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Library Note

Debate on 14 March: Afghanistan's Regional Relationships

This Library Note provides background reading in advance of the debate to be held on 14 March on:

“Afghanistan's regional relationships and their impact on the long-term future of that country”

Afghanistan lies at the heart of Central Asia. Since the invasion by Western-led forces in 2001, its relationships with its regional neighbours have been mixed: at times characterised by co-operation, at others by competing national interests. This Note explores those relationships in the context of Afghanistan's current security, political and economic situation, focusing particularly on key actors such as Pakistan and efforts to encourage dialogue and co-operation, and examines the potential impact of these regional dynamics on Afghanistan's future stability and prosperity.

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11 March 2013
LLN 2013/006

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Summary of Key Points

- Insurgent groups within Afghanistan remain a threat to the people of Afghanistan and the security of the Afghan territory.
- Levels of violence appear to have decreased in recent years, but it is unclear how sustainable this will prove to be, particularly following the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2014.
- Peace and reconciliation initiatives with the various insurgent groups active within the country are continuing, but are yet to make significant progress. Pakistan in particular is seen as having a vital role in this process.
- Despite advances in development and democratisation, Afghanistan continues to suffer from a weak economy, corruption, and a lack of the rule of law, particularly in rural areas, which have added to instability.
- Even after the withdrawal of ISAF forces, Afghanistan is likely to be dependent on international aid for the foreseeable future.
- Afghanistan's relationships with key regional actors have been mixed and regional initiatives to foster stability and economic co-operation show signs of progress but are yet to deliver tangible results.
- Pakistan is arguably the most important regional influence on Afghanistan's future. There have been considerable tensions between the two countries since 2001, not least as a result of the ability of insurgent groups to find safe haven in the border region between the countries, though there is hope that relations have begun to improve.
- Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UK have recently announced a 'six month push for peace' which will focus on stability, economic development and encouraging the Taliban to enter dialogue.
- Other actors in the region, including India, Iran, the Central Asian states and China, also have the potential to influence Afghanistan's long-term future, yet these regional relationships have proved complex and subject to change.

1. Introduction

Afghanistan lies at the heart of Central Asia. Since the invasion by Western-led forces in 2001, its relationships with its regional neighbours have been mixed: at times characterised by co-operation, at others by competing national interests. Nowhere is this more true than with the regional power arguably most critical to Afghanistan's long-term future, Pakistan, with whom it shares long swathes of its southern and eastern borders. Efforts to tackle the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan in particular, and to maintain its long-term security, are contingent on the two countries being able to work together to tackle the movement of militant groups within the porous border region. Regional dynamics have been central too in efforts to secure the long-term economic future of Afghanistan, to reduce its dependence on international aid, and to ensure that once international troops withdraw in 2014 it remains a sustainable and viable state.



This Note briefly examines the Afghanistan of 2013, including the security situation and the planned timetable for withdrawal of ISAF forces, and its domestic political and economic landscape. The question of how Afghanistan's relationships with its neighbours and regional attempts to foster stability and economic growth may influence its long-term future is then examined. In particular, this Note details the nature of the recent relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, including tensions and efforts to foster co-operation. It also provides a brief summary of the bilateral relationships of Afghanistan with other actors in the region.

2. Afghanistan in 2013

2.1 Security Situation

UN-mandated military operations began in Afghanistan in 2001 with the deployment of the ISAF. Initially led by a 'coalition of the willing' including the United States of America and the United Kingdom, in August 2003 the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) assumed control of the ISAF, and its mandate has been repeatedly extended by the UN Security Council.

Twelve years on from the beginning of those operations, it is widely acknowledged that the threat from insurgent groups to the people of Afghanistan, and to the security of Afghan territory, remains.¹ Attacks on ISAF, Afghan National Security Forces (the ANSF), and civilian targets continue to occur. Concern also remains over the ability of insurgent groups to penetrate into normally quiet provinces and cities, and to conduct high profile attacks in many places.² However, UK ministers argue that the security situation has improved, with 2011 marking the first time since the ISAF mission was expanded in 2006 that year-on-year violence levels decreased.³ This trend was repeated in 2012, with enemy initiated attacks falling for the second consecutive year.⁴

In a recent statement, Phillip Hammond, Secretary of State for Defence, provided an overview of the progress which he argues has been made, and the challenges remaining:

[The combined efforts of the ISAF and Afghan forces] have arrested the momentum of the insurgency, diminished its capability, and weakened its strategic position. But it still represents a threat to the people of Afghanistan and to the security of Afghan territory. ... Our aim in Afghanistan is to build Afghan governance and security to the point where they are resilient in the face of any residual threat from the insurgency, confident in their ability to protect their own citizens and able to deny safe haven to terrorists who seek to use Afghan territory as a base from which to threaten international security. Significant progress is being made across Afghanistan [in these areas].⁵

Other observers have been less optimistic about the decreasing violence levels. Speaking with regard to a report from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which recorded a drop in violence in the first six months of 2012, UN officials cautioned that such reductions were a "hollow trend" and Taliban related action was still responsible for four fifths of the civilian deaths reported.⁶

¹ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013.

² *ibid.* These attacks include the assault on Camp Bastion in September 2012, where insurgents destroyed eight marine harrier jets and engaged in a serious fire fight with base personnel before they were killed.

³ HM Government, *Afghanistan Monthly Progress Report*, December 2011.

⁴ HM Government, *Afghanistan Monthly Progress Report*, November/December 2012.

⁵ HC *Hansard*, 26 April 2012, col 1117.

⁶ House of Commons International Development Committee, *Afghanistan: Development Progress and Prospects after 2014*, HC Paper 403 of session 2012–13, p 15.

Speaking in August 2012, Nicolas Haysom, UN Deputy Special Representative to Afghanistan, said:

The reduction in civilian casualties is welcomed, but these gains are fragile. They do not reflect a move towards a peaceful society. ... This report does not suggest that Afghans are necessarily safer or better protected in their communities. Nor does it suggest any real or concerted attempt by anti-government elements to minimise civilian casualties.⁷

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also said in June 2012 that the security situation had worsened since 2006:

Widespread conflict continues to devastate the life of Afghans in many districts and villages. The threat of civilian casualties, internal displacement, and insufficient medical care, are only some of the challenges. All of them occur against a backdrop of a splintering of armed groups, night raids, air strikes, suicide bombing, and the laying of improvised explosive devices. The expansion of the conflict to previously quiet areas has increased people's difficulties and left whole communities trapped between warring parties. The south, east, north, north-west and central regions are worst affected.⁸

Transition of Security Responsibility

Efforts to combat the threat from insurgent groups in Afghanistan have been taking place against a backdrop of the transition of security responsibility from ISAF to Afghan forces.

In a series of meetings in 2010 culminating in the Lisbon summit in November of that year, NATO agreed a roadmap to gradually hand over security responsibilities to the ANSF by the end of 2014. Cautioning that such a transition should not necessitate a 'rush for the exit' but more 'a move from the lead into a supportive role', in setting the parameters for withdrawal the NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, confirmed that the criteria for deciding on transition would be assessed across all three pillars of the [Afghan National Development Strategy](#): security, governance and development. It was also affirmed, in agreement with the Afghan government, that the transition process would follow the following principles:

- Transition would be a conditions-based process and any recommendations will be based on conditions on the ground.
- Transition would not signify a withdrawal of ISAF forces but a gradual shift to a supporting role as the capabilities of the ANSF developed. As circumstances dictate, the international community's civilian and military representatives would gradually shift toward a supporting, then mentoring, then enabling and finally a sustaining role across all three pillars of security, governance and development.

⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 'Targeted killings in Afghanistan up 53 percent', 8 August 2012.

⁸ International Committee of the Red Cross, *The ICRC in Afghanistan*, 1 June 2012.

- Transition would involve key Afghan institutions and functions as well as geographical areas, and would include the evolution of the ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) towards a mainstream developmental model. ISAF Headquarters would remain even as forces draw down.⁹

The criteria for transition were defined accordingly:

Successful transition of security responsibility requires that ANSF, under effective Afghan civilian control, will be capable of tackling existing and new security challenges, with continued support from ISAF. Transition assessments will also consider the ability and authority of the Afghan government to provide rule of law and manage public administration at sub-national and local levels; and the capacity of an area to sustain socio-economic development. Transition must be irreversible.¹⁰

At NATO's Chicago summit in May 2012 an explicit deadline was agreed for the ISAF combat mission in Afghanistan to end on 31 December 2014, the final declaration from the summit stating:

By mid-2013, all parts of Afghanistan will have begun transition and the Afghan forces will be in the lead for security nation-wide. This will mark an important milestone in the Lisbon roadmap. ISAF is gradually and responsibly drawing down its forces to complete its mission by 31 December 2014.¹¹

In keeping with the timetable set out in the Chicago Declaration, responsibility for security in Afghanistan is currently being transitioned to ANSF. The process began in 2011 and will progress through five stages, finishing in 2014.

At Chicago the shape of the new, NATO-led mission to be put in place post-2014 to train, advise and assist the ANSF was agreed. In order to support the ANSF in meeting its security responsibilities, the international community also pledged at the summit to provide funding to support its continued development in the years after 2014, with a preliminary annual budget of \$4.1 billion providing for an ANSF force of around 228,500.¹²

It is also intended, however, that as the Afghan economy and the revenues of the Afghan government grow, it will fund an increasing proportion of its security costs directly. Beginning with a commitment of at least \$500 million in 2015, it is planned that no later than 2024 Afghanistan will be able to assume full financial responsibility for its own security forces.¹³ The UK government have stated that in the light of this, they expect

⁹ Agreed at the Kabul Conference in July 2010. Source: House of Commons Standard Note, *Afghanistan: The Timetable for Security Transition*, 9 July 2012, p 4.

¹⁰ NATO Factsheet, [NATO's role in Afghanistan](#).

¹¹ Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan Issued by the Heads of State and Government of Afghanistan and Nations contributing to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), NATO, 21 May 2012.

¹² HC *Hansard*, 19 December 2012, col 855.

¹³ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 46.

international donors, during this so-called 'Transformation Decade', will be able to reduce their financial contributions commensurate with the Afghan government taking over financial responsibility.¹⁴

UK Military Deployment in Afghanistan

Individual countries are setting their own withdrawal plans within the framework of the 2014 deadline. The UK, the second largest contributor to the ISAF after the United States, withdrew 500 troops in 2012, leaving 9,000 in place at the beginning of 2013. On 19 December 2012, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, and Phillip Hammond, Secretary of State for Defence, announced that the UK would reduce force levels in Afghanistan by 3,800 in 2013, leaving approximately 5,200 in the country at the end of the year.¹⁵

In his statement, Mr Hammond said that number was based on current UK military advice, and was in line with the NATO strategy agreed at Lisbon and ongoing ISAF planning. This reflected the 'real progress' being made in areas such as Helmand, and was possible because of the success of the ANSF in assuming a lead role:

Across many parts of Afghanistan, security is already delivered by the ANSF. Today, the ANSF has lead security responsibility in areas that are home to three quarters of the population, including each of the 34 provincial capitals and all three districts that make up the UK's area of operations. Across Afghanistan, the ANSF now leads on more than 80 percent of conventional operations and carries out 90 percent of its own training. It sets its own priorities, leads its own planning and conducts and sustains its own operations. By the middle of next year—marking a moment of huge significance for the Afghan people—we expect ANSF to have lead security responsibility for the whole country.¹⁶

All three districts in Task Force Helmand's area of operations have completed or entered the transition process. The latest stage of the transition, Tranche Four, was announced by the Afghan government on 31 December 2012. The twelve provinces added in this tranche are predominately in the north and interior of the country. One district in Helmand (Now Zad) is included in this tranche. The UK government argue that this is a further sign of progress and a reflection of the improving capabilities of the ANSF.¹⁷

The government have been keen to stress, however, that the withdrawal of combat troops will not mean the end of the UK's engagement in Afghanistan. As part of the commitments made at the Chicago summit, the UK agreed to provide an annual contribution of £70 million towards ensuring security in Afghanistan post-2014 (in addition to maintaining development assistance at £178 million per year).¹⁸ At Chicago the UK government also committed to lead the international contribution to the Afghan National Army Officer Academy in Kabul.

¹⁴ HC *Hansard*, 14 January 2013, col 592W.

¹⁵ HC *Hansard*, 19 December 2012, col 854.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ HM Government, *Afghanistan Monthly Progress report*: November and December 2012.

¹⁸ HC *Hansard*, 14 January 2013, col 592W.

Minister Andrew Robathan recently outlined how the UK government see the future role of British forces in Afghanistan:

We envisage the primary role of British forces after 2014 to be assisting, mentoring and teaching at the Afghan National Officer Academy in Qargha outside Kabul. Beyond that, after 2014, we do not envisage any combat troops being involved in what one might describe as face-to-face operations with the enemy; we see them—if at all—in a mentoring capacity only.¹⁹

In response to a recent Parliamentary Question about how the protection for UK personnel engaged at the Afghan National Officer Academy would be provided for, Mr Robathan said:

The Afghan National Officer Academy is being built within the perimeter of an Afghan facility, the perimeter of which will be defended by Afghan troops. Inside this Afghan National Army perimeter, UK personnel based at the Academy will operate from within a coalition force Operating Base where they will be protected by UK or coalition military personnel.²⁰

He added:

The ability to provide force protection will be a key consideration for any additional contribution we may decide to make.²¹

The government have stressed that other than its commitment to the Academy, no final decisions have been made on the UK's post-2014 presence in Afghanistan.²²

Ongoing Security Threats: Who is the Enemy?

A brief overview of the chief insurgent groups active within Afghanistan is provided below, as summarised from analysis by the US Congressional Research Service. Many of these groups operate across the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and are discussed in further detail in section 3.2 on the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan below.

Taliban

The main insurgent faction in Afghanistan remains the Taliban movement, nominally led by Mullah Muhammad Umar. Umar and his subordinates reportedly operate from Pakistan (possibly from the city of Quetta, hence they are often called 'Quetta Shura Taliban').²³ In recent years top aides to Umar and commanders in the group have reportedly been lost to US military action (notably drone strikes, including that which

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ HC *Hansard*, 4 February 2013, col 73W.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

²³ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 24.

killed Mullah Nazir in January 2013)²⁴ and arrests by security forces in Pakistan. Recent estimates have suggested that the Taliban number approximately 20,000 fighters.²⁵ The Pakistani Taliban, though primarily seeking to challenge the government of Pakistan, also supports the Afghan Taliban, and some of its fighters reportedly operate from safe havens in Taliban-controlled areas on the Afghan side of the border.

Al Qaeda

Though thought to be very small in number (possibly comprising as few as 50–100 individuals), Al Qaeda is still thought to retain some presence in eastern Afghanistan. Like the Taliban, they are also thought to be moving back and forth across the border with Pakistan. Following the death of Osama Bin Laden, efforts to tackle Al Qaeda have focused on his ally Ayman al-Zawahiri, named the new leader of Al Qaeda in June 2011, and who is thought to be on the Pakistan side of the border.

