Research Paper

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Regional Implications of Afghanistan's Transitions

Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

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Summary

- The withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan does not pose a major security risk *per se* for regional neighbours. Rather, the problem is the lack of an adequate regional security structure. Scope exists for broader bilateral or regional engagement and discussion on a range of regional challenges. However, the lack of institutional capacity in Afghanistan is a constraining factor.

- Regional economic connectivity is limited. Obstacles to integration include water disputes. Two key development projects – the Central Asia–South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) and the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) pipeline – face numerous hurdles. Support for increased people-to-people contacts could provide an entry point for broader initiatives, but macro-level solutions are unlikely at this stage.

- Pakistan's relationship with the Afghan Taliban will remain one of the key determinants of Afghanistan's future stability. Islamabad tolerates violent radicalization so long as it does not target the Pakistani state. In contrast, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan regard *Pakistan*, not Afghanistan, as the main source of religious radicalization.

- The withdrawal from Afghanistan of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is unlikely to affect levels of drug-trafficking or crime, as the drug trade serves the interests of the ruling elites.

- Refugees are not a major concern for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, but a further influx of refugees in the event of a deterioration in security in Afghanistan would be destabilizing for Pakistan. Pakistan is seeking to reduce its attractiveness to Afghan refugees, but efforts to encourage repatriation are failing.

Introduction

The year 2014 was a crucial one for Afghanistan, as the country underwent three transitions. In the military sphere, responsibility for security was transferred from the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to Afghan forces. In politics, the country held national elections that – after two rounds of voting and a stand-off between rival candidates over the outcome – resulted in Ashraf Ghani succeeding Hamid Karzai as president. In the economic sphere, spending connected to the Western military presence declined and GDP growth stalled.

In the lead-up to these transitions there was much speculation, especially in the West, about the possible ramifications for Afghanistan's neighbours. At the same time, the dominant – although by no means universal[1] – narrative among neighbouring states' political elites was that Afghanistan's transitions presented particular security risks.

This paper reviews how **Pakistan**, **Kyrgyzstan** and **Tajikistan** assessed the likely consequences of Afghanistan's transitions. The three countries were chosen for this study because they are the largest recipients of foreign aid in the region. They are also funding priorities for major international donors.

The paper is based on interviews in all three countries in 2014. Approximately 70 interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders including government officials, development assistance partners, members of NGOs and local experts.

While the study highlighted differences between respondents in the three countries on the nature and scale of perceived regional security threats from Afghanistan's transitions, it also identified several cross-cutting themes. Common areas of concern included the following:

- Religious radicalization and the activities of Islamist insurgent groups
- Violence and armed conflict
- Drug-trafficking
- Increased refugee flows
- Adverse economic impacts
- Broader impact on political and geopolitical processes

[1] It should be noted, for example, that the emphasis on 2014 as a defining year for Afghanistan was by no means unanimous. While policy-makers in Pakistan considered the Afghan government's limited capacity for tackling security risks as a fundamental concern, most Central Asian states rated instability in Afghanistan as low on the list of security threats they faced.

In all three countries, it was felt that if stability or state capacity diminished as a result of Afghanistan's military, political and economic transitions, then problems would be most likely to manifest themselves in the above-mentioned areas. That said, this paper argues that Afghanistan is seen as exacerbating ongoing challenges – some of which have been present for decades – rather than creating new ones.

Pakistan

Since its founding in 1947, Pakistan has had close political, security, economic and cultural links with Afghanistan. This largely reflects the fact that both countries have sizeable Pashtun populations. Ever since the Soviet invasion of 1979, Pakistan has played a highly securitized role in relation to Afghanistan. While Pakistan's support for the Taliban declined after 9/11, many members of the Taliban leadership continue to live in Pakistan. Questions over the extent of their relationship with elements of Pakistan's security apparatus remain unanswered.

For Pakistan's government, domestic concerns take precedence over potential future threats resulting from developments in Afghanistan. The events of 2014 encouraged this domestic focus, given widespread scepticism within Pakistan regarding the ability of the Afghan state to survive the political, economic and military transitions in that year.

From the 1990s until recently, Pakistan's military saw Afghanistan's importance through the prism of its India policy. It regarded a pliant, pro-Pakistan Afghanistan as something positive, and any Indian influence in the country as something negative. Over the past couple of years, however, the picture has evolved. The rise of the Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP) – coupled with fears about the future of the post-2014 Afghan government – led Pakistani discourse on Afghanistan to become dominated by the question of 'ungoverned spaces' (particularly in southern and eastern Afghanistan) from which the TTP could operate freely.

At the same time, the Afghan state has proved more durable and capable than many in Pakistan had initially supposed. Following his election, President Ghani launched military action against the TTP in Afghanistan, which had not happened under his predecessor. Following the TTP's attack on a school in Peshawar in December 2014, Pakistan and Afghanistan announced joint military action against the group.

For a range of domestic challenges in Pakistan – access to resources, the civil–military balance of power, ethnic tensions – events in Afghanistan could aggravate existing and long-standing problems. These immediate domestic challenges, while not unconnected with the situation in Afghanistan, are the focus of Pakistani politicians and policy-makers.

Greater stability in Afghanistan is likely to have a positive impact on Pakistan's western provinces. However, the reverse is also true: a deterioration in Afghanistan's political or security situation could exacerbate Pakistani concerns, and prompt a reaction with broader consequences for stability. For instance, fears of Pashtun (or Baluchi) secession have driven attempts to emphasize

Pakistan's Islamic identity, which in turn have driven the development of the extremist forces that now threaten Pakistan.[2] The resulting instability in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas has caused internal population displacement on a large scale, which in turn has upset the ethnic balance in Karachi and led to an upsurge in violence. If Pakistan were able to improve governance in the tribal areas, and thus enable internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return, tensions elsewhere could be reduced.

The Indian dimension is also important. If developments in Afghanistan can affect Pakistan, and vice versa, their geopolitical impact is also likely to inform political decisions in India (which in turn could lead to reciprocal responses from Pakistan). Outcomes in Pakistan cannot be seen in isolation from their impacts on Afghanistan and Indian Kashmir. Since 1979 the incidence of violence has shifted between Afghanistan, Pakistan and India depending on their respective political situations. In the 1980s violence was concentrated in Afghanistan. In the 1990s it also affected Indian Kashmir. Since 2001 violence has declined dramatically in Indian Kashmir but has risen significantly in Pakistan.

Many Pakistanis fear that if the Afghan Taliban appears to be in the ascendant, then India will increase support to the Afghan government (or, in the worst-case scenario, to former Northern Alliance warlords). In that event, Afghanistan could become the arena for some kind of proxy war between Pakistan and India (and potentially Iran). It could also fuel increased civil–military tensions in Pakistan. The decision by India's government in August 2014 to break off talks with Pakistan – and subsequent difficulties in reopening a line of communication – increases the scope for bilateral misunderstanding.

A further factor affecting the outlook for stability in the region is the United States' ongoing re-engagement with Iran. This could affect Pakistan's dominance of trade with Afghanistan. By creating economic opportunities for Iran, it could cause losses for Pakistani businesses reliant on transit trade. On the other hand, it could also intensify the desire for stability apparent among many Pashtuns wishing to engage in cross-border trade.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the concept of 'Afghanistan post-2014' is widely regarded as one formulated and advanced by the United States and European governments through sponsorship of conferences and studies devoted to the subject. The Central Asian states do not consider 2014 to have been a turning point for their region.

Problematic relations with neighbouring states, corruption and the diminishing feasibility of a 'multi-vector' foreign policy owing to the exit of the United States from the region are viewed with greater apprehension than any of the potential risks posed by Afghanistan's transitions. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan view greater and more imminent security threats as emanating from the north, in the

[2] Kristina Zetterlund (ed.), *Pakistan – Consequences of Deteriorating Security in Afghanistan*, FOI, 2009.

form of the current Russian economic downturn increasing Russian encroachment on their sovereignty, rather than from Afghanistan to the south.

Moreover, any discussion of the risks Afghanistan's transitions pose for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is complicated by the difficulty of disentangling myth from reality, given the widespread propensity of politicians in both countries to exaggerate the 'spillover' narrative to suit particular agendas. By presenting Afghanistan as a national security threat, for example, authorities can capitalize on international anti-terrorism budgets to receive more funds from the United States and Europe to fight terrorism. They can also use the anti-terrorism narrative to repress domestic Islamic opposition parties (such as the moderate Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan).

None the less, on key issues of concern for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, such as drug-trafficking and the threat from transnational jihadist organizations, there is no consistent perception in either country that emerging risks are substantially linked to the withdrawal of ISAF troops or other developments in Afghanistan. Analysts in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan see domestic corruption as a greater impediment to fighting the drugs trade than any potential increase in trafficking from or opium cultivation in Afghanistan. Similarly, there is a consensus that the cross-border jihadist groups that pose a threat to Central Asia originate in the Indian subcontinent rather than in Afghanistan (even though some may establish safe havens and training camps in Afghan territory). In Tajikistan, tensions between the centre and the periphery, as evidenced by local insurrections in the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region in 2014, are viewed as internal problems largely disconnected from events in Afghanistan.

