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Toward Convergence: An Agenda for U.S.-India Cooperation in Afghanistan

C. Raja Mohan, Caroline Wadhams, Wilson John, Aryaman Bhatnagar, Daniel Rubin, and Peter Juul

June 2013

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Introduction and summary

As the United States reduces its military presence in Afghanistan and transfers security control to the Afghan government in 2014, the governments in New Delhi and Washington should find ways to strengthen their partnership in Afghanistan. At the same time, they should embed it in a sustainable structure of regional cooperation in order to ensure the future stability of Afghanistan. The United States and India share a number of objectives in Afghanistan and the wider region, including:

- A unified and territorially integrated Afghanistan
- A sovereign, independent, and functional Afghan government based on the principles underlying the current constitution, including democracy, nonviolent political competition, and basic human rights for both women and men
- An Afghanistan that prevents terrorist groups from using its territory to train and mount attacks both in the region and around the world
- An Afghanistan that serves as a central trade and transit hub connecting South and Central Asia
- A stable and responsible Pakistan that prevents militant groups from operating within its territory and seeks economic and political cooperation with its neighbors

Until recently the United States discouraged active Indian military involvement in Afghanistan due to sensitivities toward Pakistani fears of encirclement by India.[1] New Delhi's own instinct was to move cautiously in Afghanistan, focusing on economic development, building infrastructure, and social-sector projects despite its larger security interests. But as the relationship between India and the United States has deepened over the last decade—combined with plans for the transfer of security responsibility to the Afghan government in 2014—U.S. and Indian policymakers have an opportunity for an enhanced partnership in Afghanistan. As U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns stated during his visit to India in

October 2012, "there has never been a moment when India and America mattered more to one another. And there has never been a moment when partnership between us mattered more to the rest of the globe."[2]

While shared objectives provide a foundation for U.S.-India collaboration in Afghanistan, deeper cooperation is not inevitable. U.S. and Indian policies have often worked in parallel rather than in concert and have been further impeded by differing policy approaches in Afghanistan, as well as in the region. The United States has been directly involved in Afghanistan, deploying thousands of troops and billions of dollars of economic assistance, while India has sought to build up diplomatic and economic ties with the country.

Differences between the two countries remain. While the United States and India share many of the same concerns over negotiations with the Taliban, the reliability of Pakistan as a partner in supporting peace in Afghanistan, and the need for Afghan ownership of any political settlement, the Indian and U.S. assessments of the risks involved and the best path forward do not always coincide. Such differences are understandable given the two countries' differing locations, rivalries, political pressures, foreign-policy priorities, and capacities for addressing challenges in Afghanistan and around the world.

Both the United States and India share the goal of a negotiated political settlement in Afghanistan. To this end, the United States has fitfully pursued talks with the Taliban and other Afghan militants since 2010 while maintaining a realistic view of the potential for success. While India is more agreeable now to the overall goal of a negotiated settlement, policymakers in New Delhi say that they are more suspicious than their Washington counterparts of the Taliban and other militants.[3] As a result the path forward for both countries will be in finding common ground on the course and substance of future efforts to negotiate a political settlement in Afghanistan.

Both the United States and India similarly believe that Afghan stability requires Pakistani support and that accommodation of Pakistan's legitimate security interests will be necessary. The challenge for the United States and India is to determine a mutually acceptable understanding of Pakistan's "legitimate" interests. India, similar to the United States, is wary of the Pakistani military defining these interests, and New Delhi believes that the Pakistani military has not given up its longstanding goal of a weak and pliable Afghanistan aligned with Islamabad. Because the government in New Delhi feels more directly vulnerable to Pakistani actions or inactions, many Indian policymakers fear that the United States will be too quick to trust the Pakistani military leadership and cede it an outsized influence over Afghanistan's future.[4]

At the same time, Indian and U.S. policymakers view Iran and its potential role in Afghanistan differently. U.S. policymakers are much more adverse to Iranian involvement given Tehran's malign international behavior—from its failure to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency over its nuclear program to Tehran's direct support for terrorism groups. Indian policymakers, on the other hand, aim to maintain an amicable relationship with Iran in order to ensure access to Afghanistan if instability worsens or tensions with Pakistan rise, as well as to satisfy growing domestic energy demands.

Concerning the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, the Obama administration argues that the United States needs to draw down the vast majority of its forces in order to be able to better align its military posture and resources with a changed strategic environment—one in which Afghanistan is not a central priority—as well as to reduce the negative consequences of a large U.S. military presence and force Afghan leaders to take greater responsibility for their own security and future. U.S. policymakers ultimately believe that the United States can protect its interests and contain the instability in Afghanistan through a small reserve force post-2014, performing counterterrorism operations and training of the Afghanistan National Security Forces, or ANSF.[5] India, however, worries that the United States is withdrawing too quickly and that it will leave behind an unstable environment in which Pakistan wields excessive influence and terrorist groups can find sanctuary.

The United States and India should address these differences over the next year and beyond to prevent a divergence in policy approaches. India and the United States must seek better coordination of their policies or risk deepening instability

in Afghanistan. Washington and New Delhi can complement each other's efforts by utilizing their strengths, unique relationships with countries in the region, and relationships with Afghan actors to further mutual goals related to security, economic integration, and political stability. The trilateral diplomatic framework between Afghanistan, India, and the United States, for example, offers one such forum for the pursuit of these discussions and should be bolstered.

The following recommendations offer a way to move toward a common regional strategy between the United States and India. The United States and India should undertake the following:

- **Support a strengthened political consensus in Afghanistan.**

  - Support Afghanistan's upcoming presidential elections in 2014 through greater encouragement and emphasis on the creation of an Independent Election Commission, an electoral complaints mechanism, and clear rules surrounding the elections.

  - Encourage the political consensus building among Afghan elites and civil society that is occurring alongside the formal election process in order to foster a more legitimate electoral outcome.

  - Strengthen Afghan government institutions and advance broader Afghan political reforms through training Afghan government officials at all levels and allocating more assistance through the Afghan government while leveraging these funds to push for good governance reforms as committed to in the Tokyo Framework.

  - Consult more extensively on negotiations with the insurgent groups while recognizing that the United States will play a more central role in those negotiations than India.

  - Facilitate a larger reconciliation effort among a diverse set of Afghan stakeholders and countries in the region. The United States and India should use their unique relationships with Afghans and membership in organizations to advance political agreements among Afghans while nesting them within a larger regional framework.

- **Encourage political and economic regional integration through U.S. and Indian collaboration to bolster regional trade and dialogue.**

  - Consult more closely on U.S. and Indian approaches to Pakistan. The United States should attempt to facilitate dialogue between India and Pakistan, and between India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan in a quadrilateral forum.

  - Maintain focus on economic integration through sustained engagement with the private sector, multilateral forums and organizations, and other countries to ensure sustained financial support for Afghanistan's economic integration into the South and Central Asia regions.

  - Extend dialogue to additional countries by leveraging the respective regional partnerships and alliances of the United States and India to advance shared goals in Afghanistan. This includes India's relationships with Iran and Russia, and the United States' relationship with Pakistan.

- **Strengthen Afghan National Security Forces, with India providing more financial assistance, training, and support.**

  - Allocate Indian government funding for the ANSF in consultation with existing NATO and U.N. security force trust funds, including the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan, in order to best coordinate with other international donors in line with the needs of the Afghan forces.

  - India should respond positively to the requests from Kabul for greater material assistance to the Afghan National Security Forces.

  - Increase Indian training of the Afghan National Police and continue training the Afghan National Army.

  - Support the development of military infrastructure in Afghanistan based on the needs of the Afghan government.

  - Create a mechanism for consultation between the government of India and the NATO International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, to increase the effectiveness of their security assistance programs to Afghanistan.

