

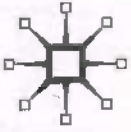
China and India in Central Asia

A New "Great Game"?

Edited by

Marlène Laruelle, Jean-François Huchet,
Sébastien Peyrouse, and Bayram Balci

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CHINA AND INDIA IN CENTRAL ASIA

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CHAPTER 12

The Reconstruction in Afghanistan: The Indian and Chinese Contribution

GULSHAN SACHDEVA¹

Afghanistan has witnessed diverse projects of nation building and sociopolitical transformation in the recent decades. The Soviet project of building communism in Afghanistan resulted in over 1 million dead and 5 million Afghan refugees, mainly in the neighborhood. Similarly, when Pakistan pushed the conservative Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the world faced disastrous consequences, including 9/11. The current international project of building democracy and market economy is mandated by the United Nations and being implemented mainly by the Western alliance led by the United States. So far, this endeavor has produced mixed results. Apart from installing a democratic government, the country has made significant achievements in infrastructure, education, and the economy in the last eight years. After reaching record levels in 2007, opium cultivation and production have somewhat stabilized at moderate levels in the last two years. Although the alliance has had significant successes in many areas, the Taliban insurgency is gaining strength in some parts of the country and security situation has deteriorated. There is also an alarming rise in suicide bombings. Most analysts believe that there is a need to rethink the present strategy.²

The new Af-Pak policy in Afghanistan has failed to show any significant improvement. Instead of weakening, antigovernment forces have been able to increase its strength even in northern Afghanistan.³ Within six months of announcing a "comprehensive new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan" in which the new U.S. president Barack Obama aimed "to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future,"⁴ he was again considering shifting his strategy.⁵

The new Afghanistan-Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy outlined by the U.S. State department in January 2010 focuses on reintegration, expanded civilian presence, and regional diplomacy. At the recent London Conference participants “re-affirmed the goals of greater Afghan leadership, increased regional cooperation and more effective international partnership.” To end the stalemate, consensus is also emerging on reconciliation with the Taliban.

With continuing excessive focus on security, narcotics, and corruption in the Western media, relatively less attention has been paid to India and China in Afghan reconstruction as well as developments in the area of regional cooperation. This chapter also argues that despite difficult security situation and limited capacities, Afghanistan could emerge as an important player in regional economic cooperation. All international and regional players have appreciated its approach toward regional cooperation. High economic growth in both Central and South Asian regions is also pushing policymakers to work for integration strategies. It is further argued that developments in the area of regional cooperation involving Afghanistan have major implications for regional peace and stability as well as India’s linkages with the Eurasian region.

Background

Decades of war, followed by the Taliban regime, destroyed the core institutions of Afghan state. The heavily war-torn economy faced high levels of absolute poverty, ill health, large-scale illiteracy, and complete marginalization of female population. In addition, millions of Afghans left the country and became refugees mainly in the neighboring countries. After the fall of Taliban, all Afghan factions who were opposed to Taliban met in Bonn in December 2001. The meeting was sponsored by the United Nations. The Bonn Agreement⁶ charted the roadmap for the political transformation of the country into a democratic state. The UN Security Council endorsed the agreement through its resolution 1383.⁷ Under the leadership of Hamid Karzai, a transitional administration was established to guide the process of transformation. The interim administration derived its authority through the *Loya Jirgha* (Grand Council) convened by former Afghan king Zahir Shah. In early 2002, international donors pledged about US\$4.5 billion in Tokyo for the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. In March 2002, the UN also established the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The constitutional *Loya Jirgha* adopted a new constitution in January 2004, with the presidential form of government. In April 2004 in Berlin, 23 donor nations pledged a total of US\$8.2 billion in aid to Afghanistan over three

Under the new constitution, presidential elections were held in October 2004 and parliamentary elections in September 2005. More than 75 percent voters participated in the presidential election and a significant number of women were elected to the National Assembly. The constitution also established legal protection for private property and it was presumed that economic development in the country will be based mainly on the market economy. These were remarkable achievements for a country destroyed by decades of war. Once these landmarks were achieved, international community and the Afghanistan government agreed on the *Afghanistan Compact*⁹ at the London Conference in 2005. The compact set ambitious targets for security, governance, development, regional cooperation, and counter-narcotics. While reviewing the *Afghanistan Compact*, at another international conference on Afghanistan in Paris in June 2008, the international community made further commitments for the next five years.¹⁰ Despite serious difficulties, the process of the second presidential election was completed in 2009.

Achievements

According to the *Afghanistan National Development Strategy*¹¹ (ANDS) more than 5 million Afghan refugees have returned home since 2002. In 2006 alone 342,925 Afghan refugees returned from Pakistan and Iran and another 1,000 from other countries. The number of school-going children has grown from under 1 million in 2001 to about 6 million in 2007 (one-third of them are girls). In 2007, there were more than 9,000 schools (including 1,337 all-girls and 4,325 co-educational). The number of teachers has increased sevenfold to 142,500, which included 40,000 female teachers. In the health and nutrition sector, an amount of more than US\$1 billion has been invested in the last five years. As a result, percentage of people living in areas where basic health care facilities are made available has increased from 9 percent in 2002 to 85 percent in 2008. Infant mortality rate has been reduced by 26 percent in five years¹²; 76 percent of children under the age of five have been immunized against childhood diseases. Between 2002 and 2008, there has been a 38 percent reduction in child mortality and 40 percent in maternal mortality. As a result, the lives of approximately 500,000 children have been saved since 2003.¹³

