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## On the road to disengagement? Envisioning a long-term strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan

### **Abstract**

*The situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan is alarming. In Afghanistan, the planned 2014 withdrawal of international troops is likely to usher in civil war. Nuclear-armed Pakistan is shaken by repeated cycles of social, political, and economic crises. Despite these daunting challenges, the US and its European allies have yet to formulate a coherent, long-term strategy for their engagement in South Asia after international forces' pull-out from Afghanistan. Lasting stability can be achieved only through political conflict-resolution and social change. Accomplishing these objectives requires a multi-level strategy for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the larger region. Such a strategy should prioritize a political solution for the conflicts in Afghanistan and Kash-*

*mir, support for moderate parties and local ownership, and strengthen initiatives for regional cooperation. However, implementing such an ambitious multi-level strategy will be possible only if policy-makers on both sides of the Atlantic can convince their constituencies that continued engagement in the region is in their long-term interest.*

As the 2014 deadline for NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan edges closer, a growing number of policy-makers on both sides of the Atlantic are calling, publicly and privately, for disengagement from both Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> After more than a decade of intervention, military engagement in Afghanistan is increasingly unpopu-

lar at home and amongst Afghans. Human and financial costs are stark, yet security, effective governance, and sustainable economic development remain elusive. Many in Washington also claim that Pakistan is not a trustworthy partner anymore. They have begun to advocate containment of Islamabad rather than engagement.<sup>2</sup> The stability of this region remains crucial for Europe and North America, however, in terms of the international narcotics trade, terrorism, and nuclear confrontation and proliferation.

Disengagement from Afghanistan and Pakistan is tempting, but it is a dangerously short-sighted answer to the tremendous challenges that these complex neighboring countries pose. Without a political settlement of the conflict between the government and insurgent leaders, Afghanistan faces the possibility of a protracted civil war. As history has shown in Afghanistan, another period of conflict over local and national authority would likely make its terrain a fertile breeding ground for extremism and illicit trade alike. From a normative political perspective, the viability of Afghanistan's and Pakistan's representative political systems will serve an important signaling function for democratic aspirations in the region and in Muslim-majority countries worldwide.

What is needed is a revised transatlantic strategy rather than a premature disengagement. As NATO troops begin to leave Afghanistan and the responsibility for internal and external security is given over to the Afghan government, it is more important than ever to formulate a long-term strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The recent NATO summit in Chicago produced a great deal of consensus that the combat mission is complete and the NATO partners can now hand over responsibility to the Afghan forces. Yet policy-makers have struggled to implement a common long-term approach. The Chicago Summit Declaration states clearly that the task of NATO partner states and the international community is not finished, but it does not specify any actions beyond the continued financial and logistical support of the Afghan security forces. NATO leaders must adopt a coherent, long-term, and multi-level strategy for Afghanistan, Pakistan and the greater region. This strategy must translate Western values into concepts that are locally accepted, encourage incremental societal change and promote regional cooperation.

To this end, a new transatlantic bargain must be struck between the US and its European NATO allies. The US and Europe should, to use the term coined by Joseph Nye project "smart power" by leveraging their hard and soft power within a joint strategy. The European countries

will have to define their own interests in the region and increase their civilian engagement, while the US will have to include the European allies in decision-making and refrain from military actions that alienate local populations. Improving transatlantic synergy is particularly important now, at a time when most NATO countries face severe budgetary crises.

The need to strike a new transatlantic bargain does not imply that the US and EU must be joined at the hip when implementing security policy in South Asia. However, closer cooperation has the potential to reduce ineffective use of resources and to increase delivery capacity. Facing the possibility of an Afghan civil war and an escalation of the lingering conflict between the nuclear powers Pakistan and India, it is high time to get serious about transatlantic cooperation in this crucial region.

### **Flaws of Existing Strategies**

The formulation of a transatlantic strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan faces one key challenge: on the one hand, it must stabilize both states, such that they cease to pose a threat to global and regional security; on the other hand, a transatlantic strategy should fulfill the normative requirements of Western political thought. These two goals have tended to lead to contradictory, sometimes hypocritical Western policies in the past. Yet stability and political reform must be combined into a coherent strategy in order to address security concerns abroad and remain acceptable at home.

Since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan in 2001, the NATO allies – under the leadership of the USA – have revised their strategy several times. Most recently, in 2009, the Obama administration adopted a more comprehensive approach to the conflict in Afghanistan. President Obama preferred a mix of negotiation with moderate groups within the insurgency, offensive military action against groups who were not willing to enter into talks, and efforts at winning the "hearts and minds" of the Afghan population. In pursuit of these goals, the USA and other allies increased their military and civil engagement in Afghanistan and continued their attempts to cooperate with Pakistan on cross-border issues. At the same time, they announced the plan to withdraw the lion's share of international troops by 2014. Through an intensified effort to train Afghan security forces, the NATO forces hope to achieve a complete transfer of responsibility for security to local forces by the end of that year.