U.S. interests and policy in Afghanistan

Under the Obama administration, the United States' primary goal has been to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat" Al Qaeda and its affiliates in Afghanistan and Pakistan and prevent their return to either country.[6] As a result of intense counterterrorism operations in Pakistan and Afghanistan, U.S. forces have decimated the structure of Al Qaeda's command and control and killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan on May 1, 2011.[7]

U.S. policy regarding the relationship between Al Qaeda and the Taliban has been less clear, however. Following the attacks of September 11, the United States viewed both the Taliban and Al Qaeda as inseparable terrorist organizations, and for many years neglected the growing threat from the Taliban-led insurgency.[8] In recent years, however, U.S. policymakers have made an effort to conceptually separate the Taliban and Al Qaeda from one another. U.S. policymakers now view the Taliban as primarily an Afghan insurgent group with local goals as opposed to having the multinational character and international objectives of Al Qaeda. This recent conceptual separation has enabled the pursuit of a negotiated political settlement to end the conflict in Afghanistan.[9] The military defeat of the Taliban is no longer seen as a prerequisite for the defeat of Al Qaeda proper.

Proving even more elusive, however, will be preventing the return of Al Qaeda and affiliated terrorist groups, including the Taliban, to Afghanistan and Pakistan. U.S. policymakers have argued that a stable, functioning Afghan state with robust security forces is the best guarantee against the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist safe haven. But they have also acknowledged that a negotiated political settlement with at least certain elements of the insurgency that reject Al Qaeda may be necessary to ensure stability.[10] At the same time, some U.S. analysts and policymakers argue that the United States may be able to protect the U.S. homeland even in the absence of a functional Afghan state. In these circumstances the United States could defend its interests through discrete counterterrorism operations either from within Afghanistan or offshore.[11]

Following two major policy reviews in 2009 amid a deteriorating situation on the ground, the Obama administration increased the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan to 100,000. It began an expansive, expensive counterinsurgency campaign that sought to reverse the momentum of the Taliban insurgency—identified as the primary vector for Al Qaeda to return to strength in the country—and strengthen the Afghan government at all levels. In order to advance this strategy both for Afghans and the international community, the United States and its NATO partners are building a 352,000-strong Afghan National Security Force and made a long-term commitment to support its continuation.[12]

While significant gains have been made, they remain fragile. Military operations did drive insurgents out of many areas and degraded their capabilities, but the basic drivers of the conflict have not fundamentally changed. These operations could not rectify the internal political dynamics that contribute to Afghanistan's conflict—a task not for soldiers and marines but for diplomats and politicians. Nor were military efforts able to destroy militant safe havens in neighboring Pakistan. The tactical victories achieved in Afghanistan are potentially reversible, and policymakers remain uncertain as to the political future of the Afghan state beyond the 2014 security transition. Moreover, the danger of further political fragmentation leading to conflict escalation remains.

The impact of Afghanistan's instability on Pakistan remains a major concern for U.S. policymakers. With more than 180 million people, an expanding nuclear arsenal, and the failure to eradicate terrorist groups with links to Al Qaeda, the disposition of Pakistan remains a vital national security interest for the United States.

Pakistan faces a strengthening, multiheaded adaptive network of extremists with links to the Al Qaeda network, some of which—namely, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi—are attacking the Pakistani state, secular politicians, and minority groups within Pakistan. There are other groups that focus on targets outside of Pakistan especially in Afghanistan and India, such as the Afghan Taliban and the Lashkar-e-Taiba, which are widely believed to enjoy the support of the Pakistani military establishment. Eliminating these groups has been especially difficult given the Pakistani approach of making distinctions among terrorist entities despite their apparent collusion—likely a result of sympathies within the Pakistani military for some of these entities—and a lack of state capacity. Moreover, a strenuous debate exists over whether U.S. drone strikes and Pakistani military operations have significantly reduced violent extremism overall in Pakistan.[13]

An escalation of the conflict in Afghanistan could create greater instability in Pakistan given the latter's toxic mix of militant religious extremism, weak and dysfunctional government, and systematic economic problems. The emergence of Afghan territory open to militant groups or increased refugee flows, for example, could put additional pressure on Pakistan's already weak and overburdened state structures and institutions.

In addition, the United States has also pursued a "New Silk Road" strategy for Afghanistan and the region, which aims to link South and Central Asia through infrastructure, transport, and trade, making Afghanistan an important regional-transit corridor.[14] Policymakers argue that greater regional integration will enable Afghanistan to become more economically self-sufficient while creating economic incentives for regional actors to support a stable Afghan state rather than to perceive a weak and unstable Afghanistan as in their national interest. Increasing trade among countries in the region, including Central Asian countries, Pakistan, Iran, and India, could provide mutual benefits to all involved and move countries out of a zero-sum mentality in which one country's gain is another's loss. In the long term, U.S. policy envisions linking the New Silk Road to a broader inter-regional economic community that connects Central and South Asia to the Middle East and Southeast Asia.[15]

The declining military presence and economic assistance of the United States and NATO-ISAF makes the New Silk Road initiative that much more important in enabling Afghanistan to become more economically sustainable. The United States and NATO-ISAF began to transition security responsibility to the Afghan government in earnest in 2011 with Afghan National Security Forces assuming "lead security responsibility" across the country. The Obama administration soon began the previously announced drawdown of U.S. troops, removing 10,000 troops in 2011 and 23,000 troops in 2012.[16] In January 2013 the United States and the Afghan government agreed to marginally accelerate the shift of the U.S. security role from combat to an "overwatch" role by the spring of 2013.[17] President Obama also announced that the United States would withdraw an additional 34,000 troops through 2013, leaving 32,000 troops in 2014 through the election process. He further stated that the primary goals of any post-2014 U.S. force in Afghanistan would be "first, training and assisting Afghan forces and second, targeted counterterrorism missions against Al Qaeda and its affiliates."[18]

The post-2014 role of the United States and its international partners was broadly outlined in a series of agreements between the United States, NATO,

international donors, and the Afghan government in 2012. These agreements aim to provide long-term security and economic support to Afghanistan in the decade from 2014 to 2024 and will be capped by a bilateral security agreement between Kabul and Washington that is currently under negotiation. The agreements currently in place are:

- **The U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement:** Signed on May 1, 2012, this agreement outlines a set of mutual commitments between the United States and Afghanistan. In particular, the United States has committed to an unspecified amount of security and economic assistance to Afghanistan until 2024, with a pledge to provide continued assistance in training, equipping, supplying, and advising the Afghan National Security Forces. The exact nature of the level of U.S. involvement post-2014 has not yet been defined due to ongoing negotiations over the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement, but the U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement hints at continued U.S. counterterrorism efforts in addition to training, funding, and advising.[19]

- **Long-term security assistance to the Afghan National Security Forces:** At the NATO Chicago Summit in May 2012, member countries affirmed that NATO's security partnership with Afghanistan would not end with the current campaign and that they would commit $4.1 billion to the ANSF—with $2.3 billion coming from the United States and $1.4 billion from allies through 2024. Under the current plan laid out in Chicago, the $4.1 billion annual budget for the ANSF through 2017 will be met by reducing the ANSF from its targeted manpower peak of 352,000 troops in February 2013 to around 228,500 troops by 2017.[20] As recently as February, however, NATO members were reported to be seriously considering a new aid package that would keep the ANSF at 352,000 troops through the end of 2018.[21]

- **The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework:** In July 2012 in Tokyo, the United States and the international community committed to providing $16 billion in economic assistance to the Afghan government through 2015 and agreed to maintain support through 2017 at levels at or near the past decade. The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework establishes a set of goals and commitments for the Afghan government and its donor sponsors.[22]

Serious challenges remain to Afghanistan's stability, and despite setbacks, insurgents continue to mount frequent attacks.[23] The scheduled and constitutionally

mandated presidential elections in 2014 have the potential to further destabilize Afghan politics as the competition to replace President Hamid Karzai intensifies. The risk of repeating the highly flawed electoral experiences of 2009 and 2010 remains high with problems such as insecurity, a flawed electoral system, and limited independence and authority for election officials persisting today. While the United States and its international partners have moved forward on post-2014 arrangements on security and economic assistance, agreements and policy toward the critical 2014 political transition remains underdeveloped.

India's interests and strategy in Afghanistan

The decade after the fall of the Taliban in 2001 saw a rapid expansion of India's political, economic, and security cooperation with Afghanistan. The Indian government reopened old consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar and established new ones in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif. It also provided nearly $2 billion in economic assistance over the same time period.[24] New Delhi also signed a strategic partnership agreement with Kabul in October 2011 that commits India to provide military assistance to Afghanistan.[25] Both India's presence and influence in Afghanistan have never been as prominent as they are today. As the United States and its partners prepare to hand over responsibility for Afghanistan's security to the Afghan government, India contends with the challenge of sustaining its current investments and securing its core interests in a changing Afghanistan.

