Afghanistan and Central Asia in 2015

An Overview of Actors, Interests, and Relationships

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Summary

This report assesses the interests of the most relevant state and non-state actors in Afghanistan and Central Asia in the aftermath of the 2014 Afghan presidential election. It is guided by the premise that the armed conflict in Afghanistan should be understood as being heavily intertwined with regional politics. Its purpose is to serve as an overview of the negotiation environment in Afghanistan and Central Asia. It identifies actors, interests, and relationships that are helpful to take into consideration when sequencing and orchestrating a peace process that could de-escalate the war in Afghanistan and help build a more stable and cooperative region. The majority of the report focuses on relevant actors and their network of relationships, and the conclusion details three future scenarios and a set of recommendations that could facilitate a coordinated negotiation process.

The new Afghan Government of National Unity, led by President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, includes politicians with a broad range of ideological backgrounds and interests. While Ghani has spoken out in favor of peace negotiations with the Afghan insurgency, it is so far unclear if his efforts will be more successful than those of his predecessor. As in the case of the Karzai administration, many Afghan warlords are closely affiliated with or members of the government. The insurgency considers most warlords to be corrupt war criminals. Within Afghan civil society, many demand that war crimes committed by all sides in decades of war and civil war, by warlords and Taliban alike, should be prosecuted, and that the government should do more to fight corruption and ensure an inclusive political process.

Regardless of the transition of power from Hamid Karzai to Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, the insurgency continues its armed struggle against the security forces of the government and the remaining NATO and US forces in Afghanistan. The dominant insurgent group is the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," the Afghan Taliban, followed by the Haqqani network which is allied with the Taliban, and the Islamic Party led by the warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The Taliban consider the Afghan government a pro-American "puppet regime" and argue that the current constitution was dictated by the United States. They demand the complete removal of foreign soldiers from Afghanistan, the removal of their leaders from the UN terrorist lists, and recognition as a legitimate political actor by the international community. They demand a harsh interpretation of Islamic law in Afghanistan in order to restore "Islamic stability," while struggling to emancipate themselves from the ISI, Pakistan's Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence.

While Afghanistan moved into the center of US foreign policy following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, in the eyes of many Americans, its war in Afghanistan has now come to an end. Indeed, the vast majority of US and NATO soldiers have withdrawn from Afghanistan, but the number of civilian casualties in the country has reached a record high. The US maintains a small military presence with its "Operation Freedom's Sentinel" which has a dual mandate of counterterrorism operations and supporting NATO's new "Resolute Support" Mission in training, assisting, and advising the Afghan National Security Forces. The United Nations continues to support Afghanistan with its Assistance Mission (UNAMA). The Afghan Taliban question the neutrality of the UN in Afghanistan and accuse it of being pro-American. UNAMA has repeatedly called on Afghan government, insurgency, and international forces to protect civilians from harm and to fulfill their obligations under international humanitarian law.

While the Afghan Taliban provided shelter to former al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden when they ruled Afghanistan, they have been cautious not to aggressively embrace a global Jihadist agenda within the last decade. Instead, they repeatedly reaffirmed their primary objective of lib-

erating Afghanistan from foreign occupation. Hence, while the Afghan Taliban have arguably moved away from al-Qaeda, the Pakistani Taliban are believed to have strengthened their ties with transnational militant Islamists. Pakistan's Tribal Areas along the Afghan border remain the home base for a variety of Islamist groups with different goals and agendas. In spite of these ideological differences and internal clashes, they share a conservative Sunni interpretation of Islamic law and claim to fight for the end of foreign, non-Muslim interference in Muslim lands. Many groups skillfully connect local grievances with a transnational, Islamist agenda in order to recruit followers. Different separatist sentiments in Central Asia are thus intertwined with both religious and geostrategic questions in this volatile region.

Facing many internal problems, Pakistan is struggling to manage the ISI's ties with the Afghan Taliban and other militant groups, while trying to balance the desire for relative stability in Afghanistan with limiting Indian influence over its neighbor. India, in return, seeks to reduce Pakistani influence in Afghanistan and aims to expand economic cooperation with Kabul, while the disputed region of Kashmir continues to be a hot spot between the two nuclear powers. Iran has played an important role in the international efforts to rebuild Afghanistan, while the US accuses Tehran of maintaining ties with parts of the insurgency. Turkey pursues an assertive role in the Middle East and in Central Asia, has provided substantial development aid to Afghanistan, and has led a variety of diplomatic initiatives in the region. China increasingly emerges as Russia's main rival in infrastructure and energy affairs in Central Asia and its Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) has secured the $3 billion contract for the Aynak copper mine in Afghanistan. Beijing now embraces a policy in favor of intra-Afghan reconciliation, and it has encouraged Pakistan to play a more productive role in facilitating the Taliban's participation in peace talks. Russia is strengthening its ties with several Central Asian republics with which it shares a long cultural and colonial history. While neither Moscow nor Beijing wishes to see a permanent Western military presence in Central Asia, they are even less interested in Afghanistan collapsing into chaos which they fear would further fuel militant Islamism across the region.

The Arab States of the Persian Gulf are also involved. Saudi Arabia seeks to contain Iranian influence by providing support to Sunni groups in Central Asia. Funding for radical organizations and madrassas in Pakistan can be traced back to wealthy donors from Saudi Arabia. The United Arab Emirates has increased its cooperation with the US, has sent troops to southern Afghanistan, and hosts the Al Dhafra Air Base. Qatar tries to project itself as a neutral mediator in peace negotiations in Afghanistan, though the talks related to the Taliban's official political office in Doha have stalled.

While there is no coherent policy of the Central Asian states towards Afghanistan, they have expressed concerns over the winding down of NATO's military presence. Tajikistan pays attention to the developments in Kabul due to its long border, because militant Islamists from Afghanistan were once active in Tajikistan's civil war, and since Tajiks are the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Aspiring to become a main regional transportation hub, Uzbekistan benefits from intense competition between Chinese and Indian firms, while facing various militant Islamist groups, some of which have ties with the Afghan Taliban. Turkmenistan, home to some of the largest undeveloped oil and natural gas fields in the world, tries to shield itself from the political turmoil in Afghanistan, while expanding economic and energy-related ties with Kabul and striving to achieve political and economic independence from Russia. Kazakhstan tries to advance its relations with the West while not alienating Russia in order to maintain its "multi-vector foreign policy." Kyrgyzstan is struggling with drug smuggling and human trafficking originating in Afghanistan and seeks to benefit from regional infrastructure projects such as the Russia-backed and Uzbekistan-opposed Kambarata hydroelectric project, intended to export energy to Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan conflict does in fact consist of at least five overlapping sub-conflicts. First, the armed conflict between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and other insurgent groups on one side and the Afghan government on the other side can be considered a conflict of legitimacy. The Taliban see themselves as the honorable defenders of Afghanistan and Islam in a just war against Western invaders and a corrupt pro-American "puppet regime." Second, within Afghan society, conservatives and reformists experience a conflict of modernization about the role of tradition and religion in society. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and other insurgents exploit this conflict by demonizing proponents of democratization and liberalization as Western agents. Third, the withdrawal of most US and NATO troops in combination with the unsettled armed conflict may lead to an escalation of ethnic tensions in multi-ethnic Afghanistan. The uncertain future may provide incentives to Afghan warlords to mobilize their followers along ethnic lines and to activate transnational ties with ethnic diasporas or foreign sponsors. Fourth, while power-holders and traditional elites have benefitted from the influx of money during a decade of nation-building, large segments of the Afghan population are suffering from poverty and violence. The resulting gap between wealthy and poor Afghans fuels socio-economic tensions which, combined with endemic corruption, increase distrust in the political system. Fifth, a complicated regional environment that may be characterized as a regional security dilemma in Central Asia further aggravates the situation in fragmented and unstable Afghanistan. The lack of institutionalized dialogue and confidence-building measures across the region provides incentives to various governments to support their Afghan proxies in order to hedge against a loss of influence. This has negative consequences for intra-Afghan reconciliation and societal peace. The regional security dilemma is further fueled by transnational militant Islamism, separatist sentiments, and traditional geopolitical rivalries.

This uncertainty serves as an incentive to all parties, both state and non-state, to engage in various "hedging strategies" in order to prevent marginalization. For the states of the region, the lack of a legitimate forum or institutional framework that they can rely on in order to balance their interests further reinforces patterns of mistrust and misperception. A notable feature of the conflict is a shortage of static, reliable, and durable coalitions built on trust among the main parties. Instead, relevant actors, both state and non-state, constantly renegotiate, adjust, or shift their alliances, or rely on different actors to advance different goals. Within the network of relationships, some actors, such as Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and China are placed at strategic locations which enable them to play a key role in peace talks.

Considering the variety of state and non-state actors and their often diverging interests, the different sub-conflicts, as well as the complicated network of relationships, three future scenarios seem to be equally likely as Afghanistan and Central Asia approach the fifteenth anniversary of the beginning of the US-led military invasion in 2001.

In a worst-case scenario, the conflict of legitimacy between insurgency and Afghan government dramatically escalates, all efforts to end the war remain completely fruitless, the government of unity disintegrates into factions and tribal thinking, and the states of the region fail to increase cooperation and build trust, instead hedging their bets by beefing up support for their preferred Afghan and other proxies. As a result, Afghanistan would enter another, even more brutal, decade of civil war in which the central government merely controls the urban centers, while the Afghan Taliban and their allies expand their control in the rest of the country and different warlords struggle to carve out their own de-facto states in their strongholds. The level of violence would increase, and even more civilians would be harmed and killed. For the radical wings of the different militant Islamist movements in the region, such an outcome would be good news, since political, socio-economic, and separatist grievances across Central Asia would grow, waiting to be exploited by the advocates of new political orders based on harsh interpreta-

tions of Islamic law. Instability and chaos would grow in Afghanistan and Pakistan alike, and the region would face a dark future.

In a status-quo scenario, a collapse of the Afghan government can be prevented through negotiations conducted by Ghani and Abdullah, yet a diplomatic breakthrough that would bring the Taliban back into the political process cannot be accomplished. As a result, some factions of the insurgency whose specific interests are met might join the political process; there may be some reforms to the political system, and, potentially, a slight increase of trust between Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, large parts of the insurgency continue the armed fight, potentially in an even more fragmented, decentralized fashion, and the violence does not cease. Regionally, there might be some progress in policy areas on which there is overall agreement, but no "big push" for more integration. As a result, Afghanistan and Central Asia will enter a decade of "muddling through," which would not bring a complete deterioration of the security situation, but no peace for Afghanistan and no hope for a better future for the region either.

In an "end-of-war scenario," the war in Afghanistan will come to an end as the result of inclusive peace negotiations between the government and the insurgency, embedded into a multi-level framework and international support and/or mediation. It is difficult to project the path of negotiations, or even the elements of a potential settlement. However, successful peace talks are not an unrealistic endeavor. Successful negotiations would have to treat the Afghanistan conflict as intertwined with regional politics in Central Asia. Official talks should be sequenced based on a careful analysis of Afghan, regional, and international actors and their internal divisions and contradictions.

While many parties might prefer a "muddling through" over a negotiated settlement with painful concessions, the number of parties that would prefer the "worst-case scenario" over the same agreement is much lower. Hence, parties that resist accommodation through negotiation should be confronted with the constant risk of Afghanistan collapsing into even more chaos as long as no substantial and credible steps towards an agreement are undertaken.

An important goal of an inclusive negotiation process is to replace a system dominated by mistrust and hedging strategies with a system dominated by trust and cooperation. Negotiations should first address those sub-conflicts and relationships with a high level of violence and risk of escalation. If the intra-Afghan conflict of legitimacy, the regional security dilemma, and the complicated relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan are de-escalated by means of negotiations, Afghanistan and Central Asia would move a big step closer towards a cooperative and more peaceful future.

Possible steps include a cease-fire and negotiations without conditions; a credible offer to the insurgency to gain international political legitimacy in return for integration into the political system; a coordinated negotiation framework; a neutral mediator or mediation team; confidence-building measures between the main parties on all levels; both state and non-state, changes to the political system in Afghanistan within the framework of the constitution, including decentralization, a reform of the role of the provincial governors, and a new election law; the inclusion of all levels of the Afghan insurgency into a peace process; potentially a referendum about the future of foreign troops in Afghanistan; a non-aggression agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan; a Standing Conference for Security and Co-operation in Central Asia; and a "Stability Pact for Central Asia" with which the US and the international community would pledge their support to this important region.

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1. Introduction

14 years after the US-led invasion, a peaceful and secure future for Afghanistan is a remote hope at best. An armed insurgency steps up its attacks against the national security forces of the fragile state, neighboring countries cooperate with their proxies on Afghan soil, and the new government is struggling to navigate domestic cleavages and regional security risks in an international environment plagued with transnational militant Islamism, economic problems, and geopolitical rivalries.

The complexity of the Afghanistan conflict which involves a variety of state and non-state actors and has both a national and a transnational dimension makes attempts to launch an inclusive negotiation process very difficult. This report takes stock of the relevant Afghan, regional, and international actors, both state and non-state, and assesses their interests in the context of the Afghanistan conflict, and their multiple connections, rivalries, and alliances. It serves as an overview of the negotiation environment in Afghanistan and Central Asia and identifies actors, interests, and relationships that help understand the challenge that negotiators face when identifying steps towards a peace agreement in this volatile region. It is guided by the premise that the conflict in Afghanistan should be understood as heavily intertwined with regional politics.

This introduction lays out purpose and scope of the report, gives an overview of five different sub-conflicts that underpin the armed conflict in Afghanistan, and explains the category scheme used in the actors' assessments which make up the main part of the paper, as well as its overall structure.

1.1 Purpose and scope

This report seeks to outline the political environment in which any Afghanistan peace process would have to unfold. Its main purpose is to offer a snapshot of the actors and their interests and relationships in Afghanistan and Central Asia as of early 2015. It focuses on those parties that would play a role in a comprehensive multi-level peace agreement for Afghanistan, that have strong potential as spoilers, or that should be considered when sequencing a peace process since their key interests would be affected.

Based on this scope, the state and non-state actors to be considered can broadly be grouped into seven main clusters of parties. The first cluster includes Afghan actors that act on the basis of the Afghan constitution and support the current political system in spite of ideological disagreements. This includes the Afghan government, prominent Afghan warlords, and civil society actors. The second cluster includes the different factions of the Afghan insurgency, i.e. those actors who are also Afghan, but seek to overthrow the current political system by force. These are the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and the Islamic Party. The third cluster involves the most prominent international actors. Given the purpose of this assessment, the report only focuses on those international actors that would play a decisive role in a negotiation process, namely the USA and NATO and the United Nations. Actors that are unlikely to be involved in a negotiated settlement (such as NGOs, state development agencies, Japan, and individual NATO member states) are not analyzed, even if they are undoubtedly active in Afghanistan. The fourth cluster involves the different non-Afghan militant Islamist movements in the region which have huge potential to be spoilers and multiple connections with the Afghan insurgency. The fifth cluster captures the regional powers, i.e. Pakistan, India, Iran, Turkey, China, and Russia. The sixth and seventh cluster includes the Arab States of the Persian Gulf and the Central Asian states respectively.