Religious Radicalization and Islamist Insurgent Groups

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Since the early 2000s, commentators and analysts have frequently conflated increased religiosity and observance among Muslims in Central Asia with radicalization, and contrived a link to Afghanistan despite a scarcity of evidence. The re-awakening of religion brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union is not to be confused with radicalization as 'the general process of moving from relative apathy to political mobilization against secular government and society'.[3]

In addition to the natural revival of religion, however, home-grown underground networks of militants proselytize through the internet and in prayer rooms and mosques, often in conjunction with foreign groups such as Tablighi Jama'at. Concerns about radicalization, expressed with greater frequency in Kyrgyzstan than in Tajikistan, widely consider the threat as stemming from Pakistan (seen as the incubator of Salafist jihadism) and the Middle East rather than from Afghanistan. Local experts note that young mullahs from countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) who have been trained abroad, as well as Islamist insurgents of Central Asian origin, were indoctrinated with anti-Western ideas first and foremost in Pakistan, where they received the central message that oppression by a secular regime must be fought with terrorist methods. According to a former head of security services in Kyrgyzstan:

> Pakistan is the smartest of all. Their theologians attracted hundreds of young Central Asians [to Pakistan] and taught them anti-Western ideas and how to fight for the hearts and minds of the people in their own languages. That's Tablighi Jama'at – trained in Pakistan.[4]

Most members of the elites in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan concur that the probability of society being significantly radicalized is small, but that the risk is present and growing. In surveys even young, liberal Kyrgyz people educated in the West have expressed concern that a quarter of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan are now of a more conservative and radical character than they were as little as five years ago.

In Tajikistan, the prevailing view is that Salafist ideology is attracting more young people even if wider popular support is lacking.[5] Views on how to tackle the threat from radicalization differ: in Tajikistan, the government has embarked on a campaign against religious expression; in Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, officials are clear in their belief that prohibition would only further radicalize religious extremists. That said, in both states home-grown Islamist networks are not viewed as having any direct links with Afghanistan. Rather, their emergence is attributed to

[3] John Heathershaw and David W. Montgomery, *The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization*, Chatham House Research Paper, November 2014, p. 2, footnote 2.
[4] Interview with General Tokon Mamytov, former head of the security services in Kyrgyzstan, June 2014.
[5] Some experts hold that the government of Tajikistan's President Emomalii Rahmon has allowed the Salafis slightly greater freedom in order to counterbalance the considerable influence of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan.

proselytizing by globalized jihadist groups and 'migrant-mullahs' trained in Pakistan, as well as to bad domestic governance.

Nor do the elites in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan believe that a resurgent Afghan Taliban is planning incursions into Central Asia, or that Salafi networks in the region are inspired by similar movements in Afghanistan. Their predominant concern, instead, is that Central Asia could at some point become the target of terrorist acts by globalized insurgent groups containing militants of Central Asian origin. An Afghan connection would be present only in so far as such groups could find safe haven in and/or safe passage through Afghanistan, and to the extent that the Afghan Taliban could provide logistical support such as bases and training in the north of the country. However, given that Central Asian militants who were present in Afghanistan have been displaced rather than eliminated by ISAF, concerns remain that they could eventually become active in the region again.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is Central Asia's primary and best-known militant network. More accurately described as the 'neo-IMU', the name has evolved into an 'umbrella' rubric that encompasses all known currents of Central Asian jihadism, including splinter groups as well as fighters operating under the original IMU banner. Today's IMU is not the same entity that burst on to the scene in southern Kyrgyzstan in the late 1990s, taking hostages and fighting Kyrgyz and Uzbek troops. After fleeing to Pakistan's tribal areas from northern Afghanistan following US airstrikes in 2001, the group split into factions, often mixing with other militant groups. As one group of experts put it: 'As [the neo-IMU] networks wandered, they mingled with a veritable alphabet soup of global jihadist militancy, developing ties with groups and individuals far removed from the Ferghana Valley.'[6] Some returned to Afghanistan in the late 2000s, particularly following drone strikes and Pakistani army operations in the tribal areas, to mix with the Taliban. Other returnees retained the IMU label. By and large, Central Asian fighters in Afghanistan have not mounted offensives in other countries in the region, although some have claimed joint responsibility for several attacks in the border regions of Afghanistan. The possibility of the Afghan Taliban gaining sustained access to the Tajik–Afghan border, or of there being a more pro-Taliban government in Kabul, following the ISAF drawdown worries many in Central Asia. Such a prospect would portend a return to the situation of 1999–2000, when a network of military bases along the Tajik–Afghan border supported the IMU in a more organized way.

Two main schools of thought prevail in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan with regard to the IMU. The first holds that militant groups operating under the IMU umbrella have not evolved dramatically over the past 10 years, and that their primary aim is still to overthrow President Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan and establish a caliphate.[7] The second, more prominent school maintains that the various IMU splinter groups have become part of globalized jihadist networks over the past decade, with a concomitant change in their views and goals. Within the second school, there are those who argue that the IMU is likely to restart its activities in Central Asia in time.

[6] Thomas M. Sanderson, Daniel Kimmage and David A. Gordon, *From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan: The Evolving Threat of Central Asian Jihadists* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2010), p.5.
[7] For an overview of IMU activity around 2011 in northern Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Central Asia, see Christian Bleuer, 'Instability in Tajikistan? The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Afghanistan Factor', Central Asia Security Policy Brief No. 7, OSCE Academy Bishkek, February 2012.

Despite these differences, there is a relative convergence of opinion over the dearth of IMU activity in Central Asia over the past 15 years or so.[8] Rather than focusing on Central Asia, it is argued, at present these groups are devoting their energies to global jihadist theatres such as Syria, Libya, the Caucasus, the India–Pakistan border and the Xinjiang region in China – where they feel they have a clear mission and are better received than they would be in Central Asia's Ferghana Valley.

Today's Central Asian jihadists are less dependent on or influenced by Afghanistan, owing to their greater mobility and enlarged geographical scope. Although there is disagreement on the exact figures, since 2012 Central Asians have joined Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in ever larger numbers. While Central Asia supplies only a small fraction of ISIS fighters in Syria, they are valued for their literacy skills, in particular.[9] As of early 2015, estimates of the number of Central Asian fighters in ISIS ranged from 400 according to the US-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to 5,000 according to analysts in Russia.[10] What is clear, however, is that Central Asian militants are flocking to Syria to join the insurgency in a way that simply did not occur in Afghanistan. The phenomenon is still in its early stages, and hard data are limited, but it can be speculated that the fight in Syria holds greater appeal for Central Asian insurgents owing to the transnational nature of the jihad there, the role of social media, and the relative ease of recruitment and travel to the country.[11]

With the rise of ISIS, Central Asian governments have become more concerned that their citizens fighting with militant groups abroad – whether in Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria – will return to wage war at home.[12] At present, however, Central Asian fighters with ISIS are focused on waging jihad in Syria and establishing a caliphate there. Recruitment is taking place across the region, including in Russia, where some Central Asian migrant workers have become radicalized.[13] Social media and word of mouth are key recruitment methods, and IMU members are reported to have been actively recruiting for ISIS in the Ferghana Valley for quite some time.[14]

ISIS's presence in Afghanistan is still relatively limited, although widely acknowledged. It remains unclear how many of its fighters there view Central Asia as their target. Some voices, in Russia in particular, have warned that ISIS is gathering its forces in northern Afghanistan to prepare for an attack against Russia and Central Asia. Russia's special representative for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, said in December 2014 that a small group of 'a bit more than a hundred IS fighters' was being redeployed from ISIS's main base in Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan to supplement local fighters loyal to the group.[15] While Russian officials regularly issue alarmist reports regarding the security risks posed by jihadists, and while serious ideological differences exist between ISIS and the Taliban, it does seem likely that there is a growing presence of fighters loyal to ISIS in

[8] This is not to say, however, that there has been no IMU-inspired terrorist activity in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. See, for example, James Kilner, 'Militant Islamist group threatens Tajikistan', *Daily Telegraph*, 19 September 2011.
[9] Good literacy enables these recruits to read manuals on mixing explosives and to run websites and post videos. Bruce Pannier, 'Central Asia's Desirable Militants', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 6 November 2014.
[10] The International Crisis Group put the figure at between 2,000 and 4,000 in January 2015. International Crisis Group, 'Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia', Europe and Central Asia Briefing No. 72, 20 January 2015, p. 3.
[11] Christian Bleuer, 'To Syria, not Afghanistan: Central Asian jihadis "neglect" their neighbor', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 8 October 2014.
[12] Edward Lemon, 'The Taliban and Islamic State Haunt Tajikistan', Eurasia Daily Monitor, The Jamestown Foundation, 28 May 2015; Andrew Roth, 'Police Commander from Tajikistan Appears in ISIS Video', *New York Times*, 29 May 2015.
[13] Pannier, 'Central Asia's Desirable Militants'.
[14] International Crisis Group, 'Syria Calling', p. 6.
[15] Joshua Kucera, 'Kremlin Talks Up ISIS Threat to Central Asia', EurasiaNet.org, 6 January 2015, http://www.eurasianet.org/node/14733.