India's Afghanistan policy stems from its overriding goal of an independent, moderate, and sovereign Afghan state that controls its own territory and is economically integrated with both South and Central Asia. India aims to prevent militant groups targeting the Indian state from gaining ground in Afghanistan as occurred during the rule of the Taliban. New Delhi hoped that the United States' post-9/11 intervention in Afghanistan would help drain the swamps of international terrorism that spread across Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Taliban-led insurgency unfortunately continues to receive sanctuary in Pakistan and has been used to target the Indian presence in Afghanistan, including attacks on the Indian Embassy in Kabul, the Indian consulate in Jalalabad, and a number of Indian road projects.[26]

From India's perspective, the withdrawal of U.S.-led international forces amid a significant surge in Taliban insurgent activity—with militant safe havens in Pakistan—is bound to significantly weaken the current government in Kabul. India fears that political commitments for declared post-2014 Afghan policy in the United States and NATO nations will prove weak, leading to less support than has already been agreed.[27]

While initially surprised by the "surge and exit" strategy announced by President Obama, India is preparing to cope with its consequences. New Delhi is aware of the difficulties of sustaining its economic activity in Afghanistan amid a deteriorating security environment. While decisions will have to be made on the specific circumstances in each region, a general reduction of India's economic presence should be expected.[28] India has similarly welcomed the New Silk Road Initiative outlined by former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,[29] but is aware that if conditions in Afghanistan deteriorate and Pakistan continues to deny India overland transit facilities, the regional economic integration of Afghanistan will be impossible to implement.

Though some in India have called for muscular military support of the Karzai government, a cautious government in New Delhi has been right to be hesitant rather than bold given the sensitivities in the region and the potential for backlash from Pakistan. While Indian troops could play an important role in offsetting the effects of the upcoming withdrawal of International Security Assistance Force troops, regional complexities would make this extremely difficult to execute. Sustaining such a military presence would be both logistically challenging as well as provocative to Pakistan and the Afghan insurgency. Because of these political difficulties, India will be unlikely to provide assistance to Kabul through deploying troops to Afghanistan, although New Delhi has been keen to look for other opportunities to provide less controversial support for the Afghan National Security Forces. India has started to extend some military assistance to help shore up the Afghan government, with the current focus on training the Afghan army and police at facilities in India.[30]

Kabul is also eager to acquire arms and military equipment from India.[31] Afghan President Hamid Karzai, during a three-day visit to India in May 2013, sought military hardware for the ANSF, including artillery, medium-lift aircraft, and bridge laying equipment.[32] Indian government leaders have indicated their willingness to consider these requests and provide greater support for the ANSF. Further decisions are likely to be made later this year when the India-Afghanistan political and security cooperation working group meets.[33]

On the political and diplomatic front, New Delhi may not be averse to engaging the Taliban.[34] With Kabul trying to engage the Taliban, Indian leaders have realized that they cannot forever keep the Taliban at arm's length. New Delhi, however, is more concerned than the United States about the ability of the Taliban and Kabul to reconcile. Indian policymakers suspect that the Taliban interlocutors promised by Pakistan for talks with Kabul and the international community

will be proxies for Islamabad. And they worry that legitimization of the Taliban could give a boost to radical Islamist groups in the region. Such groups have already gained ground in Pakistan over the past decade, and Indian policymakers worry that their influence and impact will spread into the rest of the Subcontinent. Indian policymakers also fear that a settlement with the Taliban, a predominantly Pashtun insurgency, and other militants would likely generate a backlash among the non-Pashtun minorities who will contest any such a settlement, potentially igniting a renewed civil war in Afghanistan.

Given the difficulties the United States has experienced in reaching out to the Taliban, however, and given Pakistan's likely influence over the Taliban, the prospects for India's engagement with the insurgent group appear to be limited. If the Taliban opens a formal office outside Afghanistan, there may be opportunities for the New Delhi government to connect with its representatives. India is also aware of the importance of reaching out to Afghan Pashtuns, and it has stepped up its development assistance in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan in recent years.[35] New Delhi, however, is conscious of the dangers of alienating its current friends and supporters among non-Pashtun minorities in its attempt to acquire influence with Afghan Pashtuns and a channel of communication with the Taliban.

If the Taliban gains ground in Afghanistan, refuses to reach a political compromise with Kabul, and does not moderate its extremist policies, India might be compelled to craft an alliance to counter such a development.[36] It might not be possible, however, to replicate the coalition in the late 1990s when India along with Iran, Russia, and the former Soviet Central Asian republics supported the Afghan Northern Alliance to fight against Taliban rule. Engagement with Afghanistan's neighbors is critical for New Delhi to ensure that India has some physical access to the country in order to have even a limited counterterrorism role after 2014 and beyond. Iran provides India with the easiest access to Afghanistan and is one reason why New Delhi has sustained political engagement with Tehran despite the latter's conflict with the United States and the West.

Even as India considers a variety of options to deal with the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, there is much that New Delhi can do with Washington in the run up to 2014 and beyond. For one, the two sides need to continue and intensify the trilateral dialogue with Afghanistan, two rounds of which already took place in September 2012 and February 2013. While the initial discussions have been focused on economic matters, it is in the interest of both New Delhi and Washington to strengthen this forum and expand its scope. India and the United

States will need to consult each other more extensively on Afghanistan, step up intelligence exchanges, and coordinate their diplomatic, economic, and political approaches to the extent possible.

Even more important is a purposeful conversation between India and the United States on the future of Pakistan. India has invested considerable energy during the past decade on improving ties with Pakistan, including an offer for bilateral talks on Afghanistan and a readiness to address Pakistan's concerns about India's presence across the Durand Line—the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan that largely divided Pashtun communities and is not recognized by Afghanistan. While the Pakistan military may not be ready to support such a dialogue, it is very much in the United States' interest to encourage Pakistan to engage India on Afghanistan and other fronts. It is also in India's interest to recognize and address Pakistan's legitimate concerns in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's internal instabilities

Afghanistan's experience of war over the past three decades has been predominantly characterized by the intervention of great powers and its immediate neighbours. These outside incursions have interacted upon a complex and fragmented domestic political system that ultimately houses the drivers for both continued conflict and potential political settlement.

While the 2001 American intervention and subsequent NATO-run and U.N.-backed International Security Assistance Force mission achieved early and quick successes in dislodging the Taliban regime, establishing a government capable of consolidating control over Afghanistan's territory and balancing the interests of its many competing centers of power has proven a substantial and ongoing challenge. The stability of the current Afghan state structure through the medium to long term after 2014 remains a question, particularly as the Afghan government faces the prospect of declining levels of international assistance with which to sustain itself and continuing insurgent violence.

Although Afghanistan is often characterized as a society heavily divided along ethnic and tribal lines, the primary distinguishing division fueling the current conflict has been between those with access to and control over the formal political system established after 2001 and those communities and political organizations excluded from representation in that system and its associated benefits. These benefits include international recognition and legitimacy, access to foreign aid flows, and powers of patronage, adjudication, and appointment. Furthermore, persistent sanctuaries in Pakistan for those insurgent groups fighting the state in Afghanistan have compounded the problem.

