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GREAT POWER POLITICS ON AFGHANISTAN

BÜYÜK GÜÇLERİN AFGANİSTAN POLİTİKALARI

АФГАНСКАЯ ПОЛИТИКА МИРОВЫХ ДЕРЖАВ

سیاسات القوی العظمی حول افغانستان

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES
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THE BLACK SEA INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DIALOGUE



**AFGHANISTAN IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF
NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES**

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PRESENTATION

As we observe the tenth anniversary of the September 11 Attacks, we see that among many other recent issues in the Middle East, the attacks against the US still have their influence on regional politics. The influence of the 9/11 Attacks range from international relations to regional security. It is possible that the Afghanistan problem, which was the top agenda item for the US foreign policy before the Arab Spring, will force itself to the regional considerations due to the effects mentioned.

There are many question marks about the capacity of the Afghan security forces, which Obama's strategy vowed to develop. The NATO forces' withdrawal process started in July 2011, and violent terrorist attacks continue on a daily basis in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Besides, the raid against Osama bin Laden, which was carried by the US forces on the Pakistan territory, shattered the US-Pakistani relations. In this atmosphere, the stability and security efforts remain difficult.

The Afghanistan issue is important for security in South Asia and Middle East because it does not remain confined in Afghanistan. Due to its geographical position, Afghanistan has witnessed developments, which resulted negatively for the Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. This as well might be the case for the future.

A lot of questions remain on this matter. What will be the future of the Afghan central government? What does the Taliban resurgence mean for Afghanistan and the region? How will the situation in Afghanistan influence the Middle East, which was already shattered by the Arab Spring. How will all those developments influence the policies of the US, China, and Russia towards the region?

We, as ORSAM, carry on our interest in the Afghanistan issue. We present our report, which is the outcome of deliberations and studies, to the attention of researchers.

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GREAT POWER POLITICS ON AFGHANISTAN

Executive Summary

- An effective regional strategy for South and Central Asia must therefore focus primarily on securing U.S. vital interests at the lowest reasonable cost.
 - o Prevent a nuclear conflict on the subcontinent
 - o Contain al Qaeda-inspired violent extremism
 - o Support stability in Pakistan
 - o Resolve the Afghan war
 - o Prevent future regional conflicts
- China's Afghanistan Policy focuses more on economic aspect, however it does not neglect the security dimension.
 - o China's initial indifference towards Afghanistan is replaced with a rise in economic activities.
 - o China has been spending much effort in the reconstruction of Afghanistan in recent years.
 - o However, China lacks a comprehensive strategy towards Afghanistan.
- Russia's Afghanistan policy follows a similar pattern to the Soviet Era, therefore it is not difficult to predict its course.
- For Russian Foreign Policy, Afghanistan should be considered in terms of the geopolitical setting between the USA, China, India and Pakistan.

1. The US Policy on Afghanistan

In order to evaluate the present situation in Afghanistan for the United States of America, it is needed, first of all, to touch upon the reasons that America undertook commitments in the conflict-torn country. Two significant events in the last thirty years mark the importance of Afghanistan for America. One is the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979; while the other is the September 11 Attacks carried out against the United States. These two events took place in very different periods in terms of international politics. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the world politics had had a bipolar character. There was also the Non-Aligned Movement, which should not be underestimated; however, the competition between the US and the Soviet Union had an overarching influence in many parts of the world. Therefore, the Soviet Union's step towards protecting its client in Afghanistan turned out to imply much more than a regional development. In the then-present strategic overview, the Soviet invasion was considered as a move towards the Persian Gulf, a significant passage way of the world oil trade. As it is well-known, the US initiated a covert struggle against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan with the aid of Saudi and Pakistani secret services.

The Afghan resistance, supported covertly by America and Pakistan, inflicted heavy losses to the Soviet forces. The resistance, however, did not have a unified character; rather it was a struggle carried on by various decentralized and geographically dispersed groups. Their struggle by non-conventional means and methods brought about not only the end of the invasion but also the demise of the Afghan central state mechanism. The decade-long conflict also deeply impacted the livelihood of Afghans throughout the country. Afghanistan was in a dire need of post-conflict relief aid; however the attention of the US turned elsewhere, to the East Europe, at the end of the 1980s. Since the Soviet penetration