Hikmatyar Faction

Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, a former mujahedeen party leader, leads the Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) faction. The HIG is ideologically and politically allied with Al Qaeda and Taliban insurgents, but is widely considered to be amenable to a reconciliation deal with Kabul and the Karzai administration. Talks between Afghan government and HIG representatives have been held on a number of occasions since 2010.²⁶

Haqqani Faction

The 'Haqqani Network', led by Jalaudin Haqqani, another mujahedeen commander, has been labelled by US officials as one of the most significant threats to Afghan security.²⁷ The Haqqani Network reportedly has around 3,000 fighters and supporters. Given the group's apparent propensity to target Indian interests in Afghanistan, US analysts suggest they appear to act as a tool of Pakistani factions. It is this group who claimed responsibility for recent attacks on the Indian and US embassies, and the siege at the Intercontinental hotel in 2011. There is debate as to how amenable the Haqqani Network is to a political settlement with the Afghan government. It is considered less ideological than the Taliban or Al Qaeda; it appears primarily concerned with earning funds through illicit businesses in Pakistan and the Persian Gulf and in controlling parts of Ghost province, which analysts observe could potentially be accommodated as part of a political settlement.²⁸

²⁴ BBC News, '[Pakistani militant Mullah Nazir killed in drone attack](#)', 3 January 2013. Though nominally a member of the Pakistani Taliban, Nazir led a faction which allegedly formed an alliance with the Pakistani government, and predominantly sought to attack ISAF targets inside Afghanistan.

²⁵ BBC News '[Q&A: Foreign forces in Afghanistan](#)' 12 February 2013.

²⁶ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 14.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

Attempts at Dialogue and Reconciliation with the Taliban

The Afghan government, backed by international partners after initial reluctance, have attempted to negotiate with the Taliban to find a lasting peace settlement.²⁹ In September 2010 an “Afghan High Peace Council” was established to oversee the settlement process, with former President and Northern Alliance political leader Burhanuddin Rabbani appointed by President Karzai to lead it, in an apparent effort to gain the support of sceptical Tajiks and other minorities.³⁰ Among other achievements, Rabbani was able to create provincial representative offices of the Council in at least 27 provinces in Afghanistan. As has been subsequently confirmed, discreet talks also took place at that time between US, Taliban and Afghanistan representatives.³¹ However, these efforts were dealt a considerable blow in September 2011 when Rabbani was assassinated by a Taliban infiltrator posing as an intermediary. This, combined with Pakistan’s boycott of the 2011 Bonn conference (discussed below), served to effectively stall much of the progress which had been made.

In December 2011, when tensions from these incidents had abated, efforts continued with plans to open a Taliban political office in Qatar—where Taliban officials are already operating informally—in order to facilitate talks. Disagreements on issues such as the potential transfer of prisoners again served to hinder progress, however, and in March 2012 the Taliban announced a suspension of this dialogue.

Recently however there have been signs that this process might be revived. In January 2013 President Karzai and President Obama issued a joint statement which included the announcement that they would support the establishment of an office in Doha, “for the purposes of negotiations between the High Peace Council and the authorised representatives from the Taliban.”³² That statement called on the armed opposition to join a political process and to take the steps necessary to open a corresponding Taliban office in the Qatari capital. To date such a Taliban office has yet to formally open.³³

The importance of Pakistan in particular to any process of dialogue has been repeatedly underlined. In the past Pakistan has been accused of arresting members of the Taliban who sought to negotiate with Kabul, notably including Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in 2010, because such talks would circumnavigate its influence (particularly that of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI)).³⁴ However, as discussed in greater depth below, a new flexibility on the part of Pakistan and its improving relations with Kabul have led to

²⁹ International fears have centred around a desire not to legitimise the Taliban, or to allow freedoms instituted in the country to be reversed, should insurgent leaders be reincorporated into the political system.

³⁰ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 43.

³¹ Confirmation that the dialogue took place has been provided by former US Secretary of State Robert Gates. Source: Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 44.

³² HM Government *Afghanistan Monthly Progress report*, January 2013.

³³ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

hopes that it wishes to play a more active and constructive role in the reconciliation process.

Attempts have also been made to reintegrate insurgents who can be persuaded to surrender into their communities. They include a formal reintegration plan, drafted by the Afghan government and adopted by a peace *loya jirga* in 2010, which included providing fighters who lay down their arms with jobs, amnesty, protection and an opportunity to be part of the security architecture of their community/local area. This reintegration effort has received formal international backing, with the UK among those who have donated funds to aid this process.³⁵ At the end of 2012 approximately 6,800 fighters had entered the reintegration process.³⁶

Other Security Issues: Capability of ANSF Forces

Despite the confidence expressed in the ANSF and their developing capabilities by NATO politicians, questions have been raised about the ANSF's capability to take on the increased responsibility for security. Problems including high personnel turnover—approximately 35 percent of the force does not re-enlist each year, and so must be replaced—a lack of literacy skills, a lack of resources experienced by many units including weaponry, spare parts and fuel, and skilled maintenance personnel, and a growing number of 'insider attacks', have all provoked concern.³⁷

Insider Attacks

'Insider' or 'Green on Blue' attacks are incidents of assaults on ISAF personnel by Afghan security forces, or those disguised as such. The rising number of such attacks has drawn considerable attention to the threat: in 2007 two ISAF soldiers were killed in such incidents, but by 2012 this number had risen to 60, including 14 Britons.³⁸

William Hague, the Foreign Secretary, said that despite such attacks ISAF forces continued to work well with the ANSF:

Insider attacks remain the exception. The overwhelming majority of our forces work well with their Afghan colleagues. The ANSF are increasingly in the front line in combating the insurgency and they too face the insider threat. We will not allow these terrible incidents to detract from the very real progress which has been, and continues to be, made in Afghanistan. Nor will we let them derail our strategy or our commitment to the mission, while taking steps to reduce the threats to the absolute minimum.³⁹

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.* Most of those reintegrated—around 3,900—are from the north and west of Afghanistan, rather than the more violent south and east.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ BBC News, '[NATO curbs Afghan joint patrols over insider attacks](#)', 18 September 2012; BBC News, '[Afghan insider attacks not harming NATO operations](#)', 15 January 2013.

³⁹ HC *Hansard*, 2 November 2012, col 28WS.

ISAF has also issued a Tactical Directive in March 2012 with specific measures to improve force protection, including close-quarter combat and active shooter training for personnel at increased risk of an insider attack (e.g. mentors) and for coalition force units to create safe zones inside Afghan security force compounds where they can defend themselves if necessary.

2.2 Domestic Context: Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Modern Day Afghanistan, and the Plight of the Afghan Economy

Afghanistan's diverse domestic influences—including those of religion, ethnicity and geography—and its political landscape and attempts to tackle endemic problems such as corruption and an economy weakened by decades of war, will all play an important role in its future after 2014, and in its relationships with regional partners.

Historically, power has been held in Afghanistan by regimes with widely different ideologies. Yet common to many of them has been a weak central governmental structure, unwilling or unable to exert meaningful control or financial/administrative mandates on all of Afghanistan's diverse ethnic communities, or on the 80 percent of the Afghan population who live in rural areas.⁴⁰ Even in present day Afghanistan geographical factors continue to pose a challenge to effective governance. Many communities are separated by mountains and wide expanses, which can take days to reach and require traditional modes of transportation, which also contributes to the difficulties in maintaining security in many remote border regions. The result is that in much of Afghanistan an informal power structure of ethnic, regional, tribal, clan, village and district structures continue to exercise authority at many levels.⁴¹ Ties of family, clan, tribe, village, ethnicity, region and past allegiances are of central importance in Afghan society, despite the political and economic modernisation which has occurred since the fall of the Taliban.