Yet, Obama's "Af-Pak" strategy has suffered from three major weaknesses. First, the strategy

has neglected the regional dimension of the conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan, Iran, China, the former Soviet Republics in the North, and Russia all hold significant influence over the situation in Afghanistan and need to be included in attempts at conflict resolution. The broadening of the transatlantic Afghanistan strategy and the creation of new for a such as the International Contact Group on Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Istanbul Process are steps in the right direction. However, many American and European policy-makers have underestimated in particular Pakistan's importance for reaching sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Since Osama bin Laden was found in Pakistan in 2011, the dominant feeling in Washington is that Pakistan is not a trustworthy partner. The US government's attempts to act in Afghanistan without – or even sometimes in direct opposition to – Islamabad have been counterproductive. Mutual distrust and lack of communication led to the deadly NATO air attack against a Pakistani border post in November 2011, in which 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed. In reaction, Pakistan refused to attend the highly anticipated December 2011 Afghanistan conference in Bonn and closed the NATO supply routes to Afghanistan. In short, the transatlantic partners need to reassess their attempts at including Pakistan and other crucial regional powers in conflict resolution efforts in Afghanistan.

Second, NATO's engagement has concentrated too heavily on military solutions to insurgency and extremism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In particular, the US has relied on problematic military tactics such as night raids in Afghanistan and the increased use of drone strikes in Pakistan. The heavy-handed military tactics have led to an increasing animosity towards the US and NATO among the people of the region, producing new volunteers for the struggles against the Afghan and Pakistani governments. The transatlantic allies have failed to define a political and economic development perspective for each state and the region as a whole. Recent development initiatives such as plans to turn Afghanistan into the trade hub of a modern "Silk Road" resemble a romantic ideal rather than a practical suggestion.

Finally, Germany and other major European powers have been fairly passive in the international debate over strategy, preferring instead to react to US policies.<sup>3</sup> For example, in 2010 the European allies followed President Obama's new strategy without significant critical discussion and agreed to increase their military engagement while announcing a pull-out date. The lack of serious debate is surprising when one considers the strategy's risks: while yielding only the vague

possibility of lasting effects, the troop surge led to more violent conflicts with the insurgents and significantly increased the number of Afghan and Western casualties. In addition, the announcement of a pull-out date for the NATO troops creates few incentives for insurgent groups to look for a political compromise, as their bargaining position is likely to improve in the future. The European governments ought to define their own priorities in the region in order to re-enter in an open dialogue with Washington over strategic questions.

### **Political Dilemmas of an Afghanistan-Pakistan Policy**

Western policy faces difficult political dilemmas in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Two dilemmas are likely to dominate the post-2014 period. First, how can liberal values and human rights be promoted such that strongly conservative societies embrace them? Second, how can a sustained financial engagement be justified in times of austerity?

With regard to the first dilemma, advocacy for human rights appears to be directly opposed to both the Realpolitik mantra of stability and to powerful social norms. In Afghanistan, the military intervention may have produced a constitution that enshrines human rights, but these rights exist largely only on paper. In Pakistan, conflicts over the country's blasphemy law give some indication of how dramatic the human rights situation is. This law punishes any desecration of the name of the Prophet Mohammed with death and is often used to prosecute members of religious minorities such as Christians. In early 2011, two of the most prominent critics of this law – the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, and the Minister for Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti – were assassinated. Both had advocated leniency for a Christian woman who had been sentenced to death under the law and both had urged reform of the law.<sup>4</sup> By doing so, however, they drew the ire of religious extremists from various sections of Pakistani society. The murders of Taseer and Bhatti illustrate the magnitude of the human rights challenge in Pakistan.

Classical Western politics relying primarily on dialogue with political elites seems unlikely to deliver results in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Conservative elites are particularly averse to measures regarding the rights of women and religious minorities, and those supporting such measures are often not socially organized. All experience since 2001 indicates that the West needs to re-think its policies to promote human rights and social change the region.

The second major dilemma will be to justify further financial engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan while states on both sides of the North Atlantic find themselves in deep debt crises. Every foreign policy strategy must deal with the constraints of domestic politics and financial resources. Yet this dilemma is particularly acute with respect to states such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, where corruption is widespread and it is hard to establish whether development aid is ending up in illicit channels. Thus, a transatlantic policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan faces the daunting task of having to reconcile liberal values and *realpolitik*, and addressing widespread public skepticism towards engagement.