towards south was stopped, the Americans considered little for the rest in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, once again, found itself as a priority in the US global agenda, in 2001. Al Qaeda attacked main economic and political symbols of the US power right at the heart of America. The attacks had groundbreaking consequences in terms of the course of American foreign policy. America. The Article 5 of the NATO Charter, which considers an attack on a member as an attack on all, was invoked. The US went on to pursue al Qaeda in a 'Global War on Terrorism', of which the first stage was Afghanistan. The Taliban rule in Afghanistan, after a bloody civil war, was diplomatically recognized by only Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. It had a gross infamy for its harsh approach towards society, in line with its dogmatic religious interpretation and principles. Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda had been staying in Afghanistan, where he spent a great deal of time during the Soviet invasion. Based on his connections among the Afghans, which are rooted in the brotherhood-in-arms against the Soviets, Osama Bin Laden ensured the support of Taliban and various groups within Afghanistan. Claiming that the Taliban administration shares a responsibility for the 9/11 Attacks, the US initiated the 'Operation Enduring Freedom' against Afghanistan. Therefore, the Taliban rule was overthrown and the American forces were deployed in the country. However; once again America's attention shifted away from Afghanistan to Iraq due to the growing insurgency there after the US invasion in 2003.

At the start of Mr. Barack Obama's tenure as the President, the Afghanistan issue was considered a high priority item for the US agenda, since the growing Taliban insurgency threatened the progress that was achieved in the eight years after the end of Taliban regime. That is not to say, much has been achieved in this process, however in the US perspective, the Taliban activity was about to cause America to lose Afghanistan. In this context, first

of all Obama sent 17,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. Then the Obama administration undertook a serious process, in which they elaborated and assessed the current situation. President Obama declared the new Afghanistan strategy of America in December 1, 2009, during his speech in the West Point Military Academy. According to this strategy:

- A total of 30,000 new troops will be deployed in Afghanistan, in order to reverse the Taliban's momentum and defeat it militarily.
- The US Army will speed up the training and capacity building of the Afghan security forces; therefore the Afghan government will be strengthened and ready for taking over responsibility.
- The withdrawal date of the American troops is July 2011, after transferring security responsibility to the Afghan security forces.

The death of Osama bin Laden and the projected US troop drawdown bring about new prospects for the US military presence and political influence in South Asia, which it has been enjoying for the last nine years. These prospects include both challenges and opportunities that will shape the US strategy towards not only Afghanistan but also the South Asia region. For the reason that any strategy on the South Asia needs to take into consideration the interaction between the South Asia and the outlying regions, America is faced with the requirement to develop a short-to-mid term approach that ably balances the intra-Afghan politics with regional geopolitics.

U.S. Interests in the Region

The United States is at a strategic inflection point in South and Central Asia. In the face of looming fiscal austerity, the days of unconstrained economic and military power permitting expansive and largely unconstrained global U.S. deployments are now gone. An

effective regional strategy for South and Central Asia must therefore focus primarily on securing U.S. vital interests at the lowest reasonable cost.

The US Priorities and Interests in the Region

The foremost U.S. security interest in the region remains preventing attacks on the United States from actors based in this corner of the world. While in 2001 that threat might have been limited to al Qaeda, today newly capable regional terrorist groups such as LeT and even the TTP have achieved some degree of global reach. Al Qaeda, although badly damaged by the death of bin Laden and recurrent U.S. drone strikes, continues to plot attacks against the United States and has inspired a global franchise of terrorist actors with similar, if smaller-scale, aims. The United States retains a vital interest in continuing to degrade and disrupt al Qaeda and its confederates, eliminate their safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and work with regional partners to prevent these groups from expanding further throughout the region. Ensure nuclear weapons or other WMD from the region do not fall into the hands of terrorists. South and Central Asia includes two nuclear-armed states, India and Pakistan, which together possess as many as 200 nuclear weapons. Although proliferation from either nation would cause grave concern, the historical record suggests that Pakistan poses the greater risk. The discovery of the decades-long Pakistani nuclear proliferation network led by Abdul Qadeer Khan, and the rising power of extremist groups in Pakistan, raise serious concerns about the security of the Pakistani nuclear weapons program, both from internal and external threats. Terrorist groups such as al Qaeda have long sought access to this capability. A security breakdown at a nuclear weapons site or in transit, the infiltration of extremist sympathizers into the nuclear program or, in a less likely scenario, the toppling of the Pakistani government by

extremist groups or popular radicalization all risk putting weapons or technology into the hands of highly dangerous actors. The risk that nuclear weapons technology could fall into the hands of al Qaeda, a group that has publicly vowed to employ such weapons, is particularly chilling.

