

# Partners for Stability: Afghanistan's Neighbors and Regional Cooperation

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The civil war in Afghanistan has created trans-border problems for all its neighboring countries as well as for the regional powers not directly bordering the country. Each of these neighbors tries to exert influence in Afghanistan, through ethnic networks, economic investment and development aid, but also with financial and material assistance for political and militant groups. Only in the past two years have processes begun to build up institutional frameworks for the neighbors to coordinate activities among themselves and with the Western states leading in International Security Assistance Force for Afghanistan (ISAF). But hopes are dim, old animosities and mistrust hamper profound cooperation. That is all the more worrisome, because the policies of the regional players will be a primary factor for the political development in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Western combat forces in 2014.

The purpose of this collection of articles, produced in a project funded by the German Marshall Fund of the U.S., has been to learn more about the intricacies of the neighborhood strategies in Afghanistan, but also to detect the conflicts and frictions among the transatlantic partners in defining a regional approach. Accordingly, the questions posed to the authors from the USA and Germany, from most of Afghanistan's neighbors and from International Organizations active in the country focus both on the regional situation as well as on transatlantic cooperation: What role can Afghanistan's neighbors and regional powers play in the country's stabilization? What specific approaches can be designed to improve their role? What options exist to foster transnational or regional cooperation among neighboring states and Afghanistan? What interests guide transatlantic cooperation with regard to Afghanistan's neighbors? Where are areas of agreement or dispute?

In Afghanistan's history, great powers from the near and far abroad played a crucial role, but could never occupy the country for long. Not so much as invaders, neighbors have offered themselves as trading partners and investors, using Afghanistan's strategic position for transit and trade, and as stake holders in political power brokering. Most importantly, cultural and ethnic ties have connected people on both sides of the respective borders, often with a binding power greater than the loyalty to

the state itself. The neighbors are, thus, intrinsically linked with the Afghan political system and society.

In the light of this historical experience—that competing interests of strong neighbors and outside powers have fueled internal conflicts—Afghanistan itself has a vital interest in a regional approach. The landlocked country needs peaceful relations with its neighbors and a balanced system to resolve conflicts and respond to their claims. “The future we are trying to build in Afghanistan is one that we will share in peace with Pakistan, with Iran, with our neighbors to our north, and with China, India and Russia, and it is a future that we cannot build without the goodwill and support of these neighbors.” said President Hamid Karzai at a UN conference in March 2009.<sup>1</sup>

## Neighbors and Regional Powers

For the sake of Afghanistan’s stability, the neighbors, though sometimes part of the problem, must be made part of the solution and won as partners in a cooperative effort. Their divergent interests and the overriding bilateral conflicts make this a difficult task.

- Iran has strong influence in Afghanistan’s Western provinces. Farsi is widely spoken in the country. Iran supported Shiite groups in Afghanistan and opposed the fundamentalist Sunnite rule of the Taliban.<sup>2</sup> Today, it is helping a wider spectrum of political players to preserve its influence over whatever political forces might come to power after the withdrawal of ISAF.<sup>3</sup> Iran spends hundreds of millions of dollars on Afghanistan’s reconstruction, creates regional trade networks, connecting Central Asia and Iran’s Eastern provinces—and by that builds up an Iran-dominated economic space. Iran is suffering from the drug production, since addicts have multiplied there. It saw thousands of border police officers die in the fight against drug trafficking across the border,

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1 Statement By His Excellency Hamid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, International Conference on Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context, The Hague, 3/31/2009 <<http://www.afghanistan-un.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/karzai-at-hague-conference-on-afghanistan.pdf>>.

2 Cf. Mohsen M. Milani, Iran’s policy towards Afghanistan, in: *The Middle East Journal* 2/2006, pp. 235–256.

3 Cf. Karim Sadjadpour, Iran, in: Ashley J. Tellis/ Aroop Mukharji, *Is A Regional Strategy Viable In Afghanistan?* (Carnegie Endowment for international Peace), Washington, DC 2010, pp. 39–44.

but has improved its counter-narcotics capabilities immensely.<sup>4</sup> The country has taken one to 1.5 million Afghan refugees and many illegal migrants.<sup>5</sup> Iran needs stability in Afghanistan but deems itself forced to oppose Western and international presence that could help make that possible. Tehran and Washington failed to establish cooperation right after the ousting of the Taliban regime when their interests converged. The USA accuses Iran or actors operating from there of supporting the Taliban and their allies with weapons.

