

# CENTRAL ASIA: SECURITY IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-2014 AFGHANISTAN

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## ABSTRACT

**I**ts geographic location, domestic political complications, ethno-confessional diversity, and involvement in the global shadow economy keep Afghanistan in the center of the intertwining interests of state and extra-state forces. This threatens the

country's immediate neighbors and even whole regions and explains the never weakening interest of Pakistan, India, Iran, the Central Asian Soviet successor-states, China, and Russia in what is going on in this country.

**KEYWORDS:** *Afghanistan, Central Asia, security, the Taliban, drug trafficking, ethno-confessional diversity, the Afghan problem, Afghanistan after 2014.*

## *Introduction*

In the last two years, the world political scientific community has been actively discussing the possible post-2014 developments in Afghanistan; as the event draws closer, all sorts of think tanks, funds, and institutions have been coming up with more and more scenarios.

The leading Western centers, such as the RAND Corporation, the Carnegie Endowment, the Institute of Central Asia and the Caucasus at Johns Hopkins University, Chatham House of the UK, and the Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI), to name a few, are looking for every possible answer to the question: What will happen in Afghanistan after the Western pullout? The Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany set up a network of groups staffed with experts from the Central Asian republics, Pakistan, India, Iran, Turkey, China, and Russia to monitor the situation and forecast possible developments inside and outside the country after 2014.

Here are some of their scenarios; I would like to point out that under any of them the Central Asian countries will be threatened.

In the geopolitical context, the developments in Afghanistan will undermine the security of a much wider region: South Asia, the Middle East, the CIS countries, and China. This explains why the problem remains high on the world agenda and why Pakistan, India, Iran, the post-Soviet Central Asian states, China, and Russia are closely following the developments in this country.

## The Afghan Problem in the World Political Context

The United States relies in its Afghan policies on the “Pashtunization” strategy suggested by the RAND Corporation, which comprises two elements. The United States and its allies are determined either to capture or liquidate the most odious members of the anti-Western coalition of the Taliban and other radical, mainly Pashtun, groups, and then they intend to create a new structure of power out of moderate Taliban members (Pashtun fighters) driven by ethnic nationalism rather than religious fundamentalism.

In the last few years, the American expert community has been promoting the idea of decentralized democracy<sup>1</sup> in Afghanistan, which Washington is ready to accept under certain conditions. The centralized state will survive, while the regions will become autonomies with extensive rights and democratic institutions. The center should be strong enough to control the country’s entire territory to prevent any attempts to destabilize Pakistan or attack the United States.

A “state of decentralized democracy” is a challenging task:

- First, the Taliban, which rejects democracy in principle, will oppose “decentralized democracy” as aggressively as it is fighting centralized democracy.
- Second, the administrative potential of the Afghan state is limited.
- Third, the anti-government and very influential figures in the Afghan provinces will hardly hail this variant.

In the past, Chatham House, a British think tank, devised a plan of conflict settlement in Afghanistan coordinated with the United States and the other NATO members, which mentioned, among other things, security, administration, development, and regional relations. Under this plan, the numerical strength of Afghanistan’s national army should be brought up to 134 thousand and the size of the police force to 109 thousand to be able to assume control over the country and ensure its security.

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<sup>1</sup> The government in Kabul will remain in control of the country’s foreign policy; it will have the right to declare war and apply anti-drug legislation; it will control customs services and mining, but will have limited rights in supervising trade between provinces.

It was planned to set up an international reintegration fund to support those Taliban fighters who wanted to resume a peaceful life.

The third section of the same document envisaged much closer coordination between the Afghan forces (including ISAF) and neighboring countries (Pakistan in particular). It was expected that the special international fund would accumulate at least \$500 million.

It should be said that the Karzai government<sup>2</sup> put its own plan of reconciliation with the Taliban on the table, according to which those who moved over to the side of the government would acquire jobs, education, and security, the latter being the main point. Under this plan, those willing to embrace reconciliation could count on protection against their former comrades-in-arms, their past activities forgiven and forgotten.

Washington liked the plan on the whole; however, the price (\$1 billion) proved forbidding. The Afghans looked to the world community for donations.

Turkey, likewise, was interested in what would happen to Afghanistan and the Turkic Central Asian states in particular; it intended to make the problem a regional one in order to stir the neighboring states into more active involvement in its solution.

China is worried lest Islamists gain control over the Uyghur separatist movement. This will add vigor to the Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan, while the XUAR will become an outpost of terrorist activities in the region. In this event, Beijing will have to move from observation to action, in particular to economic interference in the Afghan conflict to weaken the Taliban. China is also interested in exploiting the country's mineral resources.

India, in turn, wants its own mechanisms of involvement in Afghanistan. However, some experts think that Islamabad is deliberately maintaining tension in the Pashtun areas in case of another military conflict with India.

