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SUB-COMMITTEE ON TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

AFGHANISTAN – THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

REPORT

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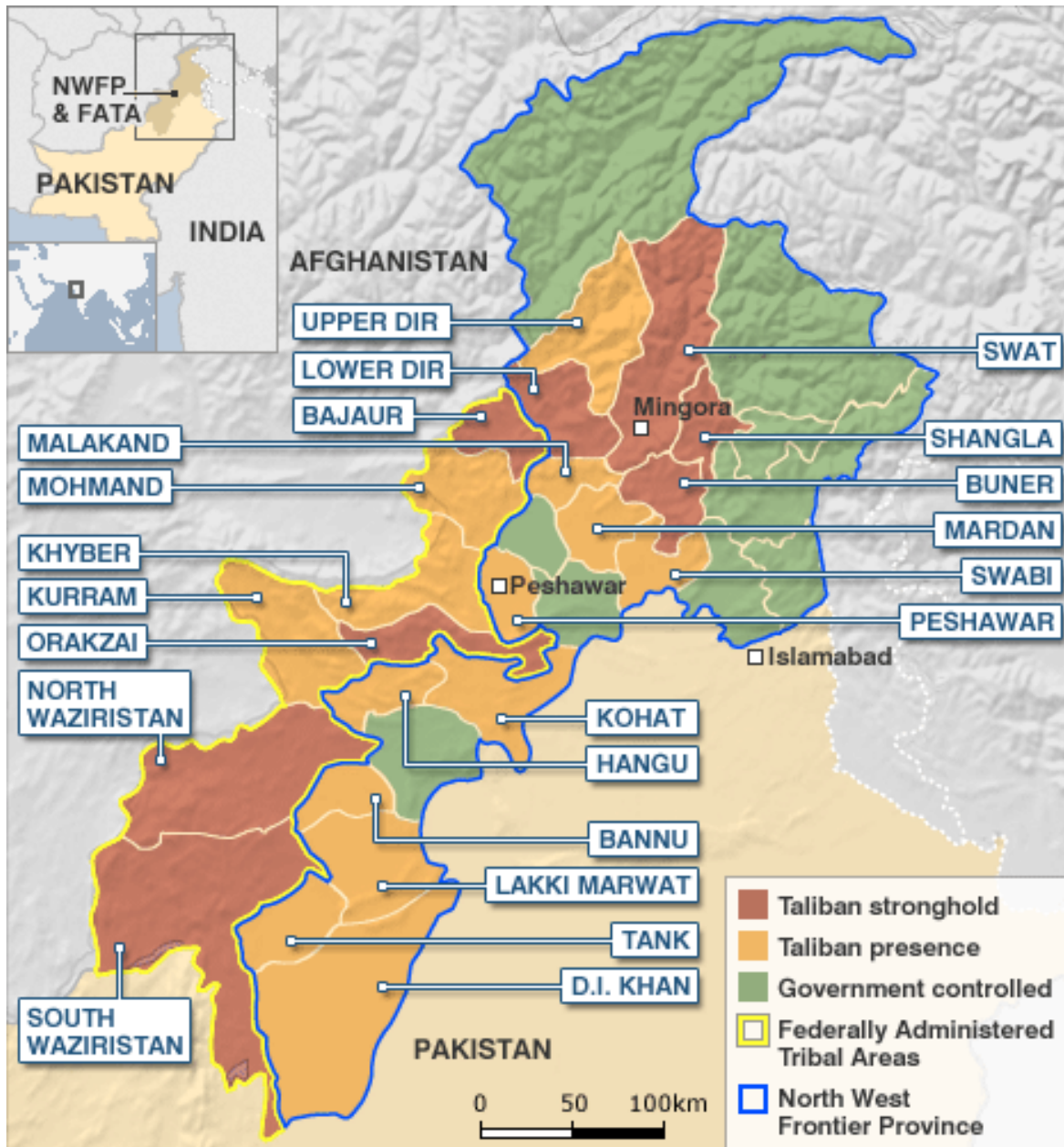
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MAP OF PAKISTAN



Source : US Congressional Research Service (CRS)

PAKISTAN : MAP OF CONFLICTS



Source : BBC News http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8046577.stm