It is remarkable that despite a difficult legacy, the macroeconomic stability in Afghanistan has been maintained in the last few years (see table 12.1). This has been a result of disciplined fiscal and monetary policies. A new currency was successfully introduced. Till 2007, inflation remained reasonably low and exchange rate has been stable. More than a dozen private commercial banks, two private airlines, and 13 microfinance institutions are operating successfully. About 150 cities across Afghanistan now have access to mobile phone

Table 12.1 Some Macroeconomic Indicators in Afghanistan

Year	GDP Growth	Inflation	Exchange rate to US\$ (annual average)
2004	8.0	N.A	47.8
2005	16.1	12.3	49.7
2006	8.2	5.3	49.9
2007	12.1	12.9	49.8
2008	3.4	28.3	50.2
2009*	9.0	6.0	N.A
2010*	7.5	6.8	N.A

Note: *projected

Source: *Asian Development Outlook 2009* (ADB: 2009), pp. 296, 303, 314.

networks and Internet provider services. Many multinationals are already operating or showing an interest in Afghanistan, which include Coca Cola, Siemens, Nestle, and Etisalat. In 2001, only 15,000 people had access to telecom facilities. Today the number of telephone users (mainly mobile) has crossed 4 million, which is more than 15 percent of the population. Afghan Telecom has installed 86,000 fixed digital lines and 233,000 wireless lines in all 34 provinces. By mid-2009 the process of constructing a 3,200-kilometer optical-fiber network connecting major provincial capitals with one another and also with neighboring countries will be complete. A largely free and privately owned media sector has developed. Presently Afghanistan has seven national TV stations (out of which six are private), numerous radio networks, and a diverse and increasingly professional print media. According to government sources, about 12,000 kilometers of roadways have been rehabilitated, improved, or built, including the 2,200-kilometer-long ring road that connects all major towns of Afghanistan, national highways, provincial roads, and rural roads. More than US\$2 billion has been spent on roads. All these projects are implemented in difficult security situations that are normally not mentioned while discussing broader security and strategic matters concerning Afghanistan.

Security Situation and Narcotics

After initial successes till 2004–2005, situation in Afghanistan has become more difficult, complex, and challenging. One of the main reasons has been the deteriorating security situation, particularly in the south and east of the country. A major change that has happened in the last three years is the rise in suicide bombings that reached almost 150 in 2007 and further increased in

Table 12.2 Coalition Military Fatalities in Afghanistan, 2001–2009 (by year and month)

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2001	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	5	4	12
2002	10	12	14	10	1	3	0	3	1	6	1	8	69
2003	4	7	12	2	2	7	2	4	2	6	8	1	57
2004	11	2	3	3	9	5	2	4	4	8	7	1	59
2005	2	3	6	19	4	29	2	33	12	10	7	4	131
2006	1	17	13	5	17	22	19	29	38	17	9	4	191
2007	2	18	10	20	25	24	29	34	24	15	22	9	232
2008	14	7	19	14	23	46	30	46	37	19	12	27	294
2009	25	24	28	14	27	38	76	77	70	74	32	35	520

Source: <http://icasualties.org/oef/> (accessed on 15 January 2010)

2008. As table 12.2 shows the figures of coalition casualties in Afghanistan are growing with every passing year making 2009 the bloodiest year since 2001.

In addition, opium production continues to be a serious problem in Afghanistan although 2008 and 2009 opium surveys by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have shown that there has been some moderate decline. In 2008 it was shown that 98 percent of the total cultivation was confined to seven provinces with serious security problems. Five out of these provinces were in the south and two in the west of Afghanistan. The seven provinces that contributed to 98 percent of Afghan opium cultivation and production in 2008 were Hilmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Daykundi, Zabul, Farah, and Nimroz, clearly showing strong linkages between local opium production and the security situation. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan has decreased by 22 percent, from 157,000 hectares in 2008 to 123,000 hectares in 2009. In 2008, Hilmand remained the single largest opium-cultivating province where 66 percent of the total Afghan opium cultivation was done. In 2009 cultivation declined by a third, to less than 70,000 hectares in Hilmand. The 2009 survey also shows that compared to 13 in 2007 and 18 in 2008, 20 provinces (out of 34) were poppy free. All the seven provinces in the northern region have been poppy free for almost a decade. The survey rightly asserts that “controlling drugs in Afghanistan will not solve all of the country’s problems, but the country’s problems cannot be solved without controlling drugs.”¹⁴

Various official and unofficial reports and studies have broadly pointed out that Afghanistan today is at crossroads. The *Afghanistan Study Group* report that was released in early 2008 sums up the mood by asserting that “the progress achieved after six years of international engagement is under serious threat from resurgent violence, weakening international resolve, mounting regional challenges and a growing lack of confidence on the part of the Afghan people about the future direction of their country”¹⁵