Afghanistan. Potentially supporting this assumption, in August 2015 reports emerged that the IMU had formally switched its allegiance from the Taliban to ISIS.[16]

Pakistan

Pakistan tolerates violent radicalization as long as it does not target the Pakistani state. Its military has even encouraged violent radical groups to operate in Afghanistan and Indian Kashmir, and has facilitated their activities. Such a strategy provides an outlet for these groups, in turn helping authorities in Pakistan to keep violence outside the country's borders as much as possible.

Pakistan's military is stepping up pressure against the TTP, yet until recently the government and security forces had seemed ambivalent about the gradual radicalization within Pakistan itself (the latter a consequence, in part, of increased support from Gulf states for militant groups). Many commentators within and outside Pakistan accused the government of turning a blind eye to radicalization provided that security was maintained in Punjab. Weak state capacity and the government's lack of interest in countering radicalization have left a void filled only by a few NGOs, civil society and a diminishing number of journalists.

The Peshawar school attack appears to have galvanized a broader section of society into protesting against violent extremism. Since the end of the US military 'surge' in Afghanistan in 2012, Pakistan has become more concerned that Afghanistan could provide safe havens for the TTP, and the Pakistani authorities' thinking on this issue is changing. Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to establish a joint working group on security, co-chaired by their respective foreign ministers, to establish more effective institutional mechanisms for border control and to reduce the occurrence of militants crossing between the two countries.

Yet this shift in position is by no means universal. The military's belated recognition that the TTP *does*, in fact, present a significant threat to Pakistan contrasts with the pre-election position of Nawaz Sharif – now the prime minister – in which he expressed support for peace talks with the TTP, a position which was likely less part of a strategic plan and more motivated by fear of personal attack from the TTP.

The threat of attack (particularly since the 2008 murder of Benazir Bhutto) has limited the freedom of movement for civilian politicians in Pakistan. This, in turn, has led the military to maintain responsibility for Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan (and India) and to take responsibility for action against extremists within Pakistan (trying extremists in secret military courts, for instance).

Pakistan's relationship with the Afghan Taliban will remain one of the key determinants of Afghanistan's stability. Before 9/11, the closeness of this relationship provided Pakistan with security, by acting as a 'release valve' for radical Pakistanis and ensuring that the country did not find itself sandwiched between two hostile states (the other being India). After 9/11, Pakistan

[16] Merhat Sharipzhan, 'IMU Declares it is Now Part of the Islamic State', RFE/RL, 6 August 2015, www.rferl.org/content/imu-islamic-state/27174567.html; Aaron Y. Zelin, 'Statement from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan's leader Uthman Ghazi: "It's Been Thirteen Years Since We Have Heard From You Mullah Muhammad Omar"', Lawfare, 1 July 2015, https://www.lawfareblog.com/statement-islamic-movement-uzbekistans-leader-uthman-ghazi-its-been-thirteen-years-we-have-heard-you.

downgraded its ties with the Afghan Taliban, although concerns over India's relationship with the Afghan government under President Karzai meant that they were not broken entirely. While many outsiders interpreted this partial maintenance of ties as a ploy to ensure Pakistani leverage after the expected Western troop withdrawal, the emergence of the TTP – which explicitly targeted Pakistan – created a new dynamic. Pakistan now feels compelled to maintain connections with the Afghan Taliban because of fears – already being realized – that the TTP could use southern Afghanistan as a base from which to attack the Pakistani state.

For Pakistan, the key political question posed by the transitions in Afghanistan is how they will affect the relationship between the 'two Talibans' – that is, between the Afghan Taliban and the TTP. Three contradictory narratives are circulating in respect of this question.[17] The first is that the two organizations are proxy outfits operating in the interests of the Afghan and Pakistani intelligence agencies respectively. The second is that they hold much in common and could unify following the withdrawal of Western troops to target both the Afghan and Pakistani states. The third is that the groups are far from homogeneous and contain factions within factions. Further, many groups purporting to be Taliban are in fact autonomous gangs without connection to the Taliban leadership.

The unity or not of the various 'Talibans' remains contentious. While it seems clear that there are multiple factions, it appears that they did hold allegiance to Mullah Omar in common. The announcement of his death in 2015 (and the fact that he had actually died two years earlier) appears to have increased factionalism within the movement.

In-fighting and the emergence of new factions reflect long-running power struggles, conflict over targets and the efforts of Pakistani intelligence forces to encourage fragmentation within the Pakistan Taliban. Some, but not all, TTP factions appear to have shifted their attention to Afghanistan. The fissures within the movement are further complicated by the emergence of ISIS as a parallel Islamist power structure to which some factions could pledge allegiance.

Underlying Pakistan's position is a lack of belief in the durability of the Afghan state. Pakistan has taken steps to facilitate some form of reconciliation in Afghanistan but such steps have merely highlighted different approaches within the Taliban – a part of which, at least, clearly feels that it could win militarily.

The temporary 'fall' of the Afghan city of Kunduz to Taliban fighters in 2015 has complicated the picture. On the one hand, it demonstrated the brittle nature of Afghan security forces. (Indeed, the city's fall had prompted NATO to extend its military presence in Afghanistan.) On the other, the city's subsequent recapture by government and Western forces indicated the limits on the Taliban's ability to hold Afghan cities while the Western military presence remains.

Pakistan is trapped in a vicious cycle, in which the government feels compelled to maintain links with the Afghan Taliban for historic reasons and to limit the latter's ties to the TTP. This policy

[17] For a more detailed discussion see Michael Kugelman, 'When the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban Unite', *Foreign Policy*, 23 March 2015, http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/03/25/when_the_afghan_and_pakistani_taliban_unite/. At times during Karzai's presidency it seemed clear that Afghan intelligence agencies were attempting to engage with the Pakistan Taliban as part of a policy based on the principle that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. This appears to have ceased since Ashraf Ghani became president.

reinforces distrust of Pakistan in Afghanistan and India, where it is seen as demonstrating that Pakistan has not shifted away from its traditional use of proxies as a means of conducting foreign policy.

Violence and conflict in Pakistan

The security ramifications of Afghanistan's 2014 transitions are of concern for Pakistan, which is affected by a series of related conflicts. Various Islamist groups operate in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indian Kashmir. In addition, there are secessionist movements in Baluchistan and Indian Kashmir. Karachi has also been plagued by ethnic violence. Events in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's tribal areas affect the dynamics of each of these conflicts. The impact varies. Afghanistan's lack of security currently exacerbates conflicts in Pakistan, yet in the recent past Pakistan has also benefited from instability in its neighbour. As mentioned, turbulence in Afghanistan – as in Indian Kashmir – has acted as a 'release valve' for Pakistani extremists, who at times have served Pakistan's foreign policy interests.

Things changed after the emergence in 2007 of the TTP. Pakistan's military recognizes that the TTP presents a threat to the country. But it does not view all violent, radical groups – let alone non-violent extremists – in the same way. Other Islamist groups have been seen as serving – to a greater or lesser extent – the interests of the military, although the killing of the leader of another previously tolerated group, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, in August 2015 suggests that the authorities are taking the threat from such groups increasingly seriously.

The relationship between Pakistan's tribal areas and Afghanistan is complex. Pakistan inherited colonial laws, notably the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) that threatened tribes with collective punishment for wrongdoing but in return exempted them from the writ of Pakistan's legal system and provided protection from Afghanistan. The system of governance in the tribal areas started to break down in the 1980s as a result of civil war in Afghanistan, and by 2001 it was largely defunct.

After 9/11 the region provided safe havens for extremist groups that had been active in Afghanistan. In 2004, under Western pressure, Pakistan's military entered the tribal areas in an attempt to extend the writ of the state there. This led to the emergence of the TTP. Initial military interventions employed conventional methods, rather than more population-centric counter-insurgency tactics.[18] However, many of the interventions were signalled in advance, allowing militants to move to other tribal areas.

Over the past decade there has been a growing acceptance in Pakistan of the need for a more coordinated approach towards the tribal areas, and of the need to change their exceptional status. The FCR were reformed in 2011, but governance structures have continued to disintegrate. Significant questions remain over the ability of the state to introduce some form of government after the military interventions are finished.

[18] Given the special status of the tribal areas, some dispute whether the military's operations should be described as counter-insurgency.

The announcement in 2010 of the planned Western military drawdown from Afghanistan had two immediate impacts. Most importantly, it triggered fresh thinking from Pakistan's military: counter-insurgency rather than conventional war-fighting became its priority. It also emboldened militants, who felt freer to operate on both sides of the Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Pakistan's approach towards the TTP reflected the civil–military divide in the country. In the 2013 parliamentary elections most political parties stood on a platform of dialogue with the group. This was driven more by self-protection than by the existence of a well-considered strategy. The military, in contrast, was keener on adopting a forceful approach. That a process of attempted dialogue first had to fail meant that military action in the TTP heartland of North Waziristan did not begin until June 2014. Military action remains ongoing, and seems likely to persist until the situation in Afghanistan becomes clearer.

If the government and military eventually introduce some form of order in the tribal areas, militants would be displaced to Afghanistan and other parts of Pakistan, notably South Punjab and Karachi (as well as Quetta and Peshawar). While this could present opportunities to provide development assistance to the tribal areas, two issues would need to be watched: first, the government's commitment to political reform in these areas, and to their continued integration into Pakistan; and second, the commitment of the government and security services to tackling militancy elsewhere in Pakistan. Absent such commitment, any security gains in the tribal areas would likely be balanced by increased instability elsewhere in the country. The tribal areas' needs would be extensive while new, locally supported governance structures were being put in place. Health and education would clearly be priorities, followed by infrastructure. If these issues were not tackled first, economic initiatives would be unlikely to succeed.