Prevent a nuclear conflict on the subcontinent

Since partition in 1947, India and Pakistan have fought three bitter wars and have also engaged in a long-term unconventional conflict over the contested province of Kashmir. This sustained conflict has cost the lives of thousands and risks further escalation in light of regional instability, terrorism and the growing arms race between the countries. Both possess sizeable nuclear stockpiles, and Pakistan's arsenal is the fastest growing in the world. Both nations have committed publicly to policies of minimum nuclear deterrence, but the grim reality is that both have increased their fissile material production capabilities, modernized their nuclear delivery vehicles and maintained ambiguity in their first-use doctrines. In any full-scale war, the risks of a nuclear exchange are uncomfortably high. Averting a potential nuclear war on the subcontinent is a vital U.S. national interest and requires maintaining the balance of power in the region. A nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan could cost millions of lives, severely damage the global economy and seriously destabilize both countries if not all of South Asia. In Pakistan, the ensuing instability could directly threaten the coherence of the state and further erode control of its nuclear arsenal. The 2008 Mumbai attacks demonstrate the provocative dangers posed by extremists in this tense environment and their potential to trigger wider wars. These vital interests should drive future U.S. actions in this region, but a range of other interests also remain important. These are dominated by security concerns, an outlook unlikely to change in the foreseeable future given the region's abundant turbulence and risks. Eco-

nomics interests in the region are also rising in importance, due to important concentrations of energy and critical minerals, and growing markets in China and India.

Contain al Qaeda-inspired violent extremism

Preventing a terrorist attack on the United States by al Qaeda or its offspring, and capitalizing on the demise of bin Laden, is crucial. Despite the violent death of its long-time leader, the al Qaeda network remains the most dangerous proximate threat to the United States and its interests in this region. Al Qaeda's amorphous presence across Pakistan, Afghanistan and adjoining states reflects the degree to which it has adapted and globally exported its ideology and apocalyptic vision since the attacks of September 11, 2001. Its influence is reflected in what were formerly regionally-focused terror groups such as the Pakistani-based LeT and the TTP, which now have made nearly-successful attempts to directly strike the United States. Al Qaeda's remaining leadership has now been driven underground but can be expected to exert influence by mobilizing proxy actors to commit attacks and sustain its Internet-enabled campaign of global radicalization. The United States will (of necessity) continue to devote substantial counterterror resources to disrupt, dismantle and ultimately defeat this organization and its allies in the region.

Support stability in Pakistan

Pakistan is, in many ways, the most dangerous nation in the world. Although designated a major non-NATO ally of the United States for security assistance purposes, Pakistan hosts myriad insurgent groups, radical Islamist political parties and a large military establishment well armed with both nuclear and conventional weaponry. These disparate internal actors with highly divergent objectives illustrate the innate fissures and conflicts that characterize of this outwardly unitary state. As recent events have spectacularly re-

vealed, Pakistan has, wittingly or unwittingly, also provided a hideout for the world's most wanted terrorist for years. Its populace has been cited as the most anti-American citizenry in the world. The government's authority throughout the country is uneven, and militant groups operating inside Pakistan directly threaten the stability of the regime and challenge its monopoly on the use of force. These groups are deeply connected with much of the country's radical Islamic religious leadership, as illustrated by the 2006 Red Mosque standoff and battle in Islamabad. State failure in Pakistan, triggered by extremism, popular uprising, or economic meltdown would have immensely dangerous repercussions for the United States and a host of regional actors.

Resolve the Afghan war

The impact of the death of bin Laden on the Taliban and its members' calculus regarding settlement of the war is not yet certain. Negotiating an end to the conflict with elements of the Taliban seems more likely now, although given historical norms, it could take years to achieve conclusive results.³⁹ In the meantime, the United States should continue building the Afghan security forces. Hamid Karzai's troubled nine-year rule has also dimmed prospects that the government of Afghanistan will eventually emerge as an exemplar of democracy, respect for human rights and resistance to resurgent extremism. Warlords and power brokers continue to pursue their own agendas, even when they occupy positions in the government. Yet in the midst of an ongoing war, Afghanistan remains one of the few nations in the region with a representative government, albeit nascent. As the United States begins transitioning to a much smaller presence, it must shape an outcome that builds on this fragile beginning by crafting policies designed to avoid civil war, regional proxy conflict or a return of a Taliban-dominated state. The trajectory and speed of the U.S. transition in the face of mounting costs and limited public support

must avoid these negative outcomes, which would be both bloody and potentially destabilizing and could engulf the entire region in a largescale war. They would also encourage extremist actors catalyzed by their perceived success against the West, perhaps further destabilizing existing governments. The war in Afghanistan must be resolved in a way that protects U.S. vital interests without compromising other important goals such as democracy and human rights.

