

MAPPING THE SOURCES OF TENSION AND THE INTERESTS OF REGIONAL POWERS IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

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A Regional Perspective*

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This Mapping Document draws on ten expert papers commissioned under the CIDOB project “Sources of Tension in Afghanistan & Pakistan: A Regional Perspective” (STAP RP), together with the analytical outputs of project round table seminars and in-region research (September 2011-November 2012); and interviews with a wide range of stakeholders in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Europe over the same period. The document schematically summarizes policy research findings on the sources of tension with regional implications that affect Afghanistan and Pakistan; and identifies the interests of, and related “red lines” for, the five main implicated regional powers: India, Iran, Russia, China and Saudi Arabia.

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Introduction

A crossroads appears to be approaching in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As Western powers rapidly disengage from a divided Afghanistan, Afghan political and security institutions will either successfully maintain stability, or the country will move into a new era of conflict and chaos. Under either of these scenarios, the robustness of the institutions created by the 2001 Bonn accord will be put to the test. Meanwhile, Pakistan is confronting a challenging social and political transformation of its own. Whether its civilian institutions can truly address the fundamental issues facing the country and its identity, and avoid a national crisis that could shake its core foundations, is still to be determined.

Indeed, the very sources of tension that have for many years defined the internal dynamics of both countries are once again in flux. While tensions surrounding governance, social and economic issues, the conflict in Afghanistan, ethnicity and sectarianism, radicalisation and militancy have defined the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan and with the rest of the region throughout the last decade, the nature of these tensions is rapidly changing, as are the stances of actors who define them.

In both countries, state institutions have been strained in responding to these challenges. Furthermore, bilateral confrontations have characterised the public facade of their mutual relations. However, in parallel, the past years have also seen increasing political, commercial and people-to-people ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan. A growing realisation on the extent of the challenges at hand and their interconnected nature with the region's stability, has led to increased dialogue and interaction between a range of concerned actors and communities.

The withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan in the coming years, together with the crisis point that appears within reach in both countries, has none the less also led to increasing concerns at the national, regional and international levels. With the precedent of the Soviet troops' withdrawal in 1989 being followed by a civil war in 1992, and with much of the world presently facing a grave economic crisis, pessimism abounds as to the potential scenarios that might develop.

What is however often absent from most future scenarios which are identified from afar, are the perspectives of those closest and most affected by how things develop in Afghanistan and Pakistan: the neighbouring countries - and the most influential among them, the regional powers. In the geo-political context of Asia's rapidly-rising share of global trade and growing energy needs, regional powers are conscious that opportunities also abound in Afghanistan and Pakistan. With these regional powers likely to play an increased role in both countries following the withdrawal of Western forces, understanding their evolving interests and how they may play out, is more crucial than ever.

In Afghanistan, regional actors are positioning themselves to fill the vacuum which will be left behind by the US and its allies. The extent to which these regional powers will influence the future of Afghanistan - and how - is however still unclear. What is unquestionable, however, is that major interests are at stake: conflict in Afghanistan has an impact that

goes far beyond its borders and the country lies in a strategic position for the potential economic integration of the region.

Given the volatile phase being entered, and the changed context after a decade of a strong international presence in Afghanistan, regional powers have adopted hedging strategies, adjustable depending on the different scenarios being played out after most international troops withdraw in 2014 and beyond. How these strategies develop will be conditioned by factors ranging from how Afghanistan's weak institutions respond to urgent governance challenges, to what type and level of residual presence the US and NATO will leave behind.

In this context, Afghanistan's own primary interest is avoiding an escalation of conflict with the withdrawal of international forces. While different actors have diverging positions and objectives, an escalation of tension into a new civil war actually appears to be against the interests of most - if not all - of the relevant Afghan actors. Whilst these continue to compete domestically over power and influence, there is an obvious need for all national actors to work together towards common national interests.

But what, indeed, can be categorised as a common understanding on the nature of Afghan national interests? Common ground appears to exist on advancing economic ties with regional powers; and on regional economic integration. While opposing national actors have different strategies to reach the same end, all seem to share that same final objective. Other objectives – by no means always common - such as ending the insurgency through the democratic participation of all relevant Afghan actors (including the Taliban), are harder to achieve. For these, increased dialogue will be required in order to reach basic consensus. The international community, through the appointment of an international facilitator, perceived to be both neutral and of high standing, should assist Afghanistan to generate this common interest, whilst promoting an Afghan-owned, Afghan-driven process.

Meanwhile, Pakistan – the key external actor for Afghanistan, as well as a major regional actor – increasingly forms the focus of regional and international concerns. While there appear to be some encouraging changes taking place there, such as the strengthened role of the judiciary and the devolution of powers to the provinces, the destabilising potential of a nuclear power with a population of 185 million falling further into crisis presents a nightmare scenario.

At present, a wide array of domestic threats ranging from increasing militancy and radicalism to addressing urgent energy needs, challenge Pakistan's stability. Whilst some can be addressed in the coming two to three years, others will require a longer time frame of a decade or more. The extent to which the country's leaders recognise and confront these challenges and are able to achieve the requisite deep-seated political, economic and social transformation, will be central factors affecting both domestic and regional stability, and the prospects for regional economic integration.

