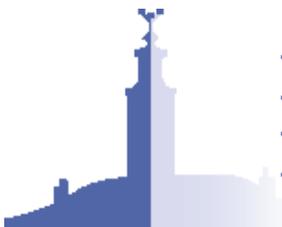


Security and Development in Afghanistan After 2014

6th Annual
ISDP-AMS Conference
December 6-8, 2013

Edited By
David Mulrooney

CONFERENCE REPORT



Institute for Security &
Development Policy

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Security and Development in Afghanistan after 2014 is a *Conference Report* published by the Institute for Security and Development Policy's Asia Program. The Institute is based in Stockholm, Sweden, and cooperates closely with research centers worldwide. Through its Silk Road Studies Program, the Institute runs a joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center with the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies. The Institute is firmly established as a leading research and policy center, serving a large and diverse community of analysts, scholars, policy-watchers, business leaders, and journalists. It is at the forefront of research on issues of conflict, security, and development. Through its applied research, publications, research cooperation, public lectures, and seminars, it functions as a focal point for academic, policy, and public discussion.

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ISBN: 978-91-86635-79-4

Printed in Singapore

Distributed in Europe by:

Institute for Security and Development Policy
Västra Finnbodavägen 2, 131 30 Stockholm-Nacka, Sweden
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Distributed in North America by:

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Foreword

It gives us great pleasure to introduce the proceedings of our most recent joint conference, which was held in Beijing in December 2013. The topic under discussion during this conference, i.e. the future prospects for Afghanistan after the planned withdrawal of international forces at the end of 2014, is obviously a matter of great concern to both the Swedish and the Chinese organizers of this conference, and to the other participants from Europe and the United States. Sweden has played an important part in trying to bring security and development to Afghanistan, both through its military contribution through ISAF and as a major donor of development aid. China also attaches great importance to peace and stability in Afghanistan, particularly because it is one of China's neighboring countries, and has taken various steps to encourage peaceful development there.

When we met in December, there were three key questions on our minds: 1) Would Hamid Karzai sign a Bilateral Security Agreement with the US before the end of the year 2013 as the US had asked, or would this task fall to his successor (and the related question of whether the US would, in fact, withdraw all troops if the BSA were not signed); 2) Would the Afghan presidential elections scheduled for April 2014 produce a viable successor to Hamid Karzai?, and 3) Were the Afghan National Security Forces capable of shouldering the burden of preventing the Taliban and other insurgent groups from re-establishing themselves after the drawdown of the international forces? Some six months later, it appears that there will indeed be a peaceful transition of power to Hamid Karzai's elected successor—although the election results have not yet been finalized—and that the task of signing the BSA will fall to him. The critical question of the readiness of the Afghan National Security Forces to provide for the country's security remains unanswered, although we heard some quite optimistic assessments during our conference. We will be paying close attention to the situation in Afghanistan in the years to come, and remain hopeful that it will emerge in time as a peaceful, stable and prosperous country.

This was the sixth joint conference to be held by the PLA Academy of Military Science and the Institute for Security and Development Policy, and there is every sign that our cooperation will continue into the future. We plan to hold the seventh annual joint conference in Stockholm in October 2014.

Major General Pi Mingyong, PLA AMS
Dr. Niklas Swanström, ISDP

前言

我们非常荣幸地推出 2013 年 12 月在北京举行的第 6 届中国人民解放军军事科学院与瑞典安全和发展政策研究所联合研讨会论文集。本次会议主要讨论在 2014 年底国际部队计划撤出之后阿富汗的前景。对会议的中瑞两个主办方以及来自欧美的其他与会人员而言，这是一个值得关注的议题。瑞典通过派员参加国际安全援助部队和提供发展援助，为恢复阿富汗安全与发展做出了重要贡献。作为阿富汗的邻国，中国同样对阿富汗的和平与稳定给予高度重视，并采取多种措施推动该地区的和平发展。

12 月召开会议时，有 3 个主要问题萦绕在我们头脑中：（1）卡尔扎伊是否会像美国要求的那样，在 2013 年底签署与美国的双边安全协议，还是会把这一任务留给他的继任者（与之相关的问题是，如果未能签署这一双边安全协议，美国是否会撤出全部部队）？（2）计划在 2014 年 4 月举行的阿富汗总统大选是否会产生一个有效的卡尔扎伊的继任者？（3）阿富汗国家安全部队能否在国际部队人员减少后，承担起阻止塔利班和其他叛乱组织卷土重来的任务？在 6 个月之后今天，看起来权力确实会和平地移交给卡尔扎伊的继任者（虽然大选结果尚未最终明确），签署双边安全协议的任务也将留给他。虽然在会议上我们听到了一些很乐观地预测，但对阿富汗国家安全部队是否已经准备好为国家提供安全，答案尚不可知。未来我们将继续密切关注阿富汗的局势，并期望随着时间的推移，阿富汗能够成为一个和平、稳定和繁荣的国家。

这是中国人民解放军军事科学院与瑞典安全和发展政策研究所联合举办的第 6 届研讨会，我们相信这一合作会继续进行下去。第 7 次年度会议预计于 2014 年 10 月在斯德哥尔摩举办。

中国人民解放军军事科学院 皮明勇少将

安全和发展政策研究所所长 施万通

Order of Events

Saturday, December 7, 2013

Opening Speeches by Major General Pi Mingyong, Head of the Scientific Research Guidance Department, AMS and Dr. Niklas Swanström, Director, ISDP

Panel 1

Moderator: Dr. Niklas Swanström

- Senior Colonel Wang Guifang, "Five Major Factors Influencing the Future of Afghanistan"
- Brigadier Simon Levey, "Afghan National Army Training: Strengths and Weaknesses"

Panel 2

Moderator: Senior Colonel Ding Hao

- Professor Chen Jidong, "The Situation in Afghanistan after 2014: Caught between the 'War on Terror' and Peace Talks"
- Professor Tyler Rauert, "Transnational Threat 'Convergence' in Afghanistan: Regional Implications and Responses"

Panel 3

Moderator: Professor Tyler Rauert

- Dr. Niklas Swanström, "Afghanistan and its Neighbors: the Challenge of 2014"
- Professor Zhang Wenmu, "Petrodollars and the U.S. Decline"

Panel 4

Moderator: Professor Chen Jidong

- Mr. Felix Kühn, "Negotiating Peace: The Afghan Taliban and Prospects for a Political Settlement in Afghanistan"
- Colonel Yan Wenhui, "The U.S. Should Withdraw its Troops from Afghanistan in a Responsible Manner"

Sunday, 8 December

Panel 5

Moderator: Senior Colonel Wang Guifang

- Professor Liselotte Odgaard, "The Consequences for China of the U.S. Exit from Afghanistan"
- Mr. Wang Shida, "How China Sees the situation in Afghanistan after 2014"

Panel 6

Moderator: Mr. Bernt Berger

- Mr. Jeffrey S. Payne, "Enhancing Security: Opportunities for U.S.-China Cooperation in Afghanistan"
- Senior Colonel Ding Hao, "Prospects for China-U.S.-India cooperation in Afghanistan after 2014"

Round-table discussion

Moderators: Dr. Niklas Swanström, Professor Chen Jidong

Closing Speeches by Dr. Niklas Swanström, Director, ISDP and Major General Wang Weixing, Head of the Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS

Speakers (in Alphabetical Order)

Professor Chen Jidong, Executive Director, Pakistan Study Center, Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University

Senior Colonel Ding Hao, Deputy Director, Office of Asian-African Military Affairs, Department of Foreign Military Studies, AMS

Mr. Felix Kühn, PhD candidate, Department of War Studies, King's College, London.

Brigadier Simon Levey, Defence and Military Attaché, British Embassy, Beijing

Dr. Liselotte Odgaard, Associate Professor, Institute for Strategy, Royal Danish Defence College

Mr. Jeffrey S. Payne, Research Fellow / Academic Affairs Manager, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University (NESA), United States

Professor Tyler Rauert, Director, Strategic Studies Network, Associate Professor of International Politics and Strategy, Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University (NESA), United States

Dr. Niklas Swanström, Director, ISDP

Senior Colonel Wang Guifang, Research Fellow, Office of National Security Strategy, Department of Military Strategic Studies, AMS

Mr. Wang Shida, Unit Chief of the Southwest Asia Unit, Institute of South & Southeast Asian & Oceanian Studies, the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR)

Colonel Yan Wenhui, Research fellow, Center for National Defense Policy, AMS

Professor Zhang Wenmu, Center for Strategic Studies, Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics

Opening Remarks

Dr. Niklas Swanström, Director, ISDP

As we open the sixth annual AMS-ISDP joint conference, we would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge a number of individuals. First, we would like to thank Air Force General Liu Chengjun, the President of AMS, for his support for ISDP's joint activities with AMS. We would like to thank Major General He Lei, the former head of the Scientific Research Guidance Department at AMS, for his work with us on this event in previous years and to wish him every success in his new role as Deputy Commander of Lanzhou Military Region. We thank Major General Pi Mingyong, the new head of the Scientific Research Guidance Department, for his support for this conference—we look forward to working with you in the years to come and to strengthening the co-operation between our two institutes. We would also like to express our deep appreciation for the hard work and professionalism of Senior Colonel Zhu Yuxing and Colonel Liu Silong of the Foreign Affairs Office at AMS in organizing this event.

ISDP is, as you know, a Swedish think tank, and our work is made possible by the generous support of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The subject of this year's conference is of particular relevance to Swedish foreign policy concerns. Sweden has had troops on the ground in Afghanistan for more than ten years, and continues to lead the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Mazar-i-Sharif through our role in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The lion's share of Sweden's overseas development assistance goes to fund projects in Afghanistan. Large numbers of refugees fleeing the conflict in Afghanistan continue to find asylum in Sweden.

Looking ahead to the situation after 2014, there are many uncertainties, the most urgent of which is obviously the Bilateral Security Agreement between the government of Afghanistan and the United States, which is still under negotiation. We fully expect that the period following the withdrawal of the majority of international troops will be a difficult one as the Afghan National Security Forces take up the challenge of keeping the Taliban and other insurgent groups at bay. We expect that Sweden will continue to support security and development in Afghanistan through providing development assistance and continuing to provide training and support to the Afghan National Security Forces. It is clear that the co-operation and support of the international community will be necessary for the government of Afghanistan to achieve a lasting peace. We are here today to talk about ways we can all work together towards a more secure, peaceful, and prosperous future in Afghanistan and the region.

We are very pleased that friends from the Swedish Embassy have been able to join us this morning, and would particularly like to acknowledge Colonel Martin Bodin, the Defense Attaché at the Embassy of Sweden in Beijing, who has himself served valiantly in Afghanistan in training the Afghan National Army. We are also honored that Brigadier Simon Levey, the British Defense Attaché, is joining us as a speaker for this event. Brigadier Simon Levey has served both as Commander of British Forces Afghanistan in 2002 and, more recently, as the Commander responsible for all aspects of training the Afghan National Army. We salute these two gentlemen for their service.

We would also like to thank the Chinese and international experts who have joined us this weekend, some of whom have traveled a great distance to be here. We are very much looking forward to the presentations and to having the chance to discuss these important questions with you.

Our next joint conference will be held in Stockholm in late 2014. We hope that many of you will be able to join us then. Thank you.

Five Major Factors Influencing the Future of Afghanistan

Senior Colonel Wang Guifang, Research Fellow, Office of National Security Strategy, Department of Military Strategic Studies, AMS

The situation in Afghanistan is attracting widespread attention from the international community because it has a profound bearing on regional security and stability and on global counter-terrorism efforts; it affects complex interactions among regional and international powers, and exerts a significant influence on China's security situation. However, as for the future direction of the situation in Afghanistan, like other experts who have spoken here today, I am personally quite pessimistic. There are five major factors that should be closely followed when observing the situation in Afghanistan.

The first factor is the disintegration and integration of political power within Afghanistan; its core element is the political role of the Taliban and the main indicator is whether the political transition is smooth. The end of the decade-long Karzai presidency and withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) indeed marks the beginning of a period of redefining the roles of various parties. As you know, from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban ruled Afghanistan. Although the war on terror in 2001 overthrew the Taliban regime, the political influence of the Taliban has remained. Over the past two years, its influence has in fact been on the rise. There are two prominent features or signs of this trend. The first is that the United States has begun political negotiations and contacts with the Afghan Taliban, having started secret contacts in 2009. In June 2013, the United States also supported the establishment of an office in Qatar, and began formal political dialogue and contacts with the Taliban. But at present, the two sides failed to establish a good basis for negotiations, as can be seen by the major differences on four key issues: the first is the withdrawal of troops; the second is disarming; the third is the breaking-off of relations with Al-Qaeda; and the fourth is accepting the constitution.

