Big'. Coll's description of 'Mr. Big', his background, reason and role are both contradictory and complementary to the man leading the ongoing U.S. negotiations with the Taliban. If one should ever get confused about his

intentions, this book will remind them, the U.S., and the Afghan people of ‘Mr. Big’s’ motivation to remain in awe of himself and his personal interests.

Afghanistan’s first President in the post-2001 period, Hamid Karzai, is another figure on whom Coll has elaborated. His character sketch presents the now former president’s humility and charm as well as traces his mood shifts and paranoia as they kicked in over the course of his presidency.

Certainly a piece of work with heaps of testosterone in its contents, a smaller section of the book is dedicated to the female actors. Pakistan’s former Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, is one of them, but her conduct reflects stereotyped masculinity and bravery. Even the moments leading up to her assassination is described, leaving room for speculation regarding her assassin and his motivation.

It is important to mention, however, that at the time of writing *Directorate S*, Coll was potentially unaware of the potential political situation in Afghanistan post the 2018-2019 period. However, the book will guide the reader through the series of events and their contexts up until the current peace talks began, and the presidential election. Despite the length of the book, any reader, irrespective of their background, will gain a deeper understanding of the conflict in Afghanistan as well as of the roles of the actors involved. Through his narrative and detail, Coll manages to bring the reader into the room and provides them a seat at the table, to listen, observe, feel the tension, and even laugh. The latter will mostly rest in the description of the characters, and their habits. Overall, one will learn that this war involved little sophisticated planning, random candidate selection, and a crash course on war games. Meanwhile, Pakistan as usual was at the top the game, while the rest were occupied with crisis management—a state-of-affairs which continues till date.

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Editorial

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