### **Key Elements of a Comprehensive Strategy for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Region**

Every foreign policy strategy must formulate goals and describe means to achieve them. For Afghanistan and Pakistan, what is necessary is a comprehensive two-level strategy that lays the foundation for long-term cooperation with both countries and development in the region. For the local/national level, the strategy must outline how political goals can be translated into local traditional norms and processes. For the region, the strategy should suggest a political process that involves all neighboring states and induces regional powers to exercise more responsibility for the region.

A comprehensive strategy must coordinate political and military measures with projects for development and effective governance and administration. Closer civil-military coordination does not mean that development personnel in Afghanistan should work directly with military personnel. Collaboration in the field blurs the line between civilian and military actors and puts at risk aid agencies' relationships with local communities.<sup>5</sup> That being said, it would be appropriate to coordinate civil and military approaches better through dialogue and, where possible, joint planning.

In order to make the transatlantic efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan more effective and efficient, the NATO allies should develop a common post-2014 strategy for South Asia and present united positions to the Afghan and Pakistani governments. Yet this will require the willingness on both sides of the Atlantic to make difficult compromises to overcome the diverging interests of the various NATO allies.

The following sections will outline a comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the region. Each section begins with an overview of

current challenges and discusses Western short-term and longer-term goals. Based on this analysis, the authors suggest appropriate means to attain transatlantic goals in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region as a whole.

### **Afghanistan on the Edge: Encouraging Political Solutions and Self-Reliance**

The operation in Afghanistan has been one of the most ambitious state-building endeavors in modern history. Yet after more than a decade of international engagement, security, effective governance, and sustainable economic development remain elusive. The armed conflict between the Afghan government and the international troops on one side and a growing insurgency on the other increasingly threatens to reverse the precarious progress that has been made in areas such as education, health and infrastructure. Conservative estimates from the UN mission in Afghanistan indicate that almost 12,000 civilians have died between 2007 and 2011.<sup>6</sup>

The NATO countries have invested vast resources in their counterinsurgency campaign, but the insurgents' momentum has not been effectively slowed. According to data provided by the independent Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, insurgent attacks have constantly increased since 2006 and reached the record number of almost 14,000 attacks in 2011.<sup>7</sup> Preliminary numbers indicate a downturn in the number of armed clashes in 2012 but the level of violence in the country remains high. By May 2012, more than 3,000 international coalition soldiers had lost their lives in Afghanistan.

At the same time, support for the international military presence has been waning. Although the vast majority of civilian deaths are attributable to insurgent activity, the tolerance of the Afghan government and population for civilian deaths caused by foreign troops has worn thin. Incidents such as the February 2012 Koran burning at Bagram Airbase and the March 2012 massacre of 16 civilians by a US soldier in Kandahar province continue to erode the support for the international troops.

It is important to recognize that the main challenge for Afghanistan's future is not the military strength of the insurgents but the weakness of the country's political system and its nascent institutions. Western powers, in particular the US, intervened at critical junctures of the political process and have promoted a highly centralized and personalized political system centered around President Karzai. On the one hand, this system lacks checks and balances to hold the government accountable for its actions. The go-

vernment's legitimacy suffers from corruption, nepotism, and an inability to offer protection from injustice. On the other hand, the political system has failed to include important political groups and prevented the development of political alternatives to Karzaï.

The main driving force behind the violent conflict now lies in the struggle of various political and ethnic groups to gain access to power and resources.<sup>8</sup> The Karzaï government's unpopularity allows the insurgents, as Mao put it, to swim like fish in the water.<sup>9</sup> Without a fundamental change of course, Afghanistan's post-2014 prospects are bleak: The country risks collapse into various zones of influence and protracted fighting for supremacy between armed factions.

The dramatic situation requires the NATO allies to revisit their ostensible ends and means in Afghanistan. At the 2011 Afghanistan conference in Bonn, the international community promised the Afghan government comprehensive political and financial support for a "Decade of Transformation" from 2015-2024.<sup>10</sup> At the 2012 summit in Chicago, NATO members promised again "strong and long-term political and practical support" to Afghanistan and announced plans for a post-2014 training and advisory mission in the country.<sup>11</sup> Still lacking, however, is a strategic concept that goes beyond vague declarations of intention and addresses the structural weaknesses of the Afghan state. Western governments routinely insist that they cannot influence internal decisions of the Afghan government, in particular with regard to the post-2014 phase. Given the massive dependency of the Karzaï regime on external military and financial support, however, such assertions are neither credible nor helpful. The Western reluctance to demand substantial political reforms seems more likely to be rooted in concerns about Afghanistan's stability. Stability is currently fatally linked to maintaining the existing political system. Yet the Arab Spring has shown how deceitful the stability of personalized forms of government can be.