Another key element that strongly conditions stability in Pakistan - and which is today in flux - is its relations with the United States. Externally, the US has overtaken India as Pakistan's prime foreign policy concern, which strongly impacts on the country's stance towards Afghanistan,

because Pakistan regards the US as one of the major causes of the problems in the neighbouring country and indeed within Pakistan itself. There is an overwhelming sentiment among a wide cross-section of Pakistani society, is that this partnership is both a net negative and a major impediment to peace within Pakistan's borders. Indeed, a fundamental reason for Pakistan's hedging strategies (which impact in turn across the region) is that it has never believed that the US will emerge victorious in Afghanistan. For Pakistan, therefore, unlike other regional actors, hedging results from certainty (that the US will not win), not uncertainty (on the final outcome of the war in Afghanistan). Furthermore, this belief that the US cannot win, may well make its defeat in Afghanistan a self-fulfilling prophecy.

in addition to managing its relations with the US, Pakistan aims to maintain a tricky balance of regional interests: managing its relationships with India (which colour its stance towards Afghanistan); maintaining China as a counterbalance to both the US and India and as a source of economic benefits including as a major energy transit hub; managing disagreements with Iran over the strategic approach to Afghanistan and Central Asia, whilst simultaneously aiming to benefit from energy deals. Internally, Pakistan faces major concerns including on state control over militants, and achieving improved economic stability and growth. Relations with Afghanistan itself have been schizophrenic and troubled, despite geography, ethnic bonds, shared Pashtun culture, a porous border and large amounts of aid from Pakistan for reconstruction and civilian assistance. However, for almost two decades, Islamabad's partnership in Afghanistan has been limited to the Afghan Taliban and its affiliates. It is difficult to predict what will be Islamabad's relationship with Afghanistan after the impending security transition, because this in turn will depend on what kind of Afghanistan is left behind.

The Roles & Interests of Regional Powers

From a regional perspective, the effect of the urgent needs of the Afghan and Pakistani economies, coupled with the growing energy needs of rising regional powers such as India and China, could play a transformative role for relations between states in the region. While regional economic integration is not the guaranteed panacea it is presented as being by some, none the less, significant steps are being taken to advance through practical steps that could eventually prove to have broader importance.

Increased fora for regional collaboration, such as the recently formed Heart of Asia initiative, are taking practical steps in areas of common interests such as counter-terrorism, border control, crisis management and counter-narcotics. As this process proceeds, it will be necessary to address the competing geo-strategic economic visions and bilateral tensions that act as obstacles towards regional integration. In this instance, the international community, and in particular the EU, can play a positive role in dissipating tensions in key cases such as relations between India and Pakistan or the US and Iran, via support to bridge the bilateral "trust gap"; and in supporting discussions between key regional powers on common interest areas in Afghanistan in particular. Bilateral aid to Pakistan and Afghanistan should include a strong focus on interventions to combat extremism of mindsets. Issues that raise tensions across the region- such

as the insurgency in Balochistan or the financing of radical or militant groups - require closer international cooperation, neutral external assistance and greater engagement. Mutual economic concerns can be leveraged at the international and regional levels, towards achieving greater regional peace and stability. China, Iran and the Central Asian states are all key stakeholders, whose shared interest be leveraged to counter the rise of extremism in Pakistan in particular, including through the development of a regional strategy to counter insurgency, bring law and order to the border areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan. A peaceful Afghanistan can serve as a land bridge to South Asia, the Middle East, Far East and Central Asia.

The ways in which the different sources of tension in both Afghanistan and Pakistan develop and interplay with regional powers' interests will largely determine the region's future. The short-term challenges that each country confronts and the uncertainty surrounding the future role of the US in the region has inevitably lead to hedging strategies, deliberately conceived to be adaptable depending on how different geopolitical outcomes may play out. Behind these regional hedging strategies lie a diverse range of specifically national interests. While these are generally historically based and deep-rooted, most are gradually evolving with the changing context of the region.

In the case of greater regional economic integration, new economic forces have the potential of transforming different sets of bilateral relations and regional dynamics on the whole. The growing energy needs of rising global powers such as China and India are especially relevant in this regard. Their own national interests and economic power could serve to alleviate key bilateral tensions between countries such as India and Pakistan. Close cooperation, and in some cases, external assistance will however be needed so that growing external interests in areas such as mineral investments do not result in new tensions due to increased competition.

Without adequate knowledge of the evolving interests, changing policies and seemingly contradictory actions of regional powers - and the will to apply that knowledge - Western peace-building efforts in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region will be relegated to failure. Understanding these fundamental issues is therefore a basic step to being able to deal constructively with the sources of tension that affect Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region itself. Recognising and leveraging positive bilateral dynamics, as well as the roles that can be played by "organic" regional fora with confidence-building and multilateral cooperation potential, such as the SCO, RECCA, the Heart of Asia, will also be key steps towards this end.

Five specific regional powers have been identified as being critical to how the future of both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and of the region will play out:

- India
- Iran
- China
- Russia
- Saudi Arabia

Others, such as the Central Asian states, other Gulf States, and Turkey are implicated actors, with real interests and concerns in relation to both countries, but do not have the same depth and level of implication and/or influence as the above "big five" regional powers.

The Five Main Regional Powers

The tables below provide a schematic overview of the main interests and red lines for the five most important regional powers for Afghanistan and Pakistan. These points are drawn from the research done under the project, as well as from previous research projects with similar themes, by other organisations: (see Further Reading section).

“Interests” are defined here as issues, concerns or objectives whose development or outcomes directly concern the national interests of the regional power involved. “Red lines” are those issues, concerns or objectives whose development or outcomes are so important to the national interests of a particular regional power, that any serious escalation would result in a change in policy with potentially important repercussions for Afghanistan and/or Pakistan, and/or for the other regional powers and stakeholders concerned.

Table 1: Regional Powers’ Interests in Afghanistan & Pakistan

| 1. INDIA |
|--|
| <p>Interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing Afghanistan from becoming a terrorist safe haven • Countering increased Pakistani influence over events in Afghanistan • Preventing rising radicalism and Islamic militancy in Afghanistan and Pakistan from influencing its own Muslim minority population, thus putting India’s social cohesion in danger • Obtaining access to raw materials in Afghanistan to meet the needs of India’s growing population • Ending the reported use of the Lashkar e Tayyeba as a proxy by the Pakistani ISI to act against India • Engaging with the nationalist insurgency in Balochistan and across the border in Afghanistan, regarded by some observers as a counterbalance to Pakistani ISI pro-Taliban support • Competing robustly on economic competition with Pakistan in Afghanistan, which also provides India with a rationale for support to the Afghan government and for active Indian outreach to Iran • Gaining the upper hand in Indo-China rivalry, which spills over into Pakistan • The Kashmir issue, in dispute with Pakistan (unresolved since 1947) <p>Additional Interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing coordination with Iran, to counter Sunni Islamist militant groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to establish commercial and energy routes through Afghanistan to Central Asia • Using international cooperation in Afghanistan to project India as a key global power with geo-strategic pre-eminence in the Indian Ocean basin; shaping regional security and economic arrangements; and creating regional fora such as RECCA. • Avoiding escalation in water disputes with Pakistan (eg Wullar Barrage) with water shortages being blamed on India by the anti-India elements on the Pakistan side |
| <p>Red Lines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Taliban government in Afghanistan with close ties to Pakistan • Pakistan controlled by Islamist militants • Escalation in conflict with Pakistan over Kashmir • Further high-scale terrorist attacks in India organised from Pakistan territory (such as the Lashkar e Tayyeba 2008 attacks in Mumbai) • A major escalation in other potential conflict triggers with Pakistan, such as the Sir Creek boundary, Siachen, and water issues including the Wullar Barrage |