Prevent future regional conflicts

South and Central Asia have been embroiled in near continuous wars since the late 1970s – mostly in or on the periphery of Afghanistan. Although the Afghan war has grown more lethal in recent years, it remains largely confined to the territory of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The pending drawdown, with its potential for diminished U.S. involvement, threatens to reduce or remove the constraints that have limited both the war's proxy involvement and its geographic scope. The United States has a strong interest in preventing the regional spread of this conflict or its descent into an even bloodier civil war that could include neighbors employing proxies to influence the outcome. An enlarged Afghan conflict that spills over into open warfare between India and Pakistan would be even more dangerous. The terrorist attacks on the Indian embassy in Kabul in 2008 and 2009 and on various civilian targets in Mumbai in 2008 nearly triggered war between the two nuclear-armed states. The potential for such a military confrontation has increased greatly since the Mumbai attacks, and an escalation of the Afghan war would make it even more likely. Perhaps the most dangerous scenario would be another direct terrorist attack on India emanating from Pakistan, which could trigger a strong Indian military response. India's assessment of the unchecked U.S. strike deep inside Pakistan to kill bin Laden is unknown, but is unlikely to encourage restraint in future Indian military actions.

2. China's Afghanistan Policy

China showed little interest in Afghanistan throughout the 20th century but its growing energy and natural resource demand combined with increasing Afghan openness to foreign investors have alerted Beijing of the country's potentials. This growing interest was particularly manifested with Beijing's giant \$3.5 billion investment in Afghanistan's Aynak copper field late last year, the far largest foreign direct investment in Afghanistan's history. Reports from Kabul also indicate that additional Chinese investments are underway. Although these investments may be the engine in Afghanistan's economy, the Chinese piggy-backing on ISAF's stabilization effort is bound to be unpopular in the U.S. and Europe, though not necessarily with the Afghan government.

China showed little interest in the reconstruction of Afghanistan following the overthrow of the Taliban. Bilateral assistance and aid have thus far been extremely limited, even if bilateral trade has steadily increased. According to some sources, China has now, together with Pakistan, emerged as a main exporter to Afghanistan while a few Chinese companies were also active in Afghanistan in the immediate aftermath of Operation Enduring Freedom.

For example, Chinese companies ZTE and Huawei partnered with the Afghan Ministry of Communications to implement digital telephone switches, providing roughly 200,000 subscriber lines. China has also taken part in the Parwan irrigation project, restoring water supply in Parwar province, as well as the reconstruction of the public hospitals in Kabul and Kandahar. Moreover, the EU has hired Chinese firms for various construction projects in Afghanistan, including road restoration activities.

The political ties between China and Afghanistan also have been relatively cordial since

2001, and President Karzai has publicly reiterated his ambition to emulate "America's democracy and China's economic success". China and Afghanistan have signed a number of agreements for the establishment of bilateral business councils and other similar institutions devoted to the development of bilateral ties.

Notwithstanding that China has increased its activities in Afghanistan gradually since 2001, Afghanistan figured overall as a relatively peripheral concern to Beijing up until 2006. In contrast to China's rapid emergence in neighbouring Siberia, Central Asia, Pakistan, and Southeast Asia, Afghanistan has remained a rather untouched square in Beijing's Eurasian hopscotch. Indeed, this disinterest could be observed throughout the entire 20th century, perhaps partly accounting for the complete disregard of China as a potential future investor in the World Bank's 2005 Investment Horizons: Afghanistan.