The alternative would see some form of 'muddling through', wherein the introduction of new governance structures in the tribal areas would be partially effective, but militants would continue to operate from within these areas. Given the porous border, Afghanistan's objections to fencing it and likely poor governance on the Afghan side, this would seem to be the most probable outcome. Therefore, providing support for governance reform and capacity-building in administration should probably be prioritized over healthcare and education.

Managing the Afghan–Pakistani border

Many Pakistanis want more effective border management, feeling that violence in their country is linked to Afghanistan. However, this focus also reflects the politics of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan's refusal to recognize the Durand Line is a serious point of contention between the two countries. Pakistan clearly hopes that the Durand Line will be accepted as the border, but there are fears that the issue could become even more contentious and politicized in moves towards a post-2014 settlement. Any effort to strengthen cooperation would require implicit Afghan acceptance of the border. Many Pakistanis cite Afghanistan's rejection of the proposal, during General Pervez Musharraf's presidency (2001–08), for a border fence to curb terrorism as an instance of Afghanistan undermining Pakistan's efforts to promote security.

Afghanistan's citizens (and its leaders) have argued that a national consensus is needed before the border can be agreed. Many Pakistanis contend that attempts to promote bilateral understanding around interaction through border crossings are insignificant compared to the broader political

disconnect between the two countries. There are also limits to what can be achieved in tightening border security when one side is ambivalent about the very legitimacy of the border itself.

While there is agreement that the border is a concern, questions of border management are not necessarily framed in the same way. Some people argue that border management has been a challenge for hundreds of years; others that the issue has intensified since the Durand Line's supposed expiry in 1993 (the border agreement was signed in 1893 and was intended to last 100 years; however, it has never been formally ratified). A third view is that the border issue is less important in its own right, mattering more as a symptom of the bad politics between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The paradox is that differences over the Durand Line cannot be resolved because of political mistrust, yet Afghanistan's failure to recognize the border is itself a cause of such mistrust in Pakistan. Moreover, until the border question is resolved, both countries will continue to be threatened by cross-border terrorism that further reinforces mutual suspicion. Pakistan regards Afghanistan's non-recognition of the border as impairing the latter's ability to deal with refugees, drug-trafficking and arms smuggling, and as an impediment to Afghan efforts to promote regional economic cooperation. Meanwhile, Afghanistan views Pakistan as a hub for terrorism because of the latter's perceived inability to manage its borders – even though this problem is related to Afghanistan's non-recognition of the border.

Many of the potential solutions proposed seem unfeasible. Some argue that Pakistan and Afghanistan could establish more official border crossings. Others propose a civilian-led border-management mechanism that would give the provinces more power to supervise their respective stretches of the border, while phasing out military involvement – particularly in the tribal areas. At present border-management issues are led by the military. A civilian-led mechanism seems unlikely in the short to medium term, given that the border is highly militarized.

Any steps to integrate the tribal areas fully into Pakistan will require the acceptance of the Durand Line as an international border, which would divide Pashtuns in Afghanistan from those in Pakistan. Some observers have suggested that free movement should be allowed between the two sides to facilitate continued cross-border engagement.[19] Others have argued that this is unworkable, at least in the short term, since 'as long as militants are able to cross the border more freely than the two states' security personnel, the Taliban movements will maintain a crucial advantage'.[20]

Concerns about the disputed border and the potential for secessionism are not the key drivers of Pakistan's Afghan policy at present, but they provide an additional explanation for its continued engagement with the Afghan Taliban.

[19] Abubakar Siddique, *The Pashtun Question: The Unresolved Key to the Future of Pakistan and Afghanistan* (London: C Hurst & Co, 2014).
[20] Owen Bennett-Jones, 'Across the Durand Line', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 36 No. 18, 25 September 2014, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n18/owen-bennett-jones/across-the-durand-line.

Drug-trafficking

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

During the past decade, Western policy-making circles have helped to sustain two assumptions with regard to the flow of drugs smuggled from Afghanistan to Central Asia. The first is that the withdrawal of US troops will automatically increase levels of trafficking, while the second is that improved border checkpoints will substantially reduce drug flows into Central Asia. Currently, less than 10 per cent of the Afghan opiates trafficked through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are seized by authorities.[21]

Within Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, however, discussions of the effects of the international military presence in Afghanistan on drug-trafficking shift in accordance with the political agenda of the day. Thus, in a statement reflecting his country's turn towards Russia and away from the United States, President Almazbek Atambayev of Kyrgyzstan declared in 2012 that 'they [Western governments] try to scare us by saying that narco-trafficking will increase when the coalition troops are withdrawn from Afghanistan … but in the past 11 years the stream of narcotics has risen rather than declined'.[22]

Given that the drug trade primarily serves the interests of ruling elites in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the ISAF withdrawal is unlikely to significantly change levels of trafficking or drug-related crime in the two states. As David Lewis has pointed out, the nexus between the drug-fuelled shadow economy and officialdom has led to a paradoxical situation whereby 'the more drugs are trafficked through Central Asia, the lower the level of drug-related crime'. In a second paradox, state control over trafficking ensures the stability of the regimes by preventing political rivals from gaining access to funding and weapons.[23] As a result of the close connection between the drug trade and officialdom, most of the significant investment in countering drug-trafficking has had little impact.

The drug trade has become a structural component of government in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, with the consequence that no physical border checkpoints between Central Asia and Afghanistan will stem the flow. Drug mafias are deeply linked with the political establishment in Tajikistan.[24] It is believed that nearly all law enforcement and border guards in the border districts are involved in drug-trafficking, greatly contributing to the criminalization of the security organs in general.[25]

In 2009–10, some 25 per cent of heroin brought out of Afghanistan traversed Central Asia, with three-quarters of such shipments destined for the Russian market. Of the total opiate flow through Central Asia, 85 per cent goes through Tajikistan, and most of the laboratories in northern

[21] Interview with Ali Saryazdi, senior regional cooperation advisor, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Dushanbe, May 2014.
[22] 'Atambaev: My podgotomivsia k vyvody voisk SShA iz Afghanistana' [Atambaev: We are preparing for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan], Radio Azattyk, 24 December 2012.
[23] David Lewis, 'High Times on the Silk Road: the Central Asian Paradox', *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Spring 2010, pp. 46–47.
[24] Saule Mukhametrakhimova, 'Central Asia at Risk from Post-2014 Afghanistan', Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 20 August 2013.
[25] Luke Falkenburg, 'Trafficking Terror through Tajikistan', *Military Review*, July–August 2013, p. 11.

Afghanistan are located along the Afghan–Tajik border.[26] The primary route for Afghan opiates trafficked through Tajikistan is then through Kyrgyzstan via the country's southern Batken Province and onwards to Kazakhstan and Russia. Other routes emanating from Tajikistan are westward into Uzbekistan with small amounts also going to Russia by air. A smaller, older route to Osh in Kyrgyzstan traverses the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous region. Somewhat ironically, foreign investment in Tajikistan has led to the construction of roads and bridges spanning the Pyanj River along the Afghan–Tajik border that function as alternative trafficking routes (the Pyanj Bridge was built in 2007 at a cost of $33 million in US aid to foster trade between Afghanistan and Tajikistan).[27]

Local drug users and some experts refer to the drug trade in terms of three 'channels'.[28] The first is the 'green channel', in reference to Islamist groups who use trafficking to finance their operations. The green channel accounts for only a minimal part of the total flow, despite the widespread conflation of Islamist insurgency with drug-trafficking. 'Black' heroin trafficked by small criminal groups also makes up a small quantity of the total. The bulk of the drug trade goes through the 'red channel' (larger criminal cartels that enjoy the support of senior officials). 'Red' heroin is trafficked by law enforcement structures and sold at discount prices at 'red dens' in Bishkek, Osh and Jalal-Abad before being shipped to Kazakhstan and Russia. While the traffickers of 'red' heroin tend to use main roads and official checkpoints, those trafficking 'black' and 'green' heroin generally avoid them. The red channel is widely viewed by local interlocutors as growing larger as it steadily merges with or consumes black-channel criminal groups.

Narcotics are a huge source of illicit income in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, surpassed only by remittances from migrant workers in Russia and Kazakhstan.[29] Drug proceeds far exceed the revenues generated by foreign assistance and legal business activity, with the consequence that there is very little incentive for governments to crack down on this profitable industry, irrespective of developments in Afghanistan.