Since the paper assesses the parties through the lens of the Afghanistan conflict, it does not intend to give a full assessment of entire security strategies that might reach well beyond Afghanistan and Central Asia. Only interests relevant for or connected to the Afghanistan conflict are touched upon. The report does not intend to reference all previous negotiation attempts or to give a historical overview of changing and evolving relationships over time. Instead, it allows the reader to quickly access the most important information about an actor in the context of the current state of the conflict.

While the report concludes with policy recommendations related to an inclusive peace process, these are not the only way to decode the complex political landscape and should only be understood as one possible set of suggestions.

1.2   Sub-conflicts

Since the withdrawal of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the new Afghan government pushed for a new round of exploratory talks with the insurgency, while the Afghan Taliban announced the nomination of a new leader, Mullah Mansour. This report seeks to help assess current events in light of the broader political context in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

It is useful to understand the Afghanistan conflict as a set of interconnected sub-conflicts or cleavages. It is the interplay of these cleavages and the interplay of the often multi-faceted relationships that make a negotiation process so difficult. The five sub-conflicts to keep in mind when assessing actors, interests, and relationships are:

1. The armed conflict between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and other insurgent groups on one side and the Afghan government on the other side can be considered a **conflict of legitimacy**. The Taliban see themselves as the honorable defenders of Afghanistan and Islam in a just war against Western invaders and a corrupt pro-American "puppet regime."

The conflict of legitimacy is central to the situation in Afghanistan and involves all actors, notably the Afghan government and the insurgency. Historically, Afghanistan does not have a tradition of strong central governments which perpetuates the current crisis in addition to ideological differences. "Local populations expect to solve their own problems through mediation and arbitration conducted by people of their own choosing" (Herbert 2014: 4). Attempts to create a centralized government after 2001 failed to achieve nation-wide legitimacy, since the Karzai government was not able to provide elementary services such as security and a reliable public administration. The government was never able to play a coherent role that would increase its legitimacy in the eyes of the people, given its complicated position between international actors and their proxies, Afghan religious and political leaders, and insurgents. The dependence upon international aid and military forces also prevented nationalism from becoming an adequate "legitimizing ideology" (Suhrke 2013: 282–283). Consequently, the government has not been successful in defending its monopoly of power. The insurgency accuses it of being un-Islamic and corrupt, warlords try to secure their spheres of interest within or against the established political system, and civil society has to navigate these hybrid systems of power: "People are affected by a complexity of relationships, dependencies, power through weapons, money, influence and fear. While there are real differences of opinion between civil society actors, there are also misperceptions and long standing resentments" (Winter 2010: 58).

The intra-Afghan conflict of legitimacy has a regional equivalent in the fight of a variety of Islamist movements that aim to overthrow different governments that they accuse of cooperating to closely with the West. However, a notable difference between most of these radical groups and

the Afghan Taliban is that while the latter is strongly driven by nationalist motives, other militant Islamists explicitly embrace a transnational Jihadist agenda.

2. Within Afghan society, conservatives and reformists experience a **conflict of modernization** about the role of tradition and religion in society. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and other insurgents exploit this conflict by demonizing proponents of democratization and liberalization as Western agents.

According to opinion polls, 63% of all Afghans agree that women should be allowed to work outside the home. While 82% of the women see working as their right, only 51% of the men support this attitude. 77% of Afghans living in urban areas and 80% of Hazara, but only 50% of Pashtuns agree (Asia Foundation 2013: 114). As this example illustrates, interpretations of tradition and religion diverge significantly along various lines within Afghan society. Differences of opinion and lifestyle between North and South, generations, gender, and ethnic identities are significant. Particularly notable is the urban-rural divide: As part of the international trade network of the Silk Road, Afghan cities have historically been the engine of modernization, while in rural areas traditional structures of society prevail (Schetter 2004: 12). Additionally, Afghans who returned from exile imported manners alien to the rural population when they moved back to the country after 2001.

Civil and military internationals are thus navigating a challenging cultural environment in Afghanistan. Since many of them are not familiar with the values and norms of local communities, misunderstandings have contributed to a decrease of trust in international actors. For instance, opinion polls in northeastern Afghanistan suggest that the part of the population feeling a threat of local traditions and Islamic values by the presence of international NGOs increased from 22% in 2007 to 43% in 2009 (BMZ 2010: 19). Overall, the modernization conflict is a conflict within Afghan society about the role of religion and tradition and the relationship between the individual and his or her community. Even though external actors did intervene in this conflict, they did not cause it, since the question of modernization played a role well before the US-led invasion in 2001. The modernization conflict is especially intertwined with the conflict on legitimacy, since the Taliban and other Islamists accuse more liberal Afghans of being controlled by or to closely associated with Western culture.

3. The withdrawal of most US and NATO troops in combination with the unsettled armed conflict may lead to an escalation of **ethnic tensions** in multi-ethnic Afghanistan. The uncertain future may provide incentives to Afghan warlords to mobilize their followers along ethnic lines and to activate transnational ties with ethnic diasporas or foreign sponsors.

While some argue that Afghanistan has historically been ruled by Pashtuns, which led to the discrimination of other ethnic groups such as Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazara, others question the relevance of ethnicity before the *jihad* against the Soviets started. "The basic category to describe one's affiliation has traditionally been *qawm* – best translated as 'solidarity group'" (Simonsen 2004: 708). A *qawm* is a fluent construct and may be defined by tribe, religion, profession, or other categories. As a consequence of selective international support during the 1980s and the following civil war in the 1990s, factions with leaders "encouraging spirals of ethnicised violence" emerged (Simonsen 2004: 710). Therefore, this conflict does not result from the mere existence of different ethnic groups, but from the construction of ethnic coalitions for political ends (Fearon/Laitin 2003: 75). Ethnic tensions in Afghanistan have both a domestic and a transnational component, since foreign governments have ties with their preferred Afghan proxies who often belong to specific ethnic groups.

The frequent employment of "divide and conquer" strategies in the last decades has further contributed to the construction of ethnic identity, with each group feeling discriminated in terms

of political rights and power (Mujtaba 2013: 246–248). However, most Afghans name their national before their ethnic identity (ABC/BBC/ARD 2009: 38–40). While ethnicity played a major role in the decisions of voters during the recent elections, all candidates showed their willingness to form inclusive tickets with presidential and vice-presidential candidates from different ethnic groups. Accordingly, the Government of National Unity includes two Pashtuns (Ashraf Ghani and Mohammad Khan), one Tajik (Abdullah Abdullah), two Hazara (Sarvar Danish and Mohammad Mohaqeq), and one Uzbek (Abdulrashid Dostum). Nonetheless, regional powerbrokers and warlords still base their legitimacy on ethnic identity and could easily use this highly emotional cleavage to delegitimize the central government in a struggle for power. Should the war escalate further and should the legitimacy of the central government come under more pressure, local strongmen may be tempted to increasingly play the ethnic card, thus perpetuating a spiral of mistrust and hostility between the different groups. Luckily, the inclusiveness of the new government has for now prevented such a scenario.

4. While power-holders and traditional elites have benefitted from the influx of money during a decade of nation-building, large segments of the Afghan population are suffering from poverty and violence. The resulting gap between wealthy and poor Afghans fuels **socio-economic tensions** which, combined with endemic corruption, increase distrust in the political system.

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world and the war has left its marks on the economy. Agriculture, the most important economic sector, "is still 50% below its pre-war (1979) level" (Asia Foundation 2013: 47). Afghanistan continues to heavily depend on international aid. Still, experts argue that the resulting financial benefits stay in the hands of a small part of the Afghan society, with the larger part suffering from increasing prices and rents (Ruttig 2011d). Accordingly "inequality edged up in the last years" (World Bank 2014: 8). According to opinion polls in 2013, "corruption was the second most frequently mentioned major problem facing Afghanistan" (Asia Foundation 2013: 78). According to Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perception Index, Afghanistan is the third-most corrupt country out of 174 (Transparency International 2014). The Karzai government has been unable or unwilling to deal with this problem, and it is too early to tell if the Ghani administration will deliver on its promise to fight corruption. Additionally, "opium poppy cultivation continues to provide an economic lifeline for large segments of the population and underpins much of the country's economic growth" (Felbab-Brown 2014: 175).

84 percent of poor Afghans live in the rural areas of the country (World Bank 2014: 21), and the improvement of economic conditions after the Taliban period can be felt more in urban than in rural areas (Asia Foundation 2013: 48). However, while the harvests in 2012 and 2013 have been good, the "economic growth slowed considerably in 2013" in the non-agricultural sectors (World Bank 2014: 3), mostly for security reasons and because of a lack of investment. It is hard to assess the role of the socio-economic conflict within the overall dynamics of the Afghan civil war. While it does not seem to be the core cleavage and while economic motivations are not the main driver of the insurgency, unsolved socio-economic problems further undermine the legitimacy of the government, facilitate Taliban recruitment efforts, and lead to increasing tensions between poorer and wealthier parts of Afghan society.

Hence, the socio-economic situation in Afghanistan is intertwined with the conflict of legitimacy, since the level of violence has a negative impact on sustainable development and on the level of foreign private investment. The fact that Afghanistan did not emerge as a major hub for transportation, energy, or private investment within the last decade also represents a missed opportunity for Central Asia. A more stable and more prosperous Afghanistan would certainly have a positive impact on the flows of trade and investment in the region.

5. A complicated regional environment that may be characterized as a **regional security dilemma** in Central Asia further aggravates the situation in fragmented and unstable Afghanistan. The lack of institutionalized dialogue and confidence-building measures across the region provides incentives to various governments to support their Afghan proxies in order to hedge against a loss of influence. This has negative consequences for intra-Afghan reconciliation and societal peace. The regional security dilemma is further fueled by transnational militant Islamism, separatist sentiments, and geopolitical rivalries.

Pakistan's tribal areas along the Afghan border are a hotbed for transnational militant Islamism. Most states are struggling with their own militant Islamist movements that aim to end any perceived Western influence in Muslim lands. These groups receive generous support from donors in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. With its "Overseas Contingency Operations," the US seeks to destroy al-Qaeda operatives and other militant Islamists in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Pakistan's Tribal Areas, the US relies heavily on drone strikes. These areas are the strongholds of the Pakistani Taliban who continue their armed struggle against the Pakistani state. Unaddressed grievances in Balochistan (Pakistan and Iran), Kashmir (Pakistan, India, China), and Xinjiang (China) fuel separatist sentiments that are further exploited by militant Islamists. Regional governments blame each other for stirring up instability and violence on each other's territory. This behavior is related to several geopolitical rivalries between states that compete for religious leadership as well as political and economic influence. Examples include Saudi Arabia and Iran, Pakistan and India, India and China, US and Russia, US and China, and China and Russia. Some of the Central Asian republics benefit from this competition, while others are plagued with political instability and severe economic problems.

Along with the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the "Heart of Asia/Istanbul Process" has emerged as a platform for regional discussion on the development in Afghanistan since 2011. While the process has not yet led to a breakthrough in regional integration, scholars agree on its importance for keeping up the dialogue between the 14 participating states (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and the UAE). Still, there have not been significant achievements beyond the announcement of plans for confidence-building measures. "Moscow is reluctant to give full support to the IP [Istanbul Process], which is largely connected to its own interests in influencing the HA [Heart of Asia] countries" (Quie 2014: 294). "Russia, Pakistan and Iran have rejected anything that vaguely resembles a ‚mechanism', correctly arguing that there are already South and Central Asian mechanisms which barely function" (Quie 2014: 296). Due to this lack of liability, there has been no agreement on the organization and funding of planned projects (Kazemi 2014).

1.3 Structure and category scheme

The main part of this report is not organized by sub-conflict, but by clusters of actors (Afghan politicians and civil society, Afghan insurgency, international actors, other militant Islamist movements, regional powers, Arab states of the Persian Gulf, and Central Asian states). This allows the reader to easily find the assessment of a specific actor. The paper primarily relies on

secondary sources, such as the work of Afghanistan experts and Central Asia scholars. Occasionally, primary sources from the relevant parties to the conflict are taken into account in order to illustrate a party's position.[1]

In chapter 2, Afghan politicians, civil society actors, and warlords, are analyzed. Chapter 3 deals with the Afghan insurgency and chapter 4 focuses on the most prominent international actors, i.e. the US, NATO, and the UN. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the militant Islamist movements in Pakistan, chapter 6 deals with the regional powers, including Afghanistan's neighbors Iran and Pakistan, and chapter 7 and 8 shed light on the Arab States of the Persian Gulf and the Central Asian States respectively. Chapter 9 presents conclusions which consist of a visualization of the network of relationships between the various actors, three brief future scenarios, and recommendations related to an inclusive peace process.

For purposes of systematic comparison, the paper uses a uniform system of categorization which lists the following characteristics of each party:

Key figure: the most important person that holds formal or informal authority over this party. Other influential figures may be referred to in the detailed party's description. If a party has several figures with equal formal or informal authority, they may all be listed.

Relevant divisions, factions, subgroups, subordinated institutions: in the case of states, relevant institutions that have different interests or involvements related to the Afghanistan conflict; in the case of non-state actors, relevant formal or informal internal divisions or factions; in the case of organizations, relevant subordinated institutions; mostly only listed if relevant in the context of this assessment.

Memberships: key organizations or alliances of which a state is a member; only listed if relevant in the context of this assessment.

Strong ties: the party's most important allies and partners. The relationship usually includes significant material or financial support related to a party's armed struggle against an armed opponent; the party may either be the donor or the recipient of this support.

Notable ties: other important partners of the party. The relationship is characterized by material, financial, or ideological support, which may or may not be linked to an armed struggle. Actors with whom the party maintains channels of cooperation and assistance may also be listed under this category.

Armed opponents: actors with whom the party is currently in a state of armed combat.

Rivals: actors with whom the party is in a state of political, ideological, or economic rivalry but with whom there is currently no direct armed combat. Rivalry does not exclude the possibility of cooperation, and captures a wide range of competitive behavior including conflict over contested territory as long as there is no ongoing armed combat.

Relevance of conflict: the importance that a party attaches to the situation in Afghanistan in comparison with other issues on the party's agenda. This is not to be confused with the relevance of this party *for* the conflict or with the perception of this party's relevance by other parties.

Key interests: most important desires, demands, and objectives of the party which are directly or indirectly related to the Afghanistan conflict.

With ***party,*** the paper refers to a state or a non-state actor or a distinguishable group of actors or figures involved in the Afghanistan conflict. With ***figure,*** the paper means an individual person. An ***actor*** may either be a party or a figure.

Since the report uses the term "key interests" when assessing the parties to the conflict, it is necessary to briefly address the advantages and the disadvantages of the concept of "interests." An advantage, especially in the context of an overview such as the one provided in this paper, is that it allows for a simplification of the objectives of a specific actor that can quickly be captured by the reader. In order to make sense of political conflict, it is necessary to understand what the parties want. Taking interests into account instead of focusing only on positions allows for a better understanding of a party's real objectives, including the scope of potential concessions and the room for compromise. At the same time, "interest" implies a monolithic and inflexible nature of (often competing) political, economic, or strategic objectives that can be misleading. For instance, different domestic groups within a state may have different objectives concerning Afghanistan, and the overall construction of the respective "national interests" is a function of the relative strength of these groups, and their ability to negotiate and lobby for their specific goals. Parties also reformulate and rethink their interests depending on the way others deal with them, depending on how the own role with respect to others is interpreted, and depending on how the overall network of relationships evolves over time and how it is perceived.

