



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

The fate of Afghanistan and the success of U.S. and coalition efforts to stabilize Afghanistan will in large measure be affected by the current and future policies pursued by its varied proximate and distal neighbors. Most analyses of Afghanistan have focused on its internal dimensions or the policies pursued by U.S. and coalition partners. To date, there have been few analyses that situate Afghanistan's future within the context of its region and the key players in this region. This is unfortunate because many states, including Pakistan, Iran, India, China, Russia, and the Central Asian republics, have an important ability to influence positively and negatively the course of developments in Afghanistan.

To address this analytical gap, the United States Institute of Peace, Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention requested Dr. Marvin G. Weinbaum to evaluate the courses of action Afghanistan's key neighbors are likely to take and assess their importance for Afghanistan's evolution toward a stable and robust state.

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.

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*Marvin G. Weinbaum*

# Afghanistan and Its Neighbors

## An Ever Dangerous Neighborhood



Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

## Summary

- Predatory neighbors have been a fact of life for the Afghan state throughout most of its history. In defense, Afghans have chosen both isolation and resistance. Today, openness and cooperation with regional powers offer the best prospects for security and economic progress for Afghanistan.
- Conversely, the region's political stability and economic potential are broadly influenced by the ability of post-conflict Afghanistan to succeed in its recovery.

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- The region's opportunistic states are liable to revive their interventions in Afghanistan in the event of a faltering Kabul government or an international community that reneges on its commitments to help secure and rebuild the country. Already there are some indications that the forbearance shown by neighbors in recent years may be flagging.
- Pakistan and Iran offer Afghanistan its most imposing and critical regional bilateral relationships. Whether they cooperate or create obstacles for Afghanistan's recovery is greatly influenced by American strategic policies in the region.
- There is widespread belief among Afghans and others in the region that U.S. interest in the country will fade quickly once its major objectives in the region are realized. While an arguable expectation, perceptions alone are enough for many Afghan and regional power brokers to begin to hedge their bets in supporting the Karzai regime.
- Afghanistan's emergence as a regional crossroads for trade and resource sharing in a post-Taliban era remains a distant though hopeful prospect. Endemic economic and physical constraints and retrogressive political developments block progress toward the region forming a vital new economic entity.

## Introduction

Landlocked and resource poor, Afghanistan is at risk of unwelcome external influences, its sovereignty and traditions vulnerable. The competition among external powers has at times enabled the country to enjoy their beneficence. More often, it has suffered at their hands. For more than a century, Afghanistan served as the classic buffer state between the British and Czarist empires. During the Cold War it was first neutral ground and then contested terrain between Soviet and surrogate American power. Under the yoke of the Soviet Union's occupation during the 1980s, at least one-third of the population went into exile and most of the contested countryside lay in waste. The state itself suffered near disintegration in a following decade of civil war sponsored in part by regional powers. By the late 1990s, Afghanistan hosted the opening salvos in a war between radical Islamists and their designated, mostly Western enemies. A post-Taliban Afghanistan, still not free from conflict, extracts benefits for its recovery from international patrons and hopes for the forbearance of traditionally predatory regional states.

Framing the discussions in this study is the assertion that Afghanistan's future and that of the regional states are closely bound. Constructive partnerships involving Afghans and their neighbors are essential to regional stability. Just as the capacity of Afghanistan to overcome its political and economic deficits will have deep bearing on the region's security and development, the domestic stability and foreign policies of the neighboring states will affect the prospects for progress in Afghanistan. Many Afghans insist that outside forces drive the current insurgency in the country, while for the regional players Afghanistan remains a potential source of instability through the export of arms, drugs, and ideology.

The study posits that over much of the last four years Afghanistan's neighbors have assessed that support for a stable, independent, and economically strengthening Afghan state is preferable to any achievable alternatives. None have directly opposed the internationally approved Hamid Karzai as president or seriously tried to manipulate Afghan domestic politics. All have pledged, moreover, some measure of development assistance. Undoubtedly, the presence of foreign military forces and international attention has contributed to their restrained policies.

The strategic approaches to Afghanistan by its neighbors are, however, always subject to readjustment. No regional state is prepared to allow another to gain a preponderance of influence in Afghanistan. Moreover, each retains links to client networks that are capable of fractionalizing and incapacitating an emerging Afghanistan. States in the neighborhood may well sponsor destabilizing forces in the event that Kabul governments fail over time

to extend their authority and tangibly improve people's lives, or should Afghanistan's international benefactors lose their patience and interest. More immediately, as described below, political currents in several regional countries may be overtaking the economic forces on which more optimistic projections for regional cooperation have been based. Poorly considered policies by international aid givers and the Kabul government have in some cases helped to increase suspicions and tensions with neighbors.

This study first examines how Afghanistan has historically engaged and been impacted by neighboring states and other foreign stakeholders. The section looks at the way the country has at different times tried both to insulate itself and attract benefactors. A second section focuses on the dynamics of contemporary political and economic relations among countries of the region. It considers how as a regional fulcrum Afghanistan is leveraged by external powers pursuing competing interests. The two sections that follow focus on Pakistan and Iran, countries providing Afghanistan's most imposing and critical regional bilateral relationships. For each country, the study describes motives and forces driving policies that have been at times obstructionist and at others constructive. A fifth section looks more briefly at the stakes and changing parameters of engagement for each of the other countries bordering Afghanistan as well as noncontiguous Russia and India. The study concludes with an examination of the broader international community's contributions to the shaping of regional security. The section looks as well at how the international community can help create the opportunities and conditions that could foster cooperation in the region and safeguard against future instability. It also assesses briefly U.S. priorities and policies in the region and their bearing on the Afghan project of state building.

## The Historical Backdrop

Much of Afghanistan's modern history has been taken up with its own political consolidation. Though outside influences penetrated in important ways, affecting the outcome of domestic struggles, Afghanistan was not a visible player on either the regional or world stage until the 1950s. For centuries the country was best known for the foreign armies crossing its territory. Iran has had a long history with Afghanistan and until the mid-nineteenth century controlled large areas in the country's far west. Afghanistan's legendary status over two centuries as a pawn in the Great Game between the region's imperial giants precluded the country from having an independent foreign policy even while it was spared colonial status. Efforts to open the country to modernization through contacts with Europe were undertaken by King Amanullah in the late 1920s. But with the monarchy's overthrow in 1929 by reactionary elements, these policies abruptly ended. Within a year the royal line was restored with British assistance, as was the traditionally ascendant Pashtun ethnic group. Afghanistan resumed its relative isolation under a new, more conservative king, Nadir Shah. In the late 1930s, British efforts to thwart Nazi Germany's efforts to gain an economic and political foothold in Afghanistan drew the country into international politics. Iran's strategic location prompted the Allies to remove its distrusted king, Reza Shah, in 1941 and to occupy the country. But neutrality sufficed for Afghanistan, a backwater in the global conflict.

Adjusting to the new, postwar international order, the Afghan royal family sought to avail Afghanistan of security and development assistance. Initially, however, the country was not high on anyone's strategic agenda. Even with the Cold War under way, the Soviet Union was at first mostly occupied with institutionalizing aid relationships with other newly minted communist countries. Communist doctrine through the early 1950s generally ruled out aid to nonaligned, less developed countries like Afghanistan. Economically and socially backward, Afghanistan held even less interest for a United States engaged in trying to prevent European countries from falling within the Soviet orbit. The death of Stalin and a containment policy of regional alliances forged by John Foster Dulles

### **Afghanistan: Post-9/11**

#### ***Political Timeline***

##### **October 7, 2001**

Operation Enduring Freedom begins, leading to the fall of the Taliban regime five weeks later.