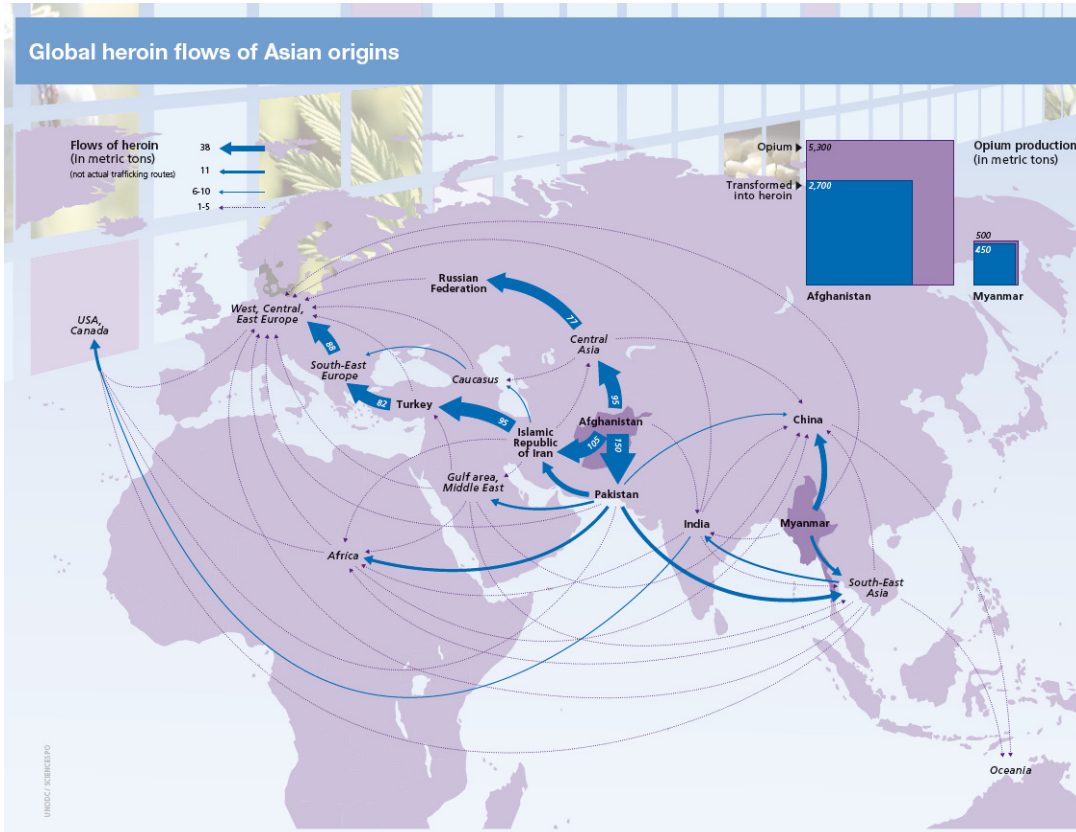


Fig. 3 Global heroin flows of Asian origins 2010. Source UNODC World Drugs Report 2011

I. INTRODUCTION

1. As manifest in the evolving policies on both sides of the Atlantic, the growing conviction that the conflict in Afghanistan can only be resolved by addressing the complex interstate relationships in the region necessitates an in-depth analysis of the situation in Afghanistan from a regional perspective. This regional constellation has been shaped by numerous forces that have been at play for decades. The Sunni/Shia divide, remnants of Cold War allegiances, the Islamic Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Afghan Jihad and the rise of the Taliban constitute some of the forces that left their mark in the region, as Afghanistan has become an arena for competing rivalries. With the imminent transfer to Afghan authority, the necessity for a regional approach is even more pressing as regional powers are likely to compete in carving out their own space in Afghanistan, following the gradual withdrawal of the international military presence, particularly that of the United States, the first phase of which is scheduled to be completed by December 2011.

2. Indisputably all countries of the region have a stake in Afghanistan's well-being, and the latter's future is likely to have an impact on the region at large. In 2002, the Kabul Declaration was signed by the neighbouring states of China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, reaffirming their commitment to constructive and supportive bilateral relationships based on the principles of territorial integrity, mutual respect, friendly relations, co-operation and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Similarly, the 26 January 2010 Istanbul "Heart of Asia" Declaration commits the signatory countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, China and Tajikistan) to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan as well as of each of the other signatories. The importance of regionally-owned solutions is being increasingly recognised, as seen more recently at the London Conference that was held on 30 January 2010. Nevertheless, the situation in the region remains complex and rife with tensions. Despite the increased resort to regional organisations, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation, the Economic Co-operation Organization and the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO), unresolved issues such as Kashmir impede their full capacities. Thus, the international community needs a well-calibrated regional approach that includes the relevant countries/actors, addresses their concerns, seeks to reconcile differences and builds upon common opportunities. An integral part of the regional approach has to include the strengthening of the Afghan security forces and institutions. Without a functioning Afghan government, development of a regional approach will be very difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

3. While there are various interpretations of what a regional approach would entail, a common theme is the effort to align all of Afghanistan's neighbours and vital stakeholders into a co-operative framework resting on counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, reconstruction and state-building, which would ultimately lead to a stabilised Afghanistan. US President Barack Obama has urged for such an approach since the early days of his presidency, when he publicly announced a new US strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan in March 2009. A prominent element of that strategy was to bring "together all who (...) have a stake in the security of the region - our NATO allies and other partners, but also the Central Asian states, Gulf nations and Iran, Russia, India and China".¹ One notable expression of that approach is the fact that, in the operational realm, Afghanistan and Pakistan are currently treated as a common theatre. Similar expansion has occurred in the policy dimension, and has prompted the emergence of relevant institutions and structures. For example, soon after the appointment of Richard Holbrooke as the US Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, other involved nations appointed counterparts to Holbrooke's position to form what President Obama has termed as the "Contact Group for Afghanistan and Pakistan". The group is an informal arrangement that provides room for discussion and dialogue on Afghanistan, but experts, including Ashley J. Tellis, point out that its size has not been conducive to effectiveness.

¹ Jesse Lee, "A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," *The White House Blog*, 27 March 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/09/03/27/A-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/>

4. These developments are indicative of the regional stance assumed by the international community in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, efforts to mitigate crucial rivalries have achieved little, largely because of the incompatible alignment of national interests in the region and the cross-cutting nature of the security dilemmas that hold neighbours in an intractable deadlock. Experts such as Ashley J. Tellis, claim that recent announcements by NATO Allies on troop withdrawal between now and 2014 may have contributed to hardening the positions of neighbouring states. Convinced of the imminent allied exit, they may, in fact, focus even more closely on pursuing their national interests. The announced timetable for the withdrawal of the international military presence, most notably that of the United States which provides the bulk of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), is likely to prompt a recalculation and recalibration of all interests and players involved, making the achievement of a regional approach an infinitely more difficult, but increasingly more crucial, task.

5. If cracking the core issues of conflict in the region is a daunting task in the short-term, encouraging economic integration is, perhaps, one viable channel for aligning the various interests involved. Experts, including Frederick Starr and Haroun Mir, have suggested efforts and programmes towards reviving the old Silk Road or engaging the region in a common water management mechanism, since Afghanistan can serve as a major water supplier for Pakistan, Iran, and the Central Asian Republics. Other cross-national economic issues that have a large potential comprise electricity, minerals, oil and gas, including their exploitation and transit. Such initiatives can function as key confidence-building measures. The majority of Afghan trade occurs with its neighbours. This creates a network of economic interdependence, which unfortunately has not yet encouraged actors to focus on accumulating absolute economic gains rather than relative political gains. Instead, many states have been more focused on using Afghanistan as a playing field in order to gain relative political advantage vis-à-vis critical rivals. It seems evident that for regional economic co-operation to work, the necessary security guarantees need to be in place.