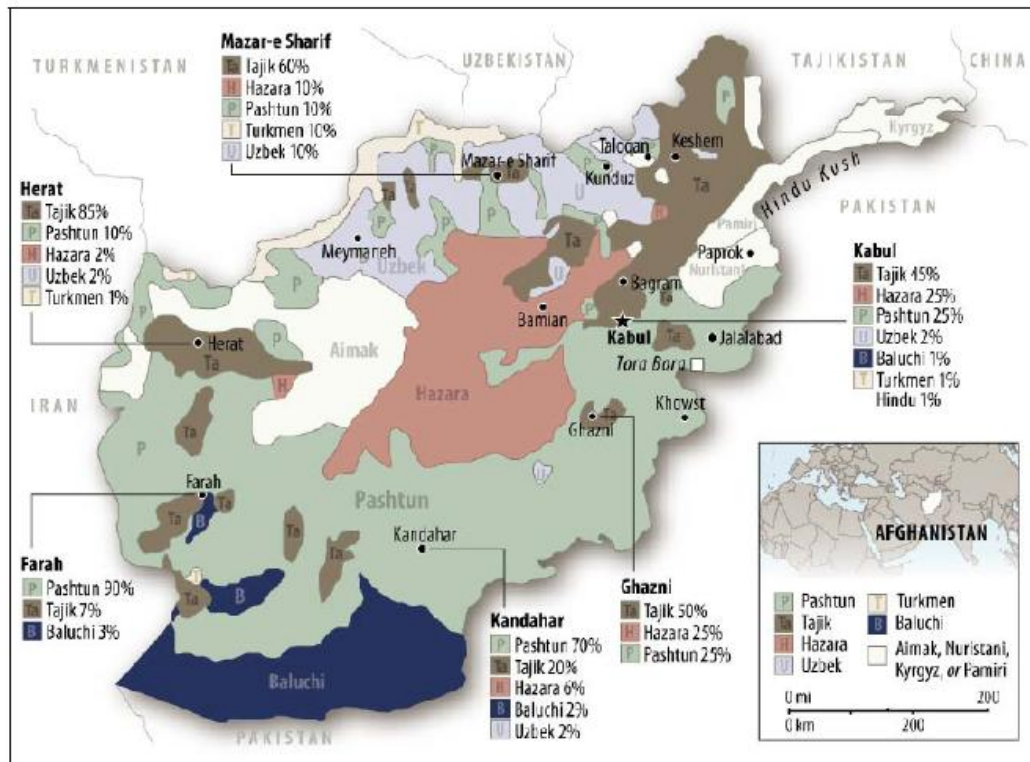
Afghanistan is ethnically diverse. Pashtuns are the largest ethnic community in the country, comprising approximately 42 percent of the population. The current President, Mohammad Karzai, is Pashtun, as are the majority of members of his cabinet and inner advisory circle. However, President Karzai has also been credited by some observers with consulting other communities before issuing decrees or reaching decisions, notably the Tajiks. Forming around 25 percent of the population, the Tajiks are the second most numerous, and arguably thus second most powerful, community in Afghanistan. Like the Pashtun community, Tajiks are predominately Sunni Muslim. Hazaras in contrast, who comprise an estimated 10 percent of the Afghan population, are predominately Shi'a and Persian-speaking. The final sizeable community in Afghanistan are Uzbeks, who also make up approximately 10 percent of the overall population.

⁴⁰ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections and Government Performance*, November 2012.

⁴¹ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 53.

A map of Afghan ethnicities is provided below:

Figure A-2. Map of Afghan Ethnicities



Source: 2003 National Geographic Society. <http://www.afghan-network.net/maps/Afghanistan-Map.pdf>. Adapted by Amber Wilhelm, CRS Graphics.

Notes: This map is intended to be illustrative of the approximate demographic distribution by region of Afghanistan. CRS has no way to confirm exact population distributions.

Though tensions between different ethnic groups still exist, there have been relatively few clashes along ethnic lines since the fall of the Taliban. However, the lack of the rule of law, particularly in rural areas, has led to clashes between local groups, creating insecurity and providing openings for insurgency.⁴²

Political Context

It is against this backdrop that the current Afghan administration, led by President Karzai, attempts to operate. As noted in the recent report by the House of Commons International Development Select Committee, post-Taliban political affiliations have broadly followed ethnic, tribal and regional lines, and the development of political parties has been slow. Afghanistan has also historically lacked democratically elected institutions. A bi-cameral Parliament, consisting of the *Meshrono Jirga* (Upper House) and *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower House) was created after the fall of the Taliban, however, and as noted by the International Development Committee has at times taken a notably hard line toward the

⁴² House of Commons International Development Committee, *Afghanistan: Development Progress and Prospects after 2014* HC Paper 403 of session 2012–13, p17.

administration.⁴³ Civil society in Afghanistan has developed considerably since 2001. However recent crackdowns by the government on media outlets and human rights organisations have dismayed international observers.⁴⁴ Structures of accountability ultimately remain weak, and much of the population are excluded from meaningful democratic participation.

Many of the key challenges are summarised by Cookman and Wadhams from the Centre for American Progress:

The Afghan population currently has few means of expressing dissent regarding policies carried out by the international community and the Karzai government, which operates on a highly centralized patronage model in which power and resources are channeled through Hamid Karzai's personal and political allies. The system lacks the connection, rules, and checks and balances necessary to make leaders truly accountable to the domestic population, which invites corruption, rent-seeking, and a hemorrhaging of domestic legitimacy. Local governmental bodies are the appropriate places for representing Afghans and responding to their needs, but these currently suffer from a lack of capacity, confusion over their roles and authorities, and little legitimacy.⁴⁵

It has been widely recognised that a key component in the future of Afghanistan, post-2014 in particular, will be effective governance and the rule of law. However, the International Development Committee notes that the prospect of security transition has exacerbated Afghanistan's already volatile political landscape.⁴⁶ With Presidential Elections looming in 2014, and no obvious successor to Mohammad Karzai, who has said that he will obey constitutional limits and not seek a third term, key individuals are already positioning themselves and in turn fuelling uncertainty and unpredictability.

Corruption also remains a particularly acute problem in the country, serving to undermine international confidence in the Afghan government.⁴⁷ Already described as 'endemic' by former International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell, there are also signs as reported by the International Development Committee that corruption is becoming an even greater problem in the country: Afghanistan ranked 180 out of 183 on Transparency International's 2011 Corruption Perception Index, in comparison with 117 out of 158 countries in 2005. Recent scandals, particularly that involving the [Kabul Bank](#), have proved particularly high profile and damaging.

In return for development aid pledged at the Tokyo conference in July 2012, Afghanistan has pledged to tackle such corruption. This was welcomed by international donors including the UK, who have highlighted the importance of addressing the issue, and

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Cookman, C and Wadhams, C, [Looking ahead to what we leave behind](#), Centre for American Progress, 2010.

