



Afghanistan After 2014

Five Scenarios

STEFAN OLSSON, ERIKA HOLMQUIST,
SAMUEL BERGENWALL, HELENE LACKENBAUER



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Project Manager's Remarks

In late 2011 the Asia Security Studies program at FOI hosted a two day work shop on possible developments in and around Afghanistan after 2014. In panels on regional dynamics, state building, negotiations and the prospect for compromise and peace, economic development, ethnic and religious conflict, and the Taliban and insurgent nexus, twenty experts discussed prospects for Afghanistan's future. While the exchange was frank and warm the messages and assessments were grim. Afghanistan faces such a multitude of problems and challenges that it is difficult to discern bright futures. In the midst of corruption, societal grievances, a weak central government, bleak economic prospects, the Taliban conflict and unhelpful rivalries amongst the regional states, it is difficult to see how things could turn out well for Afghanistan and its people.

All the same hope must not be abandoned and although the West has signaled an accelerated draw down of troops, stakes are too high and interests too deep to allow for full withdrawal politically and economically. Abandonment is not a realistic option even though the fate of Afghanistan does not lie with the West. Among the findings of the report is that the best we can hope for is a compromise in which all the political power centers balance their interests. And as Afghanistan in some sense has always been a country of carefully balanced politics this may not be so bad in the end. But the question remains—what road will lead us where?

This report is influenced by and in part builds on the inspiring discussions and disheartening analysis at the Stockholm workshop. As program head I was particularly pleased to be able to host such a diverse group of experts from all around the world including Afghanistan. The multitude of perspectives voiced around the table was instrumental in making the two days extraordinarily fruitful. The program remains deeply in debt to everyone engaging in these discussions. The result makes for thought provoking reading.

Since more than a decade the Asia Security Studies program at FOI strikes a balance between studying current issues that directly affect Swedish foreign and defense policy, on the one hand, and research on topics with wider regional and global implications. The program also attempts to identify key issues of tomorrow and research them. The program is mainly financed by the Swedish Ministry of Defense but research is also commissioned by other ministries and agencies in Sweden and internationally.

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John Rydqvist

Head, Asia Security Studies Rrogram, FOI

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Summary

By the end of 2014 the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), will, if the timetable remains fixed, have withdrawn from Afghanistan. After a period of transition which already has begun the full responsibility for security will be transferred to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

But the signs of progress have so far been few. A number of uncertainties keep hanging as a dark cloud at the horizon. The Taliban insurgency is not broken, the ANSF are still not fully manned, and the national government suffers heavily from widespread corruption. The list of problems, that ideally should have been solved many years ago, is long.

The important question is then: What will happen in Afghanistan after 2014 when the transition has been completed and ISAF has left the country?

This report focuses on some of the key issues that will be of importance for Afghanistan after 2014 and develops a small set of possible scenarios. Among the main conclusions are that a peace settlement that allows the Taliban to join the government of Afghanistan is the best hope for a sustainable peace, that the Kabul regime is too weak to continue the war on its own, and that there is a risk for a new power vacuum in Afghanistan once the ISAF has left the country. There is a risk for a new geopolitical tug of war between the regional powers. A peace settlement that includes all major parties—the Kabul regime, the Taliban, the United States, Pakistan and India—is necessary to guarantee a lasting peace.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Pakistan, United States, Taliban, ISAF, NATO

Sammanfattning

2014 ska International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) ha dragit sig tillbaka från Afghanistan. Överlämningen till de afghanska säkerhetsstyrkorna, (ANSF, Afghan National Security Forces) har redan påbörjats. Hittills har dock tecknen på framgång uteblivit. Ett antal osäkerheter hänger ännu som ett åskmoln vid horisonten. Talibanernas motstånd är fortfarande inte brutet. ANSF är få och otränade och den afghanska regeringen lider av svårartad korruption. Listan över problem som idealt sett borde ha lösts för länge sedan kan göras lång.

Den intressanta frågan är därför: Vad kommer att hända med Afghanistan efter 2014 när överlämningen är avslutad och ISAF har lämnat landet?

Denna rapport uppmärksammar ett antal frågor som kommer att ha stor betydelse efter 2014 och utvecklar ett antal framtidsscenarion. Bland de viktigaste slutsatserna är att ett fredsavtal som tillåter att talibanerna tar plats i regeringen skapar de största möjligheterna för en hållbar fred, att Kabulregimen är för svag för att kunna fortsätta kriget på egen hand samt att det finns en risk för ett nytt maktvakuum i Afghanistan när ISAF drar sig tillbaka. En ny geopolitisk dragkamp kan komma att utspela sig. Med ett regionalt fredsavtal som inkluderar samtliga viktiga aktörer, – Kabulregimen, talibanerna, USA, Pakistan och Indien – kan en sådan situation undvikas.

Nyckelord: Afghanistan, Pakistan, USA, talibaner, ISAF, Nato

Executive Summary

If the current timetable is adhered to, by the end of 2014 the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will have withdrawn from Afghanistan. Military personnel from the 49 participating countries will have returned home. After a period of transition, which has already begun, full responsibility for security will be transferred to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

When the international community committed troops to Afghanistan about a decade ago, the hope was that it would become a country where the power of the Taliban had been curtailed, peace achieved and human rights would be respected. These high expectations have faded away. Problems regarding Afghanistan abound: government corruption at the national and provincial levels is rampant; the state lacks a solid economic base and depends on foreign aid for its survival; and the ANSF are still relatively weak and unskilled. For many, the limited effects of the military intervention make a negotiated settlement with the Taliban the only option remaining on the table.

The important question is thus: What will happen in Afghanistan after 2014 when the transition has been completed and ISAF has left the country?

To make conjectures about the future in Afghanistan is almost impossible. It is nevertheless necessary to make informed estimates in order to make rational decisions about future plans and actions. To develop a post-2014 policy, decision makers in the ISAF countries need assessments of likely developments in Afghanistan after the withdrawal. This report endeavors to make such an assessment by identifying key issues and outlining five possible scenarios for Afghanistan post-2014.

Four key issues, crucial for the future of Afghanistan, are highlighted in the report: the geostrategic situation, the role of Pakistan, the status of the civil government, and the prospects for a negotiated settlement.

The Geostrategic situation of the Afghanistan Conflict

Afghanistan has historically been a battleground for geostrategic conflicts between regional and global powers. The so-called Great Game of the late 19th century, that is, the rivalry between Tsarist Russia and the British Empire, is about to be replicated in Afghanistan today, albeit with the involvement of new powers. Today, a large number of states have security concerns and key interests in Afghanistan:

- The primary objectives of the United States are to eliminate al-Qaida and prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a base for global terrorist groups.
- Pakistan tries to limit the role of its arch enemy, India, in Afghanistan and wants a friendly government in Kabul.

- India has economic interests in Afghanistan, and wants to reduce Pakistan's influence and prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe zone for terrorist groups operating in Kashmir.

- China attempts to strengthen its economic ties with Afghanistan and is concerned about the continued military presence of the United States as well as the potential threat of Uighur militant groups operating in Xinjiang from bases in Afghanistan.

- Iran desires the removal of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and is concerned about the inflow of opium and new arrivals of Afghan refugees.

- Russia similarly wants to end the U.S. presence and fears increased drug smuggling and the export of extremism through Central Asia.

- Several of the Central Asian states have ethnic ties in Afghanistan and are concerned about the spillover effects of yet another breakdown of its troubled neighbor.

Hence, the road to peace in Afghanistan is paved with conflicting interests and strategic, economic and cultural rivalries between foreign powers. Unless some of these rivalries are addressed, peace is likely to remain elusive.

The Role of Pakistan in Afghanistan

The stability of Afghanistan is closely intertwined with developments in neighboring Pakistan. Islamabad has assisted the Taliban in the past and once again stands accused by the United States of supporting the Taliban groups fighting ISAF forces in Afghanistan.

A wide consensus among analysts on Pakistan seems to confirm that Islamabad provides safe havens for the Afghan Taliban groups that operate from its territory. Some researchers argue that the Pakistan military actively aids the insurgents through funding, the provision of weapons, strategic planning, and so on, as well as through its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. Others maintain that rogue elements within ISI support the Afghan Taliban in contradiction of the official policy of Pakistan's political and military leaders. What is clear, however, is that Pakistan has played a double game in the sense that it has bowed to U.S. pressure by combatting those factions of the Taliban, the so-called Pakistani Taliban (TTP), that are at war with the Pakistani state, while failing to crack down on the Afghan Taliban on its soil which fights only in Afghanistan.

The rationale behind Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban can be understood in the context of its historical rivalry with and the perceived existential threat from India; past and present tense relations with Afghanistan in the light of the issue of Pashtunistan; its perception of U.S. betrayal and the U.S. short-term perspective in Afghanistan; and the threat of instability and escalated civil war in Pakistan that a military campaign against the Afghan Taliban safe

havens might bring about. Pakistan has legitimate security concerns and without acknowledging these, the reasons behind its illegitimate methods of playing the Taliban card cannot be fully understood.

The Kabul Regime: Political Actors and Current Trends

Peace in Afghanistan also hinges on developments at the local and national levels. The functioning of the civil government and the economic foundation of the state will be of great concern in Afghanistan after 2014.

The government in Afghanistan is weak and suffers from widespread corruption. Ethnic and tribal allegiances and patronage linkages shape the parliament and political parties. The major objectives of the dominant political parties have been to secure power and access to resources for their patronage networks and leaders, who are often equivalent to the former warlords.

The power of the central government is concentrated in the executive branch, headed by President Hamid Karzai who dominates and manipulates the judicial and legislative branches. Notwithstanding the power of the executive, the state lacks military and administrative control over provinces and districts. Warlords and local commanders have the real power at the subnational level.

Afghanistan is an aid dependent state. Today, domestic revenues amount to just 10 percent of GDP. This figure is not likely to increase significantly in the coming years while, at the same time, it is estimated that costs related to security are likely to rise. The stability of Afghanistan after 2014 is supposed to be maintained by the ANSF, which is heavily dependent on foreign aid. Without continued substantial international financial assistance, the Afghan government will not be able to provide for the state's security forces and civilian service—or for basic services. The survival of the Afghan state is thus in the hands of the international community and in particular the United States.

Prospects for a Negotiated Peace

ISAF forces will leave Afghanistan at the end of 2014 and it is highly unlikely that the Taliban will be rooted out before that date. A negotiated settlement is therefore now being promoted by the United States. What are the prospects for a negotiated peace in Afghanistan?

The primary objective of the Taliban is to push foreign troops out of the country and to participate in the governance of Afghanistan. The Taliban is reported not to have the power to recapture Kabul and impose an extremist Islamic regime on the whole of Afghanistan.

The main aim of the United States is a stable Afghanistan that cannot be used as a sanctuary for global terrorism. Since the Taliban have a purely national agenda and may be persuaded to cut their ties with al-Qaida, a negotiated peace between the US-backed Karzai government and Taliban could perhaps be achievable.

A stable Afghanistan also needs a regional peace agreement – on which the signature of Pakistan would be crucial. Pakistan wants a friendly government in Afghanistan and to reduce the perceived threat from India. Without a settlement regarding Afghanistan between India and Pakistan, Islamabad may act as a spoiler. Other spoilers of a settlement could be the warlords in Afghanistan or those Taliban factions in Pakistan and Afghanistan that do not accept a peace deal.

A peace settlement would imply that the Taliban participates in the government of Afghanistan and is acknowledged as the de facto ruler in some provinces in the southern and eastern parts of the country. The question arises whether the liberal West could consent to such a deal since respect for human rights and for gender equality have never been trademarks of Taliban rule.

Five Scenarios

How will the security situation look in Afghanistan following the departure of the ISAF forces? This report presents five possible scenarios with a time frame of five to ten years.

In scenario analysis the focus is on variables that have strong causal effects, and which may change quickly and in an unpredictable way. The two most important variables that we believe will determine the future in Afghanistan are the strategies of the United States and Pakistan. First, U.S. financial and military support for the Afghan government and its national security forces are crucial. A changed mood in Washington regarding foreign aid to and military involvement in Afghanistan might remove the financial basis for Kabul's efforts to stabilize the country. The behavior of Pakistan in Afghanistan is another variable that has a strong causal effect and may change rapidly and unpredictably. Pakistan has hedged its bets on the Taliban in a future Afghanistan, but if U.S. pressure and/or an acceptable peace agreement in Afghanistan led Pakistan to try to rein in the Taliban and crack down on the safe havens, this would have major implications for stability in Afghanistan. The same would be true if the Pakistani military went in the opposite direction, that is, by continuing or increasing its support for the Taliban and refusing to accept a negotiated settlement.

Focusing primarily on the long-term U.S. commitment to Afghanistan and the options of Pakistan as the key variables for understanding the future, five possible scenarios for Afghanistan post-2014 have been outlined:

1. The Taliban get a Share of the Government of Afghanistan

If the United States stays financially and militarily committed to Afghanistan while the Taliban and Pakistan accept a peace deal, a coalition government with the Karzai government and the Taliban could be established. Afghanistan would then be in a good position to repress spoilers that have an interest in prolonging the war. Violence in Afghanistan would be likely to decrease, but the liberal constitution and respect for human rights will be endangered.

2. Pakistan as Afghanistan's New Big Brother

If the United States cuts its aid to Afghanistan while Pakistan supports a peace agreement between the Taliban and Kabul, Islamabad could step in to fill the power vacuum. This might provoke other powers, such as India and Iran, to raise the stakes in Afghanistan. Moreover, local powerbrokers aligned with the Kabul regime might be displeased by the outcome and, like dissident Taliban groups, act as spoilers. A long-lasting low-intensity conflict could very well be the consequence.

3. War of Proxies

If the United States stays committed to the government and security of Afghanistan while Pakistan supports the Taliban to achieve "strategic depth," a proxy war would be a possible scenario. The war in Afghanistan would continue and the conflict between Washington and Islamabad escalate.

4. Civil War

If the United States cuts its military and financial aid to Kabul while Pakistan continues to support the Taliban, Afghanistan might descend into a civil war akin to the conflict of the 1990s. The ANSF might disintegrate and former warlords re-enter the scene to fight the war against the Taliban. A civil war in Afghanistan would drag other regional players into the conflict, which might use Afghan groups as pawns in a game of regional influence.

5. The American Dream

If the United States stays committed to the government in Afghanistan but Pakistan acts according to the "American dream," that is, cracks down on the Afghan Taliban safe havens, this could have severe repercussions. Pakistan is a weak state with major internal problems, including two internal wars (in Baluchistan and the Pashtun tribal areas). If Pakistan also made the Afghan Taliban into enemies of the state, this would cause further instability in the vulnerable and nuclear-armed country.

Conclusions

Based on the above discussions, the report reaches a number of conclusions and raises a set of issues that need careful consideration by policymakers in the ISAF countries.

- **The best we can hope for is a peace settlement and a return of the Taliban.** If this happens, Afghanistan may remain fertile soil for religious extremism. In addition, the Taliban in power raises worries about respect for human rights and gender equality. This, however, is the most optimistic scenario, given that ISAF will leave in 2014. All the other scenarios (civil war, proxy war or spillover effects into Pakistan) are worse.

- **A regional peace treaty is needed.** Afghanistan has for decades been a theater of war in the rivalry between various external powers. The United States, Russia, China, India, Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian republics have different and often conflicting interests in Afghanistan. A local and national settlement needs to be complemented by a regional peace treaty.
- **Pakistan has legitimate security concerns too.** Islamabad fears an antagonistic regime in Kabul that is allied with India, which is gradually increasing its presence in Afghanistan. The Pakistani state is weak and faces two civil wars. Pakistan may thus be unable to crack down on the Afghan Taliban bases without endangering its own stability.
- **Everybody wants the United States to leave but not to leave.** Most regional powers as well as public opinion in the West want the United States to leave Afghanistan. After ten years of fighting without achieving significant gains, many think that to continue the struggle against the Taliban is pointless. On the other hand, if the United States were to withdraw completely it would create a power vacuum which the Afghan army might not be able to fill. Regional powers might intervene. Civil and proxy wars are possible outcomes following a withdrawal.
- **The Kabul regime is too weak to continue the war on its own.** ISAF plans to hand responsibility for security to a capable and efficient government in Afghanistan. The regime is corrupt and weak, however, and is unlikely to be able to successfully lead the fight against the insurgency.
- **Putting the jigsaw puzzle together after 2014.** If the West leaves Afghanistan and the Kabul government fails to cope with the insurgency, neighboring countries will not remain idle. A new Great Game in Afghanistan may be the consequence of the withdrawal of ISAF. It is thus important that the ISAF countries monitor the geopolitical situation in and around Afghanistan.

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1 Introduction

In 2014 responsibility for the security situation in Afghanistan will be transferred from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. By then the war in Afghanistan should have come to an end. This, at least, is the aim of the joint plan of the Afghan government and ISAF, although few if any believe that 2014 will mark the end of all foreign involvement in Afghanistan. In 2012, there are still few signs of progress and many uncertainties appear as dark clouds on the horizon. The Taliban insurgency is not broken, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are still too few and too unskilled to be able to continue the war on their own, and the national government suffers from widespread corruption. There is a long list of problems that should have been resolved many years ago.

What will happen in Afghanistan after the transition is completed in 2014? Studying the future is close to impossible but at the same time necessary. Conclusions about what might happen in the future is nothing more than conjecture, but it is necessary to make such conjectures in order to plan for the future.

Today, 49 countries participate in ISAF and in less than two years they are all supposed to withdraw their troops. It is evident that this cannot mark the end of all international support for the Afghan people and their government. Something will have to replace the current military intervention, unless Afghanistan is to be abandoned completely by the West. In order to develop a post-2014 policy for Afghanistan, policymakers in the ISAF countries need an assessment of possible future developments. It is the aim of this report to provide such an assessment.

The report focuses on some of the key issues that will be important in Afghanistan after 2014 and develops a set of possible scenarios. Three areas are singled out as highly critical: the geostrategic situation, the role of Pakistan and the status of the government of Afghanistan. It is within these three areas that the future of Afghanistan will be determined. The Afghan conflict is complex and a myriad of factors interplay. Nevertheless, as we describe in this report, in a time frame of five to ten years, changes within these areas will have a decisive influence over the path to peace in Afghanistan.

The aim of this report is to provide policymakers with advice about the factors which the ISAF countries should take into account when planning for the future. The rationale for developing scenarios is not to try to provide a prognosis of what will actually happen, but rather to provide an understanding of the different consequences that may follow from different choices made by leading actors in the conflict.

One of the main conclusions of this report is that the future of Afghanistan is to a large extent dependent on outside actors, first and foremost the United States and

Pakistan. Afghanistan is a country that suffers from an internal conflict that in many ways has been managed from outside its borders. The frontline in this war is visible at the grassroots level in Afghan society. The insurgency threatening the stability of the government operates with the population as its battleground. The struggle between the government and the insurgency is a fight that takes place locally. Nevertheless, this report argues that the main factors determining the course of events at the grassroots level are in the hands of politicians rather than farmers, insurgents or soldiers. Consequently, the bleak situation in Afghanistan is not destined to continue forever. A carefully created post-2014 policy by the ISAF nations could influence the course of events and may make peace in Afghanistan an achievable goal.

Since the aim of the report is to give policymakers advice on their planning for a policy on Afghanistan, it does not provide an account of the situation as such. Most of the problems are already known: the idea is to discuss and analyze. Consequently, this report focuses on the areas that we believe will be at the center of discussions concerning the future.

The first area we discuss is the geostrategic situation. Afghanistan is in the middle of a strategic game between large and powerful nations. What happens in Afghanistan is of importance to its close neighbors and to the United States. As chapter 2 demonstrates, many of the decisions on Afghanistan's future will be taken in the capitals of other nations.

Pakistan plays a pivotal role in this game. Pakistan is an ally of the United States. At the same time, the United States claims, with good reason, that Pakistan is supporting the Taliban. Chapter 3 focuses on the role of Pakistan and its strained relations with the United States.

Chapter 4 focuses on the civil government of Afghanistan. Governance plays a significant role in the political strategy of ISAF. ISAF's objective is to be able to hand over responsibility for security to the Afghan government by 2014. Will the government be able to stand on its own two feet? If not, what will happen?

In 2011, the governments of both Afghanistan and the United States made serious attempts to start peace talks with the Taliban. The Taliban have stated that they are willing to negotiate. To date, however, no talks have taken place, but for the first time there seems to be an agreement on both sides that a settlement is necessary. Chapter 5 summarizes the possibilities for a peace settlement.

Chapter 6 pulls together the different strands of the first five chapters by presenting five possible scenarios, and chapter 7 summarizes our main findings and identifies key questions for policymakers to address.