II. AFGHANISTAN AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

A. PAKISTAN

6. Among the neighbouring states, Pakistan's fate is the most intertwined with that of Afghanistan, as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP, the former North-West Frontier Province - NWFP) and Balochistan function as the main refuge and supply-route into Afghanistan for the insurgents.

7. Approximately 1.7 million officially registered refugees from Afghanistan are currently living in Pakistan, most of them in KP, the FATA, and in Balochistan. It is estimated that another million non-registered Afghan refugees have sought refuge in Pakistan. Pakistan is crucial for the provision of logistical support to ISAF in Afghanistan. It remains the principal artery for transporting supplies and fuel to Afghanistan, even though an increasing part of supplies to ISAF forces is now directed through the "Northern Distribution Network" (NDN).

8. As extremists continue using the Afghan-Pakistani border areas as a safe haven, Islamabad's co-operation in the allied efforts against insurgents as well as in a potential settlement between the insurgents and the Afghan government remains of crucial importance. In the past, however, Pakistan's counter-terrorism approach has been anything but uniform. While the Pakistani government has formally denounced religious extremism and Islamist terrorist groups, it has been criticised by British Prime Minister David Cameron, among others, for "looking both ways" on terrorism.² The fact that Osama Bin Laden has been hiding inside Pakistan for several

² Alex Barker, James Lamont and Farhan Bokhari, "Cameron Warns Pakistan Over Terror," *Financial Times*, 28 July 2010.

years has raised further questions about Islamabad's commitment to fight al-Qaeda and the insurgency. Elements of the Pakistani security services have been suspected of secretly aiding the various terrorist and insurgent groups that attack Afghan and ISAF forces in Afghanistan. Moreover, these elements have also been accused of supporting militant extremists in Kashmir and in India proper. Senior Pakistani officials, including Prime Minister Gilani, have regularly dismissed such criticisms.

9. Although Pakistan has often turned a blind eye on certain extremist groups on its territory, it has increasingly recognised that the insurgency poses a growing threat to the Pakistani state itself. While the number of terrorist attacks declined in 2010, the overall security situation in the country continues to deteriorate; violence has spread from the border areas in the North West to Balochistan, Punjab and the major cities. Recently, Islamabad has begun to act more decisively against extremist groups. For example, it started military offensives against the Taliban in Bajaur, the Swat Valley, and South Waziristan in 2009. However, the results have been mixed and sectarian rivalries in these areas persist. Pakistan has exercised only indirect control, mainly via the elders. However, since 2006 as many as 1,000 tribal leaders have been targeted and killed by insurgents and Pakistani Taliban, thus further limiting Islamabad's control over the border regions.

10. While Afghanistan and Pakistan share a lot of similarities, their bilateral relationship has often been uneasy. Afghan officials have repeatedly accused Islamabad of meddling into their internal matters and of openly supporting the Taliban and other extremist groups. Moreover, both sides have accused each other of not doing enough to prevent the insurgency from crossing into their territories. To a large extent, the tensions are rooted in the long-standing territorial dispute over the Durand Line which separates both countries. Neither Pakistan nor Afghanistan have ratified nor formally agreed the 2,640km-long border. The issue is further complicated by the fact that Pashtun tribes live on both sides of the porous border. Pashtuns make up 40% of Afghanistan; however, there is a larger number of Pashtuns living in Pakistan, where they constitute 15% of the population.

11. While divisive issues remain, lately the bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has improved. During a recent visit to Afghanistan by Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani, the two countries agreed on the establishment of a Joint Commission tasked to promote the peace process with the Taliban. In June 2011, President Karzai was on a two-day visit to Islamabad to discuss reconciliation efforts. At the same time, the beginning of the transition to Afghan leadership and the tense relations between Islamabad and Washington following the Bin Laden raid raise serious questions over Pakistan's own stability and its future policy towards Afghanistan.

12. The two countries are closely linked economically: Pakistan is the largest trading partner of Afghanistan, while the latter is the third largest importer of Pakistani goods after the United States and China. To promote trade, the two countries established a joint chamber of commerce in November 2010. Earlier on, in July of that year, both signed the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), which succeeds the Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA). The new agreement allows Afghan exports to India using the land border between Pakistan and India, although Afghan trucks are not allowed to pick up Indian goods and have to return empty. Moreover, it envisages the use of Afghan territory for trade between Pakistan and the Central Asian countries. Implementation of the agreement began in June 2011 and signifies great success for the Canada-brokered "Dubai Process" whose aim was to build understanding and co-operation between the two countries in a number of key areas, such as infrastructure, trade, customs, counter-narcotics, and law enforcement, among others.

13. Pakistani officials have expressed criticism over what they see as NATO Allies' (and the international community) inability to articulate a desired end-state for Afghanistan, much less a strategy to achieve it. Pakistan's main objective has long been to limit India's influence in Afghanistan and to establish a regime that is friendly to Pakistan.

14. Pakistan has long seen Afghanistan through the lens of its on-going rivalry with India. Fearful of being “encircled” by rival India and Afghanistan, Pakistan is suspicious of India’s growing presence and aid to Afghanistan. The strong perception of the Indian threat dates back to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, which left behind a legacy of bitterness and mistrust. India and Pakistan fought three wars, in 1947-48, 1965, and 1971. Tensions rose again after the terrorist attacks at the Kashmir Assembly and the Indian Parliament in late 2001 and after the Mumbai attacks in 2008. Both New Delhi and Islamabad seek to ensure a friendly regime in Afghanistan, following an eventual ISAF withdrawal.