2. IRAN

Interests

- Avoiding a long-term US military presence in Afghanistan
- Undermining the success of the US military presence in Afghanistan, yet simultaneously seeking international recognition by the US at the international level through cooperation on regional issues
- Maintaining contacts with all relevant Afghan actors
- Countering the rise of Taliban influence in Afghanistan, which has close links to Saudi Arabia
- Combating Saudi-Wahhabi involvement in Pakistan as a counter-influence to that of Shi'a Iran
- Countering threats from growing Sunni extremism in Pakistan and Afghanistan
- Combatting the drug trade stemming from Afghanistan
- Continuing to maintain simultaneous apparently contradictory stances with some regional partners (Pakistan, China)
- Expanding economic ties with Afghanistan and India
- Securing energy and communication routes to India, China etc.
- Preventing Sunni Jundullah terrorists from operating across the border with Iran in Pakistani Balochistan
- Avoiding negative spillover from Balochi nationalism in Pakistan
- Maintaining regime security in Afghanistan to avoid a situation of chaos which could alter its own domestic situation
- Within Pakistan, counteracting the effects of Pakistan's reliance on the US and Pakistan's support for the Taliban

Additional Interests

- Avoiding an increase in, and decreasing the number of, Afghan refugees in Iran
- Curbing the illicit drug economy, which badly impacts Iran's population
- Furthering its 'soft-power' regional influence in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and the rest of Central Asia
- Reducing its own energy burden through transit fees and benefits

Red Lines

- **The return of a Taliban Emirate (with close historical links to Saudi Arabia) in Afghanistan**
- **The US using military bases in Afghanistan against Iran**
- **Pakistan controlled by Islamist militants**

3. CHINA

Interests

- Access to raw materials in Afghanistan for growing internal demand
- Impeding the training of Uighur separatists in Pakistan and FATA in particular due to internal security concerns
- Using close relations with Pakistan as a lever of influence with Afghanistan and US and as a "soft" challenge against India
- Maintaining Gwadar port as a quasi-Chinese naval outpost to protect oil supply lines from the Middle East, and to counter both the US presence in Central Asia and India's influence in the region
- Protecting China's mineral and infrastructure interests in Balochistan

Additional Interests

- Increased military cooperation on China-Pakistan border, including in Gilgit-Baltistan, due to its incomplete incorporation into the Pakistani state and the resultant institutional vacuum and growing Sunni-Shi'a sectarian violence and tensions
- Apparent intent to establish one or more military bases in FATA and thus potentially to increase China's security role in Pakistan, creating a military network across Pakistan from Gwadar to FATA to oversee the transit of goods to Xinjiang¹
- Keeping the SCO primarily focused on economic (vs political and geostrategic) issues

Red Lines

- **Pakistan controlled by Islamist militants**
- **Growth of (Uighur) Muslim extremism on Chinese territory, supported from across the border with Pakistan**
- **The return of a Taliban emirate in Afghanistan**
- **Confrontation with the US over Pakistan**

1. Sources: Project consultations; and http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/MJ26Df03.html

4. RUSSIA

Interests

- *The maintenance of functional governance in Afghanistan, to obviate the need for direct engagement to counter radical Islam in the region after Afghanistan experience in the 1980s*
- *Continued cultivation of close ties with the former Northern Alliance groups to avoid the expansion of Islamic militant groups influence in Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia*
- *Countering US efforts to politically and economically draw Central Asia away from Russian influence and using US-NATO withdrawal in this objective*
- *Avoiding a long term US military presence in Afghanistan while benefiting from it as a buffer against Islamist terrorist groups.*
- *Stemming the flow of narcotics (seen as a large-scale domestic security challenge)*

Additional Interests

- *Expanding its security presence in Central Asia*
- *Developing ties with Iran as an important economic partner, including for combating the rise of US economic interests in Afghanistan*

Red Lines

- ***A substantial increase in the inflow of narcotics onto Russian territory***
- ***The return of a Taliban emirate in Afghanistan***
- ***Pakistan controlled by Islamist militants***
- ***Rising instability in Central Asia as a result of an increased Islamist militancy in Afghanistan and Pakistan***
- ***Central Asia dropping out of its 'sphere of influence'***

5. SAUDI ARABIA

Interests

- *Ideological:*
 - *Promote itself as the unifier of the Sunni community; officially promoting the Wahhabi variant of Sunni Islam (closely associated with the Salafi school of thought, which justifies the use of violence, though Wahhabism does not)*
 - *Preventing ongoing war within the Sunni community, partly because it considers this would benefit Iran*
- *Containing Iran, demonizing its role as a Shi'a threat in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia, using Afghanistan as a proxy battleground between Riyadh and Teheran*
- *Continuing to "externalize" the radical Islamist threat, fomented outside and repressed inside*
- *Minimising the threat from an Al Qaeda-Taliban axis, regarding the latter as heavily linked to the former, and hence as a threat to its own internal stability*
- *Maintaining its close relationship with Pakistan including through large aid donations, investments and oil concessions*
- *Maintaining the status quo in Pakistan: specifically, avoiding the rise to pre-eminence of democratic forces capable of re-establishing the authority of Pakistan as a Muslim, but secular, state*
- *Maintaining the Kingdom's privileged relations with the US*

