

Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia

Afghanistan's Role

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Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns in South Asia: Afghanistan's Role

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This background paper was prepared as part of a study of U.S. strategic concerns in South Asia and the regional dynamics and priorities that are likely to influence U.S. policy there between 2014 and 2026. It is one of 10 such papers covering the relevant internal dynamics, trends, relationships, and scenarios in China, Iran, the Gulf States, Central Asia, Russia, Turkey, Europe, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The final report, South Asia Regional Dynamics and Strategic Concerns: A Framework for U.S. Policy and Strategy in South Asia, 2014–2026, by Robert D. Lamb, Sadika Hameed, and Kathryn Mixon, is available at <http://c3.csis.org> and includes a framework on which the United States may base the development of policies and strategy in South Asia over the next 12 years.

Afghanistan's Relations with the United States

The United States' principal interest in Afghanistan is to prevent the country from again becoming a terrorist safe haven. Operationally this strategy has entailed an effort to prevent state failure through building a legitimate Afghan state apparatus, training the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), catalyzing development, and dismantling al Qaeda.² Current U.S. economic troubles make many skeptical that the United States will be willing to devote the necessary resources over the next ten years to make this long-term, state-building strategy work.³ The United States has other pressing geopolitical concerns, making an open-ended commitment to Afghan state building against U.S. interests.⁴ While recognizing this, the United States does need a secure environment in Afghanistan so that it can station troops there, train Afghan forces, and continue to take action against terrorist elements in Afghanistan and Pakistan. U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan is in both countries' interests.⁵ The United States may be forced to support certain factional groups over others to achieve its interests in the future.⁶

¹ The authors wish to thank Candace Carp for feedback on early drafts of this background paper but take full responsibility for its content.

² Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, June 25, 2013, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>.

³ Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), "The International Community's Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014," 2011, p. 2, http://aan-afghanistan.com/uploads/200111201-AAN_Beyond_2014.pdf; Marvin G.

Weinbaum, "Afghanistan and its Neighbors: An Ever Dangerous Threat," USIP, June 2006, <http://dspace.cigilibrary.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/15076/1/Afghanistan%20and%20Its%20Neighbors%20An%20Ever%20Dangerous%20Neighborhood.pdf?1>; National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* (Washington, D.C.: National Intelligence Council, December 2012), p. 99,

<http://globaltrends2030.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/global-trends-2030-november2012.pdf>.

⁴ Nikolas Gvosdev, "The Realist Prism: Putting U.S. Interests Ahead of Karzai," *World Politics Review*, March 13, 2013. <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12793/the-realist-prism-putting-u-s-interests-ahead-of-karzai-in-afghanistan>.

⁵ "Zero Option' Not in U.S.-Afghan Interest: American Envoy," *The Express Tribune*, July 23, 2013. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/581041/zero-option-not-in-us-afghan-interest-american-envoy/>; AAN, "The International Community's Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014," pp. 2, 4.

⁶ This section treats the Afghan government as if it is a unitary actor, although in reality there are many different factional interests in Afghanistan, and what Lamb calls a "hybrid" political order of state-nonstate governance. The United States may choose to support certain factions or groups that do not support terrorist

The Afghan state will aim to ensure that U.S. development assistance remains at steady levels post-2014 and that the United States will continue to provide training support to the ANSF.⁷ If there is a severe drop in funding, the Afghan state in its present construct may not be able to maintain itself.⁸

Internal Trends and Dynamics

There are many internal factors in Afghanistan that could affect stability from 2014 to 2026. The first factor is ethno-political relations between Afghanistan's major ethnic groups. A breakdown in ethnic relations could lead to collapse of government and increased violence that could lead to civil war. It could also provoke increased interference by Afghanistan's neighbors and create opportunities for terrorist organizations to operate in a more chaotic and ungoverned Afghanistan.⁹ Increased conflict between Afghanistan's myriad factional warlords could also turn into a broader ethnic war.¹⁰

Governance, rule of law, and democracy must improve in Afghanistan the government's legitimacy will continue to plummet, the insurgency will be strengthened, and peace negotiations will be more difficult.¹¹ The outcome of peace negotiations with the Taliban is a prominent determining factor for stability in Afghanistan.¹² If there is no reconciliation, there is a chance that a weakened ANSF will face a battle-hardened insurgency.¹³ Factional warlords could remobilize their militias and fight the Taliban directly if the ANSF fails.