⁴⁶ House of Commons International Development Committee, *Afghanistan: Development Progress and Prospects after 2014* HC Paper 403 of session 2012–13, p 11.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p 12.

improving governance, as part of securing Afghanistan's long-term future stability:

For the value of [the] support from the international community to be fully realised ... the Afghan government will need to address the corruption that remains rampant and could become a very real threat to the long-term stability of Afghanistan. The Afghan government now need to deliver on their commitments through the Tokyo mutual accountability framework to establish a legal framework for fighting corruption, improve economic and financial management and implement key economic and governance reforms, including on elections.⁴⁸

Afghan Economy and its Economic Future

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, with an economy still fragile after decades of warfare. It is one largely dependent on agriculture and rural trade, with around 85 percent of the population reliant on income from agriculture and livestock.⁴⁹ According to the World Bank, donor aid currently accounts for more than 95 percent of Afghanistan's GDP, and though that aid has supported its economic progress since 2001, it is forecast that the country will remain heavily dependent on foreign aid for the foreseeable future.⁵⁰

It has been recognised therefore that while much of Afghanistan's future economic stability depends on its security situation, it also depends on continued financial support from the international community. Identifying sources of post-2014 assistance was the focus of the international conference on Afghanistan in Tokyo in July 2012. In Tokyo, in addition to the \$4.1 billion pledged annually for security forces, donors pledged an additional \$16 billion in aid to Afghanistan to the end of 2015 (\$4 billion per year for 2012–2015).⁵¹ It is hoped that this aid will mitigate the impact of the short-term withdrawal of ISAF forces, and enable economic growth, job creation and development which the World Bank states will be 'central to the decade of transformation [2012–2022] and long-term security for the people of Afghanistan'.⁵²

The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, published in concert with the final conference declaration, lays out requirements for the Afghan government in good governance, anti-corruption, holding free and fair elections, and human rights. Those requirements are incentivised. If Afghanistan meets the benchmarks provided, the Framework will increase the percentage of aid (to 10 percent by 2014 and to 20 percent by 2024) provided through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)—which

⁴⁸ Contribution by Phillip Hammond, Secretary of State for Defence, HC *Hansard*, 19 December 2012, col 855.

⁴⁹ House of Commons International Development Committee, *Afghanistan: Development Progress and Prospects after 2014*, HC Paper 403 of Session 2012–13, p 8.

⁵⁰ BBC News, '[Afghanistan Aid: Donors pledge \\$16 billion at Tokyo meeting](#)', 8 July 2012; the UK International Development Committee recently put this figure at closer to 71 percent however.

⁵¹ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 65. It was also agreed at Tokyo that the international community would sustain support to the end of 2017 at 'levels at, or near, that of the past decade', though the specific amounts of these pledges are yet to be agreed.

⁵² World Bank, [Afghanistan: From Transition to Transformation](#), July 2012.

gives Kabul maximum discretion in the use of donated funds—and other incentive mechanisms.⁵³

3. Afghanistan's Regional Relationships

3.1 A Regional Approach to Stability

Regional co-operation is also widely acknowledged as a crucial factor in determining Afghanistan's fate after 2014, not least for its economic growth and security. Individual relationships between Afghanistan and regional neighbours will be hugely significant, but efforts have also been made to engender co-operation at a regional level, and to promote Afghanistan's integration into regional security and economic organisations and structures.

Istanbul Conference (November 2011)

In November 2011 a conference for Afghanistan's regional neighbours was held in Istanbul. At the summit, Afghanistan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and the United Arab Emirates signed up to the 'Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Co-operation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan'. The final communiqué from the conference declared that the participants shared interests in security, economic, and cultural co-operation, and in the secure, stable and peaceful future of Afghanistan.⁵⁴

The UK was an observer at the conference, and Alistair Burt, Foreign Office Minister, was positive about the progress made:

Today's conference saw regional leaders go further than before in their commitment to work together for a stable and secure Afghanistan in a stable and secure region.

Significantly, regional leaders, supported by international partners, signed up to an "Istanbul Process", ensuring for the first time a framework for taking forward political and security co-operation, and going beyond economic co-operation. They also made commitments to support the Afghan Government in its efforts to promote reconciliation and to tackle terrorism together across the region.

The test will be in the implementation, though the fact that the region could reach agreement on these quite sensitive issues is important.⁵⁵

However, following the conference the views of observers were mixed on whether the Istanbul Process would lead to genuine co-operation among Afghanistan's neighbours.

⁵³ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 65.

⁵⁴ Council on Foreign Relations, [Declaration of the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan](#), 2 November 2011.

⁵⁵ FCO, ['Foreign Office Minister welcomes increased regional cooperation on Afghanistan'](#), press release, 2 November 2011.

Despite a mutual interest in maintaining some kind of order in the country, it was highlighted that many regional actors were already pursuing what they perceived to be in their own interests with regard to Afghanistan.⁵⁶ It was also noted that other regional conferences which preceded Istanbul had produced declarations of co-operation which remained unfulfilled.⁵⁷

Bonn II Conference (December 2011)

The difficulty in achieving such co-operation was underlined at the subsequent conference on Afghanistan in Bonn a month later in December 2011. Marking ten years since the original Bonn conference had brought together international actors to decide the future of Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban government, the 85 countries and 15 international organisations represented at 'Bonn II' pledged their continuing support for the long-term future of Afghanistan post-2014.⁵⁸ The Bonn declaration concluded:

Today in Bonn, we solemnly declare a strategic consensus on deepening and broadening the partnership between Afghanistan and the International Community founded at the Petersberg ten years ago. Building on the shared achievements of the past ten years, and recognising that the security and well-being of Afghanistan continue to affect the security of the entire region and beyond, Afghanistan and the International Community strongly commit to this renewed partnership.⁵⁹

William Hague, the Foreign Secretary, provided the following assessment of the outcome of the summit:

The conference conclusions set out a plan for the international community's long-term engagement with Afghanistan beyond 2014. They included commitments to provide economic support to Afghanistan for the decade after 2014, until Afghanistan becomes economically self-sustainable. The conference also agreed to produce a clear plan for the future structure and funding for the ANSF in advance of the NATO Chicago summit next May. In addition the conclusions set out an agreed set of guiding principles for the reconciliation process and its outcomes. This builds on the recent Traditional *Loya Jirga* in Afghanistan with support for an inclusive, representative peace process.

The Afghan Government committed themselves to make further progress on key development priorities, including governance, anti-corruption and rule of law. The Afghan Government also promised to uphold all their international human rights obligations and to protect women's rights as enshrined in the constitution.

I reinforced the UK's long-term commitment to Afghanistan and the aims of the international community post-2014 including development aid and support for the

⁵⁶ House of Commons Library Standard Note, [Afghan Reconciliation and the Bonn Conference](#), 5 November p 6.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Council on Foreign Relations, [Conference Conclusions: International Conference on Afghanistan](#), December 2011.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

ANSF. I welcomed the political and economic framework agreed at the conference and the importance of regional engagement, building on the successful Istanbul conference in November.⁶⁰

However, the progress which could be made at the conference was hindered significantly as a result of Pakistan's decision not to send high-level representatives. This was a direct response to the US airstrike on 26 November 2011 which mistakenly led to the deaths of 24 Pakistani soldiers at a border checkpoint.⁶¹

Kabul/‘Heart of Asia’ Conference (June 2012)

As a follow-up to the Istanbul declaration, the regional components of Afghan stability post-2014 were discussed at a Kabul ministerial conference on 14 June 2012. Known as the ‘Heart of Asia’ conference, Afghanistan hosted 14 other countries from the region, as well as 14 supporting countries and eleven regional and international organisations.⁶² This time, as a result of improving relations with Afghanistan and the US, Pakistan did attend.