- Pakistan sees all its foreign activities in Afghanistan in the light of its confrontation with India. Its aim in Afghanistan is to keep India from gaining influence there, to avoid being trapped between two adversaries and to create strategic depth to the West.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Pakistan is a necessary partner for controlling the porous Eastern border along the disputed Durand Line. Much of the support for the ISAF is transported through Pakistan. Pakistan can hardly exert control, though, over the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA), and spur development in the North Western Frontier Provinces to cope with the free move of Taliban fighters between combat areas in Afghanistan and their sanctuaries, nor to stop arms trafficking and drug trade.<sup>7</sup> Pakistan also hosts two million Afghan refugees, with close ethnic ties between Pashtu Afghans and relatives on the Pakistani side.<sup>8</sup> After the 2001 attacks, Pakistan offered itself as an indispensable ally to the United States in the “War on terror.” However, there is low public support in Pakistan for its alliance with the USA.
- China has only a short border with Afghanistan, but is very much concerned about a possible collaboration of Afghan radicals with Islamic Uighur separatists in its north-western region of Xinjiang. Next to counter-terrorism, China’s interest in Afghanistan is mainly driven by its energy concerns and by its desire to have better access to Central Asian fossil deposits and other resources. It is

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4 Cf. Thomas Erdbrink, The West’s Stalwart Ally in the War on Drugs: Iran (Yes, That Iran), in: *New York Times*, 10/11/2012, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/12/world/middleeast/iran-fights-drug-smuggling-at-borders.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/12/world/middleeast/iran-fights-drug-smuggling-at-borders.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)>

5 Cf. Frederick W. Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, Danielle Pletka, *Iranian influence in the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan* (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research), Washington, DC 2008.

6 Cf. Frédéric Grare, Pakistan, in: Tellis/Mukharji, *Regional Approach*, op. cit. (note 3), pp. 17–26.

7 Cf. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan: border management cooperation in drug control*, Vienna 2007.

8 Cf. Selig S. Harrison, “Pashtunistan:” *the challenge to Pakistan and Afghanistan* (Real Instituto Elcano, Analyses of the Royal Institute 37), Madrid 2008.

exporting an increasing amount of goods to Afghanistan and has increased its support for the Afghan reconstruction.<sup>9</sup> Beijing also has an interest to secure the position of Pakistan, its prime ally in South Asia and a transit country for energy and trade.<sup>10</sup> This does not lead to pressure from Beijing, nevertheless, that Pakistan fights harder against the Taliban bases on its soil, as the USA would like to see.

- Tajikistan has taken in numerous Afghan refugees in the past. Many members of the original anti-Taliban alliance are ethnic Tajiks. U.S. and French forces were deployed in Tajikistan during the Afghan war. Russia has troops deployed to Tajikistan and was in charge of border controls until 2005. Tajikistan went through a civil war in the early 1990s with support from Afghanistan for Islamic militants. The country serves as a transit route for Afghanistan's heroin going to Russia and Europe and has the largest share of seized drugs in Central Asia.<sup>11</sup>
- Uzbekistan has ethnic ties to Afghanistan's Northern provinces: seven percent of all Afghans are ethnic Uzbeks.<sup>12</sup> The country has offered itself as an influential partner for the stabilization of Afghanistan, and hosts an air base of the German Bundeswehr in Termez. Uzbekistan and Russia have signed a military alliance pact in 2005, fostering Moscow's influence in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has itself worked diplomatically for a regional approach, recalling the close six-party cooperation in the early phase of the recent Afghan war. The poor human rights record of the government under President Islam Abduganiyevich Karimov still casts a shadow over the cooperation. The members of the European Union, for instance, were long divided on how to deepen relations with the resource-rich country. Following the Andijan massacre of hundreds of protesters, in 2009 sanctions from four years earlier were lifted, with the exception of an arms embargo.

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9 Cf. Nicklas Norling, 'The emerging China-Afghanistan relationship', in: *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* (Washington, DC, 5/14/2008) p. 10.