The backdrop to all these factors is Afghanistan's failing economy. Given that foreign aid makes up more than 95 percent of Afghanistan's GDP and supports 2/3 of the government's budget, 2014–2026 is a critical timeframe. It is imperative that Afghanistan increase its domestic capacity to generate licit livelihoods and government revenue, or it may face collapse, civil war, and even more reliance on opium.¹⁴ Additionally, Afghanistan's rapidly growing population will put stress on resources, require education,

groups, are more amenable to U.S. interests, or are more capable of maintaining stability, while trying to minimize "malign actors." Robert D. Lamb with Brooke Shawn, *Political Governance and Strategy in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: CSIS, April 2012), http://csis.org/files/publication/120426_Lamb_PolGovernanceAfgha_Web.pdf; AAN, "The International Community's Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014," p. 2.

⁷ AAN, "The International Community's Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014," p. 2.

⁸ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," p. 58.

⁹ Ahmed Rashid, "Afghanistan after the War: Is Peace Possible?" *The New Republic*, March 28, 2013, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112680/afghanistan-after-war#>.

¹⁰ AAN, "The International Community's Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014," pp. 8-9.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 3; Citha Maass and Thomas Ruttig, "Is Afghanistan on the Brink of a New Civil War? Possible Scenarios and Influencing Factors in the Transition Process," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, August 2011, http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2011C21_mss_rtg_ks.pdf; Rashid, "Afghanistan after the War"; Julius Cavendish, "In Afghanistan War, Government Corruption Bigger Threat Than Taliban," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 12, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/2010/0412/In-Afghanistan-war-government-corruption-bigger-threat-than-Taliban>; Katzman, "Afghanistan: Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy"; Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance," Congressional Research Service, May 23, 2013, <http://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=737545>.

¹² Rashid, "Afghanistan after the War."

¹³ Rod Nordland, "Afghan Forces Struggle as U.S. Weans Them Off Support," *New York Times*, June 18, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/18/world/middleeast/afghan-forces-struggle-as-us-weans-them-off-support.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

¹⁴ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," p. 58; AAN, "The International Community's Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014."

and need a growing economy to participate in. It is estimated that Afghanistan's population will increase from 30 million to 47 million by 2024.¹⁵

Last, there will be serious environmental stressors on Afghan society from 2014-2026. The country is predicted to experience significant water stress from climate change.¹⁶ Increasing water scarcity in Afghanistan will drag down economic growth, harm food security, and lead to tense relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors.¹⁷

Key Influencers

Key influencers in Afghan affairs from 2014 to 2026 will be the large ethnic blocs and the personalities that have the ability to mobilize members of these groups. The most influential Afghan ethnic groups include the Pashtuns (42 percent), Tajiks (25 percent), Hazara (10 percent), and Uzbeks (10 percent). These groups have historically been suspicious of one another and fought against each other during the 1990s. The balance of power between these groups' leaders will be essential for maintaining peace. There is already significant dispute over national government structure between the ethnic minorities of the former Northern Alliance and the majority Pashtun group.¹⁸ Ethnic minorities are also afraid that the Pashtun-dominated Taliban will cut a deal with the Afghan president and leave them out of the government power structure and possibly return to past abuses.¹⁹ Northern Alliance warlords are now rich and powerful, and have the military and economic means to challenge both the government and the Taliban if they see their interests threatened. 70 percent of the officers in the Afghan National Army are also Tajik, and the last two of three defense ministers have been Tajik.²⁰ In the case of growing ethnic tension, it is entirely possible that the ANSF could split along factional and ethnic lines.²¹

These ethnic groups are also particularly important because of the outside powers that have historically supported them.²² Saudi Arabia competed with Iran for influence in Afghanistan during the 1990s by supporting Pashtun groups, including the Taliban. Iran has continually supported the Hazara, and India and Russia supported the Northern Alliance, which included Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazara. Ethnic group ties to foreign powers make Afghan conflict susceptible to being internationalized. Intra-ethnic group rivalry is also a concern, and it is possible that this kind of conflict will occur, especially in the

¹⁵ Ludger Kuehnhardt, "Transition in Afghanistan: Potential and Constraints," World Security Network, July 14, 2013, <http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/Afghanistan/Kuehnhardt-Prof.-Dr.-Ludger/Transition-in-Afghanistan-Potential-and-Constraints>.