The second sign is that the Karzai government has been promoting political reconciliation with Taliban rebel groups since 2010, and initiated the reconciliation plan in an attempt to incorporate the Taliban in the process of political reconciliation. However, due to differences in their political ideas, so far a relatively favorable political atmosphere for peace talks has not been formed. It can be said that the contacts of the Karzai government and the U.S. with the Taliban have highlighted the prominent political status of the Taliban, and to a large extent have enhanced its political status. In terms of objective strength, the Taliban has established functional military and political systems in 17 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, and coordinates its efforts with those of the Pakistani Taliban. In terms of subjective intentions, the

Taliban is not willing to confine its political influence to the limited areas of eastern and southern Afghanistan. It has always aspired to enter Afghanistan's political center, and has never given up political efforts to participate in the governance of Afghanistan. But the tricky issue is that the Karzai government has not yet formed a detailed plan or political strategy for sharing power with the Taliban. What makes the matter worse is that Karzai enjoys a relatively dominant position within the government, and the Northern Alliance is also strongly opposed to the entry of the Taliban into Afghanistan's political process. As for the United States, it is in a rather contradictory position. On the one hand, it wants to include the Taliban in such a political process, so that the withdrawal of U.S. troops can go smoothly and the U.S. can get out of Afghan politics gracefully. On the other hand, the U.S. is worried that the Taliban would dominate the government through democratic elections, just like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Hamas in Palestine, leading to a historic reversal. So far, the Taliban's political role remains unclear, and the Taliban is operating outside the government. If the Taliban cannot be successfully incorporated into the political process a few months before the general election, a bitter power struggle may ensue; if the Taliban boycotts the general election in April 2014 and challenges the legitimacy of the Afghan government, the "political impulse" of Taliban extremists may be inspired, posing a threat to Afghanistan. A relatively stable political environment might emerge if the United States helps the Karzai government to incorporate the moderate forces of the Taliban into the political process, and encourages them to form a political party to participate in the general election, in order to disperse and weaken the political power of the Taliban. Therefore, the biggest variables in the situation in Afghanistan are as follows: whether the United States and the Karzai government can reach an agreement with the Taliban; how the Taliban will be incorporated into the Afghan political process next year; and what roles the Taliban will be given.

The "great games" in the region comprise the second factor that should be taken into account when looking at the situation in Afghanistan, and the main indicator is whether the geopolitical transition can be realized. Located at the intersection of West Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia, Afghanistan is geopolitically very important and a node on the routes of the expansion of big countries. This means that the geopolitical security of Afghanistan is very complicated. As we know, in the nineteenth century, Britain and Russia played "the Great Game" on the territory of Afghanistan; in the twentieth century, there was the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan; while in the twenty-first century, more strategic players or geostrategic opponents joined the competition in Afghanistan, including the United States, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Iran. For most of its history and especially in modern times, Afghanistan has been manipulated by big countries outside the region, and deprived of the space and capability to maintain its independence. Afghanistan used to be under the direct military occupation of United States and

Russia, two world powers. At present, those two great powers still have the greatest influence on Afghanistan. Russia will give the Northern Alliance more support, and the United States has begun to contact the Taliban. The main aim of Russia is to maintain the continuance in power of the current government and uphold the strategic achievements that have been made. Russia has opposed the return of the Taliban to mainstream politics in Afghanistan and supported the dominance of the Northern Alliance in Afghan politics, in order to strengthen its control of Central Asia and promote the process of regional integration. China and India are two new players in the game, albeit the goals of China are relatively limited. Both countries are worried that the rise of the Taliban might lead to the rise of domestic radical Islamic forces, and pose challenges to their domestic political security. Unlike China, India has some strategic considerations, namely trying to make Afghanistan into a force that can be used to contain Pakistan. As two regional powers bordering Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran have long been involved in the internal affairs of Afghanistan because of their deep relations with the country in terms of history, geography, language, religion, and ethnicity. Pakistan has always supported the Taliban, while keeping in touch with the Karzai government at present. Pakistan hopes that a federal system can be established in Afghanistan and that the Taliban can share power with the current government. Iran gives clear support to the Northern Alliance, and resolutely opposes the return of the Taliban to mainstream politics. An analysis of the policy tendencies of the major external forces reveals that only Pakistan supports the Taliban dominance in Afghan government, while other countries basically support the Karzai government. But the starting point of the policies of those countries is the same, i.e. striving for a geopolitical configuration that is more favorable to them.

As we can see, both world powers and regional powers are directly involved in the competition in Afghanistan, and there are obviously strategic competitions and security confrontations, and even irreconcilable structural contradictions between some of those countries. The U.S. and Iran have been strategic rivals for over 30 years. The U.S. is worried that after obtaining a foothold in Afghanistan, Iran might expand its influence in South Asia and Central Asia. The U.S. is on very high alert regarding such developments on the part of Iran. Iran is also very wary of the military presence of the United States in Afghanistan, which constitutes a direct threat to the military security of Iran.

India and Pakistan also have different goals in Afghanistan. Pakistan is trying to shape Afghanistan as a safe strategic rear and to gain a stable strategic depth. India hopes that Afghanistan will adopt at least a neutral strategy, in order to create a strategic situation of pushing Pakistan from two sides. As two regional powers with strategic ambitions in the Islamic world, both Pakistan and Iran are actively pursuing regional influence. They support different groups in Afghanistan, attempting to shape a situation in Afghanistan favorable to them and to gain advantages. Generally

speaking, all these big countries are hopeful to varying degrees that Afghanistan will remain stable in the post counter-terrorism era. At present, there is some coordination among them, especially among the four stakeholders comprised of the United States, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Taliban; this coordination is, however, not close. The main obstacles to coordination lie in the differences of interests, policy goals, and aspirations of those big countries, and it is possible that a regional pattern without obvious winners and losers might emerge. Therefore, a major factor that influences the situation in Afghanistan is geopolitical in nature and relates to questions such as whether the big powers can resolve their differences, how they will coordinate their positions, and whether the disintegration and integration of geopolitics can lead to a relatively stable and balanced situation.

The third factor is the change in the mood of the Afghan people. The core element of the factor lies in their political choices; the main indicator is whether the social transition will be smooth. Currently, the influence of ordinary people on the situation in Afghanistan is still relatively weak, and their political choices are not very mature and stable. However, participation in the political agenda has inspired their political enthusiasm, and provided them with an opportunity to express their political leanings and a means to make choices between the governance capability of the Karzai government and the political platforms of the opposition groups.

Although the Afghan public is dissatisfied with the current situation in Afghanistan, they are not making conscious efforts to change it. First, the opposition groups in Afghanistan have not been successful in attracting support among the general public. At present, there are nearly a hundred opposition parties in Afghanistan that are trying to have an impact on Afghan politics, and some of them have even explicitly advocated decentralization. However, most of them do not amount to anything, in terms of having neither the capability to mobilize the people, nor a foundation of broad popular support. Their influence on the population of Afghanistan is therefore still relatively fragmented and limited.

Second, the government has not solved the problem of people's livelihoods. Karzai became president of the transitional government in 2002 and has been in power for over a decade. Over the past two years, with the assistance of the international community, the Afghan economy has improved slightly, but the people still live in poverty, with an unemployment rate as high as 40 percent. More than half of the population lives in poverty. The harsh living conditions have not been fundamentally improved; the competence of the government is inadequate; corruption is rampant; and the power structure of ethnic politics is not balanced. All these issues lead to public dissatisfaction and the desire to change the status quo. In particular, the Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, are very discontented with the power imbalances and the dominance of Northern Alliance in Afghan politics.

Third, the country is fragmented by the strength of its tribes. As we all know, Afghanistan is a country with very obvious tribal features. There are more than 220 tribes of various sizes in Afghanistan, and each of them is a relatively closed functional system that has few ties to the external environment. This means that the views of the people are very much diversified.

The last point is that the Afghan people have always been hostile to foreign military occupation, and harbor deep hatred for the current government, which is supported by foreign occupation forces. In the twenty-first century, the awareness of the Afghan people that they should shoulder the responsibility for their own country has begun to be awakened. Along with the development of modern means of communication, ordinary people have acquired the awareness and capability to challenge the authority of the government. Therefore, while the Afghan people are often neglected when looking ahead to the situation in Afghanistan in the coming year, they may nonetheless become an increasingly important factor that should not be overlooked.

The fourth factor is the commitment of international assistance—with the core element being the sustainability of the assistance, and the main indicator whether economic transition can be achieved. Afghanistan is a landlocked country with no access to the sea. For a long time, Afghanistan had been a country forgotten and abandoned by globalization. And Afghanistan is still an agricultural society, with 80 percent of its population living in rural areas, and the Afghan economy has long been underdeveloped. Starting in the 1970s, civil strife coupled with foreign invasions led to 30 years of continuous political turmoil, causing great damage to the socio-economic development of Afghanistan and making Afghanistan one of the least developed countries in the world. In the twenty-first century, and after nearly 13 years of the war on terror, Afghanistan has essentially become a major recipient of international assistance and is not self-sustaining economically. Afghanistan is a long way from establishing an endogenous model of economic growth, but has established a very peculiar economy consisting of the ISAF economy, the assistance economy, and the drug economy. Among those components, the ISAF economy and the assistance economy are the pillars of Afghan GNP. Apart from the drug economy, Afghanistan has no other economic outputs. According to statistics, the Afghan government received about US\$ 15.7 billion in aid in 2011, accounting for over 90 percent of its public expenditure. With the withdrawal of ISAF troops next year, it is certain that much of this assistance will be reduced, and, accordingly, the ISAF economy and assistance economy will be affected. In 2015, the Afghan government will still need more than US\$ 10 billion in aid, equivalent to half of its gross domestic product. At the NATO Chicago Summit, the international community promised to provide military assistance to Afghanistan for at least ten years. Previously, the Tokyo conference also promised to raise US\$ 16 billion for Afghanistan. However, although

many commitments have been made, relatively few have been honored. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has made it clear that after 2014, Afghanistan will still need military and economic assistance for a further ten years. So international assistance is necessary not only for the survival of the Afghan government, but also for the economic development of Afghanistan. As Major General Pi Mingyong commented earlier, there can be no security without economic development. One of the most direct correlations is that economic failure leads to insecurity, which is likely to result in a vicious cycle. Given the economic conditions in the major economies, such as Europe, the U.S., and Japan, especially the mounting fiscal pressure, assistance to Afghanistan in the future might be greatly reduced. If the international community is not optimistic about the situation in Afghanistan after 2014, it is likely that international assistance to Afghanistan next year will plummet, and consequently the Afghan economy will be paralyzed. Therefore, whether the promised international assistance can be delivered has become an external factor that influences the situation in Afghanistan.

The final factor is the growth and expansion of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF); the core element is their defense capabilities. With the withdrawal of U.S. troops, the ANSF have to face an increasingly complex security situation and a variety of threats. At present, the disadvantages of the ANSF are still very obvious. First, the military forces of the government are limited in number and weak in capacity. At present, the military and police forces of Afghanistan number 350,000, which is not enough to both protect the country's territorial integrity and provide security and protection for the people of Afghanistan. In 2012, a U.S. Army lieutenant general said that only 29 Afghan army units and seven Afghan police units were capable of operating independently, which was just one percent of ANSF's total forces. Since July 2011, Afghan forces have begun to take over security responsibilities. However, it has been proven that the results are very limited, and the security situation in Afghanistan has not significantly improved. According to UN statistics, in the first half of 2013 there were nearly 4,000 civilian casualties, a 23 percent increase on the previous year. Second, the armed forces in Afghanistan are decentralized. Afghanistan is a country of tribes and warlords, and the decentralization of armed forces has undermined the effectiveness of the Afghan National Security Forces. In addition, there is an ethnic imbalance in terms of the composition of the security forces. Third, there is no adequate financial support for the construction of the security forces, which is one of the biggest problems currently facing Afghanistan. Besides the cost of civil or social reconstruction, the annual cost of maintaining the Afghan National Army is US\$ 4.1 billion, of which Afghanistan can only provide US\$ 1.7 billion on its own. There is therefore a very large shortfall.

Therefore, without adequate financial support, the development of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the enhancement of its combat capabilities will certainly

be hindered. According to the Afghan defense minister, the ANSF are only equipped with some light equipment, and some much-needed equipment cannot be obtained. There is also a lack of air power, particularly helicopters and fighters. In fact, the Afghan National Security Forces are now on their own but not yet self-sufficient. Their combat capabilities are not yet fully mature, are inadequate to cope with such a complex domestic security situation, and are especially unprepared for the sudden changes in the security situation in the crucial period of political and social transition next year. With the withdrawal of ISAF, the Afghan security forces will face more prominent challenges. The primary challenge is whether the Afghan National Security Forces can provide a relatively safe environment for the general election next year. In the next year, in order to gain control of the government, the Taliban and other local armed forces will surely launch attacks. There is some doubt as to whether the ANSF will be able to cope with these attacks and fill the security vacuum left by the withdrawal of U.S. troops. This is a very important factor influencing the situation in Afghanistan.