2 The Geostrategies of the Afghanistan Conflict

For many years Afghanistan has been an arena where the regional powers act out their rivalries. Driven by their own conflicting agendas Afghanistan's neighbors have meddled in Afghan affairs with devastating results. Several Afghan wars were exacerbated for this reason. It is clear that Afghanistan suffers from great internal problems which must be addressed. However, it will not suffice to reach a peace agreement on the local level. The regional dimension must be accounted for as well. Otherwise, peace in Afghanistan post 2014 will remain an unlikely outcome.

There is no need to venture far back in time to find examples of geostrategic games with great consequences for Afghanistan. The famous "great game" in Central Asia was played out between Great Britain and Russia in the 19th century—with Afghanistan at center stage. These were colonial times and the world's center of power was Europe, but strategic rivalries were enacted all over the globe. After two Anglo-Afghan wars, Afghanistan was established as a buffer state between Russia and Great Britain in order to protect British India from Russian advances.¹

Fast forwarding to the 20th century and the bipolar environment of the cold war, Afghanistan was again caught up in the rivalry between external powers. The Soviet Union became increasingly influential through the provision of economic aid and education, and communist ideas became popular with the Afghan elites.² Communist ideology was viewed as a threat by traditional segments of Afghan society, which saw the role of religion in the state decline.³ Several of the regional powers—Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia—were also alarmed by growing Soviet influence and financed a coup d'état to stop it. The Soviet Union in turn supported another coup to regain its position, which led Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United States to provide arms and financial support to Islamist resistance groups. These events sparked the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

The Soviet Union left Afghanistan after more than a decade of unsuccessful warfare. It managed to keep a Soviet-backed government in place, with Muhammad Najibullah as president, from 1986 to 1992. After the fall of

¹ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 720.

² Ibid., 723.

³ Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, 214.

President Najibullah, and following the rise of the Taliban, external actors were just as involved as before. The divisive effects of the ensuing civil war made Afghanistan an easy target for continued foreign intervention. Civil war ravaged the country until 1996, when what was left of the state finally crumbled and the Taliban provided order through the severe implementation of Sharia law. Until 1997 the United States had viewed the Taliban as potential peacemakers in Afghanistan and supported them together with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Iran, India and Russia were strongly opposed to the type of Sunni extremist rule that the Taliban represented, and supported those elements which later became the Northern Alliance. After the events of September 11, 2001, the United States waged a new war in Afghanistan against its former Mujahedin protégés and the dynamics of the game changed. All of a sudden the United States, India, Russia and Iran were on the same side.

Afghanistan's tribal and multi-ethnic make-up has made it susceptible to external influence, by which foreign powers have used the decentralized power system for their own gains by pitting tribes or other domestic actors against each other. Although the above constitutes a very narrow account of how the foreign powers have behaved, it shows that alliances have fluctuated during the course of time. The only actors that have constantly remained on opposing sides are India and Pakistan. Afghanistan is still severely affected by external rivalries acted out on Afghan soil and although there are several dimensions to the conflict, some of the foreign stakeholders have the potential to make or break a peace process. A summary of the major actors' interests and motives provides an understanding of the complexities of the geostrategic puzzle.

2.1 The United States

The declared strategy of the United States in Afghanistan is to "Fight, Talk, Build." "Fight" means pushing back the insurgency by military force, weakening it enough for it to negotiate. This leads on to the "talk" portion of the strategy, and lastly to the "build," which means supporting reconstruction.⁴ Notably, there is no mention of "talk" in the U.S. National Security Strategy Document of 2010. This new dimension was added during 2011, signaling a change in U.S. policy.

The main reason for the United States getting involved in Afghanistan was to "Disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al-Qaida and its violent extremist affiliates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and around the world."⁵ Now that al-Qaida has been

⁴ Clinton, "Release of the Status Report: Afghanistan and Pakistan Civilian Engagement."

⁵ "United States National Security Strategy Document."

diminished,⁶ the United States is turning its attentions elsewhere. In November 2011, speaking to the Australian Parliament, President Barack Obama said: "After a decade in which we fought two wars that cost us dearly, in blood and treasure, the United States is turning its attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region." Announcing a new defense strategy on January 5, 2012, he repeated the message and added that the "tide of war is receding." This constitutes a strategic shift in U.S. attention away from the Middle East and Central Asia.

Obama vowed to end the war in Afghanistan during his election campaign in 2008. Following up on that promise, withdrawal is set for 2014. It is planned that the Afghan National Security Forces will have resumed responsibility for security in all areas of Afghanistan by that time. It is not completely clear what U.S. engagement will look like after 2014, but it has been established that those troops that are to remain will do so in a support capacity, and may engage in combat if the Afghan government asks them to do so.⁷ General John Allen, Commander of ISAF, has said that the U.S. effort will evolve into an advisory function, and will give "day-to-day advice on planning operations, as well as calling in artillery, close air support and, if necessary, U.S. helicopters to evacuate wounded."⁸

Obama has stated that the U.S. government supports a political settlement and a reconciliation process which includes the Taliban. The U.S. terms for talks with the Taliban are that they should abandon violence, cut all ties with al-Qaida and comply with the Afghan constitution.⁹ An official statement by Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahed in early 2012 said that the Taliban are establishing a political office in Qatar and that they are ready to negotiate with the international community.¹⁰ The Karzai government has expressed that it endorses talks between the United States and the Taliban.¹¹

⁶ "Al Qaeda is becoming less of a presence in Afghanistan, says allied commander Petraeus." *Daily Mail*.

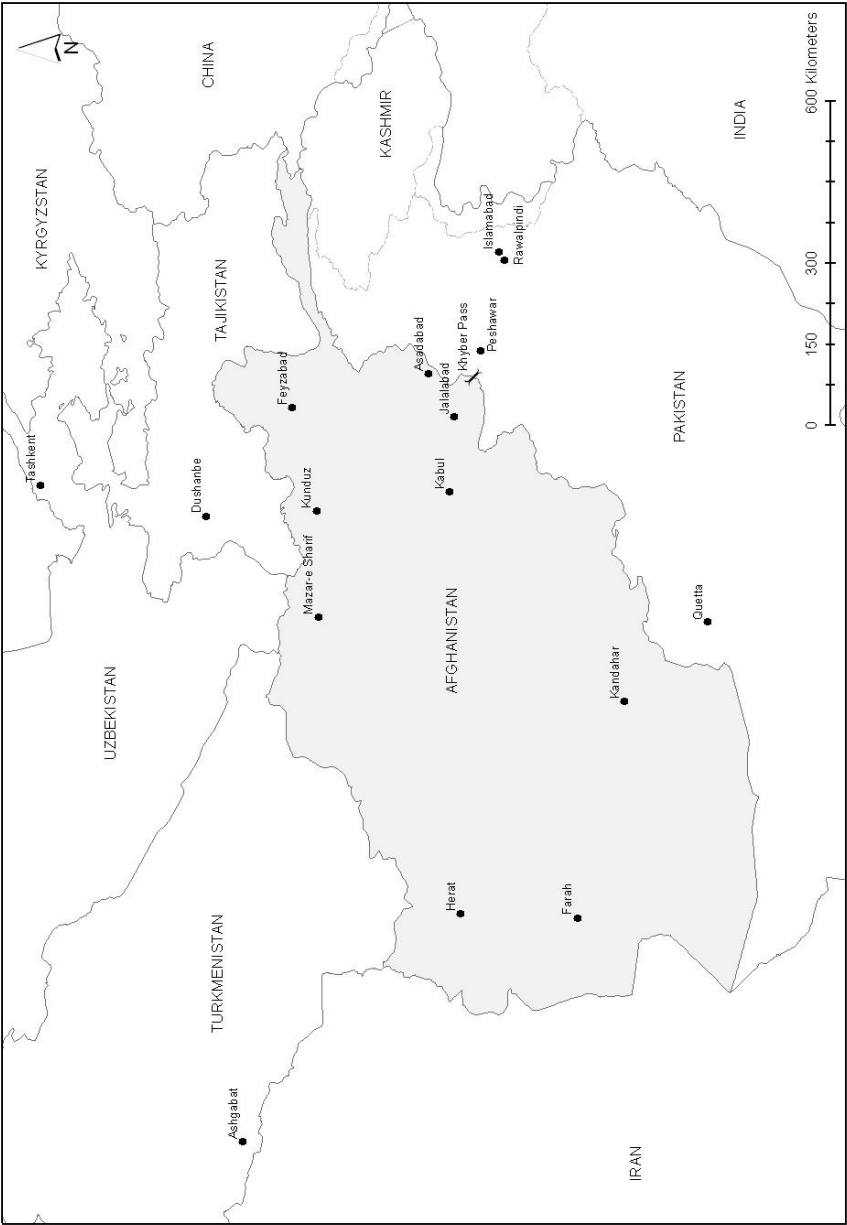
⁷ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan." Nordland, "U.S. Troops Could Stay in Afghanistan Past Deadline, Envoy Says."

⁸ Cloud and King, "U.S. plans major shift to advisory role in Afghanistan."

⁹ Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan."

¹⁰ Rosenberg, "Taliban Opening Qatar Office and Maybe Door to Talks."

¹¹ "Afghan Government Hints at Peace Talks." *CNN*.



Although no specific time frame is given for when the office will be established, such an office would mean that there is clear Taliban representation with which to communicate, and this, as far as negotiations are concerned, would constitute a step forward. The Taliban's main goal is for foreign troops to leave, and as 2014 quickly approaches it may be reasonable to believe that they see talks as an opportunity to become a part of the political system post-2014. It may also be the case that the Taliban are stalling because they know that the foreign troops are leaving. If that in fact is the case, the U.S. withdrawal may result in another civil war, and that is probably not the legacy that the United States wishes to leave behind. An escalation of the war may force the United States to re-evaluate its withdrawal. However, the economic situation in the United States is making it increasingly difficult to justify expenditure on the current scale in Afghanistan. In addition, recent polls show that 63 percent of all U.S. citizens oppose the war in Afghanistan.¹² Thus, based on public opinion and Obama's new defense strategy, it seems likely that any U.S. presence beyond 2014 will be limited in scope.

There are a number of unresolved issues linked to the withdrawal. When U.S. troops leave, their support structures will leave with them. This will create a vacuum in the economy, and it will become necessary for people who have earned their living in the troop supply systems to find new ways to make money. So far, the salaries for the Afghan National Army (ANA) have been paid in full by the United States,¹³ but this cannot continue indefinitely. The Afghan government will not be capable of shouldering this burden unless the economic situation drastically changes. The New Silk Road Initiative was launched by the United States as a measure to increase regional cooperation and stability through economic development. The idea is to re-establish Afghanistan as the Asian hub of trade that it once was. The strategy includes building infrastructure such as roads and railways, energy pipelines and electricity supply lines to enable extensive regional transport and trade.¹⁴ The New Silk Road Initiative is a long term solution that will not be able to relieve Afghanistan of its economic problems in the near future. It also hinges on the economic interests of the regional powers, which are not easily directed by another state. That Afghanistan will require outside support for a long time is underlined by the World Bank, which has predicted that Afghanistan will need USD 7.2 billion a year in aid for the next ten years.¹⁵

¹² "CNN/ORC Poll. Nov. 18–20, 2011." *CNN*.

¹³ Starr and Kuchins, "The Key to Success in Afghanistan," 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵ Boone, "Afghanistan Faces \$7bn Annual Budget Shortfall, World Bank Warns."

The United States hopes that Afghanistan's neighbors will be able to help to stabilize the country. In an attempt to implement this strategy, the Istanbul Conference on Afghanistan, held on November 2, 2011, focused on the regional aspect and how Afghanistan's neighbors could contribute to turning the negative developments around. An inherent problem in this strategy, however, is that Afghanistan's neighbors have diverging strategic interests when it comes to who rules Afghanistan—and this will continue to determine how they behave.

2.2 Pakistan

Pakistan is at the center of the geostrategic puzzle and, together with the United States, has a pivotal role in what will happen to Afghanistan. For this reason we take an in-depth look at Pakistan in chapter 3.

Summarizing Pakistan's position, in order to complete the geostrategic picture, two relationships are central: those with India and the United States. Pakistan's troubled relations with India have caused it to seek "strategic depth" in Afghanistan, meaning political influence inside Afghanistan in order to keep the country from falling under the influence of India. The rivalry between Pakistan and India goes back a long way. They have fought four wars, the last as recently as 1999, and are also in conflict over Kashmir. Pakistan feels threatened by growing Indian dominance in the region and fears becoming encircled by its arch enemy. The Kabul regime, led by Hamid Karzai, is believed to be oriented towards India. As a consequence, it is in the interests of Pakistan to assist or passively support insurgent groups inside Afghanistan.

Pakistan has also been a U.S. ally for a long time and has received military aid on and off since the 1950s. At first, the relationship was based on mutual benefit. Pakistan needed an ally against India and the United States needed an ally against communism.¹⁶ However, the end of the cold war, and later 9/11, changed the relationship radically. Suddenly, the United States wanted Pakistan to fight the former Mujahedin militias instead of channeling funds to them as it had done before.

Pakistan's complex domestic situation and its own foreign policy considerations mean that it has proved difficult to adhere to U.S. demands. The discovery and assassination of Usama bin Ladin on Pakistani soil, U.S. accusations of ISI support for the Haqqani network, (one of the semi-independent branches of the insurgency, allied to the Taliban), and the NATO air strike in Salala, which killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, made 2011 a difficult year for U.S.–Pakistani relations.

¹⁶ U.S. Library of Congress, "Country Study Pakistan."

Clearly, the premises of the relationship are different from what they used to be. The United States needs an ally against al-Qaida, but Pakistan needs an ally against India and does not think that the United States is holding up its end of the bargain. The United States has forged a closer relationship with India in order to compete with China. It has put an India-friendly government in place in Afghanistan and provided it with an army.

All of this is contrary to Pakistan's interests. Pakistan would be more comfortable with a weak Afghan army and a Pakistan-friendly government like the one in place during the Taliban era.¹⁷ Although Pakistan seemingly stands without U.S. support against India, monetary benefits remain and it is this that probably keeps the relationship going. Pakistan receives substantial amounts of military and civilian aid from the United States,¹⁸ which provides some incentives for Pakistan to continue its cooperation.¹⁹

2.3 India

India and Afghanistan share bonds of culture and history. The two countries signed a friendship treaty in 1950. Since then relations have had their ups and downs. The most recent low point was during Taliban rule, which India refused to recognize officially. Relations have improved and India is now the fifth-largest donor of bilateral assistance to Afghanistan.²⁰ A strategic partnership agreement was signed between the countries in October 2011. Among other things, they agreed to cooperate on security. India will train and equip the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), a strategic dialogue on national security cooperation will be established, and Afghanistan will support a permanent seat for India on the United Nations Security Council.

The agreement echoes some of the ideas being pushed by the Obama administration: "Regional economic cooperation shall: ... envisage assisting Afghanistan as a trade, transportation and energy hub connecting Central and South Asia and enabling free and more unfettered transport and transit linkages. ..." This is part of the remedy that the New Silk Road Initiative advocates for Afghanistan and is in tune with current strategic relations between India and the United States.²¹

¹⁷ Keller, "The Pakistanis Have a Point."

¹⁸ "A Time Line of U.S. Aid to Pakistan," *Daily Beast*.

¹⁹ "US Congress Moves to Limit Foreign Assistance to Pakistan," *The Express Tribune*.

²⁰ Embassy of India in Kabul, "Consulates."

²¹ Blake, "Looking Ahead: U.S.-India Strategic Relations and the Transpacific Century."

The announced strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific region makes it a priority for the United States to move closer to India. The prognosis is that China's share of world GDP will match the shares of the EU and the United States respectively by 2015.²² China will then be economically on a par with the United States. Because India is a democracy, it is a natural candidate for an alliance with the United States.²³

India's complicated relationship with Pakistan has a bearing on its relations with Afghanistan, the United States and China. Stephen P. Cohen writes that there are two schools of thought in India regarding Pakistan. The first is that Pakistan is an artificial state which serves the purpose of separating South Asia's Hindu and Muslim populations. The second sees Pakistan as a cradle for radical Islam, and that radical Islam poses a threat.²⁴ In turn, Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan is based on a corresponding version of the second string of thought. Pakistan perceives India as an existential threat to the Pakistani state.²⁵ Historically, Pakistan's stance has meant support for Taliban groups, and there are many signs that this continues to be the case. The rivalry between Pakistan and India has consequently made India support the opposing side. India supported the Soviet invasion in 1979, during the civil war it supported the Northern Alliance and today it is nurturing a closer relationship with the Karzai government. Thus far it has been India's strategy to apply soft power in Afghanistan, but this has not brought it any strategic gains.²⁶ India cannot tolerate Afghanistan being used as a greenhouse for anti-Indian terrorism. For India itself, however, the use of anything other than soft power would entail a costly confrontation.

2.4 China

China's main security concern in relation to Afghanistan is the potential spread of extremist ideology and violence into Xinjiang province. Xinjiang is inhabited by Uighurs, a people of Turkic descent and Muslim faith. The region is autonomous and rich in oil, gas and minerals. Some Uighurs, inspired by the new states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, cultivate the idea of real independence for Xinjiang.²⁷ Separatist ideas and their Muslim identity make the

²² Hellström and Korkmaz, *Managing Mutual Mistrust: Understanding Chinese Perspectives on Sino-Indian Relations*, 51.

²³ Blake, "Looking Ahead: U.S.-India Strategic Relations and the Transpacific Century."

²⁴ Cohen, India and Pakistan: "India and Pakistan. 'If You Don't Know Where You are Going, Any Road Will Take You There'," 137.

²⁵ Rashid, *Talibanerna*, 255.

²⁶ Pant, "The Afghan Conflict: India's Changing Role," 3.

²⁷ O'Rourke, "China's Uyghurs: A Minority in Their Own land?"

Chinese central government worried that Xinjiang could become increasingly influenced by extremism emanating from Afghanistan. There have been violent uprisings in Xinjiang—197 people were killed during a riot in Urumqi in 2009.²⁸ It is clear that the Xinjiang issue is important. A document describing Chinese–Pakistani bilateral relations says that Pakistan “firmly supports China’s position on Xinjiang,” and in a corresponding Chinese–U.S. document it is described as a “prominent issue” in Chinese–U.S. bilateral relations.²⁹

One reason China has been reluctant to become involved in non-economic sectors in Afghanistan is that it fears being perceived as an enemy of Islam,³⁰ which would not only worsen the situation in Xinjiang but also complicate China’s relationship with Pakistan. China’s entire South Asia policy is based on its relationship with Pakistan, and the relationship with Pakistan is based on mutual security interests. Thus, cooperation mainly takes place within the political and military spheres.³¹

The fact that China maintains a strong security-driven relationship with Pakistan has implications for China–India relations. The China–India relationship is characterized by mutual suspicion of each other’s intentions.³² India and the United States have forged a closer relationship because they believe it to be necessary in order to counter China’s growing influence internationally, but also because of Pakistan’s actions in Afghanistan.

On the flipside, it is likely that the closer relationship between the United States and India has caused Pakistan to act out more in Afghanistan. There is a clear discrepancy between Pakistan’s “tolerance” for extremism and China’s fear of it, and this has the potential to cause a rift in the relationship. It has already become an issue: on August 1, 2011 separatists carried out two terrorist attacks in Xinjiang and killed at least 18 people. China, which usually does not criticize Pakistan publicly, announced that the separatists, who were members of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, had been trained in Pakistan.³³

A continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan presents China with a conundrum. On the one hand, it serves China’s purposes that the United States is fighting to

²⁸ Buckley, “Ties between China and Pakistan.”

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Bilateral relations: Pakistan;” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Bilateral relations: the United States of America.”

³⁰ Pantucci, “China passes the buck in Afghanistan.”

³¹ Ye, “China–Pakistan Relationship: All-weather But Maybe Not All-dimensional.”

³² Hellström and Korkmaz, *Managing Mutual Mistrust: Understanding Chinese Perspectives on Sino-Indian Relations*, 6.

³³ Wines, “China Blames Foreign-trained Separatists for Attacks in Xinjiang.”

suppress terrorism. On the other hand, there are suspicions that the U.S. presence in Afghanistan is part of a strategy to encircle China.³⁴ Regardless of U.S. motives, if the United States should fail in Afghanistan, China's worst nightmare may come true—Afghanistan could succumb to civil war, Pakistan could lose control of the situation and extremism could be exported to China.