Pakistan

According to a 2011 study of the illegal economy in Pakistan, trade in drugs and drug precursors was valued at between $910 million and $1.2 billion; people-trafficking at $107 million; arms-trafficking at $52 million; illegal timber trading at $23 million and kidnapping for ransom at $10 million.[30] Each estimate is conservative, but the order of importance is likely to be correct. The State Bank of Pakistan suggested in 2008 that the entire informal economy accounted for just

[26] Ekaterina Stepanova, 'Afghan Narcotrafficking: A Joint Threat Assessment', EastWest Institute, April 2013, p. 28.
[27] Falkenburg, 'Trafficking Terror through Tajikistan', p. 11.
[28] Interview with Aleksandr Zelichenko, director, Central Asian Drug Policy Center, Bishkek, June 2014; Jos Boonstra, Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, 'The Impact of the 2014 ISAF Forces' Withdrawal from Afghanistan on the Central Asian Region', Directorate-General for External Policies, European Parliament, January 2014, p. 9.
[29] Stepanova, 'Afghan Narcotrafficking', p. 29.
[30] See Sustainable Development Policy Institute's project 'Illegal Economy of Pakistan', https://www.sdpi.org/research_programme/researchproject-47-26-60.html.

below 20 per cent of GDP.[31] Another study in 2007 suggested the share was between 54 per cent and 62 per cent.[32]

Many note that opium cultivation in Afghanistan has increased since 2001. In Pakistan, along with Iran and Russia, opium consumption has increased significantly. Concerns over the opium trade also relate to border management. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), on average 150 tonnes of Afghan heroin transited through Pakistan every year between 2002 and 2008, compared with 105 tonnes through Iran and 95 tonnes through Central Asia.[33] Given greater state capacity in Iran and the possibility that the Central Asian states, with Russian support, could tighten their borders, there is a risk that Pakistan could become an even more important conduit for Afghan heroin through traffickers. However, annual opium production in Afghanistan already outstrips global demand and traffickers would be loath to rely on one country as an export route.

There would likely be, however, a shift in trafficking routes away from Central Asia or Iran towards Pakistan. This would be facilitated by poor interdiction in Pakistan. In 2009, 25 tonnes of heroin were seized in Iran, compared with 2 tonnes in Pakistan. In the same year, Iran interdicted 579 tonnes of opium, while just 25 tonnes were seized in Pakistan.[34] Until border controls improve, police capacity increases and corruption is tackled, Pakistan will remain the most-used route for Afghan heroin, exacerbating associated problems such as addiction in the country. The rise in cross-border narco-cartels linked to Islamist groups but motivated more by profit than ideology has also been noted in recent years.

In the 1990s Pakistan cracked down on opium cultivation, which was widespread in the tribal areas. The crackdown, along with instability on the other side of the porous border, led cultivation to shift to Afghanistan. In 2001 Pakistan was declared poppy-free. However, in recent years cultivation has restarted within the tribal areas. Water scarcity makes opium an economically attractive option compared to more water-intensive and less profitable crops. Rising opium production in Pakistan also reflects insecurity. Just over half of the heroin smuggled into the country is thought to be consumed domestically, the rest exported.[35] There is increasing concern about the extent of drug consumption within Pakistan, where there are thought to be around 4 million heroin addicts. Drug production and trafficking, and consequent organized crime, are generally seen as the outcome of state failure rather than its cause.

[31] Ibid.
[32] M. Ali Kemal, 'A Fresh Assessment of the Underground Economy and Tax Evasion in Pakistan: Causes, Consequences, and Linkages with the Formal Economy', Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, PIDE Working Papers, 2007, http://www.pide.org.pk/pdf/Working%20Paper/Working%20Paper%20No.%2013.pdf.
[33] UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, 2010, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/5.Heroin.pdf.
[34] UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 'The Global Afghan Opium Trade: Threat Assessment 2011', July 2011, http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Global_Afghan_Opium_Trade_2011-web.pdf.
[35] Misbah Saba Malik, 'Drug trafficking, a rising concern in Pakistan', Xinhua, 29 July 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/indepth/2011-07/29/c_131018159.htm.

Refugee Flows

Large numbers of Afghans have been displaced over the past three decades owing to natural disasters, such as droughts, and political upheaval and conflict. A substantial proportion of Afghans have been refugees at one point or another. In 2009 the International Committee of the Red Cross estimated that as much as 76 per cent of the population had suffered internal or external displacement.[36] By one estimate, 44 per cent of Afghan's population are displaced: 6.4 million within the country (a number that includes the impact of seasonal migration) and 6.7 million overseas.[37]

Of the 6.7 million Afghans said to have been displaced abroad, 2.8 million are estimated to be in Iran and 2.6 million in Pakistan (a reversal of the historic trend, whereby Pakistan hosted more people). But the overall popularity of these two countries as destinations is unlikely to change, as Susanne Schmeidl argues:

> … given the numerous facilitating factors at play, regardless of the obstacles of Iran's faltering economy and an increasing negative stance against Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The fact that both countries have hosted Afghans for decades (and hence family ties exist), given that their economies are still greater and with more opportunities than Afghanistan's, and in the light of the inadequacy of health care in Afghanistan, there are enough incentives for migration to continue. Especially as the knowledge of how to avert possible obstacles likely outweighs disincentives the countries may continue to put in place.[38]

The security transition in Afghanistan has led to fears of a 'brain drain', although there is no consensus over whether migration harms or assists Afghanistan's economy. Some argue that an exodus of educated workers threatens the country's development; others that some Afghans contribute more to the economy by working abroad and sending remittances than they could at home. However, given the number of Afghans who have experienced migration and the existing networks of Afghans in other countries, an upsurge in the number of refugees would be highly plausible in the event of rising insecurity in Afghanistan. Many steps need to be taken to prevent this, and to address refugee issues. Improving urban planning and job creation in Afghanistan would discourage migration. External actors also need to provide assistance to the Afghan government in implementing its 2014 National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons.

Pakistan

Concern over the potential impact of greater instability in Afghanistan appears to be driving Pakistan's approach to Afghan refugees. This comes at the same time as military action in the tribal areas has led to the internal displacement of around 1 million Pakistanis. Central and provincial

[36] Cited in Susanne Schmeidl, 'Going, Going… Once Again Gone?', *Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Regional Perspective*, CIDOB Policy Research Project, September 2014.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

governments are taking steps to make Pakistan a less attractive destination for potential Afghan refugees. Recent moves have made it harder for Afghans to rent property or establish camps on the edge of towns in Pakistan. In March 2014 the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assembly passed a law requiring that Afghans renting apartments have recommendations from two Pakistanis, a move that forced some to return to Afghanistan. Following the Peshawar school attack in December 2014, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government announced that it would draw up plans to expel all Afghan refugees, a move some criticized as a means of diverting blame for lax security. While the government did not follow through with this threat, it has taken steps to expel Afghan clerics.

Afghan refugees are widely blamed for crime – e.g. the head of police in Peshawar has blamed them for 70 per cent of serious crimes – and the presence of drugs, as well as for exacerbating demand for resources. Afghan communities have been accused of giving sanctuary to Islamist militants, and Pakistani radical groups attempt to recruit from their ranks.[39] Dramatic deterioration in the situation is not expected as a result of the transitions in Afghanistan, however. The situation is seen as already bad and deteriorating; reported crimes increased significantly between 2008 and 2013.[40] The upsurge in violence in Karachi – partly due to the movement into the city of IDPs from the tribal areas and Afghan refugees – has raised concerns that the country's ethnic balance is being upset.[41]

None the less, efforts to encourage repatriation are failing. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only 83,000 Afghan refugees returned home in 2012; 31,000 in 2013 and 14,000 in 2014. However, more than 137,000 refugees returned during the first eight months of 2015.[42]

In the event of a deterioration in security in Afghanistan, a further influx of refugees would clearly be destabilizing for Pakistan. Although around 4 million people have returned to Afghanistan since 9/11 (not all having been 'official' refugees), the potential for renewed movement by millions of refugees clearly exists. As demonstrated by the consequences of the ongoing military operation in North Waziristan, Pakistan's government is unlikely to be prepared for such an eventuality. If refugees were to congregate in certain areas, most likely in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, camps would be constructed to hold them. But if they attempted to join existing Afghan communities in places such as Karachi, the social impact would likely be greater and more negative. This in turn would make the government more likely to adopt aggressive tactics to deter, or even repatriate, them.

That said, the decision by many North Waziristanis to move into Afghanistan rather than to other parts of Pakistan suggests that a large number of Afghans are unlikely to move into Pakistan given the increased levels of harassment they could suffer (in particular as a result of the attack on the school in Peshawar). And while Afghan refugees are vulnerable, they have a degree of protection in

[39] In September 2014 it was widely reported that pamphlets supporting ISIS were circulating in Peshawar and in Afghan refugee camps.
[40] See Shakeel Anjum, 'Crime report of five years issued', *The News International*, 29 March 2013, http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-21913-Crime-report-of-five-years-issued.
[41] An alternative minority view contends that such concern is overstated, and that doubts about Pakistan's ability to absorb more Afghan refugees should be tempered by the fact that it has been the largest host country for refugees for 32 years. Pakistan currently hosts at least 1.6 million refugees according to the UNHCR (see *War's Human Cost: UNHCR Global Trends 2013*, http://www.unhcr.org/5399a14f9.html); in practice the figure is almost certainly much higher. These people have contributed to Pakistan's economy. Some observers also maintain that competition for resources stems primarily from indigenous population growth.
[42] 'Coming home to war: Afghan refugees return reluctantly from Pakistan', Reuters, 4 September 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/04/us-afghanistan-refugees-pakistan-idUSKCN0R32K420150904.

that their vulnerability has made them a useful vote bank for some politicians, notably from the Islamic parties in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