¹⁶ Matthew Savage et al., "Socio-Economic Impacts of Climate Change in Afghanistan: Executive Summary," Stockholm Environment Institute, pp. 5-7, http://www.necsi.edu/afghanistan/pdf_data/2007447_AfghanCC_ExS_09MAR09.pdf; Sharif Amiry, "Afghanistan Will Not Cope with Climate Change: Karzai," *Tolo News*, January 30, 2013, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/9246-afghanistan-will-not-cope-with-climate-change-karzai>.

¹⁷ Savage et al., "Socio-Economic Impacts of Climate Change in Afghanistan," pp. 5-7; Fatemeh Aman, "Afghan Water Infrastructure Threatens Iran, Regional Stability," *Al-Monitor*, January 7, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/01/afghanwatershortageiranpakistan.html>; National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030*, p. 61.

¹⁸ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance," pp. 7-8.

¹⁹ Ben Farmer, "Afghan warlords prepare to rearm as Taliban arrive for peace talks in Kabul," *The Telegraph*, October 24, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/8082845/Afghan-warlords-prepare-to-rearm-as-Taliban-arrive-for-peace-talks-in-Kabul.html>.

²⁰ William Dalrymple, "A Deadly Triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan, & India," Brookings Institution, June 25, 2013, p. 11, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2013/deadly-triangle-afghanistan-pakistan-india-c>.

²¹ AAN, "The International Community's Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014," p. 4.

²² Katzman, "Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance," p. 4.

Pashtun group. The former Northern Alliance could also experience infighting, as it did before the Taliban rose to power in 1996.²³

<p>Tajik Leaders: Abdullah Abdullah, Muhammad Nour Atta, Mohammed Qasim Fahim, Ismail Khan, Ahmed Zia Masood, Bismillah Khan Muhammadi, Mohammad Younis Qanooni, Amrullah Saleh</p>	<p>Pashtun Leaders (non-Taliban): Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, Tadj Ayubi, President Hamid Karzai, Qayum Karzai, Asadullah Khalid, Abdul Karim Kurram, Ghulam Mujtaba Patang, Ghul Agha Shirzai, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, Matiullah Khan</p> <p>Pashtun Leaders (Insurgent): Mullah Muhammad Umar, Mullah Abdul Qayyum Zakir, Jalaluddin Haqqani and sons, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar</p>
<p>Uzbek Leaders: Rashid Dostum</p>	<p>Hazara Leaders: Karim Khalili, Haji Mohammed Mohaqiq</p>

Afghanistan’s warlords and diffuse military-patronage networks present a challenge to democracy, broad based economic development, good governance, and peace over the next decade.²⁴ In 2005 when the UN DDR program ended, there were 1,800 different armed groups in Afghanistan; many of those armed groups were not barred from having candidates run in the 2005 and 2010 elections. Leaders of these groups are involved in every aspect of Afghan society: illicit drug trafficking, business, corruption, governance, and politics.²⁵ While many of these actors may have an interest in peace to protect their economic assets, shrinking foreign aid and resources after 2014 may encourage power struggles that turn violent.²⁶ Remaining aid will be delegated by the Afghan government after 2014, further perpetuating old habits: Afghan warlords have, for years, channeled resources to narrow constituencies.²⁷

Negotiations with the Afghan Taliban will determine the future political arrangement in Afghanistan. The original Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, has the most potential to broker a political deal.²⁸ The Taliban leadership on the ground has, however, recently undergone change. A new generation of younger Taliban leaders who are generally more radical and less willing to negotiate than the elder generation of Taliban has taken power on the ground.²⁹ The insurgency is also becoming more diffuse because of popular anger against government abuses.³⁰ Powerful anti-Taliban political

²³ Patricia Grossman and Sari Kouvo, “Tell Us How This Ends: Transnational Justice and Prospects for Peace in Afghanistan,” AAN, February 2013, p. 9, http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/2013-06_AAN_TransitionalJustice2.pdf.