Russia wants to return to Afghanistan for several reasons; first, it needs security and is driven by geopolitical considerations: the problem of drug production in Afghanistan must be addressed and resolved, while what Washington is doing in this country should be observed at closer range. Second, Russia, as well as all other actors, is guided by economic interests: it needs markets for its military hardware and access to local natural resources.

Japan is also involved; it is acting together with the United States while also trying to reconcile Washington's intention to draw it into America's military actions and the political realities inside the country. Tokyo, however, is not limiting itself to cooperation with Washington: its diplomacy in Afghanistan has become more independent and more promising in view of the coalition's pullout and inevitable concentration on postwar rehabilitation.<sup>3</sup>

Japan is claiming the role of a global leader in dealing with humanitarian, social, and economic problems; its active involvement in postwar rehabilitation in Afghanistan will bring it closer to Central Asia, ensure its energy security, enrich it with new experience in dealing with global problems, and increase its weight in the eyes of the world.

## Main Scenarios

The scenarios are numerous and varied, but none fits the U.S.'s main demands in the security sphere: the de jure and de facto split might become a reality. The Pashtun south may be detached from

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<sup>2</sup> According to many of the Western experts in Afghanistan, the term "moderate Taliban" used by Kabul is nothing but a myth. The attempts to integrate them into administrative structures are fraught with unpredictable repercussions.

<sup>3</sup> See: O.A. Dobrinskaia, "Tokyo: aktsent na nevoennye aspekty uregulirovaniia v Afganistane," *Azia i Afrika segodnia*, No. 11, 2012, pp. 12-17.

the north and the west with their predominantly Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara populations. This will be most probable if a settlement deal with the Taliban gives it a free hand in the south, its historical foothold. It will turn these areas into safe havens of trans-border terrorism and radical movements.

In recent years, experts have discussed three (or four) possible scenarios.<sup>4</sup>

*Scenario No. 1* looked ideal, but it was rejected right away: according to it, the coalition should have won relatively easily in a couple of years; it should have set up efficient state institutions, laid a solid foundation for civil society, and left the country. Even if realized, this scenario would not have protected the country against a gradually rekindled conflict with the Taliban.

Under *Scenario No. 2*, the coalition would leave without winning because a military victory (which presupposed control over the provinces, including those where the coalition was stationed) was unattainable, there was not enough money, and the coalition allies were unreliable. On top of this, the Taliban refused to talk to the “occupants” and their puppets. In the absence of positive shifts, Washington would be forced to abandon its plans of pacification and declare the mission complete. In fact, withdrawal would look like a defeat.

*Scenario No. 3* was more realistic: confrontation with the Taliban would go on and on for an indefinite period of time, while final settlement of the Afghan Question would be indefinitely postponed; this is what the American Administration is doing.

The FOI experts came out with five possible scenarios of the Afghan post-pullout developments.<sup>5</sup>

Under *Scenario No. 1*, “the Taliban get a share of the government of Afghanistan under two conditions

“(1) The United States stays committed to Afghanistan, both financially and militarily and

“(2) Pakistan supports the Taliban’s decision to negotiate.”

*Scenario No. 2* presents “Pakistan as Afghanistan’s New Big Brother. If the United States cuts its financial support to the government of Afghanistan, Islamabad could step in to fill the power vacuum.”

*Scenario No. 3* “War of Proxies:” “The United States stays committed to Afghanistan, both financially and militarily. Pakistan supports the Taliban in order to keep its strategic depth inside southern Afghanistan.” A “proxy war” between the American forces and the forces supported by Kabul would be a possible scenario. “Thus, if Pakistan decides to continue its policy of supporting the Taliban as a means to gain strategic depth in southern Afghanistan, and the United States decides to cut its aid to Pakistan, the conflict is likely to escalate. Without U.S. financial support, Pakistan has no reason to keep a leash on its proxies inside Afghanistan.”

*Scenario No. 4* is painfully familiar: it is a full-scale civil war. “The United States cuts its financial support to the government of Afghanistan. Pakistan supports the Taliban in order to keep its strategic depth inside southern Afghanistan.”

*Scenario No. 5*, which the authors called “The American Dream,” envisages that “the United States stays committed to Afghanistan, both financially and militarily. Pakistan breaks with the Taliban in order to prioritize its domestic problems.” Afghanistan will be stabilized from the political-military point of view, while the threat of radical Islam will diminish. The United States and the world community will augment their effective aid to Afghanistan to revive its economy.

<sup>4</sup> For more details, see: M.T. Laumulin, “Stsenarii razvitiia Afghaniстана i pozitsii zainteresovannykh storon,” in: *Afghanistan: nastoiashchee i budushchee. Vozdeystvie na stabilnost i bezopasnost Tsentralnoy Azii. Materialy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii*, FFE, Almaty, 2011, pp. 109-121.