Despite the country's diverse array of local and regional political interest groups, Afghanistan's formal state system, negotiated at the Bonn Conference in 2001, is one of the most highly centralized in the world. The Afghan presidency, currently held by President Hamid Karzai, holds extensive powers of appointment across the executive, judicial, and legislative branches, and at both the national and

subnational levels. These formal powers are not boundless, and the Karzai administration must often balance its limited means of exerting authority against the demands of established regional power brokers at the provincial and district level. With the exception of cabinet ministry positions, the majority of the appointment choices of the Afghan president can be made without any requirement of formal confirmation by parliament or other independent political institutions.[37]

In his interactions with the international community, President Karzai has increasingly pushed to assert and consolidate Afghan sovereignty—with the presidency as the representative embodiment of that sovereignty—on issues related to NATO military operations and detention policies, control of development budgets, and the operations of irregular armed forces or private security companies that exist outside the government's control.[38]

The sustainability of the current highly centralized system of government in Afghanistan is at risk in the event of a dramatic decrease in the external funding and assistance upon which it depends for its continued survival. Despite improvements in customs and tax revenue collection, the Afghan government is still heavily dependent on external assistance to support its basic operating budget and provision of services. Security costs form the greatest share of this burden, with the outlays for the Afghan army and police's training, equipment, and salaries all supported by international donors. Moreover, NATO officials have yet to reach a final agreement on whether force levels will be reduced after 2015 or maintained at their current 352,000-troop level through 2018 or beyond.[39]

Even with the proposals to reduce the number of Afghan National Security Forces and optimistic forecasts of new revenue from mining and other sources, World Bank projections for 2021 and 2022 estimate that the combined operations and maintenance and salary costs for the Afghan security forces will be equivalent to the country's revenues at roughly 17 percent of GDP. This leaves no space for other government spending absent continued high levels of external budget support.[40]

Although the majority of development assistance in Afghanistan is still spent outside the Afghan government's control, budget decision making on those funds it does manage is generally concentrated at the national level in Kabul and transmitted vertically through line ministries to the provinces and districts. Institutional positions within the formal Afghan government structure through which local political communities—such as provincial councils or the as-yet still absent district councils—can elect representatives to advance their interests are generally

weak or nonexistent, and their available channels to appeal central government decisions are limited.[41]

As government service delivery has lagged and the benefits of the post-2001 infusion of resources into Afghanistan have been applied unevenly, this lack of representation has dangerously impacted the Afghan government's popular legitimacy and its ability to mobilize domestic bases of political support. At the extreme, these marginalized communities and individuals have opted to join the Taliban insurgency to challenge the state or local rivals who are affiliated with the government in Kabul.

The winner-take-all nature of the Afghan presidential system has increased the stakes of political competition as President Karzai's time in office nears an end in 2014. Although he has publicly pledged to carry through on constitutional requirements that he relinquish his position to an elected successor, uncertainty about the course of political transition remains high. President Karzai has now led the country for more than a decade, first as head of the interim government through 2004 and then in two consecutive elected terms as president. Elections in 2009 were marred by allegations of fraud from domestic and international observers.[42]

Afghan opposition leaders are already negotiating with each other in preparation for the upcoming vote, but President Karzai's choice for a favored successor remains unclear. Afghan election law limits the ability of political parties to organize, and President Karzai himself has built no political organization outside the institutions of the state.[43] The 2014 elections will be Afghanistan's first chance for a peaceful transfer of administrations through an electoral process in decades, but the ability of the system to manage the accompanying stresses and shifting coalitions of power remains untested. The outcome of this transition, even more so than efforts to train Afghan military or police forces or the drawdown of international military personnel, will have a determinative effect on the future stability and sustainability of the Afghan state.

The Taliban insurgency has shown considerable resiliency, with some of the best local-level organizational capabilities of any major Afghan political faction and a leadership safe haven in neighboring Pakistan. With a military solution to the conflict proving elusive, Washington has emphasized the importance of engaging the Taliban and finding a political reconciliation.

The United States and the Afghan government have carried out some informal talks with Taliban representatives over the past two years in an effort to identify

possible confidence-building measures such as prisoner exchanges or the delisting of Taliban leaders from the U.N.-managed international sanctions blacklist.[44] But the Taliban continues to publicly reject the Karzai government's legitimacy as a counterpart for negotiation, and discussions on more substantial concessions that might bring them into the formal political system on a large scale have yet to take place.[45] At the same time, the limited outreach that the Afghan government has conducted provoked protests from longtime political rivals of the Taliban currently serving in the government or in the opposition, which further constrains the government's ability to maneuver or offer concessions.

Pakistan and its role in Afghanistan

Pakistan has the most substantial history of intervention in Afghanistan's internal political balance over the past 30 years and is most likely to suffer the consequences of a breakdown in the post-2001 political order should a breakdown occur after 2014. Pakistan's assistance in helping the Taliban and other militant groups survive in the aftermath of 9/11, along with its support for the Taliban's resurgence, have been principal obstacles to the stabilization of Afghanistan. Moreover, specific attacks against the Karzai government and India have been linked to Pakistan's intelligence services. In a 2011 U.S. Senate hearing, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, described the Haqqani network—an insurgent group fighting against the Afghan government and U.S.-led NATO forces—as "a veritable arm of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency."[46]

Pakistan faces a number of simultaneous crises and challenges that it struggles to manage, including an internal security challenge as extremist militant groups proliferate and wage war against the Islamabad government and Pakistani minority groups and an economic crisis driven by inadequate tax revenues and low investment in human-capital productivity. The first peaceful transition of power from one elected government to another in May 2013 has raised some expectations that the new government may have the mandate to deal with the extraordinary challenges confronting Pakistan.

India and the United States have a big stake in Pakistan's stability and political moderation far beyond 2014. But they have very different perceptions on how to achieve these goals. New Delhi and Washington should engage in a sustained and intensive dialogue on Pakistan and strengthen their separate dialogues with Islamabad.

Pakistan perceives acute challenges and threats emanating from Afghanistan, including threats from terrorist groups that have taken shelter in Afghanistan and are targeting the Pakistani state; the spectre of Pashtun separatism and its impact

on its territorial integrity; and a deep suspicion of the presence and influence of external powers, especially India and the United States, in Afghanistan.[47]

Of acute security concern to Pakistan is the rise of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or the TTP, which has demonstrated its reach and capability to pick highly secure military targets in Punjab that are hundreds of miles away from the group's operational base in Mir Ali, North Waziristan, in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan.[48] Previous attempts by the Pakistan military to contain or neutralize the TTP and its allies have been largely unsuccessful, mainly due to a lack of capacity and the Pakistani army's policy of cherry-picking terrorist groups to target while tolerating or supporting others.

Efforts to formulate a coherent response to the militant threat have been further complicated by the reluctance of the political leadership to endorse military action. If the Pakistan Peoples Party, or PPP, government was hesitant to endorse stern measures against the TTP, then the Pakistan Muslim League and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf - the main victors of the May 2013 election - have openly called for an engagement with the TTP and other militant groups.

Equally daunting for Pakistan is the sensitive issue of the Durand Line and Afghanistan's refusal to recognize the British-drawn border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan's longstanding border anxieties originate in fears of Afghanistan stoking the Pashtun nationalist sentiments on either side of the Durand Line to call for an independent entity called "Pashtunistan."[49] More recently, Pakistan and Afghanistan have traded accusations of cross-border incursions and civilian casualties due to errant artillery fire from both sides for the past two summers, further straining efforts to establish a common strategic partnership agreement and a steady bilateral diplomatic track.[50]

Moreover, the presence of external powers in Afghanistan, in particular the United States and India, also raises deep suspicions in Pakistan. Indian influence in Afghanistan fuels Pakistan's persisting and often exaggerated fears about Indian encirclement. In the real world, without geographic access to Afghanistan, India's ability to pose a serious threat to Pakistan from Afghanistan is limited. Reducing Pakistan's fears about India's role in Afghanistan can only be accomplished as part of a broader normalization of India-Pakistan bilateral relations. This in turn involves ending Pakistan's use of militant groups as an instrument of foreign policy and deepening India's commitment to resolve its outstanding issues with Pakistan.

Pakistan has historically sought to be the predominant foreign influence in Afghanistan to offset its strategic economic and military weaknesses vis-à-vis India and to prevent Afghanistan from pursuing irredentist claims to Pashtun-majority areas in Pakistan. Its current model of acquiring such influence is based on Islamabad's experience backing Islamist militants against the Soviet Union during the 1980s. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency served as the primary conduit of American and other international assistance to these militants, and funnelled funding to six Islamist groups.[51]

Following the Soviet withdrawal and the civil war between the Afghan victors in the early and mid-1990s, Pakistan's security establishment threw its weight behind the Taliban. As Human Rights Watch documented in 2001, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency and the Pakistani military played a key role in planning and supporting Taliban military operations. Taliban-era Afghanistan also provided a staging ground for terrorist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Harakat-ul Mujahidin to acquire experience and training.[52]

The 9/11 attacks and subsequent U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan against Al Qaeda forced Pakistan to publicly abandon its support for the Taliban. Since then Pakistan has played an ambiguous role vis-à-vis the U.S. and NATO mission in Afghanistan. On the one hand, Pakistan provides a key supply route for international forces in Afghanistan. The government in Islamabad has also conducted military operations, albeit unevenly, against militant groups in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas on the border with Afghanistan, and it has allowed the United States to conduct drone strikes against militants within its own borders.