15. While bilateral relations with India have recently improved, the continuing tensions between the two countries have resulted in a disproportionately high Pakistani defence budget. Moreover, the country suffers from sluggish economic growth, high inflation, rampant corruption, high unemployment and a weak tax collection system. These factors severely limit Islamabad’s ability to provide basic services to its population, which, in turn, poses a serious challenge for the government. Many families depend on the remittances of workers that have sought employment elsewhere, notably in the Gulf and other Muslim countries. The growing Pakistani population further complicates the country’s internal situation. Approximately half of the country’s population is below the age of 20, according to a 2009 British Council study; its population is estimated to grow by 85 million in the next 20 years.

16. Moreover, the increasing urbanisation of the country heightens ethnic tensions, providing ripe opportunities for radical organisations to recruit new followers among the impoverished in Pakistan. Pakistan’s ranking in the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Human Development Index slipped from 120 in 1991, to 138 in 2002, and to 141 in 2009, below Congo (136) and Myanmar (138). There is considerable underinvestment in education. According to independent expert Stephen P. Cohen, “extremist movements have displaced the Pakistani army as the largest recruiter of young Pakistani males”.³ As a result of these developments, there is an increasing radicalisation of society, as demonstrated by, among other developments, the assassinations of representatives of minorities and other political figures. The 2005 Kashmir earthquake and the catastrophic consequences of the 2010 floods have made matters worse.

17. In sum, Pakistan views its relations with Afghanistan, first and foremost, through the lens of its relations with India and its efforts to avoid a strategic “encirclement”. To that end, Islamabad has a vested interest in maintaining a weak government in Kabul that it can easily control with its foreign policy interests in mind. In order to achieve a negotiated settlement with the Taliban, Pakistan’s co-operation would be crucial. To that end, Pakistan’s reputation, damaged by the Bin Laden raid, needs to be recovered and viable confidence-building measures need be pursued.

B. IRAN

18. Iran has deep economic, historical and cultural links to Afghanistan and the two countries share a border stretching close to 1,000km. They have maintained frequent high-level contacts and economic ties since 1979, a critical year in their bilateral relations when the Islamic Revolution unravelled in Iran and Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union. Tehran lent heavy support to the anti-Soviet resistance and absorbed millions of refugees from Afghanistan. Fiercely opposed to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran partnered in forming the interim post-communist Afghan government following the Soviet withdrawal. Nevertheless, their allegiances quickly diverged thereafter – with Pakistan supporting the Pashtun communities and the Taliban. In contrast, Tehran, perceiving a threat from the militant Sunni vision of the Taliban, gave its support to the Northern Alliance, which became the anti-Taliban stronghold in the North. While the two countries had regular disputes regarding the rights of water supply from the Helmand river, their current bilateral relationship is good. However, a number of critics allude that Iran is stifling

³ Stephen P. Cohen, *The Future of Pakistan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, January 2011).

economic expansion of Western Afghanistan -by cheap exports, for example- to maintain an economic grip over its Eastern neighbour.

19. As Iran has been directly affected by the sharp increase in drug consumption among its youth and because its territory provides the main route for exporting Afghan drugs to the West, Tehran does share the Allies' concern regarding the drug issue. Similarly, Iran has an interest in the emergence of a stable and inclusive regime in Kabul. However, Tehran or elements of the Iranian security establishment, are reportedly acting to undermine coalition goals and operations in Afghanistan. Even though it remains wary of the emergence of an anti-Shia government in Afghanistan, Tehran or elements of the regime's security services, are reported to be providing insurgent groups, including the Taliban, with lethal weapons and training. Independent observers have suggested that Tehran's tactical support for the Taliban, who are mostly Pashtun, is largely at odds with its own long-term interests and is primarily motivated by its tense relationship with the United States.

20. Iran played a constructive role in overthrowing the Taliban regime in 2001. Since the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, Iran has absorbed more than 2 million immigrants from Afghanistan, putting a severe strain on its tenuous social welfare system. Iran has pledged over US\$1 billion in aid to Afghanistan, though this commitment has largely remained unmet. Nevertheless, it has invested considerably in agriculture, infrastructure and other rebuilding efforts as well as in general development projects, mostly in Herat Province. While it maintains economic and cultural ties with Persian-speaking and Shia minorities and sustains close relations with the leading Shia cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Mohseni, Iran is also careful in hedging its position vis-à-vis all political, ethnic and religious groups in the eventuality of a sudden change of power. Moreover, Iran has issued joint statements with India on co-operation and stabilisation in Afghanistan, committing to fighting terrorism, in addition to partnering on transportation, infrastructure and energy projects. A number of high-level visits between Tehran and Kabul have taken place in 2011 to discuss efforts to combat drug trafficking and organised crime. Most recently, an Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran trilateral summit meeting was held in Tehran in late June 2011, with the aim of strengthening cooperation in the political, security and economic areas.

21. Even though it has an interest in the emergence of a stable and inclusive regime in Kabul, Iran's relations with the United States are the main determinant of its policy towards its Eastern neighbour and the region.

C. CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

22. The repercussions of the conflict in Afghanistan, particularly in terms of drug trafficking, pose serious security challenges to the Central Asia countries (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan). The region's borders with Afghanistan are treacherously porous, thereby providing an open door for drug trafficking to Russia and to Europe. Additionally, traffickers have gained wide-ranging influence over state institutions, particularly in the two most fragile states of the region, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Another key challenge is religious fundamentalism, and in particular the destabilising influence of the Pakistani Taliban. There are indications that a growing number of Central Asian militants are trained in Pakistan and sent to fight in Afghanistan, before they disappear into the neighbouring Central Asian countries.