Among the above five major factors, the first two are external factors and the most important ones, and the other three are internal factors. The future development of the situation in Afghanistan is dependent on two basic conditions. The first is the internal conditions, i.e. whether the domestic political forces can eventually achieve reconciliation and share power to ensure a smooth political transition. The second is external conditions, i.e. whether various external forces can reach consensus on policies and actions and co-ordinate their efforts, and especially whether regional powers can play an important role in the process. The key elements of both conditions that deserve attention are whether the Hamid Karzai government can hand over power smoothly and whether the United States can withdraw its troops successfully. To sum up, there are not sufficient reasons to feel optimistic about the future of Afghanistan after the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The next year will be a critical year of transition. The future direction of the situation in Afghanistan is full of uncertainties, among which the biggest is whether the return of the Taliban can be prevented after the withdrawal of U.S. troops, and whether Afghanistan will once again become a sanctuary for international terrorism. Then there is, too, the greater uncertainty as to whether or not another civil war will break out in Afghanistan.

The Situation in Afghanistan after 2014: Caught between the “War on Terror” and Peace Talks

Professor Chen Jidong, Executive Director, Pakistan Study Center, Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University

The current situation in Afghanistan and its direction after 2014 have attracted worldwide attention. In my opinion, Afghanistan has been caught in a dilemma between the “war on terror” and peace talks. Whether or not the dilemma can be resolved depends on the efforts of all parties concerned.

In the first part of my speech, I want to talk about the manifestations of the dilemma. The first manifestation is that the war on terror in Afghanistan is unsustainable. It has been 12 years since the United States launched the war in Afghanistan in 2001. Judging from the current situation, the war on terror in Afghanistan cannot be sustained any longer for several main reasons. First, U.S. policies have changed. The United States chose to resolve the Afghan issue by military means, but the past 12 years of intervention have shown that this was ineffective. Overburdened with the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. withdrawal is inevitable, meaning that there is a need to resort to other means to solve the problem. Therefore, President Obama proposed and implemented the plan to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan and announced that the U.S. would end the war on terror in Afghanistan by the end of 2014 and promote face-to-face peace talks with the Taliban.

Second, deprived of its main target, the war on terror in Afghanistan is now becoming hollow. Since the United States is promoting peace talks with the Taliban, excluding the Afghan Taliban from the list of terrorist organizations, and actively supporting the release of the backbone of the Afghan Taliban detained by Pakistan, the war on terror in Afghanistan is becoming hollow, which is to say that the war has lost its main target, the Taliban. Such a war cannot be called a “war on terror”; therefore, the war on terror in Afghanistan is destined to come to an end.

Third, the purpose of the military actions in Afghanistan has changed from counter-terrorism into a sham fight against terrorism. Currently, the purpose of military actions by the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan has changed to promoting peace talks with the Taliban rather than eliminating it. The U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan are in a hurry to shift security responsibility to the Afghan National Army so as to get away, but the Afghan National Army, with neither the morale nor adequate fighting capacity, let alone the willingness to take the initiative to fight, only takes passive actions to deal with the Taliban’s attacks. Therefore, the

war on terror has become a sham fight. This is the first manifestation of the dilemma: the war on terror in Afghanistan is unsustainable.

The second manifestation is that peace talks are beset with difficulties. From a practical perspective, peace talks are the only option to achieve national reconciliation and avoid a new round of civil war in Afghanistan, but it is very difficult to hold peace talks that involve many issues. In June 2013, an achievement was made on the issue of peace talks between the United States and the Taliban. The Taliban opened an office for peace talks in Doha, which can be seen as significant progress. However, due to the protests of the Karzai administration, the Taliban office in Doha was forced to lower its flag and to no longer use the Islamic Emirate sign. The Taliban representatives withdrew from Doha in protest. The Doha peace talks on Afghan issues have thus reached an impasse. However, they will be renewed in the future. Due to the great differences between the positions of the two parties, the negotiations will be a long and arduous process and the outcome is difficult to predict. Time is on the Taliban's side.

The third manifestation is that the United States does not want to leave Afghanistan in spite of the acceleration of the withdrawal. In 2013, U.S. troops were withdrawing faster than planned. While U.S. troops are withdrawing from Afghanistan, they also have to prevent the outbreak of a large-scale civil war in Afghanistan. Therefore, the United States has intensified the training of the Afghan National Army to make it capable of fighting against the Taliban. However, considering the current capacity of the Afghan National Army, people have no confidence in its capability to shoulder the security responsibilities in Afghanistan. After 2014, the United States will still have military troops and bases in Afghanistan, so the withdrawal does not mean the end of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan per se. That is why I say that the U.S. troops are withdrawing but not completely leaving. On the other hand, the Afghan government will still rely on financial aid from the United States after 2014; but the United States will assess the operations of the Afghan government each year and only after the Americans are satisfied will they decide whether to continue the appropriation the following year, so as to retain financial control over the Afghan government. Therefore, from both the military and financial point of view, the United States will not get out of Afghanistan after the completion of the withdrawal in 2014; they will just withdraw from the battlefield in Afghanistan. The United States welcomes the participation of all countries in the region in the reconstruction of Afghanistan in order to have them share its responsibilities even as the U.S. effectively controls the situation in Afghanistan. This is my opinion.

The fourth manifestation is that the security situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. It has been deteriorating since the Taliban launched its spring offensive in

2013. I will brief you on a few indicators. The first indicator is the number of casualties. According to incomplete statistics, there was a total of 2,499 civilian casualties in the first six months of 2013, but the number of casualties in the same period of the previous year was 1,900. The second indicator is the Global Peace Index (GPI). The latest release of the GPI on June 13, 2013, shows that Afghanistan's GPI ranks last in the world. It has become the country with the lowest level of political stability and least respect for human rights in the world. Experts say that the current GPI in Afghanistan is even lower than that in 2008. There is another indicator. On July 15 this year, at a joint press conference with the International Security Assistance Force, the spokesman of the Afghan Defense Ministry said that 2013 was the "year of death" for Afghanistan, indicating his pessimism regarding the security situation in Afghanistan.

To sum up, we can draw the conclusion that Afghanistan is now caught in a dilemma between the "war on terror" and peace talks. There are too many uncertainties and conflicts between all the parties involved; therefore it's not easy to find a solution to this dilemma.

The second part of my speech will mainly present my analysis of the reasons that Afghanistan is caught in this dilemma. There are many causes. To reiterate, it's clear that the war on terror in Afghanistan is unsustainable. However, the key problem is that peace talks cannot go on either, for the following reasons.

First, the parties are turning to peace talks because the war on terror is unsustainable, so there is a lack of sincerity and mutual trust. The United States has never halted its military operations, even as it calls for peace talks. On November 28, 2013, U.S. drones attacked villages in Afghanistan's Helmand province and injured two women and children, which triggered protests. This indicates that the United States is negotiating while fighting. As for the Taliban, it thinks that since the U.S. troops are withdrawing from Afghanistan, it still has a chance to make a comeback, as long as it can persevere for a while. The Taliban is not a loser. The Afghan presidential election is due in April 2014 – Hamid Karzai is unable to run for the presidency and all parties are fiercely competing with each other. It's unclear who will be the next president of Afghanistan, so it is difficult now to enter into a substantial negotiation with the Afghan government. The Karzai administration has a very complex attitude toward peace talks. On the one hand, Karzai has claimed that he is willing to hold peace talks with the Taliban; on the other hand, he has also identified some preconditions. For example, he has asked the Taliban to recognize Afghanistan's constitution and so on. In fact, he does not recognize the Taliban as an equal bargaining opponent. I think that the essence of these preconditions is to put the Taliban into the position of a conditional surrender rather than to consider it as an equal negotiating partner. If the Taliban does not accept these conditions and the

peace talks fail, the current Afghan government can put the blame on the Taliban and demand that neighboring countries help the Afghan government to defeat or eliminate the Taliban, highlighting the possibility that instability in Afghanistan might spread to those countries. This is the first point, i.e. that the parties lack sincerity.

Second, there is a great gap between the positions of the parties. The Taliban once asked to hold peace talks after the withdrawal of foreign troops. Now they have adjusted their position and agreed to hold peace talks while foreign troops are withdrawing. But until now the Taliban still hasn't accepted the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan. Their principle has not changed. However, the United States does not intend to withdraw all troops but will keep some military bases and troops in Afghanistan after 2014. This is a contradiction.

Third, external factors are exerting influence. The political forces in Afghanistan all have their own aspirations and try to maximize their interests in peace talks. They are supported by different foreign countries respectively; therefore, the Afghan issue is not only a domestic issue but also a regional one. As for how to solve Afghan issues, the parties concerned haven't reached any consensus, but are playing games with each other to find a solution in their own favor.

Fourth, there is a lack of confidence in the outcome and effect of peace talks among all the parties in Afghanistan. They think that even if peace talks succeed, there will be only a temporary period of peace in Afghanistan, which can be easily destroyed, and the reconstruction of Afghanistan will also encounter difficulties. Therefore, the parties involved in Afghanistan now do not want to make too many concessions on the issue of peace talks, which adds additional obstacles to the success of peace talks.

In the third part of my speech, I want to talk about the future direction of the situation in Afghanistan after 2014. First, how should we see the Afghan issue? Afghanistan has been at the intersection of eastern and western civilizations throughout history. The invaders from East and West Asia often entered South Asia through Afghanistan. A multi-ethnic and multi-cultural modern Afghanistan was thus formed. The founding of Afghanistan was a result of the decline of the Persian Empire. Afghanistan's survival as an independent country was the result of a compromise between tsarist Russia and the British Empire. They needed a buffer zone between each other, so Afghanistan survived as a political entity. In 1979, Afghanistan's independence was challenged by the Soviet invasion, which provided a legitimate reason for anti-government forces all over the country to openly revolt. Ever since then, it has been the norm that foreign forces help some group of locals to suppress their opponents. For example, the Hazaras stood alongside the Soviet Union while Pashtuns, when fighting against Soviet troops, also attacked non-Pashtuns who helped the Soviets.

After the September 11 incident, the U.S. overthrew the Taliban regime by force, but now the authorities in Kabul lack the confidence to fight against the Taliban, so the Afghan government and the United States need to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) so as to provide a legal basis for the presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan after 2014. On November 24, 2013, the Afghan government decided to sign the BSA with the United States, but this issue is yet to be finalized, which indicates that the game between the two sides has not come to an end.

Second, what is the crux of the reconstruction of Afghanistan? According to the current situation, the issue of national reconciliation must be addressed before the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, ethnic relations in Afghanistan have undergone significant changes. On the one hand, after 30 years of civil war and turbulence, the ethnic minorities in Afghanistan have all developed their own armed forces and established their own sphere of influence and autonomous regions, and are supported by external forces. They no longer accept the rule of the Pashtuns once imposed on them but try to defend their interests and rights in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. On the other hand, splits have emerged among the once dominant Pashtuns, whose control of national power is on the decline, making it difficult for them to restore their past dominance. The United States helped the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance to establish a national government. Although President Hamid Karzai is a Pashtun, he does not have much credibility among the Pashtuns, but is regarded as a puppet of the United States. However, the Taliban is more influential among the Pashtuns and the majority of the Northern Alliance, which holds the real power in the current government, is non-Pashtun. There are still some problems about the composition of the Afghan National Army. According to the materials I have read, the Afghan National Army is mainly composed of non-Pashtuns. But today I have learned something new. Just now someone said there was a balance between the number of Pashtuns and that of non-Pashtuns in the Afghan National Army. Most of the soldiers in the Afghan National Army stationed in the southern Pashtun areas are not locals; they do not understand Pashto, and have difficulty distinguishing between the Taliban and local villagers, so to some extent when fighting against the Taliban, they are actually fighting against Pashtuns. This is a war between tribes. It is unlikely to change that fact that Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country. To carry on the reconstruction of Afghanistan, they first have to achieve national reconciliation, only after which can a peaceful reunification of Afghanistan be reached. Therefore, the key to the reconstruction of Afghanistan is to improve ethnic relations and to achieve national reconciliation. Otherwise, once foreign troops withdraw, another civil war is inevitable. The parties concerned will take "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" as their principle for dealing with power sharing and will divide the country into spheres of influence. To achieve national reconciliation, the Taliban must be allowed to return to the mainstream of

political society. External forces can provide some help and create favorable conditions for Afghanistan, but ultimately finding a resolution to the Afghan issue depends on the Afghan people.

Third, what are the major indicators of the direction of the situation in Afghanistan after 2014? At present, it's difficult to predict the direction after 2014, but we can track developments from the following indicators. First, whether Afghanistan's presidential election and provincial elections due in early April 2014 can be held smoothly and what the outcome will be. Second, how far the BSA has progressed and what the outcome and its influence will be. Just now it was mentioned that the United States wanted to sign it by the end of 2013, while President Karzai has proposed to sign it after the presidential election in April 2014. This is a dispute that raises the question of how it can be solved. Third, whether the Afghan government and the Taliban will hold peace talks, how far the peace talks have progressed, and what the outcome will be. Fourth, how the parties concerned will abide by and implement the agreement between Afghanistan's current government and the Taliban if they reach one. The four indicators above will decide the direction of the situation in Afghanistan after 2014. It's either peace or a civil war.