On the other hand, Pakistani intelligence is believed to have revived and sustained the Taliban and other militant groups such as the Haqqani network in operations against the Kabul government and the international diplomatic and military presence in Afghanistan.[53] Moreover, Pakistan apparently draws a distinction between the "good Taliban" that serve its interests in Afghanistan and the "bad Taliban" that attack Pakistanis at home.[54]

What offers some hope, however, is that as the United States draws down from Afghanistan, Pakistani leaders appear increasingly aware that their traditional approach to Afghanistan no longer serves Pakistani interests and may in fact undermine Pakistani security.[55] Pakistani leaders have taken steps to reach out to non-Pashtun groups to discuss the future of Afghanistan,[56] re-engage with the Karzai government on reconciliation, release Taliban prisoners as requested by

the Afghan government, and publicly pledge their support for an inclusive Afghan peace process.[57] The process, however, broke down in May 2013 amid renewed mutual recrimination between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The political challenge of building mutual trust between Kabul and the Pakistani leadership endures despite the many efforts by the United States and the United Kingdom.

Pakistan Army chief Gen. Ashfaq Kayani's recent statements about the need to tackle terrorism are a departure from the army's earlier position of its role in the "war against terrorism," in which it had cast itself as a victim, compelled by external actors and circumstances to act under duress.[58] Moreover, Pakistan leaders, arguably with the tacit approval of the army, have made efforts to improve the relationship with India.

Despite these positive signals, it remains unclear whether the Pakistani army is genuinely committed to play a constructive role in advancing a stable Afghanistan or in establishing a normalized relationship with India over the long term.

While the challenges are immense and distrust is high among all four countries, opportunities may exist for increased collaboration among the United States, India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to address Pakistan's anxieties about terrorism and larger security issues. To underscore this point, the government in New Delhi has formally offered to talk to Pakistan about its concerns of India's presence in Afghanistan. Despite Islamabad's reluctance to embark on such a dialogue, India should persist in finding a way to engage Pakistan on the issues relating to Afghanistan. India's strong repository of goodwill among ordinary Afghans and its long ties with both Pashtun and non-Pashtun leadership can be leveraged effectively to assure Pakistan of the sanctity of the Durand Line.

Next steps: Toward enhanced U.S.-India cooperation in Afghanistan

Given the challenges to Afghanistan's stability—both from internal and external sources—and the shared interests of the United States and India in ensuring a stable Afghanistan over the long term, an opportunity exists for greater cooperation between the two countries. The United States and India should focus on three areas in deepening their partnership: pursuing a strengthened political consensus in Afghanistan; advancing economic and political integration in the region; and supporting Afghan security forces.

Pursuing a strengthened political consensus in Afghanistan

A credible political transition is critical to Afghanistan's stability in 2014 and beyond. The lynchpin of this process will be the presidential elections scheduled to take place there in April 2014. The elections must be transparent, free, and fair, enabling the participation of Afghanistan's diverse political and ethnic groups and its growing youth population.

A repeat of the problem-ridden 2009 presidential and 2010 National Assembly elections in Afghanistan risks undermining the decade-long effort and commitments made by Afghans and the international community. An illegitimate election will dash the hopes of millions of Afghans and risk driving away donors and investors, leaving the country divided and extremely vulnerable to an escalation of conflict or potentially an extremist takeover. That being the case, New Delhi and Washington have every reason to prevent such an outcome in Afghanistan.

While there is great concern both in and outside of Afghanistan that President Karzai may try to stay on despite a constitutional bar against serving a third term, President Karzai will also largely determine whether the election is credible and fair through his actions leading up to the election. This includes his appointments of election officials, his influence on the electoral laws before parliament, and whether he allows competitive candidates to emerge. Because of the highly cen-

tralized Afghan system, President Karzai appoints thousands of government officials, including the Supreme Court and the Independent Election Commission.[59] Provincial governors and key government officials have enjoyed his patronage and hence may remain hesitant to challenge President Karzai before the elections. President Karzai should therefore be firmly engaged in the political transition process and not be marginalized.

While both New Delhi and Washington agree that President Karzai must abide by the Afghan constitution and step aside for an elected successor, they have not always agreed on how to persuade the Afghan president to allow a transition to occur. Indian policymakers worry that the Obama administration has mishandled its relationship with President Karzai.[58] Given the increasing distrust between the U.S. government and President Karzai, India could be an effective interlocutor with the Afghan president in convincing him to follow the laws of his country and take proactive steps to safeguard and promote a credible and enduring political system, a free and fair election, and a smooth transition in Kabul.

Robust reforms in the Afghan political system are essential to create greater accountability, inclusivity, and transparency, thereby making the system more legitimate to the Afghan people. Building this legitimacy requires institutions, processes, and leaders independent from President Karzai. The Afghan Supreme Court and the Independent Election Commission are two institutions in particular that need strengthening for the overall success of the political transition. The appointment of the judges to the Afghan Supreme Court needs to be more transparent and those justices whose terms have expired, should be replaced; merit should trump ethnic patronage. The Independent Election Commission should likewise be led by individuals whose integrity remain above suspicion and abilities are unquestioned. President Karzai's attempts to pre-empt any closer scrutiny of the elections should be resisted. The election commission should be vested with the authority to investigate and punish electoral fraud as opposed to President Karzai's proposal to vest the Supreme Court with this responsibility.

India and the United States should support civil-society initiatives to strengthen public support for a credible election and wider political reform as Afghans increasingly debate the appropriate voting system for their country; the independence of the judiciary and election commission; an electoral complaints commission; the introduction of a multiparty system; and gradual devolution of power. New and younger Afghan leaders should be encouraged to participate in

these debates and in the political activities. At the same time, India and the United States, although engaged with the Afghan political elite at various levels, should avoid inviting allegations of outside interference.

The appointment of independent election officials and observers, as well as a legitimate mechanism for resolving electoral complaints, will pave the way for greater transparency in the process. India and the United States can take the lead in offering to contribute their share of the cost and training for election preparation.