<sup>5</sup> See: *Afghanistan after 2014: Five Scenarios*, FOI, Stockholm, 2012, 100 pp.

The FOI scenarios expect that Pakistan will be actively (positively or negatively) involved in the developments.

In December 2010, the Learned Council of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences, met to discuss Central Asia in the Afghan context. An international conference on the same subject was held in 2012.<sup>6</sup> The participants discussed possible scenarios and concluded that the situation in Afghanistan would largely be determined by one of the scenarios realized after (or during) the pullout.

*Scenario No. 1*, pessimistic (the Taliban-2): Afghanistan will be plunged into a civil war between an ethno-territorial Pashtun group, on the one hand, and a “second edition” of the Northern Alliance (Tajik-Uzbek-Hazara bloc), on the other. This strife will remove the Karzai government and bring to power the irreconcilable Taliban; this will bring back the situation of 1996-2001 when the country served as a shelter for al-Qa’eda and international terrorists fighting under its aegis. They threatened Central Asia, Russia, and, in fact, the rest of the world. This will challenge all of Afghanistan’s neighbors, particularly the Central Asian states.

In view of the extremely weak armies and border guards of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, their CSTO and SCO partners will have to step in, which will increase social and economic tension in all the member states.

*Scenario No. 2*, optimistic (peaceful Afghanistan): it suits the interests of the people of Afghanistan and its neighbors, including the Central Asian countries. This will start the so-called Kabul process, launched in July 2010 at a Kabul Conference on Afghan Settlement. If implemented, the program of national reconciliation and reintegration and structuring of the system of state governance will allow the local administration to maintain stability. A coalition government patterned on the Iraqi model will rely on a consensus between the key political forces to represent, on the whole, the interests of the main political forces—the Pashtun and other ethnic groups.

The 2012 conference offered its own scenarios.

*Scenario No. 1* (pessimistic): fiercer confrontation among ethnic groups up to and including a wide-scale armed struggle; it will be gradually gathering momentum as the main contingents of the United States and ISAF pull out of the country. This may bring irreconcilable Taliban to power, which will revive the situation of 1996-2001 when the country served as a shelter for al-Qa’eda and international terrorism forces that threatened the world.

If implemented, this scenario will create all sorts of risks for the Central Asian states:

- The theater of civil war will spread to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as Afghanistan’s closest neighbors;
- Internal destabilization might provoke ethnic conflicts in Central Asia;
- Refugees from Afghanistan will add to the social tension;
- The hot climate and water shortages will make the epidemiological and sanitary situation even worse;
- The Islamist underground will regain its vigor in Central Asia (and the Ferghana Valley, in particular); its “dormant cells” will join forces with the “comrades-in-arms” (militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and al-Qa’eda-type groups based in Afghanistan) to carry out anti-government armed actions aimed at undermining the secular nature of the region’s states.

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<sup>6</sup> See: I. Labinskaia, “Tsentralnaia Azia v kontekste afghanskoy situatsii,” *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia* (MEMO RAN), No. 5, 2011, pp. 3-16.

*Scenario No. 2* (moderately pessimistic): the pullout of the Western coalition and possible retirement of President Hamid Karzai will be followed by a short period of fierce struggle for power among various political forces. The moderate Taliban will win.

In the short-term perspective, Central Asia will remain safe from dramatic repercussions promised by the pessimistic scenario. First, the Taliban will not try to capture territories in Central Asia or set up a Caliphate there; second, the Uzbeks and Tajiks of Afghanistan, who want to fortify their own positions inside the country, will not seek support outside it among the Uzbeks and Tajiks of Central Asia.

We should bear in mind, however, that in the long-term perspective the moderately pessimistic scenario might become pessimistic because of rivalry in Afghanistan or because of worsened relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This will make security threats to the Central Asian countries very real.

*Scenario No. 3* (optimistic): if implemented, the programs of national reconciliation and reintegration in Afghanistan will create a foundation for a coalition government that will represent the interests of all the political forces and peoples of Afghanistan—both Pashtun and non-Pashtun (Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazara, etc.). Much will be done to neutralize or even liquidate Islamist groups connected with the irreconcilable Taliban or al-Qa'eda. This will deprive the religious extremists in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as in the Central Asian states, of a great share of support.

If realized, this scenario will allow the Central Asian countries

- To strengthen their political systems in the absence of an outside threat of destabilization;
- To preserve the secular development vector and the historically shaped traditions of secularism of state power and political regimes;
- To develop mutually advantageous relations with Afghanistan in the sphere of energy supply and transportation.

There are also several alternative scenarios.