Additional Interests

- *Bringing peace in Pakistan (ending violent terrorist activities, cross border insurgency), which is regarded a by-product of peace in Afghanistan*
- *Extending its sphere of political influence, by using its support of the mujahedeen against Soviet forces in the 1980s and its early recognition of the Taliban regime, to play a role in mediation talks in Afghanistan and Pakistan*
- *Capitalising on investment opportunities for Saudi Arabian business in both countries*
- *Containing intra-Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) rivalries (eg with Qatar over the latter's new role in regional security issues and Saudi Arabia's desire to be seen as a strategic lobbyist)*

Red Lines

- ***A civil war in Afghanistan following the departure of foreign troops, leading to the return of a Taliban Emirate linked to Al Qaeda, in Afghanistan; or a victory of warlords united in a renewed "Northern Alliance" supported by Iran, Russia, India***
- ***A substantive increase in Iranian influence in Afghanistan and/or Pakistan***
- ***An increase in al Qaeda's strength and influence in the region***
- ***Pakistan's implosion and resulting regional instability***

Sources of Tension in Afghanistan & Pakistan With Regional Implications

The term “sources of tension” refers to issues that are relevant for both Afghanistan and Pakistan and which can act as fault lines, by creating friction or conflict, within each country and in the region. Each source of tension is explained below by identifying its main manifestations or examples in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Some manifestations are applicable to both countries, and have been collectively presented. Others manifest themselves differently in Afghanistan or Pakistan, and have therefore been listed separately for each country. In all instances, the sources of tension and manifestations have impacts and implications that go beyond a single country’s national borders.

A series of tables below present the six main sources of tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan and their manifestations schematically. The sources of tension are:

1. Governance
2. Social and economic issues
3. Conflict in Afghanistan
4. Ethnicity and sectarianism
5. Radicalisation
6. Militancy

Table 2: Source of Tension 1 – Governance

| 1.1 GOVERNANCE IN AFGHANISTAN | |
|---|---|
| <p>One of the most significant concerns as international troops and aid begin to exit Afghanistan is how weak national institutions will cope with increasing internal tensions and the upcoming institutional requirements for economic development. In a changed context with new local actors, ordinary Afghans suffer from daily corruption and lack of rule of law. Many domestic actors and external observers have put in to question the highly centralised political system that emerged after the Bonn conference in 2001. Reforming this system and addressing the urgent governance needs of Afghans will prove challenging due to the increasingly-polarised positions of different groups within Afghanistan.</p> | |
| MANIFESTATIONS | |
| Patronage & Corruption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption has been linked to powerful figures in the government • Large amounts of international aid to Afghanistan are calculated to have been lost as a result¹ • Corruption has spread in to all areas of life, from public health to justice • A new ‘mafia’ of well connected business interests and entrepreneurial commanders has emerged • Drug trafficking is often linked to formal power brokers |
| Weak Rule of Law | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blurred lines between the formal and informal power structures have created complex patronage systems • The judicial system lacks enforcement power and adequate procedures • Concerns over the separation of powers due to the use of Presidential decrees to sideline Parliament |
| Taliban Parallel Structures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice and policing parallel structures created by the Taliban have gained acceptance in many areas of the country due to prevailing corruption and insecurity • The Taliban have politically marginalized tribes and the key governance role their elders have traditionally played • Western donors are now trying to marginalize the Taliban by creating new local elites |
| Tensions Over Centralised Political Systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central government lacks the capacity to meet its obligations under the Constitution • Non-Pashtun groups are mostly against the current centralized system (nominations to key positions by the President), as a defensive strategy against the threat of the rise of the Taliban in Pashtun areas system • The 2010 elections created tensions in the Afghan parliament due to contested results and the role of a presidentially-selected special tribunal • Upcoming 2014 elections are further exacerbating existing tensions |

1.2 GOVERNANCE IN PAKISTAN

Whilst governance failures in Pakistan impact most strongly internally, none the less, together with socio-economic sources of tension, they act as triggers for the other primary regionally-relevant sources of tension (radicalism, militancy, ethnic and sectarian tensions, and the conflict in Afghanistan). Domestically, the repeated failure to regard the people of Pakistan as citizens, rather than as clients of a patron state with mutual responsibilities and rights, creates a weak base for effective government. In parallel, non-state actors including feudal, tribal and other socially-sanctioned structures vie with one another for power, leading to further instability. Weak institutions compete with strong patron-client-based social structures, while public assets are stripped for distribution to supporters of patrons. Recent promising constitutional and legislative amendments have yet to be translated into meaningful implementation. Whilst none of these are new occurrences, a worsening law and order situation since 9/11 and particularly since 2007 mean that they combine to foster or exacerbate other key sources of tension with both regional and national implications.

MANIFESTATIONS

| | |
|--|--|
| Indifferent State, Persistent Militants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State failures to provide for its citizens lead to fertile recruitment grounds for the Pakistani Taliban • Militant groups try to fill void left by the state by providing basic services such as dispute resolution, access to swift justice, and urgent humanitarian aid |
| The Role of the Armed Forces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The traditional power of the armed forces and secret services undermine the authority of civilian institutions • While positive signs have emerged of political parties and institutions such as the judiciary standing up to armed forces interference, the civil-military gap is still large • The role of ISI (secret services) is still perceived in neighbouring countries as leading an independent destabilising agenda |
| Non-State Actors Fill Local Governance Role | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional institutions, patronage networks, criminal organisations and insurgents all step in to act as “local government”, in areas where the state is weak or absent |
| Low Level of Extension of Government Writ Into FATA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less-than-full incorporation in the Federation leads to discriminatory legal structures, including collective punishment, lack of access to justice, to security and to development; and to the denial of civil and human rights, including political participation and low levels of law and order • Non-applicability of the rule of law in some agencies of FATA (eg Waziristan) • Taliban insurgents remain active creating conflict, instability, internal displacement and undermining local government institutions, including through dispensation of informal justice and dispute resolution • Cross-border shelling into Kunar by the Pakistan army exacerbates tensions with Afghanistan |
| Conflict & Ethnic Tensions in Balochistan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power remains in the hands of the military and intelligence agencies, impeding a political process to end a near-civil war in the province • A nationalist insurgency, religious/sectarian extremists and targeted killings of professionals • Reported support for nationalists from Afghanistan and India leads to heightened regional tensions • Nationalist forces (eg the Balochistan Liberation Army) appropriate commissions from the local business community and mine owners • Smugglers & crime syndicates result in increased levels of corruption, which erode local institutions through bypassing formal systems • Unchallenged “disappearances” of people in Balochistan by the Pakistani state create local resistance to its writ, specifically manifested via opposition to the activities of the armed forces and the secret services • The confused mandates of the “reach” of federal vs provincial law enforcement agencies and security apparatus lead to lack of coordination, duplication of effort and competition between law enforcement entities active in the province • Presence of the Afghan Taliban Quetta Shura and terrorist networks along the Pakistan-Afghan border of the province; create tensions with Afghanistan • Conflict in Balochistan over ownership and control over mineral resources can potentially escalate and further destabilise region, given the interests of both the state and regional powers (eg China) |