2.5 Iran

Iran belongs to the camp of countries in the region that is not happy about the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Although Iran is severely affected by the war in terms of the enormous drug inflows across the border with Afghanistan,³⁵ and plays host to the world's second largest refugee population,³⁶ the Iranian government sees U.S. encirclement as its worst problem. Even though Iran probably takes pleasure in watching its nemesis fail in Afghanistan, deterioration in security is not what Iran wants. Much like China, Iran fears the spread of separatism on to its territory, which could be detrimental since Iran is a multinational state. If Afghanistan were to fall apart, Iran would probably resort to supporting non-Taliban groups as it did during the 1990s. One reason for this is that the identity of the Iranian state is in part based in Shia Islam. To have Sunni extremist rule just across its eastern border would be an unacceptable threat. Iran sees itself as the protector of Shia Islam and Shi'ism is the predominant belief of Afghanistan's Hazara population.

The other part of Iran's state identity is the perception of itself as an antithesis to the West.³⁷ Therefore Iranian–U.S. rivalry is an inherent ingredient of Iranian foreign policy. Iran does not want the United States or its allies to have any influence over Afghanistan. This rivalry goes both ways. The United States does not want Iran to gain any more influence in the region than it has already. Awkwardly enough, Iran and the United States agree on the threat posed by Sunni extremism.

The U.S. state department has accused Iran of supporting Taliban groups in Afghanistan. That Iran would even consider supporting Taliban factions is an indication of how deep its problems with the United States have become. Alireza Nader and Joya Laha write that Iranian support for the Taliban is rooted in enmity towards the U.S. position on the nuclear issue, and perceived U.S.

³⁴ Swaine, "China and the 'Afpak' Issue."

³⁵ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2011*; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011*.

³⁶ UNHCR, *2012 UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Islamic Republic of Iran*.

³⁷ Ghahremanpour, "Iran Looking West: Identity, Rationality and Foreign Policy," 54–55.

support for the Baluchi insurgency inside Iran.³⁸ Open support for the Taliban would undermine the credibility of the Iranian regime domestically, but limited and clandestine support might be possible if it served an important enough strategic purpose.

The former President of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, offered a window of opportunity to improve Iran–U.S. relations during the first Bonn conference when he sided with the United States and gave his full support to the new Afghan government. In 2002, the U.S. President, George W. Bush, repaid this gesture by naming Iran as one of the three countries in the axis of evil. This clearly stated that the United States wished that particular window to remain closed.³⁹ Seven years into the Iranian presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, relations between Iran and the U.S. have reached a low point. According to Naser Hadian and Shani Hormozi, the lack of leeway during the Bush administration pushed Iran into pursuing “a reactive, costly Anti-US Counter Containment Survival Strategy.”⁴⁰ Even though cooperation on Afghanistan could benefit both countries, it is likely that they will continue to pursue their own strategies.

Iran believes that economic measures will increase development and improve security in the region.⁴¹ It has launched infrastructural projects with several of the regional powers as well as with Afghanistan itself. For example, it is to build a pipeline together with Pakistan,⁴² which could one day connect Iran to the Chinese and Indian markets. The United States favors the TAPI (Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India) pipeline and is pressuring Pakistan to abandon the plan.⁴³ Iran is supporting reconstruction efforts and is currently building a railway from Khaf to Herat, which will connect Afghanistan to Iran’s railway network.⁴⁴ These efforts are not altruistic. Iran sees the potential to increase trade with Afghanistan and the rest of Asia if Afghanistan can be stabilized. Iran views itself as a very important partner in the reconstruction of Afghanistan but complains that many of its efforts have been thwarted or are unappreciated by the United States.⁴⁵ Since the U.S. presence is perceived as the greatest threat in this complex situation, Iranian policy towards Afghanistan will continue to be a

³⁸ Nader and Laha, *Iran’s Balancing Act in Afghanistan*.

³⁹ Ayman, “Afghanistan as a Bridge,” 46.

⁴⁰ Hadian and Hormozi, “Iran’s New Security Environment Imperatives: Counter Containment or Engagement with the US,” 49.

⁴¹ “FM Official Underlines Iran’s growing Aid to Afghanistan,” *Fars News Agency*.

⁴² “Pak–Iran Gas Pipeline to be Complete by 2013,” *The Express Tribune*.

⁴³ “Iran Gas Pipeline: Pakistan Uses U.S. Opposition as Bargaining Chip,” *IR Diplomacy*, Sept. 19, 2011.

⁴⁴ Norling, *Afghanistan’s Railroad Frenzy*.

⁴⁵ Saghafi-Ameri, “Prospects for peace and prosperity in Afghanistan.”

reaction to U.S. policy. As long as the United States and Iran continue to disregard the fact that they share common interests in Afghanistan, it will remain a possibility that Iran acts as a spoiler in Afghanistan.

2.6 Russia and the Central Asian Neighbors

Russia supported the Northern Alliance alongside India and Iran in the civil war that took place in the 1990s. In the current war, Russia seems to have applied dual policies, giving limited support to NATO, while at the same time trying to undermine U.S. strategic cooperation with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. For example, Russia attempted to stop the establishment of the Manas transit center in Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁶ This could be explained by the fact that Russia has three fundamental problems in regard to Afghanistan. First, Russia fears that extremism could spread to Central Asia and Caucasus, possibly destabilizing that whole region. Second, Russia is suffering dire consequences from the flow of illegal drugs from Afghanistan—drug abuse causes 30,000 deaths a year.⁴⁷ Third, Russia is not happy about a long term U.S. presence in the region,⁴⁸ because that would interfere with and reduce Russian influence.⁴⁹ A complete U.S. withdrawal would have a negative impact on the first two of Russia's problems, and the effect on the third is self-evident. It is however quite likely that the United States will maintain a small strategic presence in the area.

A complete withdrawal is also a concern for the Central Asian countries, which share Russia's concerns over drug trafficking and extremism. The Central Asian states are fragile and may not be able to handle the spillover effects if security deteriorates in Afghanistan. With the possible exception of oil rich Kazakhstan, they are in very bad shape.⁵⁰ The fact that these countries have great economic and technical needs could have an impact on the ability of the United States to remain in the region. The United States has cooperated successfully with several of them on the Northern Distribution Network, which has provided them with economic benefits and perhaps also acted as a counterweight to Russian influence.⁵¹ At the same time some people fear that the United States is using

⁴⁶ Kirchik, "The Russians Return."

⁴⁷ "Drug Scourge is 9/11 legacy for Russia," *Moscow Times*.

⁴⁸ Nordland, "Talks on U.S. Presence in Afghanistan after 2014 Unnerve Region."

⁴⁹ "Unclear Future for U.S. Airbase in Kyrgyzstan", *Aljazeera*.

⁵⁰ International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Decay and Decline*.

⁵¹ Blank, *U.S. Drawdown in Afghanistan Stirs Reactions*.

Central Asia and Afghanistan as a platform to establish Western hegemony and to launch a future campaign against Iran.⁵²

2.7 Conclusions

The future of Afghanistan is at the mercy of a set of highly complicated state-to-state relationships and competitions. Given that the United States hopes to resolve Afghanistan's problems through regional cooperation, acknowledging the nature of these relationships is key. The United States itself is the central concern of the regional powers. It is safe to say that all of the powers calculate their next move around what the United States decides to do.

The United States has a number of strategies outlined for Afghanistan: the withdrawal of the main part of its troops in 2014, igniting a reconciliation process, boosting the economy through regional cooperation and encouraging the regional powers to take on part of the responsibility for stabilizing Afghanistan. It is not completely clear in what capacity the United States is going to remain in Afghanistan after 2014, and while the New Silk Road is an interesting idea it will not fix the Afghan economy in the short term. A reconciliation process that has the potential to leave the Taliban in government positions is intolerable for Russia, Iran and India for ideological as well as strategic reasons. If the regional powers are going to somehow assist with stabilizing Afghanistan they will do so with their own interests in mind, and—as we have seen—their interests diverge.

The U.S. strategic shift instills fear in the region that the United States is going to leave behind a broken Afghanistan, while the neighbors are left to face the consequences of destabilizing extremism and a socio-economically eroding drug trade. At the same time, there is a fear of the opposite—that the United States is never going to leave and will stay on to encroach on the strategic interests of the regional powers.

The Pakistan–India–United States triangle is a central problem. Pakistan is an ally of the United States but it has become obvious that Pakistan is still supporting insurgents, which is completely contrary to U.S. interests. Pakistan is driven by its perception of India as an existential threat and is probably greatly threatened by the friendship between the United States and India. One U.S. motive for befriending India is to be able to compete with China, but in relation to Afghanistan this may have poured fuel on the fire.

⁵² Bohr, *Central Asia: Responding to the Multi-Vectoring Game*, 115.

Another issue is the enmity between the United States and Iran, which both have chosen to put ahead of their converging interests in Afghanistan. Iran has the opportunity to be a positive influence but as long as it feels threatened by the United States it will also be a spoiler.

3 The Role of Pakistan in Afghanistan

The stability of Afghanistan is closely intertwined with developments in Pakistan. Islamabad has for decades played a determining role in Afghanistan. Pakistan helped the Taliban to power in Kabul in the 1990s. After 9/11, Pakistan gave vital support to the U.S.-led campaign to topple the Taliban regime. Today, Pakistan is yet again accused of supporting the Taliban. The behavior of Pakistan will to a large extent determine the conditions in Afghanistan beyond 2014 and is therefore a key variable in our scenario analysis.

Following the assassination of Usama bin Laden on May 2, 2011, and the 19-hour assault on the U.S. Embassy compound in Kabul on September 13, allegedly perpetrated by the Pakistan-based Haqqani network, the relationship between Washington and Islamabad hit a nadir. U.S. officials, including President Obama, have lashed out against its major non-NATO ally and accused Pakistan of harboring and interacting with Afghan insurgents.⁵³ Admiral Michael Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has gone even further in his criticism, publicly accusing Pakistan's government of actively aiding the Afghan Taliban,⁵⁴ and claiming that the Haqqani network "acts as a veritable arm of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency."⁵⁵

But is there any truth in the U.S. claims of Pakistani support for the Taliban? If so, what is the rationale for Pakistan's double dealing vis-à-vis Afghanistan?

3.1 Diverging Views on Pakistani Support for the Afghan Taliban

Today it is common knowledge that Pakistan allows safe havens on its soil for major Taliban groups that fight the ISAF forces in Afghanistan. The core Afghan Taliban movement (the Quetta Shura) led by Mullah Omar, Hizb-e Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG) and the Haqqani network are all based in and operate out of Pakistan. A key question which analysts have been grappling with is whether Pakistan harbors the Taliban due to an unwillingness to crack down

⁵³ Obama, "News Conference by the President."

⁵⁴ Mullen, "Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Afghanistan and Iraq."

⁵⁵ Barnes, "U.S. Accuses Pakistan of Militant Ties."

on them or the Pakistani military and/or the intelligence leadership actively back the insurgents in Afghanistan.

There is a widespread belief among analysts on Pakistan that rogue elements within the ISI—behind the backs of the government, the military and the intelligence leadership—have aided the Afghan Taliban. Antonio Giustozzi argues that current or retired members of the ISI have assisted Taliban insurgent groups.⁵⁶ Hassan Abbas as well as Fredric Grare maintain that certain groups within ISI, but not the ISI as a whole, actively support the Taliban.⁵⁷ Anatol Lieven argues, however, that although Pakistan has not taken strong action against the Taliban, the military and intelligence leadership do not actively aide the insurgency, which is demonstrated by its lack of sophisticated weaponry and training and its low-quality IEDs.⁵⁸ C. Christine Fair and Seth G. Jones accuse neither the government nor the military leadership of providing active support to the Taliban insurgency, but hold that elements within the Frontier Corps, the military and the ISI are using the Taliban as proxies in Afghanistan.⁵⁹

A contending narrative on Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan, however, has gained momentum in recent years in the context of Washington's publicly expressed frustration over Islamabad's unwillingness to comply with U.S. demands. Ahmed Rashid claims in *Descent into Chaos* that the Pakistani military and intelligence leadership, which for decades has monopolized Pakistan's foreign and security policy, has provided covert and active support for the Taliban insurgency behind the backs of the United States. Rashid's hypothesis is supported by, for example, Matt Waldman and Admiral Michael Mullen.⁶⁰

Since the mid-1970s, the official policy of the Pakistani military has been to support Islamic fundamentalist groups as proxies in Afghanistan. According to Rashid, this policy did not end with 9/11. Financial, military and logistical aid to the Afghan Taliban has continued, and the policy of the most senior Pakistani generals, including President Pervez Musharraf, was always to provide active support for the Taliban. In order to hide its real intentions, the Pakistani military establishment has adopted a "two-track strategy:" hunting down al-Qaida operatives with one hand and feeding the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan with the other. Rashid argues that the ISI is the key implementer of the policy, but the

⁵⁶ Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*.

⁵⁷ Bajoria, "The ISI and Terrorism: Behind the Accusations."

⁵⁸ Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country*, 412.

⁵⁹ Fair and Jones, "Pakistan's War Within," 181.

⁶⁰ Waldman, "The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship Between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents."

ISI follows the orders of the military leadership which also effectively controls the state apparatus.⁶¹

3.1.1 A Supportive U.S. Ally in the War on Terror

Pakistan has for almost a decade been perceived as one of the closest allies of the United States. After 9/11, the head of the military regime, General Musharraf, pledged support for the War on Terror. Pakistan agreed to a number of U.S. demands: to grant over flight and landing rights, stop Pakistani fighters joining the Taliban, and so on. In exchange, the United States waived three layers of sanctions imposed because of Pakistan's nuclear program and the military coup of 1999 and instead pledged foreign assistance.⁶²

In most respects Pakistan has kept its promises. The provision of over flight rights, military bases and intelligence cooperation contributed significantly to the swift removal of the Taliban from Afghanistan. Moreover, during and after Operation Enduring Freedom, Pakistan apprehended hundreds of al-Qaida operatives and foreign jihadists. Key al-Qaida leaders such as Abu Zubaydah, former head of al-Qaida's overseas operations, and Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, the mastermind of 9/11, were caught and handed over to the United States.⁶³ In addition, after U.S. pressure, and just hours before the war in Afghanistan began, President Musharraf forced three influential generals, ardent supporters of the Taliban, to resign, among them the chief of the ISI who was replaced by a close aide of President Musharraf.⁶⁴

The contributions of Pakistan to the war and the apparent policy shift in Afghanistan obviously pleased U.S. officials. President George W. Bush praised Pakistan's efforts as critical contributions to the successful toppling of the Taliban.⁶⁵ "I honestly believe," Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said in December 2001, "that we have received such a wonderful cooperation from the Pakistani government."⁶⁶

The relationship between the United States and the military regime in Pakistan remained strong almost throughout the Bush presidency. Bush described Musharraf as a "courageous leader and a friend of the United States."⁶⁷ In 2004

⁶¹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 220.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 149, 225–226.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁵ Bush, "The President's News Conference with President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan," (2002).

⁶⁶ Rumsfeld, "DoD News Briefing."

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, "The President's News Conference with President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan," (2003).

bilateral relations were reinforced when the U.S. President designated Pakistan “a major non-NATO ally.”⁶⁸

3.1.2 Signs of Complicity

Even in 2001 there were signs that the ISI, or at least elements within the military and intelligence establishment, were not complying with U.S. requirements, but instead continued to support the Taliban. Just before the US-led war in Afghanistan, an ISI report allegedly estimated that the Taliban could withstand a U.S. attack until 2002 and subsequently fight a guerilla war from the mountainous regions.⁶⁹ The report probably influenced the double dealings within the military and intelligence. While some ISI operatives assisted the CIA in targeting al-Qaida operatives and certain Taliban members, others provided assistance to the Taliban resistance during 2001. Fuel trucks for the Taliban entered Afghanistan through the Khyber and Chaman passes. Thousands of Pakistani and foreign fighters entered Afghanistan from the tribal areas to assist the Taliban in the war against United States and the Northern Alliance.⁷⁰ At the end of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, hundreds of ISI officers and Pakistani soldiers became trapped around Kunduz together with Taliban fighters. With U.S. permission, Pakistan conducted an airlift to rescue its citizens and reportedly also Taliban commanders from Afghanistan.⁷¹

The United States managed to topple the Taliban regime in just six weeks. Washington soon lost interest in Afghanistan and became increasingly preoccupied with the planning and execution of the war in Iraq. In the years that followed the “victory” in Afghanistan, the Pakistani military and intelligence seemed to hedge their bets on the Taliban, and began to distinguish between so-called good jihadists—the Afghan Taliban based in Quetta, the Haqqani Network, Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG)—and “bad jihadists”—the Pakistani Taliban, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), al-Qaida and foreign fighters. While the good jihadists solely aimed their weapons at Afghanistan, the bad jihadists also targeted the Pakistani state.⁷² Thus, while the Pakistani military helped the United States to pursue its predominant objective—capturing and killing al-Qaida fighters—Islamabad simultaneously sheltered the Afghan Taliban,

⁶⁸ Ibid, “Memorandum on Destination of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as a Major Non-NATO Ally.”

⁶⁹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 77.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 77–83.

⁷¹ Ibid., 90–93.

⁷² Ibid., 155.

which was allowed to regroup in Pakistan and then in 2004 to stage a comeback in Afghanistan.

According to Rashid, Pakistan not only harbored the Afghan Taliban but also actively aided them. According to information provided to Rashid, the Pakistani military established a clandestine organization, separate from the intelligence and military hierarchies, to support the Taliban and other militant Islamist groups. The organization has no direct organizational links with the ISI or the army at the operational level, but receives support through the Frontier Corps. It allegedly hires retired military and intelligence personnel on a short-term basis, who are primarily of Pashtun decent and have been part of pro-Taliban programs in the past. In order to remain undetected, the contractors simultaneously have civilian occupations—such as teachers, aid workers, administrators, and so on. Rashid maintains that the organization has offices in Quetta, Peshawar and other cities, from which the Afghan Taliban receives training, funds and strategic direction.⁷³

Since 2001, the Pakistani military and the intelligence service have run training camps outside Quetta, assisted the Afghan Taliban with means of communication and transportation and provided medical facilities in Pakistan for injured Taliban insurgents. Moreover, the U.S. base in Bagram has monitored communication between Taliban commanders and Pakistan army officers, in which for example the former have asked the latter for safe passage to and from Afghanistan. Hence, while the United States was too preoccupied with the war in Iraq, the Taliban regrouped in Baluchistan, south of the border with Pakistan, and, with the help of ISI members, launched a new offensive.⁷⁴

The hypothesis of active assistance to the Taliban insurgency is supported by the results of a field study conducted by Matt Waldman in February–May 2010. Waldman interviewed several Taliban commanders in Afghanistan to shed light on the linkages between the ISI and the Afghan Taliban in Quetta and the Haqqani network in North Waziristan.⁷⁵

Waldman's research indicates that the Pakistani military establishment and President Zardari provide active assistance to the insurgency.⁷⁶ It is difficult to make a clear distinction between the military and the ISI. Most officers in the ISI are from the army.⁷⁷ Furthermore, President Musharraf reorganized the ISI and

⁷³ Ibid., 221–222.

⁷⁴ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 222–223.

⁷⁵ Waldman, “The Sun in the Sky.”

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Bajoria, “The ISI and Terrorism: Behind the Accusations.”

the army after 9/11, and appointed close associates as chiefs of the ISI.⁷⁸ The current chief of army staff, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, was appointed by Musharraf as head of the ISI in 2004–2007 (i.e. during the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan).⁷⁹ In 2008, Kayani appointed the current chief of the ISI, Ahmad Shuja Pasha, in opposition to the wishes of the democratically elected government.⁸⁰ It is thus difficult to blame the ISI for complicity without also accusing the army.

Waldman's assertion that the ISI orchestrates and provides active backing for the Haqqani network is, in contrast to the account of the support to the Quetta Shura, based on just a handful interviews. It is difficult to verify the statements of Admiral Mullen that the Haqqani network acts "as veritable arm of ISI" or to demonstrate that ISI is to be blamed for attacks on the U.S. and Indian embassies in Afghanistan, as Kabul and New Delhi claim. Studies on the Haqqani network indicate that the group is an independent actor in the Afghanistan–Pakistan arena, a nexus cooperating with different groups at different times for various purposes. The Haqqanis have had very close relations with al-Qaida and been funded by the ISI; the group seems to be on good terms with the Pakistan Taliban and has pledged allegiance to the Quetta Shura, but nevertheless operates independently of the core Afghan Taliban movement.⁸¹ Even though the Pakistani intelligence service and the Haqqani network are on good terms, sufficient credible information from open sources is lacking. The nature of the current ISI–Haqqani relationship is unclear, as even President Obama and U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta acknowledge.⁸² It is nevertheless clear that the Pakistani military has double dealt in the sense that it has sheltered the Haqqani network in North Waziristan while at the same time fighting the Pakistani Taliban in South Waziristan and other neighboring districts of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

Even though the accounts of Rashid, Waldman and Mullen suggest that Pakistan's military leadership has sanctioned active assistance to the Taliban through the provision of funds, arms, training, logistics, strategic direction, and so on, it is hard to validate the hypothesis. The military and the ISI are not necessarily monolithic organizations. Rogue elements within the military and security establishment might, as many researchers assume, have acted in defiance

⁷⁸ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 79.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁸⁰ Feierstein, "Kayani Exercises Influence with New Military Appointments."