Similarly, the *Centre for Strategic and International Studies* (CSIS) report¹⁶ sums up its findings as follows: (1) Afghans are losing trust in their government because of an escalation in violence; (2) Public expectations are neither being met nor managed; and (3) Conditions in Afghanistan have deteriorated in all key areas targeted for development, except for the economy and women's rights. In September 2008 the UN secretary general in its report observed that "the overall situation in Afghanistan has become more challenging." Despite enhanced capacities, he notes that the "security situation has deteriorated markedly." Further, "the influence of the insurgency has expanded beyond traditionally volatile areas" and "incidents stemming from cross border activities from Pakistan have increased significantly in terms of numbers and sophistication." In addition, he mentions that the humanitarian situation has also deteriorated. The report also draws particular attention to the increase in the number of civilian casualties that "are caused mainly by anti-government activities but are also the unintended consequence of operations by pro-government forces."¹⁷

In 2009, General Stanley A. McChrystal, the then commander of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, had warned that the situation is serious and "neither success nor failure can be taken for granted" and that "many indicators suggest that situation is deteriorating." He further wrote that "we face not only a resilient and growing insurgency, there is also a crisis of confidence among Afghans—in both their government and in the international community—that undermines our credibility and emboldens the insurgents."¹⁸

Reconstruction

Overall, more than 70 nations have committed over US\$57 billion for Afghan reconstruction. As of February 2009, the United States had pledged US\$38.6 billion, out of which US\$22 billion had already been disbursed. As table 12.3 shows, more than 50 percent of this aid has gone into building the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. Other commitments are in the areas of economic and social development, governance, counter-narcotics and support to many civil society activities. Apart from this, the number of U.S. troops serving in Afghanistan could touch 100,000 in 2010.¹⁹ Figures provided in table 12.3 do not include resources provided for military operation in the country.

The other major commitment to Afghanistan is from Europe. Individual member states of the EU and the European Commission are making significant contribution to security and justice reforms, development and reconstruction, counter-narcotics and regional cooperation activities in Afghanistan.

Table 12.3 U.S. Government Funding Provided in Support of Afghan Security, Stabilization, and Development, Fiscal Years 2002–2009

<i>Dollars in millions</i>	<i>Fiscal Years</i>								<i>Total</i>
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009 ^a	
Security	\$147	\$388	\$949	\$2,307	\$1,989	\$7,431	\$2,763	\$5,606	\$21,580
—Afghan National Army	86	361	719	1,633	736	4,872	1,778	4,043	14,228
—Afghan National Police	24	0	160	624	1,217	2,523	964	1,512	7,024
—Other security	37	27	70	50	36	36	21	51	328
Governance, rule of law, human rights	110	97	262	244	110	286	517	824	2,450
—Democracy/Governance	103	89	233	223	80	221	391	614	1,954
—Rule of law	7	8	29	21	30	65	126	210	496
Economic and social development	650	498	1,153	1,570	1,007	1,591	2,100	2,448	11,017
—Reconstruction	124	295	855	1,240	706	1,191	1,494	1,871	7,776
—Humanitarian/Other	526	203	298	330	301	400	606	577	3,241
Counternarcotics	40	3	126	775	420	737	617	802	3,520
—Eradication	39	0	50	257	138	177	183	202	1,046
—Interdiction	1	3	76	338	137	323	248	366	1,492
—Alternative development	0	0	0	175	140	229	181	225	950
—Other counternarcotics	0	0	0	5	5	8	5	9	32
Total	\$947	\$986	\$2,490	\$4,896	\$3,526	\$10,045	\$5,997	\$9,680	\$38,567

Source: *Afghanistan: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight*, Report to Congressional Committee (Washington DC: U.S. Government Accountability Office, April 2009), p. 4. Available at www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-09-473SP (accessed November 15, 2009).

EU has also deployed a police mission. Together they have committed around 8 billion euros (around US\$11.5 billion) for reconstruction activities. In addition, twenty five EU nations are participating in the NATO-led ISAF with around 30,000 troops. Their military involvement in Afghanistan has been controversial at times because of limits of their deployment and “national caveats” on many of their troops. Many EU nations committed themselves thinking that it would mainly be a peacekeeping and reconstruction effort rather than a project of “war on terror” in which they have to engage with the resurgent Taliban. There have also been problems of coordination with other international partners as well as within the EU nations themselves.

Despite significant success in many areas (economy, education, infrastructure, health, women rights), defeatism is spreading in many European capitals. Exit strategies are being worked out, including "negotiated settlements" with the Taliban. On reconstruction, the United Kingdom has spent over BP 740 million (around US\$1175 million) in the last eight years and committed to more than BP 510 million (US\$810 million) over the next four years.²⁰ Germany has also increased its funding in 2008–2009; by 2010, it is likely to have made available resources worth some 1.2 billion euros (US\$1.72 billion).²¹ From Asia, Japan has pledged around US\$1.8 billion to Afghanistan for projects in areas including reconstruction (US\$919 million), security (US\$212 million), and governance (US\$247 million). Together with the UN, Japan is a lead nation in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and is also involved in the construction of the Kabul-Kandahar highway and a terminal at the Kabul International Airport.