10 Cf. Michael D. Swaine with Tiffany P. Ng, *China*, in Tellis/Mukharji, *Regional Approach*, 2010, op. cit., pp. 61–69; Tariq Mahmud Ashraf, *Afghanistan in Chinese strategy toward South and Central Asia* (Jamestown Foundation Washington, DC, China Brief 8), 5/13/2008, pp. 2–6.

11 Cf. Oxford Analytica, *Tajikistan, drug problems*, <<http://europeandcis.undp.org/files/uploads/CA%20HDR/oxford%20analytica%20-%20Tajikistan.pdf>>.

12 Cf. Vladimir Paramonov, Aleksej Stokov, *The economic reconstruction of Afghanistan and the role of Uzbekistan* (CSRC, Central Asian Series; 06/22(E)), Camberley 2006.

- Turkmenistan is rich in oil and gas. Its government kept in contact with the Taliban rule, because Afghanistan was seen as possible route for exporting energy reserves. In March 2012, after twenty years of negotiation, the state company Turkmengas signed deals for gas transfers with its counterparts in India and Pakistan, through a pipeline yet to be built, running partly through Afghanistan (TAPI Pipeline). Turkmenistan has kept itself out of Afghan affairs by holding a position of neutrality. After a power transition following the death of President Saparmyrat Niyazov in 2006, the new government renewed contacts to NATO. Turkmenistan has allowed the use of military bases, slightly stretching its neutrality principle. A poor human rights record might impede closer relations and cause tension between the Western states.<sup>13</sup> About one million Turkmen live on the Afghan side.<sup>14</sup> Turkmenistan has the largest share of drug trade going to the North.

Four regional powers that do not share a border with Afghanistan might have an even greater impact on its future development.

- Russia, a former occupier of Afghanistan, is trying to build up its influence in Central Asia. The Afghanistan conflict today creates numerous challenges to the Russian security. The number of Russian drug addicts and the extent of organized crime are growing. Many Russians have seen the build-up of Western military deployment in Central Asia as an attempt to create a bridgehead in the energy-rich region, limiting Russia's space of influence at the same time. According to this view, the war on terror has been merely a pretext for a broader agenda.<sup>15</sup> Afghanistan is itself high on the foreign policy agenda of Moscow, but also plays an instrumental role. It is a trump card for Russia to gain political leverage in its relation with the American counterpart.<sup>16</sup> The U.S. has shifted focus away from containing Russia to re-building partnership for more effec-

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13 Cf. Bruce Pannier, *Turkmenistan: NATO finds new partner in Central Asia* (Open Society Institute), New York, NY 2008.

14 Institute for the study of war, *Turkmenistan and Afghanistan*, <<http://www.understandingwar.org/turkmenistan-and-afghanistan>>.

15 Cf. Dmitri Trenin, Russia, in: Tellis/Mukharji, *Regional Approach*, op. cit., pp. 71–81; The Path to Peace and Concord in Afghanistan Will Be Determined by the Position Russia Takes (The Institute for Demography, Migration and Regional Development), Moscow 2008, <<http://afghan.idmrr.ru/index.en.htm>>.

16 Cf. Stephen J Blank, Beyond Manas: Russia's game in Afghanistan, in: *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 2/11/2009, pp. 3–6.

tive international handling of the issues like the Afghanistan operation and the nuclear crisis in Iran.<sup>17</sup>

- Turkey is making the stability of Afghanistan a top priority—it is the only ISAF contributor of the regional powers at hand. With its new foreign policy under the conservative AKP government, formulated by foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkey seeks to establish itself not only as a regional power but also as a power in several regions; Central Asia being one. With the Turkmen minorities, Turkey sees ethnic ties as a source of legitimacy for its role as arbiter in the conflict. Ankara has made regional cooperation a cornerstone of its policy and has brought Afghanistan and Pakistan together in a tripartite conference series. With the Istanbul process, Turkey is especially active in establishing a multilateral institutionalized dialogue on security issues among Afghanistan's neighbors.
- India understands the strategic importance of its political foothold in Afghanistan in the light of its conflict with Pakistan, but it looks beyond that: India seeks deeper economic relations with Central Asia, not the least because of its energy needs. India therefore has an interest in an independent and stable Afghanistan as a transit country, and supports the fight against Islamist radicalism to serve this goal. India has used political, diplomatic and developmental means to establish closer ties to Afghan elites: The lack of direct access and Pakistan's fierce opposition hamper India's influence in Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup>
- Saudi Arabia has been supporting the Mujahedeen fighters against the Russian occupation and was one of the few countries to recognize the Taliban government. It has begun to play a more open role of supporter of Afghanistan's reconstruction, with huge sums flowing from official sources and numerous other donors from Saudi Arabia. The heterogeneity of Saudi support makes an overall assessment difficult. The interests to strengthen its close alliance with Pakistan and to hedge against Iranian influence are important drivers behind Saudi policies, next to the wish to be the central power in the Muslim world. The efforts to mediate between Afghanistan and parts of the Taliban have been unsuccessful, but were praised internationally.<sup>19</sup>