The "key interests" of a party which are presented in this report should thus always be dealt with in awareness of the shortcoming of this very concept, and the additional information provided about a party should be taken into account. Actual negotiation moves that target a specific party must of course be based on research that reaches well beyond this report, so that action can be grounded in a sophisticated, comprehensive understanding of the respective actor. The diverse community of Afghanistan and Central Asian scholars has created a rich literature about the country and the region which politicians and mediators can access should a formal peace process be launched.

2. Afghan politicians and civil society

Most political parties in Afghanistan have their roots in *Mujahideen* factions or alliances that emerged during the war against the Red Army in the 1980s. Political alliances are constantly reshuffled and the new government of national unity consists of warlords and other politicians with very different ideological backgrounds. It is hard to assess who might play a significant role in the next years and how cleavages between the unity government and opposing political groups and parties that are now somehow affiliated with it break open again. For now, it is useful to distinguish the current government, the Afghan Warlords, and Afghan civil society.

2.1   Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Key figures	President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah
Subordinated	ANSF, HPC
Memberships	Istanbul Process, OIC, SCO (observer), CSTO (observer), Almaty Process, CICA
Strong ties	USA, NATO
Notable ties	Afghan Warlords, India, Iran, Turkey, UAE, Saudi Arabia, China
Armed opponents	IEA, HQN, HIG
Rivals	Pakistan
Relevance of conflict	High
Key interests	Maintain stable unity government; defend Afghan state against the insurgency; maintain external financial and military aid; implement constitutional reform

The "Government of National Unity" is the result of the stalemate after the run-off of the 2014 presidential elections. While Ashraf Ghani was declared elected President by the Independent Election Commission, runner-up Abdullah Abdullah joined the government as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The position is not part of the constitution but is planned to be transformed into a Prime Minister by a *Loya Jirga* (Grand Assembly) within two years. According to the deal signed by the two candidates, both positions "seem to be rather equal in their powers" (Clark 2014b). The two teams agreed on "parity in the selection of personnel between the President and the CEO at the level of head of key security and economic institutions, and independent directorates" and the "full participation of the CEO" in the appointment of other senior officials. Furthermore the CEO has "specific administrative and financial authorities" and the right to propose "reforms in all government agencies" ("Government of National Unity" deal as quoted in Clark 2014b).

The new president, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, who received 32% of the votes in the first round of the elections and 56% in the run-off, is one of the few Afghan politicians who do not have a warlord-background: With his master's degrees in political science, international relations and anthropology, as well as a PhD in anthropology (Columbia University), he had taught at Kabul, Berkeley and John Hopkins Universities and worked at the World Bank for ten years before returning to Afghanistan in 2001 when he was appointed minister of finance. In 2004, he decided to quit politics and started teaching at Kabul University. In 2005, he founded the Institute for State Effectiveness. Recently, his research has focused on failed states and aid programs. While he stresses the importance of an independent Afghanistan and has a critical approach towards financial aid (Ghani 2005), he has spoken out in favor of long-term Western support, including ongoing military presence of US and NATO forces, which he deems necessary to rebuild Afghanistan. The four main points of his vision are the promotion of security, accountability, economy and education. In his 2014 inauguration speech, Ghani stated that a stable and peaceful Afghanistan needs economic reforms, social justice, and an administration free from corruption. He emphasized that he wants to maintain good relations with neighboring countries, with Islamic states, and with the international community with its "big development organizations" and "big private investors" (Office of the President of the IRoA 2014a). Because of his 24 years in exile and his Christian-Lebanese wife, some Afghans perceive Ashraf Ghani as an "outsider." However, as Tolo-News points out: "Ghani has undergone a change of image. One could say the realities of Afghanistan have caught up with him. Emphasizing his Pashtun ethnicity by adopting his tribal

name 'Ahmadzai', growing a beard, performing a Hajj pilgrimage and showcasing piousness, have all been effective measures" (Baryalay 2014).

The vice president Abdulrashid Dostum is known as "one of the best equipped and armed warlords, ever" (Williams 2012: 3). As an "Afghan with Uzbek ethnicity" (Dostum 2014b), he has his stronghold in Northern Afghanistan and, like many warlords, looks back at a history of complicated and often shifting alliances. Dostum fought against the Soviets, supported the pro-soviet Najibullah-Regime and participated in the coup against Najibullah. In 1991 Dostum founded the National Islamic Movement (*Junbush-e Melli-e Islami*) party, aiming at a decentralized but united Afghanistan. During the civil war he fought Hekmatyar alongside Ahmad Shah Massoud, and Ahmad Shah Massoud alongside Hekmatyar. In 1996 he co-founded the Northern Alliance to fight the Taliban, but left for Turkey after his defeat in 1997. After his return to Afghanistan in 2001 he was aligned with the US in the fight against the Taliban. In the new government Karzai appointed him Deputy Defense Minister. In 2004 Dostum ran for president (10%) and in 2009 he supported Karzai. On his website he writes, "My greatest accomplishment is representing my countrymen in always working for a free, democratic Afghanistan," and, "I think that in Afghanistan's long violent history, my role of the largest single military entity has been engaged in warfare, but my use of the military has resulted in peaceful resolution of disputes" (Dostum 2014a,c). BBC characterizes him quite differently: "General Dostum grew rich, but his rule was harsh. He is reported to have frequently ordered public executions of criminals, who were usually crushed to death under tanks" (BBC News South Asia 2001). The second vice president is Sarvar Danish, member of the fragmented Hazara Unity Party (*Hezb-e Wahdat*). Educated in Iraq, Syria and Iran, he has degrees in Islamic Law, Journalism and Islamic Culture and Education. He was the first governor of the province Daikundi and Minister of Justice (2004–2010) and Minister of Higher Education (2010–2014) under Karzai.

CEO Abdullah Abdullah (45% in the first round of elections, 44% in the run-off) has a Tajik mother and a Pashtun father and grew up and studied in Kabul. After fleeing to Pakistan in 1982, he soon returned to Afghanistan and joined Ahmad Shah Massoud in the North as "Head of the Health Department of Panjshir Resistance Front" (Tolo News 2014). He was a member of the Islamic Society (*Jamiat-e Islami*) party, which joined the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in 1996. In 1999 he was appointed Foreign Minister of the United Front, a position he held under Karzai until 2005. Abdullah Abdullah was a candidate in the 2009 presidential elections, but withdrew his candidacy in the run-off against Karzai. As the founder of the Coalition for Change and Hope he came to be the leader of the Afghan opposition. His 2014 candidacy was supported and financed by the warlord and governor of Balkh, Atta Mohammad Noor (Böge 2014). Another supporter is Amrullah Saleh, former head of the Afghan intelligence service National Directorate of Security (NDS). He founded the National Movement (*Basje-e Melli*) and is strictly opposed to reconciliation with the Taliban. Abdullah's involvement in the *Mujahideen* movement goes along with acceptance within Afghan society, but also brings "a lot of patch-work, reconciliation and a lot of facing up to criticisms, which could in turn produce more bottom-up stabilizing effects if dealt with democratically and constitutionally" (Baryalay 2014).

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Mohammad Khan, is a senior figure of the legal part of the Islamic Party (*Hezb-e Islami*). During the war he had been deputy and head of Hezb-e Islami's intelligence, but he does not give more information about his position and tasks. "It should be stressed that his name does not appear in any of the reporting on war crimes committed between 1978 and 2001. Moreover, 'head of intelligence' does not necessarily mean he had real power or command responsibility" (Clark 2014a). Mohammad Mohaqeq, the second Deputy Chief Executive Officer, a former member of the Hazara Unity Party (*Hezb-e Wahdat*), has founded the National Front of Afghanistan (*Jabh-e Melli*) with Ahmad Zia Massoud and

Abdulrashid Dostum (Vice President). They aimed at a decentralized "parliamentary form of democracy instead of a personality-centered Presidential system" (declaration as quoted in Ruttig 2012). Mohaqeq had been Minister of Planning from 2001 to 2004. Nonetheless he supported Karzai in the 2009 presidential elections, to again break with him in 2010 because of Karzai's reconciliation offer to the Taliban (Partlow 2010).

Ashraf Ghani appointed Ahmad Zia Massoud as High Representative of the President for Reform and Governance (Office of the President of the IRoA 2014). This new position seems to be created for Massoud, "who had been due to get the CEO job himself, before stepping aside in the interests of national unity" (Clark 2014c). He was on a ticket with Zalmai Rassoul and is the chairman of the National Front of Afghanistan (*Jabh-e Melli*). Rassoul came in third in the first round of the elections (11%). He had resigned from the cabinet in order to be allowed to run as a candidate. After the first round, he decided to back Abdullah Abdullah in the run-off, probably for the pragmatic reason to have a good stand in the new government. One of his vice candidates was Habiba Sarabi, a member of the Truth and Justice Party.

Hanif Atmar, former Minister of Interior, is National Security adviser. He quit his position on the Karzai government together with Mohammad Mohaqeq in 2010 because of his opposition to the reconciliation with the Taliban. He is a prominent member of the small Truth and Justice Party (*Hezb-e Haq wa Edalat*) that claims to be a "reformist" opposition party comparable to European Social Democrats (Ruttig 2011b). Abdul Salam Rahimi was appointed head of the Office of Administrative Affairs (OAA). Since Ghani dissolved the Presidential office in order to avoid double structures, Rahimi replaced not only Sadeq Modaber, former head of OAA, but also Abdul Karim Khoram, the president's chief of staff under Karzai (Ruttig 2014). Rahimi is the founder of one of Afghanistan's biggest NGOs, former member of the Human Rights Commission and since 2005 "head of one of Afghanistan's largest media groups" (Clark 2014c) and former deputy finance minister.

Even without considering other figures in the new government, it is evident that it includes a broad range of backgrounds, ideologies, and interests and it will be difficult to find a common agenda. One of the first actions in office of the new government was the signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) regulating the presence of American and international forces in Afghanistan for the next ten years. Two further points, decentralization and a reform of the election law, have been briefly addressed in the agreement of a Government of National Unity. Ashraf Ghani offered peace negotiations to the Taliban and other militant groups (BBC News Asia 2014). However, the positions of other members of the government concerning this topic are unclear and his efforts quickly met resistance. Analyzing Abdullah Abdullah's ticket, Kate Clark stated: "The alliance, if it holds, could possibly heal one of the most bitter and deadly of enmities of the last few decades" (Clark 2014a). On an even higher level, the same can be said for this new government. At the same point, this also points to what might turn out to be the new government's key weakness: The fact that it integrates so many different actors may make it difficult for it to take a clear stand on hotly contested issues, essentially preventing the Afghan government from embracing an active, assertive role in peace talks with the insurgency.

2.2 Afghan warlords

Key figures	Abdulrashid Dostum, Ismail Khan, Atta Mohammad Noor, Karim Khalili, Mohammad Mohaqeq, Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf, Gul Agha Sherzai
Divisions	Ethnic, religious, political, and regional cleavages
Strong ties	Afghan government, USA, NATO
Notable ties	Iran (Hazara warlords and Ismail Khan); Turkey and Uzbekistan (Abdulrashid Dostum); Saudi Arabia (Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf and others); USA, CIA (pro-Western and pro-government warlords)
Armed opponents	IEA, HQN, HIG
Rivals	Internal rivalry; Afghan Civil Society
Relevance of conflict	High
Key interests	Maintain control over their areas of influence; prevent punishment for war crimes and other human rights abuses; secure influx of international resources; establish security and prosperity in their strongholds; manage political influence within Afghan government without giving up own military and political power; prevent return of the Taliban to Kabul

Afghan warlordism is "first and foremost explained by the strong demand for security by the population, especially in the villages" (Giustozzi 2003: 4). A warlord can be defined as a ruler

> "whose basic characteristics are his independence from any higher authority and his control of a 'private army,' which responds to him personally. [...] Less essential, but still important characteristics are that his power is overwhelmingly based on military strength and/or charisma and that he lacks full 'legitimacy' among the civilian population of the area that he controls." (Giustozzi 2003: 2)

The most prominent Afghan warlords share the history of *Jihad* against the Soviets in the 1980s. Financial and material help from the US, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran as well as the control over opium economy "allowed the commanders to take authority away from traditional tribal elders and become the de facto governors of the districts they dominated, since they provided both security and jobs" (Marten 2007: 55). After having expelled the Red Army, the victorious *Mujahideen* then turned against each other and Afghanistan slid into a bloody civil war. The resulting anarchy paved the way for the success of the Taliban, who established their Islamic Emirate and their rigid interpretation of Islamic law in 1996. In 2001, in order to overthrow the Taliban, the US and its allies relied on the warlords, who returned from exile to claim back their traditional areas of influence that the Taliban had stripped them of. Various other external actors maintain close ties with specific warlords and continue to support them financially, depending on political and religious preferences as well as economic motivations. While the term "warlord" commonly refers to non-state actors, most (former) Afghan warlords have been included in the political system. After 2001 they "expected and received senior positions in the new administration" (Mac Ginty 2010: 588).

Abdulrashid Dostum is one of the strongest warlords in the Government of National Unity. Others have been appointed governors in their strongholds and "have proven quite successful in areas ranging from security and reconstruction to counternarcotics" (Mukhopadhyay 2009: 1), even though they are accused of war crimes and other human rights violations. Atta Mohammad Noor, the Governor of Balkh, has been supporting Abdullah Abdullah throughout the election process and could be accountable for the pressure on the presidential candidate not to accept election results that might favor Ashraf Ghani (Böge 2014). Noor declared that he would con-

tinue to support Abdullah, while Ghani announced his intention to combat parallel structures to the government, indirectly referring to Noor (Ahmadiar 2014). Still others control only a small number of troops and act within their rural district (Marten 2007: 58).

Overall, as Antonio Giustozzi puts it, "these warlords are more akin to politicians than to businessmen, in that what they are looking for is power rather than money as an end in itself" (Giustozzi 2003: 3). Hence, warlords in Afghanistan should not be seen exclusively as a "counterweight to the state" (Schetter et al. 2007: 138), but as a broad variety of strongmen with different backgrounds, interests, and resources. Since many Afghans demand that war criminals should be brought to justice, the extensive inclusion of warlords into the government has negative effects on the legitimacy of the central government (Merkel 2014: 21–22).

With 7%, the Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf ticket was the fourth most popular in the first round of the elections. Human Rights Watch accuses him of severe war crimes and crimes against humanity (HRW 2005: 112–114). Furthermore, he "became so revered within al-Qaeda circles that an affiliate group in the southern Philippines derived its name from his" (Joscelyn 2014: 24). Sayyaf is the leader of the Organization of the Islamic Call (*Tanzim-e Dahvat-e Islami*), a party "allegedly receiving funding from fellow Salafis in the Middle East" (ICG 2013: 4). Sayyaf had been a Karzai ally. On his ticket was the religious conservative Ismail Khan, former governor of Herat and one of the most famous Afghan warlords.