⁸¹ Ruttig, "The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity"; Ressler, and Brown, "The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of al-Qaida."

⁸² Obama, "Pakistan–U.S. Relations," "Panetta Calls for 'Trusting' Ties with Pakistan," *Dawn*.

of official policy and the top generals. What seems clear, however, is that Pakistan has supported the Taliban in at least one sense. Islamabad has provided the Afghan Taliban with safe havens on its territory. The Pakistani military has thus played a double game in that the army has fought against the Pakistani Taliban and al-Qaida, which threaten the state and internal security, but done nothing about the Afghan Taliban—the Quetta Shura, Haqqani network and HIG—which continues to combat ISAF and ANSF forces in Afghanistan from its sanctuaries on the Pakistani side of the border.

3.2 Rationale for Pakistani Support for the Afghan Taliban

The logic behind Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban can be understood in the context of: (i) the historical rivalry with and perceived existential threat from India; (ii) past and present tense relations with Afghanistan in the light of the issue of "Pashtunistan"; (iii) the perception of U.S. betrayal and of the U.S. short-term perspective in Afghanistan; and (iv) the threat of instability and civil war that a Pakistani military campaign against the sanctuaries of the Afghan Taliban might bring about.

3.2.1 The Historical Rivalry with India

Ever since its formation in 1947, Pakistan has grappled with an acute sense of insecurity—a sentiment strengthened by ensuing wars with India and by Afghanistan's refusal to recognize the Durrand-line as its international border with Pakistan. Security conditions facilitated the rise to power of the military, which has taken control over foreign and security policy. For the past 35 years the military has based its national security agenda on three pillars: develop a nuclear weapons arsenal, counter Indian dominance in the region and establish a friendly government in Afghanistan. The primary method for achieving the latter two objectives has been to support militant Islamist groups and parties such as the Taliban.⁸³

For more than 60 years, ever since the United Kingdom partitioned India and departed its colony, India and Pakistan have been at each other's throats. Four major wars have been fought (1947–49, 1965, 1971 and 1999) and almost a fifth in 2002.⁸⁴ In addition to Kashmir, Afghanistan has gradually emerged as a key

⁸³ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 219.

⁸⁴ Wolpert, *India and Pakistan: Continued Conflict or Cooperation?*

theater in the conflict between the two major powers of the subcontinent. After partition, India established good relations with Afghanistan but the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan became tense, sometimes even hostile.⁸⁵ Pakistan has accused Kabul of supporting separatist movements through its Afghan backdoor. Moreover, during the Afghan civil and proxy war of the 1990s, India trained and armed the warlords of the Northern Alliance, which fought against the Taliban and other militant Pashtun groups allied with and supported from Pakistan.⁸⁶

Following to the doctrine of “strategic depth,” a Pakistan-controlled buffer zone in Afghanistan has been a deep-rooted idea among Pakistani generals since the late 1970s. The primary objectives of “strategic depth” in Afghanistan are to avoid Indian encirclement, preclude the risk of a two-front war and thwart alleged support to Baluch and Pashtun militants in Pakistan from India’s intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).⁸⁷

The events surrounding the war between India and Pakistan in 1971, which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh, are of particular interest since they have contributed to the current shape of Pakistan’s security policy. The first ever general elections in Pakistan were conducted in December 1970, resulting in a victory for the Awami League, the Bengali nationalist party. But the ruling military regime, based in West Pakistan, refused to let Awami League form a government and instead ruthlessly cracked down on the Bengali nationalist movement. India intervened in this conflict by assisting the Bengali rebels. Indian troops even crossed the border to defeat Pakistani forces inside East Pakistan.⁸⁸

The loss of East Pakistan and 55 percent of its population in 1971 due to the intervention of India is a major national trauma for the Pakistani military.⁸⁹ The creation of Bangladesh demonstrated the vulnerability of the ethnically heterogeneous Pakistan when targeted by joint external and internal enemies.

3.2.2 Pashtunistan

In the minds of Pakistan’s military leadership, the threat from India has been exacerbated by the troublesome relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. When Pakistan was created in 1947, Afghanistan refused to recognize the

⁸⁵ Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*.

⁸⁶ Rashid, *Talibanerna*, 255.

⁸⁷ “RAW Is Training 600 Balochis in Afghanistan,” *Outlook India*.

⁸⁸ Talbot, *Pakistan*, 201; Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 457–461.

⁸⁹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 33.

Durrand-line, demarcated in 1893 following the Second Anglo–Afghan war (1878–80), as the international border between Afghanistan and the British Raj. The Pashtun monarchy in Kabul maintained that the Durrand-line was a mere colonial construction which artificially separated Afghan Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in the country, from their numerically superior ethnic brothers in Pakistan, where the Pashtuns constitute the largest minority. Afghanistan was the only country in the world to vote against Pakistan’s membership of the United Nations, and it began to support the Pashtun nationalist movement in Pakistan which promoted the idea of a united Pashtunistan. During the 1950s and 1960s, armed incursions from Afghanistan were a cause of great irritation in Pakistan, and diplomatic relations between the two states were frosty.⁹⁰

The aftershock of the “debacle in Bangladesh” resulted in Pakistan adopting new security instruments to mitigate a combination of domestic threats (ethnic separatism) and foreign threats (India and Afghanistan). A few months after the military defeat in East Pakistan the new Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, launched the nuclear weapons program.⁹¹ Following the fall of the monarchy in Afghanistan in 1973, Pakistan also began to aid militant Islamist groups in its Afghan backyard in order to avert potential security threats from Afghanistan and India.⁹² Just as Indian West Bengal had been used as a launching pad for Bengali proxies, Islamabad feared that the Pashtun and Baluchi provinces in Afghanistan could be exploited by foreign powers as springboards to strengthen militant separatist movements among the minorities on the Pakistani side of the border. Indeed, Pakistan had for years accused Kabul and New Delhi of supporting separatist movements among Baluchis and Pashtuns through the porous and contested Durrand-line. The offensive security policy of strategic depth through Islamist proxies thus began to take shape in the late 1970s to counter the regional supremacy of India, prevent the disintegration of Pakistan and secure a buffer against hostile forces in Afghanistan.

Pakistan’s support for fundamentalist Islamist groups increased during the military regime of Zia ul-Haq (1977–88) and multiplied during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–89). In the final decade of the cold war the United States poured billions of dollars into the pockets of the ISI, which used it to fund and equip seven Afghan Mujahedin groups in Peshawar.⁹³ India, on the other hand, gave tacit support to the Soviet Union, its main weapons supplier. New Delhi refrained from condemning the Soviet invasion and occupation of

⁹⁰ Talbot, 99.

⁹¹ Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm*, 184.

⁹² Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, 100.

⁹³ Rashid, *Talibanerna*, 47.

Afghanistan and supported the Moscow-backed Najibullah regime in Kabul (1986–1992).⁹⁴

Following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan at the beginning of the 1990s, Afghanistan descended into a civil and proxy war. India together with Russia, Iran and four of the five Central Asian states supported the Northern Alliance, a coalition of mainly Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara warlords that managed to capture Kabul in 1992. Pakistan, on the other hand, aided the Pashtun warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his Hizb-e Islami. When Hekmatyar failed to conquer Kabul, however, Pakistan began to support the emerging Taliban movement in Kandahar. The Taliban conquest of Kabul in 1996 was thus a major success for Pakistan's security establishment. For the first time, a friendly Pashtun regime had been established in Afghanistan and strategic depth against India achieved.⁹⁵

3.2.3 Perceived U.S. Betrayal and a Shifting Regional Balance of Power Post-9/11

On the eve of 9/11, the conflict between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan continued to be close to military confrontation. Pakistan assisted militant groups that perpetrated attacks against Indian targets in Kashmir, while India supplied the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan with weapons and training. Pakistan had the upper hand in Afghanistan. For the first time in decades, a pro-Pakistani government, the Taliban regime, ruled in Kabul. Then an unforeseen variable entered the equation: aircrafts hijacked by al-Qaida operatives crashed into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon, and overnight the rules of the game in Afghanistan were changed.

Thus, when George W. Bush requested Islamabad's support for the War on Terror, Pakistan was in danger of losing a key ally in Kabul as well as strategic depth inside Afghanistan. Leading generals within the army and the ISI consequently opposed acceding to U.S. demands regarding the war in Afghanistan. But Musharraf argued that United States would attack the Taliban regardless of Islamabad's concerns and if Pakistan did not support Operation Enduring Freedom, Washington would instead turn to India and thus tip the regional balance of power in favor of Islamabad's arch enemy. Musharraf won the internal debate and Pakistan acceded to all the demands of the United States, albeit with a key reservation—that the war would not involve Indian military

⁹⁴ Crossette, "India to Provide Aid to Government in Afghanistan," Joshi, "India's Strategic Calculus in Afghanistan."

⁹⁵ Rashid, *Talibanerna*.

forces.⁹⁶ In addition, Pakistan asked the United States not to allow the Northern Alliance to capture Kabul and to allow moderate elements of the Taliban to be an essential part of any future government.⁹⁷ The United States, however, disregarded the latter two requests and instead let the Northern Alliance take Kabul, excluded all Taliban groups from power and made Hamid Karzai president. Karzai is a Pashtun known for his antipathy towards the Taliban and the ISI (he accuses the ISI of the murder of his father) and also for being on friendly terms with India (Karzai is a Political Science Graduate from Himachal Pradesh University in Shimla, India).⁹⁸

The key aims behind Pakistan's pledge of support for the U.S. war in Afghanistan—to keep India at bay in Afghanistan and avoid closer relations between Washington and New Delhi—proved futile. Despite Pakistan's initial accession to most of the U.S. demands, the regional balance of power in general and in particular within Afghanistan has markedly tilted towards India since 9/11—partly because of the United States.

The gradual geopolitical shift from the West towards the East has been accompanied by growing U.S. alignment with the rising India in order to contain China. In his second term in office, U.S. President Bill Clinton actively worked to improve the strained relations between the United States and India. During the Bush administration, a key aspect of its foreign policy, in addition to the War on Terror, was to draw the world's largest democracy into the orbit of the United States. Washington to a large extent succeeded in its efforts, primarily through the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal in 2005 and the implied acceptance of India into the nuclear weapons club. The defense ties between the countries have subsequently grown increasingly strong. U.S. military sales to India have grown in less than a decade from zero to about USD 6 billion.⁹⁹ Obama labels the relationship with New Delhi “one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century” and the Pentagon prioritizes military relations with India.¹⁰⁰

Operation Enduring Freedom resulted in a loss of strategic depth and the replacement of the pro-Pakistan Taliban regime with the more India-friendly administration of Hamid Karzai and the former warlords of the Northern Alliance. Thus, in December 2001, when the United States assumed that the mission against the Taliban was accomplished and readjusted its focus to the

⁹⁶ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, 29, 89.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3–6.

⁹⁹ US Department of Defense, “Report to Congress on U.S.–India Security Cooperation,” 5.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

looming war in Iraq, Pakistan was, despite its crucial contributions to the war, on the losing side of the power game in Afghanistan.

From the perspective of Islamabad, the actions of the United States during and after Operation Enduring Freedom seemed to follow a pattern of U.S. shortsightedness and betrayal. When the Soviet Union was forced to retreat from Afghanistan in 1989, the United States immediately abandoned not only Afghanistan but also its ally, Pakistan. Even though Islamabad contributed significantly to the defeat of the Soviets, it received nothing in return when the war finally ended. Instead, the United States drastically reduced its aid and imposed sanctions linked to Pakistan's nuclear weapons program—even though it had been a well-known fact for more than a decade.¹⁰¹ Nor did Washington take account of Pakistan's security interests in Afghanistan, which soon descended into a civil and proxy war in which the warlords supported by India, Iran and Russia were successful until Pakistan began to support the Taliban.

Today, from Pakistan's point of view, it seems as if the United States is once again ignoring growing Indian influence at the expense of Pakistani security concerns. In the past decade, India has invested heavily, economically and diplomatically, in Afghanistan. India is the sixth largest contributor of aid to Afghanistan (2010),¹⁰² and has a significant diplomatic presence. In addition to an embassy in Kabul, India has opened four consulates (in Kandahar, Jalalabad, Herat and Mazar-e Sharif).¹⁰³ Pakistan blames India for supporting the Baluchi rebellion inside Pakistan which restarted in 2005, from the consulate in Kandahar, as well as the unrest among the Pakistani Taliban in the tribal areas from Jalalabad.

Since 2001, the United States has discouraged any Indian military presence in Afghanistan. But India has been training Afghan officers at the National Defense Academy in New Delhi and agreed to train cadets at its military academy in Deradun. In the context of deteriorating U.S.–Pakistan relations and following the assassination of former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani in September 2011 by the Haqqani network, the ties between New Delhi and Kabul have grown stronger. In October 2011, President Karzai and Prime Minister Singh signed a “strategic partnership” in which India among other things pledged

¹⁰¹ Keller, “The Pakistanis Have a Point.”

¹⁰² Embassy of India in Kabul, “India's Assistance Programme for Afghanistan's Reconstruction.”

¹⁰³ Embassy of India in Kabul, “Consulates.”

“training, equipping and capacity building programs for Afghan National Security Forces.”¹⁰⁴

The nightmare of the Pakistani military seems thus to have come true. While the West prepares for withdrawal from Afghanistan, Islamabad’s two historic adversaries have joined hands and established a long-term security pact of military cooperation.

Pakistan’s fear of increased Indian influence in Afghanistan since 9/11 is undoubtedly exaggerated. It is nevertheless based on genuine security concerns. The fact that the U.S. War on Terror resulted in a changed regional power balance in Afghanistan in favor of India provides a background for understanding why Islamabad continues to support the Taliban in spite of its status as an U.S. ally.

3.2.4 The Taliban and the Stability of the Pakistani State

Pakistan allows the Afghan Taliban to operate on its territory in order to achieve important security objectives in Afghanistan. In addition, it is possible that the army shelters the Afghan Taliban in order to prevent Pakistan from descending into total chaos. Indeed, if Pakistan’s army for some reason, such as U.S. pressure or intervention, changed its mind and decided to clamp down on the Afghan Taliban’s sanctuaries in Baluchistan, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it might create yet another enemy which the fragile and embattled Pakistani state might lack the capacity to defeat.

Since 9/11, the Pakistan state has had to cope with major security challenges. In 2003, al-Qaida declared war on Pakistan. The number of attacks on Pakistan’s police and military forces annually has grown steadily.¹⁰⁵ In 2005, Baluchi nationalist groups, which seek to establish an independent state for the Baluchi people, instigated a new round of fighting in the perennial civil war against the Pakistan state.¹⁰⁶

Pakistan’s security situation deteriorated dramatically in 2007, following a crackdown on the militants in the Red Mosque in Islamabad and the formation of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The flow of foreign jihadists and Taliban fighters into FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after the war in Afghanistan in 2001 contributed to the radicalization of these mountainous Pashtun-dominated areas.

¹⁰⁴ India Ministry of External Affairs. “Text of Agreement on Strategic Partnership between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.”

¹⁰⁵ Rashid, *Talibanerna*, 230.

¹⁰⁶ Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country*, 349.

FATA became a safe haven for global jihadists, who trained and planned attacks on the West and in Pakistan, as well as for indigenous Taliban who struggled against and successfully pushed back Western forces in Afghanistan.

International pressure on Musharraf led him to crack down on Islamist militants, who responded by unleashing violence and suicide attacks in Pakistan. Since 2008, about 37,700 people have died in terrorist attacks, clashes between the army and militants, operations by security forces, drone strikes, sectarian violence, and so on.¹⁰⁷ Even though the level of violence has decreased somewhat in the past two years, it is still at a very high level. In 2011 about 7,000 Pakistanis were killed in violent attacks, primarily due to the war between the Pakistan military and the Taliban and the Baluchi nationalists.¹⁰⁸

Violence has been concentrated in the Pashtun-dominated areas of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkwa, and is to large extent a result of the de facto civil war between the Pakistani Taliban and the military. In 2007, the TTP took control of large parts of FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkwa. The Pakistan army has since launched several military campaigns against the TTP and managed to push it back in 2009, but the costs of the war have been heavy. Since 9/11, about 8,800 military personnel have been killed in Pakistan.¹⁰⁹ In 2009 alone about 10,000 people, including Taliban, civilians and more than 2,350 officers, lost their lives in the war between the TTP and the army.¹¹⁰ The exact death toll among civilians is unclear, but undoubtedly high due to the brutal tactics of the army (collective punishment, bulldozing houses etc.) and the nature of the terrorist operations by the militants. During Operation Zalzalā in South Waziristan, more than 4,000 houses were destroyed in January 2009 alone, displacing around 200,000 people according to an official investigation.¹¹¹ Moreover, refugee organizations estimate that more than 3 million people were forced to leave their homes due to fighting in the Swat region.¹¹²

Since Pakistan has had such difficulty in pushing back the Pakistani Taliban, it is safe to suppose that a war against the Afghan Taliban would result in havoc and instability on an even greater scale. Thus, even if Islamabad wanted to eliminate the Mullah Omar's Afghan Taliban and their allies, the Pakistan army might be unable to achieve their objectives. An onslaught on the Afghan Taliban has the

¹⁰⁷ Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, "Pakistan Security Report 2011," 5; "Pakistan Security Report 2010," 2.

¹⁰⁸ Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, "Pakistan Security Report 2011," 5.

¹⁰⁹ Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country*, 475.

¹¹⁰ "Global war on terror claims 30,000 Pakistani casualties."

¹¹¹ Fair and Jones, *Pakistan's War Within*, 174.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 177.

potential to create yet another civil war within the territory of the nuclear-armed and weak state of Pakistan.

3.3 Conclusions

Two questions were posed at the beginning of this chapter: Is there any truth in the U.S. claims that Pakistan supports the Taliban; and what is the rationale behind Pakistan's double dealing vis-à-vis Afghanistan?

First, Pakistan supports the Afghan Taliban in the sense that Islamabad harbors the key Afghan Taliban groups that fight ISAF in Afghanistan. Islamabad also plays a certain kind of double game by distinguishing between the Pakistani Taliban, which the Pakistan army combats, and the Afghan Taliban, which is left alone to fight a jihad in Afghanistan. Moreover, elements within the Pakistan military and intelligence establishment have been actively aiding the Afghan Taliban. There is, however, not enough evidence to determine whether the leading generals in the army and the ISI actively support the insurgency through funding, logistics, strategic assistance, and so on. Islamabad is unlikely to be in control of the movements of the Afghan Taliban, which seems to be independent.

Second, a key factor for Pakistan's support for the Taliban is a sense of insecurity—undoubtedly exaggerated but nonetheless real—at the hands of its nemesis, the growing economic and military power of India, and to lesser extent from an unfriendly Afghanistan. In the past decade the regional balance of power in South Asia has shifted, partly due to the growing economy and increasing military spending of India. The trend has accelerated due to U.S. action in the region. During the War on Terror, Pakistan's historical ally gradually aligned with India in order to secure its long-term interests in Asia. At the same time, Pakistan, as it sees things, has lost its strategic depth in Afghanistan because of the United States. A sense of U.S. betrayal in Islamabad coupled with the realization that Washington's long-term commitment lies with India are likely to have contributed to Pakistan's double game in Afghanistan. Thus, to counter the perceived Indian threat and avoid encirclement, Pakistan has continued to play the Taliban card in pursuit of its desired strategic objective in post-2014 Afghanistan.

In addition, even if the Pakistan military were willing to combat the Afghan Taliban it might lack the capacity to defeat it. A tougher policy towards the Afghan Taliban might escalate the internal problems that the Pakistani government has with its own Taliban. Pakistan's double play in Afghanistan may thus to some extent be motivated by legitimate concerns regarding its own national security.

Hence, Islamabad's willingness to shelter the Afghan Taliban and let them operate from its territory is linked to both internal and external threats to its

national security. The Taliban is perceived as a useful ally in Afghanistan, particularly post-2014, since it may help reduce the influence and lessen the threat of India—as it did in the 1990s—and act as a bulwark against an unfriendly regime in Kabul. However, the Afghan Taliban are themselves internal security threats to the state of Pakistan. To crack down on their bases would be likely to escalate the internal conflict in Pakistan and further destabilize a state which already faces a number of major domestic challenges.