- (A) The Central Asian states and Afghanistan will develop on the basis of the Eurasian Union. They will form a confederation of sovereign states with a common political, economic, military, and customs space based on the union of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, as well as several integration structures (EurAsEC, CES, the Customs Union, and CSTO).
- (B) Implementation of the American mega-projects the Greater Central Asia and the New Silk Road, which presuppose closer economic and political integration of Central Asia and South Asia based on Western political patterns.
- (C) Stronger economic and political influence of the “growing powers” (China, India, and Turkey) in Central Asia mainly based on economic relations. The Central Asian states will remain true to their multivectoral policy and will preserve close contacts with Russia, the EU, and the United States.<sup>7</sup>

## What the Experts Think

According to Robert Blackwill, an expert at the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, “Washington should accept that the Taliban will inevitably control most of the Pashtun south and east and that

<sup>7</sup> See: *Vyzovy bezopasnosti v Tsentralnoy Azii*, IMEMO RAN, Moscow, 2013, 150 pp.

the price of forestalling that outcome is far too high for the United States to continue paying... The United States and its allies would withdraw ground combat forces over several months from most of Pashtun Afghanistan, including Kandahar. The ISAF would stop fighting in the mountains, valleys, and urban areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan (although it would continue to provide arms, aid, and intelligence to local tribal leaders there who want to resist). Washington would concentrate its efforts, meanwhile, on defending the areas in the north and west of Afghanistan not dominated by the Pashtuns, including Kabul. Washington would enlist Afghanistan's Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and supportive Pashtuns in this endeavor—as well as its NATO allies, Afghanistan's various neighbors, and hopefully the United Nations Security Council.

“The Afghan Taliban would be offered a *modus vivendi* in which each side agreed not to seek to enlarge the territory it controlled, so long as the Taliban stopped supporting terrorism.

“Accepting a de facto partition of Afghanistan makes sense only if the other options available are worse,” writes Blackwill. “One alternative is to stay the current course in Afghanistan. Another alternative is for the United States to withdraw all its military forces from Afghanistan over the next few years. But this would lead to a probable conquest of the entire country by the Taliban.

“A third alternative would be to try to achieve stability in Afghanistan through negotiations with the Taliban. NATO could seek to entice the Afghan Taliban to stop fighting and enter into a coalition government in Kabul.”<sup>8</sup>

John D. Podesta, chair of the Center for American Progress, has elaborated the main principles of Washington's future strategy in Afghanistan: “...as the United States prepares to exit Afghanistan, it is focusing too much on security, overlooking the political elements of the transition. To leave behind a stable government in 2014, Washington needs to push harder for electoral reforms, negotiations with the Taliban, and a regional settlement involving Pakistan.”<sup>9</sup>

Experts of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University have offered a wide range of measures designed to stabilize Afghanistan to be implemented in three stages:

- (1) short-term, from 2012 to 2020;
- (2) mid-term, from 2010 to 2025, and
- (3) long-term, which will begin in 2025.

As could be expected, the plan follows the logic of the well-known Greater Central Asia concept of Frederick Starr. These, mainly long-term, measures are geared at transportation and energy supply projects.<sup>10</sup>

According to Chinese experts at the Center of Russian Studies (Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences), after 2014 Central Asia will face three real threats and three potential security challenges:

- *The first threat*: “three forces” have been and remain the main enemy of Central Asian security.
- *The second threat*: transborder crime, which greatly violates law and order in Central Asia.

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<sup>8</sup> R. Blackwill, “Plan ‘B’ in Afghanistan. Why a De Facto Partition is the Least Bad Option,” available at [www.foreignaffairs.com/print/669822/6].

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137696/stephen-hadley-and-john-d-podesta/the-right-way-out-of-afghanistan].

<sup>10</sup> See: S.F. Starr, A.C. Kuchins, *The Key to Success in Afghanistan. A Modern Silk Road Strategy*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program—A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, Washington, D.C., 2010, 48 pp.; S.F. Starr, *Finish the Job: Jump-Start Afghanistan's Economy*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program—A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, Washington, D.C., 2012, 55 pp.

- *The third threat*: external terrorist forces, which penetrate the region and exacerbate the situation.
- *The first challenge*: struggle among the Great Powers in Central Asia complicates the security situation in the region.
- *The second challenge*: the power struggle at the coming elections makes the region's future vague and the situation unstable.
- *The third challenge*: sharper national contradictions threaten Central Asian stability.<sup>11</sup>

Experts of the Institute of South and Southeast Asian and Oceania Studies at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations believe that the situation in Afghanistan may follow one of four possible scenarios.

- (1) A civil war might be inevitable if no peaceful agreement among all the sides is signed (irrespective of whether the coalition forces pull out or stay put).
- (2) In the most extreme case, a civil war and foreign interference may cause disintegration after 2014.
- (3) If disintegration has been avoided, a civil war or political reconciliation may end in self-administration of the provinces.

According to Ivan Safranchuk, Deputy Director of the Institute of Contemporary International Studies, Diplomatic Academy, RF Foreign Ministry, the future of Afghanistan is not predetermined and still hinges on several variables:

- (1) a basic compromise between the warlords and the effective government in Kabul survives;
- (2) if it falls through, this compromise will open the road to regional and ethnic rivalry.