2.3   Afghan civil society

Groups	ACSFo (umbrella organization), other NGOs such as ANCB, AWN, CSHRN, and FCCS; the CDCs; media and independent journalists; but also traditional institutions such as local *jirgas* and *shuras*
Notable ties	UNAMA, USAID, foreign NGOs
Rivals	IEA, Afghan Warlords
Relevance of conflict	High
Key interests	Mediate between Afghan society and government; ensure "inclusiveness" of any political settlement between insurgency and government; review the role of the HPC; conduct any peace process under the leadership of a neutral mediator; strengthen "a regional and long-term approach," strengthen the rule of law; fight corruption; strengthen "transparency and accountability" (Afghan Civil Society Actors 2013); protect democratic rights, women's rights, and civil liberties

While the term "civil society" has emerged in Afghanistan within the last decade in order to describe specific actors, there is no consensus about what it exactly captures (Winter 2010: 7). On one hand, traditional institutions such as *jirgas* and *shuras* as well as religious authorities could be considered part of the Afghan civil society. On the other hand, a number of organizations that have been founded since 2001 are more commonly referred to as official representatives of civil society. In addition, the term "civil society" is used to refer to the overall population in contrast to power-holders and political elites.

Most NGOs are organized within networks such as the Afghan Civil Society Forum-organization (ACSFo): With more than 140 member organizations, the Forum's main activities include "coordination, civic education, advocacy, media, capacity building, peace building, research and consultations" (ACSFo 2012: 3). The range of CSOs is broad and includes organizations such as the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), as well as the Afghan Analysts Network (AAN), other research institutions, and the Afghan Chamber of Commerce & Industries (ACCI)

(AREU 2014: 49–69). Out of the more than 3,000 NGOs operating in Afghanistan "only a small number are foreign-based" (Novak 2013: 884). Yet most founders of Afghan NGOs had been working with international organizations before and the influence of international donors is significant (Novak 2013: 878; Winter 2010: 30).

When it comes to those people not holding positions of power in government, opposition, warlord militias, or insurgent groups, research suggests that people "feel that politics and government are imbued with ethnic division, that they have experienced discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity and that this has been exacerbated by both the Afghan Government and the international community" (Winter 2010: 9). Therefore, many Afghans want civil society actors to mediate between society and government in order to secure the inclusion of "the men, women and young people" in the decision-making-process (ACSFo 2014: 43).

Decades of civil war have taken a heavy toll on the Afghan people: From 2001 to 2013, between 12,000 and 43,500 Afghan civilians have died in the war. Including the deaths of international and Afghan security forces, insurgents, journalists, and NGO workers, estimates vary widely from 30,000 to (less likely) figures as high as 100,000. Opinion polls suggest that "Afghans identify insecurity (30%), corruption (26%), unemployment (25%), and the economy (10%) as the top four problems currently facing Afghanistan as a whole" (Asia Foundation 2013: 6). Accordingly, civil society actors are expected to support the government in these fields, in human and women's rights, in education and in supervising the reconciliation process (ACSFo 2014: 42–43).

Polls also suggest that a slight majority of Afghans see their country moving in the right direction (Asia Foundation 2012: 5), and state that "their families are more prosperous today than they were during the Taliban era" (Asia Foundation 2012: 14). At the same time, research conducted among households in the rural areas of Badakhshan, Kandahar, and Sar-i-Pul

> "found that while many have experienced improvements in access to basic services since 2002, livelihood security […] has declined for the majority. Changes outside of their control, including drought, the ban on opium poppy cultivation and rising global food prices, led to large decreases in agricultural production or threatened food security." (Kantor/Pain 2011: 1)

Polls and qualitative research also indicate significant differences between the Afghan provinces as well as a notable rural/urban divide when it comes to political preferences. People from the cities tend to be more liberal, while inhabitants of rural areas tend to be more conservative. This cleavage can be traced back to the century-old history of the silk road which integrated the Afghan cities in a "cosmopolitan trade network" and left the rural provinces untouched (Schetter 2004: 12).

While the insurgency is very unpopular in the eyes of the Afghans – two thirds have no sympathies for these groups at all – "there is a high level of public awareness (74%) of the government's attempts at reconciliation with AOGs [armed opposition groups], and a majority of Afghans (63%) say that these efforts can help stabilize the country" (Asia Foudation 2013: 7). In the context of civil society and the reconciliation process, the role of traditional structures such as *jirgas* and *shuras* is widely discussed. Scholars argue that "taking into account the political culture" (Roy 2005: 1010) is necessary to build a stable political environment. *Jirgas* and *shuras* resolve conflicts on the basis of customary law, "administered by a body of village elders with established social status and reputation for piety and fairness" (Wang 2014: 216). They work on the side of the official courts and are particularly relevant in rural regions with a lack of access to and/or trust of state institutions. These mechanisms can facilitate reconciliation processes without a loss of dignity for all involved parties (Semple 2009: 14). That traditional structures can be

included in an official decision making process became evident with the role of the Loya Jirga in the development of the new constitution of Afghanistan.

3. Afghan insurgency

The Afghan insurgency is not a coherent actor but consists of different armed groups with distinct goals and different ties with non-Afghan actors.

The dominant group is the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," the Afghan Taliban. In terms of followers, supporters, and revenue (Giustozzi 2010: 4), the Islamic Emirate is the most important and most influential faction of the insurgency, though it also consists of different networks. The two other most notable actors are the Haqqani network which is allied with the Taliban, and the Islamic Party (*Hezb-e Islami*) led by the Islamist warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

3.1 Afghan Taliban (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, IEA)

Key figure	Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, "Commander of the Faithful"
Divisions	Supreme Shura; four regional military shuras in Quetta, Peshawar, Miran Shah, and Gerdi Jangal; several committees such as the political committee and the military committee; different networks such as the Kandahari Taliban, the Tora Bora Jihad Front, and smaller Salafi groups
Strong ties	HQN, IMU
Notable ties	ISI; Iranian Revolutionary Guards; donors from the Arab states of the Persian Gulf; TTP; other militant Islamists such as LeT, *Jundallah*, LeJ; HIG (occasionally); al-Qaeda
Armed opponents	RSM, OFS, NATO, ANSF, Afghan government, Afghan Warlords
Rivals	HIG; internal rivalry between different networks; Afghan Civil Society
Relevance of conflict	High
Key interests	Removal of foreign soldiers from Afghan soil; "security for themselves, neutralizing the international and Afghan threat to them and ending the targeting of their leaders and families, international recognition as a legitimate political actor, removal of key leaders from UN terrorist lists, and release of prisoners, […] purge of corrupt government leaders and prosecuting or exiling unfriendly warlords" (Pickering 2011: 29–30); "law and order, especially as enforced by *ulema* (Islamic scholars) against criminals; application of sharia, involving harsher punishments and changes to the Afghan constitution; legitimate exercise of power or Islamic government; conformity with perceived Islamic social rules, involving further constraints on women; political, but possibly not administrative, power; […] peace and security" (Waldman 2010: 1); emancipation from the ISI

The Taliban can be defined as "all those who acknowledge the leadership of Mullah Omar [now deceased, followed by Mullah Mansour in 2015, A.B.] and of the Leadership Shura and who in turn are acknowledged by the leadership as members of the movement" (Giustozzi 2012b: 5). Still, each commander works within his own social network (Semple 2009: 33) The first generation of the Taliban "grew from the Pashtun refugee camps, mostly in Pakistan, where a modified and selectively interpreted version of Wahabist Islam influenced some madrassa students (talib)

to adopt an ultraconservative approach to social issues and politics." (Afsar, Samples, Wood 2008: 60) They put an end to the civil war between the various *Mujahideen* factions that had appeared after the withdrawal of the Red Army from Afghanistan and enforced "graveyard peace" in large parts of Afghanistan when they officially established their Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1996. They ruled until 2001, though they were unable to establish full control over all parts of the country.

Then, in the eyes of the Taliban, "the West invaded Afghanistan to prevent Islamic stability, to wipe out the nation's Islamic and religious values and norms, to divert the future generation from Islam, and to forever subjugate, occupy and secularize the Afghan Mujahid nation" (IEA 2013). Consequently, while formally ousted from power, the Taliban did not accept defeat and were "determined to regroup, reorganize, and fight again. They have done so to surprising effect, with apparent support from some in the Pakistani intelligence services" (Brahimi/Pickering 2011: 21). The Taliban claim not to have a global agenda. They have targeted American and NATO forces on Afghan soil, but have so far restrained from committing terrorist attacks against the US or other NATO countries. In comparison with other militant Islamists, the IEA is thus more of a national insurgency than a transnational terrorist movement. The Taliban declared a "two stage war: first, to expel foreigners; secondly, to change the government" (International Crisis Group 2014: 30) in order to resist the perceived invading infidel forces that threaten Afghan and Islamic values and culture (Waldman 2010: 3–4) and to establish a truly Islamic order. On their website, the IEA declared it would not recognize the new president, since the elections were heavily influenced by the Americans (IEA 2014b) and the new administration would thus be as much a "puppet regime" as the Karzai government. The variety of motives to join the Taliban is as heterogeneous as the network itself. Some research points to ideological or religious reasons (Broschk 2011: 82–83), while other studies highlight economic motives as well as reaction to the harsh treatment by international and Afghan security forces (International Crisis Group 2014: 20, 26, 33). Yet, "for many people being associated with the Taliban is indeed about belonging to a network as opposed to actively participating in an armed struggle" (Semple 2009: 35). The radicalization seems to take place only after the recruitment (Broschk 2011: 86).

Organizationally, the Taliban are a decentralized actor which is composed of different networks: "The predominant mode of organization used by the Taliban is personal networks, formed around charismatic leaders" (Giustozzi 2010: 5). The supreme council called *rahbari shura* gives advice to the Taliban leader, the "Commander of the Faithful". Approximately ten ministry-like shuras, special commissions, and a military council are subordinated to the supreme council. With similar structures on regional, provincial, and district level, the IEA theoretically controls a complete shadow government (Ruttig 2011c : 45–49). In reality, not only the strength of the affiliated regional networks, such as the Peshawar Shura or the Haqqani Network, but also of the huge amount of local networks differs significantly. Most of the Taliban are "part-time fighters" (International Crisis Group 2014: 8), have no political, ideological, or religious education and therefore have a widely pragmatic approach (Johnson 2012: 82).

Mullah Omar reportedly avoided "siding too closely with any particular network" (Giustozzi 2009: 5). His successor, Mullah Mansour, will face the same challenge. He will have to carefully manage intra-Taliban negotiations in order not to alienate the moderates or the more radical factions, as well as to protect the integrity of the Islamic Emirate. A key figure within the more radical wing of the Taliban is the young Mullah Zakir who only recently has been replaced by Ibrahim Sadar as the Taliban's military leader. Zakir had reportedly been objected to peace negotiations, while Mullah Mansour was said to have had a more open attitude during his time as Mullah Omar's deputy. He supposedly supported the opening of the Taliban political office in Qatar as well as the participation of some Taliban members in unofficial talks organized by the

Pugwash Conference. However, it remains to be seen how he can reconcile the need to establish authority and credibility within the Islamic Emirate with attempts to negotiate with the Afghan government which is officially denounced as pro-American. A hotly debated issue within the Taliban is not simply the question *if* one should negotiate, but also *how* one should negotiate, most notably to what extend the movement should rely on Pakistani support.

Overall, there are reasons to believe that the Taliban leadership is willing to compromise as part of larger peace agreement: They

> "have been living in exile for over a decade, their children are growing up as Pakistanis, and their movements are surely watched and constrained by their Pakistani patrons. […] they live under the constant threat of assassination by U.S. drones or commando raids […] And the war imposes costs on the Taliban, too. […] Stalemate is costly enough that the Taliban might consider an offer if the process is not tantamount to capitulation." (Biddle 2013: 9)

The Taliban leadership announced the IEA would enter negotiations, on the condition that international forces withdraw from Afghanistan, especially from Kandahar, Helmand and Shindand, nevertheless not all affiliated networks agree here (Giustozzi 2014: 17–18) and many say, the Taliban will test their chances as soon as international forces withdraw. Radical groups, such as the *Mahaz-e Fedayeen* declared they would continue to fight at any means (International Crisis Group 2014: 5-6).

While most Afghans agree that the legal system should be based on the Sharia, the Taliban have "increasingly encountered sharp resistance from the population when they have sought to re-impose the stern morality code of emirate days" in areas under their control (Brahimi/Pickering 2011: 23). This resistance has forced the Taliban to rethink their positions on issues such as education for girls and the notorious ban on music, which turned out to be so unpopular that Mullah Omar "issued a fatwa giving local field commanders discretion on enforcing the emirate's social edicts – and most have opted for a relatively relaxed attitude" (Brahimi/Pickering 2011: 23). While the Taliban claim not to have an ethnic agenda, "there is no question that Pashtuns account for the overwhelming majority of the Taliban's ranks. [...] At the same time, however, it is clear that the Taliban have at least since 2006 carried out intense efforts to mobilize support among non-Pashtuns, with at least some success from 2008 onward" (Giustozzi 2012b: 58).

3.2   Haqqani Network (HQN)

Key figure	Sirajuddin Haqqani
Strong ties	IEA, TTP, al-Qaeda
Notable ties	Other militant Islamist groups, ISI
Armed opponents	RSM, OFS, ANSF, Afghan government, Afghan Warlords, Army of Pakistan, Army of India
Relevance of conflict	High
Key interests	Maintain position as hub between various militant Islamist groups; "maintain its autonomy and influence in Loya Paktia and North Waziristan" (Rassler/Brown 2011: 15) instead of seeking power in Kabul; support global *Jihad* while avoiding being openly associated with al-Qaeda or attacks against Pakistan

The Haqqani network is an Afghan-Pakistani insurgent group with a unique function in the network of militant Islamism. The HQN was founded by Jalaluddin Haqqani who served as its leader until his death in 2015. Haqqani fought as a U.S. ally against the Soviets and joined the Taliban government as Minister of Tribal Affairs in the mid-90s (Katzman 2014a: 15–16). Today, the

HQN counts around several thousand fighters and serves as a hub between various Islamist groups by enhancing the transfer and exchange of material and ideological resources for the cause of transnational *Jihad.*

The strongholds of the HQN are the Afghan provinces of Khost, Paktia, and Paktika, as well as Pakistan's North Waziristan (Rassler/Brown 2011: 8). This strategically relevant location has enabled the HQN to function as the "primary conduit" (Rassler/Brown 2011: 5), helping many TTP fighters to access the war in Afghanistan, and to act as an "important regional platform for the [Afghan] Taliban to project power and influence in Southeastern Afghanistan" (Rassler/Brown 2011: 12). At the same time, analysts claim that the HQN has ties with the Pakistani ISI, and that Pakistan stated that it could "'deliver' the Haqqani network and reconcile it with President Karzai's Afghan government" (Rassler/Brown 2011: 50). The HQN finances its activities "through licit and illicit businesses in Pakistan and the Persian Gulf and in controlling parts of Khost Province" (Katzman 2014a: 16). While the HQN "has carefully avoided any direct association with international terrorism or the targeting of Westerners outside of Afghanistan," (Rassler/Brown 2011: 49) it has been associated with attacks against Afghan, Pakistani, and Indian targets, and has close operational ties with TTP and al-Qaeda (Rassler/Brown 2011: 16). After the death of Jalaluddin Haqqani the HQN is run by his son, Sirajuddin Haqqani, who also is a member of the leadership of the IEA, which illustrates the tight links between the Haqqani network and the Afghan Taliban.