What can and should be the goals of transatlantic engagement in Afghanistan? We argue that it is both in America's and the European states' interest to ensure that the country becomes a reliable partner for regional stability, human rights, and the fight against terrorism, rather than a battlefield for national and regional rivalries. In the short term, the main goal must be to create a political order that can survive the withdrawal of foreign troops by reaching a political settlement with the insurgents. In the mid-to-longer-term, the international community must help the Afghan society to build the prerequisites for a durable peace, broad political participation

and economic development. In order to promote these ambitious goals, it is necessary to rearrange the foreign policy tool chest of the Western states.

The first priority should be immediate measures to guarantee the viability of the Afghan state. These include training and capacity-building measures in the security sector as the country faces a civil war that threatens all existing political structures in Afghanistan. NATO efforts must focus on producing a financially sustainable number of well-trained, ethnically balanced security forces. Training efforts also have to be combined with significant capacity-building in the justice sector and the search for a political settlement. The insurgents cannot be militarily defeated; at most they can be kept limited in their reach.<sup>12</sup> Unless an inclusive political settlement to the conflicts in Afghanistan can be found, the Afghan National Security Forces are likely fracture along ethnic lines after 2014.<sup>13</sup>

Afghan and international efforts to reach a political settlement with the Taliban have long remained lukewarm and patchy.<sup>14</sup> The negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban hit a crisis point following the September 2011 murder of Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former leader of the Northern Alliance and head of the High Peace Council. Hectic attempts are now being made to ensure a last-ditch agreement before the self-imposed 2014 deadline.

The US and its European allies must ensure that the search for a political settlement in Afghanistan becomes more inclusive and structured. Specifically, the UN should organize a broad-based negotiation process and function as an honest broker. In contrast to the Geneva accords of 1988 and the Bonn agreement of 2001, all important stakeholders and political groups must be included in the process to make the accord viable. Insurgent groups should be offered credible opportunities for integration into the political process. Negotiations should explore the possibility of forming a government of national unity which prepares new presidential elections.

To support a sustainable solution to the conflict, longer-term efforts should concentrate on three core areas:<sup>15</sup> First, the transatlantic partners should encourage a gradual reform of the political system. More political and financial authority should be transferred from Kabul to the Afghan provinces. This would provide provincial governors with the means to initiate development projects without entering each time in a cumbersome process of obtaining approval from the central bureaucracy. At the same time, provincial councils need to be given the authority to

exercise scrutiny in order to make local administrations more accountable for their actions. These structural reforms could improve the speed and quality of services and increase local acceptance of the government.

Second, support for traditional forms of governance while keeping in mind the dangers posed by empowering such institutions. Support for participatory governance institutions such as Shuras and Jirgas should be cautiously encouraged and expanded in areas where the Afghan state is largely absent. While these institutions bear the risk of making arbitrary and socially repressive rulings, they also have the potential to close a crucial gap in the provision of justice that the Afghan authorities are currently unable to fill. In contrast, support for local security mechanisms poses greater risks: on the one hand, they may produce desperately needed public safety; on the other, many local militias are involved in criminal activities such that empowering them can lead to more insecurity than security.<sup>16</sup> Thus, when considering support for a given local security provider it is crucial to determine whether the group is accepted by the local population and whether its empowerment may have destabilizing effects on regional and/or national power structures. Based on this assessment, local security groups should either be supported or progressively disarmed.

Finally, it is important to promote the development of rural areas in Afghanistan, where three quarters of the population live. One key focus should be the improvement of rural livelihoods through better agricultural infrastructure such as irrigation systems, roads, and access to electricity. Development projects must also increase the financial security of farmers via micro-credits and micro-insurances and the rural population's access to education. A more profitable and secure agricultural sector will create viable licit job opportunities for young Afghans. Rural development is likely to reduce both many farmers' dependence on opium and the number of volunteers who join the insurgency due to a lack of economic opportunity.<sup>17</sup>

In the past decade, there have been multiple international initiatives to reform the Afghan state and billions of aid dollars have been pumped into the country. Yet the failures of the past suggest that these initiatives need to be more context-sensitive, internationally coordinated, and implemented under Afghan leadership to produce viable results.