Indian Role in Reconstruction

With a broad understanding that peaceful and stable Afghanistan is crucial for regional stability, India has been playing an active role in the reconstruction since 2002. So far it has pledged assistance for about US\$1.3 billion, with projects covering the whole country mainly in the areas of road construction, power transmission lines, hydroelectricity, agriculture, telecommunication, education, health, and capacity building. Details of these projects can be classified under four major heads:²²

One of the major infrastructural projects completed by India is the construction of the 218-kilometer-long Zaranj-Delaram road in southwestern Afghanistan. This road has a strategic significance for India as it is going to facilitate movement of goods and services from Afghanistan to the Iranian border and, onward, to the Chahbahar Port. This road, together with 60 kilometers of inner-city roads in Zaranj and Gurguri, was completed in January 2009 at a cost of US\$150 million. During construction 6 Indians and 179 Afghans lost their lives due to insurgent attacks. Another major project, which was completed in 2009, was the construction of a 220kV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul and a 220/110/20 kV substation at Chimtala. Built at the cost of US\$120 million, this line has facilitated an almost 24-hour power supply from the northern grid to Kabul City. Further, Indian engineers will also be setting up additional 220/20 kV substations at Charikar and Doshi along with Pul-e-Khumri Kabul transmission line. With India's help, construction and commissioning of the 42 MW Salma Dam power project on the Hari Rud River in Herat province is also going to be completed by the end of 2010 at the cost of US\$184 million.

The Indian government is also going to invest US\$180 million to construct the Afghan Parliament building by 2011. It has also restored telecommunication infrastructure in 11 provinces and expanded national TV network by providing an uplink from Kabul and downlinks in all 34 provincial capitals. Earlier, it also supplied vehicles (400 buses and 200 minibuses for mass urban transportation, 105 utility vehicles for municipalities) and 3 airbus aircrafts and spares to Ariana Afghan Airlines. The Indian government also supplied equipment for three substations in the Faryab province and for a 125-kilometer-long transmission line from Andkhoi to Maimana, besides rehabilitating Amir Ghazi and the Quargah Reservoir Dam. It further helped in the restoration/revamping of the Afghan media, including the setting up of Azadi (Freedom) printing press, a 100KW-SW transmitter at Yakatoot (Kabul), as well as a TV satellite uplinking/downlinking facility for 10 TV stations and a downlinking facility and TV transmitters in 24 provinces. Other infrastructure projects include solar electrification of 100 villages, construction of a 5000MT cold storage in Kandahar, establishment of a modern TV studio and a 1000W TV transmitter in Jalalabad, setting up of a mobile TV satellite uplink and five TV relay centers in Nangarhar, digging 26 tube wells in 6 northwestern provinces, drilling of 24 deep wells in Herat, planning the construction of a Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) building in Jalalabad and leasing of slots on the Indian satellite INSAT3A for RTA telecast since 2004.

At the humanitarian level, the Indian government is providing a daily supply of 100 grams of fortified, high-protein biscuits to nearly 1.2 million children under a School Feeding Program. This program is administered through the World Food Program and will cost US\$460 million when completed in 2012. It has also reconstructed the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Kabul and provides free medical consultation and medicines through branches of the Indian Medical Mission in Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharif to over 300,000 patients annually. Apart from supplying blankets, tents, medicines, vegetables, seeds, and other items during 2002–2004, the Indian government also announced a gift of 250,000 metric tons of wheat in 2009.

India is also playing an important role in the field of education by providing 675 long-term university scholarships annually. These fellowships are sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations for undergraduate and postgraduate studies. In addition, 675 annual slots for short-term technical training courses are being provided every year since 2006. At the January 2010 London Conference, the Indian external affairs minister announced further 200 graduate and 100 postgraduate/PhD fellowships for 5 years in agriculture and related fields. In 2005, with India's assistance, the Habibia School in Kabul was reconstructed and about 9,000 educational kits provided to its students. Further, it provided 20,000 school desks to the Ministry of

Education and laboratory equipments and sports goods to schools in Nimroz as well as teacher training and books to Kandahar and Khost Universities.

In cooperation with the UNDP, the Indian government has also been deputing 30 Indian civil servants as coaches and mentors annually under the Capacity for Afghan Public Administration program since 2007. It has also provided services of Indian banking experts to Da Afghan Bank and the Millie Bank as well as of Indian English teachers in 5 cities; it has provided vocational training in carpentry, tailoring, welding, masonry, and plumbing (through the Confederation of Indian Industries) to 1,000 Afghans as well as in garment making, nursery plantation, food processing, and marketing to 1,000 Afghan women (through the Women's Vocational Training Centre in Baghe-Zanana), besides setting up computer training centers as well as Hindi and English departments at the Nangarhar University. Special training courses have also been provided to more than 150 Afghan diplomats at the Indian Foreign Service Institute, 30 staff of the National Assembly at the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training, about 300 Afghan police, 60 teachers, 60 doctors and paramedics, 60 Ariana Airlines officials, and 40 officials from the Ministry of Mining and Industry. In addition, Indian institutions are also providing training to Afghans in various fields through training programs organized by many international agencies independently.

With the help of the Indian government, around 100 small development projects in the areas of agriculture, public health, rural development, and education have also been under different stages of implementation in 19 provinces of Afghanistan since 2007. In 2002, India contributed US\$10 million to the Afghan government budget and has supported the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund regularly since 2002. In 2005–2006, it also provided 150 trucks, 15 ambulances, 120 jeeps, bulletproof jackets, bulletproof helmets, laser-aim points, mine detectors, winter clothing, medicines, and other items to the Afghan National Army. It also helped in the setting up of the Common Facilities Service Centre and Tool Room at the Pule-e-Charkhi Industrial Park and trained 5,000 self-help groups in Balakh. The government of India has also agreed to restore the Stor Palace in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the House of Screens in old Kabul City.