While official refugees are allowed to stay in Pakistan until the end of 2015, the outlook for unofficial refugees is less certain. The total number of Afghans in Pakistan is widely believed to be much higher than the 2.6 million figure given above, with estimates ranging from 3 million to 5 million. In February 2014 the chief minister of Sindh, Qaim Ali Shah, claimed that more than 1 million lived in Karachi alone. Occasional Pakistani threats to repatriate all Afghan refugees are unlikely to be carried out, but the outlook for them is poor none the less, particularly given that international attention is shifting towards refugee crises in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

Similar concerns apply to IDPs. If military operations in the tribal areas are successful, and if the government is able to introduce some form of stable governance there, many IDPs will presumably return home. If the military intervention is prolonged, the IDP crisis will worsen, likely causing a further hardening of attitudes towards Afghan refugees. While Pakistani hospitality was notable towards those affected by recent natural disasters – namely the Kashmir earthquake and extensive flooding – this has not been the case for IDPs. This may reflect a worsening economic situation, the sense that the refugee crisis is man-made and should be dealt with by politicians, or negative perceptions of people from the tribal areas.[43]

Afghan refugees and IDPs are a significant challenge for Pakistan and are likely to remain so in the coming years. In the event of an upsurge in refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan is likely to toughen its restrictions on Afghans, request assistance from Western governments and demand that refugees are resettled in third countries. There is a widespread belief in Pakistan that other countries have not sufficiently recognized the impact on it of hosting millions of Afghan refugees for decades.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Central Asian elites do not expect Afghanistan's transitions to produce significant refugee flows to their countries. Central Asian states have never been a destination of choice for Afghan refugees, and large numbers did not go there even when the Taliban was making deep advances into the northern regions of Afghanistan and was just short of taking the Panjshir Valley in 2001. Whereas refugees in Pakistan and Iran have established networks and are well integrated, Tajikistan's government does not welcome refugees from across its southern border. In the south of the country there is a small community of Afghan refugees who fled civil war in the 1990s, but the government maintains a very restrictive policy towards them. For example, many members of this community have been in Tajikistan for a decade or more, but the authorities still refuse to grant them citizenship.

[43] 'Apathy towards the IDPs', *Dawn*, editorial, 24 July 2014, http://www.dawn.com/news/1121151.

Economic Impacts

Economic connectivity in South Asia and Central Asia is underdeveloped. There is scope for vastly greater trade among countries in these regions, most clearly in power and energy. Potential opportunities for Afghanistan to cooperate more with its neighbours have been impeded by unresolved tensions between the country's formal and informal political systems, and by the lurking possibility that the country could disintegrate into ethnic-based states.

The general lack of stability has resulted in lost economic and social opportunities. In particular, it has held back trade and infrastructure and energy projects that could catalyse regional development. While the benefits of increased connectivity are widely recognized, it is not a priority for the countries concerned – both because of political tensions and because of fears that domestic industries in the region's smaller economies would struggle to compete with Indian firms.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

The idea of integrating Afghanistan's economy more closely with the rest of the region is not a new one. Its most recent and high-profile incarnation is the 'New Silk Road' concept promoted by the United States since 2011, which entails the creation of a trade hub linking Central Asia, South Asia, China and the Middle East via Afghanistan. However, the concept has been controversial: Central Asian states generally regard it as an unwelcome attempt to shoehorn them into an artificially defined 'region' that includes Afghanistan; other regional powers view it as a strategy by the United States to gain a political advantage at China's and Russia's expense.[44]

The 'New Silk Road' project has had problems from the outset. Not only is Central Asia one of the world's least integrated regions, but its two most important development projects – the Central Asia–South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) and the proposed Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline – have failed to materialize.

Both projects face numerous obstacles. CASA-1000, initiated in 2007, was envisaged as a means of developing electricity trade between Central and South Asian countries in cooperation with a number of international financial institutions. The fundamental premise of the project is to transmit 1,300 megawatts of excess summer electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan via a cable network to Afghanistan and Pakistan, thereby fostering a new era of regional cooperation in addition to boosting supply to energy-poor South Asia while developing Central Asia's own energy resources. The aim is for the project to transform Afghanistan into a transit country for electricity and to provide additional revenues for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

[44] Elizabeth Wishnick, 'Post-2014 Afghanistan Policy and the Limitations of China's Global Role', *Central Asian Affairs*, Leiden, 2014, pp. 139–140.

Ballooning costs have been a primary obstacle preventing CASA-1000 from being realized. In 2014 the World Bank Group and Islamic Development Bank agreed to finance the project; commitments were formalized by participant states in December.[45] Yet despite such progress, CASA-1000 seems likely to remain yet another US-backed project in the region stuck in the planning phase owing to an unrealistic assessment of facts on the ground. For example, in addition to the usual security risks associated with Afghan-related infrastructure projects, it is unclear whether CASA-1000 will ever receive a sufficient supply of electricity to be worthwhile. An anticipated rise in local demand means that the amount of electricity available for export is likely to decrease with each passing year.[46] Moreover, the failure of Tajikistan – which has supplied Afghanistan with electricity since 2007 – to boost domestic generation has prevented it from achieving the capacity promised.[47] Without additional hydroelectric power from the Rogun Dam – a project vehemently opposed by Uzbekistan on account of the impact it would have on water flows in that country – Tajikistan's electricity exports will not be cost-effective.

The TAPI pipeline faces just as many obstacles. With a projected cost of over $8 billion, the project has yet to find a solid source of funding. Security risks are a major concern, as are competing pipeline projects from Iran and Qatar, difficult terrain and the high sulphur content of Turkmenistan's natural gas.[48]

Even if stability were to be achieved in Afghanistan, many obstacles to economic integration with the Central Asian states would remain. Among these would be numerous water- and energy-related tensions. Afghanistan is an important potential participant in disputes over water, although the post-Soviet states did not include it as a stakeholder in negotiations over the distribution of water from the Amu Darya Basin at the beginning of the 1990s.[49] Some experts believe that if Afghanistan were to develop economically, it would seek to claim its full share of water from the Amu Darya/Pyanj rivers, to which it is entitled under a 1964 agreement with the Soviet Union (it currently uses only about one-quarter of its quota). This could lead to tensions with Afghanistan's northern neighbours. The Central Asian states do not suffer from water scarcity but use disproportionately large quantities of water relative to the sizes of their economies and populations, most of it to irrigate crops grown in poor-quality soils.[50] Indeed, as a result of this the Central Asian states have been labelled in some quarters as the 'world's biggest water wasters'.[51] Until their domestic governance of water resources improves, plans to pursue regional hydroelectric projects are unlikely to come to fruition.

Regional economic integration is further impeded by a number of other factors. In addition to opposing hydroelectricity initiatives in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan has obstructed railway traffic from Russia and Iran to Tajikistan, and has cut off electricity running via transmission lines from Turkmenistan through its territory to Tajikistan.

[45] John C. K. Daly, 'Central Asia to Power Afghanistan and Pakistan with Electricity', Silk Road Reporters, 30 October 2014, http://www.silkroadreporters.com/2014/10/30/central-asia-power-afghanistan-pakistan-electricity/.
[46] Casey Michel, 'An Historic, but Pointless, CASA-1000 Accord', *The Diplomat*, 5 December 2014.
[47] Thomas Ruttig, 'The Other Side of the Amu Darya: Tajik and Afghans, neighbours apart', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 1 September 2013.
[48] Annette Bohr, *Turkmenistan: Power, Politics and Petro-authoritarianism*, forthcoming Chatham House Research Paper.
[49] Boonstra et al., 'The Impact of the 2014 ISAF Forces' Withdrawal from Afghanistan on the Central Asian Region', p. 27.
[50] Olli Varis, 'Resources: Curb vast water use in Central Asia', *Nature*, Vol. 514, 2 October 2014, pp. 27–29. Kyrgyzstan is ranked fifth and Tajikistan seventh in the world in terms of water use per capita.
[51] Ibid.

More positively, the construction of the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Tajikistan railway (planned for completion in 2016) should give Tajikistan access to trade and transit routes that circumvent Uzbekistan. In addition, the construction of power lines from Turkmenistan through northern Afghanistan could solve the problem of electricity supplies being interrupted as a result of Uzbekistan's actions.

The disappointing results of regional infrastructure projects so far are mirrored by low levels of people-to-people contacts. The ethnic Tajik communities in Afghanistan have failed to capitalize on improved opportunities for cross-border cooperation with their counterparts in Tajikistan. Numbering approximately 8 million, Tajiks form the second-largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, after the Pashtuns. Yet since the reopening of the Tajik–Afghan border in 1991, relations at both governmental and grassroots levels have not developed significantly between Tajiks on either side of the border. This is despite the fact that mutually understandable versions of Persian are spoken in both communities.[52] While some cross-border economic cooperation has begun, interaction is still in its infancy.

Pakistan

Pakistan's domestic difficulties overshadow the possible economic impact on it of the transitions in Afghanistan. Developments in Afghanistan would likely have only modest macroeconomic implications for Pakistan and are thus of less concern for the latter than continuing power shortages, economic upheaval from political disputes and increasingly regular heavy flooding.