I want to point out that the key problem is whether peace talks will be held against the background of the signing of the BSA and the continued presence of some U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan. If peace talks cannot be held, there will be no peace in Afghanistan and the reconstruction of Afghanistan will face many difficulties. It can be predicted that without peace talks, the Afghan National Army will not be able to control the situation in Afghanistan, and there is a great possibility that a civil war or similar turbulence will break out in Afghanistan after 2014.

To conclude, the solution to the Afghan issue consists of the complete withdrawal of foreign troops, peace talks, and the reconstruction of Afghanistan. But the current Afghan government is not going to sign a BSA with the United States. Therefore, it is unlikely that foreign troops will completely withdraw from Afghanistan. Which is the way out for Afghanistan? This is the current problem.

Afghanistan and its Neighbors: the Challenge of 2014

Dr. Niklas Swanström, Director, ISDP

The focus of international attention has shifted away from Afghanistan as the conflicts in Egypt and Syria have intensified, but the prospect of the withdrawal of U.S. and allied troops in 2014 raises the possibility that the situation there may take a turn for the worse and again demand our attention. It is beyond doubt that all regional actors have both strategic and economic interests in the region, but the question is how they will respond to the reduction of the current forces, as there is a clear threat that 2014 will mark the beginning of increased instability. It is often heard, not least in China and India, that the U.S. troop drawdown will not be as fast or large as has been claimed, as this would reduce U.S. influence in the extended region. This is an argument that is not in tune with the situation in Washington, where there is an eagerness to minimize international engagements, not least in terms of the financial burden they entail and also for their impact on higher priority domestic issues. The speed and extent of the withdrawal will be decided as we go along, but the tide has turned and the current forces will be reduced.

Foreign troops have been crucial in securing the stability of the country since the U.S. intervention and ousting of the Taliban, and a small force will be left behind to monitor the situation and assist the Afghan National Security Forces and the Afghan National Police, but few expect the national organizations to manage after the transition without more direct support. The U.S. will most likely continue working in Afghanistan under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) but on a much more limited basis and not with the focus of assisting the Afghan state. This will create some confusion among the Afghan public, which has not been able to see the difference between OEF and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). With the new trend, regardless of the final outcome, we can expect a much lower level of international engagement from the OEF and ISAF countries.

It is not in the West, i.e. in the U.S. and Europe, that we will have to look for stabilizing solutions; rather, it is among Afghanistan's neighbors, who have the most to lose and to win. The new emerging economies, such as India and China, have increasingly seen Afghanistan as a transit region for trade, not so much for its economic and political stability but for its critical geographic position. The Greater Central Asian region, which extends into Iran, India, and China, has emerged as one of the fastest growing markets. For example, China has shown an increased interest in Afghanistan over the past decade, not least in the mining sector, and India is following suit, albeit at a slower pace. These corporate interests are in need of a stabilized area in order to extract natural resources in a safe and efficient manner, as well as to allow

for the transit of goods and people. Moreover, continued or increased instability will have severe implications for the regional and national security of all neighboring states—most obviously Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Iran, but also China and India, which will be both directly and indirectly affected, as trade and regional security is at stake and they are the only states with enough leverage to impact the region at large.

The Regional Dynamic

The challenge for the region is that the dynamic is often very negative and tense, with a conflict pattern that transcends borders as well as ethnic and religious lines. The inter- and intra-state conflicts that are rampant in the region have been threatening regional stability and more often than not have spilled over into neighboring states and regions. Moreover, some of the regional neighbors themselves have serious domestic issues that decrease their ability to act constructively, and in some cases have a political agenda that is detrimental to long-term regional stability.

Afghanistan

The most severe problems lie without doubt in Afghanistan itself, and will only be compounded by the retreat in 2014 of the U.S. forces and the NATO-led ISAF. It is unclear how quick this retreat will be and how large a proportion of the foreign forces will remain, but the U.S. has threatened to withdraw completely if it does not get the cooperation of the Afghan government in security matters. A complete withdrawal is unlikely, but the costs have been high for the participating states, in terms of lives, economic and political capital, and many are eager to withdraw completely as soon as possible. If this happens, there are few that think that the Afghan National Security Forces and the Afghan National Army could step up to the challenge. Increased insecurity and violence will most likely be the outcome of the changes, despite international intentions. The expectation is that the Taliban will increase its military operations, as will groups such as the Haqqani network and Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, among others, unless they are incorporated into the political process, and even then it will be difficult.

The reasons for continued instability are many, but continued political and economic instability and increased radicalization are some of the major issues. There is rampant corruption that has virtually coopted government institutions, not least the police and military, which are working closely together with organized crime and especially with narco-traffickers. The smuggling of opium and heroin has destabilized the country and hindered legitimate economic development. This is accentuated by the ethnic conflicts that still are rampant and often strengthened by organized crime and the political strife. Afghanistan is dependent on the continued sales of drugs,

without which Afghanistan could not sustain its current rate of development, but if the government continues to depend on the drug trade it will hamper all other economic development.

The presidential election on April 5, 2014, is still a challenge, with the majority of candidates (16 out of 27) deemed unqualified to run for office by the Election Commission. It is impossible to predict the outcome of the presidential election, and the provincial council elections are if anything more unpredictable. The emergence of a strong and stable government is unlikely and it seems that instead there will be increased fragmentation and conflict in the political system due to the great ethnic and political diversity of the country. It will be difficult, as is already the case today, to manage a political transition without strong external involvement, something that will be increasingly difficult to muster.

Pakistan

When dealing with the future of Afghanistan, Pakistan emerges as one of the major problems but is also a fundamental factor for stabilization. One of the major concerns is that Pakistan, despite its crucial role, does not have a stable and long-term policy towards Afghanistan. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan provides sanctuary and support for the Afghan-based Taliban movement, but on the other side the Afghan-based groups support the Pakistan-based Taliban groups in their struggle against the Pakistani government. The government of Pakistan is torn between public opinion that is often strongly anti-U.S. and pro-Taliban and the reality that they will be crippled and possibly ousted if more radical groups take power.

Pakistani intelligence, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), has strong links to the Haqqani network and is generally believed to be supporting the militants in Afghanistan with training and general support. This was something that became even more apparent after the revelation that the most sought after terrorist in the world, Osama bin Laden, was able to live in Pakistan for five years with what seems the tacit agreement of the ISI. It is beyond doubt that the radical movements in Afghanistan have direct and indirect support from official and unofficial levels in Pakistan—and nowhere is the support higher than in Pakistan's northwest.

On the positive side, Pakistan has said it could provide a platform for talks between the government of Afghanistan and the Afghanistan-based Taliban. President Karzai has been eager to initiate these talks to gain some legitimacy, but the Taliban movement has been less eager, as they think that they have the advantage of time and that after the initiation of the retreat of foreign troops they could uncompromisingly gain power through military means. Pakistan has previously been reluctant to assist in this process, which has been supported by the government of Afghanistan and by the U.S. There could potentially be a shift in policy of the Pakistani

government, but the question is still how much support this would have with the Taliban groups, both inside and outside Pakistan.

Pakistan's reluctance to engage Afghanistan is also based on the regional security situation, i.e. India and the question of Kashmir. Unless some significant improvements in bilateral relations are accomplished, the relationship between Pakistan and India will make it more difficult to find a solution. Islamabad is threatened by the increasing presence of India in Kabul and has painted a picture of encirclement in some camps.

A result of the increased insecurity on Pakistan's western border is that organized crime, and in particular drug trafficking and the weapons trade, has flourished. There is a significant economic interest in having these activities continue, so even if the government actively works to resolve the dispute, there are economic interests in both Pakistan and Afghanistan that would not be interested in changing the current situation.

India

India will become an increasingly crucial actor in Afghanistan, not least in terms of the financial contributions it has made and will continue to make in Afghanistan. Politically, this is motivated both by a desire to decrease Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan but also to prevent the emergence of a platform for fundamentalist groups to operate from, which is something that would inevitably have a negative impact on India. The investments have been much lower and are still being reduced below what was initially hoped for. One example is India's planned US\$ 11 billion investment in ore mining, which is now being reduced significantly due to the expected insecurity and rise of fighting with the withdrawal; India has so far invested a limited sum of US\$ 1.5 billion.

The government of Afghanistan and President Karzai himself have been working actively to get India to invest in Afghanistan, but also to get involved politically as a counterbalance to the large number of non-democratic states in the region. The limitations to Indian engagement are obvious as they lack a common border. Despite its mining potential, the primary objective is to prevent the spread of fundamentalism and Pakistan's influence. Cooperation with Pakistan over the situation in Afghanistan in infrastructure projects could on the other hand have some positive impact on India-Pakistan relations.

Iran

Afghan-Iranian relations have been very complicated due to historical relations and the mass migration of Afghans to Iran and the appalling treatment they have received.

Some three million Afghans live in Iran under conditions of constant abuse, something that has made both the grassroots as well as the more fundamentalist groups attack Iranian interests. Hangings of Afghans in Iran have furthermore led to similar violence against Iranians in Afghanistan. Tougher migration laws in Iran and the border violence between Iranian and Afghan security forces in Nimroz province in July 2011 have not decreased tensions. President Karzai has publicly pointed out that he has no illusions about Pakistani and Iranian attempts to meddle in Afghan affairs.

Iran has been seen as a direct source of weapons and training to the Taliban movement in Afghanistan, something that will undoubtedly be a double-edged sword as the Taliban considers the Shia government of Iran to be a threat to the true faith. Iran has from the start had strong objections against the U.S. and ISAF involvement in Afghanistan, which it views as a potential threat to its own influence in the country. For its part, the U.S. has actively tried to keep Iran from exerting influence in Afghanistan.

Religion has been, and will continue to be, a constant source of tension. In Afghanistan, some 80 percent of the population are Sunnis while around 20 percent are of Shia faith, the latter being primarily Twelvers (of the Hazara ethnic group). Iran has the opposite figures, whereby 89 percent are Shia (Twelvers) and some 9 percent are of the Sunni faith. This distinction has created problems in the relations with Iran, as the Taliban considers the Shia interpretation blasphemous and are ready to go to great lengths to defend the true faith. This situation is complicated by the ethnic composition of the Twelvers, which makes them distinct from the majority groups that are of Sunni faith.

The trade between Iran and Afghanistan is more positive and has passed US\$ 1 billion. With the trilateral agreement between India, Afghanistan, and Iran to collaborate over Chabahar port, the vision is to increase this to a much larger volume. Moreover, Iran views the trade with India as the most important goal, whereas Afghanistan views trade with Europe as yielding potential. In both cases bilateral relations have to improve significantly and all transit has to be conducted through each other's territory.

A more negative trade is the drug trade from Afghanistan to Iran. Afghanistan produces some 94 percent of the world's opium/heroin and an estimated 50 percent of this goes through Iran. The southern route is the most well established route and the Iranian police and military often blame, with some justification, the Afghan migrants for the increase in the trade, but the problem is both older and more complex than this. The transit trade of drugs through Iran has benefitted large groups there, and an unstable Afghanistan benefits the trade, but the national impact on Iran has been significant, with some 4 million drug-abusers. If the Iranian government is to be able to tackle the domestic problem they will have to decrease imports from

Afghanistan and that can only be done by decreasing production through long-term economic development.

Central Asia

Central Asia is as much a problem for Afghanistan as Afghanistan is a problem for Central Asia. The arc of instability reaches through Central Asia and Afghanistan as well as parts of Iran and Pakistan. The political and economic situation in Central Asia has been very varied and all states there score among the highest in the world regarding corruption (including Kazakhstan, which is the least corrupt of the Central Asian states). Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have been virtually co-opted by organized crime and particularly by the drug industry. Economic development has been confined to Kazakhstan—and then a small elite—while in the other states economic development is weak and the political legitimacy of the governments is in serious doubt.

Twenty-five percent of Afghan narcotics currently passes through Central Asia and this has in effect taken over the national economies of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The weak economies and leadership of the smaller states have been easy targets for the criminal networks. The connection between the criminal networks and radical groups has been close and in many cases it is difficult to differentiate between them, not least when the criminal networks and the radicals offer support and security that the government cannot provide.

The result has been a radicalization of the populace, which has worried the governments in Central Asia and moreover other governments in the region. Central Asia has witnessed a trend of Wahhabi conversions and a strengthening of radical groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and the Islamic Jihad Union. These are groups that have links in Afghanistan but also in other states in the region, such as China and Pakistan. The links between the different radical and extremist organizations in the region are evident and in some cases the military and/or support functions of these organizations reach directly into some of the states, most notably Afghanistan.

Illegal immigration has moreover been a critical issue in relations, and in contrast to the normal trend for Central Asia, they have been the recipients rather than the source. This has further created tension between Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. This is accentuated, as both radical and criminal elements are involved in both the organization of the migration as well as among the immigrants.

China

Looking to China, there are obvious gains from the trade, not least in terms of natural resources, and there are a number of major investments, such as the Aynak mine, which was supposed to add US\$ 3.5 billion in investments and an additional US\$ 2 billion in infrastructure. Chinese telecom companies such as Huawei and ZTE have made critical investments in the telecom infrastructure, which are also impressive. The reality of investments and trade incomes has been more modest, however, and has been inhibited by the insecure investment climate. Notwithstanding, the largest potential lies not in Afghanistan itself but rather through the infrastructural networks that could tie China together with India, Iran and other nations. The profits for China, and the surrounding states, would be significant and much larger than the individual trade. This would be much more difficult to accomplish with a more radical government, such as the Taliban, but China has been more oriented towards a broader political solution that incorporates the Taliban, among other groups, than other states.