### **Rediscovering Pakistan: More Engagement with New Partners**

Military withdrawal from Afghanistan will allow

both Europe and the USA to concentrate their efforts on the most daunting security problem in South Asia: Pakistan's instability. Given Pakistan's size – six times the population of Afghanistan and second largest Islamic country in the world –, its strategic position between Iran, Afghanistan, and India, its nuclear arsenal, and its large diaspora in the West, Pakistan presents a much more substantial challenge for regional and international security than Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup> It is also the key to both greater stability in Afghanistan and more regional cooperation in general.

The transatlantic allies need to revise their goals and means in Pakistan based on a thorough analysis of the country's turbulent domestic situation and its regional aspirations. An essential cornerstone of Pakistan's development as a state and a nation remains its enduring conflict with its dominant neighbor India. Since 1947, the two states have fought no fewer than three wars with each other (1947, 1965 und 1971). Most recently, in 1999, the Kargil conflict over Kashmir raised the spectre of nuclear war.<sup>19</sup> The unresolved conflict with India strongly determines Islamabad's foreign policy towards the larger South Asia region. Specifically, Pakistan maintains ties to Afghan Taliban and other insurgent groups as a strategic hedge against potential Indian aggression and seeks to deepen its partnership with China.

In Pakistan's domestic politics, separatist and Islamist movements are increasing their influence and have in many regions either undermined or co-opted the security forces. Fueled by the revolutionary mass movements that have spread throughout the Muslim world since early 2011, politicians and analysts speculate openly about the possibility of a state collapse and an Islamic revolution in Pakistan. In the worst case scenario, the nuclear arsenal might fall into the hands of radical religious actors.<sup>20</sup>

These fears are only exacerbated by the structural deficits in Pakistan's political system. Political parties function primarily as dynastic patronage networks and are seldom anchored in popular sentiment. The weak regime in Islamabad lurches from one crisis to the next, and is perceived by the public to be thoroughly corrupt. The legal system is inefficient and highly politicized. High unemployment, inflation, and shortages of energy and foodstuffs bear the risk of social unrest. Natural catastrophes such as the 2005 Kashmir earthquake and the floods of summer 2010 increase social pressure on the political system. Pakistan's only effective state institution is the military. The military has governed the country for long stretches of its his-

tory. As the self-declared defender of national unity, it continues to exercise political control even after the transition to a civilian government in 2008 and plays a dominant role in all sectors of the Pakistani society.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the clear weaknesses of Pakistan's political institutions, the oft-repeated media warnings of a power takeover by religious parties are an unlikely scenario in the near future. Support for Islamist groups has generally been limited in national elections and has also not developed into a country-wide mass movement spreading into the major cities of Lahore and Karachi.<sup>22</sup> The military's strength and the ruling classes' persistent capacity to defy internal and external pressures for reform cement the status quo and give Pakistan a stability that many other Asian states lack. In addition, a relatively free and diverse media sector and a growing middle class reduce the risk that radical elements will gain the upper hand within Pakistani society.

However, recent events in Pakistan indicate the loss of influence of moderate forces. The 2011 murders of liberal politicians Taseer and Bhatti found widespread support among the populace – including the legal classes, who used to be celebrated as a democratic opposition group. The fragile situation in Pakistan hence requires the highest level of political attention from policy-makers on both sides of the Atlantic.

A Pakistan at peace with its neighbors and with itself is of central interest to both the US and Europe. It is key to achieving stability in Afghanistan, regional security, and to contain nuclear proliferation. In the short term, the goal should be to support moderate forces in state institutions in order to limit the influence of radical, violence-prone groups. In the longer term, the goal must be to secure Pakistan as a reliable partner and to encourage reforms in the civil service as well as the electoral, judicial and security sectors that will create lasting stability. From a Western perspective, it is important to see Pakistan not merely as an instrument for stabilizing Afghanistan but as a complex society facing many existential challenges. Solutions to these challenges are as necessary from a human rights perspective as from a security perspective. Up to this point, Western policies toward Pakistan have concentrated far too heavily on the fight against terrorist groups and on securing the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The means by which these goals shall be accomplished are even more contested than the goals themselves. The opportunities for external actors to influence Pakistani politics and society are very limited. On the one hand, constrained

Western resources are significantly mismatched against the immense challenges in Pakistan. On the other hand, there is a distinct lack of possible starting points for an expansion of cooperation: The Pakistani side is primarily interested in technical projects and not in measures aimed at changing social structures or the political system.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, sustainable change towards more stability can come only from within Pakistan. Yet while the West must recognize the limits of its influence in Pakistan, the transatlantic allies should cautiously support stability and gradual reform in Pakistan.