Table 3: Source of Tension 2 - Socio-Economic Issues

| 2.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES IN AFGHANISTAN | |
|---|--|
| <p>Though overall socio-economic performance has been patchy, throughout the last decade, important socio-economic indicators, such as the infant mortality rate and the percentage of children in schools, have improved considerably in Afghanistan. In 2010/2011, real GDP growth reached 8.4%, with areas mostly dependent on international economic aid such as construction and transportation doing particularly well. This international dependency creates significant internal tensions and pre-supposes a major challenge for the long-term sustainability of the Afghan economy. To address the important poverty, food security and employment challenges the country faces, it will be vital to shift from a security-based economy to an agriculture-based economy (where about 70% of Afghans work).</p> | |
| Dependence on International Aid | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afghanistan is likely to need US \$7000 million annually during the next decade for institutions to keep functioning² • War and the aid economy has created “dirty bargains” with local elites at the sub national level |
| Growing Economic Disparity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic disparities between rich and poor, urban and rural populations are increasing • Internal migration is also consequently affected |
| A Fragile Private Sector | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While considerable investment has reached Afghanistan in the past decade, the private enterprises which have benefitted most, are linked to patronage or have ties with corruption • The danger of Afghan entrepreneurs that have done well in the last decade moving out of the country with their money |
| Challenges of Dealing With Natural Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The important mineral reserves found in Afghanistan have attracted the interests and investments of region powers creating a new kind of competition • Afghan public institutions are not currently adequately equipped to ensure transparency; “crony capitalism” that takes the benefits away from the people, abounds |
| 2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES IN PAKISTAN | |
| <p>As in the case of governance, socio-economic issues also act as triggers to exacerbate other sources of tension. In Pakistan, state and society are highly interconnected, with kinship, class, caste, clan and ethnicity usually taking precedence over institutional (state) affiliations. Feudal, tribal and other socially-sanctions structures mediate socio-economic issues including access to assets, labour market, job opportunities and social mobility. Critical challenges include: a stagnant economy in deterioration since 2007, with a population growing at 1.6% (currently approximately 181 million), poor economic indicators, and a growing disparity between rich and poor. Access to water, power and food security constitute critical socio-economic issues for the majority of the population. Food supply-related civil unrest was witnessed annually in Pakistan between 2007-2010, resulting in the creation of a new class of poor.</p> | |
| Lack of Economic Growth, A Growing Population | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low economic growth rates do not keep pace with population growth • The country lacks a coherent strategy to address economic problems and growing gap between rich and poor • The country faces a balance of payments crisis and severe energy shortages • The productive economy has been stagnant for the past four years: (GDP 3.7% in 2011-12, the same level as in 2007-8) ; and Pakistan currently has the slowest economic growth rate (2.4% in 2011) in South Asia³ • There are severe intra-provincial disparities, particularly for Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan which experiences the most inequitable distribution of development funds within the Federation with consequent impacts on service delivery and low levels of development indicators |
| Illegal Economic Activity Linked to Criminality and Militancy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of job opportunities and lack of state support systems for the poor and indigent leads to extreme coping behaviours • Pakistani Taliban resorting to kidnappings for ransom to finance their activities; criminals become easy recruits for Talibanisation for financial gain |
| Lack of Access to Water, Power & Food Security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe water shortages; poor water management, inefficient distribution, poor drainage negatively impact (poor) harvests • Chronic energy deficit; power shortages due to distribution issues, institutional debt, poor management, inadequate supply • Rising food prices, inadequate distribution; high proportion of income spent on food by the poor |

2. Source: World Bank estimates.
 3. http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapter_12/01-GrowthAndStabilization.pdf.

4.1 ETHNICITY & SECTARIANISM IN AFGHANISTAN

Ethnic boundaries are transcended by bilingualism, intermarriage, religious and political ideology in Afghanistan, where local-level identities and group interests tend to be associated with a political or regional unit - not with ethnicity. However, the country as a whole has experienced Pashtun-dominated government in one form or other for much of its modern history. While conflict prior to 2001 has been wrongly portrayed as an ethnic struggle, ethnically-motivated violence was none the less very much present in Afghanistan. Since 2001, ethnic patronage networks have been critically strengthened, conditioned by the formation of ethnic electoral coalitions based on a proliferating system of patronage politics.