4 The Kabul Regime: Political Actors and Current Trends

After the Taliban regime was ousted in 2001, the process of transforming Afghanistan into a democratic state was kick-started. The Bonn Agreement of 2001 moved the country into an era of presidential rule. Like most fragile states emerging from decades of civil war, this has proved to be a complex and difficult undertaking. The government is fragile and inexperienced, and it depends on aid and international security forces for its protection. Expectations pertaining to a modern state, such as democracy, human rights and service delivery, are intertwined with traditional governance structures and warlordism. Ethnic and tribal allegiances and patronage systems shape the political landscape.

The prospects for a successful statebuilding are bleak. Afghanistan remains fragmented and the central government's capacity for and interest in responsible governance is questionable. This, in combination with immunity from prosecution for serious violations, endemic corruption in governmental institutions and a failure to deliver essential services to the population, has contributed to the resurrection of the Taliban in otherwise stable and secure regions of Afghanistan, such as the northern provinces.¹¹³

The stability of the Afghan state and its capacity to govern and control its entire territory are pivotal to a sustainable peace and the relations among the regional powers, after 2014. If the Afghan state remains a rickety balance of ethnic allegiances and patronage systems, and if the state disintegrates into subnational fragments, this will have an impact on the security, politics and economies of neighboring countries.

4.1 Political Actors

After the victory over the Taliban in 2001, hopes were raised for progress towards a strong and pluralist political party system that would contribute to a democratic nation state. However, after the first parliamentary election of 2005, such hopes faded quickly, together with any perception of the legitimacy of the government lead by President Hamid Karzai. The president is perceived as prejudiced against political parties as political institutions. He has been criticized for pushing government policies with the aim to sideline political parties and

¹¹³ Giustozzi and Reuter, *The Insurgents of the Afghan North*, 2.

party development in order to curtail political competition.¹¹⁴ The president has neither formed his own political party nor officially joined an existing one.

4.1.1 Political parties: Perceptions, Role and Profile

There are a host of political parties in Afghanistan, although they have little resemblance to political parties in a Western democratic state. There are no exact figures for the number of political parties, since not all of them have registered or been accepted for registration. Prior to the most recent political party law, of September 2009, 110 parties had registered with the Ministry of Justice. However, at the time of the parliamentary election in 2010, only five had completed the required reregistration process.¹¹⁵

Progress towards a strong and pluralist political system in Afghanistan has proved difficult. It is challenged by the perception that political parties are support networks for individuals rather than organizations led by these individuals. It is also a commonly held belief that the current environment is not conducive to the development of new political parties or a role for such parties.¹¹⁶ This is very much a result of the 2001 Bonn Conference, at which new and emerging democratic parties were not allowed to participate but were invited only as observers.¹¹⁷ The optimism of the new parties was further reduced by the lack of a safe political environment. After the Bonn Conference, factional militias and the warlords, superficially transformed into political parties and politicians, began to dominate the political scene and governmental institutions. They did not welcome the new democratic parties. The new modern and democratic parties live in fear of persecution and can only operate freely in urban areas.¹¹⁸

In the post-Taliban era, political parties have mainly focused on elections; and there is hardly any activity in the period between such elections. Although some of the parties have historical links to political ideologies, for example, Marxism, politics in Afghanistan is not necessarily organized around cross-cutting issues or ideologies, but instead around the interests of warlords, commanders, tribes, clans or ethnic groups. Apart from these links to different ethnic, tribal and religious groups, few parties have a political profile with a clear ideology,

¹¹⁴ International Crisis Group, *Political Parties in Afghanistan*, Asia Briefing No. 39, 1.

¹¹⁵ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance*, 3.

¹¹⁶ National Democratic Institute, *Political Parties in Afghanistan: A Review of the State of Political Parties after 2009 and 2010 Elections*, 12.

¹¹⁷ Elliot, *Political Party Development in Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Bijlert, *How to Win an Afghan Election: Perceptions and Practices*, 9.

message or policy separating them from one another. During the most recent elections they pushed similar agendas with general opinions on unemployment, security, education, health, and so on.¹¹⁹ The main objectives of the dominant parties are to secure power, authority and access to resources for their patronage network and their leaders.

Political actors—whether they are running for government positions or parliament—are perceived by their supporters as service providers, since a group’s loyalty should be translated into concrete rewards if the candidate is victorious.¹²⁰ This is inspired by the concept of “waseta,” which permeates the Afghan society. It is a concept based on the assumption that there is always a need for a person on the inside in order to get what you need, for example, service delivery, a favorable ruling or access to resources. It easily translates into a patron–client system or patronage networks.¹²¹ The most recent presidential election was a good example of politics by patronage. Support was traded for future promises, immediate profit or control over resources.

The voting system, single non-transferable vote, is also a factor that has a significant impact on the development of a functioning system of political parties. There is no formal incentive for candidates to represent or join a party since they can stand and win seats independently. There is a high number of independent Members of Parliament (MPs). This has contributed to the fragmentation of parliament and an inability to form functioning parliamentary groups or a reliable opposition. The individual MP has first and foremost to consider personal alliances and his or her patron–client network rather than political agendas.¹²²

4.2 Old Parties and Warlords

The old political parties in Afghanistan have roots that extend back to the middle of the 20th century. Many parties emerged in the 1940s as a product of the king’s modernization attempts. Several leftist factions emerged in the 1960s. Some rose to prominence with the backing of the Soviet Union.¹²³

¹¹⁹ National Democratic Institute, *Political Parties in Afghanistan: A Review of the State of Political Parties after 2009 and 2010 Elections*, 11.

¹²⁰ Afghanistan Research and Evolution Unit, *Afghanistan Looking Ahead: Challenges for Governance and Community Welfare*, 12.

¹²¹ Bijlert, *How to Win and Afghan Election: Perceptions and Practices*, 16.

¹²² Larson, *Afghanistan’s New Democratic Parties: Means to Organise Democratisation*, 10.

¹²³ National Democratic Institute, *Political Parties in Afghanistan: A Review of the State of Political Parties after 2009 and 2010 Elections*, 8.

Today the political parties in Afghanistan correspond to three major historic currents: Islamist, the left and the ethnic nationalist. The Islamist parties have become stronger than the left, which is much divided. This very much reflects the ideological problems that faced communist parties around the world after the fall of the Soviet Union. The ethnic nationalists are also divided into minor groups. The Islamists dominate both the political scene and governmental institutions.¹²⁴

During the decades of Soviet occupation and civil war, the old parties became armed militias led by warlords. The warlords were prominent officials of the various factions. They rose to power through their military capabilities and access to financial resources. They took on the role of tribal and ethnic leaders when the customary institutions could no longer guarantee security and distribution of resources. The warlords commanded the armed factional militias and controlled parts of the Afghanistan's territory and its population. In the post-Taliban era some transformed into political party leaders and government officials with their original constituency as a support base. At the same time, they maintained their role as warlords or leaders of armed militias. Some also continued with their illicit activities, such as trafficking in arms and drugs.

The warlords play an important role in contemporary Afghanistan. Since they occupy political and governmental positions, they have the capacity to threaten the stability and unity of the country. During the Taliban era they lost power and influence over the political realm. However, they were strengthened by their support for Western coalition forces through the Northern Alliance after 9/11. In spite of their questionable past and involvement in illicit activities, they have become partners with the international community in the post-Taliban era. The current government has several cabinet members who are warlords, including vice-president Khalili and vice-president Fahim. The warlords have benefited hugely from the Afghan state's culture of impunity. During the civil war they committed horrifying atrocities for which they have not been prosecuted.

The transformation of the "old parties" from armed forces to political parties began at the 2001 Bonn Conference. However, this transformation has not been entirely successful and the leaders maintain the behavior of warlords—including the use of violence—rather than the behavior of politicians working in a democratic multiparty system.

¹²⁴ Ruttig, *Islamists, Leftist—and a Void in the Center*, 17.

4.2.1 Islamist Parties

The old Islamist armed factions—known as the Mujahedin—were encouraged by the Bonn Conference to transform their armed wings into political parties. Often these were made up of loose groups organized to fight the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. In anticipation of the parliamentary elections in 2005, several split due to conflicts over the leadership of the party. New parties were formed by unsuccessful leadership candidates. This has contributed to the fragmentation of the parliament. Today these ex-Mujahedin factions, referred to as *tanzim*, dominate the political landscape. An additional explanation for their dominance is their connections to the Northern Alliance. This granted them a privileged position in the post-Taliban era and the privilege of dictating the peace. It also empowered and strengthened the weak Mujahedin warlords.

The Islamist parties can be described as the political right in Afghanistan. They are divided along religious lines within Islam, that is, into Sunni parties and Shia parties. These parties promote greater interconnectivity between religion and politics, conservative social values and Islamic law.¹²⁵ However, the Islamist parties in Afghanistan have not been able to develop political objectives for how Islam will be integrated through social and public development.¹²⁶

The Sunni parties are influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Several of the most prominent Afghan political leaders studied in Cairo at the Al Azhar University. With the support of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence the Sunni Islamists were organized into seven "tanzims," in order to fight the Soviet occupation. In the post-Taliban era, these seven parties, and their leaders, have become major political players.¹²⁷

Although the tanzims have transformed themselves into political parties, they remain representations of their past as armed factions divided along ethnic and tribal lines. Two prominent Sunni parties provide examples of this: Jamiat-e Islami and Hizb-e Islami. Jamiat-e Islami is dominated by ethnic Tajiks. It was founded and led by Burhanuddin Rabbani until his assassination in 2011. The party has several prominent and vocal members, among whom are the former presidential candidate, Dr Abdullah Abdullah, Karzai's main opponent in the 2009 election; the Minister of water and energy, Ismail Khan; and Governor Atta Mohammad Noor of Balkh province.

¹²⁵ National Democratic Institute, *Political Parties in Afghanistan: A Review of the State of Political Parties after 2009 and 2010 Elections*, 14.

¹²⁶ Larson, *Deconstructing "Democracy" in Afghanistan*, 7.

¹²⁷ International Crisis Group, *Political Parties in Afghanistan*, Asia Briefing No. 39, 3.

Hizb-e Islami is divided in two main factions: one political party loyal to the current government and one armed terrorist faction that opposes the government. Hizb-e Islami draws its membership from ethnic Pashtuns. It was founded by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who led the party until it was prevented from participating in the Bonn conference in 2001. This prohibition provoked Hekmatyar to declare a jihad and take up arms against the Karzai government and the international coalition in 2002. He founded an armed resistance faction, known as Hizb-e Islami Gulbuddin, HIG, which remains part of the insurgency today.

Many of Hizb-e Islami members broke with Hekmatyar, distancing themselves from the violence and terrorism, and announced their support for President Karzai. They formed a Hizb-e Islami party loyal to the government, currently chaired by the Minister of Economy Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal. Although many Hizb-members have denounced their relations with Hekmatyar, and pledged allegiance to the government of Afghanistan, their status remains ambivalent. Many observers believe that the split between the political party loyal to the government and the terrorist organization is artificial.¹²⁸

The Shia constituency is made up of several ethnic groups. The different groups have formed various political factions within the “Hizb-e Wahdat” party, which is divided along ethnic lines. The Shia groups enjoy the support of Iran, which has been encouraging them to unite—but without success. Several of the Shia leaders have held prominent government positions. For example, Mohammad Mohaqqueq was appointed a vice-president in Karzai’s transitional government—a position held today by another Wahdat leader, Karim Khalili.¹²⁹

4.2.2 A Non-Mujahedin Tanzim

Jumbesh-e Melli Islami-ye Afghanistan plays an important role in Afghan politics. It is a military political organization, like the Mujahedin tanzim, but it cannot be described as a jihadist party since it has a different make-up and background. Jumbesh has changed its alliances over the years and its supporters come from a variety of backgrounds, including the left and Islamists. It has its main constituency among the Uzbek and Turkmen population. It was initially a militia supporting the Soviet puppet government, but in 1992 it allied itself with the Northern Alliance. The party is dominated by its leader, General Rashid Dostum, a warlord famous for his eccentric and violent leadership. Since the fall of the Taliban regime the party has been oscillating between the government and

¹²⁸ Ruttig, *Islamists, Leftist—and a Void in the Center*, 24.

¹²⁹ International Crisis Group, *Political Parties in Afghanistan*, Asia Briefing No. 39, 3.

the opposition camp. In the most recent presidential election Jumbesh supported Karzai's candidature. General Dostum was instrumental in delivering the votes of the Uzbeks and Turkmen. Today he holds the position of Chief of staff for the armed forces. Jumbesh has made several attempts to internally democratize, which has contributed to tensions and division within the leadership.¹³⁰

4.2.3 The Left

The "left" has its roots in the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which was founded on Marxist–Leninist principles in the 1960s. In those days, the party fought for a secularized one-party state and against its Islamist rivals. Eventually, the party split along ethnic lines into two factions: the Khalaq and Parcham. In the 1970s the Khalaq staged a coup against the ruling regime, the Saour Revolution, and formed a government notorious for its violence and intolerance of political opposition. The Soviet occupation replaced Khalaq with the Parcham faction under the leadership of President Najibullah, but failed to prevent the conflict between the two factions from escalating. A number of Maoist parties also emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of these joined the Islamic resistance against the Soviet occupation, while others joined the PDPA factions. During the civil war many erstwhile leftists formed alliances with the Islamists or along ethnic lines.¹³¹

Today there are more than 15 parties led by former Khalaq and Parcham officials. They all claim that they have left communism behind. Some of them insist that they were never true believers in the communist cause, but were only Afghan patriots. They have dissociated themselves from economic dirigisme and support a free market economy.¹³² Currently, there is no notable political party in Afghanistan pushing a Marxist or socialist agenda.

4.2.4 The Parliament: "Wolesi Jirga"

Afghanistan has a presidential system that assigns extensive powers to the office of the president. The powers of the president go beyond those of presidents in Western democracies. According to article 60 of the constitution of 2004, the president of Afghanistan "...conducts his authorities in executive, legislative and judiciary branches." The president's influence over the judiciary is demonstrated

¹³⁰ Ruttig, *Islamists, Leftist—and a Void in the Center*, 25–26.

¹³¹ International Crisis Group, *Political Parties in Afghanistan*, Asia Briefing No. 39, 2.

¹³² Ruttig, *Islamists, Leftist—and a Void in the Center*, 29–32.

by the fact that that he appoints High Court judges and enjoys discretion in the dismissal of the judges in the lower courts.¹³³

The parliament has the power to table votes of confidence against ministers, and it is required to pass laws. The constitution makes the president responsible to the nation and the parliament; and it holds the ministers responsible to the president and the parliament. However, according to article 69 of the constitution, the parliament is only able to start proceedings against the president for reasons of “crimes against humanity, national treason or crime.” The constitution remains untested so no precedent exists, but as the parliament is given the right of confirmation of appointment, its later rejection of a minister would appear to be binding on the government. In contemporary Afghanistan, the president’s power is occasionally contested by the parliament. Nonetheless, he can obtain majorities by activating his patronage network and emphasizing ethnic politics.¹³⁴

The process of confirming Karzai’s cabinet after the 2009 presidential election demonstrated that the legislative branch has some power over the executive. Karzai’s nominees were voted down by the parliament in several nomination rounds. By August 2011 the President still did not have a full cabinet. Relations between the executive and the legislature were further strained by the fraudulent parliamentary elections, after which the president tried to impose an inquiry into the electoral process. However, Karzai has chosen to govern by decree and has thereby strengthened the executive branch to the detriment of the legislature. The fate of Afghanistan’s current government does not necessarily rest with the parliament. Instead, it is dependent on Karzai’s allegiances in the cabinet and his ability to maintain his patron–client network.

4.2.5 President Karzai and an Ambiguous Parliament

The parliament is to a large extent the key political institution in which non-Pashtuns and independents can express political opposition and have some influence over President Karzai, who is a Pashtun.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, there is no formal separation between the pro-government and opposition blocs in the parliament. According to Wilder in *A House Divided*¹³⁶ there are three categories of Members of Parliament: pro-government (or more accurately pro-Karzai), opposition and unaffiliated. These groups are far from stable and MPs are known to be unwilling to categorize themselves formally. The political shifts between

¹³³ Prohl, *Promoting Democracy in Post-Conflict Societies*, 6.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance*, 7–9.

¹³⁶ Wilder, *A House Divided?: Analysing the 2005 Afghan Elections*, 4.

political party leaders and the government contribute to this ambiguity and instability.¹³⁷ Many opposition MPs state that they oppose the Karzai government because of public complaints about government corruption—they do not want to appear to condone such unlawful behavior.¹³⁸

The lack of reliable statistics and the reluctance of MPs to declare their allegiances make it difficult to determine how many seats a specific political party has secured in parliament. There are also benefits in maintaining a position of ambiguity, which makes it a well-developed political and military strategy that shapes the political landscape in Afghanistan. Maintaining the possibility of changing allegiances is essential in order to preserve power and access to resources.¹³⁹

Estimates made by various organizations after the most recent election indicate that former Mujahedin parties have increased their number of seats, while the “left” has reduced its representation. Analysts maintain that it is difficult to speculate on whether the number of MPs supporting Karzai/the government has increased or decreased since most prefer the strategic benefits of sitting on the fence.¹⁴⁰ However, it is safe to assert that Karzai has a support base among the ethnic Pashtuns and the Hizb-e Islami party representation in the parliament. Several of Karzai’s supporters are from his home province of Kandahar.¹⁴¹

4.2.6 Karzai and the Opposition

The declared opposition to Karzai consists mainly of ethnic minorities, such as Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazara. They often advocate greater autonomy for the provinces in order to limit Pashtu influence over their constituencies and traditional territory. The opposition is also critical of the peace negotiations with the Taliban, especially the Hazara who were victims of atrocities and discrimination during the Taliban regime. However, the opposition factions are not united and their differences make them ineffective as a front against Karzai. Several of the ethnic minorities’ most prominent political party officials, or warlords, have joined with Karzai and hold cabinet positions.¹⁴² The President succeeded in splitting the opposition during his last election campaign and

¹³⁷ Wafaey, *The Wolesi Jirga in 2010*, 4.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Bijlert, *How to Win an Afghan Election*, 10–11.

¹⁴⁰ National Democratic Institute, *Political Parties in Afghanistan: A Review of the State of Political Parties after 2009 and 2010 Elections*, 52–53.

¹⁴¹ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance*, 9.

¹⁴² Ibid., 11.

secured support across ethnic lines in exchange for cabinet and civil service positions as well as other gains.

4.3 President Karzai: Playing the Political Scene

4.3.1 Concentration of Power in the Executive

President Karzai's dubious attitude towards political parties and his declining legitimacy were further underpinned by the chaotic and fraudulent presidential election in 2009 and the fraudulent parliamentary elections of 2010, as well as the resulting stand-off between the parliament and President Karzai. This has eroded public confidence in democratic processes and the international community's commitment to the reconstruction of political and democratic institutions. During Karzai's tenure as president, there has been an increased concentration of power in the state's executive branch to the detriment of the legislature and the judiciary. The executive dominates and manipulates the other two branches.

4.3.2 Governing Through Patronage and Warlordism

During the presidential election in 2009, Karzai proved that he was not willing to break ranks with the warlords. On the contrary, he continues the warlordism that was a trademark of his first term as president. When former mujahedin warlords ran on Karzai's ticket for prominent positions in the cabinet, this provided a clear signal. For example, Qasim Fahim, a former Tajik commander, and Karim Khalili, the leader of the Hazara party Hezb-i Wahdat, were both appointed vice presidents. Karzai also had the support of the notorious warlord General Rashid Dostum, leader of Jumbesh-i Milli-yi Islami. However, Karzai was not the only presidential candidate to "flirt" with the patronage network and the warlords. His main opponent, Dr Abdullah Abdullah, also utilized the mujahedin network. One major supporter was the Tajik leader and Jamiat-e Islami strongman, Mohammad Atta Noor, governor of Balkh province. He organized voting blocs and delivered many Tajik votes to Abdullah for president.¹⁴³

Karzai has proved a shrewd president with a developed capacity to balance different factions and ensure support across ethnic and religious lines. During the 2009 presidential election he secured backing from opposition ethnic groups and

¹⁴³ Bijlert, *How to Win an Afghan Election*, 10–11.

succeeded in splitting the vote in some. He rearranged the fields of rivals and gained support from powerful patrons or warlords. He used all the opportunities provided by the patron–client system. However, his support base is very fragile and could easily vanish, especially since Karzai appears to have a deliberate strategy of boosting the Pashtun presence in the government.

An increasing number of key appointments have favored the Pashtun elite over the other ethnic groups in the past five years. In the aftermath of the presidential election, Karzai annoyed his non-Pashtun supporters when the number of Pashtun nominees for governmental positions outnumbered those from other ethnic groups. Vocal allies such as General Dostum complained that Karzai had violated deals made with his party before the election. It seems that Karzai is seeking to shore up his traditional ethnic support base through patronage while at the same time the Pashtun belt is increasing its support for the insurgency against the government.