It seems the Afghans have a very positive perception of Indian activities in the country. This fact has been brought out by many opinion polls. In the latest nationwide survey conducted by the BBC, ABC News, and the German news agency ARD in December 2009, 71 percent of Afghans had a very favorable or favorable opinion about India (see tables 12.4 and 12.5). Corresponding figures for the United States, the United Kingdom, Iran, and Germany were 51 percent, 39 percent, 40 percent, and 59 percent respectively. Only 15 percent of the Afghan population had a favorable opinion

Table 12.4 Afghan Population's Opinion about Different Countries, 2009

	USA	UK	India	Iran	Germany	Pakistan
Very favorable	8	7	29	18	17	2
Somewhat favorable	43	32	42	32	42	13
Somewhat unfavorable	21	28	22	25	21	32
Very unfavorable	25	24	14	20	14	49
No opinion	3	9	7	6	8	3

Source: BBC, ABC and ARD Poll, December 2009. Available at www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/11_01_10_afghanpoll.pdf (accessed January 15, 2010)

Table 12.5 Afghan Population's Opinion about Overall Role Played by Different Countries, 2009

	USA	UK	India	Iran	Russia	Pakistan
Positive	45	28	36	23	22	9
Neutral	18	31	44	29	38	13
Negative	31	31	13	39	31	73
No Opinion	6	10	6	5	5	5

Source: BBC, ABC and ARD Poll, December 2009. Available at www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/11_01_10_afghanpoll.pdf (accessed January 15, 2010)

about Pakistan. Similarly, 44 percent Afghans think that India is playing a neutral role and 36 percent think it is playing a positive role.

Chinese Involvement in Reconstruction and Development

China condemned Soviet intervention in Afghanistan²³ and later cooperated with the United States in arming Afghan Mujahedin groups against Soviet occupation.²⁴ After the collapse of the Taliban, Chinese authorities showed relatively little interest in Afghanistan's reconstruction. According to Chinese government sources, China has provided more than 900 million Yuan (US\$132 million) in grants to Afghanistan. The main projects include the Jomhuri Hospital and the Parwan Irrigation Project as well as training for about 500 Afghan officials in diplomacy, trade, finance, agriculture, counter-narcotics, and other fields.²⁵ It remained disengaged in the country until the Afghan administration opened its energy, mineral, and raw material to foreign investors.²⁶ In November 2007, the Metallurgical Construction Corporation of China (MCC) and the Jiangxi Copper Limited (JCC) consortium were

selected as preferred bidders for the Aynak copper mine project by the Afghanistan Ministry of Mines. In 2008, the Afghan cabinet approved the project.

The Aynak copper mine, a 28 sq. km field, is in Logar province, some 60 kilometers southeast of Kabul. This is the second largest copper mine in the world. According to the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency, MCC plans to invest US\$2.9 billion in the project; with investment reaching to US\$5 billion in the future. MCC will pay to the Afghan government US\$400 million annually to operate the mine and an additional US\$800 million as assurance to start extraction work at the copper mine. MCC has also agreed to build a 400 MW power station that will be used both for the mine and for the residents of Kabul. MCC will excavate the coal mine deposits in the area for its energy resource and is committed to build a railway line from the Logar province to one of Afghanistan's borders to facilitate the export of copper. It is expected that this large investment including subprojects will create direct and indirect employment opportunities for 15,000 people. Based on facts from the Ministry of Mines, the Aynak copper mine is believed to contain almost 20 million tons of copper. The construction period of this project is 5 years with a production period of 30 years. There have been allegations that a bribe of US\$30 million was paid to get this contract.²⁷ However, the minister of mines rejects all bribery allegations, saying that MCC's bid was the strongest.²⁸ In March 2009, at the special conference on Afghanistan, organized under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, members "stressed the importance of concerted and combined efforts in the region to counter terrorism, illicit narcotics and organized crime, in particular coordination and cooperation of Afghanistan and its neighbors."²⁹

In recent years, the Chinese have begun to understand that, as a major power, China has to take some major responsibilities in Afghanistan. Broadly speaking, three views of Chinese involvement have emerged. The first view is that China should stop seeing the Afghan issue as an exclusive American problem as it has long-term security implications for China. A second more cautious view indicates many negative consequences for its involvement in the Afghan problem. A third view suggests that instead of a regular army China may send police and paramilitary forces into Afghanistan.³⁰ Whatever position the Chinese government takes in future, it is becoming clear that it will be more involved in Afghanistan than hitherto.

Regional Economic Cooperation

Despite difficult security situation, bad governance, and limited capacities, Afghanistan could emerge as an important player in regional economic

cooperation. Policymakers in Afghanistan believe that after decades of war the country now has a unique opportunity to realize its potential as a "land bridge" between Central, South, and West Asia. They also advocate that peace and stability in this strategically important country is going to provide huge economic opportunities not only to Afghanistan but also to its neighbors. Increasingly it is pointed out that with enhanced cooperation, landlocked energy-rich Central Asia could be connected to energy-deficient South Asia. Similarly, Afghanistan could also realize significant revenue as transit fee and improve its economic activities in the process.