In the short term, the most promising way to stabilize the situation in Pakistan seems to be cooperation with moderate forces within the military. The NATO allies should use economic and political incentives to strengthen these elements and encourage them to play a more constructive role in Afghanistan. Some constructive contributions the Pakistani army could make would be the cessation of logistical support to the insurgents, effective policing of the border, and the support of peace negotiations. A genuine appreciation of Pakistan's legitimate national security concerns and its inclusion in a peace deal in Afghanistan could help to persuade important parts of the army and the political elite to work towards a stable Afghanistan.

In the longer term, a Pakistan policy that focuses on stability must be replaced by a more comprehensive approach that helps to create the foundations for social and economic development. This requires a strategic consensus between the transatlantic allies on how to build functional cooperation with moderate political forces in Pakistan. Just as in Afghanistan, security problems in Pakistan can be solved only through a political approach and a strengthening of the civil society. Thus far the idea of democratization has been too strictly understood as strengthening large political parties. Yet these parties have historically proven as willing as the military regimes to use repressive means to secure their positions.<sup>24</sup>

On both the local and national level, Western states should pay attention not only to parties and status-quo oriented political elites but also the representatives of economic and middle class interests, human rights groups, intellectuals, and moderate clerics.<sup>25</sup> Through political and economic exchange, dialogue, and participatory local projects, these groups should be enabled to organize themselves, pool their resources and get a stronger voice in the political process. They could then demand more accountability from the governing parties for their policies. Strengthening moderate political and religious groups in

Pakistan might also gradually reduce tensions with India: unlike the military that draws its legitimacy from the enduring rivalry with New Delhi, the Pakistani civil society has no institutional interest in maintaining that conflict.

In addition to engaging with new political partners, Western development policies should set new geographic and substantive priorities. Development aid should include more projects that promote effective and accountable governance structures and concentrate less on the Pakistani regions that border Afghanistan. In the long term, the future of Pakistan will be determined in the Punjab and Sindh provinces: the former is the most populous and politically influential and the latter is the home province of the feudal elite. A focus on new partners for dialogue, on key regions, and good governance issues in these regions is necessary to address the root causes of violence and instability in Pakistan.

Exerting pressure on the Pakistani elite via conditional development and military aid, in contrast, might prove counterproductive. Such measures are likely to weaken reform-oriented groups within the Pakistani society who are ready to partner with the West. Western policy should rely more on carrots than on sticks and try to identify common interests with the Pakistani government – from prevention of a military conflict with India to the stabilization of state institutions. One important measure to build trust would be the cessation of US drone strikes, as formally demanded by the Pakistani parliament in April 2012. Ending the drone strikes would not only be an important political signal but also remove a prominent argument used by extremists to recruit new fighters against the US and the Pakistani government.

Finally, the US and the EU should rethink their division of labor in Pakistan. Currently, the US is much more strongly engaged in Pakistan than the European states. Yet broad segments of the Pakistani population and the political elites are skeptical or even openly hostile towards American engagement in Pakistan. American agencies thus face problems finding appropriate projects and local partners who are interested in meaningful cooperation. The Europeans should try to fill this lacuna by improving their capabilities for development cooperation programs, while working closely with Washington DC to avoid duplication of effort.

### **It's the Region, Stupid! Key Elements of a South Asia Strategy**

The situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan are heavily influenced by the political tensions in the South Asia region where the diverse interests of

multiple global and regional powers meet and clash. Since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the warp and woof of issues in the broader “crisis region” that ranges from Afghanistan to Kashmir has become even more tangled. Neither the situation in Afghanistan nor Pakistan can be understood and changed without taking into account developments in the larger region.

The traditionally conflict-prone relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has worsened in the last years. The Afghan government continues to refuse to recognize the Afghan-Pakistani border (the Durand Line), and accuses Pakistan of supporting insurgent groups in Afghanistan. Pakistan, for its part, accuses the Afghan government of supporting the rebellion in Waziristan. As India continues to increase its activities in Afghanistan, large parts of Pakistan's military and political establishment see their country being strategically encircled. In October 2011, India and Afghanistan signed a strategic partnership agreement which includes an Indian pledge to train and equip Afghan security forces.<sup>26</sup> As a result, Afghanistan increasingly constitutes a major field of battle for the India-Pakistan conflict. The two nuclear powers have resumed political dialogue after a hiatus following the terrorist attacks on Mumbai in November 2008 and have taken significant steps to improve trade relations, but relations remain plagued by suspicion. In April 2012, both Pakistan and India conducted ballistic missile tests which highlighted ongoing tensions and the threat of a new arms race in Asia.