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17 Cf. Roy Allison, *Security cooperation between Western states and Russia over Central Asia/Afghanistan: the changing role of Uzbekistan* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, programme paper), London 2008.

18 Cf. Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, India, in: Tellis/Mukharji, *Regional Approach*, op. cit., pp. 27–38.

19 Cf. Christopher Boucek, Saudi Arabia, in: Tellis/Mukharji, *Regional Approach*, op. cit., pp. 45–50.

All neighbors share the interest in a stable and independent Afghanistan that keeps jihadist groups at bay. However, their bilateral animosities, their conflicting claims inside Afghanistan as well as the widespread opposition against Western military deployment (combined with weak hopes that it might achieve some progress before it ends) impede joint and coherent policies in the region. Afghanistan's stability seems to be of secondary importance, or at best instrumental, in the light of some of the regional competition.

## ISAF and the Regional Approach

With the rising intensity of the insurgency in Afghanistan, and the obvious refuge the Taliban found in Pakistan, regional consideration became more central for the ISAF. Many of its contributors also saw the "regional approach" as the best way to transform the external stabilization mission into a process driven by neighboring actors already involved, with stakes in the development process and of a greater proximity to the cultural system of the Afghans. The idea was not only to build up Afghan ownership itself, but also to use the individual interests of the neighbors for the goal of stabilization.

A regional approach can be understood, firstly, as a mere shift of perspective, to include the trans-border nature of Afghanistan's conflicts in strategic considerations. The then Commander of the U.S. Central Command, General David H. Petraeus, asked at the Munich Security Conference 2009 for "a strategy that addresses the situations in neighboring countries."<sup>20</sup> Secondly, a regional approach refers to the task of combining and coordinating the existing political instruments that the neighbors apply against the same sort of challenge in order to multiply forces. Looking at a future Afghanistan, a regional approach would, thirdly, mean to win partners who are willing and able to take over responsibilities for Afghanistan's security, in the form of military presence, military training or financial assistance.

Since the beginning of the NATO-led stabilization force in Afghanistan, the neighboring countries have played a strategic role in its success. Countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan provide the infrastructure for deployment and support of the ISAF troops. Without the involvement of the country's neighbors, the Western

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20 Gen. David H. Petraeus, "The Future of the Alliance and the Mission in Afghanistan," Speech at the Munich Security Conference, 2/8/2009 <[http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu\\_2009=&menu\\_konferenzen=&sprache=de&id=264&](http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu_2009=&menu_konferenzen=&sprache=de&id=264&)>.

allies and Kabul would find it hard to cope with most of Afghanistan's problems, such as the escalation of violence, the flourishing drug production and trade, the millions of refugees, and development. The interest in the stability of Afghanistan and in the roll-back of militant Islamist fighters will be shared by the neighboring countries, which have suffered from radical infiltration and the drug trade in particular.

The nature of the West's relation to Afghanistan's neighbor countries is still mostly bilateral: With the Istanbul process, only slow progress is made to build a multinational institutional setting for solving Afghanistan's problems. These efforts are often burdened with conflicts and issues distinct from the stabilization of Afghanistan—such as the nuclear crisis with Iran or the U.S. drone war against Jihad terror groups in Pakistan. When considering cooperation with countries like Iran, Russia or China, the transatlantic partners have diverging views.