²⁴ AAN, “The International Community’s Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014,” pp. 4, 8–13; Grossman and Kouvo, “Tell Us How This Ends,” pp. 14–19, 24–28.

²⁵ Grossman and Kouvo, “Tell Us How This Ends,” p. 15.

²⁶ ODA and contractor services; AAN, “The International Community’s Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014,” p. 8–9.

²⁷ AAN, “The International Community’s Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014,” pp. 4, 8–9, 12–13.

²⁸ Katzman, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy”; AAN, “The International Community’s Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014,” p. 16.

²⁹ Mullah Abdul Qayyum Zakir, the top Taliban military commander on the ground, is an example. Katzman, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy.”

³⁰ AAN, “The International Community’s Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014,” p. 16.

groups will be of critical importance to the success of any political settlement in Afghanistan.³¹

The Haqqani Network insurgent group is allied with the Taliban and has carried out numerous attacks in Afghanistan over the last several years. It is purported to be in close connection with the Pakistani Inter-Services-Intelligence (ISI) agency, which might see the Haqqani Network as a means to influence any Afghan political settlement. The Network has signaled that it will join negotiations if Mullah Umar decides to participate. The group is also believed to be close to al Qaeda, although al Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan is limited.³²

Regional Relations

Relations with Pakistan

Pakistan has several interests that dictate its policy toward Afghanistan. Pakistan's principle interests are to have a government in Afghanistan that is not in alliance with India and not strong enough to challenge Pakistan over the Durand Line.³³ This fear of "encirclement" and strong desire for strategic depth has driven Pakistan to support the Taliban and other militant groups in Afghanistan that are not connected to India and are conciliatory toward Pakistan's interests.³⁴ Pashtun nationalism runs deep in Afghanistan, which makes border issues a perennial source of tension between the two countries.³⁵ Pakistan continues to offer support to the Taliban, militant Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin, and the Haqqani network, which all continue to fight the Afghan government.³⁶ Safe havens for these groups have been recognized as one of the main threats to Afghanistan's stability.³⁷ Pakistan will continue to support these groups to gain leverage against India in Afghanistan, and may escalate support if Indian influence in Afghanistan increases.

Water scarcity in South Asia is likely to be a stressor for the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship in the future. Pakistan relies on water flowing from Afghanistan, and is expected to experience greater water stress from 2014 to 2026.³⁸ This may mean Pakistan will attempt to sabotage Afghan efforts to build dams, add additional storage capacity, and increase their water use in the future. Afghanistan's growing population will need additional water per capita as well, and is predicted to experience significant water stress from 2014 to 2026.³⁹ Water issues will exacerbate relations between the two states, and may lead to increasingly hostile relations without a sustainable water agreement.

³¹ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy"; AAN, "The International Community's Engagement in Afghanistan Beyond 2014," p. 17.

³² Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy."

³³ Truman National Security Project, *Truman Security Briefing Book*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: Truman National Security Project, 2013), pp. 83–98, <http://trumanproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/TSBB-Complete-Book-FINAL.pdf>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ In May 2013, Afghan and Pakistani border forces traded fire and there were several casualties. This event prompted President Karzai to declare that no Afghan government would ever recognize the Durand line, and thousands protested against Pakistan in Kabul. Eltaf Najafizada, "Clashes Resume Along Afghan-Pakistan Border Amid Karzai Protests," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, May 6, 2013, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2013-05-06/clashes-resume-along-afghan-pakistan-border-amid-karzai-protests>.

³⁶ Truman National Security Project, *Truman Security Briefing Book*, pp. 83–98.

³⁷ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy."