4.3.3 A State Without Control of the Subnational Level

An additional complication in the current political landscape in Afghanistan is the state's limited control over the country. It is not enough to create a support network through patronage before an election and gain the majority of the votes; an Afghan government can only govern if it succeeds in regularly striking deals with the regional warlords, commanders and powerbrokers throughout its tenure. Although one feature of the Afghan state is its extreme degree of centralization, the government has limited control, both militarily and administratively, in large parts of the country. Formally and technically, there is no local government in Afghanistan, with the exception of the municipalities. The de facto state in the provinces and districts is controlled by regional warlords and local commanders. Their profiles vary from region to region, but the strongmen's power is based on financial and military strength, as well as personal, factional and historical loyalty reaching back to the civil war of the 1990s and beyond. This situation is further complicated by the deals struck by the Karzai government in conjunction with the latest presidential election. Individuals with de facto power were given formal positions at both the central and the subnational levels, provincial and district, in exchange for their support.

Consequently, these individuals use governmental structures to their own advantage, and this is a major source of corruption. The struggle between the different sources of power, authority and control in Afghanistan is, to a large extent, taking place within the subnational governmental structure, and between

the subnational and central levels.¹⁴⁴ A telling example is the relationship between Governor Mohammad Atta Noor of Balkh and the Karzai administration. Atta has claimed significant fiscal and political autonomy and controls both the security situation and the administration of the province. The central government must negotiate with Atta in order to implement its decisions. However, it is not uncommon for Atta to ignore the government's edicts. This happened when the central government shut down the national highway police force and dismissed its chief of highway in Balkh. Atta simply refused to execute the decision, maintaining a provincial highway police force and keeping the chief on the government payroll.¹⁴⁵ Relations between the central government and the subnational level in Afghanistan have been interpreted by government officials as a "struggle between 'warlords' and 'central' power."¹⁴⁶

4.4 An Aid Dependent State

The economic and security sectors are of special concern to the government. The ability of these sectors to perform adequately shapes the possibilities for stability and sustainable development. Economic development and security are interrelated in any fragile state with a challenging history of instability. Any form of economic development in Afghanistan will require security in most of the country's population centers as well as stability in the border areas with Pakistan, which are pivotal for the flow of goods between the two countries. Financial stability is also crucial for the country's capacity to stabilize and guarantee long-term security. There is also an urgent need for revenues to sustain the capacity of the Afghan security forces.

Thirty years of war have left Afghanistan a severely underdeveloped country, with little possibility of financing the costs pertaining to the state and little capacity to speed up economic development. According to the World Bank, together with Liberia and the occupied territory of Palestine, Afghanistan is the largest recipient of international aid.¹⁴⁷ In 2010–2011 around USD 15.7 billion was received from the international community; it made up two-thirds of Afghanistan's government budget.¹⁴⁸ The enormous amount of financial assistance is closely linked to the international military effort and has created a dependency on foreign support that cannot easily be replaced when international

¹⁴⁴ Evans, *A Guide to Government in Afghanistan*, 20, 97–98.

¹⁴⁵ Personal communication with Governor Atta and his associates, 2009.

¹⁴⁶ Evans, *Guide to Government in Afghanistan*, 20, 97–98.

¹⁴⁷ The World Bank, *Transition in Afghanistan*, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance*, 35.

troops withdraw. Today, the government's domestic revenues are 10 percent of the GDP and are projected to increase to 17.5 percent by 2022. In the security sector the wage bill is projected to increase from 7 percent of GDP to 10 percent in order to achieve the planned 300,000 troops. In total it is estimated that security- and non-security-related operating expenditure will be twice the size of domestic revenues by 2022.

Although the international community has pledged to continue its financial support, the state budget will only partly be financed by international aid.¹⁴⁹ The local economy will only provide limited revenue as it is dominated by the informal sector—including illicit activities such as the opium trade—which accounts for 80–90 percent of total economic activity.¹⁵⁰ At this point, there are few signs to indicate that the Afghan government is capable of financing its expenditure. Observers have stressed that the financial survival of the Afghan state is dependent on the international community's willingness to pledge long-term assistance.¹⁵¹

The aid dependent war economy has generated enormous income for the elite, through both legal and illegal activities. The elite's future access to financial gains will probably be an important determining factor for the stability of Afghanistan. Economic interests may be served by keeping violence and armed conflict at bay, although they could equally exacerbate the violence as competition over shrinking resources increases after 2014. The siphoning off of resources by current power holders will probably have an impact on the stability of the country.¹⁵²

In the context of the Afghan government's limited domestic revenues, the future of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), in terms of paying its wages, will depend on international assistance for the foreseeable future. The most pressing dilemmas in 2014 will be to reduce the level of security threats and to maintain stability. These can only be achieved if the ANSF has the capacity to maintain and increase its number of troops. The capacity to finance ANSF salaries will be crucial to this effort.¹⁵³

The Afghan government has sought to secure binding agreements with the United States and NATO in order to ensure long-term support. However, given

¹⁴⁹ The World Bank, *Transition in Afghanistan*, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Afghan Analysts Network, *The International Community's Engagement in Afghanistan beyond 2014*, 5.

¹⁵¹ The World Bank, *Transition in Afghanistan*, 4.

¹⁵² Afghan Analysts Network, *The International Community's Engagement in Afghanistan beyond 2014*, 5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2.

the lack of public support for and legitimacy of the current Afghan government, there is a risk that the international community will be providing assistance to one side in a potential civil war between different factions and ethnic groups.¹⁵⁴ The ANSF is dominated by Tajiks. Its imbalanced representation of ethnicities, especially among the officers, and low rates of recruitment among Pashtuns both represent major challenges.¹⁵⁵

4.5 Looking Beyond 2014

To predict the future of Afghanistan is an almost impossible task, but all analysts agree that a democratic, modern state will not materialize without substantial changes to the political system. The fate of Afghanistan will probably not be determined by the current president's allies, but instead by the political processes and strategies through which he has secured power. He is acting against the development of a political party system, thereby undermining other the branches of government to the advantage of the executive branch. He favors providing support through patronage, which has contributed to the fragmentation of the state. His alliances are fragile and dependent on his continued ability to distribute power, privilege and resources, and corruption is endemic at all levels of society.

Afghanistan will hold its third presidential election in 2014—the same year as the international coalition is due to withdraw its combat troops. According to the constitution, President Karzai will not be able to run for a third term. However, the international community is worried about rumors that Karzai plans to alter the constitution to his advantage. His current cronies are concerned that a new president might remove them from the governing structure, thereby reducing their power and access to resources. This could facilitate Karzai's intended constitutional changes. The international community, led by the United States, has advised Karzai to abandon such thinking and leave office in 2014.¹⁵⁶

Regardless of whether Karzai stays or leaves, no major political changes in governance can be expected after the 2014 election. The cast of cabinet members will, of course, be adjusted but the factional balance will probably remain. Karzai has built a platform to facilitate the return and empowerment of mujahedin factional leaders across ethnic lines. This group is evolving into an oligarchy that preys on public resources and uses its power to build political-cum-business networks. The leaders have traded their support—and their constituency's

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵⁶ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance*, 27.

votes—for government and civil service positions, which have enhanced their power at the subnational level to the detriment of government control. This group has much to lose and is mainly interested in securing its interests and power through a continuation of the status quo after the transition in 2014. A prolonged conflict would hamper this ambition. In the 2014 election the factional leaders will probably form a coalition around a presidential candidate who can maintain the current state of affairs.

However, there are dark clouds on the political horizon. Opposition leaders claim that they are being marginalized by Karzai and his Pashtun allies. They think that the president has reneged on his pre-election agreements by empowering the Pashtun elite. At the same time, Pashtuns are increasingly joining with the insurgent cause against the government. One of the core issues that will determine the political future of Afghanistan is any possible reconciliation process with and potential concessions provided to the Taliban by the government. Without support across ethnic lines, it is highly unlikely that the government will be able to strike a peace deal with the Taliban. Support will be hard to come by without giving non-Pashtuns both power and access to resources. If the non-Pashtun leaders perceive that they are losing influence or privileges in the reconciliation process, one possible outcome would be that they distance themselves from the government. This could contribute to a process by which the Afghan state disintegrated into regional factions governed by warlords or, even worse, trigger full-scale armed conflict.

5 Prospects for a Negotiated Peace

In late December 2011 the United States revealed that talks had been initiated with the Taliban.¹⁵⁷ This news did not come as a surprise. For a long time the idea of negotiating with the Taliban had been seen as impossible but during 2011 the mood changed both in the United States and among its allies.

What would a peace settlement look like and what are the chances of a settlement lasting? These questions still have no clear answers. For peace to be sustainable, several conditions need to be in place, primarily that the main actors are willing to negotiate and establish a minimum level of trust. What are the prospects for a negotiated peace in Afghanistan surviving beyond 2014?

5.1 Why Negotiate with the Taliban?

The main reason for negotiations is that defeating the Taliban and its allies is too difficult with the limited resources and time available. If ISAF announced that it would be remaining in Afghanistan for the next 20 years, and if it could conduct a full-scale, nationwide, fully resourced counterinsurgency campaign with dramatically increased troop levels, there is a good chance that the insurgency would be defeated.¹⁵⁸ A final “military” victory would then have been achieved. However, since neither the United States nor its allies are willing to make such a commitment—and actually never have been willing—negotiations are unavoidable.¹⁵⁹

The insurgency is not strong militarily. It cannot hold territory and suffered heavy losses in the ISAF campaigns of 2010 and 2011.¹⁶⁰ Rooting out a guerrilla force entirely, however, is a completely different matter. The Taliban are not only a military organization, they are also a religious and political movement with widespread support inside the largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns. One of the Taliban’s strategic advantages is that they claim to offer the Afghan people an alternative government, through supposedly non-corrupt governors and non-corrupt sharia courts. Thus, it comes as no surprise that a large number of people in Afghanistan share their beliefs and support them for ideological reasons—and fighting beliefs with guns is not possible.

¹⁵⁷ “Exclusive: Secret US, Taliban talks reach turning point,” *Reuters*, December 19, 2011.

¹⁵⁸ Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 329; Olsson, *Stabilitet i Afghanistan*, 55.

¹⁵⁹ Shinn and Dobbins, *Afghan Peace Talks*, 12–13.

¹⁶⁰ Chaudhuri and Farrell, “Campaign Disconnect.”

From a strictly military point of view, a total defeat of the insurgency seems impossible while it is allowed to maintain its safe havens in Pakistan. Neither ISAF nor the Afghan National Army can cross the border into Pakistan in pursuit of insurgents without causing political turmoil at the highest level. Since Pakistan is unwilling to move against the safe havens, the insurgents will survive and continue to cause trouble.

Furthermore, it is obvious that the Kabul regime is weak and may be unable to continue the fight against the insurgency by itself. Even if the central government were moving in the right direction, in terms of reducing corruption and improved governance, it would take years before it were strong enough to stand on its own. It would be better for the United States and its allies to strike a deal with the Taliban now when ISAF is at its strongest. Attempting to reach a settlement later when the Kabul regime could be crumbling would probably result in a far worse deal.¹⁶¹

As things stand in early 2012, it seems impossible to get rid of the Taliban altogether. At the same time, however, the insurgency is not strong enough to defeat the Kabul regime as it did in 1996. The insurgency is politically strong but militarily weak. If ISAF were to withdraw all its forces the Taliban would not be able to take over the entire country. A protracted civil war would be the result. Consequently, neither side appears able to “win the war” in any meaningful sense, either militarily or politically. Negotiations would therefore seem to be the most viable option.

5.2 Who Are the Parties? What Do They Want?

Any peace treaty would need to be signed by many parties. Key actors are the Afghan government, the Taliban and the United States, although it is obvious that a treaty must also include Pakistan and India and, possibly, also Iran and China.

The Kabul regime of President Hamid Karzai has clearly announced its willingness to negotiate with the Taliban. For the purpose of legitimizing a peace settlement, Karzai in 2010 appointed a Loya Jirga (also known as the Peace Council) with representatives from different sections of Afghan society. The

¹⁶¹ Shinn and Dobbins, *Afghan Peace Talks*, 13.

jirga was headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani. Its purpose was to establish a framework for peace negotiations.¹⁶²

Karzai's willingness to negotiate is obvious. The Kabul regime does not control all of its territory and, as already mentioned, is unlikely to be able to defeat the insurgency. For Karzai and the men behind him the primary motive for negotiations is to safeguard their own interests. As is explained in chapter 4, access to power equals access to money and other resources. A shared government with the Taliban might be considered the safest bet to keep some control of the governmental structures.

The Taliban used to have a single point agenda: to establish an Islamic government based on their interpretation of Sharia law. As it has become clear to the Taliban that they will not be able to take full control of the government and govern alone by military means, they have changed their narrative. Today, the primary goal is to free the country of foreign troops. The Taliban's leader, Mullah Omar, has laid out the Taliban's vision for a future Afghan government and declared that they seek an "independent Islamic regime," and that "every legitimate option can be considered."¹⁶³

The Taliban's agenda is focused solely on Afghanistan. They are not part of any global jihadist movement. They have ties with al-Qaida but assisting international terrorist organizations is probably something that they could easily live without. Their two basic aims are to be a part of an Islamic government of Afghanistan and to have no foreign troops on Afghan soil.¹⁶⁴

The United States intervened in Afghanistan in 2001 as a direct consequence of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Ever since, the primary goal for the United States has been to defeat al-Qaida and to make sure that Afghanistan does not return to being a breeding ground for international terrorism. This has not changed. What has changed over time is the U.S. view of the Taliban. The Taliban were for a long time regarded as a movement that needed to be defeated utterly. As the years have passed and the United States has realized that a total defeat of the Taliban is unlikely, it has reconsidered its goals. Usama bin Laden has been killed and al-Qaida is no longer a major actor in Afghanistan. Thus, the primary

¹⁶² Ruttig, *The Battle for Afghanistan*, 14.

¹⁶³ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, *Mullah Omar's Eid ul-Fitr Message*. See also Siddique, A., "Deciphering Mullah Omar's Eid Message."

¹⁶⁴ Shinn and Dobbins, *Afghan Peace Talks*, 24; Ruttig, *The Battle for Afghanistan*, 16; Chandra, "The Evolving Politics of Taliban Reintegration and Reconciliation in Afghanistan," 840.

objective for the United States in a peace settlement is to ensure that Afghanistan remains stable and is not used as a sanctuary for terrorists.¹⁶⁵

The fourth major actor that it is necessary to include in a settlement is Pakistan. As is discussed in chapter 3, the Afghan conflict has gradually developed into an Afghan–Pakistan conflict. Afghan insurgents operate from bases in Pakistan.

Pakistan's prime motive for not wanting to cleanse the border areas is most likely a desire to maintain strategic depth inside Afghanistan vis-à-vis India by supporting the Taliban. However, it is important to keep in mind that Pakistan has big problems with its own Taliban as well as other religious extremists. The Pakistan government might not be able to move against the Afghan insurgents as strongly as it would like since this could cause domestic problems.

A peace settlement in which the Taliban is given a role in a new government of Afghanistan would resolve many of Pakistan's dilemmas. Pakistan would get a friendly government in Afghanistan that is out of the reach of India and at the same time preserve friendly relations with the United States. Currently, U.S.–Pakistani relations are frosty even though Pakistan continues to receive aid from the United States. A large proportion of this money goes directly to support the Pakistan army.

Finally, the fifth important actor that has to be included in a settlement is India. It is obvious that the conflict in Afghanistan is directly connected to the many conflicts between India and Pakistan. Everything that India does is interpreted by Pakistan as a threat to its nation. Without India as a signatory, Pakistan would be better off keeping the war in Afghanistan going, since that would be the easiest way to keep Afghanistan away from falling under Indian influence.

The Central Asian republics together with Iran and China are currently keeping a low profile. The strongest power in the region is the United States. When the United States leaves Afghanistan, China and Iran are likely to move in to protect their interests. Iran will perceive it as its duty to protect the Shia minority. China fears that Islamic extremism will spread into the Xinjiang province. Although probably not the most important actors to bring to the negotiating table, both are stakeholders in the conflict and it would be ill-advised to exclude them from any peace talks.

¹⁶⁵ Shinn and Dobbins, *Afghan Peace Talks*, 48–52.

5.3 Stumbling Blocks

On paper, a peace settlement definitely seems plausible. No major actor favors a continued war. They all have stated that they are willing to start peace talks. However, there are several stumbling blocks.

The hardest issues to deal with are the irreconcilable standpoints of the United States and the Taliban. The United States simply cannot leave Afghanistan without a guarantee that the country will not again become a sanctuary for terrorists. This means that it will want to have some kind of military presence—“a strategic partnership” as the U.S. administration calls it. This, however, is totally unacceptable to the Taliban. The United States is also likely to insist that all ties are severed between al-Qaida and the Taliban. Thus far, the Taliban have refused to do so.

Another issue that the United States and its liberal-democratic allies will have to face is that a peace agreement will probably require a new constitution for Afghanistan. As far as we can tell, the Taliban, as an Islamic movement, do not recognize liberal-democratic values. Islamism in its most extreme version is not compatible with democracy and human rights. What kind of government will Afghanistan have if the Taliban maintain their hard line Islamism? Will basic human rights be respected? Will women be granted equal rights?

Other problems will complicate the coming peace talks. One major problem is the rivalry between Pakistan and India. It is of course unfair that Afghans cannot make peace among themselves because two of their neighbors cannot agree, but a peace agreement for Afghanistan must to some extent also be a peace agreement between India and Pakistan.

Another troubling factor is the rush in the United States to agree on a deal as soon as possible. The United States weakened its bargaining power severely once it set a timetable for withdrawal. Its most important counterpart, the Taliban, are in no hurry at all. Their bargaining power increases as the United States becomes more and more anxious to negotiate.¹⁶⁶

The biggest question, however, is whether a peace agreement will hold. There are many potential spoilers on both sides.¹⁶⁷ The Taliban have two major allies, the Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) and the Haqqani network. The HIG is in favor of peace talks but the Haqqani network probably is not. The Kabul regime

¹⁶⁶ Shinn and Dobbins, *Afghan Peace Talks*, 51; Chandra, “The Evolving Politics of Taliban Reintegration and Reconciliation in Afghanistan,” 846.

¹⁶⁷ Ruttig, *The Battle for Afghanistan*, 6; Chandra, “The Evolving Politics of Taliban Reintegration and Reconciliation in Afghanistan,” 845.

is also a coalition of allies, and it rests on a complicated patron–client network. It is difficult to predict whether all the local warlords, strongmen and other powerbrokers will be willing to accept a new government, especially if they believe that their interests are threatened. The cohesion of the Kabul regime and its powerbase are very fragile. The peace council is a way for Karzai to create unity in order to negotiate with the Taliban. There are strong doubts about whether he has managed to gather the support that he needs. Some of the strongmen that support Karzai may turn against him if he starts to give away power and influence to the Taliban.

There are also potential spoilers in Pakistan. Northern Pakistan is a quagmire of religious extremism. Even if the Afghan Taliban decided to put down their arms, other groups based in Pakistan might want to continue what they see as a jihad. The Pakistani Taliban, in contrast to its Afghan counterpart, support global jihad.¹⁶⁸ Another example is Lashkar e-Jhangvi, which is based in Pakistan but attacked Shiites inside Afghanistan in December 2011.¹⁶⁹ Al-Qaida is still present in the region. Any settlement will almost certainly be met with violence.

5.4 Prospects for a Negotiated Peace Settlement

A peace settlement is a realistic option. All the major actors have stated that they are willing to talk. This is based on a realization that the war is not going to end in any meaningful way as things stand. The United States and its allies are powerful enough to defeat the Taliban militarily but total defeat would take decades and be very expensive. None of the ISAF nations is willing to stay on. They all want to leave as soon as possible. Hence, negotiations with the Taliban remain the only way forward.

A peace settlement will resolve many issues, if constructed in such a way that it addresses regional issues in a broad sense. The relationship between Pakistan and India is not really an issue for the Afghans, but it has to be dealt with at the same time. Pakistan is at the center of the conflict and many of its actions are motivated by its fear of increased Indian influence.

It is important to recognize the many potential spoilers. Afghanistan and Pakistan together is a troubled area. Neither government is able to control all the extremist movements there. In such a protracted civil war it is safe to assume that many

¹⁶⁸ Siddique, Q., *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan*, 21.

¹⁶⁹ “Lashkar-e-Jhangvi: Inciting Sectarianism in Afghanistan?,” *Dawn*.

men have made fighting their occupation. Any peace settlement needs to plan for the reintegration of former insurgents into society.