23. All five Republics of Central Asia see security and stability in Afghanistan as vital to their national security. Though their interests and concerns with regard to Afghanistan differ, there are certain themes, threats and opportunities that present a common denominator. Nevertheless, there are variations in their positions on three basic, and largely interdependent, points: perception of core threats and vital national interests; relations with Russia; and engagement with the United States and ISAF. The Central Asian Republics share a concern regarding the threat posed by

al-Qaeda, terrorism and, to varying degrees,⁴ drug trafficking. Nevertheless, as experts point out, the Republics differentiate between the threats posed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban, being deeply concerned about the former but not viewing the latter with particular urgency. Instead, the Republics are considerably more worried regarding the prospect of a premature, in their opinion, ISAF withdrawal.⁵

24. To varying degrees, the Central Asian Republics, short of Turkmenistan's "positive neutrality", are aiding the allied effort in Afghanistan, including through participation in the Northern Distribution Network, which provides a vital, and increasingly important, alternative supply route for ISAF. Currently, about half of the ground cargo for the U.S. forces in Afghanistan is transferred through the NDN. Moreover, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan provided ISAF with airfields. Engagement with the United States and ISAF has been carefully sequenced and calibrated vis-à-vis relations with Russia. Russia retains a strong influence in the region, particularly through its links with the political and security establishments. However, Moscow's diplomatic prestige was tarnished by the 2008 Georgia war and, in particular, by its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In this context, the Central Asian Republics remain suspicious of Russian foreign policy goals in the region.

25. So far, Kazakhstan has been the only state of the region to provide foreign assistance to Afghanistan. The Central Asian Republics are engaged in a number of regional initiatives on border management and local law enforcement such as the "Caspian Sea Initiative (The Violet Paper)", as well as the "Security Central Asia Borders (The Yellow Paper)." Overall, co-operation between the five states remains limited and regional agreements often remain unimplemented. For instance, despite regional agreements on the free movement of goods across borders, Uzbek authorities have imposed, for alleged security reasons, a permanent blockade of their border with Tajikistan. Overall, the Central Asian Republics' contribution to efforts to stabilise Afghanistan have been primarily motivated by economic self-interests of the ruling regimes; they have made no real attempt to provide aid or development.

26. In addition to the challenges emanating from Afghanistan, another challenge stems from the very nature of the regimes in power in Central Asia. The suppression of opposition movements by the autocratic regimes, often justified by the threat of terrorism, creates a situation in which the Islamic opposition is the only structured, capable alternative to the regimes. In addition, the lack of prospects for the young, particularly in Uzbekistan where approximately 70% of the population is under the age of 30, provides a fertile ground for recruitment by fundamentalists. According to Alain Déléroz, Vice-President Europe of the International Crisis Group, the hard line assumed by the Central Asian regimes, the drug and weapon trafficking, the free-moving extremists, and the high youth unemployment rates could bring down any one of the regimes, which would have a catastrophic impact on all states involved.

27. While differentiating between the threats posed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the Central Asian Republics are particularly concerned about a premature Western withdrawal from Afghanistan. Dreading the possibility of any ensuing instability, the Republics display a vivid interest in developing economic links in the region, but also seek to tailor their engagement with a view to balancing Russia's influence in the region.

⁴ Drug trafficking poses a much bigger threat for Tajikistan, which is also vested in Afghanistan's future in lieu of the large numbers of ethnic Tajiks in Afghanistan.

⁵ Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asian Republics," in Ashley J. Tellis and Aroop Mukharji (ed.), *Is a Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), p. 58.

D. RUSSIA

28. Since mid-19th century, Afghanistan's relations with Russia have varied between co-operation and confrontation. In modern times, their relationship hit its lowest point following the 1979 Soviet invasion and the ensuing decade of war. And while the Soviet invasion and the war are still remembered in both countries and limit Moscow's ability to engage more actively with Kabul, relations have gradually improved in recent years, evidenced most notably by Hamid Karzai's first official visit to Moscow in January 2011. Similarly, Russian President Medvedev is scheduled to visit Kabul for the first time later this year. This improvement stems partially from Moscow's recognition that a possible failure of the international coalition in Afghanistan would ultimately destabilise Central Asia and undermine its own security. As a result, Moscow has put Afghanistan high on its priority list.

29. One upshot to that has been the Afghanistan Air Transit Agreement, signed in 2009, which allows Russian territory to be used for the transit of NATO supplies, thus offering a vital diversification for ISAF supply routes. The material transported through the NDN, mostly non-lethal cargo comprised of food, fuel, and other supplies, makes up 50% of all ground cargo to Afghanistan. However, there are discussions underway between Russia, the Central Asian Republics and NATO regarding the possibility of including weapons in the list of transit supplies. Financed by the United States, Russia has also delivered 24 helicopters to the Afghan air force. At the recent NATO-Russia Council meeting in Berlin in mid-April 2011, NATO and Russia agreed to establish a Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund that would provide training, spare parts and tool kits for Afghan helicopters. Moreover, Russia has pledged to train Afghan police and military forces and offered assistance with rebuilding vital infrastructure and industry complexes that were originally constructed by Russian engineers in the 80's. Russia has expressed readiness to participate in the financing and construction of important regional energy projects such as projects for power transmission from Tajikistan to Pakistan (Central Asia-South Asia electricity scheme CASA-1,000). This might also include the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline (TAPI), although a number of observers argue that Russia would not be interested in TAPI as it would give alternative economic outlets to the Central Asian Republics, which would reduce its economic and political sway over them.

30. Russia has tried to limit and reverse Western military presence in Central Asia, which it considers its sphere of influence. One manifestation of that are the two "quadrilateral summits" between Pakistan, Russia, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, aimed at curtailing drug trafficking and smuggling. These constitute a major concern for the Russian Federation and the latter has been vocal in criticising NATO for not doing enough to tackle drug production in Afghanistan. However, while it is trying to contain U.S. power, Moscow nevertheless also recognises that the interests of the Allies and ISAF in Afghanistan coincide with its own. Russia sees a stable Afghanistan as a main prerequisite for securing its Southern border.