Including the neighbors has been a persistent element of every new strategy on part of the USA and among the transatlantic partners in order to increase the chances of ISAF's success. NATO had already identified the need to better include the region in its Strategic Vision issued at the summit in Bucharest in April 2008. The summit's declaration regarding the "ISAF's Strategic Vision" included as a principle "increased cooperation and engagement with Afghanistan's neighbors, especially Pakistan" and demanded resolute support for the Kabul government's activities.<sup>21</sup> But frustration came quickly—despite many attempts to interact with difficult partners on the working level and in large donor conferences. Regarding governance in Afghanistan, there has not been enough unity among the neighbors and the states leading ISAF to develop a coherent strategic approach for developing the cooperation with Afghanistan's neighbors. That is not likely to change until the withdrawal of combat forces and the end of ISAF in its current form in 2014.

The stronger focus on a regional approach was a consequence of the new U.S. strategic review under President Barack Obama, with the intention to look more closely at activities in Pakistan and redefine its relations with Russia and Iran. In the new Afghanistan strategy Obama first outlined in March 2009, the regional approach was a crucial element in addition to a surge of forces and a limitation of the war objectives towards fighting Al Qaeda. Security planners of the new government first conceptu-

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21 Cf. ISAF's Strategic Vision. Declaration by the Heads of State and Government of the Nations contributing to the UN-mandated NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, Bucharest Summit, 4/3/2008 (Press Release 2008/052) <<http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-052e.html>>.



alized the regional approach as the larger focus on “AfPak” as theater for operations against the Taliban forces on both sides of the Durand Line. In the course of the evolution of the new strategy, it took in more elements of conflict settlement with the neighbors, to remove adversarial interests that prohibited a joint undertaking in Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> Yet any hopes that tying in neighbors in Afghanistan’s stabilization into an integrated cooperative framework, to share responsibilities and costs, could be the way out of the Afghanistan quagmire, were quickly lost after a sober analysis of what divided the regional powers. “When the national aims, perceptions, and actions of Afghanistan’s many neighbors are carefully assessed, however, the effective consensus necessary to support the coalition’s larger political and military goals seems to lie beyond reach,”<sup>23</sup> wrote Asia expert Ashley Tellis in 2010.

### Slow Progress for Regional Cooperation

Conferences on regional cooperation started early on in the transition of Afghanistan, beginning with a Kabul conference on good neighborly relations in late 2002. The Regional Economic Co-operation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) has focused on the economic aspects of Afghanistan’s rebuilding in the course of five meetings. The UN hosted a conference on March 31, 2009 in The Hague, entitled “Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context,” with weak demands for cooperation and a dialogue mostly between Afghanistan and Pakistan. A RECCA session in Istanbul in November 2011 gave Turkey an opportunity to step up as a patron for an expansion of the agenda to security related issues, such as drugs and the fight against terrorism.<sup>24</sup>

The “Istanbul Process” has won accolade from Western states, who provide material support for new projects, because this process offers a framework to hand over to the regional players responsibility for Afghanistan’s stability, while the schedule for the pull-out of ISAF troops is taking shape. During a “Heart of Asia” Foreign

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22 Cf. Jessica T. Mathews, Through Their Eyes: Possibilities for a Regional Approach to Afghanistan, in: Tellis/Mukharji, *Regional Approach*, op. cit., pp. 1–6 <[http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/regional\\_approach.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/regional_approach.pdf)>.

23 Cf. Ashley Tellis, Implementing a Regional Approach to Afghanistan: Multiple Alternatives, Modest Possibilities, in: op. cit., pp. 85–125.

24 On the evolution of concepts on regional cooperation in Central Asia, cf. S. Reza Kazemi, *Upcoming Regional Co-operation Conference on Afghanistan: A Primer* (Afghanistan Analysts Network), <<http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=2810>>, posted: 6/13/2012.

Ministers meeting in Kabul in June 2012, the ministers agreed on a set of seven areas for confidence building measures among their states. These include the plan to establish guidelines for disaster management, information exchange on counter-terrorism, cooperation on counter-narcotics, and improvements in the area of commerce, infrastructure and education. This by itself shows the persistent frictions and conflicts among them.<sup>25</sup>

At the Bonn conference in November 2011, the host Germany referred to the Petersberg conference a decade earlier and succeeded to gain commitments for an economic support of Afghanistan beyond 2014. At this point in time, Berlin could point to initial and cautious talks with Taliban representatives as a first step for a negotiated end of hostilities. The results on the closer integration of regional efforts in Afghanistan, however, remained meager. In reaction to a NATO air attack hitting a border station in Pakistan earlier in the month, Pakistan did not participate.