3.3 Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Islamic Party (HIG)

Key figure	Gulbuddin Hekmatyar
Notable ties	IEA (occasionally)
Armed opponents	RSM, OFS, ANSF, IEA (occasionally)
Rivals	IEA, Afghan Warlords
Relevance of conflict	High
Key interests	Remove US and NATO forces from Afghan soil; replace the Afghan constitution with a more "Islamic" version; ensure survival of the HIG; sign a deal with the Afghan government; prepare HIG for political role following such an agreement

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is one of the most prominent and illustrious figures in Afghan politics. Relying on generous financial support by the USA, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, he fought against the Red Army in the 1980s, was briefly Prime Minister of Afghanistan in the early 1990s, and fled to Iran when the Taliban rose to power. Since 2001, his Islamic Party (*Hezb-e Islami;* or *Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin, HIG*) is waging a guerilla war against US and NATO forces.

Within the last decades, Hekmatyar has shifted his alliances so often that "in the view of many who have dealt with him, Hekmatyar has a proven record in breaking commitments" (Brahimi/Pickering 2011: 60). Consequently, the relationship between his HIG and the Taliban "can often be turbulent, as in this case: Hizb-i Islami and Taliban often fight each other in local context, while cooperating in others" (Giustozzi 2010: 6). In contrast to the Taliban, Hekmatyar has publicly and repeatedly announced his willingness to enter into formal negotiations with the Afghan government. He has authored dozens of books and a proposal for a renewed Afghan constitution. Some of his followers have registered a wing of the Islamic Party with the Afghan authorities and they have won seats in the Afghan parliament. The fact that Hekmatyar told his

followers to vote in the 2014 Afghan presidential elections was "widely interpreted as an attempt to position HIG for a future political role" (Katzman 2014a: 15).

4.   International actors in Afghanistan

While the US-led invasion of Afghanistan was originally aimed at destroying al-Qaeda and ousting the Taliban from power, the mission evolved into multilateral nation-building that was met with increasing resistance by an armed insurgency. Though the American military presence has been significantly reduced with the withdrawal of ISAF, the US remains one of the key international actors that would play a role in any kind of negotiated settlement between the Afghan government and the insurgency. Other prominent international actors to consider in negotiations are NATO and the United Nations.

4.1   United States of America (USA)

Key figure	President Barack Obama
Factions	White House, Congress, Pentagon, State Department, Republicans, Democrats
Subordinated	CIA, OFS
Memberships	NATO, CICA (Observer)
Strong ties	NATO, Afghan government, Afghan Warlords, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Pakistan, India, Turkey
Notable ties	*Jundallah*
Armed opponents	Al-Qaeda, IEA, HQN, HIG, TTP
Rivals	Iran, Russia, China
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	"Preventing the resurgence of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan; assisting a reasonable stable, friendly, autonomous Afghanistan; preventing further Afghan violence from destabilizing Pakistan; preserving democratic and human rights in Afghanistan; continuing credibility for NATO; reducing illicit drug trade" (Pickering 2011: 30)

The Bush administration

> "was never able to reconcile the tensions between countering terrorism and promoting democracy. […] As such, when the Obama administration inherited the Afghanistan campaign, the situation was worse than that which had been seen at the start of the war. This has resulted in the Obama administration abandoning the notion of democracy promotion in favour of transferring power as quickly as possible to an illegitimate Afghan government". (Hassan/Hammond 2011: 532)

Critics argue that a "flawed state-building process," "unfavourable 'allies' and misjudgment of the Taliban,'" combined with a "flawed counter-insurgency and an inconclusive 'surge'" as well as a "lack of a political strategy and dependence on Afghan forces" (Waldman 2013) eventually led to the failure of US attempts to rebuild Afghanistan and defeat the insurgency.

Today, Afghanistan does not rank prominently on the political agenda in the US. Polarized debates about domestic issues, such as health care and the economy, are of much higher relevance, and the public has the general impression that America's war in Afghanistan is coming to

an end. Political observers point out that the US has only two main objectives in Afghanistan: "that Afghanistan not become a base for terrorism against the West, and that chaos in Afghanistan not destabilize its neighbors, especially Pakistan" (Biddle 2013: 4). At the same time, negotiations with the insurgency are unpopular:

> "Many U.S. conservatives doubt the Administration's motives in the talks, fearing giveaways to cover an Administration rush to the exits and worrying that negotiation signals weakness. American progressives fear the loss of hard-won gains for Afghan women and minorities in concessions to the Taliban." (Biddle 2013: 8)

In spite of the decreasing lack of interest in the conflict, the US will remain a key player in Afghanistan, since the ANSF heavily rely on ongoing US support in their war against the insurgency. Also, the recent advances of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have made Washington aware of the risk of dramatic Taliban gains from 2015 on, in addition to ISIS establishing an "Afghanistan branch." The first US anti-terror operation in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), has ended in 2014. The follow-up mission is Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS), which is part of NATO's new Resolute Support Mission (RSM).

4.2   North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Key figures	Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and General John F. Campbell, Commander Resolute Support and US Forces Afghanistan
Subordinated	Resolute Support Mission (RSM)
Member states	Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA
Strong ties	Afghan government, Afghan Warlords, OFS
Notable ties	UN, India
Armed opponents	IEA, HQN, HIG
Rivals	Russia, China, Iran
Relevance of conflict	High
Key interests	Maintain stability and security in Afghanistan; support Afghan government and ANSF; demonstrate own relevance and capabilities

While NATO invoked Article 5 of its charter after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and while NATO members joined the US in its "Operation Enduring Freedom" (OEF) against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, it was not until 2003 that NATO officially assumed leadership of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) that had been established by the UN Security Council. ISAF was operating under a UN Chapter VII mandate that has been extended by the UNSC on an annual basis. ISAF represented "NATO's first significant out-of-area deployment" and was "viewed by many observers as a key test for the Alliance – a measure of both its current capabilities and its possible future relevance" (Dale 2011: 22).

While the intensity of the armed conflict was relatively low until 2005, in 2008 U.S. Army General David McKiernan acknowledged that the situation had escalated: "We are at war in Afghanistan. It's not peacekeeping. It's not stability operations. It's not humanitarian assistance. It's war" (quoted in Bowman/Dale 2009: 14). In order to deal with the growing insurgency, ISAF enacted "a greater resourced, population-centric counterinsurgency strategy" (Brand 2011: vii)

that relied on "integrated, population-centric approaches that engage traditional local political authorities, civil society, and a wide range of religious actors" instead of "militarized strategies focused on killing the enemy" (Bruton 2009: 81). The number of NATO troops in Afghanistan (ISAF and OEF combined) peaked at more than 150,000. The idea was that the "surge" would significantly weaken the insurgency in order to allow a smooth transition to the ANSF by the end of the ISAF mission in 2014. However, "this has not happened. Tight deadlines for U.S. withdrawal combined with Taliban resilience have left insurgents in control of enough critical terrain to remain a threat well after 2014" (Biddle 2013: 6). With the end of ISAF in 2014, NATO support for the ANSF in the form of training, advice, and assistance continues as part of the new Resolute Support Mission (RSM) which counts approximately 12,000 personnel.

4.3　United Nations (UN)

Key figure	Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Head of UNAMA Ján Kubiš
Subordinated	UNAMA, UNSC, UNGA, UNHRC, UNICEF, UNODC, WHO, UNESCO
Cooperates with	NATO, RSM, OFS, Afghan government, ADB, World Bank, ICRC, OIC, Istanbul Process, CICA
Armed opponents	IEA, HQN, HIG, TTP
Relevance of conflict	High
Key interests	Support a peaceful security transition from NATO to the Afghan government (Margesson 2010); promote "accelerated Afghan leadership and ownership, strengthened international partnership and regional cooperation, improved Afghan governance, enhanced capabilities of Afghan security forces, economic growth and better protection for the rights of all Afghan citizens" (UNSC 2014: 1)

The UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) is a special political mission led by the UN which was established by the UNSC in 2002 following the 2001 Bonn Conference. Although UNAMA "has built a fair amount of credibility with the Afghan public with its outreach to civil society" (Brahimi/Pickering 2011: 57), some observers argue it lacks a political basis for peace, a suitable mandate, and the resources necessary for the mandate's implementation (Chesterman 2002: 39). UNAMA supported the election process in Afghanistan with "technical and financial assistance to the electoral bodies" and promoted "local dialogue and peace initiatives" in 12 provinces (UN 2014: 4–5). More than 20 UN agencies are currently working in Afghanistan. They focus mostly on advising the relevant ministries and establishing and supporting training programs. UN Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan stress the importance of a reconciliation process and a "dialogue for all those who renounce violence, [and] have no links to international terrorist organizations" (UNSC 2014: 3). UNAMA has repeatedly called on Afghan government, insurgency, and NATO and US forces to protect civilians from harm and to fulfill their obligations under international humanitarian law.

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan does not perceive the UN as a neutral actor, but one controlled by the US. It profoundly disagrees with official UN statistics according to which the insurgency is responsible for three quarters of all civilian deaths and injuries, and claim that UNAMA reports on civilian casualties are "directly produced by the US embassy and then published under the name of [the] United Nations" (IEA 2014a).

5.   Militant Islamist movements in Pakistan

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan, which border Afghanistan, are "home to over roughly 45,000 militants and forty militant groups" (Qazi 2011: 1). Though they maintain various connections, their political goals are for the most part different.

5.1   Pakistani Taliban (TTP)

Key figures	Emir Maulana Fazlullah and Naib Emir (Deputy) Khalid Haqqani
Relevant divisions	Strong local networks, Supreme Shura, various *shuras*
Strong ties	HQN, LeI, LeJ, TNSM, HuJI, JeM, al-Qaeda
Notable ties	IEA (in its war in Afghanistan)
Armed opponents	Pakistani Army, ANSF, NATO, USA, OFS
Relevance of conflict	High
Key interests	Strict enforcement of Islamic Law in Pakistan; removal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan; end cooperation between Washington and Islamabad; prevent recognition of Durand line

The Taliban Movement of Pakistan (*Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan*, TTP) is a network of various militant Islamists groups that united in 2007 to fight against the NATO forces in Afghanistan and against the Pakistani Army. Its origins can be traced back to the 1980s, when Pakistan and the USA

> "used the FATA as launching pads for sponsored mujahideen […]. The sprouting of madrassas, an abundance of modern weaponry, and an influx of Afghan refugees radicalized the environment. […] many foreign mujahideen (mostly Arabs) settled in the FATA and were absorbed into tribes through marriage. Due to ethnic, religious, ideological, and cultural affinities, the area's residents viewed the Taliban's rise favorably." (Afsar/Samples/Wood 2008: 60)

While the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was a substantial mobilizing factor for the TTP, "it was the Pakistan Army's 2002 invasion of the tribal areas that transformed the existing widespread militancy into a full-blown insurgency" (Qazi 2011: 2). The TTP is ideologically less coherent than the IEA, different factions prioritize either the armed struggle in Afghanistan or in Pakistan, and followers are driven by a variety of motives, from local grievances and criminal activities to the involvement in drug trade. The TTP is also known for its opposition against foreign aid workers and believes that polio vaccinations conducted in Pakistani villages by the WHO are part of a Christian-Western conspiracy conducted in order to make Muslims impotent.

A key feature of the TTP is "their alliance with al-Qaeda, including personal relations dating back to the days of the Soviet-Afghan war" (Qazi 2011: 1). The TTP is associated with the failed terrorist attack on the New York Times Square in 2010, after which the US officially labeled the TTP a foreign terrorist organization. Faisal Shahzad, the "times square bomber," justified his action as retribution for the US drone attacks in Pakistan. From 2004–2012, these CIA drone strikes killed "2,562–3,325 people in Pakistan, of whom 474–881 were civilians, including 176 children" (Standford/NYU 2012: vi). While the IEA is believed to have moved away from al-Qaeda within the last decade, "the Pakistani Taliban have moved in the opposite direction due to their alliance with al-Qaeda and other al-Qaeda aligned groups" (Qazi 2011: 9).

5.2　Al-Qaeda

Key figure	Ayman al-Zawahiri
Relevant factions	AQIM, HSM, EIJ, AQAP, Al-Nusra Front
Strong ties	TTP, HQN, IMU, ETIM, LeT, HuJi, JeM, IJU; also: JI, ASG, MUJWA
Notable ties	IEA
Armed opponents	USA, ANSF, NATO, ISIS, Pakistan, India, Iran (and others)
Relevance of conflict	High
Key interests	Liberate the Muslim World from American occupation; establish world-wide Islamic caliphate; overthrow governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the associated political orders

According to the fatwa issued by Osama bin Laden (1957–2011), Ayman al-Zawahiri, and others in 1998,

> "The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilian and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim." (as quoted in FAS 2014)

Al-Qaeda's ideology draws from Salafism and Wahabism as well as from the writings from Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), an Egyptian Islamic theorist. Al-Qaeda considers non-Sunni Muslims "infidels" and is responsible for sectarian violence; most victims of its terrorist attacks are of Muslim faith.

13 years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, "U.S. officials put the number of al-Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan at between 50–100, who operate mostly in provinces of eastern Afghanistan such as Kunar" (Katzman 2014a: 13–14). However, al-Qaeda continues to maintain a presence and influence in the FATA, and it has strong ties with other militant Islamist groups. Factions of al-Qaeda also operate in Syria (Al-Nusra Front), Saudi Arabia and Yemen (AQAP), and Northern Africa (AQIM, HSM, EIJ). The head of the US Special Operations Command, Admiral William McRaven, said in early 2014 that "there is a threat of an Al-Qaeda resurgence in Afghanistan if all U.S. troops depart Afghanistan at the end of 2014" (Katzman 2014a: 13–14). However, with the declaration of an Islamic Caliphate by ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, an unprecedented strategic challenge has emerged for the al-Qaeda leadership. Al-Qaeda's authority as the global leader of the Jihadist movement is seriously threatened which may have repercussions for the organization's activities in Afghanistan as well. In the Middle East, armed fighting erupted between ISIS and al-Qaeda, and similarly open clashes may erupt in Central Asia, where tensions between different Islamists group are common.

5.3   Other militant Islamist groups

Key figures	Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi (LeT), Fazlur Rehman Khalil (HuM), Masood Azhar (JeM), Maulana Fazlullah (former head of the TSNM, now leader of the TTP), Mangal Bagh (LeI), Abu Zar al-Burmi (IMU), Muhammad Dhahir Baluch (Jundallah), Hafiz Saeed Khan (LeT)
Groups	LeT, HuJi, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, HuM, JeM, LeJ, TNSM, LeI, IMU, ETIM, SSP, *Jundallah*, *Jundallah* (PRMI), ISIS, others
Notable ties	Internal cooperation, as well as exchange with IEA, TTP, HQN, HIG (occasionally), and al-Qaeda, yet different degree of support; donors from the Arab States of the Persian Gulf
Armed Opponents	Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, China, USA, Uzbekistan, Iran, and others; depending on the group
Rivals	Internal rivalry due to political differences and personal disputes
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	Enforcement of their strict interpretation of Islamic law; distinct political goals, ranging from separatist ambitions to support for the Afghan or Pakistani insurgency and to global *Jihad*

While the overall number and individual strength of the different militant Islamists groups is constantly changing, they share a conservative Sunni interpretation of Islamic law and the disdain for non-Muslim interference in Muslim lands. Key issues are the US-led invasion of Afghanistan as well as the Kashmir conflict between Pakistan and India.