Manifestations

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Growing Ethnic Divides | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Former Northern Alliance groups' opposition to current negotiation with Taliban strategy has led to increasing tensions with the government and political divides along ethnic lines The last decade of international presence in Afghanistan has resulted in an influx of foreign funds that have further exacerbated ethnic group divisions Political parties have not developed beyond ethnic lines, in part due to institutional weakness, thus increasing a toxic system of patronage politics |
| Fears of Ethnic Conflict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns by some Afghan, regional and international actors that negotiations with the Taliban could lead to conflict and a de-facto north-south split of the country Marginal fears that calls for a Pashtunistan would exacerbate nationalist and separatist forces in Pakistan and create a separatist movement in Afghanistan The arming of local groups based on ethnic lines (eg local <i>arbaki</i> armed militias) by the US and international forces as a dangerous exit strategy Fears that national security institutions, such as the Afghan National Army, might fracture along ethno-regional lines |
| Sectarian Violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While sectarian violence is rare in Afghanistan, attacks on the 10-15% Afghan Shi'a minority community (such as those on 2011 Ashura day) have occurred These raised concern as to the potential for al Qaeda's and other regional actors to create internal tensions and draw actors such as Iran and Pakistan into conflict |

4.2 ETHNICITY & SECTARIANISM IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan is experiencing a rising incidence of sectarian violence (Sunni-Shi'a, anti-Ahmadi). Targeted political killings are overlaid with sectarian motives. Growing regional/external Sunni and Shi'a involvement in fomenting sectarian violence is likely to continue unless the Pakistani state itself is able to clear its own territory of sectarian militant groups. Ethnic violence finds expression in the port city of Karachi, via the nationalist insurgency in Balochistan, and increasingly in areas of Sindh and the Punjab as well.

Manifestations

| | |
|--|--|
| Sunni-Shi'a & Other Forms of Sectarian Violence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rising incidence of near-daily sectarian violence targeting Shi'a populations, particularly in Quetta, Balochistan; Kurram Agency (Waziristan); Gilgit-Baltistan; Hyderabad (Sindh) and in Karachi Weak or intentionally absent government responses to sectarian violence Sufi shrines targeted by bombs in the Punjab province and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Anti-Baloch discrimination on sectarian grounds in Iranian Balochistan (a Sunni minority in Shi'a-majority country) spills over into Pakistani Balochistan Increased minority community, anti-Hindu, anti-Christian intolerance, expressed increasingly violently |
| Increased Ethnic Divisions & Tensions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite Pakistan being a multi-ethnic state, the dominance of the state structure by one or two ethnic groups tends to augment ethnic tensions and violence Increasing ethno-sectarian-politically motivated violence in Karachi, where it is hard to distinguish between the targets and <i>modus operandi</i> of the sectarian, Taliban-led extremist, criminal groups and gang-related violence |
| Centre-Periphery Ethnicity-Based Tensions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political and military domination by Punjabis results in reluctance to devolve authority to provinces dominated by other ethnic groups, though it is somewhat mitigated by recent progress on devolution The three main ethnically-based nationalist movements (Balochistan, the Sindhudesh Movement in the 1980s, and the Muhajir Qaumi Movement in the 1990s) were brutally suppressed by the (Punjabi-dominated) state, with no room for accommodation and compromise |

Table 6: Source of Tension 5 – Radicalisation

| 5. RADICALISATION | |
|---|---|
| <p>The growing influence of radical groups has become a major source of tension in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. Often inter-linked, these groups spread hate and terror throughout the region. The non-violent radicalisation of mindsets in Afghanistan, Pakistan and across the region is achieved through a range of means, including the mainstream educational curriculum, the media, and public opinion. These messages call out not only against the United States but also against diversity, different religions, Muslim sects, ethnicities etc, leading to increasing conservatism, nationalism and exclusionary interpretations of Islam.</p> | |
| Manifestations | |
| Growing Anti-US/Western Sentiment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan as well as the failures of the US/Western presence to improve livelihoods has created a fertile ground for recruitment • Continued US drone military operations in FATA inadvertently provide new opportunities to radicalise elements of the population • In a June 2012 Pew Research poll, 74% of Pakistanis considered the US an enemy, up from 69% the previous year⁴ |
| Radicalisation of Media & Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taliban-established parallel education media and justice structures spreading messages of hate in Afghanistan • Allegations of Iran using its 'soft power' in Afghanistan, Tajikistan etc. in irresponsible ways that can increase radicalisation based on anti-Western sentiment, sectarian affiliation etc • Ethically irresponsible, consequence-oblivious private visual media in Pakistan routinely airs extremist, ultra-nationalist views • Lack of development of a counter-ideology to combat mindsets of extremism in Pakistan results in people taking refuge in a more tangible, rightist, religious ideology. |
| Radicalisation Across Socio-economic Groups in Pakistan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different manifestations in different socio-economic groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For the lowest groups, deprivation directly links with criminal and militant activity - For the lower-middle groups ideology, politics, identity and nationalism are the main drivers of attitude - For the elites, radicalism is also spread via mainstream public and private educational institutions • In addition, alienation and politics have given rise to extreme social groupings (eg <i>Hezb e Tahrir</i>, the <i>Defa-i-Pakistan</i> Council) |

4. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2297/pakistan-united-states-extremist-groups-barack-obama-economic-aid-military-aid-taliban-haqqani-kashmir-ayousaf-raza-gilani-imran-khan-tehreek-e-insaf-indi>