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Over three international workshops the project Partners for Stability sought insights not by looking at each neighbor separately, but through a discussion of cross-cutting political problems such as drugs, security and economic development.

## Drugs

The first section of this collection is based on papers from a workshop in Berlin seeking to analyze the Afghan drug problem from the perspective of several neighboring states and the international community. The drug problem has many transnational aspects. The drug economy is an integral element of Afghanistan's weak and corrupt system. These criminal connections damage the credibility of the new institutions. It is doubtful that the uneven progress in the fight against drug cultivation will continue after the end of ISAF.<sup>26</sup> Drug trafficking also fuels the insurgency since the Taliban receive financial means from drug trade. The increased inflow of heroin affects the neighbors to a varying degree. Porous borders, badly equipped

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25 Cf. Niamatullah Ibrahim, *Guest Blog: Heart of Asia Hardly Beating at the Second "Heart of Asia Meeting,"* <<http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=2820>>, posted: 6/22/2012.

26 Cf. Alissa J. Rubin, Matthew Rosenberg, U.S. Efforts Fail to Curtail Trade in Afghan Opium, in: *New York Times*, 5/26/2012.

border controls, weak administrative structures, and widespread corruption are problems faced by the neighboring countries when they try to target drug trafficking. In their papers, the authors looked at drug trade and the problems impeding a coherent strategy from national viewpoints. Nasser Saghafi-Ameri provides a insightful analysis of the horrendous consequences for Iran of the increased drug trafficking from Afghanistan. Iran suffers from rising narcotics use and rampant drug criminality. The country calls for better cooperation with the international community, which could better integrate Iran. Kamoludin Abdullaev reports that Tajikistan, suffering equally from smuggling of drug contraband, has stepped up its seizures and enjoys financial support from the USA for improving both its border infrastructure and its protection. Syed Mohammad Ali adds an opinion on how Pakistan handles its drug problem and proposes a closer focus on existing domestic and international instruments. He suggests considering alternative—and legal—uses of the opium crops. Vanda Felbab-Brown elaborates on the important role that the drug market is playing for the Afghan economy as a whole. She further develops ideas of alternative cultivation and shows that eradication of crops might be counter-productive. Rural development and interdiction of trafficking are more promising strategies.

## Security

The second section, combining papers from a workshop in Washington, looks at the prospective role of the neighbors in enhancing Afghanistan's security. All neighbors share common concerns about drug trade and extremist threats re-emerging from Afghanistan, but are reluctant to get engaged as comprehensively as the U.S. and their allies in ISAF. Some of the neighbors provide the infrastructure for ISAF's deployment. These countries are also players in the conflicts in Afghanistan and exert influence on specific ethnic or religious groups there. The most pressing problem is that the Taliban have found sanctuary in Pakistan and operate from within the border regions of the FATA. Security in Afghanistan can be influenced by the neighbors in two ways—through capability-building and assistance—and through a perpetuation of militant conflict. Shao Yuqun emphasizes China's ambitions for the Afghan reconstruction process. She describes a decision-making in flux, analyzing different schools of thought on the U.S. presence in the region and on a future role for China. According to Victor Korgun, Russia has a strong interest in Afghanistan's stability, and can influence the situation in many ways. Russia has opened the door to cooperation with NATO. Shanthie Mariet D'Souza analyzes the relations between India and Afghanistan in the light of the strategic shift under Obama, and with a view to the

withdrawal of Western combat troops from the country. India can apply soft power to help the Afghan government improve its capabilities. Muhammad Amir Rana, in contrast, evaluates the possibility of joint security measures by Afghanistan and Pakistan—after an agreement about the Durand Line. Both countries share the interest in clamping down on Taliban insurgency on both sides of the border. Rounding off the section, Massoumeh Torfeh analyzes Iran's role in Afghanistan. While opposing U.S. presence, Iran skillfully combines economic and humanitarian assistance with the generation of political influence.