This conference, like Bonn II before it, marked a broadening of the regional approach to peace in Afghanistan. Economic development was placed at the heart of the agenda, and in particular it reinvigorated a plan backed by the US to develop Afghanistan as a Central Asia-South Asia trading hub as part of a ‘New Silk Road’, which it hoped will keep the country stable and economically viable in the future.⁶³ Outlining the strategy at an earlier discussion, Robert D. Hormats, Under Secretary for Economic, Energy and Agricultural Affairs in the US State Department, said:

The basis for the “New Silk Road” vision is that if Afghanistan is firmly embedded in the economic life of the region, it will be better able to attract new investment, benefit from its resource potential, and provide increasing economic opportunity and hope for its people. We also believe that the New Silk Road Initiative will be of particular importance to Pakistan, and can be an important way for Pakistan to further develop its economy and provide jobs for its people. Indeed, we believe the New Silk Road Initiative can provide a critical economic boost for all of Afghanistan’s neighbours.⁶⁴

The US has particularly sought to advance ‘New Silk Road’ programmes which run along a north-south, central-south Asia corridor (thus bypassing Iran to the East). They include the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (TAPI) pipeline project, from which Afghanistan may stand to gain \$160 million per year in annual transport revenues.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ HC Hansard, 8 December 2011, col 45WS.

⁶¹ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 49.

⁶² Participating were: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, UAE, and Uzbekistan.

⁶³ Peacebuilding Institute of Oslo, *Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia*, 2012.

⁶⁴ US State Department, *The United States “New Silk Road” Strategy: What is it? Where is it Headed?*, 29 September 2011.

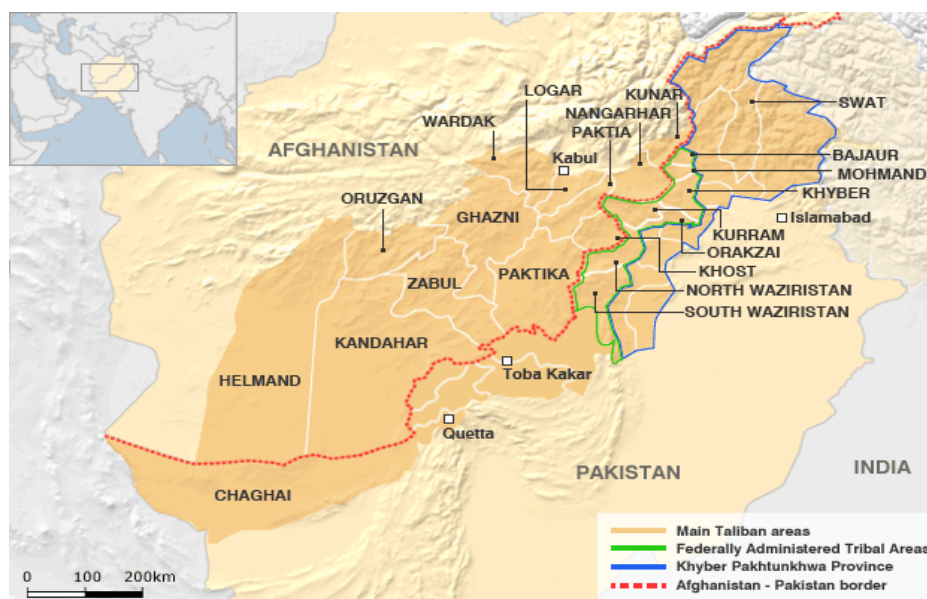
⁶⁵ <http://www.orfonline.org/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/analysis/AnalysisDetail.html?cmaid=47920&mmacmaid=47921>

Like the Istanbul and Bonn conferences which had preceded it, however, scepticism has been expressed on whether the 'Heart of Asia' approach can deliver. Pointing to the lack of direct commitments to emerge from the Kabul Conference, Niamatullah Ibrahim observes:

Beneath the surface of all the nice but inconsequential statements, the concept of Afghanistan as the heart of Asia and a 'land-bridge' between the troubled regions of Central, South and Western Asia faces formidable challenges. Afghanistan's 'near and extended neighbourhood', as the conference declaration describes, is one of the most challenging regions of the world for regional cooperation. Such description of Afghanistan's neighbourhood also revealed the complexity of the search for a regional solution to the problem of Afghanistan. The speeches delivered during the Kabul conference, cloaked in diplomatic niceties as they were, also point to differing views and, as a consequence, different proposals for solutions for the problem of Afghanistan.⁶⁶

These differing views are explored by country below.

3.2 Afghanistan-Pakistan: Border Issues, Co-operation and Disagreement



Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21338263>

The regional actor and neighbour considered the most vital to the future of Afghanistan is Pakistan. In particular, the long, often geographically remote and porous border region between the two countries, and the ability of insurgent groups to move within it and find

⁶⁶ Afghanistan Analyst Network, [Heart of Asia Hardly Beating at the Second 'Heart of Asia Meeting'](#), 22 July 2012.

safe haven, has been cited as t one of the most significant challenges to Afghan security, both now and post-2014.

Since 1947 relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have fluctuated widely, and have often been characterised by tension and mistrust. Territorial disputes continue to exist over the drawing of the colonial era Durand Line to denote the border between the two countries. Pakistan has also been accused of providing backing and safe haven (and indeed allegedly in some instances directly providing training and weapons to, and controlling the activities of) Islamist insurgent groups operating inside Afghanistan, including the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and the Haqqani Network. Speaking in 2011 before a recent thaw in relations, President Karzai said:

Pakistan has pursued a double game toward Afghanistan, and using terrorism as a means continues.⁶⁷

Observers who share this assessment suggest that Pakistan's motivation for backing such groups has included a desire to keep Afghanistan weak and compliant, particularly as a bulwark against Indian power and influence in the region.⁶⁸ Whilst Pakistan has accused India of using its Embassy and consulates to train anti-Pakistan militants, in turn it is alleged that Pakistan has been the source of attacks of insurgent groups on Indian interests in Afghanistan, particularly those carried out by the Haqqani Network.⁶⁹ These include the attacks on the Indian Embassy in Kabul in 2008 and 2009, for which the Haqqani Network claimed responsibility.⁷⁰ The Haqqani Network has also reportedly been behind a number of attacks on American targets, including on the US Embassy in Kabul in September 2011. High ranking US officials have alleged that the Haqqani Network is openly tolerated, even protected, in the North Waziristan area of Pakistan, and appears to receive direction from Pakistani intelligence. These include former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, who testified in 2011 that the Haqqani Network acts "as a veritable arm" of the ISI, and former Secretary of State, Leon Pancetta, who said in June 2012 while referring to the presence of the Haqqani Network in Pakistan:

It is an increasing concern that the safe haven exists and that there are those—likely Haqqanis—who are making use of that to attack our forces.

We are reaching the limits of our patience here, and for that reason it is extremely important that Pakistan take action to prevent this kind of safe haven from taking place and allowing terrorists to use their country as a safety net in order to conduct their attacks on our forces.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *Guardian*, '[India may pay heavily in future for supporting the Karzai regime](#)', 5 October 2011.

⁶⁸ A. Hakimi, "Af-Pak: what strategic depth?", www.opendemocracy.net, 4 February 2010.

⁶⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, '[Leon Pancetta says US reaching limits of patience with Pakistan](#)', 7 June 2012.

⁷⁰ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 16.

⁷¹ *Daily Telegraph*, '[Leon Pancetta says US reaching limits of patience with Pakistan](#)', 7 June 2012.