Most official declarations indicate that Afghanistan is seriously committed to regional cooperation. It intends to share the benefits of its centrality through regional cooperation with its neighbors and countries beyond its immediate neighborhood. The two major documents *The Afghanistan Compact* and *The Afghanistan National Development Strategy* clearly show that regional economic cooperation is one of the main priorities of the government. Despite difficult conditions and limited capacities, the Afghan government has been able to market itself as an important player in regional cooperation. This is evident through various international declarations such as the Good Neighborly Relations Declaration of 2002, the Dubai Declaration of 2003, the Berlin Agreements of 2003, the Bishkek Conference of 2004, the Kabul Conference declaration of 2005, the New Delhi Conference declaration of 2006, and the Islamabad Conference declaration of 2009. Through these announcements, countries in the region have accepted the centrality of Afghanistan in economic cooperation.

Afghan Engagement with Regional Organizations

Afghanistan has requested for accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). In December 2004, the General Council of the WTO established a working party to examine its membership. At the WTO General Council, Afghan ambassador Assad Omer reiterated that Afghanistan "hoped to re-establish itself as the land bridge for trans-continental trade." Apart from making efforts to join the WTO, the country is also simultaneously engaged with many of its neighbors through bilateral and multilateral trade, economic, and investment agreements. Afghanistan is an active member of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). At the fourteenth South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit, which was held in New Delhi in April 2007, Afghanistan became the eighth member of the group. Afghanistan's membership in the SAARC has the potential to bring new dynamism in economic relations between the South Asian and Central Asian regions. Afghanistan also serves in the contact group of the Shanghai

Cooperation Organization (SCO). Through its membership in the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), the Central and South Asia Transport and Trade Forum (CSATTF), and the UN Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECAs), Afghanistan is also trying to involve itself with various regional projects and activities associated with enhanced regional cooperation. Officially it is claimed that “through regional cooperation, Afghanistan wishes to (a) improve trading opportunities; (b) integrate itself with the regional rail and road networks; (c) be an important partner in regional energy markets; (d) eliminate narcotics trade; and (e) achieve Millennium Development Goals.”³¹

Regional Economic Cooperation Conference (RECC) on Afghanistan

To publicize the concept of Afghanistan’s centrality and to identify some regional projects, Afghanistan initiated an institutional mechanism called Regional Economic Cooperation Conference (RECC) in 2005. The first RECC was held in Kabul on December 4–5, 2005 and was organized at the initiative of the United Kingdom, the G-8 chair at the time. The Kabul Conference attempted to bring together 11 regional countries—namely, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Uzbekistan—and G-8 representatives along with officials from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, IMF, ECO, SCO, and other such organizations. The focus of the initiative was to promote specific forms of economic cooperation in areas of critical concern to the regional countries. These included specific sectors such as trade, investment and transport facilitation, electricity trade, and energy development, among others. At the end, an ambitious Kabul Declaration was adopted that incorporated decisions on areas that were identified as promoting cooperation. These areas included (a) electricity trade and power development; (b) sharing the benefits of water; (c) counter-narcotics; (d) transport; (e) energy transport; (f) trade facilitation; and (e) business climate.

The second RECC was hosted by India in New Delhi in November 2006. This meeting tried to build on the work done at Kabul in 2005 and followed on the themes identified in that conference. The countries that participated at the New Delhi meeting were Canada, China, Finland (EU presidency), France, Germany, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Uzbekistan. In addition, ADB, Aga Khan Development Network, European Commission, European Council, IMF,

major themes discussed in New Delhi were trade and transport facilitation, investment, regional energy trading, and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline. Special focus was also given to renewal energy and agriculture. In association with the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA), concurrent business meetings were also held. Some of the recommendations of these meetings included the following:

- The creation of a Centre for Regional Cooperation in Kabul.
- Public-Private partnership as a key aspect of regional development.
- Existing regional groupings should consider integrating their efforts into a larger single entity.
- Afghanistan would benefit more from a region-specific approach to capacity development.
- New themes for the next conference were identified as mining, water, health, labor movement and human resource development, and trade and transit.

Similarly, among other things, the New Delhi Declaration decided that

- Regional countries will undertake stronger credibility/confidence-building measures and will intensify efforts to remove obstacles to over-land trade and transit between countries and regions.
- The short-term focus of regional economic cooperation will be on practical win-win projects, notably in the fields of energy, transport and trade, agriculture, and mining.
- There will be better information sharing, via prioritization of key issues, among the countries and regional organizations in order to avoid duplication of efforts.
- ADB will undertake a study on regional integration strategies and will share key findings at the next conference.
- Regional countries will work toward aviation liberalization for greater regional connectivity.
- Work will be accelerated on TAPI gas pipeline to develop a technically and commercially viable project.
- The regional countries will encourage forging of institutional linkages with training institutes in their respective countries with a view to capacity building of their workforce, with the long-term objective of establishing regional training institutes in specialized areas.

At the New Delhi conference it was decided that the next RECC will take place in Islamabad in 2007. However, due to political changes and other reasons, it was postponed many times. Finally, the third RECC took place in Islamabad in May 2009 where many issues concerning trade,

energy, capacity building, agriculture, and counter-narcotics were discussed. Among many other decisions, it was agreed that priority will be given to the following items.