In the first case, the balance of power between Kabul and the provinces will be gradually redistributed in favor of the latter. "Ultimately, the Afghans should be given the opportunity to build a steady balance of forces at home, and then use these forces as a basis for political compromise. The role of external players, large regional countries, and immediate neighbors should not be obtrusive mediation. The Afghans will have to agree among themselves. The main requirement for all political forces in the country must be as follows: Afghanistan as a threat is not good for the country, which needs to be an integral political and economic part of the region. The external players, the large regional countries and closest neighbors should avoid nagging mediation."<sup>12</sup>

Experts of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs believe that the West can still win if the following key tasks are addressed and accomplished:

- (1) an Afghan national police force and Afghan national army should be set up.
- (2) Afghanistan should acquire an effective state apparatus and carry out an efficient anti-corruption campaign.
- (3) Afghanistan should achieve national reconciliation.
- (4) Afghanistan should organize regional cooperation with Pakistan and Iran in particular.
- (5) Afghanistan should create conditions conducive to economic growth.

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<sup>11</sup> See: *Vyzovy bezopasnosti v Tsentralnoy Azii*, pp. 84-89.

<sup>12</sup> I. Safranchuk, "Afghanistan in Search of Balance," available at [[http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/person/p\\_1260](http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/person/p_1260)].



NATO based its Afghan strategy on the hope of achieving progress, at least in some respects, but, so far, nothing has happened.<sup>13</sup>

Experts from the Institute of the Far East, Russian Academy of Sciences, have reduced all possible post-2014 developments to four scenarios, two of them negative, one moderately negative, and one positive.<sup>14</sup>

The first scenario is fraught with possible Balkanization, which will become probable in the absence of an obvious victory at the concluding stage of Operation Enduring Freedom and also if the Americans fail to negotiate territorial delimitation with the Taliban and if vast areas escape the control of the Karzai government.

The provincial leaders and warlords, many of whom have no real trust in the Kabul authorities today, will gain strength.

The country may slip into another version of the Arab Spring with wide-scale criminalization and radicalization of the region's population and worsened national relations still further aggravated by Islamic extremism. Tajikistan inundated by the Islamist opposition so far stationed in Afghanistan will be plunged into the second wave of a civil war.

Secular power in the other Central Asian republics may collapse; this will do nothing for the international energy projects and will intensify the flow of drugs to the region, Russia, and Europe. There is no doubt that all sorts of terrorist groups will use this opportunity to step up their activities along the borders of the Central Asian countries and inside them.

Under the second (moderately negative) scenario, the Americans and the Taliban will agree to divide the country: the government armed forces will assume responsibility for the north and the west, while the Taliban will move into the south and the east of the country, something which the local warlords will accept.

Under the positive scenario, the United States will remain in Afghanistan; in this case the elite will close ranks around the government in Kabul; agreements with the moderate members of the Taliban will become possible. The Afghan army will fortify its positions across the entire territory, which spells defeat for the irreconcilable part of the Taliban. Social and economic problems will be addressed, while efficient mechanisms of control over drug production and trafficking will be set up.

Washington will do its best to alleviate the concerns of Moscow and Beijing about America's continued presence in Afghanistan. The international community, very much as usual, will side with the United States to persuade Russia and China to join the concerted efforts to rehabilitate and stabilize Afghanistan for the sake of regional stability. This variant is possible, but the United States, Russia, and China are unlikely to arrive at a consensus on America's presence in the region.

On the whole, if realized, most of the scenarios will negatively affect regional security and the national interests of the Central Asian SCO members and also of China and Russia, two key members, the positions of which are the strongest in the region.

Dr. Mariam Arunova of the Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, has pointed out that the Afghan Question might become regionalized after 2014: the regional powers, including those acting within the SCO format, will increase their impact on Afghanistan. The possible SCO role was discussed in 2009-2011 at the meetings among the presidents of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Russia and

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<sup>13</sup> See: S. Harnisch, *Back to the Future: Germany's Afghanistan Policy after 2014*, Institute of Political Science, Heidelberg, 2013, 12 pp.

<sup>14</sup> See: Yu. Morozov, "Afghanistan posle 2014 goda: stabilnost dlia gosudarstv ShOS ili novy vitok napriazhennosti v Tsentralno-Aziatskom regione?" *Problemy Dalnego Vostoka*, No. 2, 2013, pp. 94-114 (Yu. Morozov, "Afghanistan after 2014: Stability for SCO States or New Tensions in Central Asia?" *Far Eastern Affairs*).

of representatives of the heads of the executive structures of the SCO, CIS, EurAsEC, and CSTO, as well as at the SCO summit.<sup>15</sup>

Shah Mahmud, Ph.D. in political science, research fellow, and lecturer at the MGIMO (U), Foreign Ministry of Russia, has pointed out that the Taliban is far from a homogenous movement and that some of its members have already sided with the Kabul leaders. There are at least 400 former Taliban members in President Karzai's closest circle involved in the administrative processes; this also accounts for the current relative lull in the southern provinces (Kandahar, Helmand, etc.).