31. To that end, Moscow has engaged in training Afghan and Central Asian counter-narcotics personnel -more than 1,000 officers have been trained at the Domededovo Counter-Narcotics Training Centre since 2005. The establishment of a second training centre in St. Petersburg was agreed upon by the NATO-Russia Council during the Lisbon Summit. Most recently, Russian counter-narcotic officials participated in raids that eliminated four illegal drug labs in Afghanistan. In sum, Russia has gradually expanded its contribution to the stabilisation of Afghanistan. However, it seems unlikely that it would be willing or able to make any military contribution to fighting the insurgency.

32. In brief, Russia's current stance on Afghanistan and the region needs to be understood against the backdrop of its painful memories from Afghanistan, its aspirations for influence in Central Asia as well as its efforts to demonstrate at least token support for NATO and the United States. That said, Russia is genuinely interested in a stable Afghanistan and has strengthened its contributions to ISAF.

E. INDIA

33. With the exception of Pakistan, India shares the interests of all relevant stakeholders in the region. Its focus in Afghanistan is on preventing the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. To that end, it stands against the prospect of a Taliban return to power and has invested significantly in boosting the capacities of Afghan institutions, businesses and human capital. India-Pakistan relations are a key factor in New Delhi's reluctance to contribute to the development of the Afghan security forces, even though it is cognizant of its vital importance for the internal stability of the country. On the economic front, India is interested in strengthening its position in the region as well as in reaching into Central Asia, where it is being outpaced by its main economic rival -China.

34. India maintains high level contacts with Afghanistan and has reaffirmed its commitment to partnership with Kabul. It is the fifth largest state contributor to Afghan reconstruction, having pledged US\$ 1.2 billion on civilian development, infrastructure and economic development projects. Currently working on the Salma hydroelectric dam in the Herat Province, India had also partnered with Iran in the construction of a highway connecting Afghanistan's ring road to the Iranian ports, thus by-passing Pakistan's monopoly on access to sea routes. India opened consulates in a number of key Hindu and Sikh-populated Afghan cities, located near the Pakistani border, prompting Pakistani accusations that it is planning to use them against Islamabad. In May 2011, India's Prime Minister made his first visit to Afghanistan since 2005, pledging more economic support.

35. The Kashmir question is probably the single most sensitive issue for India. New Delhi is bitterly opposed to any international efforts to mediate the dispute, which stems from the conflicting claims over the Kashmir region. The relationship between Islamabad and New Delhi has been tense, particularly following the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. However, there has been a thaw in bilateral relations, as indicated by a recent meeting in India between Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, which took place during a World Cup cricket game between the two countries.

36. Striving to prevent the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, India has focused its efforts on capacity-building and strengthening economic ties with Afghanistan. Its political/strategic rivalry with Pakistan and economic rivalry with China invariably play a strong role in its policy calculations.

F. CHINA

37. China's involvement in Afghanistan is closely related to its larger interests in Pakistan and Central Asia: internal counter-terrorism issues, bilateral relations with the United States; and the acquisition of foreign goods, energy and mineral resources. Geographically, China shares a border with the North-Eastern sliver of Afghanistan known as the "Wakhan Corridor". The strategic Wakhjir Pass connects the Chinese Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XAR) with this Eastern tip of Afghanistan. With renewed international focus on Afghanistan and due to their common border, Chinese interest in Afghanistan has increased in the last decade. Thus far, however, China has been reluctant to become involved in any multilateral fora and has preferred to pursue a bilateral approach towards Afghanistan.

38. Beijing has made concerted efforts to maintain co-operation with other regional actors, including Pakistan and India,⁶ in order to sustain its economic growth. Overall, however, China views Afghanistan in terms of its wider alliance with Pakistan and relations with its economic rival India. Beijing does not want its Afghanistan policies to strain its long-standing, privileged relationship with Islamabad. Independent observers, especially those in India, perceive Chinese

⁶ People's Daily, "China-India Relations Maintain Healthy, Steady Momentum of Development," *People's Daily*, 14 December 2010.

support for Pakistan as a key aspect of Beijing's policy of "encirclement" of India. This, they believe, is a means of preventing or delaying New Delhi's ability to challenge Beijing's regional influence.⁷ Lingering mutual distrust between India and China, and the rise of both nations' geo-political power over the last decade, strengthen the credibility of such views.

39. China, like Western countries and India, is deeply concerned by the growth of Islamist militancy in Pakistan and the training of Chinese Muslims in militant camps. Moreover, a rising Islamic terrorist threat to China has made increased security co-operation with Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan a priority of the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO). China is also creating economic partnerships with the Central Asian Republics, and the region is a growing market for Chinese consumer goods.⁸

40. A badly destabilised Afghanistan presents a threat to Chinese security. China is worried about increasing threats from domestic insurgents, drug smugglers and other criminals via connections between groups operating in Afghanistan and those in the XAR. Like Russia, China does not want Afghanistan to become the base for a long-term, sizeable Western political, economic, and military presence in Central Asia. Many Chinese observers believe that a long-standing US presence would cement Washington's "strategic encirclement" of China and weaken China's influence among other Central Asian states, in much the same way as India fears Chinese encirclement. However, as it has considerable economic interests in Afghanistan, China does not want ISAF (and the international community) to fail in Afghanistan. However, its economic and other interests in Afghanistan have, thus far, not prompted Beijing to become a more active actor (and contributor?) to the stability of Afghanistan.

41. China has made limited contributions to training the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). In March 2010, military ties were strengthened after a number of meetings between the Chinese and Afghan Defence Ministers. Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie pledged that the "Chinese military will continue its assistance to the Afghan National Army (ANA) to improve their capacity of safeguarding national sovereignty, territorial integrity and domestic stability". Both countries have strong Police links, particularly in the realms of counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism. There is further evidence that China is developing border access routes, communication networks and supply depots near the Wakhjir Pass to facilitate possible increased Chinese involvement in Afghanistan.⁹

42. While the deployment of Chinese police forces to Afghanistan remains a possibility, any future involvement by the People's Liberation Army is less likely.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Chinese efforts to modernise and upgrade infrastructure in the region bordering the Wakhan Corridor make it increasingly obvious that Beijing sees a need to safeguard its interests in the region, especially as its strategic and economic interests in Afghanistan grow.