³⁸ Aman, "Afghan Water Infrastructure Threatens Iran, Regional Stability"; Mujib Mashal, "What Iran and Pakistan Want from the Afghans: Water," *Time World*, December 2, 2012, <http://world.time.com/2012/12/02/what-iran-and-pakistan-want-from-the-afghans-water/>.

³⁹ Savage et al., "Socio-Economic Impacts of Climate Change in Afghanistan," pp. 5–7; Aman, "Afghan Water Infrastructure Threatens Iran, Regional Stability"; Mashal, "What Iran and Pakistan Want from the Afghans."

Relations with India

India is now a large donor to Afghanistan and has contributed substantially to the country's infrastructure, health, transportation, and security.⁴⁰ However, India and Afghanistan have not always had close relations, and India never recognized the Taliban regime.⁴¹ After the 2001 U.S. intervention toppled the Taliban, relations shifted and India again became allies with Afghanistan.⁴² When President Hamid Karzai came to power, India reopened its embassy and greatly increased its foreign assistance to the country.⁴³ Afghanistan and India share greatest concern over their common neighbor, Pakistan, and both could strongly benefit from strategic cooperation to reduce cross border conflict. Mutual suspicion of Pakistan has quickly brought India and Afghanistan together as allies: a 2009 poll revealed 74 percent of Afghans view India positively, compared to only 8 percent that view Pakistan positively.⁴⁴ In May 2012 India and Afghanistan created the Strategic Partnership Council and one year later India announced it would increase economic and military assistance to Afghanistan.⁴⁵ The exact role India will play in a post-2014 Afghanistan is unknown; however, its increasing foreign assistance and strategic partnership deals could provide evidence for continued competition with Pakistan and other regional players over influence and access to the country's resources.⁴⁶ India has already sought to reorganize elements of the former Northern Alliance for a post-2014 Afghanistan, and is tacitly partnering with Iran to limit Pakistan's leverage over Afghanistan's economy by constructing roads to connect the Iranian port of Chahbahar to Afghanistan.⁴⁷ This is also an attempt by India to gain access to Central Asia without having to go through Pakistan.

Other Relationships

Afghanistan-Iran

Iran's interests in Afghanistan are diverse. Iran has a particular desire to maintain influence in western Afghanistan and aid Afghanistan's Shiite Hazara minority.⁴⁸ Some analysts believe that Iran has the ability to sway a large proportion of western Afghans.⁴⁹ Iran will continue to promote stability in the West and attempt to limit the flow of narcotics and refugees from Afghanistan into Iran.⁵⁰ It is unlikely that Iran wants a Taliban resurgence of power, and is only supporting Taliban militants as a means to thwart U.S. interests and bleed U.S. forces.⁵¹

⁴⁰ Dalrymple, "A Deadly Triangle," p. 28.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 14–15.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 21–22, 29.

⁴⁵ Robert M. Shelala II, Nori Kasting, and Anthony H. Cordesman, *U.S. and Iranian Strategic Competition: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Central Asia* (Washington, DC: CSIS, June 2013), p. 22, <http://csis.org/publication/us-and-iranian-strategic-competition-afghanistan-pakistan-india-and-central-asia>.

⁴⁶ Dalrymple, "A Deadly Triangle," pp. 33, 45.

⁴⁷ Jayanth Jacob, "India Shuffles its Northern Card," *The Hindustan Times*, August 9, 2010, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/India-shuffles-its-Northern-card/Article1-584429.aspx>.

⁴⁸ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy."

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

⁵⁰ Mohsen Milani, "The Iran Primer: Iran and Afghanistan," USIP, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-afghanistan>; Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy."

⁵¹ Shelala et al., *U.S. and Iranian Strategic Competition: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Central Asia*, p. 22; Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy."

India and Iran share similar goals in Afghanistan and would like to see Afghanistan stabilize rather than collapse.⁵² Both India and Iran supported the Northern alliance during Taliban rule, and would benefit from stability in Afghanistan.⁵³ Iran currently has positive relations with the Karzai regime, and could play a key role in promoting broader Afghan stability.⁵⁴ In the case of Taliban resurgence, Iran would support both Hazara and former Northern Alliance groups.