##### **November 14, 2001**

UNSCR 1378 calls for central role for the United Nations in establishing a transitional administration.

##### **December 5, 2001**

Major factions sign the Bonn Agreement forming a 30-member interim administration, chaired by Hamid Karzai, to govern until the holding of an emergency *loya jirga*, which will choose a government to run the country until a new constitution is approved and national elections are held. The agreement also authorizes an international peacekeeping force to maintain security.

##### **December 6, 2001**

UNSCR 1385 endorses the Bonn Agreement.

##### **December 20, 2001**

UNSCR 1386 authorizes an international peacekeeping force.

##### **June 2002**

An emergency *loya jirga*, consisting of 1,550 delegates, meets and selects Karzai to remain as leader until presidential elections can be held.

##### **October 2002**

A thirty-five-member constitutional commission is appointed.

##### **January 4, 2004**

A constitutional *loya jirga* approves the draft constitution with only minor changes.

##### **October 9, 2004**

Karzai receives 55 percent of the vote and is elected president over seventeen challengers.

##### **September 18, 2005**

Voters elect the 249-seat lower house of parliament, or *Wolesi Jirga*, as well as the provincial councils. The upper house, or *Meshrano Jirga*, is subsequently appointed by Karzai and the provincial councils.

brought a major reorientation. Soviet strategy now called for mobilizing nonideological support through assistance to countries, most of them less developed states, that could be weaned away from Western influences. Moscow tested its new policies on regimes in the just-emerging Third World Movement and countries like Afghanistan.

By the mid-1950s, Soviet leaders were offering substantial development and military assistance. And, as occurred in India and Egypt, the United States responded with its own aid programs designed to keep countries from tilting entirely in the Soviet direction. In the case of Afghanistan, however, Washington was willing to cede most of the development and the defense sectors to Russia as the price for pleasing the more valued Pakistan. Pakistan had already been enlisted as an American military ally in the Baghdad Pact in 1954 and its relations with Afghanistan were poor, mostly because of the Afghan government's advocacy of a Pashtun ethnic state to be carved out of Pakistan.

Unlike neighboring states, Afghan governments remained formally nonaligned until the communist coup in 1978. Moreover, to a remarkable degree, despite the preeminence of Soviet involvement, the country's leaders showed themselves adept at playing off the Soviet Union and the United States in order to extract more aid from each. In fact, for more than twenty years Afghanistan saw a degree of accommodation between the superpowers found in no other country during the Cold War. Meanwhile, however, Kabul governments were less successful in relations with the two countries to their east and west.

Serious disputes erupted during the 1950s and 1960s between Afghanistan and Iran and Pakistan. Both states were critical to trade routes for Afghan imports and exports. Relations with Pakistan had gotten off to a bad start in 1947 as a result of a border drawn by the British more than a half century earlier to divide Afghanistan's principal ethnic group, the Pashtuns. Afghanistan was the only country to refuse to support Pakistan's UN membership. In response to Afghan governments' continuing irredentist rhetoric during the 1950s and early 1960s promoting a Pashtun state, Pakistan on several occasions closed its border, creating serious economic difficulties for Afghanistan. The country's economy was denied access to the port of Karachi, the principal entry point for Afghan imports and exports. Iran objected to any attempts by Kabul to divert the Helmand River because of the adverse effects on water reaching Iran's parched southeast. Although treaties were agreed to with both countries in the 1970s that largely normalized relations, suspicions of malicious intentions remained.

While the Soviet Union as a regional state was understood to be the senior aid partner, the Afghan leadership maintained stronger cultural ties with Europe and the United States. As increasing numbers of Afghans went to the West and India to study, they tended to avoid the Soviet Union. When King Zahir Shah decided to open the political system with a new constitution, he named Western-oriented officials to undertake the drafting. They produced a document in 1964 that aimed at establishing Western-like institutions and democratic values, defying not just local communist sympathizers but political Islamists in the country who sought a system built on principles enunciated by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. But if the constitution opened opportunities for popular participation in a liberal government, it also offered the country's Marxists and Maoists greater opportunities to organize and, significantly, to infiltrate the military ranks.

The failure of the constitutional experiment was marked by the fall of the monarchy in a military-led communist coup in 1973. But over the next five years, although the Soviet Union was now clearly preeminent in its influence over the country, President Mohammad Daoud gradually sought to dilute Moscow's influence. Daoud, a former prime minister and cousin of the king, reached out not to the West but to other Islamic countries. He hoped to counterbalance the Soviet Union with massive financial assistance from oil-wealthy Arab states and Iran. Before he was deposed and killed in 1978 by communists, again led by the military, Daoud had even tried to reconcile with Pakistan.

Replacing Daoud were dedicated Afghan communist party leaders who were determined to impose a Marxist-Leninist government and society. With their takeover, Afghanistan became, in effect, a willing satellite of the Soviet Union. The communist regime's

attempts to impose their ideologically driven policies were crude and culturally offensive. They soon provoked an Islamic-led insurgency, whose successes over the next year and a half threatened the communists' grip on power and drew the intervention of the Red Army in December 1979.

The jihad mounted from Pakistan during the 1980s, supported by the United States and Saudi Arabia, among others, drew Pakistan into Afghan affairs as never before. By funneling assistance to the mujahideen, Pakistan enlisted in the geostrategic effort to keep Soviet forces tied down in Afghanistan. Pakistan's participation also suggested the possibility of eventually liberating Afghan territory to provide strategic depth against India. As a payback for assistance to the insurgency and its acceptance of Afghan refugees, the Pakistani military took a healthy cut of the military aid intended for the mujahideen. Islamabad expected to be further rewarded with an indebted, friendly government taking power in Kabul when Afghanistan's communist government finally fell, three years after the Soviet army's withdrawal.

But the Afghan mujahideen parties, following their return, battled one another for power and brought the country to near anarchy and commercial paralysis. Resisting subordination to Islamabad, government leaders in Kabul turned to India for a political and economic counterweight. In reaction, Pakistan's security forces in league with commercial interests took sponsorship of a group of religious students seeking to overthrow the Kabul regime. By 1996 the largely Pashtun-led Taliban had swept much of the country and captured Kabul, thanks in no small part to Pakistan's poorly disguised military assistance. With territory continuing to fall in the country's north, Afghanistan's other neighbors took alarm that the Taliban might foster insurgency in their countries. More distant countries, but especially the United States, took aim at Islamic extremism in the person of Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network in Afghanistan. Despite UN sanctions, the Taliban were probably just months away from a total victory when the events of September 11, 2001, forced Pakistan to cooperate with efforts to eliminate al Qaeda and bring regime change in Afghanistan.

## Regional Dynamics

At focus is a region reaching across Central and West Asia to the Indian subcontinent, with shared roots, and whose parts to a large extent intersect in Afghanistan. Historically it is the land bridge over which great powers have crossed in pursuit of imperial ambitions and commercial goals. It proved vital in helping to seal the fate of armies of Greeks, Arabs, Persians, Mongols, and, most recently, the Soviets. There is much today that integrates Afghanistan socially with the region. The country's diverse population of Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Uzbeks, among others, suggests the close ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, and cultural links it maintains with the states it borders. Although encompassing various nationalities and ethnicities, the countries of the region also share in many respects a common future in which a revived Afghanistan can contribute to their chances of peace and prosperity. Mohammad Iqbal, Pakistan's national poet, once called Afghanistan "the beating heart of Asia."