Shah Mahmud does not rule out post-2014 splits and violent disagreements among the local political forces, including the irreconcilable ones; he has in mind the old guard of the Taliban and the new generation of militants who refuse to accept the regime. Opposition between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns may flare up to cause a split inside the politically active groups of population.

Victor Korgun, who heads the Afghanistan Sector at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies (RAS), has pointed out that the pullout is complicated by a number of factors: the content and nature of the future bodies of power in which the Taliban and its allies will be obviously represented. Afghanistan's neighbors, particularly Pakistan and Iran, which have divergent interests, will strongly affect the transfer of power and responsibility for the country's security to Afghanistan.

Ruslan Sikoev of the Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, has offered his vision of post-2014 society. He concentrates on the role of the Muslim clergy as one of the most influential social groups flexible enough to be promptly adapted to the changing conditions and find a place in the structures of state power. His analysis led him to an interesting conclusion: the clergy has failed to capitalize on the integration potential of Islam since it is split into regional and ethnic groups.

As 2014 draws closer, the non-Pashtun ethnic groups are establishing positions they will retreat to in the event of war; they are ready to defend the social and political gains of the recent decades.

Indian experts are convinced that their country wants stability in Afghanistan, something which will become harder to attain after 2014. New Delhi believes that the involvement of Pakistani sub-state and non-state actors in what is going on in Afghanistan is one of the main factors causing the problems and slowing down normalization of the processes underway in this country.

Pakistan, on the other hand, looks at the Afghan problem as a Great Game waged by the great and regional powers. Islamabad fears that China, India, and the United States might fortify their positions in the region, the positions of Iran and India causing the greatest concern. Pakistan looks at the possible role of the Central Asian countries mainly through the prism of big geopolitics, "the pipeline politics" and its own interests.<sup>16</sup>

Pakistan prefers to initiate and implement a plan of the country's rehabilitation and stabilization on its own. It suggests that the OIC and Saudi Arabia should also be involved in the process and deliberately ignores China, Russia, SCO, and the EU, all of them with their own interests in Afghanistan. Islamabad is convinced that the U.S. should not insist on preservation of the state system for Afghanistan set up within the Bonn Agreements.

In an interview given on 21 September, 2012, Zamir Kabulov, Russian presidential envoy to Afghanistan, said that about 68 thousand U.S. military would stay behind in Afghanistan until the end of 2014. The Americans are prepared to pull out all units involved in the fighting; a certain number

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<sup>15</sup> See: V. Belokrinskiy, S. Kamenev, "Afghanistan i Pakistan: sostoianie i perspektivy?" *Vostok-Oriens*, No. 4, 2012, pp. 165-170.

<sup>16</sup> See: A. Durrani, "Post-NATO Afghanistan: Implications for Regional Security," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 4, 2012.

of American military, however, would stay longer to provide training for the Afghan troops at 5 to 7 training (in fact, American full-scale military) bases.

The American pullout is better described as a hasty and sloppy process: Washington was in a hurry to concentrate its might in the APR to balance out China. By the fall of 2012, half of the country had been transferred to the Afghan police and the army; by the end of 2012, they were expected to control 75 percent of the entire territory; by mid-2013, they would assume responsibility for the entire territory.<sup>17</sup>

According to Mikhail Konarovskiy, Deputy SCO Secretary General, Kabul and the external players should seek wider autonomy for the provinces, leaving the center in control of the key spheres such as finances, foreign economic trade and aid, domestic and foreign policies, the defense and security structures, etc. The author is convinced that considerable or even radical shifts in political and ideological landmarks can hardly be avoided.<sup>18</sup>

Vadim Sergeev, Third Secretary at the Department on Issues of Security and Disarmament, Foreign Ministry of Russia, believes that Afghanistan will remain an Islamic state. "It is very probable that, in a few years from now, the Taliban will take Kabul and restore the regime that existed in the 1990s under the name of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan... The Taliban movement will soon come to power in Afghanistan once again. The Taliban movement does not pose a bigger threat to Russia than other Afghan armed groups. Cooperation with the Taliban can help attain two important tasks in Afghanistan today: turning the country into a stable and peaceful state and radically reducing illegal drug production."<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Dina Malysheva of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, RAS, looks at assistance from other countries and wider responsibilities for the local governments as two remedies that might reduce tension inside the country and prevent its spread to the neighboring countries and regions.