From an ISAF point of view, it is important to recognize that a peace settlement implies that the Taliban will become part of the government of Afghanistan.¹⁷⁰ It is most likely that a new constitution will need to be written. This is probably a more troublesome issue for the United States and its allies than it is for Karzai and his supporters. The Taliban are religious extremists and there is no guarantee that they will respect basic human rights, in particular women's rights. Will it be acceptable to the United States and its liberal minded friends in Europe and elsewhere to bring the Taliban back to power? They would not control the entire country as they once did, but it seems highly unlikely that a peace settlement could be concluded unless the Taliban were given a share in the government.

¹⁷⁰ Ruttig, *The Battle for Afghanistan*, 18.

6 Post-2014 Scenarios

Predicting how the situation in Afghanistan will develop after 2014 is very hard to do. From the perspective of policy planning it is necessary to at least try to peek around the corner. One way of doing this, without making the mistake of trying to foretell the future, is to discuss possible scenarios. Scenarios are not predictions but rather conjectures about plausible outcomes. They give us an idea of what to expect and prepare for, even though they tell us very little about what will actually happen.

The main conclusion from our scenarios is that the two most important factors determining the future will be the choices made by the United States and Pakistan. The Afghan conflict is highly complex and a lot of factors interplay, but these two factors stand out as more influential than the others.

Today, the United States has committed itself to support Afghanistan after 2014, both militarily and financially, but how much and for how long? This is unknown, and the ambitions of the United States may change rapidly. Similarly, Pakistan stands at a crossroads. It cannot continue to support the Afghan insurgency and be an ally of the United States at the same time. Pakistan will have to make some tough choices. Whatever it does will have a big impact on the situation in Afghanistan.

We have developed five scenarios that describe possible futures for Afghanistan after 2014. The time frame is about five to ten years.

- Scenario 1: The Taliban get a share of the government of Afghanistan.
- Scenario 2: Pakistan as Afghanistan's new big brother.
- Scenario 3: A war of proxies.
- Scenario 4: Civil war.
- Scenario 5: The American dream.

Before presenting the scenarios a short note is required on methodology. Many factors influence the conflict and in order to extract a set of scenarios we needed to make some serious simplifications. We have done this by viewing the situation in Afghanistan as a causal system, like balls on a pool table or the cogs and wheels of an engine, in which variables affect each other. Some variables have a strong causal effect, while some have a weak effect. Some variables change quickly and others change slowly. Some variables fluctuate unpredictably, but others move in a constant direction all the time.

From the point of view of scenario making, the most important variables to look at are the ones that have a strong causal effect, may change quickly and in an unpredictable way. Among all the important variables, many candidates fit this

description so a choice is necessary. Some variables are more likely to change the future of Afghanistan than others. Although focusing on them gives us a very narrow perspective on the overall situation, they still give us some idea of what might happen in the future. Why we believe that some variables are more important to base scenarios on than others is explained along the way.

All factual assessments are based on known facts or the opinions of experts. Expert opinions were gathered at a two-day workshop in Stockholm on November 28–29, 2011. The list of participants is presented in the appendix. The web of arguments and the considerations that make up the scenarios, however, are the sole responsibility of the authors.¹⁷¹

6.1 The Variables: What Will Determine Afghanistan's Future?

If we consider the conflict in Afghanistan as a causal system, it is reasonable to argue that most factors within the system are in some sense predictable. The clan system in Afghanistan, for instance, has a major influence on Afghan society, and thus also affects the conflict in many ways. We know that the system is changing its character slowly, but for the foreseeable future it will not change in any significant way. It is a very influential factor, its causal effect is strong, but for a time frame of five to ten years it will remain static and will not determine the future of different scenarios. We need to look at variables that are unpredictable, have a strong causal effect and might change rapidly.

6.1.1 Influential but not Determinative Variables

Many factors play an important role, but most of them will remain static over a period of five to ten years. They will have a strong causal effect but will not change. Influential factors of this kind are the drug economy, the clan system and the ethnic divisions of the people of Afghanistan. We know that the drug economy fuels the conflict. If the opium trade diminished we would probably see a decline in violence. In the near future, however, we cannot see that the drug economy will change in any significant way. We judge the clan system and ethnic divisions in the same way.

Another feature of Afghan society that plays a similar role is corruption, which permeates all levels of society. Bribing government officials is part of the normal

¹⁷¹ For further discussions on how to use scenarios see Rydqvist and Zetterlund, *Consequences of Military Actions Against Iran*, 15–20; Rydqvist, *Risk of War on the Korean Peninsula*.

way of life for many ordinary Afghans. At senior levels officials use their positions to enrich themselves, and large parts of Afghanistan can be described as a kleptocracy. Corruption undermines the legitimacy of the Government of Afghanistan and makes it hard for the people to trust its rulers. This in turn undermines the government's capacity to maintain peace and order. In this way it is right to argue that corruption has a strong effect on the conflict in Afghanistan. However, despite its strong influence on Afghan society, the level of corruption is not likely to change for many years to come. Rooting out corruption in a society takes decades.

Similarly, we do not believe that the policies of Iran, India, and China will change in any significant way. It is important to monitor them carefully because if any of them change it will have a tremendous effect on the situation but, at this point in time, we see no indication of any serious policy changes.¹⁷²

6.1.2 Important But Less Influential Variables

Variables that we believe will have neither a strong causal effect nor change rapidly are the policies of Afghanistan's northern neighbors—the Central Asian republics (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) and Russia. The Central Asian republics have so far preferred to keep a low profile. They have nothing to gain from entering the Afghan conflict in any way, and may well fear the spread of violence and extremism to their own countries. The same applies to Russia. It is in Russia's interests to stop the spread of religious extremism and to reduce the opium trade. It is not in its interest to get involved in the conflict per se.

Two other variables that we believe will have a weak impact and not change quickly are the presence of al-Qaida and the current military campaign by ISAF. These assessments might seem counterintuitive, since al-Qaida is still active in the region and since ISAF is the most powerful military force ever in Afghanistan, but the situation needs to be viewed from a long-term perspective.

As far as we know, al-Qaida is no longer an important organization in Afghanistan or Pakistan. The terrorist group has not been rooted out. It has survived and is still present in Pakistan. It still has close ties to the insurgency, primarily the Haqqani network but also the Taliban (the Quetta Shura). The fact that al-Qaida has not been eradicated from the area is an annoyance to the United States. Nevertheless, no one argues that al-Qaida plays an important role in the conflict any more.

¹⁷² See chapter 2.

The presence of ISAF is a major factor of importance for the overall situation in Afghanistan. The current military campaign is what keeps the security situation from escalating into an all-out civil war. In the years following the end of the transition, ISAF will be diminished substantially. If everything goes according to plan, there will not be any foreign combat forces operating in Afghanistan post 2014. The drawdown of forces has already begun. This means that foreign troops—be they ISAF, U.S. troops, trainers and advisers, special forces for counterterrorism or any other kind—will not play any significant role. Since all the ISAF countries have declared that they will pull back their forces, it is almost certain that continued fighting by ISAF will not be a defining characteristic of the future.

An even more counterintuitive claim of ours is that we do not believe that the central government of Afghanistan will be a significant influence on future developments. This is of course debatable, but we base this assumption on the observation that the current central government is weak and fragmented, and that most parts of Afghan society carry out their everyday business without contact with Kabul.

Afghan government is a patrimonial system. Family ties and clan loyalties determine power relations. On paper, the president of Afghanistan controls 34 provincial governors who are supposed to be the strong executive arm of the central government. In reality it is the other way around. The provincial governors are the constituency on which the president bases his power, making him a weak president.¹⁷³

We do not know what is going to happen to the central government once it is supposed to stand on its own, with no foreign forces to protect it and with less financial aid. Hamid Karzai is required by the constitution to leave office in 2014 and there is no guarantee that the next president will be stronger. If all goes well, the capacity of the government to really govern will be strengthened, the levels of corruption will be reduced and the legitimacy of the regime in the eyes of the people will be increased. On the other hand, the situation might just as easily deteriorate. The population's trust in the central government's ability to govern may plunge once its backers realize that there is nothing to be gained from supporting it. There is a possibility that the central government will cease to function.

However, due to the fact that the central government is a patrimonial system, weak and fragmented, a total breakdown of Kabul's ability to govern may not cause the whole of Afghan society to break down. If the president suddenly finds

¹⁷³ See chapter 4. See also Biddle, "Running Out of Time for Afghan Governance Reform."

himself powerless, other powerbrokers in society at the local level will step in to uphold basic governmental functions. There are unofficial institutions that make society work regardless of what the central government does, of which the clan system is the most important. The most likely situation in case of a total collapse of central government is not anarchy but an even more fragmented society.

If this assessment is true it means that the survival of the Kabul regime is not an important issue in determining Afghanistan's future. We realize that this conclusion contradicts one of the cornerstones of the overall strategy of the ISAF countries. This strategy is based on the firm belief that a strong civil government is essential for establishing peace. We agree that a strong civil government would be beneficial to the Afghan people but since this is not the case in Afghanistan and since we do not see any trend towards a stronger government, we do not believe that, compared to other factors, the status of the government will play a significant role in determining future developments.

6.2 Key Variables That Will Determine the Future

As is mentioned above, the variables that we believe are most likely to determine different scenarios are the ones that have a strong causal effect, and could change rapidly and unpredictably. The two most important variables of this kind are the commitment of the United States to supporting Afghanistan and the strategic choices made by Pakistan.

There is no doubt that whatever the United States decides to do regarding the future of Afghanistan, its decisions will have a very strong impact on all the other actors. In June 2011 the U.S. president announced that he would start the drawdown of U.S. forces. This is in line with the strategy presented in December 2009. The idea was to increase U.S. troop numbers during 2010 and 2011 in order to break the Taliban's momentum and then step by step hand over responsibility for the security situation to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). As far as we can tell, the United States will stay on this path. The U.S. public may elect a different president in 2012, but there is no evidence to point to a change in policy in that event. The pace of the drawdown may change but not the direction.

What is unclear, however, and what will be of great importance, is what the United States decides to do in support of the Afghan government, and in particular the ANSF, in the future. As of early 2012, the governments of the two

countries are discussing some kind of “strategic partnership.” The United States has declared that it will not leave Afghanistan entirely, even though all combat forces will be brought home.¹⁷⁴ What the strategic partnership will consist of is still an open question. The Afghan state will not be able to finance itself. Most importantly, it will not be able to pay for its own armed forces. The question is how much money the United States will be willing to spend in Afghanistan and for how many years. For how long will U.S. taxpayers be willing to support a dysfunctional government that is heavily burdened by corruption? A change of mood in the U.S. Congress might change the future of Afghanistan overnight.

An essential part of the equation is also continued military support. Once ISAF leaves, the Afghan National Army (ANA) will not have access to advanced military means such as close air support or helicopter evacuation, in the same way as it has today. The United States will continue its support but it has not yet decided on the kind of military assistance it will provide in Afghanistan after 2014.

Equally important, and hard to predict, are the actions of Pakistan. As many analysts have concluded, trying to fully understand the motives of the Pakistan government is not easy. We know that Pakistan, or more concretely the Pakistan army, including the ISI, has always viewed the Afghan conflict through the lens of the perceived threat from India. The Pakistan army has had close ties to what is now the insurgency in Afghanistan for more than 30 years. Despite Pakistan’s formal alliance with the United States, the Pakistan army has kept its ties with the Taliban.

Evidence of this double dealing is being revealed all the time. It is reasonable to argue that the Pakistan army not only tolerates the Taliban but actually supports it and its allies. The most obvious evidence is the Pakistan army’s refusal to deny the Taliban safe havens on its territory. Several analysts even argue that the infamous Haqqani network is under the direct control of the ISI.¹⁷⁵

Given the fact that the United States is not going to tolerate Pakistan being on both sides of the conflict, Pakistan will have to make some hard choices. One option would be to continue its support for the Taliban in order to keep its grip on Pashtunistan. This would continue to give Pakistan a strategic depth inside Afghanistan. Another option would be to opt for a peace agreement which gives the Taliban a role in a new Afghan government. An Afghan government with

¹⁷⁴ Panetta, *Hearing to Receive Testimony on the U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq*. See also chapter 2.

¹⁷⁵ See chapter 3.

members of the Taliban in powerful positions would also give Pakistan some sort of strategic depth vis-à-vis India.

Although it is reasonable to argue that Pakistan and the Taliban have common interests, a third option for Pakistan would be to break its ties with its old friends. The Pakistan government has other troubles besides its fear of India. Pakistan suffers heavily from violent internal conflicts. Northern Pakistan has grown into a vortex of religious extremism with its own Taliban movement. The TTP and other violent movements are becoming an increasing threat to Pakistan as a nation. The fight against the separatist movement in Baluchistan is also an issue in this context.

Moreover, Pakistan receives substantial aid from the United States. Without this money Pakistan would probably have to reduce the size of its army. For these reasons Pakistan might actually turn 180 degrees and cut its ties with the Taliban in order to concentrate on its internal problems and maintain a friendly relationship with the United States.

Although we view these two variables as the most important to follow in order to paint scenarios of the future, a couple of other variables will also play a significant role and may change quickly. One of these factors is what the Taliban decide to do.

What do we know about the Taliban's plans for the future? Because of the secrecy surrounding Mullah Omar, and since he does not make many public appearances, we know very little for certain. We do know however that the Taliban do not expect to be able to restore the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, that is, to take full control of the country. Mullah Omar declared in his Eid-al-fitr message of 2011 that the Islamic Emirate (i.e. the Taliban) sees an "independent Islamic regime as a conducive mechanism for the sustainability of the religious and worldly interests of the country and its countrymen. For this purpose, every legitimate option can be considered in order to reach this goal."¹⁷⁶

Whatever the Taliban decide to do will obviously be very important for the future. From the point of view of scenario making, it seems that the Taliban's intentions are quite clear and fixed. They want all foreign forces to leave Afghanistan and they want to be a part of the government of a new Islamic regime.

Another issue is the role that the current allies of the Taliban will play in the future. The two most important allies are Hizb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) and the Haqqani network. Each organization may choose to break its ties with the

¹⁷⁶ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, *Mullah Omar's Eid ul-Fitr Message*.

Taliban if it fears that peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government will go against its interests. Hekmatyar Gulbuddin, the leader of HIG, however, has already proved that he is interested in joining the peace negotiations.¹⁷⁷

The Haqqani network is more likely to act as a spoiler. Experts differ as to how powerful the Haqqani network is and how close its ties are to Pakistan's intelligence service (ISI). As far as we can tell, the Haqqani network seems to be the part of the insurgency that is least likely to accept a negotiated peace. If the Haqqani network is under the control of the ISI, as some argue, it will keep up the fight as long as it is told to do so. If left alone, with no support from either the Taliban or the ISI, it is likely to keep fighting anyway, since jihad is its rationale for existing.

Another characteristic of the insurgency and of Afghan society as a whole that is important to take into account is what we call local powerbrokers. Afghan society consists of a web of clientelistic relations. It is decentralized and fragmented. This means that local strongmen, on different levels, become important players for anyone who wishes to exercise political influence. These local powerbrokers are known to be opportunistic. They would not hesitate to change sides, from supporting the government to supporting the insurgency, if they believed it was in their interests, and depending on who they believe is winning the war.

How will such a swing in loyalties affect the possible scenarios? If many of these local powerbrokers believe that the insurgency will gain momentum once ISAF has withdrawn, they may quickly switch sides—which would give the insurgency a sudden boost. If this happens it would change the scenarios dramatically. Nonetheless, we do not judge this to be a key factor for our scenarios since it is dependent on other more powerful factors such as the actions of the United States.

One final variable that will play a major role in the period directly after 2014 is the status of the ANSF, mainly the ANA. If all goes to plan, the ANSF will be composed of 300,000 soldiers and police officers.¹⁷⁸ Will these troops be strong enough to cope with the insurgency?

The sad truth is that even though the ANSF might be well trained and equipped to fight the insurgency alone, any change in their strength will be downward. Once ISAF has left the country there will be no back-up if the ANA fails in its

¹⁷⁷ Ruttig, *The Battle for Afghanistan*, 8.

¹⁷⁸ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance*, 50.

operations. The quality of the ANSF has been questioned, where illiteracy and corruption are widespread. Desertion rates may rise.

It is also important to point out that large sections of the insurgency operate from safe havens in Pakistan. There is no way that the ANA will be able to cross the border into Pakistan in order to fight insurgents. The United States has occasionally carried out raids and drone strikes inside Pakistan, but this has always been met with anger from Pakistan. We do not expect the Afghan government to be more successful in this regard. Consequently, how well the ANA will be able to fight the insurgency is very much dependent on the Government of Pakistan. For these reasons we do not see the status of the ANSF as a key variable for determining future scenarios in Afghanistan.

6.3 Five Scenarios

In focusing on the long term commitment of the United States to Afghanistan and the choices of Pakistan as the two key variables for understanding possible futures, we have developed five scenarios.

6.3.1 Scenario 1: The Taliban get a Share of the Government of Afghanistan

- *The United States stays committed to Afghanistan, both financially and militarily.*
- *Pakistan supports the Taliban's decision to negotiate.*

If the United States stays committed to Afghanistan, in terms of both financial and military support, and if Pakistan decides its best option is to create a Pakistan-friendly government in Kabul, the outcome would probably be a reformed government that is a coalition between the current regime and the Taliban.

The Taliban has announced that they may take part in such a government and the United States has already declared that it is willing to negotiate. If Pakistan also agrees to this it would maintain a limited strategic depth inside Afghanistan, blocking any Indian attempt to turn Afghanistan against Pakistan.

A government in which the Taliban are members would require a broad political settlement with most regional powers. It would also require a solution to the problem of al-Qaida, since it still is an absolute requirement of the United States that the Taliban break all ties with this terrorist organization. As of early 2012, we still have no indication that the Taliban are willing to do this. The Taliban will also have to accept that Afghanistan enters into a "strategic partnership"

with the United States. It is unclear how far the Taliban will go in this respect since one of their major demands is that there should be no foreign involvement in Afghanistan. At the same time, however, it is important to keep in mind that the Taliban only exist because of the safe havens in Pakistan. It is likely that the Taliban will be put under heavy pressure if Pakistan decides it wants a broad political settlement.

If this scenario were to develop it will have beneficial consequences for almost all the other important actors. It would mean that the ANA would not have to fight the largest branch of the insurgency and would receive all the financial support it needs for a very long time. Consequently, it will be in a good position to repress any part of the insurgency that does not support the new government or any other spoiler wishing to keep the war going.

6.3.2 Scenario 2: Pakistan as Afghanistan's New Big Brother

- *The United States cuts its financial support to the government of Afghanistan.*
- *Pakistan supports the Taliban's decision to negotiate.*

A similar scenario would develop if Pakistan decided that it wanted a reformed Afghan government based on a coalition between the current regime and the Taliban, but the United States decided to cut all financial support. If this happens, Pakistan will probably step in as the Afghan government's new big brother. The Afghan government cannot sustain itself financially by taxing its own people. It needs an outside sponsor to survive. If the United States backed out the government would need to find a new patron, and a government heavily influenced by the Taliban would probably turn to Pakistan for support.

A reformed Afghan government would still need to be based on a broad political settlement of the type pictured in Scenario 1. It would also have similar consequences. The Taliban inside the government means an end to the insurgency. Spoilers will try to fight on but without the support of either the Taliban or Pakistan, no independent insurgent group would be able to destabilize the government.

Local powerbrokers allied with the current regime might become dissatisfied with the conditions of the settlement. They have supported the Kabul regime and the ISAF coalition led by United States for a long time. With large parts of the government handed over to the Taliban and with little or no money coming in from the United States they might feel betrayed and become spoilers.

Thus, in this scenario there is a chance that the war will go on to some extent. Local warlords, former allies of either the Taliban or the Kabul regime, may

continue to cause trouble if they feel that they have not gained anything from the peace, but their resistance will probably not give rise to a new full scale insurgency.

Furthermore, the essence of this scenario is that the United States backs off and Pakistan moves in. This creates a shift in the geostrategic balance in the region. Currently, Iran, India and China are keeping a low profile. The dominant foreign power in Afghanistan is the United States and as long as it is present other nations stay away. If the United States leaves a power vacuum, however, we believe that the first country to take advantage will be Pakistan, although it is unlikely that India or Iran will remain passive.