Perhaps the most prominent group besides the TTP is *Lashkar-e-Taiba* (LeT, "Army of the Good"). Its main theatre of operation is the Kashmir valley, though it was also involved in the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. It sees its struggle to liberate Kashmir from Indian occupation as part of a global *Jihad*. There are indicators that LeT funding can be traced back to sources in Saudia Arabia and that it maintains ties with the ISI. LeT has so far been focused on attacks against Indian targets, but is "said to be increasingly active inside Afghanistan" (Katzman 2014a: 16). *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* (HuJi, "Movement for the Struggle of Islam") has committed terrorist attacks in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan and aims to integrate Kashmir into Pakistan. *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen* ("Party of the Mujahideen") pursues the same goal and some believe it has ties with the ISI. Same can be said about *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen-al-Islami* (HuM, "Movement of the Islamic Mujahideen"). *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (JeM, "Army of Mohammad") shares the separatist agenda and is considered to be one of the most dangerous and radical organizations in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi* (LeJ, "Army of Jhangvi") has been involved in terrorist attacks against mostly Shia Muslims in Pakistan that have killed hundreds of civilians within the last years, and was also accused of "several attacks on Afghanistan's Hazara Shiite community during 2011–2012" (Katzman 2014a: 16). LeJ is named after Haq Nawaz Jhangvi (1952–1990), a Sunni preacher who founded the *Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP), another militant Islamist organization. The *Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi* (TNSM, "Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law") fights for the strict enforcement of Islamic Law in Pakistan and has significant influence in the Swat valley in Northern Pakistan. The former leader of the TNSM, Maulana Fazlullah, assumed leadership of the TTP when its previous leader was killed by a US drone strike in 2013. *Lashkar-e-Islam* (LeI, "Army of Islam") is led by the illustrious Islamist Mangal Bagh, who claims to be opposed to terrorist attacks (Zaidi 2008: 12), despite recently affiliating his network with the TTP after a previous split.

Other militant Islamist movements conduct their main operations in other theaters in the wider region, yet they maintain a presence in the FATA or have ties with Pakistani, Indian, or Afghan groups. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) aims to overthrow Islam Karimov in order to install a Muslim caliphate in Uzbekistan and is proud of its ties with the Afghan Taliban. The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) aims to establish an independent state in the Chinese autonomous region of Xinjiang and is accused by Beijing of acts of terrorism, extremism, and separatism. Finally, two organizations call themselves the "Soldiers of God." The *Jundallah* of former TTP Emir Hakimullah Mehsud was involved in terrorist attacks in Pakistan. The *Jundallah* led by Muhammad Dhahir Baluch claims to fight for the interests of oppressed Sunni Muslims in mostly Shia Iran, while the Iranian government accuses *Jundallah* of terrorist activities and separatism. Observers believe that the Balochi *Jundallah*, also known as People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRMI), maintains ties with the ISI as well as with the CIA: "America is secretly funding militant ethnic separatist groups in Iran in an attempt to pile pressure on the Islamic regime to give up its nuclear programme" (Lowther/Freeman 2007). Finally, the Islamic State (ISIS) recently claimed to have recruited a substantial number of followers in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Several other high-ranking TTP members declared allegiance with ISIS after they lost political power struggles within the Pakistani Taliban in 2014. While both the IMU and the Pakistani *Jundallah* pledged allegiance to ISIS, there are conflicting reports about the number of fighters from these groups that joined the "Islamic State," as well as about the consequences for the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. Some members of the Afghan Taliban have distanced themselves from the most violent acts committed by ISIS.

6. Regional powers

The interests of several middle and regional powers clash in Central Asia. Russia and China compete for influence, Pakistan and India struggle with overlapping conflicts over establishing influence in Afghanistan, preventing the Afghan government from forging alliances with the other country, and also over the control of Kashmir. Iran and Saudi Arabia vie for religious leadership.

List of countries with GDP per capita, population, and GDP

Regional Powers	Central Asian States	Gulf States	*Legend*
Pakistan $4,700 199 M / $882 B	**Tajikistan** $2,700 8 M / $22 B	**Saudi Arabia** $52,200 28 M / $753 B	*Country GDP per capita Population / GDP*
India $5,900 1,252 M / $7,376 B	**Uzbekistan** $5,600 29 M / $172 B	**UAE** $64,500 6 M / $600 B	**Afghanistan** $1,900 33 M / $61 B
Iran $17,100 82 M / $1,334 B	**Turkmenistan** $14,200 5 M / $82 B	**Qatar** $143,400 2 M / $321 B	**USA** $54,600 321 M / $17,420 B
Turkey $19,600 79 M / $1,508 B	**Kazakhstan** $24,000 18 M / $419 B	M = million; B = billion. Population: July 2015 est.; GDP (PPP): 2014 est., data are in 2014 US dollars; GDP per capita (PPP): 2014 est., data are in 2013 US dollars. Saudi Arabia: immigrants make up more than 30% of the total population, according to UN data (2013); UAE: the UN estimates the coun-	
China $12,900 1,367 M / $17,620 B	**Kyrgyzstan** $3,400 6 M / $19 B		
Russia $24,800 142 M / $3,565 B	try's total population to be 9,445,624 as of mid-year 2014; immigrants make up more than 80% of the total population, according to 2013 UN data. Source: CIA World Factbook, cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook, accessed 27 Aug. 2015.		

6.1 Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Key figures	President Mamnoun Hussain and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif
Relevant factions	Political parties, ISI, Pakistan Army, SCOP
Memberships	Istanbul Process, OIC, SCO (observer), Almaty Process (observer), CICA
Strong ties	USA, Saudi Arabia
Notable ties	China, IEA and other militant groups (via ISI)
Armed opponents	TTP; HQN; LeT; HuJi; JeM; other Islamist and separatist groups, such as BLA and BLF in Baluchistan
Rivals	India
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	"Ensuring a neutral, stable Kabul government with the Afghan Taliban as a junior partner; supporting Afghan and U.S. operations against the Pakistan Taliban; withdrawing the United States and NATO in phases, but with continuing military and economic aid thereafter; limiting Indian influence, including effective checks on aid to the Baloch insurgency; expanding trade and investment in Afghanistan" (Pickering 2011: 30); preventing the creation of an independent "Pashtunistan;" recognition of the Afghan-Pakistani border ("Durand line") by Kabul; accessing "Central Asia's resources through Afghanistan" (ICG 2012)

Pakistan is arguably the country whose future is most intertwined with the conflict in Afghanistan.

> "Pakistan's goal is that Afghanistan, at the very least, not align with rival India, and, at best, provide Pakistan strategic depth against India. Pakistan says India is using its embassy and four consulates in Afghanistan (Pakistan says India has nine consulates) to recruit anti-Pakistan insurgents, and that India is using its aid programs only to build influence there." (Katzman 2014a: 45)

Thus, while Pakistan plays a key role in Afghanistan, Islamabad sees its "security interests in Afghanistan primarily with reference to India. Emblematic of these is [also] the issue of Islamabad's troubled region of Balochistan, where Pakistani officials allege India has been able to foment unrest by exploiting its enhanced role in Afghanistan" (Brahimi/Pickering 2011: 68).

While Islamabad has officially stated that it is willing to participate in negotiations to end the conflict in Afghanistan, and while it has stated that it has means to guarantee the participation of the Afghan Taliban – thus indirectly admitting the dangerous ties between the ISI and the IEA – its foreign relations with Kabul are further "complicated by the continuing dispute over the Durand Line, by the presence of Taliban safe havens in Pakistan, and by Pakistani perception of some senior Afghan officials' hostility to Pakistan" (Pickering/Brahimi 2011: 11). Although a Taliban-led government, which would essentially be anti-India, would provide Pakistan with the required "strategic depth," the Pakistani government is wary of "reverse strategic depth," which would assist anti-Pakistan elements in finding a safe zone in Afghanistan. (Waldman/Wright 2014: 7).

Internally, Pakistan faces severe energy problems, political instability, a popular mistrust in the political elites, and terrorist and separatist activities. Since 9/11, Pakistan has "deployed over 100,000 troops to different parts of the FATA" to fight the Taliban and their allies (Afsar/Samples/Wood 2008: 60). Observers note that with a population more than six times as large as Afghanistan's, an economy more than ten times as big, and "an actual, existing, function-

al nuclear arsenal, a failed Pakistan would be a much more dangerous sanctuary for al Qaeda" than Afghanistan (Biddle 2013: 5).

With a multitude of internal problems, the Pakistani government doesn't wish for an escalating civil war in Afghanistan as it would have negative ramifications in Pakistan. However, it doesn't "necessarily favour a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan either, with some officials fearing that increased stability could lead to a greater Indian presence" (Waldman/Wright 2014: 7). Although engaging in a cooperative relationship with the other regional powers and supporting peace negotiations and reconciliation would be advantageous to Pakistan in terms of promoting and benefiting from trade with Afghanistan, water supply and narcotics trafficking, cooperation is still perceived as "secondary to Pakistan's national security interests" (Waldman/Wright 2014: 7). However, recent pushes for intra-Afghan reconciliation made by China, Pakistan's ally, may contribute to Islamabad embracing a more constructive attitude in a comprehensive peace process.

6.2   Republic of India

Key figures	President Pranab Kumar Mukherjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi
Memberships	Istanbul Process, SCO (observer), CICA
Strong ties	USA, Russia
Notable ties	Tajikistan, Afghan Civil Society, Afghan government, Qatar
Armed opponents	HuJi; *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen*; JeM, LeT
Rivals	China, Pakistan
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	"A friendly, or at least neutral, Afghanistan not dominated by the Taliban or other Pakistan proxies; eliminating al-Qaeda and other Islamic extremists who target India; preserving a presence in Afghanistan, including political and military intelligence capacities; expanding trade and investment, including transit routes through Pakistan; ensuring basic human rights in Afghanistan; strengthening growing strategic partnership with the United States" (Pickering 2011: 31)

With a population of 1.2 billion people, India is the world's largest democracy. Over the years the presence of India in Afghanistan has increased, albeit slowly. India is the "fifth-largest bilateral donor and engaging in a range of major infrastructure and capacity-building projects" (Destradi 2014: 104). India sees its interest in the conflict primarily as it relates to Pakistan, which it seeks to prevent from realizing "strategic depth" in Afghanistan.

India aims to "deny Pakistan the ability to block India from trade and other connections to Central Asia and beyond, and to prevent militants in Afghanistan from attacking Indian targets in Afghanistan" (Katzman 2014a: 49–50). India and Pakistan, as well as China, have fought several wars over the disputed Kashmir region. (For more information on this conflict, see Köchler 2008.) New Delhi is concerned that its interests in Afghanistan will be marginalized if the government is dominated by Pashtuns who it believes to be closer to Pakistan. It is very critical of talks with "moderate Taliban" because of "concerns over whether such a group really exists" (Price 2013: 5). Although India has often expressed its disapproval of negotiations with the Taliban, isolation from the international community over this issue has pushed India to take a softer stance on peace talks.

Cautious of provoking Pakistan with its engagement in Afghanistan, India is active in contributing towards reconstruction, regional development, and economic cooperation. Its foreign aid to Afghanistan has both humanitarian and strategic motivations:

> "Most of India's assistance has gone to traditional developmental projects such as training civil servants, constructing wells, power plants and transmission lines, and building and staffing hospitals. Other projects have clear strategic functions: the construction of a road linking Afghanistan to the Iranian port of Chabahar, and the recent announcement that India would renovate the port itself, has created an alternative route for Indian goods to travel to Afghanistan"

which sidelines Pakistan (Price 2013: 5). In the event that Pakistan doesn't allow Indian goods to transit through its territory, partnership with Iran is of significance for India. Also, one of India's crucial objectives in engaging in Afghanistan is to gain access to the vast energy reserves of Central Asia: "The Iranian port of Chabahar and good relations with Iran are therefore high priorities for New Delhi: that route is the only realistic option for India to develop reliable commercial ties with Afghanistan and, through it, with Central Asia" (Destradi 2014: 105). India is very popular among the Afghan people and has

> "provided training for Afghan businesspeople on international trade and lifted tariffs on most Afghan exports to India, not to mention India's desire to link to Afghanistan's central Bamyan province through […] Chabahar, thereby accessing Afghanistan's largest known iron ore mine in Hajigak (where an Indian consortium already has won the extraction contract)." (Kazemi 2013)

Continuing good relations with Afghanistan, India's new government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has, as a gesture of goodwill, relaxed visa procedures for Afghan citizens and has promised USD 100 million for the development of the Iranian port of Chabahar with the intention of encouraging Afghanistan's connectivity (Quie 2014).

6.3   Islamic Republic of Iran

Key figures	Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani
Relevant factions	Supreme Leader, President, Parliament, Guardian Council, Revolutionary Guards, Expediency Council, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Memberships	Istanbul Process, OIC, SCO (observer), Almaty Process (Observer), CICA
Strong ties	Unity Party
Notable ties	Afghan government, Ismail Khan, some IEA commanders, Russia
Armed opponents	*Jundallah* (PRMI)
Rivals	Saudi Arabia, USA
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	"Withdrawal of U.S. […] military and intelligence forces; a stable regime in Kabul, friendly to Iran, and not dominated by Pakistan or its proxies; protection for traditional Iranian allies in Afghanistan: Hazaras, Tajiks, and Heratis; trade, investment, and transit trade through Char Bahar; return of 2 to 3 million Afghan refugees in Iran; reduction/elimination of narcotics trafficking; Kabul cooperation in fight against Jundallah [PRMI], in Iranian Baluchistan and beyond" (Pickering 2011: 31)

Iran has a multifaceted involvement in the Afghanistan conflict. Iran has played an important role in the international reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Following the displacement of thousands of people, Iran has provided refuge to many Afghans fleeing the conflict. Iran's influence is likely to grow after the withdrawal of ISAF. Despite being viewed as counterproductive by

the US, Iran's engagement in Afghanistan has been to a large extent productive and in many instances even congruent with US regional interests. The conflicting elements in Iran's Afghanistan policy stem from its "dual policy" that it follows in the region. On one hand, Tehran "continues to oppose the presence of Western military bases in Afghanistan, engages in talks with Taliban, invites them for conferences in Iran and even, allegedly, supplies arms to them. At the same time, it provides Afghanistan with technical and financial support" (Daud 2014: 9). This contradiction can be traced back to two different sets of motives.

On one hand, Iran has strong ties with the Afghan border province of Herat and with the Hazara in Afghanistan who, like 90% of all Iranians, are Shia Muslims. By extending support to the Shia Muslims and the Dari-speaking minorities in Afghanistan, Iran wishes to consolidate religious solidarity and its economic interests in Afghanistan. Thus, Tehran has supported the reconstruction of Afghanistan, especially in its Western provinces. Iran has been one of the largest donors to Afghanistan. Exporting critical goods such as food, medicine and oil, Iran's trade with Afghanistan has increased over the years. In addition, Iran has invested in Afghan NGOs, schools, and media institutions. Iranians also reached out to other groups beside their fellow Shias. Tehran recognizes that a deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan would likely lead to the growth of extremist Sunni groups in the region that could align themselves with terrorist groups based in Iran (Koepke 2013: 22). Iran, like the US, thus favors stability in Afghanistan and is strongly interested in preventing a resurgence of al-Qaeda in the region. Iran also suffers from an acute drug crisis that originated in Afghanistan, and it aims to solve this issue via cooperation (Kugelman 2014).