Issues over water could spoil positive Afghan-Iranian relations post-2014. Nearing 2030, Iran is expected to enter crisis as its water resources run out and its oil revenues decrease, limiting its ability to make up the difference by importing water.⁵⁵ If U.S. sanctions on Iran continue, Iran may find its oil revenues squeezed even further.⁵⁶ Iran currently relies on water from Afghanistan's Hirmand river, and currently uses up to 70 percent more than it is allowed to by treaty.⁵⁷ Afghans are increasingly suspicious that Iran will attempt to scuttle its attempts to build dams and increase its ability to use water resources. As water scarcity increases in Iran and Afghanistan, Iran may see more value in a weak Afghanistan that does not have the capacity to challenge it on water use. Iran would then seek to undermine Afghan stability and strength.

Afghanistan-Russia

Russia's main interest in Afghanistan lies in curbing Afghanistan's poppy production, as some Afghan elements have facilitated the mass movement of opiate drugs into Russia.⁵⁸ Over the last two decades Russia's young population has become severely afflicted by the heroin trade. This social problem is a priority in Russia, and cheap Afghan poppy, which produces 90 percent of the world's heroin, is seen as one of the main problems.

Russia does not want continued conflict in Afghanistan, which allows the drug economy to thrive, especially in the southeast. To achieve its goals, Russia will focus on getting a ceasefire between the government and Taliban, which would be the first step in curbing poppy cultivation in the southeast. A ceasefire is not guaranteed, though, which means Russian strategy must be flexible after 2014. A Russian strategy will likely include efforts to strengthen the Afghan central government and Afghanistan's licit economy, while also negotiating with local and provincial powerbrokers, including the Taliban, to limit poppy cultivation.⁵⁹

Russia also fears a return of instability and terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan, and would more forcefully act in Afghanistan if these fears began to materialize. Many Chechen militants supported the Taliban, which prompted the Russians to support the Northern Alliance when the Taliban were in power.⁶⁰ Additionally, Central Asian states

⁵² Myra MacDonald, "In scramble for Afghanistan, India looks to Iran," Reuters, July 6, 2012, <http://blogs.reuters.com/pakistan/2010/07/06/in-scramble-for-afghanistan-india-looks-to-iran/>.

⁵³ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy."

⁵⁴ Sharon Behn, "Afghanistan's Neighbors Prepare for Post-2014," Voice of America, December 21, 2012, <http://www.voanews.com/content/afghanistans-neighbors-prepare-for-post-2014/1569789.html>; Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy."

⁵⁵ Barbara Slavin, "NIC Predicts Water Shortage, Oil Glut for Iran in 2030," *Al-Monitor*, December 10, 2012, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/nic-iran-water-oil.html#ixzz2H2WpjnGn>; Aman, "Afghan Water Infrastructure Threatens Iran, Regional Stability."

⁵⁶ Aman, "Afghan Water Infrastructure Threatens Iran, Regional Stability."

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; and Mashal, "What Iran and Pakistan Want from the Afghans."

⁵⁸ Ekaterina Stepanova, "Does Russia Want the West to Succeed in Afghanistan?" PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo no. 61, September 2009, http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm_061.pdf.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," p. 54.

have a clear interest in maintaining stability in the region not only for fear of terrorist safe havens, but also because trade between Afghanistan and Central Asia results in substantial economic benefits.⁶¹ Central Asian states are likely to support Afghan groups with similar ethnic ties if Afghanistan were to enter greater turmoil; however, Central Asian states are heavily dependent on and influenced by Russia and would be reluctant to engage in behavior threatening that relationship.⁶²