China faces some significant and direct threats towards its own national security, among the worst of which is the spread of extremism and organized crime. Much of the heroin and opium abuse in China originates from Afghanistan. Myanmar has steadily decreased its production and Afghanistan has stepped up its production and sales. China has become one of most important growing markets, and this trade goes through the Central Asian networks, and much less directly through Afghanistan or Pakistan. This is due to the increasingly strong network between Central Asia and Afghanistan and Xinjiang. The increasing volume of the border trade between China and Central Asia, as well as the corruption, has made it very difficult for the Chinese government to manage the situation.

China has taken a low profile in the security issues and what could be considered the domestic affairs of Afghanistan. This is very much in line with the principles of Chinese foreign policy but will unfortunately not prepare China for the situation after 2014, with increased security threats and an established arc of instability that threatens to grow to unprecedented levels in Pakistan and Central Asia, as well as Afghanistan. China has taken the position that increased trade will be sufficient to get Afghanistan on the right track, but the situation is far more complicated and would need more direct regional assistance, which China is not ready to give today. China has not been accused of supporting the Taliban, or any organization, in Afghanistan: the problem is rather that China is not doing enough in the security sector to stabilize Afghanistan. It has been obvious that China has taken a wider strategy to create a broader political solution, something that is necessary but very difficult to accomplish without strong regional support.

How to move forward?

The international community, and the regional actors, need to assist in creating a much broader political base for Afghanistan that will include the current opposition. This will be a painful compromise for many, as the enemy will take a more prominent position in the political environment, but the reality is that the government (and the international forces) have won the battles but lost the war. This is very much in line with the Chinese policy and China would have to manage this process, in cooperation with other major powers such as the U.S., India, and potentially the EU. There is some doubt as to whether a compromise between the government, the radical movements, and the neighboring states could be reached, but such would be crucial for future political stability. The most difficult task might in fact not be including national groups but rather including regional actors in a long-term solution that could decrease in the short term the influence and economic benefits from a number of states.

Afghanistan is in desperate need of a non-military solution; the regional actors need a broader regional strategy to accomplish a diplomatic solution. This would need to incorporate a more constructive strategy from Pakistan, Iran, and also the Central Asian governments. Instability in the neighborhood of Afghanistan would be detrimental for the development of Afghanistan, particularly in the Fergana Valley in Central Asia and Kashmir between India and Pakistan, due to the close religious and organizational connections. No country is better able to facilitate such an engagement than China, which has close links with some of the more important actors and great influence over all its neighbors, even if China is reluctant to acknowledge this.

There is not only a need for multilateral political solutions, but also in the economic sphere there is a need for broader economic solutions. This is also the strength of Afghanistan. It is strategically positioned where all regional actors would benefit from a more stable and economically prosperous Afghanistan. Here China will have to take the lead: as the most significant economic actor in the region, Beijing could push for a looser and more stable economic collaboration between Pakistan and India, something which could have a positive impact on the situation in Kashmir in the long term. An Afghanistan that continues to be unstable will prevent more investments, not least in the crucial and high-risk business of infrastructural development. There is a growing need for railways, roads, and pipelines if Afghanistan is to be able to utilize its strategic position in the region.

A key to success would be to start policy co-ordination before the consequences of the NATO withdrawal appear. A positive action from the regional states would also prolong the current engagement from ISAF and OEF, as long as it would signal a credible and honest regional strategy.

Petrodollars and the U.S. Decline

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Geopolitical issues are essentially resource issues. No geopolitical issue is purely a matter of geography—they are all related to resources. To the United States, the Afghan issue is essentially the oil issue, while the oil issue is actually the petrodollar issue. Petrodollars are vital to the future of the United States. Why do I say this? Let's start from Nixon's reform. Before the Nixon administration, the basis of the U.S. economy had been U.S. industry. The most outstanding contribution of the Nixon administration to the American people was that it successfully got the United States out of the Vietnam War and reestablished diplomatic relations with China; but this also came at a huge cost, which, to the American people, might have been fatal. Nixon announced that the U.S. would leave the gold standard, and that the dollar would be linked directly with international oil. As a result, U.S. industry, including the defense industry, which used to be the basis of a strong dollar, was replaced by resources irrelevant to the labor of U.S. workers and located far away from the U.S. homeland: namely, international oil. Thus, the strength of the dollar relies on the purchases of international oil in bulk, which must be settled in dollars. From this point on, the dollar was supported not by the labor of U.S. workers but by the country's foreign wars.

Since the U.S. economy has lost its basis, the labor of U.S. workers is at the mercy of the repeated "fiscal cliffs" set up by international capitalists on Wall Street. The key to the U.S. control of international oil is to ensure that oil is priced and purchases settled in dollars, and only in dollars. The United States has thus left the gold standard era and entered the oil standard era; domestic products, the economic basis that once supported the dollar, have been replaced by oil in the Middle East. That explains why the focus of U.S. foreign policy has been gradually shifting to the Middle East since the Nixon administration and the price of oil has greatly deviated from its value at a rapid pace over the past decades. After the Nixon administration, the focus of U.S. foreign policy was not to gain the value in use of oil, but to gain the value of oil, which is to say that the United States has to ensure that purchases of international oil are settled in dollars. To guarantee a strong dollar, the United States resorts to military means to maintain its monopoly of the value in use of oil and thus creates a constant and strong demand for the dollar by the international community. For those who want to settle oil purchases with currencies other than the dollar, such as the euro, the United States will not hesitate to take military action to punish them. In this way, the United States has been completely transformed from a country that relies on the real

economy into one that depends on petrodollars. By this point, U.S. production does not rely on the labor of U.S. workers, but on foreign wars. The United States no longer makes products indispensable for people's livelihoods, such as cars in Detroit, but produces dollars and all kinds of securities. In other words, the United States has already become a country led by Wall Street instead of Washington.

Generally speaking, the basis of the value of a national currency is the real estate of a sovereign state, and the value of the products of labor is the prerequisite for the appreciation of the national currency. The United States used to raise the value of the dollar mainly by the production of the defense industry, which, compared to international oil, is produced by the labor of U.S. workers. But after Nixon directly linked the dollar with international oil, there appeared a new pillar for the dollar apart from the defense industry. Consequently, the U.S. consortiums have two channels to gain profits. Military victories will not only drive the growth of the defense industry but also ensure that purchases of international oil are settled in dollars, which will result in a strong dollar. And a strong dollar will contribute to more military victories, which in turn will strengthen the firm position of the dollar. But the precondition of this cycle is that the United States has to continue to launch wars and win those wars in order to control oil-rich regions in the world.

In retrospect, while Nixon saved the United States, he hurt it even more and made the American people farther away from factories but closer to battlefields. Ever since then, it has become a national mode of production for the United States and a way of survival for the American people to start wars all over the world out of the interests of international capitalists on Wall Street rather than U.S. national interests. To base the survival and development of the country on foreign oil rather than domestic products is equivalent to transferring the foundation of U.S. security from the homeland to the Middle East. In this way, the international consortiums on Wall Street have imposed the overloaded task of national defense on the American people and have exhausted U.S. national strength time and again after the Vietnam War.

From 2007 to 2009, U.S. defense spending accounted for about 20 percent of federal spending, and over the same period, military spending accounted for about 96 percent of defense spending. That is to say almost all the defense spending was used for military purposes without any waste. War promotes the growth of state revenue while state revenue is further overdrawn by increasingly costly war, so that a vicious cycle is formed, resulting in a crisis in the United States that so far seems to be endless. A crisis is usually triggered by the failure or unsustainability of a war. The American people have their own currency—the dollar—but have neither national industry to independently support the dollar, nor independent national banks. As a consequence, the American people can only shoulder the overloaded burden—foreign wars according to Wall Street's will—so as to beg for financial aid from international

capitalists on Wall Street. However, this only results in repeated overexertion, which leads to a “kidney deficiency” of the United States.

Now the United States is suffering from diabetes. It is common sense that how far you can move forward depends on how much food you have taken with you, and that how much work you can do depends on how much strength you possess. Currently, the national strength of the U.S. is on the decline. As a Chinese saying goes, when you are aspiring for happiness, you often have to think about whether your behavior is justified. But what can justify the U.S. aspiration for happiness? National strength stems from temperance rather than exhaustion. An effective way to cure the disease of the United States is to enhance the development of national industry and refrain from aggression and expansion. In this way, the U.S can recover and restore its national strength, so that it can embrace the world with a new gesture. However, this is impossible for the United States right now, so it can only return to the Middle East, though not necessarily to Afghanistan. The United States might choose to start another war, because the edifice of the dollar will collapse without oil. Such collapse is emotionally unacceptable to Wall Street, and even to a lot of Americans. Therefore, it is inevitable that the national strength of the U.S. will deteriorate from “kidney deficiency” to “kidney failure.”

Here I would like to mention the examples of Stalin and Roosevelt. During World War II, both Hitler and Roosevelt proposed including India in the Soviet sphere of influence, but their proposal was rejected by Mr. Stalin. If it were Peter the Great, their proposal might have been adopted, but Stalin would not do so. Why? Molotov gave this explanation: the Soviet Union would not have been able to attend to such a great sphere of influence if India had been taken in; Soviet influence couldn't reach India. That was Stalin's philosophy. Similarly, William Howard Taft had intended for the United States to become deeply involved in the affairs of Northeast Asia. But Roosevelt said that the U.S. should not be involved there. He thought that the U.S. could not win in the competition with Russia and Japan and that the real lifeline of the U.S. was along the line of Hawaii, Guam, the Philippines, the Straits of Malacca and the Indian Ocean. He thought that it was enough to control this line and there was no need to expand the battlefield. From this perspective, there should be some philosophy drawn in dealing with foreign affairs. If the United States still wants to have a hold over Afghanistan, a syndrome might follow the “kidney failure.”

The U.S. Should Withdraw its Troops from Afghanistan in a Responsible Manner

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After the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the political situation in Afghanistan will be troubled, with continued turmoil. It is probable that the “three evil forces” (separatism, extremism, and terrorism), drug-related crimes, and wars will spread. The U.S., which is responsible for the current Afghan problem, should play an active role in the resolution of problems such as international terrorism, and withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in a responsible manner, in order to play a positive role in ensuring regional security and the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

My first point is that the security situation in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of U.S. troops will deteriorate. We can see this from several aspects. The first aspect is that the security situation in Afghanistan will face severe challenges, and civil war may even break out again. Afghanistan is a country based on tribes. People there live in poverty, and 70 percent of them are illiterate. The past three decades of continual civil and foreign wars have exacerbated social tensions. At present, many political parties with tribal characteristics have become influential. The country has hundreds of political parties and the Taliban has great influence in at least 17 of the 30 provinces. In June 2001, a new political coalition formed by three powerful persons in Afghanistan publicly opposed the Karzai administration’s negotiation with the U.S. government and the Afghan Taliban. After the withdrawal of U.S. troops, the interests of those political parties and religious interests may take precedence over Afghan national interests, which may intensify the internal power struggle. Second, the Taliban may stage a comeback. There have been large-scale suppression operations launched by the U.S. and NATO forces. Osama Bin Laden, the head of Al-Qaeda, has been killed, as well as many middle- and lower-level Taliban commanders arrested or killed. However, groups including Islamic parties are still active and new groups such as the “Koran Guard” are constantly emerging. These groups, in the name of Bin Laden’s “return,” instigate global jihad, and increasing assassinations against high-rank military and political officials have been witnessed. Third, the Afghan government is unable to implement effective national management. After the withdrawal of U.S. troops, with dwindling international aid, the Afghan economy may collapse. It can hardly support its own 350,000-strong security force. Fourthly, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are still ineffective. Fifth, relying on imports for food and other bulk commodities, Afghanistan is in an era of austerity, having a foreign debt of US\$ 2.3 billion. Last but not least, the intensive intervention of foreign powers may delay the process of political reconciliation in Afghanistan. As

the U.S., Russia, Pakistan, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia, and Central Asian countries have different concerns and interests, their deep involvement will exert some influence on the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The second aspect is that Central Asia faces more threats and greater instability. The main problem is the increasing number of global Islamic groups. Due to the weak national and social systems in Central Asia, it's likely that strong Islamic political powers will appear there. At present, Islamic groups are very popular among people in Central Asia. They receive financial aid and even perhaps military aid from international organizations. Secondly, Central Asia will face a new round of extremist threats. The withdrawal of U.S. troops may turn Central Asia into a base of Islamic insurgents. In May 2004, Islamic leaders in Uzbekistan asserted that after the Afghan war they would concentrate their strength on attacking governments in Central Asia. Third, after the withdrawal of U.S. troops, corruption, poverty, and water resource shortages will intensify regional conflicts in Central Asia. Conflicts related to water resources may break out, for example, between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The president of Uzbekistan has cautioned against a possible war over water resources. On Transparency International's index of corruption perceptions of 174 countries, Central Asian states rank poorly toward the bottom of the table. Fourth, after the withdrawal of U.S. troops, it is more likely that ethnic turmoil will spread to neighboring countries, which will result in instability in some Central Asia countries.