On the other hand, Tehran feels encircled by the US military and intelligence presence along its borders and is objected to long-term US installations in Afghanistan. US support for Saudi Arabia and *Jundallah* are other sources of concern for Iran. Thus, Tehran has established channels of communication with the Afghan insurgency, and its Revolutionary Guards are believed to support Taliban commanders. It has also

> "allowed a Taliban office to open in Iran, and a high-level Taliban delegation traveled from Qatar to Iran in early June 2013 (prior to the opening of the Taliban office there) for meetings with Iranian officials. […] While some see the contacts as Iranian support of the insurgency, others see it as an effort to exert some influence over reconciliation efforts." (Katzman 2014a: 49)

Soon after the 2014 Afghan presidential elections, Iranian Vice President Shariatmadari met Afghan President Ghani to discuss the close ties between the neighboring countries. The two leaders agreed upon the importance of continued cooperation, and Iran offered to support the education of Afghan migrants in Iran (Office of the President of the IRoA 2014b). This friendly gesture is an example of further cooperation and collaboration, especially in education and trade, in the future. The 2015 Iranian nuclear agreement might increase the chances of Tehran further strengthening these economic and reconstruction components of its engagement in Afghanistan, and incentives to beef up military and intelligence capabilities against the US might decrease.

6.4   Republic of Turkey

Key figures	President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu
Subordinated	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MİT, TIKA
Memberships	Istanbul Process, NATO, OIC, SCO (dialogue partner), CICA
Strong ties	USA
Notable ties	Afghanistan, Pakistan, National Islamic Movement, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan
Armed opponents	Al-Qaeda, Kurdish organizations, ISIS
Rivals	Iran, Russia
Relevance of conflict	Low
Key interests	Strengthen its position as an autonomous actor in the Middle East and Central Asia (Giustozzi 2013: 9); promote indivisibility of regional security and politics of non-interference (Kordaş 2013); support a strong, central Kabul that includes all major Afghan groups (Kordaş 2013: 8–9); support Turkic peoples in Afghanistan and Central Asia; encourage economic ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Weitz 2011; Kordaş 2013: 10–17); protect Turkish construction sector in Afghanistan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey 2013); maintain its presence in Afghanistan past the withdrawal of NATO troops

Turkey has a long-term commitment to assist Afghanistan because of their shared cultural bonds and Islamic culture. Still, Ankara's active engagement in cooperative security measures should also be interpreted in the context of the transformation of Turkey's foreign policy over the last few years. In order to strengthen its position as an autonomous actor in the Middle East and Central Asia, Ankara pursues an assertive role in regional politics and provides substantial aid through its TIKA development agency (Kordaş 2013). In addition, Ankara has led a variety of diplomatic initiatives in the region.

Turkey is a secular democracy and 99% of its people are Muslim. It is the only NATO member state that is also a member of the OIC. While Turkey sent troops to Afghanistan, it limits their involvement to logistical assistance and capacity building for the ANSF (Kaya 2013: 23–24) and prohibits their participation in combat operations on Muslim lands. In line with its strong belief that security is tied to governance and economic development, Ankara assists Kabul in these areas (Kordaş 2013: 5–7). As part of ISAF, the Turkish government supported a PRT model that focused on "the fields of education, health, and infrastructure" (Kaya 2013: 24).

Ankara presents itself as a neutral mediator in Afghanistan and beyond and claims not to use its ethnic ties with the Uzbek and Turkmen communities in a purely instrumental way. Ankara even encourages other regional actors to forgo "jockeying for influence" in the fragile state (Kordaş 2013: 16). However, sources indicate that educational opportunities provided for young Afghans have facilitated the formation of a pro-Turkish wing of Dostum's Uzbek National Islamic Movement (Giustozzi 2012a: 16–17). Continuing its long-standing relationship with Afghanistan and demonstrating support to the newly elected government, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently signed an agreement on closer bilateral ties between the two countries (Arab News 2014).

Ankara has also hosted several meetings with Afghanistan and Pakistan since 2007 which focused on counter-terrorism activities and intelligence sharing, in addition to economic development and joint military exercises. However, these trilateral summits have not yet produced great

changes in the complicated relationship between Kabul and Islamabad (Kordaş 2013: 23). In addition, Ankara is the driving force behind the Istanbul Process for Regional Cooperation in the "Heart of Asia." As part of this process, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, the UAE, and Uzbekistan coordinate political consultations, CBMs, and their policies regarding Afghanistan.

6.5 People's Republic of China

Key figures	President Xi Jinpeng and Premier of the State Council Li Keqiang
Subordinated	MCC (state-owned)
Memberships	SCO, Istanbul Process, CICA
Strong ties	Pakistan
Notable ties	Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan
Armed opponents	ETIM
Rivals	USA, NATO
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	"Secure access to Afghan minerals and resources;" help Pakistan "avoid encirclement by India" (Katzman 2014a: 54); contain the spread of militant Islamism; maintain regional stability; control separatist ambitions in Xinjiang

While China shares a very small border with Afghanistan, Chinese policy in Central Asia has for a long time been "quiet and cautious, focused on developing the region as an economic partner with its western province Xinjiang" (Kim/Indeo 2013: 280). China's primary interest in Afghanistan stems from its objective to contain the separatist tendencies in its Xinjiang province. "The security interaction between Afghanistan and Xinjiang is obvious; as a neighbor of China, Afghanistan has strong influence on the security of Xinjiang" (Huasheng 2012: 3). China also suffers from drug trafficking and Afghanistan happens to be one of the largest source countries. The China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) secured the $3 billion contract for Logar province's Aynak copper mine, the largest foreign investment project in Afghanistan.

> "As far as infrastructure building and resource extraction go, Moscow and Beijing, not Washington, increasingly see one another as rivals in Central Asia. Central Asian security falls in a natural Russian sphere of influence, while Central Asian energy and economics falls in a Chinese sphere of influence." (Kim/Indeo 2013: 280)

China is also a member of the Heart-of-Asia/Istanbul process and states that it wants the states of the regions to "build consensus, work together to support efforts to complete the triple transitions, and encourage the situation in Afghanistan to move toward lasting peace" (Yi 2014).

China has "long-time close relations with Pakistan" (Pickering/Brahimi 2011: 12) and often relied on Pakistan for assessing Afghan politics. However, since 2011, this relationship has been changing. First, "following China's rising economic interest in Afghanistan and a clash between the two countries on the issue of the training of Uyghur Islamist groups in Pakistan," the Chinese government raised the "profile and information-gathering activities of its embassy in Kabul" (Giustozzi 2013: 3). Then, observers started pointing out that Beijing had supposedly reached out to the Taliban. Motivations include the desire to control Islamism and separatism in Xinjiang as well as the protection of its economic projects in Afghanistan, which may be at risk following

ISAF's withdrawal. At the same time, Beijing publicly sent "reassuring messages to the Afghan government" (Daud 2014: 8). Finally, within the last year, Beijing has adopted a much more affirmative stand concerning intra-Afghan reconciliation. This includes Chinese efforts to encourage Pakistan to play a productive role in facilitating the Taliban's participation in peace talks. While China does not want the US or NATO to establish a permanent military presence in Afghanistan, "Chinese experts fear that a complete NATO military withdrawal from Central Asia would contribute to regional instability and terrorism" (Kim/Indeo 2013: 280), and a peace process that leads to an economic prosperous Afghanistan and a more stable region is thus in Beijing's interest. Hence, "Chinese thinking on Afghanistan has evolved significantly since 2001, gradually shifting from a largely hands-off approach a decade ago to one approaching more active engagement today." (Scobell 2015: 325)

6.6 Russian Federation

Key figures	President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev
Subordinated	FSB, FSKN, Gazprom
Memberships	CIS, EAU, SCO, Istanbul Process, CSTO, OIC (observer status), CICA
Strong ties	India, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan
Notable ties	Iran, Pakistan
Armed opponents	IMU, al-Qaeda
Rivals	USA, NATO, China, Saudi Arabia
Relevance of conflict	Low
Key interests	Advance economic integration with the Eurasian Union; contain militant Islamism; control US and Western influence in Central Asia; support a stable central Kabul that is able to control its territories and combat terrorist activities (Jones/Crane 2013: 12); combat drug-trafficking from Afghanistan; ensure that energy interests are not threatened by Beijing (Trenin 2010: 73; Harooni 2014)

With the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan, the Russian Federation is reassessing its Afghanistan policy. Two major factors are important in understanding Russia's so far limited involvement in the Afghanistan conflict in spite of its status as a key player in the region (Daud 2014: 7). On one hand, Russia has a long history of colonial and cultural ties with the Central Asian republics. On the other hand, negative memories of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan have resulted in the so-called "Afghan syndrome" among Russia's government and public, which rejects Russian participation in the conflict (Trenin: 74; Giustozzi 2013: 8).

Moscow aims to sustain its influence in Central Asia and continues to recruit various Central Asian states for its Eurasian Union, though with varying degrees of success. Some observers argue that Russian strategy is shifting from "regional mediation" and influence maximization "to a more focused logic of hierarchy. Russia seems to be abandoning its previous doctrine of exerting general regional influence in favor of pursuing more focused influence and integration with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan" (Cooley/Laruelle 2013: 1–2). Potential spillover effects of a collapsing Afghanistan in Central Asia are a big concern for Russia, which is afraid of the spread of militant Islamism. Of prominent concern is Islamic radicalism in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan as well as drug trafficking from Afghanistan, which has increased in the last several years (Trenin 2010: 72; Lundin/Kaathoven 2013: 1). The latter remains a great concern for Moscow as nearly 90 percent of the narcotics present in Russia are of Afghan origin (Lundin/Kaathoven: 1).

However, NATO's and Russia's cooperation in Afghanistan faces a new challenge following the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Russia's policies towards Ukraine have been met with a number of sanctions imposed by the US and the EU and a setback of NATO-Russia relations (Klein/Kaim 2014). This had negative implications in the region for US and NATO military logistics, which previously benefited from Russian support. NATO ended military cooperation with Russia on Afghanistan shortly following the escalation of the Crimea crisis, and one year later, Moscow decided to end the military transit deals with NATO related to its Ulyanovsk airport.

7.   Arab states of the Persian Gulf

While Bahrain contributed a moderate number of troops to ISAF, the most relevant actors from the Persian Gulf in the context of the Afghanistan conflict are Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar. These are not only among the region's richest states, owing to their booming oil profits, but also among the most assertive ones when it comes to foreign relations. (For more information, see Katzman 2014a, Katzman 2014b).

Their future engagement with Afghanistan is likely to be shaped by two major factors. First, their discontent with US positions in the Syrian Civil War and in context of the Iranian nuclear agreement. Second, by the potential contribution they can make to reconciliation and mediation in Afghanistan. Doha has tried to play a lead role in negotiations and welcomed the opening of an official bureau of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in Qatar. However, the related negotiations between the Taliban, the Afghan government, and the international community that the office was intended to channel have stalled.

7.1   Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Key figure	King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
Subordinated	GIP, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saudi Development Fund, wealthy donors
Memberships	OIC, Istanbul Process, CICA
Strong ties	Pakistan, USA
Notable ties	Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, WML, WAMY, Wahabi groups
Armed opponents	Al-Qaeda (AQAP)
Rivals	Iran, Russia
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	Implement a more active foreign policy in the global Muslim community (Boucek 2010: 46); favor reconciliation with the Taliban and an Islamic government that maintains religious values and moral restrictions (Mir 2010: 46–48); provide off-budget and private assistance and foreign aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan to demonstrate Islamic leadership (Mir 2010: 14); contain Iranian influence in Afghanistan (Mir 2010: 13) and in the region

A predominantly Sunni state and a regional power, Saudi Arabia seeks to contain Iranian Shia influence by providing support to Sunni groups within Afghanistan (Mir 2010: 13) and the wider region. Funding for radical madrassas in Pakistan (Mir 2010: 13) can be traced back to donors from Saudi Arabia. Young Afghans, Chechens, Pakistanis, Uzbeks, and others that were educated

at these schools have been known to fight alongside the Taliban over the last twelve years (Daud 2014: 5–6). Saudi financiers are also thought to depend on the Pakistani military to deliver funds to Islamist groups in Afghanistan (Mir 2010: 13). Saudi Arabia has played an important role in Afghan political affairs by not only funding *Mujahideen* fighters during Soviet occupation, but also during recent times, by exerting influence over negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Afghanistan's previous President Karzai considered Saudi Arabia to be a key player in the stabilization of Afghanistan as well as an important source of economic investment (Katzman 2014: 53).

The versatile involvement of Saudi Arabia in the Afghanistan conflict is completed by its attempts to encourage Kabul's reconciliation with Islamabad (Giustozzi 2013: 3; Boucek 2010: 49), Riyadh's key regional partner (Daud 2014: 9). Saudi Arabia favors a conservative Sunni government in Kabul (Boucek 2010: 46) and was among the three countries to recognize the Taliban's Islamic Emirate as the legitimate government of Afghanistan in 1996 (Giustozzi 2013: 9).

7.2 United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Key figure	President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Memberships	Istanbul Process, OIC, CICA
Strong ties	USA, France
Notable ties	Pakistan, India, NATO
Armed opponents	*Jamiat Al-Islah wa Tawjih*
Rivals	Iran
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	Combat domestic and regional terrorism; cooperate with the US on measures against terrorism and its proliferation (Katzman 2014b: 15); provide economic aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan such as educational grants, medical clinics, and housing for Afghan families (Katzman 2014b: 20); strengthen economic development; establish itself as a "regional hub for businesses and institutions" (Ulrichsen 2012)

A Sunni state by majority and bordered by Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, and Pakistan, the UAE perceives its domestic security as strongly tied to its economic stability. The UAE tries to pursue its security and economic-related goals while balancing them with domestic inequality and calls for political reforms (Ulrichsen 2012). After it was revealed that two of the 9/11 hijackers were UAE nationals, the UAE has increased its cooperation with the US to combat Islamist terrorism (Katzman 2014b:15) and sent troops to southern Afghanistan in 2003. The UAE hosts the Al Dhafra Air Base (Zenko/Welch 2012) which is used "to perform intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and aerial refueling" for US forces in Afghanistan (U.S. Air Force Fact Sheets 2012). France's first permanent military base in the Persian Gulf, IMFEAU, is also located in the UAE.

Abu Dhabi's recent decision to double its expenditures on domestic security (Mustafa 2014) and the arrests of al-Qaeda terrorist suspects (BBC News Middle East 2013) point to its security concerns. Another recent development is the ongoing relocation of Afghan investments and human capital to Dubai which observers interpret as a sign of general distrust in a stable Afghanistan (Daud 2014: 3–4). At a panel held at the UN under the Abu Dhabi Process, the UAE's Ambassador to the UN emphasized the emirates' continued support and engagement with Afghanistan's newly elected government. As part of the Abu Dhabi process, leaders from Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Turkmenistan, Iran, China, EU and the US, among other nations, have engaged

in meetings to discuss regional security and cross-border economic challenges and opportunities (Gulf News 2014).