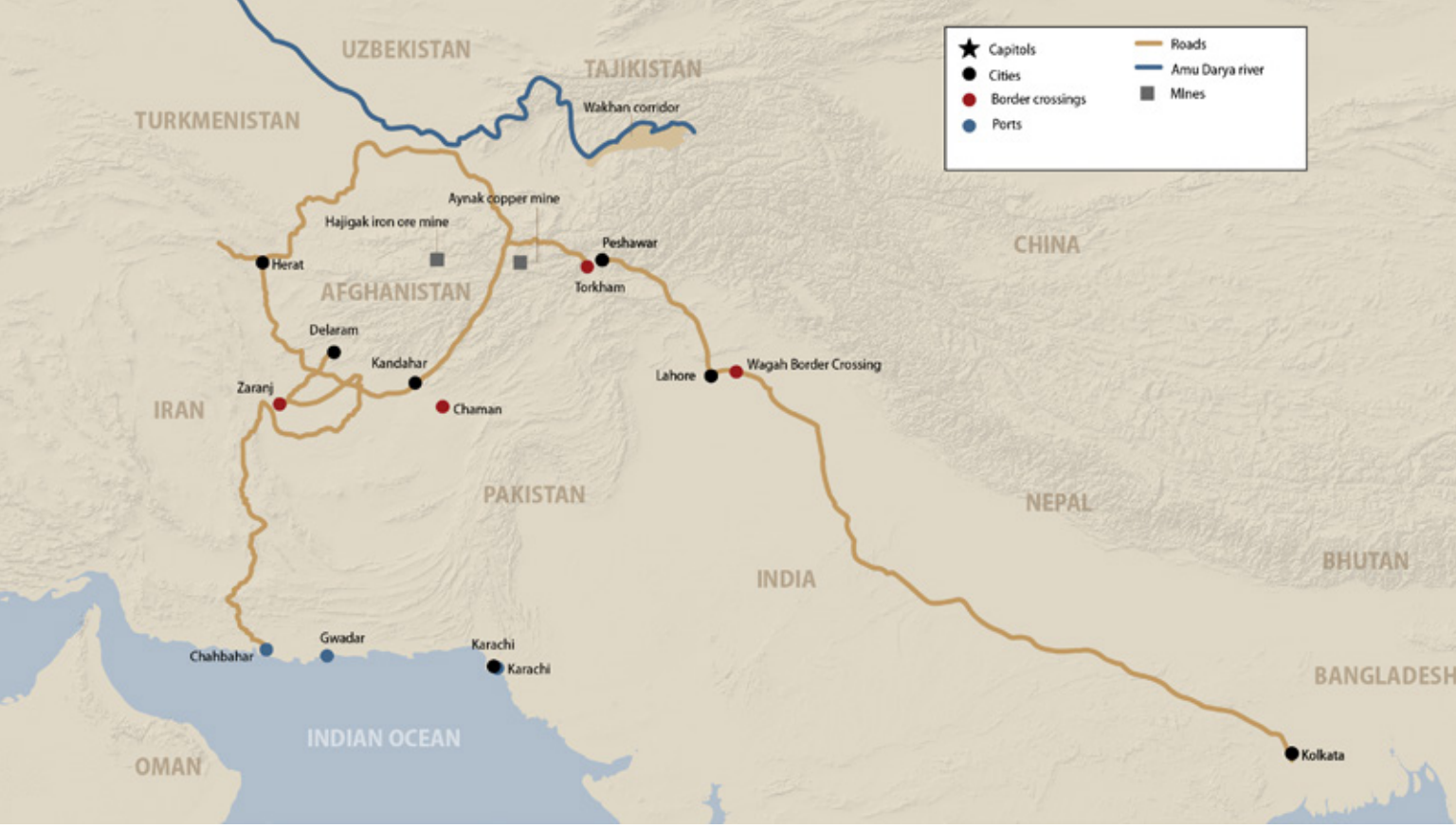
Over the long term, Afghanistan most likely will need to decentralize, transferring some power out of the hands of the president. All of the executive powers are currently vested with the president and his office, and the parliament remains subordinate to the president's office.[60] In addition, the provincial and district administrators are appointed courtesy of the president. A highly centralized government has been a serious handicap in delivering governance to distant provinces, in creating accountability, and in making Afghans feel like stakeholders.

Alongside the election, a serious variable to Afghanistan's stability going forward is how the Taliban are integrated into this framework. Nor is there clarity as to how the Taliban leaders can be accommodated into a process outside the constitutional framework. The Taliban have not shown any signs of accepting the Afghan Constitution nor have they given up their weapons. Even if some of the Taliban leaders can be accommodated as provincial and district governors and given ministerial berths in Kabul without being elected, it is unclear how various systems of governance, which are mandated by the Constitution, function with any credibility.

While both India and the United States are supporting preparations for the upcoming elections and stronger governance over the long term, a greater level of consultation and coordination between the two countries is required.

Advancing economic and political integration in the region

After a decade of war and international-aid-fueled economic growth, Afghanistan's future stability will depend on whether it can build a stronger economic foundation and mobilize domestic resources to sustain credible state structures. Doing so will likely require a more integrated region—one in which cross-border trade grows, thereby increasing economic activity in Afghanistan



Source: Google maps.

and allowing it to develop domestic industries, acquire rents from the transport of cross-country goods, and generate needed revenue for a self-sufficient government. Regional economic integration and expansion of trade flows could help reduce mutual suspicion and promote the view of Afghanistan as a place for cooperation rather than competition.

Both the United States and India have promoted regional integration and increased ties between Afghanistan and its neighbors. As discussed earlier, the United States has proposed a New Silk Road strategy that links Central and South Asia with Afghanistan serving as a land bridge between the two. India has also provided support for this strategy by pushing for Afghanistan's membership in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, or SAARC; promoting trilateral cooperation with Afghanistan and Iran as evidenced by a trilateral summit held in August 2012 in which the three nations sought to discover potential avenues for trade and transit cooperation; developing interlinking infrastructure through the construction of the Zaranj-Delaram highway; building roads within Afghanistan; and spearheading the Chabahar Port expansion in Iran. Indian companies won the bid to develop the large iron-ore deposits at Afghanistan's Hajigak mine in November 2011. [61] The success of the project will critically depend on regional cooperation, which is necessary to move the ore to the markets beyond Afghanistan.[62]

Increased efforts to foster greater trade and transit arrangements among the neighbors—India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan—should also be pursued. Current arrangements in place such as the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement are truncated at present but could be expanded with enduring benefits for all parties. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan could become energy-transit hubs for the region, providing new transit routes for Caspian gas and oil. A stable and moderating Pakistan will bolster the international community's efforts to stem the tide of extremism sweeping the region, prevent the resurgence of Al Qaeda and its allies, and create an environment for regional economic integration.

TAPI Pipeline

Source: Afghan government, Energy Information Administration.

Other neighbors such as China, Iran, and Russia are also keen to promote regional integration as a method of reaping national benefits and alleviating Afghanistan's many ailments. China, for instance, has a multipronged energy-and-trade strategy that would establish pipelines and railways between Central Asia and China.[63] China's "southern strategy" seeks to develop the Gwadar Port in Pakistan in an attempt to link China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. China also won mining rights to copper deposits in Afghanistan's Logar province and oil exploration rights in the Amu Darya River Basin in the northern region of the country. These projects will require the development of infrastructure such as roads and railways needed for transporting resources out of Afghanistan. Kabul, meanwhile, has actively sought China's support to build bilateral transport links through the Wakhan corridor in far northeastern Afghanistan.[64]

Iran's regional integration strategy similarly includes efforts to expand its Chabahar Port; improve the "Golden Transit Route," a 125-kilometer road running from Iran's Dougharoun region to Herat; fund the completion of the Anzob tunnel, a transit route from Dushanbe to Tashkent; and upgrade Afghan transit bridges over the

Helmand and Parian rivers. Reports have also surfaced suggesting that Iran is keen to develop a railway network connecting it with China via Afghanistan.[65]

While Russia has not invested in Afghanistan, during a November 2011 Shanghai Cooperation Organization, or SOC, meeting, President Vladimir Putin offered funds for the Central Asia-South Asia Regional Electricity Trade Project, or CASA-1000, a project to develop an electricity transmission system among countries in the two regions. President Putin also offered rhetorical support for the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline and for plans to develop SCO as a link between Europe and the Asian-Pacific region—all of which suggest Russia's commitment to a north-south-oriented New Silk Road strategy.[66]

Despite these initiatives and commitments, a number of obstacles exist including regional insecurity, uncertain long-term international funding streams, and political roadblocks. Afghanistan still faces significant violence from a resilient insurgency in its south and east regions where much of this infrastructure construction and trade is envisioned. The drawdown of U.S. and NATO troops between now and 2014 has generated greater doubts about whether conflict will worsen as a result of insurgent attacks, political fragmentation of Afghan elites, or both.

Funding for a New Silk Road is limited and will likely decrease. The volatility of the security situation creates disincentives for long-term infrastructure investment, especially from international sources such as the World Bank, the Asia Development Bank, and private-sector investors. In addition, Americans' increasing public opposition to U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and the global economic crisis will likely lead to a reduction in development aid commitments from the United States and interested nations.

India has contributed close to $2 billion toward Afghan reconstruction since 2001 and pledged nearly $11 billion for the exploitation of the Hajigak iron-ore deposits in central Afghanistan. Despite this, India's future commitments remain uncertain given its economic woes.