As is often stated, Afghanistan stands in a dangerous neighborhood. Responsibility for much of the political instability and misery of its people can be traced to external powers seeking to realize their own strategic, ideological, and economic interests in the country. The close and more distant neighbors of Afghanistan have regularly intervened in its politics and economy. Foreigners have sometimes acted on behalf of domestic clients and have organized and armed them to dominate large portions of the country. Although renowned for resisting foreign intruders, Afghans cannot thus be absolved of responsibility for much of the fratricide and destruction that has occurred in recent decades. Still, the aggravating role of outside states, near and far, has also made civil conflicts more sustained and lethal.

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Afghanistan's Major Ethnolinguistic Groups			
Ethnic Group	Population (% est.)	Primary Language	Islamic Sect
Pashtuns	40	Pashto	Sunni
Tajiks	25	Dari dialects	mostly Sunni
Hazara	20	Dari dialects	Shia
Uzbek	7	Uzbek dialects	Sunni
Turkmen	3	Turkic dialect	Sunni
Baloch	3	Balochi	Sunni

In a region that is broadly contentious, external rivalries as well as domestic unrest among neighbors can easily spill onto Afghan soil. Political instability in Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, a radicalized Pakistan, U.S. military action against Iran, and another major war between Pakistan and India could all impact strongly on Afghanistan. For some time, both Pakistani and Indian calculations have included gaining an advantage in Afghanistan. The quest for strategic depth dominated Pakistani thinking beginning in the late 1980s. Afghanistan was designated to provide safe harbor for Pakistani forces in the event of conflict with India. A cooperative, if not altogether satellite Afghan state would also provide assurance that India or any forces aligned with New Delhi would not pose a threat to Pakistan from across its northwest frontier. Supporting the cause of a pure Islamic state in Afghanistan not only promised to neutralize Pashtun irredentism but also helped to train and indoctrinate jihadis for the struggle against India in Kashmir.

Regional competition between Pakistan and Iran also carries over into Afghanistan. While the interventions of other countries have come and gone when expedient, these two neighbors have remained perennial meddlers in Afghanistan's internal affairs. While usually downplaying their differences, Iran's Islamic Republic's dissatisfaction with Pakistan is directly traceable to Islamabad's military partnerships with the United States and close economic and cultural ties to Saudi Arabia. Within Pakistan, sectarian attacks on Shia by Sunni militants have prompted Iranian clandestine operations on behalf of their coreligionists, and both countries suspect the other's involvement in insurgencies among their respective ethnic Baloch populations. The strategic rivalry between Pakistan and Iran is also fueled by their mutual nuclear programs, notwithstanding the possibly rogue role that Pakistani scientists have had in assisting Iran's nuclear development.

Many of Afghanistan's challenges, often thought of as domestic, are also regional in character, necessarily addressed with regional strategies and cooperation. Policies that have sometimes been used to insulate the country against interfering neighbors have denied Afghanistan the advantages of joining with neighbors to face common threats and realize new opportunities. Prospects for limiting the transit of arms and smuggling activities rest on regional approaches. With Afghanistan the originating point of a transnational drug trade, regional efforts are indispensable to interdicting traffickers. For all of the fears of porous borders, the free movement of labor across frontiers offers a source of needed skills for an Afghan recovery. The economic interdependencies that emerge in a regional open market system are thought likely to give its neighbors a greater stake in Afghanistan's stability and prosperity.

All of the region's economies carry on the greater portion of their trade outside the region. Every country in the region, not just landlocked Afghanistan, is anxious to create alternative routes to international markets. Road and rail transportation projects are also likely to promote intraregional economic growth. As Barnett Rubin points out, trade could be facilitated with customs procedures that expedite the movement of goods and the removal of tariffs and taxes. He also notes the values of harmonizing customs policy and procedures along with border security arrangements. Afghanistan is particularly handicapped by a badly deficient infrastructure. Its road system is limited even if rehabilitated to its preconflict status. Investment is required for building and repairing roads and for the eventual construction of an internal rail network linked to Afghanistan's neighbors.

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External investment in the country hinges on addressing the requirement of expanded water supplies and hydropower as a regional project. Water issues focus on the sharing of the Amu Darya-Panj River system in the north, the Helmand River in the southwest, and the Kabul River in the east. Each of these is critical to agricultural development across borders with nearly all of Afghanistan's neighbors. Improved security and a strengthened legal system in the country could attract increased private capital from within the region and elsewhere. The case can also be made that if regional trade and other economic relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors are encouraged, more pragmatic forces will be strengthened at the expense of radical Islamic forces.

Afghanistan has enough security interests in common with its neighbors that, with international encouragement and patronage, a regional security community built on pure national interest would seem a logical step. To be effective, however, any regional arrangements for cooperation on security issues will have to take into account the limited resources that Afghanistan, the regional powers, and the international community have available or are willing to commit. A cooperative approach would of course stand the best chance of success if all the countries in the region were developing economically and progressing toward democratic, legitimate regimes.

Whether on security or economic issues, regional relations are underinstitutionalized. Region-wide organizations could facilitate cooperation that, among other objectives, would discourage interference in Afghanistan. In December 2002, regional states together with Russia and the United States that had been members of the Six-Plus-Two grouping created to contain the Taliban joined with Afghanistan in the signing of a Kabul Declaration of good-neighborly relations. The group had pledged to support the Afghan people in the political process and throughout reconstruction, and some called for extending the group to include India and Saudi Arabia. Although Afghanistan and neighboring states have since reached multilateral and bilateral agreements on controlling drug trafficking and easing border restrictions, few have been effectively implemented. Nor has the group contributed much toward solidifying trade ties.

Another grouping of countries, the Shanghai Organization for Security and Cooperation, deals with concerns that broadly affect Afghanistan, such as security and economic issues, but excludes Afghan membership. The Shanghai group, formed in 1996 by China and Russia together with the former Soviet Central Asian republics except for Turkmenistan, was primarily designed to thwart Islamic challenges in the region. Russia and China continue to endorse U.S.-led operations that are aimed at defending Afghanistan against insurgency. But a long-term U.S. military presence anywhere in the region is unacceptable to the Russians and Chinese, both of whom see the Americans as trying to cut them out of spheres of traditional influence.

Afghanistan has been admitted to several regional organizations. It belongs to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. In November 2005, with the backing of both India and Pakistan, Afghanistan became the eighth member of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Afghanistan became the tenth member of the ECO in 1992, when the group was expanded from its original three, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, along with the newly born Central Asian republics. But aside from the ADB, all of these organizations have fallen well short of their original promise. The ECO has embarked on several projects in the energy, trade, transport, agriculture, and drug control sectors, but few have had impressive results. As a regional forum, SAARC aims to promote trade and cooperation on security matters, including narcotics and terrorism. Afghanistan's admission could help to draw the country economically, politically, and psychologically closer to South Asia. Most observers agree, however, that lingering political differences among members retard progress toward regional solutions. Thus it is that Pakistan still prohibits India from transporting goods across its territory to Afghanistan.

Possibly the most hopeful sign of regional cooperation was a December 2005 Regional Economic Cooperation Conference attended by nearly all of the countries across a broad

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region that included India, Turkey, and Russia. The Kabul conference was considered largely successful for Afghanistan's attempt to reach out to its neighbors to solve its problems and their acknowledging the country's importance to regional growth. Still, the sessions, supported by the G8 nations and World Bank, failed to produce much beyond general agreement to facilitate trade, transportation, and energy transfers, and a willingness to work together on such specific issues as fighting drugs and improving security.

A Greater Central Asia organization that formalizes cooperation for the mutual economic benefit of the region, as proposed by Frederick Starr, would be a natural extension of the Kabul conference. For the near term, Starr sees the cooperation probably occurring on an à la carte basis. However, to envision a newly viable geoeconomic entity emerging any time soon probably overstates the compatibility and common interests at present among the regional states. The idea of a greater region is complicated by their different political systems. The five former Soviet republics in Central Asia are still largely chips off the old Soviet bloc and more nationalist than regional in their attitudes. Many of the expected synergisms of the post-Soviet era have failed to materialize as the region has become an arena of competition among regional players. As a result, these Central Asian republics together with their southern neighbors are likely to fail for the foreseeable future to measure up to their regional responsibilities.