Wider involvement of the countries of South Asia and Central Asia in the Afghan settlement (together with U.N.) and their regional organizations dealing with politics and the economy, but not military cooperation, might strengthen regional security and open doors to those economic, energy, and transportation projects in which the Central Asian countries, Russia, China, Pakistan, India, and Iran united into SCO, BRICS, and the G-20 will work together with Afghanistan. These projects are unlikely to be implemented and the region will hardly return to normal if the United States/the West deliberately push out some of the countries (Russia, Iran, or China) from some of the projects (TAPI is a possible example).<sup>20</sup>

Nikita Mendkovich of the Center for the Studies of Contemporary Afghanistan has forecasted that the 2014 pullout will rekindle the conflict. He has also written that the central government will probably remain in control even after the U.S. troops have left the country (the case of Iraq is an example). For a long time, however, the country will have to grapple with numerous problems, including the continued influence of warlords, corruption, deficient social and economic development, etc. It will hardly slip back into the year 2001 when it radiated a terrorist threat across the region.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See: Z. Kabulov, "SShA uyduyt iz Afghaniстана, chtoby usilit prisutstvie v ATR," *Indeks bezopnosti (PIR-Tsentr)*, No. 3-4, 2012, pp. 11-18.

<sup>18</sup> See: M. Konarovskiy, "Afghanistan at the Threshold of Changes," *International Affairs*, No. 1, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> V. Sergeev, "The USA in Afghanistan," *International Affairs*, No. 2, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> See: D. Malysheva, "Afganskiy endspiel i regionalnaia bezopasnost," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*, No. 11, 2012, pp. 16-23.

<sup>21</sup> See: N. Mendkovich, "Uroki na budushchee. Voennye itogi afganskoy kampanii NATO", *Rossia v globalnoy politike*, No. 2, 2013.

## Positions of the Central Asian States

What the Central Asian states think about the future of their region is highly interesting for the simple reason that what is going on in Afghanistan inevitably echoes in Central Asia.

*Uzbekistan* proceeds from two postulates:

- (1) the use of force will not bring settlement and
- (2) the economy should play a more prominent role in the conflict settlement and the country's rehabilitation.

Tashkent moves in two interconnected directions: it is involved in economic projects and in diplomatic activities designed to pool together the efforts of Afghanistan's neighbors and the key external actors (the U.S., Russia, China, and NATO).

The Uzbek leaders are guided by the idea that a restored economy will inevitably reduce the conflict potential inside the country and that, therefore, the world community should concentrate on extending purpose-oriented economic aid to this country. Uzbekistan, in turn, is involved in building highways and railways, in the spheres of power production, construction, mining, education, and exchange of experts.

*Tajikistan* believes that its domestic situation depends on what is going on in Afghanistan and has pointed out that:

- The problem of Afghanistan cannot be resolved by the use of force;
- All interested countries should sign, at the U.N. level, an agreement on a "security belt" around Afghanistan to cut short illegal trade in weapons, ammunition, and technologies and limit, to a certain extent, the transit of military and quasi-military forces across its territory;
- The world community should fight drug production in Afghanistan and drug trafficking to the neighboring regions;
- Social economic, cultural, and political problems should receive special attention;
- Afghanistan should retain its territorial integrity and remain a centralized state.

Tajikistan is convinced that the Central Asian countries should arrive at a common and coordinated regional position on the Afghan issue. Special attention should be paid to their joint operations in Afghanistan's energy and foodstuffs market and mutually advantageous use of the infrastructural and transport potential of all countries, including Afghanistan. Dushanbe believes that geopolitical reorientation of the Central Asian countries southward (in a format close to the Greater Central Asia and the New Silk Road concepts) will contribute to the Afghan settlement.

Experts of the Tajik Research Center SHARK do not think that a reduced Western military presence in Afghanistan will greatly undermine Central Asian security, Tajikistan being the only exception. At the same time, destabilization in Afghanistan will negatively affect the situation in the Central Asian countries for several reasons: first, their security will cost more; second, many projects (energy and infrastructural, in particular) geared at progress and development will inevitably slow down.

The security-related programs Brussels, Washington, Moscow, and Beijing are implementing to help the Central Asian countries are not efficient enough and fall short of the announced targets.

A reduced Western military presence in post-2014 Afghanistan is not as important as the uncertain future of the country's statehood after the United States and its Western allies have formally transferred their direct security obligations to the Afghan government while remaining in the country and the region. This will make the security sphere less transparent and the tension greater.

This means that the latest geopolitical changes have created several serious challenges for the Central Asian countries: they must ensure their own security, realize new economic options, and survive in the harsh regional rivalry and ups and downs of the game waged by the big actors—the U.S., Russia, China and EU—and new developing leaders—Iran, Pakistan, and India in Central Asia.<sup>22</sup>

*Kyrgyzstan* proceeds from two issues of fundamental importance:

- (1) Lack of resources and political instability inside the country does not allow it to be involved in economic cooperation with Afghanistan.
- (2) The U.S. Transit Center at Manas, one of the key elements of the Northern Route opened to support Operation Enduring Freedom, is in its territory.