China is deeply involved in the economic development of South and Central Asia. It is the leading investor in mineral resources in Afghanistan, including the Aynak copper deposit in Logar Province.⁴⁶ More significantly, China and Pakistan are close economic partners, and China is deeply involved in economic infrastructure development, trade and military sales there. The China-Pakistan relationship is an important bellwether for Chinese relations with the Muslim world, as well as a Chinese hedge against the growing influence of India and Russia. China was one of the few states that spoke out in support of Islamabad following the U.S. strike that killed Osama bin Laden. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao publicly reassured Pakistan that "no matter what changes might take place in the international landscape, China and Pakistan will remain for ever good neighbours, good friends, good partners, and good brothers." China is also making trade and transport arrangements in the Central Asian states, notably Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan,

to support expanded export markets for Chinese goods and access to natural resources

China's border with Afghanistan is very short and largely inaccessible, ensuring that its interest in the country is far less pressing than might be imagined. Its involvement there is mainly economic and political, and largely driven by domestic considerations.

Economic Interests

Afghanistan is thought to have large deposits of minerals, notably oil, natural gas, copper, lithium and so on, resources that would be very tempting for China with its huge pool of liquid capital and domestic requirement for continued rapid growth. In a possible foretaste of Chinese interest in Afghan resources, in 2006 China invested \$3.5 billion in the Aynak copper field, the largest direct investment in Afghanistan's history. Yet bilateral trade is quite small, and Chinese aid is extremely modest. In some ways, Beijing appears to be in a waiting game in Afghanistan. Insecurity has delayed work on the Aynak project, but slow progress also limits China's financial exposure to any deterioration in the situation in the country.

China's contribution to Afghan security is extremely limited. It has refused to deploy troops there, and is also reluctant to allow the passage of NATO supplies, even non-lethal ones. It has confined itself to a very unexceptional training role. Thus, it is Afghan and US troops who protect the Chinese investment in Aynak. China obviously wants to avoid instability in Afghanistan, particularly given the potential for both drugs and extremism to seep across the border into Xinjiang. However, Beijing is also uncomfortable with an American military presence next-door, although it does have the merit of tying down the US. Like Pakistan, China wants to be in an influential position in Afghanistan when NATO forces withdraw, and it does have some experience of working cooperatively with the Taliban prior to 9/11.

"Afghanistan is the missing piece of the Central Asian strategy for China," commented Ms. Wishnik. China's interest in Afghanistan is to frame Central Asia and Afghanistan as a regional complex. Additionally, the worsening situation in Pakistan evidenced in the 2008 kidnappings of Chinese citizens heightens Chinese concern about the escalation of terrorism, particularly in the neighboring Xiangjiang province.

Despite the situation in Pakistan, Afghanistan is regarded as a major resource opportunity for China. With more than \$3 billion already invested in projects as diverse as coal, transportation and copper mining, and with the proper infrastructure in place, China can look to Afghanistan and Central Asia for its own energy security. Advancing development initiatives in Central Asia requires proper assessment of the demographic and social dissonance in the region. But, China has continued to look at NATO and the Northern Distribution Network as a means of emphasizing its own interests in building infrastructure that can strengthen their economic ties to Central Asia.

Some eyebrows were therefore raised when in 2007, China's Metallurgical group launched a \$3.5 billion bid and won the tender to develop Afghanistan's Aynak copper field in Logar province. The copper field is estimated to be the largest undeveloped field in the world and has been virtually untouched since the Soviet invasion in 1979. The investment is the far largest in Afghanistan's history and involves not only mining but also the construction of a \$500 million electrical plant and a railway from Tajikistan to Pakistan to support exploration. The mine will be in full operation in around six years, lead to the employment of 10,000 Afghans, while \$400 million of royalties will accrue the Afghan government yearly – more than half of the present yearly state budget. The mine is also estimated to generate millions of dollars in taxes and \$200 million in annual shareholder revenues. Further-

more, the shallow Aynak field is comparatively easy to develop, which speaks in favour of a fast materialization of this project.

As could be observed elsewhere in the developing world, Chinese state-owned companies launch bids almost doubling those of their foreign rivals. The mine was estimated to go for \$2 billion but the Chinese far outbid the competing Strikeforce (which is part of Russia's Basic Element group), Kazakhmys Consortium, Russia's Hunter Dickinson, and the U.S. company Phelps Dodge.

The tender forms part of Afghanistan's national privatization program which has resulted in international tenders for most of the major state-owned companies during 2007-2008, while legislation is continually being adjusted to allow for foreign investments. Will this giant investment be the starting shot of a serious Chinese emergence in Afghanistan or will the hitherto disinterested approach to Afghanistan continue?