Regional States: Statistics								
	Population (in mil.)	Population Growth Rate (%)	GDP Growth Rate (%)	GDP Per Cap (US\$)	Exports to Region (mil. US\$)	Below Poverty Line (%)	Literacy (%)	Political Stability Index
Afghanistan	28	2.67	8	300	1,003	53	36	3.4
Pakistan	152	2.09	7.8	632	5,149	40	49	6.3
Iran	67	1.10	4.8	2,431	10,308	32	77	19.9
Tajikistan	6	2.19	8.0	323	666	64	90	13.1
Uzbekistan	26	1.70	7.2	461	1,389	28	91	9.7
Turkmenistan	5	1.83	11.0	1,251	13,727	58	93	18.9
China	1,269	0.59	9.3	1,272	22,561	10	90	46.6
India	1,080	1.38	7.6	638	12,694	25	61	24.3
Russia	143	-0.37	5.9	4,078	15,669	18	95	21.8

A recent World Bank study casts doubt that the region's economies form natural trade partnerships, or that Afghanistan is especially suited to serve as the hub of a regional trade zone. The study finds potentially greater compatibility in sharing energy and water resources, with the best prospects coming through bilateral rather than multilateral agreements. The Bank points out that although trade between Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan and Iran is significant, trade activity is minimal among former Soviet republics, and between them and Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. It suggests that even if transport and border policies currently acting as restraints were removed, regional trade would still face serious limitations. In any case, serious infrastructural and security obstacles stand in the way of Afghanistan becoming a trade crossroads for the region any time soon. Indeed, whatever the benefits of regional integration, the underdeveloped Afghan state and economy may be for the time being the weakest link.

## Pakistan: The Covetous Neighbor

Afghanistan's border with Pakistan is longer than its border with any other neighbor. The Afghan economy is tightly tied to Pakistan's, and the two countries are closely linked culturally and historically. Provincial and interethnic rivalries in Pakistan and Afghanistan are

well known to have fueled insurgencies across their border. The division of the region's large Pashtun population has been especially responsible for both bringing the two countries together and setting them apart. A Pashtun-dominated Afghanistan has promised its neighbor a source of security through the hoped-for strategic depth against India mentioned above and at the same time offered a potential threat to Pakistan's territorial integrity. Islamabad's policies have worked to maximize the possibilities of one and minimize those of the other by championing control over the Afghan central government by those Pashtuns espousing conservative, transnational Islamic beliefs and a religious agenda for Afghanistan.

To ensure the dependence of a Pashtun-dominated Afghan leadership on Pakistan, Islamabad is often accused of promoting adversarial relations between Pashtuns and other ethnic groups. Many Afghans are convinced that cross-border clientalism represents a deliberate effort by Pakistan to exploit Afghanistan's ethnic mosaic for its strategic interests. They cite Islamabad's favoritism toward the Pashtun mujahideen against other anticommunist parties through 1992, as well as the political and military assistance furnished to the largely Pashtun Taliban movement beginning in 1994. Whatever the regime in Kabul, Pakistan's policies have usually seemed aimed at creating accommodating, if not subservient, Afghan governments.

The degree to which Pakistan has been prepared to go toward installing cooperative regimes can be measured by the political price it was willing to pay for its backing of the Taliban. That policy poisoned Islamabad's relationship with Iran, the Central Asian republics, and Russia. It also created serious complications with other countries, including its traditional ally China. Each of these countries viewed the Taliban rule as giving sanctuary to extremist elements. Islamabad was increasingly isolated in trying to justify the Taliban to the outside world. Pakistan's Afghan policy appeared for much of the international community as one piece with its support for the Kashmir insurgency and terrorism. Even as the Taliban were falling, young Pakistani men were being openly recruited to fight in Afghanistan against the Northern Alliance and the Americans. Pakistan also paid for its jihadi policies with blowback from Afghanistan that through the 1980s and 1990s was responsible for increased domestic violence and political radicalization.

Musharraf's turnabout on the Taliban in 2001 and his regime's strategic partnership with the United States on counterterrorism would seem to be a watershed in relations with Afghanistan. Islamabad post-9/11 has had to give up the idea that it can install Afghan leaders of its choice and dictate foreign policy to Kabul. To retain influence, Pakistan has instead chosen to rely on its personal networks with Pashtun leaders built up by its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate. It backs certain Pashtun regional political figures, some of them opposed to the central government, and has endorsed Pashtun claims of being disadvantaged in the distribution of government offices and development funds. For some time after Pakistan's reversal of policy on Afghanistan, pro-Taliban officials in the ISI, some officially retired, continued to be retained in their previous positions. It is frequently alleged that Taliban sympathizers continue to remain active within Pakistan's security apparatus.

High Afghan officials have regularly accused Pakistan of tolerating militant recruitment, training camps, and arms depots on its territory. On a February 2006 trip to Islamabad, Karzai presented the Pakistani president and his aides with a list of names, addresses, and phone numbers of ranking Taliban figures, more than implying that their presence and movements were with the knowledge and perhaps approval of Pakistan's ISI. Musharraf's reaction a week later, personally criticizing Karzai, broke sharply with what remained of attempts to keep their differences at the official level couched in diplomatic tones. Coming as it did just shortly before a state visit by President Bush, Karzai's actions were intended to maximize impact on Pakistan at a time when increasing Taliban activity in Afghanistan has drawn American concern. While Afghans are probably too quick to blame Pakistan for contributing to their security problems, there is little doubt that

## ***The Pashtuns***

Pashtuns are Afghanistan's traditionally ascendant ethnic group. They have dominated its politics so completely that for much of the country's history the term Afghan was more or less synonymous with Pashtun.

Pashtuns are found throughout Afghanistan but are mainly concentrated in Afghanistan's south, including those provinces in the southeast that border on Pakistan. Some Pashtuns are urban dwellers and well educated, but most are rural and illiterate. They identify with their tribal lineage and adhere to a code of behavior that encompasses tribal, customary, and religious law.

Over the period of armed conflict that began in 1978, Pashtuns made up the great majority of those Afghans who escaped to Pakistan where, in their refugee camps, religious seminaries, and mosques, many were introduced to highly doctrinaire and puritanical Deobandi Islamic thought. It was from this exposure that the Taliban movement emerged in 1994.

The anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s and the civil turmoil of the 1990s upset traditional lines of authority throughout Afghanistan. The decades brought a new political consciousness among Afghanistan's smaller ethnic groups and demands for a larger share of power and development resources. Ethnic Tajiks, whose militias carried the resistance to the Taliban, have most strongly challenged Pashtun claims to national leadership. Although initially disadvantaged in their share of key ministerial posts, Pashtuns have reasserted their preeminence in the central government following the approval of a constitution and subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections.

Afghan Pashtun leaders have long championed the cause of an ethnic state that would be carved out of the northwest region of Pakistan. Pashtunistan was prompted by the British-drawn Durand Line in 1893, meant by India's  
*(continued)*

colonial rulers to serve as the boundary with Afghanistan. Deliberately, it split the region's Pashtun tribes. The idea of Pashtunistan has remained a sore point in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan since the latter's creation in 1947. By raising the issue, Kabul governments have championed Pashtun sentiment domestically and provoked fears within Pakistan of aggravating provincial/ethnic tensions. To counter unfriendly regimes in Kabul, Pakistan has at times closed the border to commercial traffic and backed insurgencies by Islamic radicals.