- Conclusion of Trade and Transit agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan before the end of 2009.
- A pre-feasibility study (to be conducted by the European Commission) of railways across Afghanistan linking major destinations within Afghanistan and its neighbors.
- Establishment of a Customs Academy in Kabul.
- Feasibility studies for the development of border economic zones around Afghanistan.
- A centre (supported by the European Commission) within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to follow up on issues of regional economic cooperation.

At the conference it was also agreed that the next RECC will take place in Turkey.

Developments Targeting Regional Integration

It is not only that Afghanistan and its neighbors have signed some agreements; there is also significant development in the actual realization of some of these initiatives.

Afghanistan has practically no rail or water transport connections. Besides using the meager air transport, the country relies mainly on road transport. Till 1980, Afghanistan had 18,000 kilometers of road network, out of which a stretch of only 3,000 kilometers was asphalted. As a result of decades of conflict, the road network was completely destroyed. In the last few years, the country has been working on a major program of improving its road network. As per the Road Master Plan, Afghanistan has four kinds of roads: national highways (3,363 kilometers), regional highways (4,884 kilometers), provincial roads (9,656 kilometers), and rural roads (17,000 kilometers). For regional cooperation, improvement in regional roads is very important as they connect Afghanistan with its neighboring countries, namely, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. They also connect neighboring countries with each other. With the help of multilateral agencies and donor countries (mainly USAID, World Bank, ADB, European Commission, Japan, Iran, India, Pakistan, among others), most of these regional roads have been rehabilitated and/or constructed. Under this program rehabilitation of the ring road has been given priority as it connects the country starting in Kabul, going through Doshi-Puekhumry, Mazar-e-Sharif, Faryab, Badghees, Herat, and Kandahar, and finally ending in Kabul.

The total length of the ring road is 2,210 kilometers. By June 2009, the Ministry of Public Works claimed that 90 percent of the ring road project was complete. The remaining 10 percent was expected to be completed in the next 18 months with an additional cost of US\$ 300 million. The roads that connect Afghanistan to its neighbors and consequently to countries in the region are as follows: Kabul-Torkham, Herat-Torghundi, Herat-Islamqala, Kandahar-Spinboldok, Aquina-Andhkhoy, Delaram-Zeranj, and Pule Khumri-Sherkhan Bandar Naibabad. Total length of these roads is 1,153 kilometers. Out of which, 597 kilometers have been rehabilitated so far.

As a significant portion of the national ring road has already been completed, transit time through Afghanistan is greatly lowered. The opening of Sher Khan Bandar "Friendship Bridge" connecting Afghanistan and Tajikistan was also another major milestone. This bridge, 672 meters long and 11 meters wide, and costing US\$37 million, will not only connect two neighboring countries but also help increase trade and investment flows in the entire region. The plans for connecting Afghanistan with Iran (Herat-Sangan project) and Pakistan (Chaman-Spinboldok railway) are at different stages of implementation. With the completion of the ring road and further connections with neighbors, Afghanistan can also plan to become a partner in north-south transport corridors. Improvement in transit facilities through Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan and development of Regional Opportunity Zones (ROZ) on the Af-Pak border has the potential to further integrate the region.

In the area of power, Afghanistan is already involved in serious cross-border energy trade. By early 2009, imported power represented about 25-30 percent of Afghanistan's imported power supply. Currently, it imports about 100 MW of power from four neighboring countries, namely, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Under the North Eastern Power System (NEPS), Afghanistan expects to import another 300 MW of power from Uzbekistan by 2008-2009. Similarly, through the Central Asia-South Asia project (CASA-1000), it is expected that by 2012 it will import 1,300 MW of additional power from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan; out of this, about 300 MW of power will remain in Afghanistan and the remaining 1,000 MW will be exported to Pakistan. Various bilateral electricity trade deals such as the NEPS,³² together with evolving new multilateral projects such as CASA-1000, could eventually lead to the creation of an integrated Central Asia-South Asia Regional Electricity Market (CASAREM). In January 2009, a project of electricity transfer from Uzbekistan to Kabul covering a distance of 462 kilometers over the Hindu Kush through the Salang Pass was inaugurated. The 202-kilometer-long 220 KV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul along with Chimtala substation project is one of the major Indian infrastructure projects in Afghanistan.

Importance for India

Afghanistan's success in regional cooperation initiatives has major implications for India's linkages with the Central Asian region in the long run. Trade through Pakistan and Afghanistan could also alter India's continental trade. By 2015, India's trade with Europe, CIS plus Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan would be in the range of US\$500 to 600 billion annually. Even if 20 percent of this trade is conducted through road, US\$100 to 120 billion of Indian trade would be passing through the Eurasian region.³³ With improvement in India-Pakistan relations, an important portion of Indian trade (particularly from the landlocked northern states including Jammu and Kashmir) will be moving through Pakistan and Afghanistan. With the possibility of this trade passing through Afghanistan and Central Asia, most of the infrastructural projects in the region will become economically viable. These linkages will also transform small and medium industries and agriculture in Central Asia with the help of good Indian, as well as Pakistani, expertise in these fields. For this to happen, first of all a massive effort is needed to rebuild Afghanistan's transport network and economy. From the commitments of international community and multilateral institutions, it seems that this would happen immediately once there is relative political stability in Afghanistan. The second major impediment in realizing this potential is the existing difficult relation between India and Pakistan. While looking at the regional economic dynamics, it is clear that both India and Pakistan would be paying huge economic costs for not cooperating in the Central Asian region. If trade stops in Pakistan, many road and other infrastructural projects will never become viable because of low volumes. Similarly, India may never be able to radically restructure its continental trade through north-south corridor. Direct linkages between Central Asia and India will also give a huge boost to all economies in the region, particularly in Afghanistan. In cooperation with each other both India and Pakistan could become significant players in Central Asia. The economic costs of continuing conflict is going to be much bigger for both India and Pakistan than normally perceived by policymakers on both sides.