Table 7: Source of Tension 6 - Militancy

| 6. MILITANCY | |
|---|--|
| <p>Since the attacks of September 11th, 2001, militant groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia have become more closely linked. Afghan militant groups linked to the former Taliban regime have led the cross-border insurgency from their refuges in FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkwa province and Balochistan, in the bordering regions of Pakistan. As a consequence of failure to adequately address the presence of these militant groups in areas where government control is weak or absent, the Pakistani state has had to face the emergence of its own Pakistani Taliban, under the leadership of the <i>Tehrik e Taliban</i>. Although the numerous groups both within the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban have different objectives (see Militancy box, below), they generally share the call for international forces to leave the region and for (narrow interpretations of) Islamic law (<i>Shari'a</i>) to play a more important role in the state.</p> | |
| Manifestations | |
| The Afghan Taliban | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent of the control by the Quetta Shura over other groups such as the Haqqani and Hekmatyar networks, is difficult to assess accurately The Afghan Taliban lead the insurgency in Afghanistan through attacks on foreign troops, government targets and the general population They are mainly based in sanctuaries in Pakistan (eg Quetta, North Waziristan), leading to accusations from the US and the Afghan government of complicity by the Pakistan security forces |
| The "Pakistani" Taliban | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for cross-border insurgency and domestic terror attacks Increased the spread of their presence since 2007, from the border regions with Afghanistan (FATA, NWFP) to across (urban) Pakistan Domestic blow-back, including the spread of "fundraising" for the Pakistani Taliban via criminal activity by non-state actors; the criminalisation of the activities of the Pakistani Taliban and criminals falling under the influence of the Taliban |
| M i l i t a n t Networks in the Punjab & Karachi | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are cross-linkages between militancy and criminal and political violence Karachi is a locus for the militant-criminal nexus, where crime bankrolls violence Karachi has become a hideout for Al Qaeda and its affiliates due to its size and heterogeneous ethno-linguistic composition; Faisabad and Lahore are reportedly major grounds for Al Qaeda and affiliate activity Al Qaeda is thought to have entered into alliances with "homegrown" militants (eg the <i>Tehrik e Taliban e Pakistan</i>) |
| Conflict in Balochistan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing Balochi nationalist insurgency Sectarian terrorism/militancy; targeting of Shi'a azaras by <i>Lashkar e Jhangvi</i> (linked to <i>Tehrik e Taliban e Pakistan</i>, <i>Al Qaeda</i> and Afghan Taliban groups) |
| Conflict in FATA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worsening security including in the Tribal Agencies which are refuges for the Haqqani network refuge in North Waziristan The Pakistan army's apparent reluctance to eliminate the sanctuary for the Haqqani network in North Waziristan has also benefitted the "Pakistani Taliban", Al Qaeda and regional <i>jihadi</i> groups, which all exploit the same territory |
| Central Asia Terrorist Groups (IMU, Hizb ul Tahrir etc) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The IMU has used its involvement in the Afghanistan insurgency to regroup and establish itself both in Pakistan's FATA and northern Afghanistan Export of transnational terrorism to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and within Central Asia Links to illegal cross-border economies including drugs, human trafficking, via Afghanistan and Pakistan Refugees from Afghanistan, especially along the Tajikistan border |

BOX 1: The Militancy Map

| | Predominantly Foreign | Predominantly Pakistani |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Anti Pakistan | Al Qaeda; assortment of foreign militants based in FATA | Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan; Harkatul Jihad e Islami; Lashkar e Jhangvi; assortment of splinter groups – the 'Punjabi Taliban' |
| Sectarian | Jandullah (Malik Ragi group) | Sipah e Sahaba Pakistan; Lashkar e Jhangvi; Sunni Tehrik; Sipah e Muhammad |
| Anti-US/NATO | Al Qaeda; assortment of foreign militants based in FATA; Quetta Shura Taliban; Haqqani network; Hizb e Islami; | An anti-US stance is the unifying factor for all militant groups, though they differ on issues: eg, willingness to fight Pakistan, sectarian killing, waging <i>jihad</i> over Kashmir |
| Anti-India | Hizb ul Mujahideen; Al Baraq | Lashkar e Tayyeba; Jaish e Muhammad; Al Badr, Harkatul Mujahideen I Alami; Harkatul Jihad e Islami |

Source: Adapted from CIDOB Pakistan Yearbook 2012, chapter by Hooper & Yusuf, from Moeed Yusuf 2011

Afterword

Viewed from the perspective of 2016, the conflict in Afghanistan has become more regionalised than ever. The interests of the five key regional powers in both Afghanistan and Pakistan have increased, underscored by geopolitical tectonic shifts and proxy wars elsewhere (Syria, Iraq, Yemen) which affect what happens in the two countries of the project's focus. The reported spread of Daesh and new inroads by the Taliban in Afghanistan, Pakistan's struggle with domestic militants, and new or strengthened alliances with Iran, Russia, and above all, China – Pakistan's "all-weather friend", bring a renewed interest in, and stake for, the regional powers in what plays out in Afghanistan, the effects on Pakistan and how these may benefit regional players' own interests, or otherwise. The "red lines" identified in 2012 basically remain unchanged for all regional players. The strained domestic institutions identified then remain strained, the vacuum left by the withdrawal of most Western troops is being filled in one way or other mainly by regional or by non-state actors. The Taliban's interest in peace talks or in a continued insurgency ebb and flow according to prevailing circumstances, and democracy in Afghanistan at grassroots level remains elusive. Energy needs in both Afghanistan and Pakistan remain insufficiently met. Governance too remains a key unresolved issue in both countries. Pakistan's relationship with India see-saws from hope to stasis (or worse) and back again, though with cautious hopes for improvements at the present time. There is a glimpse of what fulfilment of the potential of Afghanistan as a regional economic hub may look like, though there is a long way to go still. But there is hope, and aspirations for a better future for all countries in the region may well hinge on regional economic development, particularly as fatigue with the ongoing conflict truly sets in, giving way – perhaps - to soft power politics.

Emma Hooper & Juan Garrigues
2016

Further Reading

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Consultations Held

The following individuals were consulted either via individual meetings in Europe, Afghanistan and Pakistan; or through Round Table discussion fora on the STAP RP project (in Barcelona March 2012; and in Oslo 2012). The conclusions presented in this paper are the authors' own.

Abdullah Abdullah, presidential election contender, head of the National Coalition of Afghanistan

Cyril Almeida, journalist, *Dawn* newspaper Pakistan

Masood Aziz, former diplomat, former advisor to President Karzai, author, principal at CAEPD

Alamgir Babar, Additional Secretary, Afghanistan & Americas, Government of Pakistan

Monica Bernabé, Afghanistan Correspondent, *El Mundo* newspaper

Abdul Latif Bhat, Director, Kashmir International Research Centre

Rasheed Chaudhury, Head of Research, Free & Fair Elections Network (FAFEN)

Jon Boone, journalist; correspondent for *The Guardian* newspaper

Philip Boyle, formerly Political Counsellor, UK High Commission

Amer Durrani, World Bank Senior Transport Specialist

Anne Fahler, Consultant, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Afghanistan

Sumit Ganguly, Professor of Political Science at Indiana University,

Bloomington

Ashraf Ghani, former Presidential candidate and Chairman of the security transition committee

Yang Guanda, Second Secretary, Chinese Embassy, Kabul

Imtiaz Gul, Executive Director, Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), Pakistan

Ejaz Haidar, former Director, Jinnah Institute; journalist

Aziz Hakimi, Researcher, School of Oriental and African Studies, SOAS; visiting scholar, CMI Bergen

David Hansen, Director, Pakistan Program. Centre for International and Strategic Analysis (SISA)

Hussain Haroon, Pakistan's Special Representative to the UN

Kristian Harpviken, Director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo. Member of NEGAP

Humaira Hassan, former Ambassador of Pakistan to Spain; Ambassador of Pakistan to Portugal

Tore Hattrem, Norwegian Ambassador to Afghanistan

Riaz Mohammad Khan, former Foreign Secretary, Pakistan

Javaid Jalil Khattak, Director, Afghanistan, GoP

Hege M. Kolshus Hansen, Adviser, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, South Asia & Afghanistan Section

Luis Herruzo Madrid, Defence Attaché, Embassy of Spain to Afghanistan

Haseeb Humayoon, CEO, Qara Consulting Inc.