The third aspect is that instability may appear in Pakistan. After the withdrawal of U.S. troops, chaos may erupt in the Pakistani tribal areas. Sectarian and tribal clashes will become the norm. Terrorist violence may increase. Indeed, the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan may emerge victorious in their ultimate aim of establishing a so-called Caliphate.

The fourth aspect is that organized crime, such as drug trafficking, will be rampant. Afghanistan has replaced the Golden Triangle as the world's top source of drugs. On November 3, 2013, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime published an annual report in which it was revealed that poppy planting in 2013 in Afghanistan increased by 36 percent to 299,000 hectares, while the production of opium witnessed a growth of 50 percent, thus further posing a threat to global health. Thirty percent of Afghan drugs are transited via Central Asia to markets across the world. Victor Ivanov, the Director of the Federal Drug Control Service of the Russian Federation, has said that about 150 large drug trafficking groups and nearly 2,000 drug cartels in Afghanistan were targeting Russia. Of course, China cannot be unscathed by this problem. The amount of drugs trafficked to China from Afghanistan through Pakistan and Central Asia is growing year by year. In April 2011, it was estimated that seven tons of drugs were being trafficked to China annually.

The fifth aspect is that the pressure on Xinjiang will increase. The security, political, and economic situation in Afghanistan places Chinese investments there at great risk, extending even to total loss. Terrorist forces, such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban, collude with each other and make use of each other, which will be the greatest potential threat to the security of western China. The East Turkistan Islamic Movement once published a video stating their intentions to establish an independent state in western China.

The second point I will elaborate on is that the U.S. should play a constructive role in Afghanistan's political reconciliation and national reconstruction after the withdrawal of its troops. First, the U.S. should take the issue of leftover weaponry seriously. In order to sustain the war against the Taliban, the U.S. transferred a large amount of military supplies to Afghanistan, and the transportation of those supplies back to the U.S. would cost the U.S. dearly. Therefore, the U.S. announced that part of the weaponry would remain in Afghanistan and some Central Asia countries. If there is political instability in Afghanistan or political unrest in Central Asia countries, it is very likely that the weaponry would fall into the hands of armed or insurgent groups. After the withdrawal of its troops, therefore, the U.S. should take responsibility for preventing the flow of weaponry to terrorist forces.

Another point is that the U.S. should practically push forward cooperation with the relevant countries and regions. The U.S. should continue to fulfill its commitments, carefully consider and ensure the security interests of all Afghan political forces, carefully consider the safety concerns of neighboring countries, and make contributions to the reconciliation of the various Afghan domestic political forces. The U.S. should also attach importance to the role of China, Russia, Iran, India, Pakistan, and Central Asian countries in the process of promoting reconciliation in Afghanistan. Also, the U.S. should strengthen cooperation and dialogue with organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), enhancing mutual understanding and avoiding war or intense conflicts with them in Afghanistan.

Third, after the withdrawal of its troops, the U.S. should take an objective and just view of China's role in Afghanistan, and maintain the consistency of related policies. We have noticed that the U.S. government has praised China's active role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, but have also noticed that some U.S. experts believe that China has "stolen" the benefits of the U.S. war on terror. They think that the U.S. is making efforts to achieve the stability of Afghanistan at the cost of American lives and money, while China is building a transportation system in Central Asia for mineral resources in Afghanistan. Based on this biased view, some Americans think that it would be better to intensify the disputes between China and Russia, between China and India, or even between China and Central Asia. They think that the U.S.

should implement strategic control to divert terrorist activities to other countries, including China. On June 28, 2012, the Brookings Institution published an article advising the U.S. government to take various measures to suppress China, to prevent the Middle East countries from developing friendly relations with China, and to sow dissension in Sino-Iran and Sino-Pakistan relations. Furthermore, in December 2012, Alexander Evans, a senior fellow of the Asia Society and former senior advisor to the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan of the Obama administration, published a report based on four months of interviews on the topic of "the U.S. and South Asia after Afghanistan." This recommended that the U.S. should strengthen its cooperation with India after the Afghan war in order to contain China's influence in South Asia. Although these viewpoints are not the voice of the U.S. government, they are suggestions of some retired politicians and famous think tanks. We are very concerned about this. We hope that the U.S. government can maintain consistency in related policies, contribute to the establishment of a new type of major country relationship between the U.S. and China, and play a constructive role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Fourth, the U.S. should pursue a consistent standard on counter-terrorism. We admit that the U.S. pursues a consistent standard in attacking terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and the East Turkistan Islamic Movement in Afghanistan, but the U.S. persists with double standards in other areas. Terrorist groups in areas such as Afghanistan are the godfathers of the East Turkistan groups in China. They not only instill the jihadi ideology, but also provide material assistance. The U.S. tends to support the so-called freedom fighters of East Turkistan groups in undertaking anti-social and anti-government terrorist activities. In June 2013, severe violence took place in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The U.S. State Department spokesperson took advantage of this chance to criticize China's ethnic and religious policies, which illustrates the consistent double standards of the U.S. on counter-terrorism. On June 28, 2013, a website of Kyrgyzstan published an article about the plotters behind the Xinjiang unrest, saying that while East Turkistan groups were trying to separate Xinjiang from China, the U.S. was sowing dissension among various ethnic groups in Xinjiang and making irresponsible and carping remarks about China's quelling of the Xinjiang unrest, thinking that Xinjiang is an area involving the U.S. strategic interests.

China will perform its international duties to support the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The peace and stability of Afghanistan is of great significance for fighting the "three evil forces." China has always committed itself to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. During Afghan President Karzai's visit to China in 2006, China and Afghanistan reached a strategic cooperative relationship. Since 2013, China has accorded zero tariff treatment to 97 percent of Afghan livestock products. The first foreign enterprise investing in the Afghan mining industry came from China, and the

first foreign company cooperating with Afghanistan in oil exploitation also came from China. These projects will bring considerable profits to the Afghan government, facilitate local construction, provide the Afghan people with tangible benefits, and are, furthermore, conducive to the elimination of terrorism. Since 2002, China has provided unconditional assistance of at least US\$250 million. Making use of its advantages in agriculture, education, and technology, China has trained many Afghan professionals and has built roads connecting Xinjiang, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. As the year 2014 approaches, many global organizations and institutions have withdrawn from Afghanistan due to the instability there, but Chinese enterprises and workers have stayed on in Afghanistan and provide all the assistance they can render, something which will play a key role in the situation of Afghanistan after 2014. After 2014, China will, under the guidance of the UN, actively participate in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, fully respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity of Afghanistan, respect the Afghan people's own choices about their social system and development pattern, and support the concrete actions of the Afghan government on national reconciliation. China will actively participate in international conferences related to Afghanistan and promote the development of Afghanistan towards peace and stability.

The Consequences for China of the U.S. Exit from Afghanistan

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The U.S. and NATO exit from Afghanistan, planned to take place in 2014, has caused a lot of debate. Often it is described as a major change in the security and societal dynamics. For example, employees with the Afghan National Police fear that equipment, supplies, and facilities will be lacking after the exit. Without such support, the national police force will not be able to maintain a basic level of security and law enforcement. The general perception is that the Afghans need more time before they are ready to take care of security and stability on their own.² However, an exit is likely irrespective of the mixed feelings of the Afghan people. Indeed, President Karzai's unwillingness to sign the exit agreement before the Afghan election scheduled for April 5, 2014, has led to threats of a complete withdrawal of all personnel and financial support by the end of 2013. The outcome of the election itself can also have a bearing on the character of the remaining U.S. and NATO presence. However, with these caveats, this paper argues that the U.S. and NATO exit is not a total exit, but rather a reorganization of the mission and purpose of the U.S. and NATO presence. The paper argues that the U.S. and NATO is likely to continue to provide the basic level of training and security that they currently provide. For China, the exit will therefore not mean a great deal. China will face some of the same challenges from Afghanistan and the wider regional context as it does now.

The 2014 exit – what does it mean?

The details of the exit plan have still to be settled. However, a number of changes appear to be certain to happen.³ The biggest change will be in the number of

¹ Thanks to Lars Henrik Ehrensvärd Jensen, Royal Danish Defence College, for invaluable assistance in writing this paper. It goes without saying that the author retains full responsibility for the contents.

² Brian MacQuarrie, "Afghans fear chaos will return when US leaves," *The Boston Globe*, October 12, 2013, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/2013/10/11/afghans-look-anxiously-toward-exit/Ufw6x4eicHbeHskqPMI50L/story.html>.

³ Adam Entous, "US Lays Out Afghan Plan," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2013; C.J. Radin, "How many US troops will remain in Afghanistan after 2014?" *Threat Matrix: A Blog of the Long War Journal*, January 10, 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/01/how_many_us_troops_will_remain.php#ixzz2lGabpv6l; Dylan Welch and Hamid Shalizi, "US Push to Run Counterterrorism Operations In Afghanistan After 2014 Threatens Security Pact," *Reuters*, October 2, 2013, reprinted in *Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/02/us-in-afghanistan-after-2014_n_4028483.html.

conventional forces. They will be cut to around 9,000 personnel from the current level of 60,000. This is so few ground forces that the U.S. will lose its ability to conquer and hold terrain, except for minor key objects. Possible substitutes within Afghanistan might be found similar in the 2001-2002 situation. For example, one scenario would be that the Northern Alliance, or other alliances, becomes a substitute for U.S. conventional forces, which makes sense in that the Afghans are gradually taking over control of their territory, so Western countries have little interest in continuing to occupy terrain in Afghanistan. The NATO mission will be scaled down to something like 8,000 to 12,000 military trainers and advisors who are expected to continue to train and advise the Afghan military conventional and special operations forces. Since the Afghan armed forces have been trained to provide some basic measure of security, their efforts combined with continued training and advice at a lower scale from 2014 is expected to provide a level of security and protection for the basic institutions of Afghan society and politics at approximately current levels.

It is planned that the U.S. counterinsurgency force will maintain its current levels of special operations forces presence after 2014, implying that up to 3,000 special operations forces will remain in Afghanistan. These special operations forces can be used to find and target key people in terrorist networks. If air power is maintained at current levels, it may be more efficient in combination with special operations forces without the conventional troops. A possible special operations forces strategy might be to put pressure on hidden networks by targeting key people, thereby forcing terrorist networks to expose themselves by the inevitable communications and actions they must engage in to protect themselves from these special operations. Because of the low level of conventional forces, U.S. troops may be less exposed to terrorist attacks, simply because there are fewer targets for the terrorists. This may contribute to increasing the efficiency of the counterinsurgency campaign. The fact that the U.S. troops are less vulnerable to terrorist attacks is also likely to improve strategic communication in the sense of minimizing spectacular terrorist attacks on Western troops, which tend to be reported as failures of the Western mission. The key problem for the U.S. mission after 2014 is that its forces are so unpopular among the local population that the special operations forces are likely to experience difficulties integrating with them in order to carry out their mission, and will also find it hard to convince locals that their mission benefits Afghanistan and the Afghan people. Often they support networks that are considered terrorist by the U.S. forces. As a consequence, winning the confidence of the Afghan population is a drawn-out process that is likely to take 15 to 30 years. It is anybody's guess whether the U.S. and NATO will be willing to sustain their presence for such a long period. However, this precondition does not change the conclusion that for the next five years or so, the U.S. and NATO will change the character of their mission and presence to increasingly rely

on Afghan capabilities, but that U.S. troops are likely to deliver approximately the same level of security that they do now.

China's interests in the region: Challenges and opportunities

Afghanistan is located at the crossroads of the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia. Arguably, this location also means that many of these three regions' challenges and opportunities are also present in Afghanistan and, in many cases, are transmitted through Afghanistan to neighboring states. The Middle East brings with it opportunities for trade routes and also the problems of political Islam. Suggestions have been made that Afghanistan could be the hub of a new kind of Silk Road from Central Asia through to West Asia and Europe. However, the low level of development and security characterizing Afghanistan makes this opportunity questionable for the foreseeable future. The Middle East has issues with political Islam, which is potentially problematic for China insofar as China experiences problems of its own with separatist Islamists among its Uyghur population in Xinjiang. Although Afghanistan only provides indirect links to these groups, and these links are weak at the moment, the persistence of political Islam in China's near abroad is a long-term security issue for China. In Afghanistan, one of the current issues is Iran's influence, including its links to the Northern Alliance, and how that might impact on the possibility of a civil war and threats to the viability of the Karzai government. For China, the prospects of a civil war in its neighborhood are worrying because of the impact it is likely to have on the wider South Asian and Central Asian region.