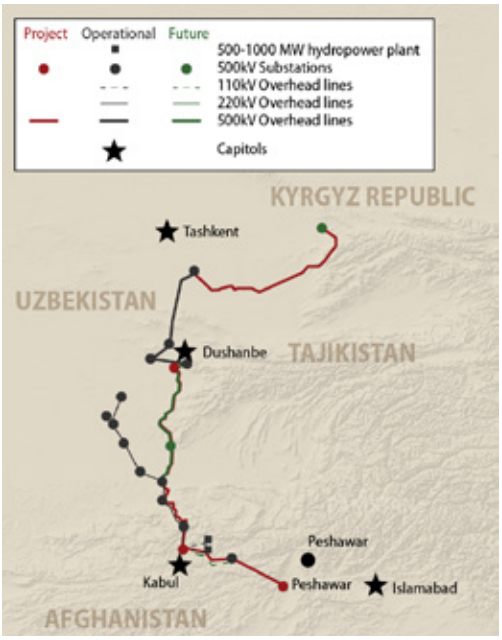
Moreover, regional distrust hinders cooperation in implementing the necessary steps for increased trade. India-Pakistan and Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions have been major barriers to promoting regional connectivity despite recent progress. These improvements include the India and Pakistan visa regime liberalization that eased travel restrictions between the two countries; the removal of certain trade barriers; Pakistan's decision to permit limited Afghan goods transit across

the Wagah Border, the only road border crossing between Pakistan and India; and the 2010 ratification of the Transit Trade Agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan that enabled greater bilateral trade and more Afghan exports via Pakistan. Because Pakistan is wary of India's perceived influence in Afghanistan and is keen to restrict India from playing a larger role in Pakistan's perceived traditional backyard, it has denied transit of Indian goods to Afghanistan. India should nonetheless actively pursue its economic engagement with Pakistan. Negotiations on normalizing trade relations between New Delhi and Islamabad during 2011 and 2012 saw some progress and an expansion of bilateral commerce.[67]

Geographic location and abundant energy resources make Iran an important factor in promoting regional economic integration. But Tehran's growing conflict with the international community on the nuclear issue, deepening tensions with Gulf neighbors, and questions about its role in the Middle East have severely constrained its role in regional economic cooperation. U.S. efforts to promote north-south-oriented projects—such as the pipeline project involving Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India and CASA-1000 that bypass Iran—and to pressure India and Pakistan to scrap their involvement in a pipeline project with Iran have drawn a reproach from Iran, which sees itself as an integral part of the New Silk Road.[68] From the United States' perspective, until there is a significant change in Iran's overall foreign policy, Iran will likely continue to face isolation from regional economic integration projects no matter how central Tehran thinks it is to them. Other countries in the region such as China and Russia also hold suspicions regarding the intentions of the United States' promotion of the Silk Road strategy. Russia in particular is wary of the United States' growing influence in Central Asia, an area of historic economic and political clout for Russia.

Continuing rivalries, competing visions of the New Silk Road strategy, and broader international problems may cause Afghanistan to be relegated to an arena for international competition rather than cooperation. Transcending these suspicions and imparting investor confidence will require stakeholder collaboration in funding, infrastructure development, and removal of tariff and trade barriers in a fashion that benefits all actors.

Central Asia South Asia Power Transmission Project CASA-1000



Source: CASA-1000 Project.

More broadly, over the long term, U.S. policy sees India as a driver for the integration of South and Central Asian economies with the global economy writ large. In this vision, India serves as the largest engine of growth, connecting markets in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other Central and South Asian states to markets in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and beyond. Growing and sustaining the economic connections within and between these regions is a critical long-term goal within U.S. strategy.[69] While contemporary political hurdles to realizing this vision are formidable, greater economic integration between and within regions around the Indian Ocean would be in the interest of all the littoral states, as well as the United States.

Strengthening Afghan armed forces

The development of capable Afghan National Security Forces, or ANSF, has been a cornerstone of NATO's strategy to transition combat responsibilities from international forces to Afghan troops by 2014. To this end, U.S.-led NATO forces have trained a force of nearly 352,000 Afghan security personnel—187,000 Afghan National Army soldiers and 157,000 police—that is sustained at an annual cost of $6 billion.

Despite the surge in investment in the ANSF that accompanied the surge in U.S. and NATO troops since 2009, the Pentagon assesses that only 1 out of 23 Afghan National Army brigades is capable of operating independently with advisers while only 20 out of 146 kandaks—the equivalent of an American battalion—have a similar rating.[70]

As the 2014 transition goal approaches, the United States and its NATO partners are weighing options to assist the ANSF going forward. While NATO agreed to support a downsized, 228,500-strong ANSF at NATO's 2012 Chicago summit, recent discussions over the alliance's post-2014 role in Afghanistan have raised the possibility of supporting the ANSF at current levels of 352,000 troops through 2018.[71] Doing so would continue to cost foreign governments close to $6 billion to support the ANSF given the Afghan government's inability to do so with its own limited resources.

In either case, sharing the burden of supporting the ANSF with other parties that have a stake in a stable Afghanistan makes sense for U.S. and NATO member-country policymakers. India is an obvious candidate for such cooperation given both

its interests in Afghanistan and its ambitions as an emerging world power. So far, however, India has refrained from becoming too involved in Afghanistan's security, both due to the fact that it could rely on NATO taking the lead and out of fear of the potential Pakistani reaction to an overt Indian intervention in its western neighbor.

In October 2011 India and Afghanistan signed a strategic partnership agreement calling, among other things, for New Delhi to "assist … in the training, equipping, and capacity building programs for Afghan National Security Forces."[72] A year later Kabul and New Delhi reportedly inked their first military-training agreement, allowing 600 Afghan National Army officers to receive training in India each year. In addition, rotations of Afghan companies, 100-strong, would receive four weeks of counterinsurgency training, while 200 Afghan military cadets would study at Indian military academies.[73]

What's more, the Afghan government is seeking material support from India. Afghan military leaders have requested medium trucks, engineering equipment, and light artillery from India.[74] On the eve of President Karzai's visit to India in May 2013, the Afghan ambassador to India, Shaida M. Abdali, said that Afghanistan would "like to go beyond the current trend of co-operation between the two countries in the defence sector" and for India to step up its assistance to the ANSF, especially through the provision of both "lethal and non-lethal assistance."[75] India is reviewing the new requests from Kabul. The United States has voiced no objections to direct military assistance from India to Afghanistan, and India has in the past supplied some equipment.[76]

One stumbling block to further Indian assistance to the Afghan National Security Forces remains the concern over Pakistan's reaction to New Delhi's assistance to the Afghan government. Islamabad's fears of encirclement have led to exaggerated suspicions and claims against Indian development and economic activities in Afghanistan. Moving forward, Washington and Kabul should encourage India to continue its economic development to Afghanistan. The United States should also seek India's support for strengthening the ANSF, while reassuring Pakistan that the intent is to stabilize the central government in Afghanistan. This task is easier said than done, but it does nevertheless provide some markers that can guide policymakers in Washington, NATO headquarters in Brussels, Kabul, and New Delhi in navigating the post-2014 landscape when it comes to assisting the ANSF.

There are two main areas where India can strengthen its efforts to support the ANSF. First, New Delhi is already hosting Afghan military personnel in India for

training in military academies and training centers. India's geographic proximity to Afghanistan makes such training outside Afghanistan itself more economical and practical than training large numbers of Afghan security personnel at academies or training facilities in the United States or Europe. If coordinated properly, increasing the number of Afghan personnel in these training programs would serve both Indian and NATO interests in Afghanistan post-2014.

Second, India could contribute more in terms of funding to sustain the ANSF. Under current plans, the United States and its NATO partners will contribute the bulk of the funding to support the ANSF through 2017. The Afghan government would contribute just $500 million to a projected $4.1 billion annual price tag. Providing financial assistance to the ANSF would both give India a greater say in NATO's post-2014 Afghanistan plans, as well as enable it to pursue its interest in a stable Afghanistan without overly exacerbating Pakistani insecurities by placing personnel on the ground in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan.

Indian security assistance to the Afghan National Security Forces will not achieve much if they are not in sync with similar efforts by the United States and NATO. Only a joint effort working toward agreed-upon goals will maximize the inputs of both NATO and India in Afghanistan's security services. India, the United States, and NATO should develop mechanisms for greater exchange of information of military and political developments in Afghanistan, continuously share assessments, and coordinate their military-assistance programs. This could take the form of a Military Contact Group between New Delhi, Washington, and Brussels. Moreover, Indian financial assistance should be provided in close consultation with existing international security trust funds such as the Law and Order Trust Fund.

As the transition to Afghan-led security force continues through 2014, the United States, NATO, and India would be wise to forge a more collaborative relationship when it comes to security assistance to the government of Afghanistan. At minimum, they should seek to reduce duplication of effort. At maximum, they should seek a greater role for India in financing and training the ANSF within a broader framework developed through consultations between New Delhi, Brussels, and Washington.