Significantly, Pashtun nationalists in Afghanistan have never advocated ceding their tribal lands to form a greater Pashtunistan. They remain dedicated to Afghanistan's territorial integrity. Similarly, the country's other major ethnic groups, despite cross-border ethnic and cultural ties, have failed to entertain separatist movements or even been willing to endorse a federal state along ethnic lines.

top Taliban commanders find sanctuary within Pakistan and opportunity to plan and launch operations. Islamabad's efforts to check extremism and prevent the infiltration of antiregime insurgents are accurately described as inconsistent, incomplete, and at times insincere.

The Islamabad government can be seen as pursuing a two-track foreign policy toward Afghanistan. At the official level, good relations with the Kabul government are sought through policies that promote Afghan stability and economic recovery. Islamabad can live with a strengthened central government in Afghanistan as long as it is reasonably friendly and, above all, sensitive to Pakistan's security needs. A regime that is pliable or openly pro-Pakistan would of course be preferred; but Islamabad has little choice at present but to respect the Afghan political process. To charges that the Pakistan government or specifically the ISI is complicit in the insurgency, Musharraf and others are quick to point out that over 70,000 troops are deployed in the border areas and that Pakistan has arrested more than 700 it labels as terrorists. Pakistan's army has lost more than 600 soldiers in these operations, though mostly in fighting with uncooperative local tribesmen. Indeed, the Islamabad government has incurred heavy domestic political costs for engaging militarily in the heretofore out-of-bounds tribal areas, and for acknowledging its coordination with the United States in intelligence gathering.

Pakistan refrained from serious interference in Afghanistan's October 2004 presidential election. Its military apparently made it more difficult for insurgents to mount cross-border attacks to disrupt the election. Karzai would probably have been denied his popular vote majority had Pakistan been determined to keep large numbers of Pashtuns from voting in refugee camps in Pakistan. Nor has Pakistan been accused of trying to influence the outcome of individual contests in the September 2005 parliamentary vote or held responsible for the militants' intimidation of Pashtun voters that held down the turnout in Pashtun-dominated provinces.

Pakistan's commercial interests in Afghanistan would prefer a stable neighbor. Indeed, a prospering Afghanistan offers opportunities for Pakistani industries and business. Some 60,000 Pakistanis are believed currently employed in Afghanistan. Private investment in Afghanistan shows signs of growing. Pakistan's wide-ranging exports to Afghanistan stand at roughly \$1.2 billion per year as opposed to the \$25 million in exports during the Taliban era. Pakistan imports more than \$700 million worth of goods, mostly fresh and dried fruits and herbs. Offers by Pakistan to help improve airports, civil aviation, roads, and highways are all meant to create a better infrastructure for trade. A promised \$200 million development aid package is also pledged for education, health care, housing, and other social sectors, in all, some twenty projects. As with other aid benefactors, many of these development projects have in fact been slow to materialize. Bitter words between Kabul and Islamabad and rising anti-Pakistan sentiment in Afghanistan could further delay delivery. The October 2005 earthquake in northern Pakistan may also affect Islamabad's ability to meet its aid commitments to Afghanistan.

Policies that contribute to Afghanistan's reconstruction and rehabilitation would seem to be in Islamabad's interest as a means of accelerating the repatriation of Afghan refugees, more than two million of whom remain in Pakistan. The country's hospitality to the refugees over the years, however admirable, has worn thin. But the preference toward stability in Afghanistan and efforts to avoid confrontation cannot be understood apart from Pakistan's partnership with the United States. With U.S. policies dedicated to defending the Kabul regime and resisting the reemergence of radical Islam in Afghanistan, a serious falling out between Islamabad and Kabul could have an adverse effect on both. The usually pragmatic-minded President Musharraf is undoubtedly unwilling to jeopardize Washington's military and economic assistance or, as some in Islamabad fear, give the Americans reason to further tilt toward India.

There exists, however, a second track in Pakistan's policies toward Afghanistan that undermines the first. The Musharraf regime's actions toward the insurgents cannot be

separated from the way Pakistan has managed its domestic extremist Islamic groups. Many of those radical groups sympathetic to the Taliban and critical of Pakistan's cooperation with the United States on Afghanistan are also ones with which the Islamabad government continues to maintain close relationships. Militantly Islamic, they were either created or were otherwise indulged by Pakistan's security forces as instruments of government jihadi policies in Kashmir and earlier in Afghanistan. In recent years this jihadi network is thought to have revived and strengthened its working relations with al Qaeda and the Taliban.

While some jihadi groups have parted ways with Musharraf, even targeted him, others remain under the unofficial protection of the government. By keeping jihadi organizations mostly intact and their mission alive, the government hopes to better monitor them and channel extremist forces away from antiregime activity. Were the jihadi movements to be entirely dismantled, it is feared that many indoctrinated and armed people would be seeded across the country, adding to the violence in urban areas. Following the London terrorist bombings in July 2005, Musharraf declared his renewed determination to end backing for radical groups that are also fueling the Afghan insurgency. His policies are constrained, however, by the large majority in the tribal belt of Pakistan that does not view the Taliban or al Qaeda as enemies. The reality is that after nearly two years of military action in tribal Waziristan, those elements financially and ideologically linked to al Qaeda rule the territory, not the Pakistani army.

For the near future, the Taliban cannot seriously threaten the Kabul government. The insurgents' strategy is long-term, to remain on the scene with their small-scale operations, with the hope that their chance will come when—as they believe—Afghanistan's international supporters will move on. The insurgency, focused mainly in the country's east and south, is designed to register doubt that international peacekeepers and the central government can protect the mostly Pashtun population. It is also intended to keep NGOs and international agencies from contributing to reconstruction and improvement in the lives of ordinary Afghans in these areas. To defeat the Taliban will require a long-term commitment of the international community to Afghanistan's security and a Pakistani government more willing and able to deny anti-Kabul forces safe haven.



Shaded region depicts Pashtun-inhabited areas. Source: Penny-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

## Iran: A Concerned Neighbor

Iran's ambitions as a regional power have not focused on its eastern neighbor. Regimes in Tehran have for some time seen Iran's major strategic interests as lying with developments in the Persian Gulf and, above all, Iraq. The Afghan state stands today more as an opportunity for Iranian expansion economically and culturally than as a rival politically and militarily. Yet Afghanistan comes into view strategically mainly out of concern that other powers might take advantage of a weak Afghan state to menace Iran. Iran has had in recent years to compete for influence in Afghanistan with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and since 2001 particularly with the United States.

Iran's interests have been best served by regional stability. Tehran has shown little interest in exporting Islamic revolutionary zeal to Afghanistan's Shiite minority, roughly one-fifth of the population. As with Pakistan, attitudes toward Afghanistan have been shaped by taking in Afghan refugees for more than two decades. Both countries acted on the basis of brotherly Islamic obligations, and each became in time highly resentful of the burdens that providing refuge placed on their societies. But unlike Pakistan, Iran never served as a base for insurgency against Soviet occupiers or the Taliban. By not creating refugee camps, Iran better integrated those Afghans in exile into its society, although Pakistan provided greater educational opportunity and social acceptance. Like Pakistan, Iran could be faced with a fresh wave of refugees if Afghanistan again becomes unstable. By one estimate, there are still 1.2 million Afghan refugees in Iran, with only 275,000 having returned home since 2001. Instability in Afghanistan would also further reduce what possibility exists for Afghan authorities to gain control over poppy cultivation. The interdiction of drugs from Afghanistan's southwest provinces—transiting Iran for foreign markets or meeting Iran's strong domestic demand—have taken a heavy toll on Iran's border security forces in clashes with better-armed drug gangs.