There are plenty of factors suggesting that China is set to increase its investments in Afghanistan in the near future. Afghanistan has unexplored reserves of oil and natural gas in the northern parts of the country. The Afghan oil reserves were recently upgraded 18 times by a U.S. geological survey, estimates standing at a mean of 1,596 million barrels, while Afghanistan's natural gas reserves were upgraded by a factor of three, standing at a mean of 15,687 trillion cubic feet (Tcf).

Afghanistan also has large iron ore deposits between Herat and the Panjsher Valley, and gold reserves in the northern provinces of Badakshan, Takhar, and Ghazni. Major copper fields also exist in Jawkhar, Darband, and in abovementioned Aynak, located around 30 km southeast of Kabul. All of these resource-rich areas are also situated in the relatively stable northern and northwestern regions.

Moreover, China's iron-ore demand increased close to 15 percent in the first 8 months of 2007, while copper demand surged by almost 35 percent in the same period. Natural gas demand has also increased rapidly, and China is desperately looking for overland energy supply diversification in the neighboring states in Central Asia, and potentially also in Afghanistan.

Apart from complementarity in supply and demand, the institutional development in Afghanistan is also entering a stage when it is becoming more and more prepared for hosting foreign companies; the Chinese also seem set to enter now when the time is ripe, and the state-owned companies are up for international tender. A similar timing of market entry has been demonstrated by Beijing in African countries.

China enjoys a comparative advantage to most other foreign companies, since the roof of spending is virtually limitless in sectors of strategic interest, which also speaks in Beijing's favor in Afghanistan. However, the Chinese free-riding on U.S. efforts to stabilize Afghanistan while simultaneously outmaneuvering U.S. companies such as Phelps Dodge has been met with resentment in American policy-making and military circles.

Pentagon officials reportedly stated that "the Afghan government's recent decision to award a copper mining contract [Aynak] to a Chinese company is worse than first reported." These concerns may be warranted, considering the lackluster Chinese contribution to the Afghan stabilization effort.

On the other hand, it will also generate invaluable massive foreign investments to Afghanistan which will generate employment, infrastructure, and an enhanced state budget which, in turn, is essential to provide state services and maintain central control over the country. Indeed, a number of studies, including the World Bank's 2004 report "Mining as

a Source of Growth” have also identified the mining sector to be a potential engine in Afghanistan’s state-building effort.

China remained disengaged in Afghanistan until Karzai’s government recently opened up its energy, mineral, and raw materials to foreign investors. The Chinese exploration of Aynak copper field is likely the start of Beijing’s drive to seize as large a share as possible of Afghanistan’s natural resources. The Chinese government will likely be successful in these endeavors considering China’s good standing in Afghanistan, ability to distort the market, and fiscal wherewithal to outbid its competitors.

Afghanistan has large energy and mineral resources, particularly in copper, but they should at the same time not be exaggerated. China is likely to emerge as a large investor in the country, for better or worse, and Beijing’s interest in Afghanistan is likely to increase. It will nonetheless continue to be overall peripheral to China’s strategic concerns compared to Pakistan and the Central Asian countries.

3. Russia’s Afghanistan Policy

In December 1979, in the midst of the Cold War, the Soviet 40th Army invaded Afghanistan in order to prop up the communist government of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) against a growing insurgency. At the time, the United States had been making headway in the Middle East at Moscow’s expense, successfully courting Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and others. The Soviet Union feared the loss of its communist proxy in Afghanistan.

Thus, over the course of the 1980’s, the Soviet Union poured in billions of dollars (US) into the war in Afghanistan, and at its peak, more than 100,000 Soviet soldiers were fighting in the country. However, the Afghan resistance (the mujahideen) was heavily supported by a wide variety of international actors, includ-

ing the US, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, China, and Egypt. In the end, the mujahideen prevailed and the Soviet Army was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan in February 1989, having lost tens of thousands killed and wounded. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow continued to supply and arm the communist regime of Dr. Najibullah, but this was not enough, and Kabul fell to the mujahideen in 1992.

The different mujahideen factions could not agree on how to share power, and the country quickly descended into a bloody civil war. In 1994, a movement of Pashtun fundamentalist students most of whom were trained in madrasas (religious schools) in the refugee camps in Pakistan seized Kandahar and started a campaign to wrest the country from the hands of the warlords. Known as the Taliban, this force marched into Kabul in 1996 and took control of most of the rest of the country by 1998. Many mujahideen warlords were forced to flee to the north, where they joined the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan or Northern Alliance, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud. Even though Rabbani and Massoud’s Jamiat-e Islami was one of the main mujahideen factions responsible for the defeat of the Soviet Army during the 1980s, Moscow decided to lend its support to the Northern Alliance, as did Iran, India, and others. Russia did not want to see a fundamentalist state emerge in Afghanistan. More importantly, the Taliban and their al-Qaeda allies were providing training and sanctuary to Chechen rebels, Central Asian militants, and others whom Moscow deemed as a threat.