Recommendations for U.S. and Indian policymakers

The next year in Afghanistan will serve as a major determinant of Afghanistan's long-term stability, with consequences for the larger region. As the United States and NATO-ISAF draw down their military presence, leaders in Afghanistan will be required to take greater responsibility for the country's security and economic growth. And Afghanistan's allies, particularly India, will need to play a more prominent role in sustaining and building on the gains that have been made. Given the intended role that the United States aims to play in Afghanistan post-2014, through financial assistance, training of the ANSF, and counterterrorism operations, close coordination between the United States and India is necessary. To that end, the Center for American Progress and Observer Research Foundation offer the following recommendations to policymakers in Washington and New Delhi.

Support a strengthened political consensus in Afghanistan

- **Coordinate Indian and U.S. support for Afghanistan's upcoming electoral process and political transition.** The United States and India should create a consultation mechanism to better support a transparent, independent, and inclusive election process. Given India's positive relationship with President Karzai, India may be a better interlocutor with the Afghan president in encouraging needed electoral reforms prior to the election, including appointing an independent chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission, establishing clear rules for the election process, and establishing a robust complaints mechanism. India and the United States should also support civil-society initiatives to strengthen public support for a credible election.

- **Support the building of the capacity and effectiveness of the Afghan government.** India should expand its efforts to train Afghan civil servants in key ministries and potentially run exchange programs so they can work in Indian ministries and with their Indian counterparts. Washington and New Delhi should support management teams in important ministries such as the Ministry

of Finance and the Ministry of Mines and channel a higher percentage of its economic assistance through the Afghan budget rather than through outside contractors and then use it as leverage to push the government toward stronger anticorruption measures. Moreover, India and the United States, as members of the Tokyo conference, should monitor and follow up on the commitments made in Tokyo. As part of these commitments, the Afghan government agreed to allow for the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission and other civil-society organizations to function freely, enforce the legal framework for combating corruption, release annual asset declarations of senior public officials, and undertake asset recovery and accountability for those responsible for the Kabul Bank crisis—the embezzlement of hundreds of millions of dollars at the country's largest bank that nearly led to the collapse of the entire Afghan financial system.

- **Actively consult on negotiations with insurgents.** If Afghan government-led talks with the Taliban and other militants proceed, New Delhi and Washington should actively consult with one another on the course of negotiations and share intelligence on the situation in Afghanistan. While the United States will clearly be more central to the negotiation process, Washington should make an effort to share information with the Indian government. U.S. facilitation of engagement between India and the Taliban could also assist in making Indian policymakers more comfortable with the reconciliation process.

- **Facilitate a civil-society effort at reconciliation.** U.S. and Indian policymakers agree that a broader reconciliation effort between and within Afghanistan's diverse civil-society groups may be required for long-term peace. Given the broad support for India within Afghanistan across its diverse ethnic groups, India may play a facilitating role in larger societal discussions on a path forward. India can also push to include their allies in any kind of negotiation; these are largely members of the loyal opposition or the former Northern Alliance, composed of individuals who feel the most threatened by a deal with the Taliban insurgency.

Encourage political and economic regional integration

- **Consult more closely on U.S. and Indian approaches to Pakistan.** While Pakistan's intentions related to Afghanistan can only be tested by its future actions, New Delhi and Washington should continue to engage Islamabad separately while attempting to achieve outcomes in the region that are satisfactory to both. For India, developing positive relations with Pakistan has been

a high priority for three successive governments over the past decade and a half. The United States acknowledged the sources of cross-border terrorism in Pakistan, urged Islamabad to dismantle terror sanctuaries, and encouraged the normalization of India-Pakistan relations without injecting itself directly into the process. Both New Delhi and Washington share the goal of a Pakistan that forgoes pursuit of a rivalry with India in Afghanistan and is better economically integrated with both neighbors. Better coordination of U.S. and Indian policy can help facilitate these goals.

- Washington should encourage Pakistan to engage India on Afghanistan, and India must recognize Pakistan's legitimate concerns in Afghanistan and help develop a framework in which these concerns are addressed. One mechanism to do this would be to expand India-U.S.-Afghanistan trilateral talks to a quadrilateral forum that includes Pakistan. Such a forum could prove effective in advancing Indo-Pakistan rapprochement over Afghanistan.

- India and the United States should also find a common approach to support Pakistan's nascent democratic process and its first successful completion of a civilian government's full term without interfering.

- **Maintain focus on economic integration.**

  - The United States and India should engage other countries, multilateral forums, and the private sector to ensure sustained financial support for Afghanistan's economic integration into the South and Central Asia regions. The October 2012 U.S.-India-Japan trilateral dialogue that produced an agreement for cooperation on Afghanistan represented a good start, as has the Istanbul Process, which met most recently in April 2013 in Kazakhstan. The Delhi Investment Summit on Afghanistan held in June 2012 similarly represents an opportunity for further U.S.-India-Afghanistan cooperation. Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan should be brought more into this vision of regional integration while leveraging the economic influence of a broader economic community.

  - The United States and India should focus economic assistance on building the capacity of Afghan ministries involved in economic development, building Afghan's own revenue-generating businesses such as in the mineral sector, and expanding regional trade.

- **Expand dialogue to additional countries.**

  - India can play an important bridging role in bringing China and Russia into discussions on Afghanistan. Signals suggest that China is willing to discuss possible cooperation on Afghanistan with India. Additionally, both India and Russia have stressed the importance of regional cooperation in combating terrorism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan.

  - India's current dialogue with Iran could serve as a foundation for broader discussions with Tehran, if Iran's foreign policy behavior changes significantly in the near term, enabling the United States to engage more constructively with Iran.

  - Expanding India-U.S.-Afghanistan trilateral talks to a quadrilateral forum including Pakistan could facilitate greater economic integration between Kabul, Islamabad, and New Delhi.

Strengthen Afghan National Security Forces

Any effort to support and strengthen the ANSF should be sensitive to Pakistani concerns and in coordination with NATO and the United States. India should coordinate with existing NATO and U.N. trust funds that pool international support for the ANSF in order to provide additional financial support in line with ANSF needs.

- **Provide equipment to the ANSF.** The shortage of adequate and effective equipment has been identified as a significant gap by the Afghan government, and they have repeatedly sought equipment from both India and the United States. While India will not deploy troops to Afghanistan, it can play an important role in developing the capacity of the ANSF by increasing the supply of equipment such as cargo trucks and training to the ANSF, if needed. India should coordinate with the United States to avoid providing material identical to the equipment that the Pentagon will likely transfer to Afghan security forces under the Excess Defense Articles program as the United States reduces its presence in Afghanistan.

- **Train the Afghan National Police.** In the efforts to develop the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police has been neglected in comparison. India has committed to providing more training to the Afghan National Police. India and

the United States could hold joint training sessions, collectively develop a training module, and focus the training on areas such as crowd control, management of prisons and detention centers, and developing investigative capacities.

- **Support building the military infrastructure within Afghanistan.** Collaboration on this front should be based on the needs of the Afghan government. Some potential avenues for collaboration include modernizing the basic military establishment, strengthening military communications and surveillance, and laying out the foundation for building a rudimentary air force.

- **Set up a Military Contact Group.** Senior officials from New Delhi, Kabul, Washington, and Brussels should increase their exchange of information and assessments on the security situation in Afghanistan and share views on the priority military needs of the ANSF. Greater intelligence cooperation should occur.

Conclusion

The situation on the ground in Afghanistan has become very dynamic in anticipation of the 2014 presidential elections and the departure of U.S. troops. Moreover, actors in the region such as Pakistan and Iran appear undecided on how to navigate and potentially influence the transition process. Yet India and the United States finally have an opportunity to engage more constructively to support Afghanistan's long-term stability as U.S. and NATO-ISAF forces draw down.

This constructive engagement will require more coordination by Indian and U.S. policymakers in assisting Afghanistan in its political and economic transitions—through support for the election process and the political consensus-building process, the regional economic integration efforts underway, and the Afghan security forces. It will also require Indians to play a stronger leadership role than they have previously. Until recently, they have largely benefited from U.S. efforts and sacrifices while playing a less prominent role.

Increasing the Indian role in Afghanistan has risks, especially as it relates to Pakistan, but the benefits of increased cooperation between the India and the United States on shared objectives have the potential to outweigh the drawbacks, especially if done with transparency and ongoing dialogue with countries in the region.

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