Afghanistan-China

China could be a game-changer in Afghanistan. The Chinese are interested in investing in Afghanistan's vast reserve of minerals, oil, and other resources.⁶³ There is also speculation that China is becoming more interested in Afghanistan to check Indian influence and help its ally Pakistan.⁶⁴ At the same time, China is becoming increasingly worried about the growth of Islamic extremism in the region, and would be particularly disturbed if Afghanistan lapsed into more chaos and instability which would foster a safe haven for Islamic militancy.⁶⁵ While China may be interested in checking Indian influence, China and India share a number of goals in Afghanistan that make it likely that China will support stability and possibly use its leverage over Islamabad to force Pakistan to do the same. Both China and India would prefer a stable environment in Afghanistan that promoted investment and access to resources. A strong Chinese presence in Afghanistan could allay Pakistani fears of encirclement, and allow Pakistan to promote less of an extreme policy toward Afghanistan. This could open doors to the kind of regional cooperation on Afghanistan that U.S. and Afghan officials strongly desire. China has a unique ability to promote stability in Afghanistan if it views its interests this way. If competition between China and India ratchets up after 2014, China may have more of an interest in blocking India's access to resources and markets in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan-Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is an important country for tactical reasons. The late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke believed that the Taliban received more funding from Gulf residents than they did from the drug trade.⁶⁶ If Saudi Arabia were to crack down on money flowing out of the country to the Taliban, the insurgency in Afghanistan could be severely weakened. Saudi Arabia might also become an increasingly important player in Afghanistan after the U.S. withdrawal. It may view supporting Afghanistan as a means to check its principle rival, Iran, by creating a friendly government in Kabul. Thus, Saudi Arabia might increasingly support the development of Afghanistan and seek to build its influence there.

Afghanistan-Europe

Many NATO European nations do not have popular support for continued operations in Afghanistan, and do not have the same interests as the United States. NATO contributors will remain important, though, as the United States pulls out most of its soldiers. The EU NATO contingent is going to act as a force multiplier for the post-2014 U.S. effort. NATO

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁶² CSIS roundtable, Washington, DC, July 18, 2013.

⁶³ Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," p. 50.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 54.

countries other than the United States will provide limited training and financial support for Afghanistan after 2014.

Conflict Scenarios

Scenario: India-Pakistan Instability

The Karzai administration has sought to use India for Afghanistan's interests while also playing up ties to Pakistan to avoid angering its neighbor. This follows traditional Afghan foreign policy which has sought to play larger powers off each other for Afghanistan's benefit. Recently President Karzai attempted to allay Pakistani fears by stating that Afghanistan would stand by Pakistan in the event of a Pakistan-Indian conflict. Kabul supported Pakistan in both 1965 and 1971 when India and Pakistan went to war. Afghanistan would have much to lose if it angered Pakistan by supporting India. However, with growing economic and security ties to India, Afghanistan would likely try to maintain its neutrality and reduce its exposure to war.

Afghanistan's response to Indian-Pakistani instability will be partly determined by the political situation in Afghanistan. If there is a political settlement with the Taliban, the Afghan government will have fewer grievances against Pakistan, and would likely maintain a low-profile in an Indo-Pakistan conflict. If Afghanistan still has a virulent insurgency, it might leverage Pakistan's crisis with India to extract concessions. Afghanistan may make moves to control its border with Pakistan and launch attacks against Taliban insurgents, or tie Afghan support for Pakistan to ending safe havens.

Conclusions

The United States is going to be the most important country to Afghanistan's future from 2014 to 2026. U.S. aid to Afghanistan, training, and political support is going to be essential to maintaining stability. Internal factors that should be monitored are: ethno-political relations, the performance of the ANSF, democracy and governance reform, reconciliation efforts with the Taliban, and economic development. If these factors do not improve, Afghanistan will slowly slide into more instability and less political cohesion. Key influencers will be ethnic leadership and the Taliban.. India and Pakistan will obviously be significant; a simmering proxy war threatens to create more violence. Out of all the other countries besides the United States, India, and Pakistan, China holds the most potential to be a game-changer. Because China has commercial, security, and political interests in Afghan stability, it could have a stabilizing effect as it becomes involved in Afghanistan. China's special relationship with Pakistan makes it the only country that could persuade Pakistan to deescalate support for the Taliban. If China became a more important ally to Afghanistan, Pakistan could rest assured that it would not be encircled by India. This could open up the floodgates for more constructive cooperation on Afghanistan between its neighbors.

About the Authors

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