Russia did not take part in the U.S.-led invasion to overthrow the Taliban in 2001, but Moscow shared intelligence with Washington during the invasion. Russia has also allowed the U.S.-led coalition to send logistical and military supplies through Russian territory, and Moscow has been a major arms supplier to the Afghan government.

Moscow fears the rise of Islamic extremism among Russia's substantial Muslim population, in addition to separatist movements among certain ethnic groups, particularly the Chechens. The Kremlin views these forces as a severe threat to the state, and thus it willingly supported the U.S.-led overthrow of the Taliban—a movement which had provided aid to these groups. Moscow has also used its participation in America's "War on Terror" as an excuse for heavy-handedness in its crack-down on Islamist and separatist movements in Chechnya and elsewhere.

Outside its borders, Russia is concerned about the growth of Islamism and terrorism in its traditional sphere of influence or "near abroad"—the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Many militants from these areas have significant ties to the Taliban, al-Qaeda, or other groups in Afghanistan, and therefore Russia does not want to see a Taliban comeback in Kabul or a failed state emerge in Afghanistan. While the Kremlin may disapprove of NATO's presence along its southern frontier, it does not want to see Afghanistan become a safe haven for a separatist, terrorist, or Islamist forces.

Russia has always been suspicious of the former anti-Soviet alliance, especially as many of its former satellite states in Eastern Europe and the Balkans accede to the North Atlantic Treaty. Unsurprisingly, Moscow is wary of the presence of so many NATO and US troops along its southern frontier. Russia supported the overthrow of the Taliban and wanted to see a stable government emerge in Kabul. It allowed the US and its partners to set up bases in its "near abroad" in Central Asia—Uzbekistan and later Kyrgyzstan—and allowed for the transport of supplies through Russian territory.

However, in recent years, Russia has shifted its policy towards its "near abroad," seeking a more assertive role in the former Soviet territories, including the Central Asian states,

Ukraine, Georgia, and the Baltic states. In February 2009, the Kyrgyz government announced that it would close the US airbase at Manas, a decision largely seen as a quid pro quo for the multi-billion dollar Russian aid package previously promised to Kyrgyzstan. It comes at a critical time for the U.S. and NATO mission in Afghanistan, as growing unrest in Pakistan has put the eastern supply route—through which 75 percent of coalition supplies travel—in jeopardy. The coalition has therefore begun looking into alternate supply routes in Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. (Iran refused to allow NATO supplies to be transported through its territory.) Moscow has seized the opportunity and has volunteered to transport more coalition supplies through Russia. This increased dependence on Russia would give Moscow more power in its dealings with NATO and greater leverage on issues such as the US's proposed missile defense shield, the Iranian nuclear program, and the Kremlin's increasingly aggressive moves in its "near abroad"—Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

Moscow has not contributed much monetarily to Afghanistan's reconstruction. However, Russia has delivered both military and humanitarian aid, and the Kremlin did decide to cancel 90 percent of Afghanistan's debt (worth US\$ ten billion), most of which consisted of military sales to the PDPA regime during the 1970's and 1980's. Russia continues to be a major arms supplier to Kabul, although most of the weapons and equipment is being purchased with U.S. money. Russian companies, including state-owned enterprises, have invested in Afghanistan, often winning lucrative contracts.

Russia has a range of economic, security and political interests in South and Central Asia. It seeks to remain the primary conduit for fossil fuels from Central Asia to the European and Western markets and to preserve its geopolitical dominance over the Central Asian

states. Russia views the decade-long NATO presence in Afghanistan with wariness, but it still supports the current Kabul government through political engagement, military and logistics support, and economic cooperation. The proposed strategic framework agreement between the United States and Afghanistan has caused some Russian officials to criticize the potential long-term U.S. presence and basing in the region.