*Kazakhstan* proceeds from its firm conviction that sustainable economic development of Afghanistan is the best guarantee against the threat of international terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and drugs, which are spreading far and wide from Afghan territory. The world community and the U.N. acting in close cooperation with the government of Afghanistan, which strives to consolidate society and build a civilized democratic state, should play an active and, more importantly, effective role in political settlement and rehabilitation of this country. It should become less dependent on foreign aid and more attractive to foreign investors; industrialization as a business project for transnational companies rather than foreign aid is the best answer.

Astana is concentrating on extending purpose-oriented economic aid to Afghanistan through the Kazakhstan-Afghani intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation as one of the instruments. This means financial support, construction of social and industrial objects, development of infrastructure, personnel training, etc.

Kazakhstan is involved in multisided cooperation in the NATO-SCO-CSTO format; it is an active member of the Workgroup on Afghanistan at the CSTO Council of Foreign Ministers and the rehabilitation projects of the Contact Group on Cooperation and Coordination of Efforts of the SCO member states.

Astana believes that multisided structures should move in the following directions:

- Ensure post-conflict settlement in Afghanistan with the U.N. playing the key role;
- Help Afghanistan build an independent, neutral, peaceful, and flourishing state free from terrorism and drug-related crimes;
- Create a security belt along the country's borders;
- Liquidate the trade barriers, open new routes of transportation of commodities, and set up conditions conducive to investments.

## *Conclusion*

Today, there are two opposite opinions about the ways and means for settling the conflict in Afghanistan.

- (1) Peace and conflict settlement are possible only after complete pullout of foreign troops from the country, or
- (2) peace and stabilization are possible only after the Taliban is completely routed.

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<sup>22</sup> See: *Vyzovy bezopasnosti v Tsentralnoy Azii*, pp. 81-82.

Long-term forecasts about the Afghan developments are practically impossible; in any case this is a thankless task. The Western countries rely on military force to fully control the Afghan army, international assistance, etc. It seems that in the foreseeable future the Taliban will split into a radical and a legal wing, the latter most probably seeking a place in the country's political system.

Today, the political situation inside the country is vague; Kabul (urged by the Western allies eager to present to the world at least their relative successes in "democratization" and "stabilization") actively promotes its achievements.

Afghanistan, a sad example of failed centralized democracy, is moving toward disintegration. The Taliban feels completely at ease in some parts of the country, while the rest remains unstable under the rule of all sorts of leaders whom no one can control. If the Karzai government falls, the country will sink into anarchy and civil war. Centralized dictatorship is another, yet hardly plausible, option. In any case, the United States will try to prevent unwelcome scenarios; this means that it will remain involved in the Afghan conflict.

It seems that the military presence of the U.S. and NATO in Afghanistan will be gradually diminished, albeit at a slower pace than happened in Iraq: the United States will have to keep from 30 to 50 thousand troops in the country to prevent its complete destabilization.

The Central Asian countries will need safe borders to keep away crowds of terrorists and flows of illegal weapons and drugs. The SCO member states will seek opportunities to be involved in Afghan economic rehabilitation and energy projects (provided there are corresponding agreements) and bigger investments if there are fewer security risks.

This will call for new bilateral (between Russia and Central Asian countries) and multilateral (CSTO and SCO) agreements on cooperation in anti-terrorist struggle.

If the situation in Afghanistan goes from bad to worse, the Central Asian countries will have to spend more on their own security, which will do nothing for the region's investment climate. Afghanistan's south and east might become a training camp of radical militants.

The flow of illegal arms in the Central Asian countries will increase; the leading political actors and international organizations will become even more eager to draw the region's countries into their spheres of influence, which will stir up even fiercer geopolitical rivalry. This will probably transform the region into a "grey" security zone; today the possibility of this is assessed as fifty-fifty.

The CSTO countries, therefore, should close ranks in the face of the looming threats.

In the political, military, and economic spheres, the Central Asian states intend to do the following:

- (1) Preserve stability after the pullout of the main coalition forces; prevent multicultural complications burdened with Islamic extremism; and upgrade Central Asian security measures. Everything should be done to prevent the south and east of Afghanistan from turning into a huge training camp of radical militants.
- (2) Ensure secure pullout of the coalition forces throughout the Northern Distribution Network; strengthen the position of the Afghan army; prevent a civil war; keep radical forces outside the Central Asian republics; cut short illegal arms trafficking; and take control over drug production and drug trafficking.
- (3) Help Afghanistan restore its economy, attract more foreign investments, and help implement energy and transportation projects.

Any of the scenarios discussed above might put an end to the current standstill; this will upset the balance of power in the world and affect all the actors with interests of their own in Afghanistan.