6.3.3 Scenario 3: War of Proxies

- *The United States stays committed to Afghanistan, both financially and militarily.*
- *Pakistan supports the Taliban in order to keep its strategic depth inside Southern Afghanistan.*

Scenario 1 and 2 are based on the assumption that Pakistan opts for a political settlement as a way to protect its strategic depth in Afghanistan. Another choice that Pakistan might consider is to preserve the current situation in which the Taliban hold parts of southern Afghanistan, giving Pakistan a strategic depth in Pashtunistan. One could argue that this is the policy that Pakistan has followed for the past ten years. Pakistan never cut its ties with the Taliban, and provided them with a safe haven and a chance to regain their strength after 2001. Through its double play vis-à-vis the United States it has managed to protect the Taliban and is now able to use them as a proxy in the war over who is going to control Afghanistan.

If this is what Pakistan truly wants, while the United States at the same time declares that it is going to support the Afghan government financially and militarily for a long time, the conflict will most likely develop into a cold war between Pakistan and the United States. The war will continue with the ANSF on one side and the insurgency on the other. Both sides will have a sponsor. It will be a war of proxies between Pakistan and the United States.

Relations between Pakistan and the United States deteriorated severely towards the end of 2011. For the first time, senior U.S. officials accused Pakistan of

supporting both sides of the war.¹⁷⁹ At the same time, the United States still supports Pakistan with aid money, of which a large portion goes directly to the military. The relationship between the two countries has never been more contradictory.

So far the United States has put up with this situation because of the need for Pakistan's help in fighting terrorism—ISAF's major supply lines go through Pakistan. It is also likely that the United States wants to keep an eye on Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. In the long run, however, it is unlikely that the United States will be willing to support a nation that sponsors its enemies inside Afghanistan. It is somewhat of a riddle why the United States has accepted this situation for as long as it has.

Thus, if Pakistan decides to continue its policy of supporting the Taliban as a means to gain a strategic depth in southern Afghanistan, and the United States decides to cut its aid to Pakistan, the conflict is likely to escalate. Without U.S. financial support, Pakistan has no reason to keep a leash on its proxies inside Afghanistan, assuming for instance that the Haqqani network is under the direct control of the ISI, as some argue.

A cold war between Pakistan and the United States may also affect the geostrategic situation. Pakistan is heavily dependent on foreign aid. It has a large army that it cannot pay for by itself. Consequently, it would have to find a new sponsor which would probably be China. China has stated that it has interests in the region, but it is far too soon to tell how eager it would be to enter this troubled area.

6.3.4 Scenario 4: Civil War

- *The United States cuts its financial support to the government of Afghanistan.*
- *Pakistan supports the Taliban in order to keep its strategic depth inside southern Afghanistan.*

Assuming that Pakistan is content to keep a grip on southern Afghanistan by supporting the Taliban, what would happen if the United States finally got tired of everything and decided to leave? Suppose that U.S. public opinion demanded

¹⁷⁹ Jaffrelot, "What Engagement With Pakistan Can—And Can't—Do."

that no more U.S. lives were risked and no more money spent on a corrupt Afghan regime that never pulls itself together to take care of its own problems.

If the United States seriously reduced its commitment to Afghanistan while Pakistan continued to support its proxies, a full scale civil war similar to the situation of the mid-1990s would be the most likely outcome. Without the support of the United States, the ANSF will face serious problems financially and militarily. The army would probably not disintegrate completely but it would suffer heavily from desertion. The warlords of the past would re-enter the scene.

Unlike in 1996, the Taliban would probably face much harder resistance. The Kabul regime will definitely not give in without a struggle and no side would be able to defeat the other decisively. The Taliban does not have access to the same military means as the ANA, but the ANA would not be able to reach the Taliban in its safe havens in Pakistan. The most likely outcome of this scenario is a protracted civil war with no end in sight.

A never ending civil war in Afghanistan with an uncertain outcome is obviously in no one's interests. If things develop in this direction the major regional powers would be likely to try to intervene once again. The United States would probably reconsider its decision to leave the region. Pakistan has an interest in having a strategic depth inside Afghanistan, but would not gain anything from an endless war. The same is probably true for Iran, India and China. They may well try to use Afghanistan as a pawn in the game of regional influence, but they have no interest in a long war.

6.3.5 Scenario 5: The American Dream

- *The United States stays committed to Afghanistan, both financially and militarily.*
- *Pakistan breaks with the Taliban in order to prioritize its domestic problems.*

So far all the scenarios have been based on the assumption that Pakistan's main interest is to keep Afghanistan from becoming an ally of India. Pakistan's fear of India is a well-known fact. Everything that the Pakistan military does can be related to the Indian threat. However, Pakistan also has other problems, most notably growing religious extremism and the separatist movement in Baluchistan.

These problems are getting worse every day and the violence produced by both the extremists and the separatists is directed against Pakistan as a state. Pakistan as a nation is under attack, and since Pakistani nationalism is the rationale for the existence of the army this means that it might be in the interests of the military

establishment to change its priorities. The domestic threat may be considered a more urgent priority than the threat from India.

If Pakistan decides that this should be its new priority, it has no reason to support the Taliban or any other insurgent group anymore. Instead, it would benefit from a stable Afghanistan. The growing religious extremism has its center in northern Pakistan, in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (the former North-West Frontier Province, NWFP). If Pakistan decided to clear these areas of domestic militants it would also clear the areas of Afghan insurgents. This is also the area in which al-Qaida is believed to be located, and where Usama bin Laden was found and killed.

The response of the United States to Pakistan would in this case be overwhelmingly positive. The safe havens of the insurgency in northern Pakistan are one of the largest threats to Afghanistan. They are the reason the Taliban survived in 2001 and was able to return. A joint Pakistani–U.S. military campaign to root out religious militants in southern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan would be the absolute dream scenario of the United States. It would finally put an end to the insurgency.

This scenario is however more of a dream than a genuine alternative. It is true that the Government of Pakistan has become more concerned about the domestic threat, and the army has launched campaigns against the Pakistani Taliban. But every domestic military action is politically sensitive. When the army attacks the TTP it actually attacks its own people. Such a campaign would not come without a high price domestically. One might even fear an escalation into outright civil war.

For this reason we do not consider this scenario to be likely. Presumably, the Government of Pakistan will do something in the long run to curb the growth of anti-state extremists such as the TTP, but it is probably going to take time.

Currently, relations between Pakistan and the United States are tense due to the double dealing by Pakistan inside Afghanistan. At the same time, however, it is true that both countries have a common interest in fighting religious extremism inside Pakistan. Pakistan is also dependent on the United States financially. Thus, if Pakistan decides to put less emphasis on its perceived threat from India and can be persuaded not to control Afghanistan, or parts of Afghanistan, there is some common ground on which to build a new partnership between Pakistan and the United States.

6.4 Conclusions

If the future looks anything like the scenarios presented in this report, except for “the American dream” which we believe to be almost impossible, the intervention by the United States and its primarily European allies will be seen as

a failure. The best anyone can hope for after ten years of war is that the Taliban return and is given a share of the government in Kabul. All the other outcomes are worse: a never ending civil war, war by proxies or that the conflict spills over into Pakistan.

Thus, from a Western point of view the future looks bleak. The Islamic extremism that provided the fertile ground for al-Qaida has not been rooted out. It is as strong as ever. Any deal with the Taliban will also be a failure in terms of protecting human rights and paving the way for democracy in Afghanistan.

From a strictly Afghan point of view, however, the situation might not be judged in such a pessimistic tone. The country has suffered from civil war for more than 30 years. One of the primary drivers for continued war has been the rivalry between its larger neighbors. The fighting parties inside Afghanistan have always had outside support. For the first time it seems that the outside actors have become war weary. This could mean that a peace settlement which includes all the major parties is possible, which would hopefully mean that all the sponsoring of irregular militias inside Afghanistan would end. However, if no peace settlement is reached, according to our scenarios the war will go on with no end in sight.

This general conclusion is based on several assumptions. Some of them are debatable but some are not. We can say almost for certain that ISAF is not going to increase its operations but only to decrease them. The campaigns of 2010 and 2011 were the last efforts to drive off the Taliban. There will not be any further attempt by Western forces to end the war militarily. Consequently, the presence of ISAF is not as important as it used to be. As long as it is present the country will not turn into anarchy, but since its presence is going to get smaller every year until 2014, the Taliban no longer have to fear a total defeat. From the Taliban's point of view, ISAF is no longer a major threat.

A more controversial claim of ours is that we do not believe that the central government in Afghanistan is key to the development of the situation after 2014. If there is any progress towards good governance, it is not fast enough. We cannot see that Afghanistan in only two years will have a government that is strong enough to fight a civil war and at the same time build a new democratic nation, but we do not believe that the Afghan people will be paralyzed because of this. There are other societal structures that make things work, of which the clan system is the most important. A collapse of the central government is of course not desirable, but it will not mean a total collapse of society. Local strongmen will not surrender to the Taliban as easily as many of them did in the mid-1990s. If the Kabul regime falls they will probably just regroup and continue to fight the Taliban.

Scenarios about the future are necessarily uncertain. They do not provide answers as to what will actually happen—they are not prognoses. The virtue of

scenario making is that it provides an understanding of how different factors interplay, and gives policymakers an idea of which factors to monitor closely. Our analysis shows that the choices made by Pakistan and the United States will be the most important factors to observe. Other factors, such as the choices made by the Taliban or India's policy towards Afghanistan, also play an important role but as things stand in early 2012, Pakistan and the United States are in a position where their actions will affect those of the other players. Even though all the cogs and wheels in the system are moving constantly, these two factors share the characteristics that they have a strong influence, and they may change rapidly in a way that is hard to predict.

The United States is still searching for a post-2014 strategy. It is trying to put together a policy that combines negotiations with the Taliban with securing a long lasting "strategic partnership" with the government of Afghanistan. The U.S. public is anxious to end the war as soon as possible and may not be willing to put soldiers in harm's way or to spend an indefinite amount of money on a government that never pulls itself together.

Pakistan in turn is caught in a dilemma. It is an ally of the United States and a major recipient of aid. The backbone of the state structure, the army, is dependent on this money. Yet anti-U.S. sentiment has never been stronger in Pakistan. At the same time, Pakistan fears India just as much as it ever has assists the Taliban in order to prevent Afghanistan from coming under Indian influence. Pakistan cannot be the ally of both the United States and the Taliban for much longer. It is going to have to choose a new path, but right now no one seems to know to where.

7 Conclusions

In 2014, according to the agreement signed by the Afghan government and the ISAF nations in Kabul in 2010, ISAF is supposed to hand over primary responsibility for security in Afghanistan to the Afghan National Security Forces, (ANSF). Given that 2014 is less than two years away, and the military situation on the ground has not improved in a decisive way, the ISAF nations are in need of a post-2014 strategy—unless they are willing to abandon the country altogether. On which issues should such a strategy focus?

The guiding question is what will happen once ISAF withdraws its combat troops. We have answered this question by painting possible scenarios with the help of expert opinions. To this end we have also taken an in-depth look at some issues that are at the center of the debate: the geostrategic context, the role of Pakistan, the status of the Kabul regime and the prospects for a negotiated peace settlement.

Based on this discussion we have reached a number of conclusions on a set of issues that we believe need careful consideration by policymakers in the ISAF nations.

7.1 The Best We Can Hope For Is a Peace Settlement and the Return of the Taliban

Scenarios are always uncertain, but if any of ours (except the improbable “American dream”) come reasonably close to the truth the West’s intervention in Afghanistan will paradoxically end with the return of the Taliban. The sad truth is that the best available option for the ISAF countries seems to be to negotiate with the Taliban and give it a share in government. All other outcomes are worse since they all foresee continued fighting with no end in sight: civil war, war by proxies or a war that also includes Pakistan.

This is of course based on the assumption that the ISAF countries are determined to remove all combat troops by 2014. The outcome would be completely different if the ISAF nations changed their mind and decided to maintain large forces in Afghanistan for a long period of time. However, we see no evidence that any ISAF country is willing to do this. On the contrary, the unanimous opinion is that all combat forces should be withdrawn as soon as possible.

The Taliban will no doubt define this as a victory. The humiliation of a defeat is perhaps an acceptable price to pay for peace. What is troublesome, however, is that the problem of religious extremism that provides a fertile ground for terrorists will not have changed. The rationale for going to war against the Taliban was to eradicate safe havens for terrorists in Afghanistan. This goal has

been reached as far as Afghanistan is concerned but the extremists are not gone. They are now in Pakistan instead.

A return of the Taliban also raises worries about respect for human rights and gender equality. Afghanistan's formal name is the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan but its constitution is secular and liberal. Basic liberties are respected. Moderate Islamism, as for example practiced by the AK Party in Turkey, is congruent with such a constitution but radical Islamism is not. The Taliban has not yet stated whether it will agree to work within a secular constitution.

Another issue that needs to be underscored regarding future peace talks is that the urgency to leave, that the United States and its allies feel, seriously undercuts their bargaining strength vis-à-vis the Taliban. If 2011 was the year when ISAF conducted its last large scale campaign against the Taliban, it is fair to say that the Taliban survived the war. Thus, from their point of view, the United States and the ISAF nations no longer set the rules. The Taliban do not have a preset schedule and do not have to sign a peace treaty by 2014. The longer they wait, the more willing the ISAF nations will be to give in to their demands.

7.2 A Regional Peace Treaty Is Needed

From a satellite perspective, it is clear that, a peace treaty if it is going to hold needs to include all the major nations in the region. The conflict in Afghanistan did not begin in 2001. For many Afghans the starting point was the invasion by the Soviet Union in 1979. The factions that today are fighting each other in Afghanistan have always had outside support. The Mujahedin forces of the 1980s were sponsored by the United States and Pakistan. Pakistan decided to support the Taliban after the Soviet withdrawal, and after the 9/11 attacks the United States decided to topple the Taliban government by supporting the Northern Alliance.

In large part, the fight between former Mujahedin warlords inside Afghanistan has been manipulated by foreign governments. During the cold war, Afghanistan was caught between the Soviet Union and the United States. Directly thereafter it was caught in the rivalry between Pakistan and India. On top of this, it became the operating ground of al-Qaida, which forced the United States to intervene. There cannot be a lasting peace in Afghanistan unless its large neighbors and the United States settle their differences too.

7.3 Pakistan Has Legitimate Security Concerns Too

Since 2001, Pakistan has been helping both the Taliban and the United States at the same time. Experts disagree about how active Pakistani support for the Taliban has been. Some say it is active and deliberate, others say that it is passive but all agree that Pakistan helped the Taliban to survive in 2001 and has done nothing to remove the insurgency's safe havens inside Pakistan. From this it would be easy to conclude that Pakistan is just another rogue state. Such an assumption is far too simplistic and fails to see the conflict from Pakistan's point of view.

Pakistan has always viewed its security interests in terms of protecting itself from India. Whether this fear of India is justified or exaggerated or not, the fact is that relations between the two nations have never been friendly. Consequently, Pakistan fears that Afghanistan will come under Indian influence. This fear is not unsubstantiated. Hamid Karzai has close relations with India and has signed agreements on military cooperation. This is the prime reason why Pakistan helps, or at least shelters, the Taliban. As long as the Taliban holds a small part of southern Afghanistan, Pakistan will have strategic depth vis-à-vis India.

From a Pakistani point of view the actions of the United States have not improved the situation. It is in the global strategic interest of the United States to connect with India, the great democracy of Asia, in order to balance China's growing power. Closer ties between the United States and India may make the United States neglectful of Pakistan's interests.

Furthermore, Pakistan faces a difficult domestic situation. Parts of the northern provinces, where religious extremism is at its strongest, are more or less ungovernable. This is where the Afghan insurgency resides and where Usama bin Laden was found. This is also the home of the Pakistani Taliban (the TTP), which sees the government of Pakistan as its prime enemy. In addition, there is also a separatist movement further to the East, in Baluchistan.

Even though such extremists challenge the Pakistani state, they are part of the population. When the government attacks the TTP militarily, which it has done several times, it is forced to wage war on its own people. This is not easily done. It may not be possible for the Pakistani government to clear the northern provinces of religious militants, including the Afghan Taliban, without risking an escalation into civil war.

7.4 Everybody Wants the United States to Leave but Not to Leave

The United States is the strongest military power in the region and the leader of the ISAF coalition. No other government dares to challenge the U.S. presence, although one suspects that most nations in the region would prefer the United States to withdraw its troops altogether. Public opinion in the United States and the ISAF nations also favors leaving Afghanistan as soon as possible.

The dilemma, however, is that if the United States leaves entirely, withdrawing all its soldiers, including military advisers and special forces, this will create a power vacuum. The Kabul regime is supposed to fill this gap with the Afghan National Army, but it is questionable whether this will be possible. The only way to ensure that there will be no power vacuum after 2014 is for the United States to leave some troops in the area. If the United States keeps troops in Afghanistan, surrounding nations—Pakistan, Iran, India, China and the Central Asian republics—will not have to worry about a geopolitical competition over this piece of land.

The United States must also ensure that Afghanistan is not used once again as a sanctuary for terrorist organizations. The best way to do this would also be to keep some troops in the region. When the United States has brought its last soldier back to the homeland it will be hard to go back if it is necessary.

7.5 The Kabul Regime is too Weak to Continue the War on its Own

A keystone of the ISAF strategy for handing over responsibility for security to the ANSF is the Afghan government. The idea is that the government should be capable of handling the situation on its own.

This report questions this line of thought. We see no improvement in the government's capacity to govern the nation. Corruption is rife, leading figures use their positions only to enrich themselves, and former warlords hold positions as ministers or governors. This will not change for many years. In the meantime, the Kabul regime will remain corrupt, inefficient and weak, and have little legitimacy in the eyes of the public. A regime of this type will not be able to successfully fight an insurgency.

However, since the Kabul regime is weak and everyone knows it is weak, the lack of a proper government may not be a complete disaster. The Afghan state is a patrimonial system. Loyalties and benefits are exchanged through informal channels, primarily through family ties. This web of clientelistic relationships is not dependent on formal governmental structures. This means that if the Kabul

regime collapses, the patrons in the system will just reorganize themselves and their followers. Former warlords will take up arms again in order to protect themselves, new alliances will be formed and the fight against the Taliban and their allies will continue.

If this is true, it is both good news and bad news for the ISAF nations. The bad news is that it would seem that a central feature of the ISAF strategy to stabilize Afghanistan has failed. It is an assumption of the ISAF strategy that a well-functioning, non-corrupt government is one of the major building blocks for creating security. The ISAF nations have not been able to create such a government, and no such government will be in place for many years. The good news, however, is that this assumption might have been incorrect to begin with. The failure to help Afghanistan to achieve a proper government may not make any difference at all to the security situation.

7.6 Putting the Jigsaw Puzzle Together after 2014

When the United States and its ISAF allies withdraw their forces there is a risk that this will create a power vacuum in Afghanistan, similar to that which was created in the 1990s after the Soviet withdrawal. If the United States leaves and the Kabul regime fails to cope with the insurgency, the neighboring nations will not be able to stand idly by. Pakistan, India, Iran and China all have interests to protect and they will probably try to control events inside Afghanistan by sponsoring Afghan powerbrokers. A continued war by proxies would be the result.

A new “Great Game” in which powerful nations use Afghanistan as a rope in a tug of war is in no one’s interests. There is no way of telling how such a struggle for influence would end. Consequently, one important issue for all the ISAF nations to monitor closely is how the geopolitical jigsaw puzzle is put together after 2014. Someone or something will have to replace the presence of ISAF, if we do not believe that the Kabul regime alone will be strong enough to fill the void. A peace agreement including all major powers in the area would be a piece of the puzzle to put in ISAF’s place. Rethinking 2014 as a fixed date for withdrawing all troops would be another, albeit that this would require a substantial shift in policy by the entire ISAF coalition. Our point here, however, is not suggest new policy initiatives, but only to underline the importance of avoiding the development of a new power vacuum in Afghanistan.

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9 Appendix

Workshop Participants

| Name | Affiliation |
|-------------------|--|
| Masood Aziz | Former Senior Diplomat, Afghanistan |
| Vishal Chandra | IDSA, India |
| Tim Foxley | Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom |
| Anders Fänge | Former Country Director, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan |
| Hu Shisheng | CICIR, China |
| Mark Jacobson | Former Deputy NATO SCR in Afghanistan, United States |
| Jang Ji Hyang | Asan Institute for Policy Studies, South Korea |
| Shashank Joshi | Royal United Services Institute, United Kingdom |
| Robert D. Lamb | CSIS, United States |
| Neil Melvin | SIPRI, Sweden |
| Harsh V. Pant | King's College, United Kingdom |
| Trita Parsi | National Iranian American Council, United States |
| Ivan Safranchuk | MGIMO, Russia |
| Abubakar Siddique | Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, Czech Republic |
| Barbara Stapleton | Afghanistan Analysts Network |
| Wang Xu | PKU, China |
| Ann Wilkens | Former Ambassador, Sweden |
| Ye Hailin | CASS, China |