A number of regional neighbors exercise influence over this crisis region. Iran borders both Afghanistan and Pakistan and is directly affected by refugee flows and the smuggling of drugs and weapons from Afghanistan. Yet it plays an ambiguous role in the Afghan conflict: The regime in Tehran seeks to prevent the radical Sunni Taliban from returning to power, but also seeks to weaken its long-time enemy, the US. Saudi Arabia, Iran's major regional rival, was one of only three states to recognize the Taliban regime in the 1990s. Despite its close ties to the United States, the royal house of Saud still sympathizes with the Taliban movement. Russia and the other central Asian states want to avoid a permanent NATO presence in the region. Yet they offer logistical support to the ISAF troops to prevent the expansion of extremist movements in the region.<sup>27</sup>

China has a vital interest in stability on its borders and seeks to limit US influence in the region. Beijing's role in the region depends primarily on its relations with Pakistan. Islamabad considers the People's Republic to be its most



reliable and influential ally – especially as the United States increases its cooperation with India.<sup>28</sup> In Afghanistan, China invests in the exploitation of raw materials deposits, but has thus far been noticeably reluctant to interfere with Afghan politics. In the medium term, China's economic and military rise will likely increase Chinese influence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the light of China's emergence as the dominant regional power, the transatlantic allies will have to increase the unity of their actions to remain relevant in South Asia.

A long-term stabilization of the whole region can be achieved only if it includes a solution to the most important conflicts in South Asia. After long hesitation, NATO governments have finally begun to acknowledge this fact.<sup>29</sup> Most notably, in November 2011 thirteen Asian states launched the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation, which has been promoted by the US and other leading NATO member states.<sup>30</sup> Yet the Istanbul Process lacks substance and binding commitments, and has thus far failed to produce a framework for regional security. The initiative's weakness is exacerbated by a lack of permanent structures and effective coordination with existing groups working for regional stabilization such as the Contact Group on Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Friends of Democratic Pakistan and the trilateral dialogue among Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the USA.

The transatlantic partners should promote the creation of one comprehensive regional forum for dialogue, exchange, and cooperation on practical issues. This forum could resemble the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which managed to facilitate cooperation between East and West during the Cold War.<sup>31</sup> In addition to Afghanistan and Pakistan, it should include Iran, China, India, Russia and the former Soviet Republics to Afghanistan's north. The US and the EU could be either members or permanent observers. Specifically, the forum could support an Afghan peace process and promote measures to improve political and economic relations between Pakistan and India.

Within such a framework it might be possible to reach agreement on basic principles of interstate cooperation and on concrete projects in the areas of trans-border security, trade, and scientific and cultural exchange. It will be particularly important to encourage stronger economic links between the member states. India and Pakistan have made an important step in this direction by signing a joint statement in 2011 in which both vow to improve trade ties. While important trade restrictions remain, the easier movement of many goods, services, and businesspeople bet-

ween the two countries promises new economic opportunities for India and Pakistan's youth. Afghanistan's economic modernization will still take decades, but efforts should be made to transform the country into the economic link between Central and South Asia, serving in particular the transport of electricity and energy resources. In the long term, the goal must be to improve relations among the relevant states through a process of political and economic rapprochement.

## Conclusions

The situation in Afghanistan and in Pakistan is likely to remain one of the greatest foreign and security policy challenges in the coming years. Accordingly, US and European states should align their policies in order to make optimal use of their comparative strengths, avoid being played off against each other, and increase their impact in this crucial region.

We have recommended a comprehensive, two-level strategy for building a long-term partnership with Afghanistan and Pakistan. In order to establish lasting stability without a foothold for extremist groups, foreign powers' strategy must address political conflict and the structural impediments to development at both the national and regional levels.

In the short-term, the transatlantic allies' central goal must be the stabilization of Afghanistan and Pakistan by promoting an inclusive political settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan. Western military operations in the region should cease by 2014. This should explicitly include an end to US-run drone strikes in Pakistan. In the longer term, the US and the European states should support the construction of governance institutions in Afghanistan and Pakistan that can guarantee political participation, fundamental human rights, and basic state services. American and European governments and civil society must strive to support progressive forces including the growing economic middle classes, intellectuals and moderate clerics. Public diplomatic interventions are likely to be useful only in exceptional cases, for example where dramatic human rights violations occur with significance for the whole state. Development initiatives should concentrate on improving governance and expanding opportunities for secure rural livelihoods through better agricultural infrastructure and education.

At the regional level, the US and Europe should promote a process of deepening political and economic cooperation across South Asia. Regional powers must be involved more closely in a

dialogue about resolving the various conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Existing international networks such as the Istanbul Process and the International Contact Group provide appropriate fora for these purposes. In the medium-term, it would be beneficial to begin a “South Asian OSCE process”, based on the principle of change through engagement. Measures aimed at a long-term solution to the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir should also be developed within this overall framework.