Success in Regional Economic Cooperation May Lead to Security Cooperation

Compared to a regional approach to economic development that has been well appreciated by all concerned players, the situation in security matters is more complex. Almost all forty-two nations that contribute troops to the ISAF are from outside the region. There are no troops from Iran, China, Pakistan, India, Russia, or Central Asian republics. These are the countries that are actually going to be directly affected by developments within Afghanistan.

Pakistan's involvement in security matters in Afghanistan is complicated. On the one hand, it helps the coalition forces in Afghanistan through logistics, intelligence, joint operations, and other such assistance as a major non-NATO ally. On the other hand, most of the Afghan insurgent groups have bases in Pakistan. In addition, they are given tactical support by many elements within the administration. Regional countries are not involved even in the training of security personnel. This despite the fact that trainers from Iran, India, Pakistan, and the Central Asian region could communicate in local languages and will have more cultural understanding of the place.

Today, what Afghanistan is facing is a typical insurgency. It has broadly two distinct insurgencies. One is the Kandahar-based insurgency that is mainly dominated by the Taliban in the south. The eastern insurgency is more complex. It is a loose confederation of affiliates such as the Haqqani Network and like-minded groups (Al Qaeda, Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, and Pakistani militant groups Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, and Tehrik Nefazi-Shariat Muhammad). Both the Taliban and the eastern groups have support structures in Pakistan. Their shared goals include the expulsion of all foreign military forces from Afghanistan, the elimination of external government influence in their respective areas, and the imposition of a religiously conservative, Pashtun-led government.³⁴

On the basis of 90 insurgencies over the world since 1945, a recent RAND study³⁵ shows that it takes an average of 14 years to defeat an insurgency. Due to history and topography, it might take even longer in Afghanistan. Experience in the region also shows that a large number of boots on the ground are needed to manage any insurgency. The ratio in South Asia is somewhere between 1 to 30 or 35. Current estimates of Taliban and other insurgents in Afghanistan are between 10,000 and 17,000. It means that to manage and defeat this insurgency a minimum 300,000 troops are needed in Afghanistan for at least ten to fifteen years. With the current number of troops it is going to be a very difficult task to manage Afghan insurgency. In the absence of the required numbers, the coalition forces have relied more on airpower in counterinsurgency operations. According to a human rights report, 116 civilians were killed in 2006 in 13 bombings. Similarly, 321 civilians were killed in 2007 in 22 bombings while hundreds more were injured. In the first seven months of 2008 at least 119 civilians were killed in 12 airstrikes.³⁶ According to UNAMA, in the first six months of 2009, 1,013 civilians died in Afghanistan due to the conflict. Out of this, 59 percent (595 deaths) were caused by antigovernment forces and 310 deaths by pro-government forces.³⁷ The large number of civilian casualties further undermines the legitimacy of the Afghan administration.

Moreover, it is highly unlikely that many of the ISAF-contributing European nations will be able to commit their forces for the next ten to fifteen years. Many European nations, including Germany and Italy, are seriously debating their

involvement in Afghanistan. So strategy in Afghanistan should be to raise the strength of the Afghan National Army to around 200,000 and to involve some of the regional countries in the management of the nation's security. To give a concrete shape to this plan, two major things need to happen in the region. First, a rapprochement between the United States and Iran must take place. Second, a dramatic improvement in relations between India and Pakistan is also a prerequisite for this strategy. Therefore, the war in Afghanistan is not only about troop numbers but also about serious diplomatic engagement by the United States to create a regional platform from where this war will be fought both militarily and diplomatically. Writing agenda for the new U.S. president, the current U.S. special envoy to the Af-Pak region Ambassador Richard Holbrooke wrote last year that "Afghanistan's future cannot be secured by a counterinsurgency effort alone; it will also require regional agreements that give Afghanistan's neighbors a stake in the settlement. That includes Iran—as well as China, India, and Russia. But the most important neighbor is, of course, Pakistan, which can destabilize Afghanistan at will—and has. Getting policy toward Islamabad right will be absolutely critical for the next administration—and very difficult"³⁸ So far there has been no regional institutional mechanism to address this issue. What is needed is a sustained institutional forum within the region to continue with this engagement on a long-term basis. Half-day meetings in some European capitals will not serve any purpose except for some photo opportunities.

Conclusion

Despite major challenges, Afghanistan has the potential to play an important role in facilitating regional integration for the different economies of South and Central Asia as well as the Middle East. Both India and China are playing a very important role in the reconstruction and development activities of Afghanistan. If proposals concerning regional economic cooperation originating from Afghanistan are implemented by other countries in the region, it could ultimately improve chances of peace not only between India and Pakistan but in the entire Eurasian region. In a typical neo-functional way, success in regional economic cooperation could ultimately lead to cooperation in security matters. This would also be useful to create any new institutional economic and security structure that may be needed for any post-NATO scenario in Afghanistan.

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