Afghan Defence Minister, Abdul Rahim Wardak, also echoed the frustration at the lack of co-operation from Pakistan at that time:

If that co-operation starts, we will be able to disrupt their command and control, disrupt their training, disrupt their weapon recruitment and also will be able to eliminate or capture their leadership. Without doing that, I think our endeavour to achieve victory will become much more difficult.⁷²

For its part, Pakistan has maintained that it is committed to a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.⁷³ It has also criticised Afghanistan and NATO in turn, however, for doing little to prevent the Pakistani Taliban from using Afghan territory as a safe haven and springboard from which to launch their own attacks on Pakistani troops in recent years.⁷⁴

US-Pakistan recriminations contrast with the first few years of the Afghanistan operation, where Pakistani co-operation against Al Qaeda was deemed to be 'relatively consistent and effective'. However, relations between the two nations, already strained mainly over Pakistan's alleged failure to crack down on the Haqqani network, soured significantly following the incursion into Pakistan in May 2011 by American special forces which resulted in the capture and killing of Osama Bin Laden. The fact that the US gave Pakistani authorities no warning or prior notice of the raid was viewed as an indication of a significant lack of trust in the ISI in particular.⁷⁵

This was followed by the attack on the US Kabul embassy by the Haqqani Network in September, and then, as referred to above, in November 2011 24 Pakistani soldiers were mistakenly killed by NATO airstrikes at two border outposts.⁷⁶ Pakistan responded to this attack by boycotting the Bonn Conference in December 2011, and by closing key border crossings used to supply ISAF troops in Afghanistan. In November 2011 India and Afghanistan also signed a strategic partnership agreement, which included military assistance from India to the Afghan Security Forces (in the form of training), and arguably fuelled Pakistani ill-feeling towards the Karzai administration.⁷⁷

Improving Relations?

Since that time, however, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan (and between Pakistan and the US) appear to have improved. Despite tensions continuing in the border region—including clashes in 2012 between Afghan and Pakistani troops—key Pakistani figures, including the Army Chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, have reportedly acknowledged that an unstable Afghanistan threatens Pakistan, rather than provides it with any 'strategic depth' against India.⁷⁸ This view was endorsed by the US Ambassador

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ Pakistan Mission to the United Nations, [Statement by Ambassador Raza Bashir Tarar, Acting Permanent Representative of Pakistan, at the Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, "The Situation in Afghanistan"](#), New York, 27 November 2012.

⁷⁴ House of Commons Library Research Paper, *Pakistan in 2013*, 6 December 2012.

⁷⁵ *New York Times*, '[Pakistan pushes back against US Criticism on Bin Laden](#)', 3 May 2011.

⁷⁶ *Guardian*, '[Inquiry into US airstrike as both sides try to shift the blame](#)', 22 December 2011.

⁷⁷ House of Commons Library Research Paper, *Pakistan in 2013*, 6 December 2012, p 60.

⁷⁸ *Guardian*, '[Afghanistan produces a roadmap for peace, but does it go anywhere?](#)', 17 December 2012.

to Pakistan, Richard Olson, who said:

On the question of strategic depth, this has been a doctrine that Pakistanis over the years have talked about and, one of the ideas that Afghanistan represents strategic depth against a potential conflict with India. My sense is that the Pakistani military and Pakistani government has moved away from that.⁷⁹

Mr Olson added:

Chief of the Army Staff Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani has redeployed his forces internally to deal with the internal threat, and heavily towards the border (with Afghanistan) to deal with the threats emanating from that region... I think these are frankly positive developments that we would like to encourage, as Pakistan looks to its strategic position.⁸⁰

Significantly, Pakistan has also indicated that it wants to play a more active role in the reconciliation process. For the first time, in February 2012, Pakistani leaders publicly encouraged Taliban leaders to negotiate a settlement to the conflict. Further significant steps came later in the year with a visit to Pakistan in mid-November 2012 by Salahuddin Rabbani (son of the assassinated former Chair Burhanuddin Rabbani) and other members of the Afghan High Peace Council, which resulted in the release by Pakistan of a number of high ranking Taliban prisoners who favour reconciliation in November and December 2012.⁸¹

In July 2012, in response to an apology by former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for the border airstrike incident, Pakistan also re-opened the closed border crossings, removing a key point of tension between them and the US.⁸² In addition, Afghanistan and Pakistan embarked on negotiations on a Strategic Partnership Agreement in September-November 2012, and Pakistan has also held talks with Afghanistan in January 2013 on potential Pakistani training for the ANSF.⁸³

UK Ministers have welcomed these developments. Speaking in November 2012, Phillip Hammond, Secretary of State for Defence, said:

I am glad to say that relationships between Afghanistan and Pakistan are improving significantly. The recent visit of the High Peace Council to Islamabad [in November 2012] marked an important step forward in building collaborative relationships in the region. Both countries understand the threat that the Taliban and other insurgent organisations pose to their security, as well as the benefits of collaboration in dealing with that threat. We are making significant progress, but

⁷⁹ Dawn, '[Pakistan has moved away from strategic depth approach: Olson](#)', 1 August 2012.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 45.

⁸² CNN, '[Pakistan re-opens NATO supply routes into Afghanistan](#)', 4 July 2012.

⁸³ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 45.

the hon. Gentleman will know that Pakistan is not a simple country, that the situation is complex and that the issue will require a lot of effort for many years to come.⁸⁴

‘A Six-Month Push for Peace’: Chequers Summit, February 2013

As part of these improving relations, the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, Foreign Secretary, William Hague, and other Ministers, engaged in a number of trilateral discussions with Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2012, which culminated in a summit between David Cameron, Mohammed Karzai, and President Zadari of Pakistan in February 2013 (the third joint meeting between the three men). In addition to the Foreign Ministers, they were also joined for the first time by Foreign Minister, Chiefs of Defence Staff, Chiefs of Intelligence, the Afghan National Security Adviser and the Chair of the Afghan High Peace Council.

Reported as a ‘six-month push for peace’, at Chequers the three leaders reaffirmed the urgency of the peace and reconciliation programme and committed, according to a Downing Street source, to take ‘all necessary measures to achieve the goal of a peace settlement over the next six months’.⁸⁵ Core among those commitments was a re-affirmation of support for opening an office in Doha to facilitate negotiations with the Taliban. President Karzai and President Zadari also agreed arrangements to strengthen co-ordination of Taliban detainee releases from Pakistani custody in support of the peace and reconciliation process, and re-affirmed their commitment to a Strategic Partnership Agreement.⁸⁶

David Cameron welcomed the progress made in a statement issued after the summit:

Britain is a strong partner of both countries, and we want to see a strong relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan built on greater trust.

Our discussions today have focused on two important issues: the Afghan-led peace process and strengthened co-operation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. And we have made progress on both. We all fully support an Afghan led peace process and the opening of an office in Doha for negotiations between the Taliban and the High Peace Council. This should lead to a future in which all Afghans can participate peacefully in the country’s political process. I also welcome both Presidents’ ongoing commitment to strengthen co-operation through the signature of a Strategic Partnership Agreement by the autumn. This should strengthen ties between both countries on economic and security issues, including on trade and border management. Today, we have agreed what is frankly an unprecedented level of co-operation.

Clearly there is much more work to be done in the months ahead and the UK will continue to stand firmly behind both countries as they work together to bring peace and stability to the region. Finally, the progress we have achieved today

⁸⁴ HC *Hansard*, 26 November 2012, col 12.

⁸⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, ‘Six months to make peace with Taliban say leaders’, 5 February 2013.

⁸⁶ HM Government, Chequers Summit Joint Statement, 4 February 2013.

sends a very clear message to the Taliban: now is the time for everyone to participate in a peaceful political process in Afghanistan.⁸⁷

True Signs of Progress?