43. China's involvement in Afghanistan needs to be understood in the framework of its wider objectives in Pakistan and Central Asia. Its main interests concern counter-terrorism and security issues, its bilateral relationship with the United States, trade, as well as energy and mineral resources.

⁷ Jamal Afridi, *China-Pakistan Relations* (6 July 2010), Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder, <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-pakistan-relations/p10070>.

⁸ Edward Wong, "China Quietly Extends Footprints into Central Asia," *The New York Times*, 2 January 2011.

⁹ Russell Hsiao and Glen E. Howard, "China Builds Closer Ties to Afghanistan Through Wakhan Corridor," *China Brief of The Jamestown Foundation*, vol. 10, no. 1, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35879](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35879).

¹⁰ Geoff Dyer, "Obama to Press China on Afghanistan," *Financial Times*, 12 November 2009.

III. CONCLUSION: PURSUING A REGIONAL APPROACH TO AFGHANISTAN

44. In addition to the issues raised above, the production and trafficking of narcotics from Afghanistan remain a key challenge that requires a regional approach. The drug flows emanating from Afghanistan have had immense impacts on its neighbours. With 1.2 million drug-dependent users, Iran has one of the most severe addiction problems in the world. Opiate addiction is equivalent to 2.26% of the population aged 15-64 years. In Pakistan, the number of opiate users has reached 628,000 of which 77% are chronic heroin abusers.¹¹ Tajikistan may have up to 75,000 drug addicts, 80% of whom are opiate abusers. In Uzbekistan, an estimated 0.5% of the adult population are injecting drug users, and Kazakhstan and Kyrgystan together have over 60,000 registered drug users. China has an estimated 2.3 million registered addicts, over 80% of whom are heroin users. Given the fact that Afghanistan accounted for 74% of global opium production in 2010 and supplied 380 metric tonnes, or 83% of the world's heroin, reducing these flows into Afghanistan's neighbouring countries is a regional priority.

45. There are many regional counter narcotic initiatives currently being pursued. The Paris Pact is an international partnership to combat trafficking and abuse of Afghan opiates and in accordance with the pact, the UNODC is leading the Paris Pact Initiative, a project that facilitates periodical consultations at the expert and policy level and also aims to strengthen data collection and analytical capacities in and around Afghanistan. This project also provides partners with the use of a secure, automated internet-based tool for the co-ordination of technical assistance in the field of counter-narcotics. The Triangular Initiative (TI) is another tool that aims to enhance cross-border co-operation in the field of counter-narcotics enforcement between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. The TI has been a major stimulus in enabling senior officials from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran to agree upon measures to improve cross-border co-operation in countering narcotics trafficking and the smuggling of precursor chemicals into Afghanistan. There are also several other initiatives, such as the Rainbow Strategy for constructive engagement with prime regional actors, and the Central Asian Regional and Information Coordination Centre (CARICC) which co-ordinates information sharing for counter narcotics operations. CARICC has also co-ordinated a number of bilateral and multilateral operations between member states and CARICC partners which have resulted in narcotics seizures.¹² Despite these international efforts, the results of these initiatives have not led to a significant reduction of opium production in Afghanistan. Drug production and trafficking remain serious challenges not only for the countries in the region but the international community at large. Even though Afghanistan's heroin production dropped by an estimated 40% in 2010, mainly due to disease¹³, and is expected to be relatively static in 2011/12¹⁴, the fact that Afghanistan still supplies the world with 74% of its opiates indicates that there is some way to go in solving the narcotics problem emanating from the country. International efforts to combat the production and trafficking of Afghan drugs must therefore continue and made more effective. Closer regional and international co-operation is essential to make progress in these areas.

46. While NATO's military engagement in Afghanistan remains crucial, it is important to point out that there can be no purely military solution to the stabilisation of Afghanistan. To that end, NATO pursues a comprehensive approach that emphasises the integration of civilian and military efforts, capacity-building and economic development, as well as the training of the ANSF. However, it remains unclear if the withdrawal of NATO forces and the transfer of responsibility to Afghan authorities can be successfully concluded by 2014 or what residual forces would stay thereafter.

¹¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan* (Pakistan: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Country Office, April 2008).

¹² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Central Asia* (2011), <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/central-asia.html>.

¹³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2011* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011), p. 61.

¹⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011: Winter Rapid Assessment All Regions, Phases 1 and 2*, (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, April 2011), p. 2.

We are presently at a critical juncture of the international engagement in Afghanistan and the raid against Bin Laden is likely to impact the future trajectory of this engagement. Experts, such as Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, point to a number of possible scenarios: 1) a light military footprint to combat terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda; 2) a continued US presence in Afghanistan with the view of maintaining a stabilising foothold in the region; 3) the possibility for a negotiated agreement with the Taliban and their reintegration in political life.¹⁵ Nevertheless, a recurring theme in all these scenarios is the need to pursue regional diplomacy and regional reconciliation in an effort to avoid further Afghan fragmentation along ethnic lines.

47. One logical conclusion is that stronger emphasis on co-operation with Afghanistan's neighbours is needed. The Allies recognise the importance of having a regional approach to the stabilisation of Afghanistan. Since late 2001, a number of NATO decisions and statements have stressed the need to deepen relationships with Partner countries neighbouring Afghanistan, most notably Russia, the Central Asian states and Pakistan.