South Asia also provides China with trade opportunities, not least in Pakistan, which is the long-standing strategic partner of China and also the recipient of Chinese investments in strategic assets such as the harbor in Gwadar. In the eyes of many, Pakistan is the key to Afghanistan's future, but it is as yet unclear in what way this influence affects Afghanistan's future. Pakistan has links with the Taliban, but the political establishment in Islamabad has cast its net wider in order to have a broader foothold in Afghanistan and secure a long-lasting influence on Afghan politics. China argues that the Karzai government should include the Taliban in negotiations on Afghanistan's political future to ensure a broad consensus, hence sharing with Pakistan the criticism of the Karzai government's unwillingness to include the Taliban. However, China's links with Pakistan are complicated by the Indo-Pakistani conflict, which means that India has also established political influence in Afghanistan to balance Pakistan's influence. At the same time, on the Indian subcontinent New Delhi is moving closer to the United States strategically to balance China's growing political-strategic presence in the small rim states on the Indian subcontinent and in Pakistan. China is critical of U.S. policies in South and Central Asia in general and in

Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular. Central criticisms include the U.S. use of drones to target what Washington defines as terrorist networks and negative U.S. assessments of the role of the Taliban in Afghan politics and society. The gradual crystallization of a balancing pattern between the U.S. and India on the one side and China and Pakistan on the other, on the basis of fragile strategic partnerships and cooperation across these balancing patterns, is reflected in the differences between these states over the political-strategic future of Afghanistan.

Central Asia also presents China with challenges. The U.S. presence after 9/11 is an irritant to China, but it is a very minor presence and hence not of much real concern for China, since Central Asia ranks very low on the list of U.S. priorities. Central Asia is also a source of political Islam of particular concern for China due to the links between Turkish separatists in Central Asia and in China's northwestern province Xinjiang. At the moment, the problem of transnational Islamic separatism is seen as manageable by Beijing. However, it is a long-standing problem that is unlikely to go away due to the weak popular legitimacy of the Central Asian regimes. In addition, in the long run it is questionable whether Russia will be able to keep its present level of engagement in Central Asia. Russia's strategic reach is gradually diminishing. Moscow no longer exercises significant political influence on the Korean Peninsula or in Indochina. At the same time, Eastern Europe and the Arctic have moved high up on Russia's list of strategic priorities, as indicated by Russia's movement of capabilities to these areas. At the moment, there is a kind of division of labor between China and Russia, with China focusing on enhancing its economic presence in Central Asia while Russia remains the dominant military power in the region. However, Russia may not be able to continue to play this role in the long run if long overdue structural economic reforms are not carried out and Russia's strategic priorities are shifting towards its northern and western neighbors. China may therefore have to gradually take over increased responsibility for assisting the Central Asian regimes with problems of security, instability, and Islamist separatism.

Central Asia also provides China with opportunities in relation to Afghanistan. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, comprising all the Central Asian states as well as Russia and China as members, has granted observer status to the majority of the central regional players in Afghanistan, such as Iran, Pakistan, India, and indeed Afghanistan itself. Consequently, the SCO is well positioned to play a role in establishing cooperation, or rather coordination, on how best to assist Afghanistan in providing for security, stability, and development in the future. The SCO kind of multilateralism is well suited to a region with complex and frequently changing patterns of conflict and cooperation between the major and small powers. The SCO provides multilateral policy coordination and a platform that facilitates bilateral cooperation on issues of central importance to Afghanistan such as terrorist threats, transnational crime, and economic integration. The flexible structure and inclusive

character of SCO makes it suitable for inter-state initiatives that might help China deal with some of the problems that flow from Afghanistan through adjacent regions to China without requiring China to play a leading role, provided such an effort is coordinated with the contributions of the U.S. and NATO. If this is not the case, SCO initiatives may run counter to Western efforts and contributions, thus destabilizing Afghanistan by using the country as an arena for great power games rather than as a platform for enhancing regional stability and development.

Conclusion

Afghanistan is at a crossroads with regard to its future. This is not caused so much by the U.S. exit itself, since the exit is a transformation of the U.S. mission and presence rather than a departure from the Afghan theater. Instead, it is because of the gradually deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan due to the fact that it is linked with multiple challenges in the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia, thus making Afghanistan a conveyor belt for problems of political Islam, great power differences, terrorism and crime, rather than as a trade hub that contributes to economic development. China will continue to face these long-standing challenges from Afghanistan and Afghanistan's near abroad due to its geographic location as a neighboring state with a stake in the same problems and issues that are present in Afghanistan. However, the linkages between Afghanistan's challenges and those of China should not be exaggerated. Looking ahead, China views favorably a smaller contingency of U.S. and NATO troops, which would lack the offensive capacities of a larger force with large numbers of conventional ground troops. Afghanistan is not a top security or economic concern for China and is unlikely to be so for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the continued problems of Afghanistan and the linkages to Chinese security concerns means that China nonetheless has an interest in cooperating with other states in securing stability and development in Afghanistan.

How China Sees the Situation in Afghanistan after 2014

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I would like to brief you on my view of the situation in Afghanistan after 2014 as a Chinese scholar in the first part of my speech, and then I will talk about China's interests in Afghanistan in the second part. Let's start from the first part—how a Chinese scholar sees the situation in Afghanistan after 2014. Personally, I think the situation in Afghanistan after 2014 will be determined by three transitions, which have long been mentioned by NATO, namely, political transition, economic transition, and security transition. Among them, political transition is the central factor, security transition offers the guarantee, and economic transition is the basis.

I will start with a few words about political transition. In fact, the political transition depends on two factors. One is whether the Afghan general election due in April 2014 can be held as scheduled so as to form a new and stable government widely recognized by all groups in Afghanistan, and the other one is whether there can be a substantial breakthrough in the Afghan peace process. Let's start from the general election. Judging from the current situation, the Afghan general election due in April 2014 will be held smoothly, provided that there are no big events. I have two reasons for this conclusion. Considering the external factors, the whole of the Western world as well as Afghanistan's neighboring countries all hope for a stable Afghan central government, no matter whose interests it represents; as for the internal factors, the main figures in Afghanistan have already reached a certain consensus that the transfer of power should be achieved through democratic means. The Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan has already announced the list of the final 11 presidential candidates, including incumbent government officials, members of the current opposition groups, and former military opponents such as Abdul Rasul Sayaf. The four most competitive candidates include the former foreign minister and the incumbent foreign minister. On the whole, the winner will be content; what really matters, however, is whether the losers will accept the result of the election. For example, when Hamid Karzai won the presidential election for the second time in 2009, he was actually faced with rather great pressure. Another problem is that there are still major disputes among various groups within the future Afghan government as to whether the government should be centralized or decentralized, whether the country should be federal or centralized. On the whole, the Pashtuns want a centralized government while the Afghan Northern Alliance prefers a decentralized one. For example, the Afghan Northern Alliance wants the provincial governments to be directly elected by the people rather than nominated by the president. This dispute

will continue to influence the future of Afghanistan. This is the first point about political transition.

The second point about political transition is the longstanding issue of the peace process. Generally, the United States and the Afghan government, as well as the Western world, have already reached a consensus on the peace process, i.e. to resort to peace talks to obtain as quickly as possible what they cannot on the battlefield. But the problem is that the Taliban doesn't want to talk with them. One important factor is the hardliners inside the Taliban. They think that since they have survived without compromise over the past ten years, even with the presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, why should they talk with them now when U.S. troops are leaving? There is a paradox. Yesterday I asked Felix Kühn on the issue of whether the Taliban would split and a new Taliban emerge if Mullah Omar rushed to join the peace process. Felix answered in the affirmative.

As for how to make substantial progress in the peace process, Pakistan should first be encouraged to play a positive role. However, rights come along with responsibilities, so we should also provide Pakistan with certain security assurances. Second, solutions should be found within Afghanistan itself. In Afghanistan, it is the High Peace Council that is in charge of the peace talks. This organization is directly authorized by the president, but the questions now are how much power it will still have if Hamid Karzai steps down and whether the next president will recognize its agreement with the Taliban if it reaches one. This is a very big problem. Third, the United States and the Western world have to maintain some troops in Afghanistan so as to exert military pressure on the Taliban. I think this is not a problem because the United States and Afghanistan have already drafted a Bilateral Security Agreement.

I want to talk briefly about the security transition, which, fundamentally speaking, entails that the Afghan people are able to independently safeguard their own country. The current situation is bittersweet. The "sweet" part is that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) has a force of 350,000 men. Brigadier Simon Levey gave an optimistic account of this yesterday. Indeed, the Afghan National Army has a good image; but this is not true of the Afghan National Police and local police, the latter of which might even pose a great threat to Afghan security in the future.

Now, let's move on to the next issue—how many troops should the United States retain in Afghanistan after 2014? The U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) states that the U.S. will keep between 10,000 and 15,000 soldiers in Afghanistan in total. In my opinion, this number is not very large, but is also certainly not a small one. It is more of a political commitment and therefore the BSA's value is not so much guaranteeing a large number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan but rather giving confidence to the current Afghan administration. The presence of U.S. troops provides a tremendous psychological boost for the Afghan National Security Forces. This is

important. The U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement, which has been widely endorsed, is now waiting to be approved by Congress. According to my analysis, the dispute over the Agreement will focus on when to sign it.

The “bitter” part is that a reduction of the Afghan National Security Forces may be likely because financial support from the West is not adequate. The current strength of the Afghan National Security Forces is 350,000, but it might be soon reduced to 230,000. A joint report says that if 120,000 soldiers are to be discharged from the Afghan National Security Forces, one million people will be affected. Then how to deal with the livelihoods of those people? Another problem is that the Afghan Air Force has long been infiltrated by the Taliban.

Finally, I’ll talk about the economic transition, which can be deemed as having been unsuccessful. Afghanistan’s current economy is a mixed economy consisting of the drug economy, foreign aid economy, as well as services for foreign troops, with foreign aid as the main component. The drug economy saw new changes in 2013. After a small decline over the past few years, Afghan drug production in 2013 amounted to 6,000 tons, an increase of 49 percent compared with 2012. This is a very bad trend. The main problems facing the economic transition in Afghanistan are the deteriorating security situation, inadequate infrastructure, the lack of standardized agreements, and so on. Since Afghanistan is an agricultural country and 80 percent of its population lives by farming, the Afghan government plans to establish mining, transit transport, and agriculture as the three pillars of economic growth in the future.

Take mining, for example. Afghanistan has attracted many foreign investments in recent years, most of which had a good start but are now faced with problems. In 2007, two Chinese corporations won the bid for a mine and planned to make an investment of three billion dollars. However, the project has been repeatedly delayed due to a series of problems such as the discovery of objects of cultural heritage, the so-called Buddhist sites in the mining area, problems concerning local land acquisition, as well as the threat of the Taliban. PetroChina’s project of oil and gas fields in northwestern Afghanistan has also encountered big problems. In spite of oil extracted from some sites, the project is currently still suspended for unclear reasons. One mainstream opinion is that the oil refinery issue is the major reason. While the oil refinery was supposed to be set up by PetroChina, it now turns out that this might be done by an American company instead. There are also some problems concerning the distribution of benefits.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention India. India won a bid for an iron ore mine in Afghanistan. The iron ore mine is very large, so at the beginning we felt jealous of India and wondered why it was not a Chinese corporation that had won the bid. But now it seems that it was not so unlucky to lose it because of the occurrence of some problems. Even though the Steel Authority of India, Ltd. won the bid, the agreement

has not yet been signed. India wants to review this agreement and reconsider the distribution of benefits.

In the second part of my speech, I want to brief you on China's interests in Afghanistan. China has three key interests in Afghanistan, namely: security interests, economic interests, and strategic interests. First, I'll talk about China's security interests. It's obvious that we have security interests there. As early as in the 1990s, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) was active in Afghanistan. But I want to mention that the ETIM was not operating in the training camps of the Taliban but in those of Al-Qaeda. There are indeed some ETIM terrorists in Afghanistan as proven by the fact that the International Security Assistance Force has killed some of them in west and south Afghanistan in recent years. Dr. Swanström made an incisive judgment, which I am highly in agreement with, which is that the Afghan security situation will influence China, not in a direct way but in an indirect way and mainly through Central Asia and Pakistan. The significance of Pakistan cannot be overstated. Pakistan is not only the pillar of China's policies in South Asia but also a bridge connecting China and the Muslim world. Needless to say, Central Asia is also important. Transported through two pipelines that run through Central Asia, Turkmenistan's gas and Kazakhstan's oil account for about 40 percent of China's imported gas and oil.

Second, I'll talk about China's economic interests. Just look at the attractive figures: mineral resources worth three trillion dollars, with unexplored mineral deposits worth a further one trillion. But there is a major problem: can all these resources be fully developed? The former Soviet Union failed. So did the Americans. How about the Chinese and Indians? The development is hindered by not only security issues, but also the inadequate infrastructure. To open a mine, you have to set up your own power plants, build roads and even railways, which will incur high costs. These are all very problematic.

Third, I'll talk about the strategic interests. There have been two grand proposals put forward by the Chinese government recently: one is to establish the China-Pakistan economic corridor and the other is the Silk Road economic corridor. On the map, we can find that Afghanistan happens to be situated in the middle of these two corridors. Will the security situation in Afghanistan affect the establishment of these two economic belts? This is a question worthy of consideration.