Despite the positive announcements stemming from the Chequers summit and other bilateral moves to improve co-operation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, some observers have questioned how far they amount to real signs of progress. For example, writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, Rob Crilly argued that the Chequers summit was as notable for who was not there as for who was. Missing, he pointed out, were the Taliban, 'the only ones who can deliver a peace', and the United States, 'the only ones who can fund it'.⁸⁸ Senior Pakistani clerics, led by Allama Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, chairman of Pakistan's influential Ulema Council, who were due to attend follow-up talks in Afghanistan next month, have also reportedly withdrawn due to the absence of the Taliban from the discussions.⁸⁹

A senior Pakistani Taliban Commander, Maulvi Faqir Mohammed, was captured in Afghanistan in February 2013. This was interpreted by some observers as a further positive sign that Islamabad and Kabul were capable of joining forces against the Taliban, including Muhammad Amir Rana, director of the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, who described the arrest as a "major step".⁹⁰ However, relations soured again only a few weeks later when President Karzai chose to level public criticism at Pakistan for not being sincere in its efforts to fight terrorism, after it failed to criticize Ulema cleric Allama Ashrafi for allegedly issuing a recent statement endorsing suicide attacks in Afghanistan. Mr Karzai said:

Afghanistan wants a real struggle against terrorism and wants the Pakistani government to realize that both our nations are burning in the same fire. The Pakistani government has an essential and important role in putting out this fire. ...We see that practical steps are not being taken to fight terrorism [by the Pakistani Government].⁹¹

The Pakistani government responded by saying that Ashrafi had denied making such a statement, and added that it had repeatedly condemned suicide attacks.⁹²

⁸⁷ FCO, [Chequers Summit joint statement from UK, Pakistan and Afghanistan](#), 5 February 2013.

⁸⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 'Dave's Afghan summit is a reminder of how much still needs to be done', 5 February 2013.

⁸⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 'Pakistani clerics refuse to attend Kabul peace talks', 18 February 2013.

⁹⁰ *Guardian*, 'Senior Pakistani Taliban Commander captured in Afghanistan', 20 February 2013.

⁹¹ *Washington Post*, ['Afghan leader accuses Pakistan of refusing to fight terrorism by backing incendiary cleric'](#), 4 March 2013. Observers have also noted that Pakistan has still to fulfil a commitment made in 2009 to establish a border control co-ordination centre; four such centres have been set up so far to monitor the border area and share intelligence on extremist movements, but all are on the Afghan side of the border.

⁹² *ibid.*

Trade

Afghanistan and Pakistan have moved to strengthen their trade relationship in recent years, including the signing of a key agreement in 2010 to allow the easier flow of Afghan products through Pakistan, particularly agricultural products which require rapid transit. In 2011 both countries began full implementation of that agreement, which is expected to significantly expand the \$2 billion in trade per year which existed previously.⁹³ This agreement has been held as a particular success of the 'Dubai Process': a Canadian sponsored programme which has also led to dialogue on issues such as modernising border crossings, corruption, and a comprehensive border strategy.⁹⁴ Pakistan is also engaged in several reconstruction and development projects in Afghanistan, including construction of hospitals, roads and educational institutions.⁹⁵

3.3 Relationships Between Afghanistan and Other Key Regional Actors

India

The interests and activities of India in Afghanistan are arguably the opposite of that of Pakistan. India seeks to deny Pakistan any strategic advantage in the country, to maintain trade and a gateway to Central Asia beyond, and to prevent militants from attacking Indian targets in Afghanistan. As Kenneth Katzman remarks, Afghanistan has sought close ties with India but without alarming Pakistan—a delicate balancing act.⁹⁶ As noted above, India signed a strategic partnership agreement with Afghanistan in 2011. This pact arguably affirmed Pakistani fears as it provided India with a formal role in guaranteeing Afghan stability for the first time, and provided a platform for expanded India-Afghanistan political and cultural links. Indian troops or combat personnel will not be deployed to Afghanistan as part of the agreement, though a further agreement has been signed for India to train some Afghan personnel.

India is the fifth largest provider of development aid to Afghanistan. It is currently funding projects worth over \$1.5 billion, and committed to fund an extra \$500 million in 2011.

Iran

There is dispute as to how influential Iran is in Afghanistan. As Katzman observes, most experts see Iran as a relatively marginal player, while others believe Tehran is able to exert considerable influence.⁹⁷ In the short-term Iran arguably is seeking to deny the United States the use of Afghanistan as a base from which to pressure or attack it. For

⁹³ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 51.

⁹⁴ Calton University Ottawa, *The Dubai Process*, 2011.

⁹⁵ Pakistan Mission to the United Nations, *Statement by Ambassador Raza Bashir Tarar, Acting Permanent Representative of Pakistan, at the Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, "The Situation in Afghanistan"*, New York, 27 November 2012.

⁹⁶ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 54.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

this reason, Iran opposed the US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement. In the longer term, Katzman argues that Iran is seeking to exert its traditional influence over western Afghanistan, which Iran borders and which was once part of the Persian Empire, to protect Afghanistan's Shi'a and other Persian-speaking minorities.⁹⁸

Iran has also pledged around \$1 billion in development aid to Afghanistan, of which approximately \$500 million has been delivered to date. However, even while seeking to aid Afghanistan's development, it is also allegedly arming insurgent groups within the country. The US State Department has reported that the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard has provided training to the Taliban and that it ships arms to militants in Qandahar in southern Afghanistan.⁹⁹

Central Asian States (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan)

The relationships between these states and Afghanistan have often been complex. In 1996 several of them banded together with Russia and China because of the perceived threat from the Taliban, and many, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, allow access to their airspace to ISAF forces operating in Afghanistan. However, mindful of the regional presences of large powers such as Iran and Pakistan, and their own, often severe, rivalries with each other, their engagement in Afghanistan has been largely limited and lacking a co-ordinated approach.¹⁰⁰

However, for the most part Central Asian states have been enthusiastic supporters of the New Silk Road initiative proposed by the US. They stand to derive direct economic benefit from many of the regional economic projects being discussed and developed, including the TAPI natural gas pipeline.¹⁰¹ A number of other key construction projects, including bridges from Afghanistan into Uzbekistan, and the Panj bridge between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, are also currently underway. These nations, with the exception of Turkmenistan, are also key elements of the Northern Distribution Network, an important air and ground supply line for non-lethal ISAF supplies and the route through which it is intended large volumes of equipment will be removed from Afghanistan.

China

After initially little involvement post-2001, China appears to have engaged more with Afghanistan in recent years. In September 2012 China and Afghanistan signed security and economic agreements, which included a pledge to help train, fund and equip the Afghan National Police force (ANP).¹⁰² China has also been engaged in securing energy supplies through Afghanistan. Observers suggest that, given regional tensions and rivalries amongst

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ *ibid.* This is despite the fact that the Taliban is a largely Pashtun movement, and Iran has traditionally supported the Shi'a/Shiite minority.

¹⁰⁰ Peacebuilding Institute of Oslo, [Central Asia and Afghanistan: Insulation on the Silk Road, Between Eurasia and the Heart of Asia](#), 2012.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy*, February 2013, p 59.

the Central Asian states in particular (and China's own interests in maintaining stability in the restless Xinjiang region), China may fill the vacuum left behind following the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, as those countries seek a partner for their own security interests. This may lead to China becoming a key force in Central Asia and the New Silk Road.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ *Economist*, '[Not as smooth as silk](#)', 2 March 2013.