On one level, the impact of the US war against al-Qa'ida and the Taliban in Afghanistan brought Russia into a closer relationship with the United States and set Russia more firmly on the path of security, political, and economic integration with the West. Not only Putin's decision to support US policy (with acceptance of US forces and then bases in Central Asia, offer of overflight rights and support for search-and-rescue missions, sharing substantial intelligence, and endorsement of US military trainers in Georgia), but his silencing of official dissent, concrete policy concessions (ABM, offensive arms talks, and NATO enlargement), and priorities (WTO, trade deals, and investment) are evidence that there is more to Russian orientation toward the US than feel-good politics and personal relationships. Putin clearly understands that for Russia to have any opportunity to fulfill his economic development agenda, there must be stability and an increased sense of security on Russia's borders and periphery. US presence in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Georgia will go a long way toward ensuring this stability. Russia's relative distancing from a strategic partnership with China, quiet development of trade and business ties with India, and discreet distancing from Iraq indicate a more general geostrategic realignment associated with the war in Afghanistan. In some respects these are derived from the US relationship, but they are more fundamentally related to Russia's shifting priorities and revised perceptions of a promising future relationship and regional powers. With China, a close relationship ironically promises a more

junior relationship because the economic aspects leave Russia essentially as a raw material supplier with little prospect of integration or development, in contrast to the array of business ties with India. With Iraq, the leadership has made clear its stake is repayment of debt, and future contracts, not the geopolitics of the political relationship.

The bottom line is that the US counterterrorist campaign in Afghanistan created a huge opportunity for Putin's Russia, which Putin has mostly successfully seized. The war shifted the focus of US security policy and threat perception to extremist Islamic terrorism in Eurasia, based not only in Afghanistan but also in the Caucasus. Although experts can make reliable distinctions between Russia's war in Chechnya and US operations in Afghanistan, it is extremely difficult to make those distinctions in a convincing way in public diplomacy, the result of which is an easing of the already weak international pressure on Russia in that conflict. The US has taken over the problem of the Taliban and its destructive role in Central Asian security, a problem which increasingly dominated Russian security concerns in the 1990s. This problem has now given an impetus to thinking in US foreign policy circles that other areas of the US relationship needed to show progress, particularly in the economic and business sphere that was Putin's priority. The acceptance of US troops in Central Asia and Georgia marks a humbling concession by Russia that it is incapable of policing its own borders and periphery. If the United States can "do the dirty work for Russia," dislodge the Taliban regime in a month and a half, and dampen at least some of the fundamentalist sentiment and general disaffection that spawned that regime, then it is a net gain for Russia despite the humiliation of having US troops stationed in the former Soviet Union. Two questions will determine whether the positive opportunity to advance Putin's agenda is sustained. The first is whether the United States succeeds in defeating terrorist networks in Afghanistan, Central Asia,

and the Caucasus. If the US presence and operations do not bring stability and security throughout the region—and especially if they exacerbate the problems by fueling extremism and terrorist attacks—then the fundamental advantage of an improvement in relations with the United States and advancing the economic agenda will be negated by an immediate increase in Russian insecurity. It is one thing for Putin to manage and silence discontent created by an American presence in Central Asia if he can point to a better security outlook to a Russian public that still sharply remembers the 1999 apartment bombings and incursions outside Chechnya. It would be quite another to defend his welcome of the United States if the result is greater instability, terror, and insecurity for Russians. The second question is whether the apparent common interest in defeating Eurasian terrorism is sustainable. How the threat is defined will affect how the conflict is conducted over the medium term. We have already seen how disagreements about Iran's role in global terrorism create serious problems in US-Russian relations, even in the midst of the overall positive context. If conditions deteriorate in Uzbekistan or Georgia, and especially if that deterioration is related to cross-border conflict

in the Russian Federation, the United States and Russia could quickly find themselves disagreeing about the extent and methods of fighting terrorism in the region. If instability spreads to Pakistan, Russia may see its investment in a promising relationship with India at risk and may become impatient with a United States that does not prevent the spread of a conflict. Most importantly, Putin's core priority for economic development underpins his acceptance of US priorities and initiatives across a range of security issues. If that economic opportunity is erased by conflict and instability throughout Eurasia, his fundamental calculation is virtually certain to change. Russia right now is discounting near term weakness and subordination for longer term benefit. Without that long-term prospect, other short-term strategies, especially competitive and obstructionist ones, may look more promising for a Russian leadership that wants to maintain a Russian Federation with a great power role. Afghanistan is not intrinsically important to Russia's Eurasian security and economic policies and ambitions, but it is unavoidably located precisely in the middle of many of the threats to and opportunities for Russian objectives.

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