In order to implement such an ambitious strategy, the European powers must optimize their foreign and development policies for the region. The European states should increase their political and economic engagement with state and non-state actors in the region and should work harder to represent their positions pro-actively in the discussion process with the US. At the same time, the US and Europe must improve the efficiency of political and development efforts by coordinating them more closely. Security and development policies must be better aligned at the strategic planning level. Overall, the Western focus ought to shift as quickly as possible from military to civilian instruments of conflict reso-

lution.

Finally, it is necessary to create and maintain a conducive domestic political context in the US and Europe for sustained engagement in the region. It will not be easy to persuade Western publics of the necessity for a long-term engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The state of public finances in most European states and in America will remain critical in the coming years. Additionally, widespread “intervention fatigue” exists after the sobering experience of more than ten years in Afghanistan.

At this juncture, it is crucial to remind skeptical citizens and policy-makers that civil approaches to conflict resolution in Afghanistan and Pakistan are far more cost-effective than managing the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of continued violent conflict. Creating a durable peace in the region is also likely to facilitate a longer-term reduction of the risk of Islamist terrorist attacks. Through forward-looking policies, NATO allies can avoid the need to engage in costly, dangerous, and highly contentious military interventions in the future.♦

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*Assertions and opinions in this paper are solely those of the author (s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Center for Transatlantic Relations or the Fondation pour la Recherche stratégique*

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## **Presentation**

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## Notes

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1. For instance, the newly elected French President Francois Hollande has pledged to withdraw France's 3,300 soldiers by the end of 2012 instead of 2014. The Netherlands and Canada pulled out the bulk of their forces in 2010 and 2011, and Poland will follow in 2012. Australia and New Zealand have both announced an earlier withdrawal, pledging to pull all troops out of Afghanistan by the end of 2013.
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4. Jane Perlez, "Extremists are Suspected in Killing of Pakistani Minister", *New York Times*, March 2, 2011.
5. Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder, January 2012, "Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan" (Medford: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University), p. 22.
6. UNAMA and OHCHR "Afghanistan - Annual Report 2011. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict", Kabul, February 2012, p. 1.
7. Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, *ANSO Quarterly Data Report*, Q. 4 2011, ANSO, January 2012, p. 9.
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10. International Afghanistan Conference in Bonn, "Afghanistan and the International Community: From Transition to the Transformation Decade", Bonn, 5 December 2011.
11. Chicago Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Chicago on 20 May 2012, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_87593.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87593.htm), para. 6.
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16. See Seth G. Jones, 2010, "It Takes the Villages: Bringing Change from Below in Afghanistan", *Foreign Affairs* 89:3 and Mathieu Lefèvre, May 2010, *Local Defence in Afghanistan: A Review of Government-backed Initiatives*, Thematic Report, Afghanistan Analysts Network.
17. William Byrd and David Mansfield, May 2012, "Drugs in Afghanistan - A Forgotten Issue? Implications and Risks for Transition", *Peace Brief* 126 (Washington, DC: USIP).
18. See Anatol Lieven, *How Pakistan Works*, Policy Paper No. 5, The Global Policy Institute, 2008, p. 7; Anatol Lieven, 2011, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (London: Allen Lane). For a fundamental treatment of the emergence and development of the Pakistani state, see Stephen P. Cohen, 2004, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press).
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23. Conrad Schetter and Katja Mielke, *Entwicklungszusammenarbeit mit Pakistan. Eine Analyse aus Ankerlandperspektive*, Discussion Paper, Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungszusammenarbeit, May 2008, p. 57.
24. The problematic distinction between democratic and dictatorial regimes in Pakistan is treated in Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country*, pp. 63-65.
25. See Xenia Dormandy, "Reversing Pakistan's Descent: Empowering its Middle Class", *The Washington Quarterly*, 35(2): 157-173, Spring 2012.
26. Jack Healy and Alissa J. Rubin, "Afghanistan Favors India and Denigrates Pakistan", *New York Times*, October 4, 2011.
27. For a useful overview of the converging and diverging interests in the region, see Ashley J. Tellis and Aroop Mukharji, (eds), 2010, "Is a regional strategy viable in Afghanistan?" (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace).
28. For example, through the signing of a nuclear agreement in 2007 and the assurance in 2010 of US support for the Indian efforts to get a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.
29. Cf. Chicago Summit Declaration, para. 10.
30. Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for A Secure and Stable Afghanistan, 2 November 2011, <http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/4598>
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