48. If NATO has systematically underscored the need for regional co-operation in Afghanistan, achieving this has proven to be far more difficult. Co-operation has grown and improved in some cases, such as with Russia, but progress with key countries such as Pakistan has remained uneven. That relationship hit a new low in the spring of 2011, following new demands by Islamabad to limit or terminate US drone strikes in Pakistan's border areas. Furthermore, as an Alliance, NATO has developed only limited political dialogue with China and has no point of contact with Afghanistan's Western neighbour Iran. Moreover, although all neighbouring states have a vested interest in a stable and secure Afghanistan, the assistance of Afghanistan's neighbours for ISAF has been only fitful and not driven by a genuine effort to help NATO succeed.

49. At the political-diplomatic level, the Alliance has addressed Afghanistan's regional context in various fora, such as the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), numerous meetings of ISAF troop-contributing countries, and the Tripartite Commission, among others. While these initiatives provide useful momentum, NATO's role in generating policy consensus among Afghanistan's neighbours is, at best, limited, especially in view of the upcoming transition. The neighbours have different, in part conflicting, interests in Afghanistan and some neighbours consider NATO with suspicion.

50. After a late start, the European Union increasingly demonstrates that Afghanistan and Pakistan constitute a legitimate area of EU engagement. The European Security Strategy of 2003 explicitly states that the Union has interests outside of its immediate neighbourhood and asserts that the most serious global threats emanate from distant places, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. To date, the EU has invested more than €8 billion in Afghanistan's reconstruction effort, making the latter the largest recipient of EU Commission aid in Asia. At present, EU member states' troops make up to 30,000 of the ISAF presence on the ground. Nevertheless, the EU presence in Afghanistan has been chaotic, deprived of a clear strategy and plagued by poor co-ordination among the various EU actors. The Rapporteur hopes that the EU will apply the "lessons learned" and bring its considerable expertise in reconstruction, development and peace-building to bear more effectively.

51. By virtue of its almost universal membership, the United Nations (UN) is an eminently important actor in this context. It provides the legal framework for the ongoing NATO mission in Afghanistan and has held numerous conferences aiming to refine the form and shape of the international engagement in Afghanistan. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and Turkey now co-chair the Regional Working Group initiative, which brings together representatives from neighbouring countries and interested parties to promote political, economic and security co-operation. This will culminate in a conference in Istanbul in early November 2011.

¹⁵ For more information, see Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, *Post-war On Terror? Implications from a Regional Perspective* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2011).

The mission is also actively engaged in peace-building through the Salaam Support Group, working alongside the High Peace Council at the strategic level and at the grass-roots level through various council representatives, religious and civic leaders, aiming to engage opposition groups, create confidence-building measures as well as to produce civilian effects. The UN is also monitoring the Afghan Government's programme attempting reintegration of insurgents which has reported an increase in the number of individuals who have registered in the programme.

52. Given the complexity of the task and the different, partially conflicting interests and agendas of its neighbours, developing a common, positive approach towards Afghanistan among the neighbouring countries will be a cumbersome, long-term process. Moreover, the weaknesses of state structures within the different countries are likely to limit the effectiveness of a regional approach. Here, too, with its different sub-structures the UN can play a leading role in assisting the countries of the region in developing their infrastructures and decent living conditions for their populations, which could, over time, help overcome existing antagonisms and rivalries. Moreover, the UN can play the important role of bringing the Iranians into the same tent as the United States.

53. Looking ahead, it is only logical that the UN will take on a more prominent role in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of ISAF forces. The UN must also have a leading role in the efforts directed at engaging Afghanistan's neighbours. A concrete step to that end would be a UN-led initiative to settle the disputed border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Rapporteur hopes that the Afghan government will not continue to use it as a bargaining chip in their relationship with Pakistan but that it will show greater willingness to reach agreement on this issue. In a broader context, it would be helpful if the Istanbul conference of the Regional Working Group Initiative would agree on a document similar to the Kabul Declaration of Good Neighbourly Relations. In addition, a mechanism designed to start confidence-building measures for regional security, trade, development, economic and cultural relations would be another important positive step forward. It would be crucial, however, that governments follow up on the agreements made. Regrettably, there has been much talk and only very little, if any, action. While Afghanistan's neighbours have repeatedly expressed their willingness to co-operate and assist Kabul to stabilise the country they have actually done little to help in practical terms. This only underlines the need for international engagement. It is important to try to get the countries to realise that there are benefits to all from interdependence. Until now they tend to view it as a zero sum game: if someone wins, someone else must lose. The Rapporteur hopes that the international Bonn conference on Afghanistan in early December 2011 will help overcome existing suspicions and lead to more effective international co-operation, particularly among Afghanistan's neighbours.

54. A viable regional approach to Afghanistan is stymied by numerous complicating factors, including the Kashmir conflict, Iran's nuclear programme and contested border issues, to name but a few. As stated above, co-ordinating the policies of the neighbouring countries does not fall under NATO's remit. Nevertheless, NATO member states need to align their policies vis-à-vis Afghanistan's neighbours. In this context, NATO should expand its existing partnerships with neighbouring countries. The Alliance should initiate political dialogue with the countries with which it currently has no formal contacts. Such efforts are crucial for the achievement of a lasting political settlement and the consolidation of hard-won political gains.

55. It falls to national governments to consider which channel or organisation can better serve in the formulation of a coherent diplomatic and political strategy regarding Afghanistan's neighbours. The bilateral relations of individual NATO member states with the countries of the region will remain important, but NATO governments should use the Alliance as the primary forum for consultation and policy co-ordination regarding Afghanistan and the region. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly has a crucial role to play here. Its role as a forum for parliamentary exchange between senior representatives from NATO member and partner countries is increasingly relevant for building awareness and understanding as well as confidence and, eventually, consensus. What is more, by closely monitoring international developments which

impact the security of NATO member and partner states, the Assembly, primarily through its members and their national parliaments, provides meaningful input into the decision making of its member states. As Afghanistan and the stability in the region remain key issues for our security, the Assembly will continue to focus its activities in the country.