Notwithstanding this broad context, the Afghan transitions are likely to have a relatively greater effect on the smaller provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, which generally are more oriented towards Afghanistan (whereas the eastern provinces look towards India). In particular, some impact is likely to be felt in the cities of Quetta and Peshawar, the economies of which have benefited from the transit of NATO supplies. Among Pashtun trading communities, there is a growing belief that livelihoods would benefit from greater political stability and security. This would allow for a resumption of or increase in cross-border trade.

Trends in the flow of Afghan refugees will also affect Pakistan's economy to some degree. While refugees are generally seen in negative terms in the country, some Pakistanis have benefited from their presence. Wages have been pushed down (harming job-seekers, but benefiting employers), while rents and land prices have increased (harming those looking for accommodation, but benefiting landlords).

In Karachi there are particular concerns that increased numbers of Afghan refugees and/or IDPs from the tribal areas could exacerbate pressure on resources – notably water and land – and thus worsen existing sectarian tension and criminal activity. Refugees, along with IDPs, are also seen as putting pressure on already strained public services such as education and healthcare (although refugees lack access to some public services, such as higher education).

[52] Ruttig, 'The Other Side of the Amu Darya'.

Instability in Afghanistan risks exacerbating such pressures within Pakistan, in turn increasing popular resentment of Afghans. But the principal domestic economic and social challenges would exist regardless of developments in Afghanistan. The pressures noted above have intensified in recent years as a result of demographic trends and economic downturn. According to official figures, 3.1 million male Pakistanis between the ages of 15 and 34 are unemployed; the rate of unemployment is higher for the educated than for the uneducated.[53] A further 8 per cent of young, educated Pakistanis are underemployed. But these figures are likely to be significant under-estimates. At the same time, while there are no official figures, most assessments suggest that the number of people living in poverty has risen in recent years, a result both of the 2008 economic crisis and of natural disasters. One report suggests that the poverty rate has risen from 30 per cent of the population in 2005 to 38 per cent – or 71 million people – in 2011.[54]

This clearly has implications for social and political stability. Many of those with little education are attracted by Islamist agendas, while the more educated constitute a significant base of support for the protest movement led by Imran Khan.

Recent Pakistani moves to open up trade with India and grant the country 'most favoured nation' trading status have stalled on various grounds. For Pakistan, there are genuine concerns as to whether its agricultural and industrial sectors could compete against Indian producers. Problems such as energy shortages weaken Pakistani firms' commercial viability relative to their counterparts in India. These concerns reinforce a commonly held view that solutions to Pakistan's myriad economic woes lie, in the first instance, in domestic policy. Until impediments to industry are removed, many Pakistani firms will feel threatened by more open competition with Indian ones, and the prospects for enhanced connectivity will therefore remain slim. For its part, India has decided that its priority is to improve connectivity and economic links to the east – with Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

None the less, their respective economic engagements with Afghanistan could build confidence between India and Pakistan.[55] For example, the direct route for shipping goods (including ores, given India's substantial investment in Afghanistan's mining sector) from Afghanistan to India is through Pakistan. Under the Afghan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement, Afghanistan has the right to ship goods through Pakistan to India, although Indian goods cannot move in the opposite direction. Pakistan's accession to the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade Facilitation implies a further commitment to allowing cross-border transit trade.

However, Pakistan has placed hurdles hindering Afghan–Indian trade and has taken no steps to allow Indian goods to enter Afghanistan through its territory. As a result, Afghanistan is finalizing a partially seaborne transit trade agreement with Iran and India that would bypass Pakistan. The Iranian port of Chabahar is expected to be completed by the end of 2017. While there is awareness

[53] Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 'Percentage distribution of unemployed persons with previous experience of work by major occupation groups, sex, level of education: Pakistan & Province, Rural & Urban', 2014, http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//Labour%20Force/publications/lfs2013-14/t39-pak-fin.pdf, p. 1.
[54] Haroon Jamal, 'Pakistan Poverty Statistics: Estimates for 2011', Social Policy and Development Centre, September 2013, http://www.spdc.org.pk/Data/Publication/PDF/RR84.pdf, p. 1 and p. 6.
[55] See Gareth Price, 'India and Pakistan: Changing the Narratives', CIDOB, July 2012.

in Pakistan of the potential benefits of allowing Afghan–Indian trade through the country, this is politically difficult until trade between India and Pakistan is normalized.

Focusing on the macro-level benefits of free trade between India and Pakistan is less likely to be effective than projects to highlight the benefits of interaction where it already exists, with the intention of building up border markets. A starting point would be to build pockets of trust in particular sectors or particular geographic locations as a means of delinking trade from the broader bilateral relationship. For instance, cross-border trade in Kashmir restarted in 2008 and has the potential to build constituencies more supportive of engagement. Potential cooperation at the sub-national level between Indian states and Pakistani provinces could also build trust. For instance, there is strong support for greater cooperation between the two Punjabs, as advocated by their respective chief ministers in 2013.

Wider Political and Geopolitical Issues

Civilian hold over power in Pakistan remains insecure. Although the military leadership has no desire to intervene in politics, it appears keen to assert its authority over specific areas of foreign and domestic policy. The transitions in Afghanistan fuelled political tension between Pakistan's army and government in 2014. While the detention of a former president, General Pervez Musharraf, was the primary source of this tension, Prime Minister Sharif's overtures to India and promises not to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs also appear to have riled the military.

The military's self-appointed role as guardian of Pakistan means that the after-effects of Afghanistan's transitions have the potential to cause tension in Pakistan. The perception of Afghanistan as a source of security risk for Pakistan reflects concerns that ungoverned spaces in southern Afghanistan could offer a safe haven from which the TTP could operate. There is also the fear that this could boost secessionist tendencies among Pashtun communities, particularly given Afghanistan's continued refusal to accept the Durand Line as the official border. Pakistan's military also sees Indian influence in Afghanistan as threatening. It is far from clear what level of Indian-backed stability in Afghanistan would be acceptable to Pakistan's army, although President Ghani's tilt towards Pakistan makes this question redundant for now.

Sharif's ambitions for closer ties with India, notably in trade, could have presented an opportunity for Afghanistan to become a source of mutual benefit for India and Pakistan – rather than of competition between them. However, these ambitions appear to have been scuppered. Numerous reports have suggested that the price Sharif has paid for not being ousted has been to cede to the military the responsibility for policy towards Afghanistan and India.

While India looms large in Pakistan's Afghan policy, Russia does the same in Central Asian thinking about the country. Meanwhile, Iran sees in Afghanistan a channel for indirect engagement with the United States, viewing the role of the Taliban in the broader context of Sunni Islamist extremism across the Middle East.

This highlights a broader conceptual question over the challenges for regional cooperation. To see Afghanistan's stability as central to the region implies the need for regional solutions on a range of issues, including terrorism, drug-trafficking and refugees. However, a counter-argument suggests that Afghanistan overlaps with three different sub-regions – South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East – each of which faces different challenges and for which Afghanistan is frequently a secondary issue (thus, in South Asia, Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan will remain problematic until its relationship with India improves). Afghanistan affects each of these regions but is not central to them. Attempts to forge a regional solution to Afghanistan's problems are seldom effective because the constraints for each sub-region are different.

The US military presence in the region has clearly had an impact on bilateral discussions in South Asia. The reduction in US forces presents an opportunity for the countries concerned to take greater 'ownership' of regional issues, but it also creates threats. Bilateral conversations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been mediated by the United States over the past decade. With the reduced,

albeit continued, US presence, the two countries have the opportunity to forge a more direct relationship – but this also means the mediating influence of the United States may be less effective.

Scope for broader bilateral or regional engagement/discussion exists with respect to a range of challenges, some of which are closely related to the Afghan transitions. For instance, the UNODC-facilitated dialogue between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran could be cultivated to facilitate cross-border intelligence-sharing and to build confidence more broadly.

One challenge in such engagement is the lack of capacity in Afghanistan. There is a sense in the country that until it has produced its own policy on an issue, it is not ready to engage with other countries. Given that Afghanistan has more immediate priorities, this hinders engagement.

India

Pakistan's relationship with India is central to the region's politics. Many in Pakistan define their country through its opposition to India and – and in the military, in particular – feel that India seeks to fracture it. This presumed existential threat is often used to legitimize the military's role in government. The Indian presence in post-Taliban Afghanistan is touted as evidence of India's supposedly nefarious anti-Pakistani designs. While Pakistan's current and former civilian governments have expressed a desire to improve ties with India, the military has stressed that the bilateral relationship falls under its remit. When viewed through this 'India' prism, developments in Afghanistan fuel civil–military tension in Pakistan, leading to further securitization of Pakistan's foreign policy towards the country.

The debate over trade with India highlights one of the main challenges in this respect. One view, which is widely held, is that there can be no improvement in relations with India unless the fundamental disagreement between the two countries over the status of Kashmir is resolved. Conversely, some Pakistanis believe that taking other steps – such as increasing trade – could boost confidence and improve high-level political relations.

An alternative approach consists of building trust at a more granular level in relation to specific shared challenges. For instance, improved trade with India would create larger constituencies in both countries that would stand to benefit from peace and stability. While this approach is by no means guaranteed to succeed, in the absence of a major political shift it seems more feasible than placing hopes on resolution of high-level issues.