## Development

For sustainable stability, few things are as important as the economic perspective and the promise of a better life. The next set of papers, presented at the third workshop in Brussels, analyzed the reconstruction process from an economic and geopolitical point of view. Development and security are mutually indispensable. Local security and overall stability are preconditions for sustainable development.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, development and the creation of economic opportunities throughout Afghanistan are strong weapons against Taliban influence. Among the important factors for Afghanistan's development are the economic interests of its neighbors and their will to invest in the country. This is mostly driven by energy needs and a desire for regional economic integration.<sup>28</sup> Western development agencies and NGOs can only improve the framework conditions for economic activities and political coordination. The bulk of the work needs to be done by regional players, including entrepreneurs and business people from Afghanistan and its neighboring countries. Saeed Parto emphasizes that many small and medium enterprises continue to operate in Afghanistan, suggesting possible strategies in order to create conditions for productive entrepreneurial activity. Antonio Andrea Monari brings attention to the Central Asian Economic Cooperation, a partnership under the supervision of the Asian Development Bank, to help central Asian countries develop their economic potential. Bernt Berger looks at the intertwined security and economic interests of China in Afghanistan. China is investing heavily in infrastructure and exploitation of resources in

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27 Cf. Jonathan M. White, *No Development without Security. The Transatlantic Donor Community Needs to Redesign Aid for Fragile States* (Brussels Forum Paper Series, German Marshall Fund of the United States), Brussels 2009.

28 Cf. S. Frederick Starr, Regional Development in Greater Central Asia: The Afghan Pivot, in: Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *Building a new Afghanistan* (World Peace Foundation), Cambridge, MA 2007, pp. 195–177.

Afghanistan. A cross-cutting factor for a successful reconstruction affecting all neighbors is the dire water situation in Afghanistan, as analyzed by Michael Renner. Prem Jha evaluates India's tremendous economic engagement in Afghanistan, through investment and active development aid, and deplores the Indo-Pakistani frictions blocking further progress. Ahadhon Najmitdinov explains the interests and strategies of Central Asian States with regard to Afghanistan's reconstruction. Wolfgang Danspeckgruber then discusses Iran's economic involvement in Afghanistan, arguing that it adds to Iran's ambitions to become a regional power.

## Outside actors

The final section addresses a broader perspective of regional and international cooperation regarding Afghanistan. John K. Wood sheds a light on the Afghanistan debate in Washington—for a long time “over-focused on the military-kinetic aspects of security,” he deplores. The USA could work to resolve some of the controversial issues that keep neighbors from cooperating in Afghanistan. Marco Overhaus looks at the cumbersome attempts of NATO to reach out to Afghanistan's neighbors—many of whose do not see it as a legitimate actor in the region. Eva Gross praises the EU for being a large donor in Afghanistan, with EU members contributing significantly to ISAF, but points out that it has negligently treated the regional aspects of the crisis for a long time. Enrico Fels sees the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, with tasks like counter-terrorism or the fight against drug trafficking on its agenda, as the logical partner for reconstruction and stabilization in Afghanistan. Reluctant neighbors and the USA would have to make room for this. Saban Kardas analyzes Turkey's determination to foster regional cooperation around Afghanistan. In a final article, former NATO General Egon Ramms gives an inside account of the difficult controversies between Western forces and Afghanistan's neighbors during the evolution of ISAF.

## Food for Thought

With the papers from the three workshops, and some additional articles to address some problems not yet discussed, we have collected material from Western think tanks and international organizations, but also by experts from Afghanistan and its neighbors. The papers, written for the workshops, needed updates, because of the developments after 2010 that substantially affected regional policies on Afghanistan—the new U.S. strategy, the surge of U.S. forces, the road map for withdrawal,

and the Bonn conference. Most authors undertook this additional work, and all papers are up-to-date in the sense that the general lines of conflict, the trans-border problems, and the sources of frustration remain the same.

Building up cooperation through the regional approach has been a slow and tedious process that nevertheless must not cease. This is ever more important, because only a small part of Western forces will stay in the country after 2014, and rather weak national forces will have to cope with the problems to come. To contain frictions and build cooperative patterns that would help minimize these problems, the neighbors are required after 2014 even more than today. This book might offer some insights and inspirations when dealing with the tasks involved.

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