Iran is anxious to prevent the reemergence of a radical Sunni regime in Afghanistan, whether the Taliban or a like group. During the period of Taliban rule, Tehran was convinced that the militant movement was a creation of its enemies intended as a strategic distraction. Tehran is particularly on guard that Saudi-sponsored Wahabbism does not become ascendant. Iran considers itself a patron of its coreligionists in Afghanistan and takes seriously its advocacy of good treatment for Shia, mainly ethnic Hazaras. While Tehran's relationship with Afghan Shiite political parties and militias has not always been close, it has consistently favored a multiethnic Afghan government. Iran also prefers a government in Kabul strong enough to act independently of Islamabad, Riyadh, and Washington.

More than Pakistan, Iran has seen things going its way in Afghanistan. If Pakistan is sometimes accused of sponsoring those who pursue violence in serving Islamabad's interests, Iran's involvement has seemed more benign. For the most part, Iran's foreign policy toward the Karzai government has been low-key and cooperative. Karzai was probably not Tehran's first choice for leadership, but Iran demonstrated early on its willingness to take a constructive attitude at the Bonn Conference in December 2001. The same cooperative policy has been visible through the process that saw Afghanistan pass from transitional government, to writing a constitution, to presidential and parliamentary elections. Tehran refused to encourage Ismail Khan, Herat's governor/warlord and its former patron, to resist his removal by Karzai in 2004 from his power base to a ministry in Kabul. During the October 2004 election, Iran joined with Russia and India in trying, unsuccessfully, to convince the leading Tajik political figure, Yunis Qanuni, not to stand against Karzai. Despite previously having backed the Tajiks and the Northern Alliance, the three countries saw more to gain for Qanuni in striking a deal with Karzai before the election. After the election, Iran weighed in with the Hazara Shiite candidate to accept the results of the election and also convinced Qanuni to do the same.

Iran has every intention of creating an economic sphere of influence in Afghanistan. Its consumer goods already compete favorably with those from Pakistan. Between 400 and

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500 trucks cross the border with Afghanistan daily. Iran's nonoil commodities exports to Afghanistan have expanded to roughly \$500 million per year. An Iranian bank to facilitate trade opened in Kabul in late 2004. To further strengthen the Afghan market, Tehran has given generous support for reconstruction of the Afghan infrastructure. Pledges of \$560 million in reconstruction assistance over five years have included extending its electric grid inside Afghanistan. A 132-kilowatt power transmission line to Herat was inaugurated in January 2005, with promises for a later tenfold increase in power exports to other cities. Iran has opened a 122-kilometer-long highway that connects Herat with northeast Iran at an estimated cost of \$68 million. Other reconstruction projects are planned, including the extension of the Iranian rail system into western Afghanistan to link it with the Iranian port of Chabahar, making Chabahar an attractive alternative to Pakistan's new port at Gwadar for both Afghanistan and Central Asia. But continuing U.S. objections to projects economically and politically beneficial to Iran may limit its future role in regional development.

Afghan-Iranian relations are, then, increasingly dictated by Kabul's relationship with the United States. Tehran has always felt uneasy about the Afghan government's strong reliance on the United States but felt unable to do much about it. Support for a stable Afghanistan and a politically secure Karzai was expected to enable Afghanistan to lean less on the United States.

Ironically, since the fall of the Taliban, U.S. and Iranian foreign policies have found considerable convergence on Afghanistan. Iran is believed to have offered search and rescue assistance as the United States readied its attack on the Taliban regime. In February 2002, Iran expelled the anti-American mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who had been living for five years in Iran. Tehran has Washington to thank for removing both the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, thereby opening the region to a more muscular Iran and the possibility of regional leadership. For nearly four years, U.S. and Iranian mutual support for the Karzai government had offered what few opportunities there were for the two countries to communicate their views more or less directly.

Two events in 2005 accelerated the rupture of Iranian and American cooperation on Afghanistan. One, a "Memorandum of Understanding" between Washington and Kabul in mid-2005, created a "strategic partnership" that could lead to permanent U.S. military bases close to the Iranian frontier. The possibility of the long-term presence of U.S. military forces in western Afghanistan naturally makes Iran nervous since it would position them within easy striking distance of strategic targets inside Iran. Even now, intelligence units and U.S. Special Forces are believed to be operating along Afghanistan's western border with Iran. Also, in Karzai's desire to please Washington, further differences with Iran could emerge over the possibility of Kabul's recognition of Israel. While the Tehran government challenges the very existence of the Jewish state, the Afghan president has gone on record as being prepared to recognize Israel upon the creation of a Palestinian state. Moreover, he has not ruled out meeting with Israeli leaders.

The second event was the election in June 2005 of Mahmud Ahmadinejad, Iran's new hard-line president. The carefully modulated policies long associated with Iran's Foreign Ministry soon came under attack with the removal of large numbers of officials in the Iranian Foreign Service and elsewhere in the bureaucracy. A more ideological, aggressive foreign policy has apparently replaced Iran's heretofore essentially defensive strategy in Afghanistan. Of late, there are reports of attempts to recruit Afghan journalists to disparage the American presence in the country, and a stronger line against the U.S. role in Afghanistan has been observed on Iranian television broadcasts, which can be seen in Afghanistan's western provinces. Iran's interests are enduring. Iran's Revolutionary Guards are accused of having set up new security posts along the border and of making incursions into Afghanistan to incite unrest among Afghan factions. Mischievous Iranian policies in Afghanistan may increase if tension between Washington and Tehran rises, especially if the United States and its allies press for UN-approved economic sanctions on Iran for its nuclear weapons program.

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The sharp rise of oil prices and Iran's cash surpluses offer additional ways for Tehran to exercise its influence regionally. Iran has recently increased its funding for favored groups and individuals in Afghanistan and reportedly funneled money to candidates, including several non-Shiites, in the September 2005 parliamentary elections. Iran's business practices in Afghanistan are reportedly becoming more assertive, even cutthroat. If Iran succeeds in further extending its influence in Afghanistan, it will most likely be through the agency of Iranian commercial interests and their expanding markets in Afghanistan.

***The increasing differences among post-Soviet Central Asian republics rule out a single approach to engaging them as regional players.***

## Post-Soviet Central Asian States and Other Powers

The increasing differences among post-Soviet Central Asian republics rule out a single approach to engaging them as regional players. In the recent past, these states shared a continuing dependency on Russia and a perceived threat to their sovereignty from Moscow's exploitation. Over time, their relationships with Russia have become more complex, and their politics and economic destinies have diverged with differences in natural resources, demographic mix, cultural imperatives, and leadership styles. Unchanged, however, are their need for external sources of development assistance and the gains possible with mutual approaches to common problems. Also remaining, despite the region's remarkable regime stability, are their common fears of insurgency, mainly from Islamic extremists.

So motivated, most of these Central Asian states welcomed the generous U.S. military and nonmilitary assistance that since 2001 has insured logistical support for operations in Afghanistan. But more recently, these former Soviet republics have "hedged their bets" mostly by raising their price of cooperation with the United States and its allies. Even then, their suspicions about U.S. strategic designs fed by the Russian and Chinese governments are no deeper than what they feel toward one another. Among the three states that form Afghanistan's northern border, nationalist rivalries between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have become a major impediment to trade, and an erratic, egocentric leadership in Turkmenistan makes it an unreliable partner for its neighbors.