There is also the viewpoint that Afghanistan, Pakistan and India need to find a grand political 'compact' wherein they would agree not to support destabilizing proxies in other countries. However, any overarching compact of this kind would still imply some level of resolution to the Kashmir dispute – an issue which India sees as demanding bilateral resolution, and which it has no intention of internationalizing.

The security transition in Afghanistan is being accompanied by an upsurge in tension in Kashmir. Some Pakistani militant groups feel that the Western troop withdrawal reflects their success, and are now emboldened to turn their attention towards Kashmir. In 2013 Hafiz Saeed, the leader of

Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jamaat-ud Dawa (JuD), asked India to 'leave Kashmir', saying: 'No one could defeat the Muslims … If America had to run away [from Afghanistan], then India, you will have to leave Kashmir as well.'[56]

Indian security analysts have suggested that an escalation of violence in Indian-controlled Kashmir is in Pakistan's interests as a means of diverting India's attention from Afghanistan and thereby strengthening Pakistan's position in the country. In addition, Pakistan may prefer that Islamist extremists operate in Indian Kashmir rather than in Pakistan itself.

India's tougher line towards Pakistan followed the escalation of shelling along the Line of Control in 2014. India perceived Pakistani shelling as an attempt to push it into talks. Instead, to show strength, India called off talks after Pakistan's high commissioner to India met Kashmiri separatists. While India's actions undermined the peace lobby in Pakistan (in particular liberals and business people), it reflected the Indian belief that this lobby remains unable to marginalize hardliners in Pakistan.

Russia

The departure of the United States from Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan, the drawdown of international troops from Afghanistan and accelerating integration with Russian-led regional organizations have drastically reduced Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's ability to pursue previously well-honed multi-vectoring foreign policy strategies. This has made Dushanbe and Bishkek more vulnerable to Russian pressure and increased Russian influence over the countries' domestic politics. Two manifestations of this have been Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union and the tightening of restrictions on civil society organizations, particularly on those that get funding from abroad, in both countries.[57] Similarly, the approval by Kyrgyzstan's parliament in October 2014 of a bill to criminalize the distribution of information offering positive views of homosexuality is widely regarded as having been inspired by Moscow.[58]

There is a feeling among the elite in Kyrgyzstan of the country being a pawn in a 'great game', as tensions between the United States and Russia have increased, or of being abandoned by the West. As one academic and former diplomat remarks: 'The West has left us alone with Russia, a wounded bear.'[59] This sense of vulnerability to Russia does not filter down to the wider population, however, owing to the predominance of Russian media and Russia as the destination of choice for migrant workers. As another academic has pointed out, Kyrgyzstan currently finds itself in a 'multi-vectoring' paradox: although President Atambayev's choice of potential allies is nominally wider than that of his predecessors, given the increasing influence in the region of China, the Arab states and even Turkey, in practice he has little option but to hew closely to Russia as the country's strategic partner.

[56] Ramachandran Sudha, 'Kashmir Tensions Mount', *The Diplomat*, 20 August 2013.
[57] Ebi Spahiu, 'Russia pushes Kyrgyzstan to Adopt Draconian Legislation Ahead of Joining Customs Union', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, 27 October 2014.
[58] Interview with Mira Karybaeva, Head, Department of Ethnic, Religious Policies and Interaction with Civil Society, President's Office of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, June 2014.
[59] Interview with Osmonakun Ibraimov, Head, Department of Eastern Languages (and former secretary of state), Manas Kyrgyz Turkish University, Bishkek, June 2014.

As the geopolitical struggle between Russia and the West has intensified since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Russian security analysts and commentators have more forcefully highlighted the threats emanating from Afghanistan. Their aim, in part, seems to have been to justify Russia maintaining a strong military and political presence in the region. While Kyrgyzstan is keen for assistance from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in strengthening its border defences, many in Tajikistan fear that Russia would use ISAF's withdrawal from Afghanistan as a pretext to return its own guards to the Tajik–Afghan border.

The preponderance of conspiracy theories in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is another complicating factor. In both countries, elites express the fear that insurgent groups in Afghanistan could be exploited by Russia and/or the United States to destabilize Central Asia. More commonly, notions about such a 'third force' originate in Russia. Speaking at a conference in Kyrgyzstan in 2013, the director of a Russian think-tank declared that 'the main source of threat and challenge to security in the region is the military and political presence of the United States'. He alleged in particular that the United States had fostered a network of Central Asian jihadists in Afghanistan in order to achieve its strategic objectives.[60] In the same vein, a well-known Russian commentator said in 2014 that Central Asian militants are sponsored by US intelligence in order to create insecurity and provide an incentive for local regimes to allow the United States to build new bases in the region.[61]

China

China's commercial interests in Afghanistan, coupled with its fear of the spread of extremism into the Xinjiang autonomous region, have encouraged it to seek an increasingly influential role in the country's politics. On many levels this is a positive development. First and foremost, China is the longest-standing ally of Pakistan, which will necessarily have a central role in efforts to promote stability in Afghanistan. Second, China appears capable of providing incentives to Pakistan – such as investment in the country – to encourage it to facilitate a dialogue with Afghanistan. Third, now that the Afghan state has proved its durability by going through the changes of 2014, the conditions are more favourable for a reconciliation process between the Afghan government and the Taliban to begin. That said, it remains unproven whether there exists a homogeneous Taliban with which China and others can engage.

Pakistan probably sees Chinese involvement, in part, as a counterweight to India's engagement with Afghanistan. At the same time, India and China share similar interests in relation to Afghanistan. China provides assistance directly. Most of its support is for infrastructure projects, frequently implemented using Chinese labour. There is widespread support for China within Pakistan. However, many Pakistanis see their government as increasingly beholden to Chinese interests. This has led numerous anti-government forces to target Chinese nationals.

[60] Proceedings of the conference: 'Afghanistan–2014: Prospects for development of the situation in IRA, challenges and threats to security in Central Asia in the context of the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force', 10 October 2013, Bishkek, in *International Observer*, No. 1, December 2013, p. 110.
[61] Edward Lemon, 'Russia Sees IS as Reason to Boost Control in Central Asia', EurasiaNet.org, 11 November 2014, http://www.eurasianet.org/node/70866.

Conclusion

To date it appears that the various risks that were posited in relation to the impact of ISAF's withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 have been either minimal or attributable to causes other than the situation in Afghanistan. This is not to deny that events in Afghanistan have the potential to exacerbate or ameliorate negative trends in the region.

Pakistan's challenges are primarily domestic, and interconnected. Official attempts to equate Pakistani identity with Sunni Islam have encouraged radicalization. Poor governance and inadequate delivery of services have opened space in areas such as education, into which radical groups have moved. These problems have also discouraged Pakistanis from paying taxes, reducing the government's capacity to push back against radicalization. Demographic growth has exacerbated pressures on a range of resources, from water to power. Refugee inflows from Afghanistan would add to these pressures. Conversely, an improvement in stability in Afghanistan could in theory encourage some unofficial Afghan refugees to return home – however, there currently seems to be little likelihood that many of the 1.6 million official refugees would return to Afghanistan.

A worsening of instability in Afghanistan would have two divergent impacts on Pakistan. First, if Afghanistan became the primary focus of Islamist groups, the number of attacks in Pakistan could fall, presenting a short-term window of opportunity in the latter for state-building and for rolling back domestic radicalization. Second, however, any perceived Taliban success in Afghanistan would likely encourage radical groups in Pakistan in their campaign against the Pakistani state, presenting a longer-term threat. The fundamental challenge is to persuade Pakistan's government, and most importantly its military, that continuing with the policy of differentiating between 'good' and 'bad' Taliban is not in the country's long-term interest.

As regards the threat from militants in Afghanistan to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the geography of jihadism has changed since 9/11. There is now greater mobility among insurgent groups who travel through Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and Turkey. Yet even in the event that Central Asian militants fighting in major jihadist theatres were to return en masse to Afghanistan with the aim of preparing to launch attacks in the Central Asia states, they would not be in a position to topple the regimes there owing to a general lack of popular support for jihad, although they could create a significant degree of localized instability.

In any event, it is ever clearer that Central Asian militants favour jihad in Syria to jihad in Afghanistan. Consequently, in the aftermath of the ISAF drawdown, ISIS is fast replacing Afghanistan as the new 'useful enemy' for the authorities of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, providing them with a convenient pretext to tighten control on religious activity and adopt laws curtailing religious freedom.

Political and security developments in Afghanistan also have implications for regional relations with Russia. Authorities in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are well aware of Russia's increased leverage and their own reduced ability to pursue a 'multi-vector' foreign policy, leading some segments of

their societies to feel abandoned by the West. But it is not the withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan *per se* that poses a security risk to Central Asia, but rather the lack of an adequate regional security structure. The main guarantor of security remains the Russian-led CSTO, while the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is unlikely to get involved in security issues.

Future opportunities for increased economic cooperation and development at the regional level are threatened by instability in Afghanistan. Equally, tensions surrounding water and energy among the Central Asian states, coupled with inefficient resource use, place obstacles in the way of potential joint energy projects with Afghanistan. The loss of economic opportunities is felt across the region. Support for increased people-to-people contact and cross-border trade could provide an entry point for broader economic initiatives. However, a macro-level solution is unlikely at this stage.

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Khyber Pass (Khaiber or Khaybar), the mountain pass linking Pakistan with Afghanistan.

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