Zahid Hussain, author and journalist, Woodrow Wilson International Centre Pakistan Scholar, author

Syed Riffat Hussain, former Professor and former Chairman, Department of Defence & Strategic Studies, Quaid e Azam University; currently National Defence University (NDU)

Safdar Hussain, Research Analyst, Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS)

Vigdis Kjølseth, Political Adviser, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Islamabad

Bruce Koepke, former Political Officer, UNAMA Afghanistan; Senior Researcher, Armed Conflict and Conflict Management Programme, SIPRI

Dr. Radha Kumar, Delhi Policy Group, New Delhi

Sverre-Johan Kvale, former Ambassador to Kosovo, Senior Advisor at the Peace & Reconciliation Section, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Cecilie Landsverk, Ambassador to Pakistan, Royal Norwegian Embassy,

Grete Lochen, Deputy Chief of Mission, Norwegian Embassy Afghanistan

Maleeha Lodhi, former Pakistan Ambassador to the US, former High Commissioner to the UK; adviser on international relations to GEO TV

Georgy Machitidze, Deputy Head of Mission to Afghanistan, Embassy of the Russian Federation

Helena Malikyar, Independent Political Analyst and Commentator on Afghanistan

Robert Matthews, consultant on Afghanistan, Pakistan and US Foreign Policy, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, NOREF

Marco Mezzera, Senior Advisor, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, NOREF

Davood Moradian, former Senior Adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Professor of Political Science at the American University of Afghanistan

Wahid Mujda, former senior official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Taliban government

Gautam Mukhopadhaya, Ambassador of India to Afghanistan

Sohail Naqvi, Executive Director Higher Education Commission

Basat Ozturk, Ambassador, Turkey

Ravi Palat, Professor of Sociology, Binghamton University, Senior Research Fellow Associate, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, CIDOB

Rouzbeh Parsi, Research Fellow, EU-ISS, Paris

Gareth Price, Senior Research Fellow, Asia Programme, Chatham House

Gonzalo Quintero Saravia, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain to Pakistan

Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, former Ambassador of Pakistan to Iraq; Director General, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad

Raffaello Pantucci, Associate Fellow, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College

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Richard Ponzio, Senior Strategy and Policy Officer at US State Department, Washington DC

Ahmed Rashid, author, journalist

Mian Raza Rabbani, Senator, Deputy Secretary General Pakistan Peoples' Party

Ayesha Riaz, Additional Secretary, Europe & FODP, Government of Pakistan

Juan José Rubio de Urquía, Ambassador of Spain to Afghanistan

Raza Rumi, Executive Director, Jinnah Institute, Pakistan; governance expert; writer

Thomas Ruttig, founder and member, Afghan Analysts Network

Mohammed Sadiq, Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan

Saleem Safi, GEO TV current affairs programme host "Jirga"

Amrullah Saleh, Former head of the Afghan Secret Services, leader of the Green Trend Party and member of the Afghanistan National Front (ANF)

Michael Semple, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University

Mikhael Shamahmoud, former Interior Deputy Minister, Director of USIP office

Naveed Shinwari, Director, Community Appraisal & Motivation Programme (CAMP), specialist on FATA

Hu Shisheng, Professor of South Asia studies, South Asia scholar at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR)

Ayesha Sidiqqa, author and independent social scientist

Abubakar Siddique, Senior Correspondent, Afghanistan and Pakistan for RFE/RL, researcher and writer

Herdis Sigurgrimsdottir, Communication Advisor, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, NOREF

Bernard Smith, Afghanistan Correspondent, *Al Jazeera*

Ekaterina Stepanova, Head, Peace and Conflict Studies Unit, Institute of the World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow

Arne Strand, Deputy Director, Research Director, Coordinator: Peace and Conflict

Astri Suhrke, political scientist, Afghanistan expert

Elia Susanna i López, Assistant Professor, American University of Kabul

Shahrbanou Tadjbaksh, Researcher Associate, Peace Research Institute Oslo, PRIO

Stina Torjesen, University of Agder. Member of NEGAP

Roberto Toscano, former Ambassador of Italy to Iran; former Woodrow Wilson Public Policy Scholar

Olav-Nils Thue, Senior Advisor at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Vygaudas Usackas, EU Special Representative to Afghanistan

Félix Valdés, Special Ambassador for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Martine Van Bijlert, Co-Director, Afghan Analysts Network

Jordi Vaquer, Director, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, CIDOB

Francesc Vendrell, former European Union Representative to Afghanistan

Pere Vilanova, Professor of Political Science, UB and Senior Associated Fellow at CIDOB

Declan Walsh, journalist; correspondent for the New York Times

Marvin Weinbaum, Scholar in Residence, Middle East Institute Washington DC

Lars Gunnar Wigemark, EU Ambassador to Pakistan

Ann Wilkens, former Ambassador of Sweden to Pakistan, with accreditation to Afghanistan; Board Member, Afghan Analysts Network

Hussein Yasa, Executive Director, Afghanistan Institute of Research & Analysis

Moeed Yusuf, South Asia Advisor, US Institute of Peace

Salman Zaidi, Deputy Director, Jinnah Institute

Faizullah Zaki, Spokesman of the Afghanistan National Front (ANF); Deputy Chairman Junbish party