Uzbekistan had special concerns during the 1990s about the radical Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Its leader, Juma Namangani, and many of his followers were known to be located in Taliban-controlled parts of Afghanistan, where they attended training camps and joined the fight against the opposition Northern Alliance. Namangani was killed when Mazar-e-Sharif fell during the U.S. military campaign that began in October 2001. Despite Karzai's assurances that Afghan soil will not be used for carrying out cross-border terrorism, Uzbekistan and the other northern neighbors fear an unstable Afghanistan that will again become a base for subversive activities. Truth be told, the leadership of these states also exaggerates the threat of Islamic militancy as a means of retaining power and discrediting and oppressing opposition elements.

The bitter falling out between the United States and the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan that led to the closing of Uzbekistan's K2 air force base in mid-2005—following Washington's strong condemnation of the brutal suppression of anti-regime demonstrations—carries implications broader than the loss of an air base for U.S. forces operating in Afghanistan. The rupture may have put in jeopardy international financing for a project designed to relieve by 2007 Afghanistan's serious electricity deficit with transmission lines from Uzbekistan. Karimov's stridently anti-Western rhetoric could also affect plans to extend, with the help of Japanese financing, a rail line to the Afghan border along with other sorely needed projects intended to help Uzbekistan develop its regional trade links.

Although a modus vivendi appears in place with Tajikistan's Islamists, the Rakhmanov regime continues to worry about a resurgence of Muslim radicals like those who fought during the 1994–97 civil war. Until 2001, the Dushanbe government, anticipating that the Taliban were likely to extend their control over all of northern Afghanistan, feared

the export of instability from Afghanistan. Like Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan facilitated military operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban in November 2001. A NATO base, under French command, has taken on increased importance with Uzbekistan's decidedly anti-American policies. Russia has continuously maintained an air base within Tajikistan, a facility that the Indian air force has been invited to share. Until they were withdrawn in 2005, Russia deployed 25,000 troops along the border ostensibly to block drugs entering from Afghanistan. Although Moscow maintains a military presence in the country, efforts to stanch the flow of the more than 100 tons of heroin that cross the frontier annually have been left to an underfunded, poorly trained, easily corrupted Tajik security force.

Tajikistan has stronger ethnic and cultural ties with Afghanistan than any of its other northern neighbors. Although human traffic across their border is substantial, their commercial trade, mostly in raisins and nuts, is modest. But as noted by Ahmed Rashid, a new road from western China and the completion of an American-built bridge across the Amu Darya could open up Tajikistan as a new transit route for Chinese goods and those from elsewhere in Central Asia. For this to occur, however, much remains to be done in reducing trade barriers and protectionism. Tajikistan's participation in a regional energy plan is closer to realization. Iran has offered to fund a \$200 million hydroelectric power project that provides for high-voltage transmission lines to Afghanistan and Iran. Together with a companion Russian-built plant, Tajikistan's energy production should more than double, meeting even broader regional demands for energy.

Turkmenistan alone among the former Central Asian republics had cordial relations with the Taliban. Although Afghanistan's current ties with Turkmenistan are positive, the poor record of participation by Turkmenistan in regional forums leaves its future contribution to regional projects uncertain. A proposed 1,000-mile gas pipeline to Pakistan through Afghanistan attracted considerable interest among Western investors during the mid-1990s. The project, however, became a victim of international condemnation of the Taliban regime. Skeptics also questioned the size of Turkmenistan's gas production capacity. Talk of a pipeline resumed with the post-Taliban Afghan government. Influenced by a favorable Asian Development Bank study, the affected countries formally endorsed the project in early 2006. Revenues from transit fees could bring as much as \$450 million to Afghanistan annually. But completion of a gas pipeline remains unlikely. None of the countries that would benefit have the funds or engineering expertise to build the pipeline. Construction costs of at least \$3.5 billion and the difficult and dangerous land route through Afghanistan and Pakistan make financing from abroad doubtful.

Russia was together with Iran a main backer of the Northern Alliance. Moscow had acted in concert with other states to try to contain Islamic radicalism, particularly because of the known presence of Chechen rebels under Taliban protection. Afghanistan was the only country to recognize Chechen independence. Moscow went along with Washington in promoting UN resolutions imposing sanctions against the Taliban and welcomed their rout by American-led forces. Since the removal of the Taliban government, many Afghans who had collaborated with the Soviet Union's occupation have been socially and politically rehabilitated. At the same time, relations between Moscow and Kabul have never recovered, and most Afghans continue to view Russia with bitterness and distrust. Russia has figured only minimally in Afghanistan's reconstruction. Late in 2005, Moscow renewed its demand for repayment of some \$10 billion in loans that were extended to Afghanistan over several decades, mostly for heavy weapons and the service of Russian military experts. However, in February 2006 the Russian government went along with a Paris Club of creditor countries agreement aimed at heavily indebted poor countries that wrote off the Afghan debt.

For some time the Russians have been uncomfortable with the U.S. role in Central Asia, an area where Moscow's preeminence had been long established. Moscow sees the promotion of democracy by the United States and NATO as a pretext for continued, even accelerated, interference in its former republics. The Karzai government's strategic partnership

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with Washington, which could allow a long-term U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, seems to confirm these fears. President Karzai vigorously denies that his strategic partnership with the United States is aimed at any country in the region and accuses the Russians of spreading “suspicion and untrue beliefs.” Especially troublesome are reports of Russian arms and funds reaching previously favored militia commanders in the north.

China shares only a small mountainous border with Afghanistan that is virtually impassable and barely inhabited. Beijing's involvement with Afghanistan increased during the Taliban rule, after Chinese Uighurs trying to stoke an insurgency among southwest China's Muslim population took sanctuary and training among the Afghans. Some Uighurs also fought together with the Taliban and al Qaeda. Lest it again become a safe haven for foreign militants under the protection of radical Islamists, China's present interests lie with an Afghanistan that is politically stable and enjoying reconstruction. Yet Beijing's contribution to date has been relatively modest, a mere \$150 million pledged by late 2005 compared with \$900 million from Japan. Of late, China seems mostly engaged in using diplomatic means to thwart an open-ended U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and the region.

India has maintained historically strong business and cultural links to Afghanistan, bolstered by a sizeable Indian resident community. Afghanistan has also served as a theater for Indo-Pakistani enmity. New Delhi fears most the Islamic radicalization of Afghanistan, especially where seen as Pakistan-sponsored. Important jihadi organizations in Pakistan have always viewed their offensive operations in Afghanistan and Kashmir as part of the same religious calling. Because of India's thinly disguised endorsement of pro-Soviet regimes in Kabul during the 1980s, Pakistan was concerned by the possibility of being outflanked by its traditional adversary. This concern should have ended with the ascent to power of a mujahideen government in Kabul in 1992. But Afghanistan's new rulers, anxious to free the country of Pakistan's influence, soon sought out India as a counterweight to their former patron. This rapprochement promptly ended with the fall of Kabul in 1996 to the Pakistan-backed Taliban insurgency.

India has worked hard to win the confidence of the post-Taliban government in Kabul. New Delhi has contributed \$565 million toward Afghan reconstruction—the sixth largest contributor—divided among infrastructure repair, humanitarian assistance, and institutional and human resource development. A wide spectrum of programs includes highway repair, communications, energy, health care, and capacity building in contributions to secondary education and the training of diplomats and bureaucrats. India will finance the construction of a new parliament building at a cost of \$50 million. Indian-donated Tata buses are a key part of Kabul's public transportation. Assistance to Afghanistan's reconstruction advertises India's claims to be a regional economic power, ready to assume regional responsibilities.