Lastly, I'll give you a brief summary. In my opinion, Afghanistan is indeed of strategic value, but how much strategic resources is it worth? In regard to this, Mr. Zhang Wenmu presented us with a clear historical picture yesterday: Britain and Tsarist Russia came here but both retreated; the Soviet Union advanced many kilometers toward the oil-producing regions near the Persian Gulf, but what did it get

in the end? Therefore, the strategic value of Afghanistan does exist, but it's still open to judgment as to how much in terms of resources we should invest in Afghanistan.

Prospects for China-U.S.-India Cooperation in Afghanistan after 2014

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I have learned a great deal about Afghanistan from listening to the presentations and discussions over the past two days, and have gained a better understanding of the issues. Just now, Mr. Jeffrey Payne talked about Sino-U.S. cooperation on the Afghan issue. I would like to go further and talk about China-U.S.-India cooperation on the Afghan issue after 2014. But first, I think it is necessary to review the situation in Afghanistan and sort out its recent and future trends, which would facilitate the strengthening of China-U.S.-India cooperation on this issue.

As we all know, the U.S. and Afghanistan recently reached a bilateral cooperation agreement, which laid the foundation for the handling of the Afghan issue after 2014. In my opinion, this agreement marks a new historical phase for Afghanistan. This new historical phase has three distinctive features. The first feature is that, politically speaking, it is likely that Afghanistan will enter the post-Karzai era. As we all know, a general election will be held in Afghanistan next spring. Currently, various groups in Afghanistan are making preparations for the election in a bid to secure positions in the future government.

In the post-Karzai era, there will be two major challenges. The first challenge is whether the various political groups in Afghanistan can reach an agreement and reconcile to the extent that the election can be held. The second challenge is whether the Taliban is willing to join in political reconciliation and the election. If the Taliban is reluctant to do so, and continues its armed resistance, the coming election might be undermined. In my opinion, the hallmark for the post-Karzai era is whether next year's presidential election can be held successfully, and whether the result can be accepted by various parties, which will determine whether there will be a smooth transition to the post-Karzai era.

The second feature is that, in terms of the security situation, Afghanistan will enter the post-troop-withdrawal era. As we all know, in the coming year, the NATO forces, including U.S. troops, will withdraw from Afghanistan and the security situation in Afghanistan will transition from one dominated by the U.S.-led NATO forces to one dominated by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). In this era, there will still be challenges, such as whether the ANSF can control the security situation in Afghanistan. In recent days, we have talked a lot about this issue. Although there are more than 300,000 troops in the ANSF and some of them are fairly capable, as we all know, it is difficult for them to gain complete control of the security situation without the assistance of U.S. troops. At present, the U.S. troops provide

substantial support to the ANSF, especially aerial support, ISR, and aerial transport. Without such support, the ANSF cannot make any significant achievements.

In addition, it costs a great deal to sustain the large numbers of troops in the ANSF. As some of you mentioned in yesterday's discussion, the ANSF has currently received only four billion dollars, far below the predicted need of six billion dollars. Moreover, besides training, the ANSF will in the future also need some mission-essential equipment, which will also be costly. Therefore, in my opinion, if the ANSF fails to control the security situation, the political transition will not be smooth.

The third feature is that, economically speaking, Afghanistan will enter the post-troop-withdrawal era. As mentioned by many experts, the Afghan economy is a complex mixture of the drug economy, the ISAF economy, economic aid given by international organizations in Afghanistan, and in last place the Afghan economy in general. Over the next year, international aid organizations will withdraw from Afghanistan one by one, which will shake the foundations of the Afghan economy, i.e. the dependence on international aid.

What are the two major challenges in terms of the economic transition? The first challenge is whether the promised international aid can materialize. Although the international community promised to donate more than \$16 billion to Afghanistan at the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, it is not easy to honor a promise of such a large amount of money. It is indeed a problem. For example, in 2011 the U.S. promised to donate more than four billion dollars but in fact only gave two billion dollars. The promised international aid must materialize so that a smooth transition can be ensured in Afghanistan. The second challenge is whether Afghanistan can become a functional economy. It is not feasible to remain dependent on the drug economy. A successful economic transition needs the building of infrastructure, the introduction of private investment and foreign direct investment, and the conducting of international trade with external assistance. Those two factors are indispensable and the economic transition cannot be achieved without international assistance. Those are the three distinctive features of the transitional period amidst the forthcoming withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2014.

In my opinion, whether there will be a smooth transition in the situation in Afghanistan around the year of 2014 comes down to two factors, i.e. the internal factor and the external factor. The internal factor is the national or policy reconciliation within Afghanistan, as has been mentioned by many experts. The external factor is whether the international community, or the international forces, including regional powers and world powers, can cooperate effectively on the Afghan issue. Both factors are indispensable. Without international cooperation, only internal reconciliation will be inadequate to ensure a smooth transition. I think both factors are essential.

As experts here mentioned yesterday, internal reconciliation in Afghanistan is affected by the fact that it is a multi-ethnic country with its own distinctive path of

historical development. The main ethnic groups in Afghanistan are trans-national ones, with the Pashtuns related to people in Pakistan; the Tajiks related to people in Tajikistan; the Uzbeks related to people in Uzbekistan; and the Turkmen related to people in Turkmenistan. National reconciliation in Afghanistan requires the cooperation of neighboring countries. Without the efforts of those countries, it will be difficult to achieve national reconciliation in Afghanistan.

What then about the external factor? Regarding international cooperation the U.S. and most European countries, as well as Japan and Australia, have common interests on the Afghan issue and their positions are similar. Therefore, I think the U.S. position is representative of that of the West, and of Japan and Australia. China's position on the Afghan issue is close to that of Russia. In addition, Russia can influence the positions of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan; China can influence the position of Pakistan. Therefore, I think China can be the representative of another side on the Afghan issue, which also includes Russia. As all experts on India know, India has its unique interests in Afghanistan, including balancing Pakistan, future trade and investment in Central Asia, and access to oil and gas in Iran. In addition, India is the leading member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which has a close relationship with Afghanistan. Therefore, India can be the representative of South Asia on the Afghan issue.

Thus, it might be appropriate to say that the U.S., China, and India can be the representatives for three groups of external forces. If these three groups can cooperate effectively, in my opinion, international cooperation on the Afghan issue can be fruitful.

This begs the question what the basis of their cooperation may be and what the outlook for such cooperation is. First, I will talk about the basis of the cooperation. As was mentioned earlier, the U.S. launched the war in Afghanistan mainly because of the September 11 incident, i.e. terrorism. Why is the international community so interested in the situation in Afghanistan? Setting aside the high-sounding talk of building a democratic and modern Afghanistan, in fact we are mostly concerned about the situation in Afghanistan because it is a base for terrorists and extremists, rather than for its geostrategic importance (as Mr. Zhang Wenmu has argued). That is to say, if the situation is unstable, Al-Qaeda will regain its strength and stage a comeback. To which country does the Al-Qaeda pose the gravest threat? Obviously, the answer is that it poses a threat to the global interests of the U.S.

Second, what are China and Russia concerned about? Whether Afghanistan is a democratic country is none of our business. We do not interfere in the sovereignty of other countries. Like other countries, we are worried about the infiltration of Islamic groups into Central Asia, which could result in instability in the region and destabilize relevant countries. What is India worried about? Without trade with Afghanistan, India can still get along. Since Afghanistan is still unstable, most of the Jihadist groups

that used to operate in Kashmir have moved to Afghanistan. If there are changes in the situation in Afghanistan, those Jihadist groups might return to Kashmir, and even infiltrate India from their bases there. Therefore, China, the U.S., and India have a common interest on the Afghan issue, i.e. counter-terrorism and counter-extremism. Frankly speaking, if there were no terrorism or extremism in Afghanistan, even a very poor Afghanistan with a very slow rate of economic growth would not have any significant impact on these countries.

Moreover, in order to ensure the stability and successful reconstruction of Afghanistan, the international community has promised to donate a huge amount of money. But where does the money come from? In an attempt to alleviate the shortage of funds, the U.S. has proposed the "New Silk Road Initiative," which is actually intended to promote foreign investment in this region and alleviate the current pressure on the international community. Meanwhile, China has proposed the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative and the Pakistan-China Economic Corridor initiative. India has also made huge investments in Afghanistan, and is one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment for the country. The reconstruction of Afghanistan, the New Silk Road Initiative proposed by the U.S., the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative proposed by China, and the investments made by India cannot succeed, however, without a guarantee of security. Thus, from the economic perspective, all parties have common ground.

I have been of the opinion that one of the most important factors in the Afghan issue is the stance of the U.S. After more than ten years of the costly "war on terror," the U.S. is determined to score some achievements in Afghanistan, rather than experience a hasty and fruitless end like the Vietnam War. The U.S. would not like to see the situation in Afghanistan turn out to be the same as that in Iraq. There are important lessons to be learned from the consequences of the end of the Iraq war. Due to inadequate postwar arrangements, the situation in Iraq still remains volatile, many years after the U.S. withdrawal. This is indeed an important issue.

Thus, I think that against the backdrop of the upcoming withdrawal of troops in 2014 and with so much common ground, the U.S. has changed its attitude this time and has taken the initiative to invite China to participate in the affairs of Afghanistan. Today, many experts, including Mr. Jeffrey Payne, have talked about this issue. China and the U.S. have already made some cooperative efforts on the Afghan issue. For example, the U.S. has brought about an agreement between Afghanistan and China, whereby China will train some Afghan policemen and diplomats. What about China and India? India used to strongly oppose China's active role on the Afghan issue, but now India has begun to request China's active participation on the Afghan issue. As mentioned by research fellow Wang Shida, China and India have held their first strategic dialogue on the Afghan issue and have agreed to formulate a common strategy to deal with future challenges in the situation in Afghanistan after the

withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2014. Therefore, in my opinion, there is common ground and space for trilateral cooperation between China, India, and the U.S.

The question now, given that there is common ground for cooperation, is in what ways can they cooperate? What are the prospects of any cooperation? The answers involve many complicated factors, both positive and negative. I have just mentioned some positive factors, and would rather not talk about the negative ones today. I will rather just talk about how to cooperate. First, it is very important to reach an agreement that there is a community of common interests in terms of the Afghan issue. A stable Afghanistan would benefit everyone. The “game” concerning the Afghan issue is not a zero-sum one like the Syrian one, in which a victory by the U.S. might mean the total failure of Russia. In the Afghan game, a win by the U.S. could benefit everyone, while a failure by the U.S. could hurt China, Russia, and India. Thus, all the parties should reach a consensus that everyone is part of a community of common interests on the Afghan issue.

All parties need to have a clear idea of their respective roles and positions. As we all know, there are no other international security forces that can replace the U.S.-led NATO security forces in the present security situation in Afghanistan. Therefore, the U.S. remains an important player regarding the security issue. However, China and India also have their advantages. China and India are the two largest foreign investors in Afghanistan and are in a position to play a major role in this field. In addition, the U.S. can also play a major role in the economic field. For example, the U.S. can make use of its influence around the world to appeal for more donations and monetary assistance to Afghanistan. China and India can also make their contribution in the security field, such as participating together in the training of the Afghan police and security forces. In my opinion, China and India can also provide some essential equipment for the Afghan security forces.

Therefore, it is very important to build consensus about the future roles and positions of all parties on the Afghan issue. The parties should not place excessive demands on each other. It is inappropriate to ask China to be responsible for the security of Afghanistan, a burden beyond the capability of China; China, for its part, should not ask the U.S. to be fully responsible for monetary assistance, a burden beyond the capability of the U.S. All parties should make use of their respective advantages and complement each other, which would thus make cooperation on the Afghan issue possible. Accordingly, my first point is that it is very important to build consensus.

My second point is that some mechanisms can be established to deal with the Afghan issue. That is to say, the U.S., China, and India can make use of their respective leading roles in relevant mechanisms. For example, the U.S. can make use of its leading role in NATO and its alliances. China can make use of its role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and India can make use of its role in the South Asian

Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). I think some special mechanisms can be established based on these three organizations. For example, perhaps China and the U.S. could establish a SCO plus one mechanism, i.e. SCO and the U.S.; or perhaps China, the U.S., and India may establish a SCO plus SAARC plus one mechanism. Given the importance of Afghanistan, it is high time to take action, since 2014 is fast approaching. In addition to such possible mechanisms, track two diplomacy, including joint conferences such as this one, is also very important. Influential think tanks from these three countries, such as the PLA Academy of Military Science in China, the U.S. National Defense University, and the Institute for Security and Development Policy in Sweden, should play an active role in this field. More forums like this one should be held to invite various parties to communicate with each other, as it is very important to understand the positions and attitudes of the various parties on the Afghan issue. Then, participants in track two activities should attempt to come up with solutions and submit them to decision-makers in their governments, informing them of expert opinions about cooperation on the Afghan issue. In so doing, we can perhaps provide some advice to aid their decision-making.