Indian activities in Afghanistan regularly draw complaints from Pakistan. Few actions rankled the Pakistanis more than the opening of Indian consulates in several Afghan cities, where they seem designed mostly as listening posts to monitor Pakistani influences and activities. But Pakistan sees more sinister motives than simple intelligence gathering, accusing the Indians through its consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad of fostering an insurgency inside Pakistan's Balochistan. Pakistan takes this especially seriously because the Chinese-built port at Gwadar stands at the southern boundary of the province. The port is central to Pakistan's plans to create a new international route for sea traffic that could serve China, but also Afghanistan and Central Asia. Meanwhile, India is building an \$80 million road linking Afghanistan's Kandahar Province with the Iranian port at Chabahar, and providing a 300-man paramilitary force to ensure the security of Indian workers. Until recently, a projected gas pipeline to carry Iranian gas through Pakistan to India stood a better chance of completion than the more problematic American-backed route from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan. But New Delhi's ardor for Iranian gas began to cool following a March 2006 agreement with Washington on cooperation in

India's civilian nuclear power program. Although this may boost interest in the Afghan route, India cannot ignore gas-rich Iran as the prime long-term energy resource supplier for South Asia.

## Afghanistan's Future and the International Implications

Following the events of 2001, the region's states seemed poised to accelerate their movement away from traditional rivalries toward greater cooperation. A rising tide of regional economic cooperation, it was hoped, would complement international assistance programs in carrying Afghanistan through the post-conflict years. But as this study has shown, the region contains as many problems as it does solutions. Particularly disconcerting are the indications that several states in Afghanistan's neighborhood are becoming more assertive, possibly reviving older geostrategic aims. While none of its neighbors and other interested powers have yet pursued a course to destabilize the Afghan state or threaten its recovery, some seem prepared to extend their influence in Kabul through their traditional, divisive Afghan clients. Only with a renewed commitment of the international community to Afghanistan will it be possible to succeed in holding back these potentially disruptive political currents.

Securing and rebuilding post-Taliban Afghanistan has been from the outset an international effort. At Bonn, the responsibilities were divided among several countries designated to lead in the areas of training a national army and police forces; constructing a legal system; eradicating poppy cultivation; and disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating into society (DDR) hundreds of private militias. Similarly, the financing of Afghanistan's humanitarian and developmental recovery began as a shared international project. Arguably, the failure of Bonn to assign the regional powers defined roles in the recovery missed an opportunity for them to become more responsible players and long-term partners with Afghanistan. But leaving them with less specified political and financial responsibilities probably prevented any of these countries from using means at their disposal to monopolize sectors of the recovery. It may also have been to Afghanistan's advantage to have regional states compete constructively in providing development assistance.

While most regional states have permanent interests in Afghanistan, international players have repeatedly demonstrated short attention spans. Bitter memories exist over how, soon after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan's prospective international benefactors backed away from their commitments, and then almost entirely washed their hands of Afghanistan during its more-than-decade-long civil war. Only the rise of international terrorism and the more repugnant actions of the Taliban brought Afghanistan back onto the international agenda. Many Afghans, like the Pakistanis, are convinced that Washington will quickly lose interest with the capture of the al Qaeda leadership, and that without the Americans most donor countries and international agencies will soon drift away. The expansion of NATO peacekeeping forces and redeployment to several southern provinces, replacing U.S. combat troops scheduled for a 12 percent drawdown in the country, have fanned speculation that the United States is reassessing its commitment.

Predictably, the levels of financial assistance and the presence of foreign military and aid personnel will decline over time. But deserting Afghanistan may not be a prudent option for the United States and others. To deprive Afghanistan of humanitarian and development aid would be cruel in light of how the country has suffered and sacrificed. Realpolitik would also dictate that this resource-poor country should not be left vulnerable. Without a visible international involvement, there exists a strong possibility of domestic political turmoil and economic failure that could condemn Afghanistan to become a narco-state, and leave it prey to rapacious neighbors. Once again, Afghanistan could easily become a breeding ground for an Islamic militancy that is regionally and globally contagious. A nuclear-armed Pakistan and the dangers of its becoming a jihadi

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state also raise the regional stakes for the international community, and especially the United States.

The investment of the international community in keeping Afghanistan from becoming a narco-state has more immediacy than any of the other threats facing Afghanistan. As a direct consequence of a broken economy and a weak state system, opium poppy cultivation has spread across the entire country and criminalized much of its economy and governance. It has created a community of interests among dealers, local militias, government officials, and antiregime militants that defies the enforcement efforts of the Kabul government and those assisting it. The country's weak judicial institutions also stand as a major impediment. With Afghanistan accounting for almost 90 percent of the world's heroin output, it is not surprising that the United States and others continue to call for a more robust counternarcotics strategy. Attempts at wholesale eradication could, however, be politically destabilizing owing to the dependence of more than 2 million farm families on their poppy crops for their livelihood. The longer-term introduction of alternative crops within a comprehensive rural development program strikes most experts as a more feasible and sustainable strategy. But these and other supply side measures conveniently ignore that the explosion of drug production in post-conflict Afghanistan is only in response to the high demand for drugs in neighboring states and more distant international markets.

The more impressive political gains and the passing of the milestones laid out in Bonn have occasioned the recommitment of the international community. The January 2006 London conference, attended by more than sixty countries and international agencies, pledged \$10.5 billion in development assistance over five years. The focal point of the conference was an Afghanistan Compact, drafted by the Karzai government, predicated on international engagement for progress in governance, the rule of law, human rights, and economic and social development. The conference participants were sympathetic to the requests by the Karzai government that it be handed primary control over aid resources. But strong doubts remain about the central authority's capacity to receive and spend the aid effectively. Agreement was reached, however, to create a trust that could release more funds to Kabul with evidence of greater transparency and accountability. Regarding concerns about Afghanistan's continuing security challenges, Pakistan was not named in connection with the growing insurgency. Instead, the Compact calls for "full respect of Afghanistan's sovereignty, and strengthening dialogue and cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbors."

Washington to date has been equivocal regarding Pakistan's Afghan policies. U.S. officials periodically press Musharraf to do more to rein in the Taliban and others engaged in anti-Kabul activities, and publicly praise the Islamabad government for its cooperation in apprehending Islamic terrorists. Actually, for most of the last four years Pakistan's leaders have had reason to conclude that curtailing the activities of the Taliban and their allies was of lesser importance to Washington than capturing those who could be linked directly to al Qaeda. Meanwhile, the United States has given Musharraf considerable slack in meeting his commitments to deal with domestic extremism or his promises to restore authentic democracy. The U.S. partnership with Pakistan would probably be on firmer footing through conditioned programs more dedicated to building the country's political and social institutions than rewarding its leadership.

Like Musharraf, Karzai is one of the pillars supporting U.S. policy objectives in the region. However, a military-focused partnership with Afghanistan may be the wrong way for the United States to demonstrate its commitment to Karzai and Afghanistan. It slights the contribution of reconstruction and improvement in the lives of most Afghans in making the country secure from its enemies. Many Afghans view a concession to Washington on long-term military basing as akin to those demands associated with an occupying power, having little relation to Afghanistan's own needs. A strategic partnership could also undermine what has been the Afghan president's largely successful personal rapport with

most of the region's leaders. As this study has shown, Afghanistan is unlikely to succeed without coming to terms with its difficult neighborhood.

The United States is frequently accused of lacking a holistic approach to this turbulent region. Its regional policies on security, democracy, and development are said to be often inconsistent if not contradictory. The decision by the U.S. State Department to incorporate Central Asia's Islamic states into the same bureau as Afghanistan can contribute to a strengthened region-wide perspective. Along with the international community, the United States might also begin to address how it can benefit Afghanistan's quest for security and recovery through aid projects and other policies specifically intended to promote regional cooperation and integration. For this to occur, U.S. priorities that are now so unidimensionally focused on counterterrorism must be better aligned with the aspirations of citizens of Afghanistan and those of its neighbors.

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