7.3   State of Qatar

Key figure	Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani
Memberships	OIC, CICA
Strong ties	USA
Notable ties	Iran
Rivals	UAE, Saudi Arabia
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	Maintain state's wealth in its unstable neighborhood; project itself as a neutral mediator in the Afghan peace talks, although the Taliban's political office in Doha proved to be a failure (Roberts 2013); compete with Saudi Arabia in exercising its influence in the region (Katuli 2013); remain crucial US ally; revive diplomatic relations with other regional actors (Ulrichsen 2014)

The country with the world's highest GDP per capita (CIA World Factbook 2013a), Qatar is a predominantly Sunni Muslim state. Doha tries to strengthen its position in mediating regional conflicts (Kamrava 2011) and has hosted the first official office of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate, though the related talks between the Taliban, the Afghan government, and the US have stalled. Doha's Al Udeid Air Base hosts the 609th Air and Space Operations Center, including a US drone operations command and control center, through which US troops and resources move from Qatar to Afghanistan (Zenko/Welch 2012). Qatar's involvement in Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, and Yemen are examples of its wider engagement in the region (Blanchard 2014).

However, Qatar might exert a less assertive foreign policy in the future because of its new Emir, Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, who is reportedly shifting away from his father's interventionist policies and focusing more on domestic issues (Ulrichsen 2014).

8.   Central Asian states

Following 9/11, Central Asia moved into the focus of American foreign policy which caused severe disruptions in the network of regional alliances. Today, the US relies on the newly established Northern Distribution Network (NDN), "a commercially-based logistical corridor connecting Baltic and Black Sea ports with Afghanistan via Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia" (CSIS Experts in the Field 2010) in order to manage the withdrawal of non-lethal supplies from Afghanistan through Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan (Nichol 2013a: 25). The NDN also serves the long-term goal of a "New Silk Road" that integrates Afghanistan economically and politically with the region for a sustained economic activity in Central and South Asia (Stein 2012: 75).

Central Asian states are at different stages of economic development, with resource-rich Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan on one side, and poorer Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on the other. All states of the region have expressed their concern over the withdrawal of ISAF troops, stating that the situation is likely to deteriorate further. However, there is no coherent

Central Asian approach towards Afghanistan. Some experts argue that the Central Asian republics' policies "can be explained by referring to factors such as its proximity to and existing links with Afghanistan, its own vulnerability and capacity as a state, its perspectives and attitudes, and its foreign-policy style, along with complex intra-regional politics and the geopolitical context" (Kassenova 2014: 2). Indeed, these factors make Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan more vulnerable as NATO proceeds to withdraw from the region, with the last one being the most susceptible to potential spillovers. Others argue that the lack of regional cooperation and a variety of regional and country-specific issues remain major sources of instability (Cooley 2012; Quinn-Judge 2010: 62–63). These issues include migration, a deteriorating physical infrastructure and porous borders, the lack of transparent and accountable political institutions, ethnic tensions, rising Islamic radicalism, and environmental problems.

Although most of them contributed to and benefited from the logistics behind the NATO intervention, such as the movement of supplies, the Central Asian states do not play a major role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, mostly because of their limited political weight and a complex set of political factors. While US and Chinese involvement in the region has increased during the last decade, the region is still heavily interconnected with Russia. For instance, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan rely on the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for their security needs. At the same time, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan managed to maintain more independent foreign policies. Kazakhstan is a member of Moscow's ambitious Eurasian Economic Union (EAU). However, in the light of worsening relations between Russia and the West following the 2015 Crimea crisis, and taking into account decreasing oil prices, it remains to be seen whether Central Asian states that are dependent on Russia can find more room for shifting away from the direct sphere of Russian influence and increase their ties and trade with other regional and global partners.

While this chapter gives an overview of the Central Asian states' interests in the context of the conflict, it does not focus on the internal divisions of the republics. It should be noted that these must be taken into account in deeper, country-specific assessments. For instance, while national governments may officially declare their intentions to combat regional drug-trafficking, local border patrols or political clans may in fact benefit from the drug trade. Hence, country experts and more specialized literature should be consulted in order to understand the internal divisions that shape the Afghanistan policy of the Central Asian states.

8.1   Republic of Tajikistan

Key figures	President Emomali Rahmon and Prime Minister Kokhir Rasulzoda
Memberships	CIS, CSTO, EAU (candidate), OIC, SCO, Istanbul Process, Almaty Process, Joint Declaration on Regional Peace and Stability, CICA
Strong ties	Russia
Notable ties	USA, Iran, Afghanistan, China, India, USAID
Armed opponents	IMU, IEA, al-Qaeda
Rivals	Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, HuT (domestic)
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	Control Islamism and terrorism; prevent spillover effects from Afghanistan to avoid refugees and local ethnic clashes; protect national borders; tackle cross-border drug-trafficking; prevent the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan (ISW 2013); develop "alternative trade routes via Afghanistan to South Asia" to decrease its economic dependence on Uzbekistan (Kassenova 2014: 15); increase trade exchange

The poorest of all Central Asian states and the world's most remittance-dependent country – many Tajik laborers work in Kazakhstan and Russia (The World Bank 2013) – Tajikistan shares a 1,200-km-long border with Afghanistan. Tajikistan's civil war (1992–97) involved militant Islamists from Northern Afghanistan (Gretsky 1995: 218). These two factors, along with Tajiks being the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan (CIA World Factbook 2013), explain why Tajikistan pays close attention to the developments in Kabul.

A fading infrastructure and a lack of proper management make border control and the control of drug-trafficking very difficult, despite assistance from the Russian 201st Motor Rifle Division. Its fragile economy and a high unemployment rate exacerbate its vulnerability to a potential spillover of insurgent and terrorist activities from Afghanistan. Observers argue that militant Islamists will find a population ready for alternative models of political order, such as a form of Islamic state as proposed by radical groups (Quinn-Judge 2010: 56–59). On the other hand, Dushanbe sees economic opportunities in a more stable Afghanistan. It is eager to develop trade routes through Afghanistan to South Asia in order to have an alternative to Russian and Uzbek routes. Also, together with Kyrgyzstan, it favors the realization of the Central Asia-South Asia electricity grid (CASA-1000) in order to export electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The project is opposed by Uzbekistan and requires international financial support. Tajikistan also hopes that the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan railway project (Kassenova 2014: 21) will have a positive impact on its economy.

While Dushanbe fears that NATO and US policies in Afghanistan favor Pashtuns at the expense of Tajiks, it favors power-sharing between the different ethnic groups (Kassenova 2014: 14). It also prefers not to see the return of the Taliban to Kabul since it believes that this could lead to armed confrontations involving Afghan Tajiks (Laruelle/Peyrose/ Axyonova 2013: 9). The future of the two countries is thus heavily intertwined.

8.2   Republic of Uzbekistan

Key figures	President Islam Karimov and Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev
Memberships	CIS, OIC, SCO, Istanbul Process, Joint Declaration on Regional Peace and Stability, CICA
Notable ties	Germany, Russia, India, Japan, Iran, National Islamic Movement, ADB, EAU
Armed opponents	IMU, IEA, al-Qaeda, IJU
Rivals	Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, HuT (domestic), Akromiya (domestic)
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	Strengthen state independence and sovereignty (Nichol 2013b: 11); develop "alternative trade routes via Afghanistan to South Asia" to decrease its dependence on Kazakhstan and Russia (Kassenova 2014: 15); continue electricity exports to Kabul and railway investments in Afghanistan; prevent the construction of Tajikistan's Rogun Dam; maintain logistical contracts within NDN while silencing the West's calls for the respect of human rights; prevent IMU from developing closer ties with the Afghan Taliban; combat drug trafficking; provide financial and military support to anti-Taliban forces in case of IEA's return to Kabul (Chayes 2012)

Home to nearly half of Central Asia's population, Uzbekistan shares a short border with Afghanistan and longer borders with all other Central Asian states. Much of the drugs smuggled out of Afghanistan to China, Europe, and Russia pass through Uzbekistan's border (Stein 2012: 76).

Aspiring to become a main transportation hub, Uzbekistan benefits from intense competition between Chinese and Indian firms. It already is a key player in Central Asia in terms of electricity supply to and transportation connections with Afghanistan (Laruelle/Peyrose/Axyonova 2013: 6–7). In 2011, five out of six NDN shipments went through Southern Uzbekistan (Cooley 2012: 45). Relations between Uzbekistan and the US are strained since the US condemned the massacre in Andijan in 2005, but the US has made attempts to improve them (Nichol 2013b: 17–23). Uzbekistan possesses the largest and strongest military force in Central Asia, and advances security cooperation with changing preferences between the US and NATO and Russia. "Karimov stated that closer bilateral ties [with Kazakhstan] were needed to address the drawdown of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operations in Afghanistan" and related economic developments (Nichol 2013b: 13).

Domestically, Tashkent fights to dismantle a variety of militant Islamist groups, including the IMU. A 2010 update of the IMU website listed "martyrs" from Northern Afghanistan and Uzbekistan (Stein 2012: 79). The history of the IMU and its current connection with the Taliban suggest that it will continue to play a role in Afghanistan (Stein 2012: 80). Therefore, Tashkent's major interest in the Afghanistan conflict is not economic, but political: to prevent the IMU from benefitting from the fighting in Afghanistan and from de-stabilizing Uzbekistan.

8.3   Turkmenistan

Key figure	President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow
Memberships	Istanbul Process, Almaty Process, OIC, SCO (guest), CIS (unofficial associate), CICA
Notable ties	Turkey, Ismail Khan, India, Pakistan
Relevance of conflict	Low
Key interests	Maintain "neutral" foreign policy, but continue to play a role in regional politics as part of the Istanbul Process (Kazemi 2013); gain geopolitical independence from Russia; continue cooperation with the government in Kabul regardless of its composition; strengthen its borders with Afghanistan (RFE/RL 2014); continue to supply Afghanistan with electricity; "construct the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline and a railway project that would run through Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan" (UN News Centre 2014)

Ashgabat officially pursues a policy of strict neutrality in foreign affairs. In a 1995 resolution, the UNGA has recognized this position and has stated it supports the "the status of permanent neutrality declared by Turkmenistan" (UNGA 1995). Some experts say that Ashgabat shifted away from its isolationist policy as it joined the Istanbul Process and Almaty Process (Kassenova 2014: 5).

Turkmenistan is bordered by Iran, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, and it has porous borders with Afghanistan. Following armed confrontation in September 2014 between the Taliban and Turkmen border guards, Turkmenistan is reportedly strengthening its borders with Afghanistan along Faryab and Jowzjan provinces, perhaps at the cost of cutting communications with ethnic Turkmens on the Afghan side of the border (Alternative News Turkmenistan 2014, RFE/RL 2014).

Although Ashgabat tries to shield itself from the political turmoil in Afghanistan, it is likely to continue its trade and energy cooperation regardless of power shifts in Kabul (Giustozzi 2013: 6), and strives to achieve political and economic independence from Russia. Turkmenistan is "home to some of the largest undeveloped oil and natural gas fields in the world" (ISW 2014). The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline, a Trans-Caspian gas pipeline to

connect Turkmenistan's gas to Europe (Petersen 2012), is scheduled to be finished by 2017. It is considered an important component part of Turkmenistan's policy of geopolitical independence (Sadykov 2013).

8.4   Republic of Kazakhstan

Key figures	President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Prime Minister Karim Massimov
Memberships	CSTO, CIS, EAU, SCO, OIC, Istanbul Process, Almaty Process, Joint Declaration on Regional Peace and Stability, CICA
Strong ties	Russia
Notable ties	USA, China, India, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan
Armed opponents	IMU, IEA
Rivals	HuT (domestic)
Relevance of conflict	Low
Key interests	Maintain multi-vector foreign policy; present itself as a stable and prosperous regional leader; maintain its credit rating and increase international investments in the country; assist the reconstruction of Afghanistan; continue its adoption of the CBMs for disaster management as part of the Istanbul Process (Kazemi 2013; Daud 2014: 2); maintain bilateral trade with and continue heavy wheat exports to Afghanistan (Laruelle/Peyrose/Axyonova 2013: 7)

A relatively prosperous country by regional standards, Kazakhstan enjoyed a rapid increase in its GDP over the last two decades, mostly owing to its significant oil exports. Of all the Central Asian states, it shares the largest border with Russia. However, it does not border Afghanistan and lacks ethnic connections with it, making Kazakhstan less vulnerable and allowing for, as some observers call it, "a calmer and less biased approach to developments in Afghanistan" (Kassenova 2014: 3). Kazakhstan's major interests include establishing itself as a stable regional leader, advancing its relations with the West while not alienating Russia in order to maintain its "multi-vector foreign policy," and retaining the profits associated with its involvement in air and land transit operations of NATO and US troops. Astana is interested in securing a non-permanent seat on the UNSC for 2017–18 (MFA Kazakhstan 2014).

Kazakhstan's concerted efforts to increase its international reputation as a trustworthy partner influenced Astana's decision to provide increased humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. Kazakhstan's Assistance Program for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan focuses on water supply, infrastructure development, and construction commodities, while the Agreement on Cooperation in Education focused on educating Afghan students at Kazakhstan's universities from 2010 to 2014 (Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the USA 2013). In addition, the Central Asian state hosts the Almaty Process, an ongoing initiative of Kazakhstan in response to the migration dynamics in the region (IOM 2013), which brings together Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Iran (Observer), and Pakistan (Observer).

8.5 Kyrgyz Republic

Key figures	President Almazbek Atambayev and Prime Minister Temir Sariyev
Memberships	CSTO, CIS, OIC, SCO, Istanbul Process, Almaty Process, Joint Declaration on Regional Peace and Stability, EAU (candidate), CICA
Strong ties	Russia, USA
Notable ties	China, Turkey, Kazakhstan
Armed opponents	IMU
Rivals	Uzbekistan, *Tablighi Jamaat* (domestic), HuT (domestic)
Relevance of conflict	Medium
Key interests	Tackle security issues associated with the drug trade coming from Afghanistan; maintain stability in ethnically diverse southern Kyrgyzstan; receive assistance and expertise necessary to control its borders (Kim/Indeo 2013: 282); benefit from internationally planned and regionally implemented projects for the economic recovery of Afghanistan, such as the Kambaratinsk Dam and CASA-1000

Bordered by China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan is highly dependent on foreign assistance and expertise to control migration through its borders. Observers believe that Kyrgyzstan is not capable of maintaining control in case of a revival of ethnic conflicts in Osh, Southern Kyrgyzstan (Norwegian Helsinki Committee 2012), or in case of a spillover of insurgent activities from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Kim/Indeo 2013: 282). *Tablighi Jamaat*, a movement that is ideologically close to the IEA, has a significant number of followers in Kyrgyzstan. Of notable concern are consequences of the drug smuggling from Afghanistan, including human trafficking, rising HIV rates, drug addiction, increased criminal activity, and alternative power structures that have appeared in the South (Olcott 2010: 51).

Even though Bishkek is ready to compromise to a certain degree with external actors when it comes to its sovereignty (Olcott 2010: 57), it seeks to maintain a delicate balance in cooperating between US, China, and Russia in order to increase its economic security and manage its large budget deficit (Kim/Indeo 2013: 282). In this context, Bishkek seeks to benefit from regional infrastructure projects. For instance, it seeks to employ its Kambarata hydroelectric project that is financed by Russia but opposed by Uzbekistan, in order to export energy to Afghanistan (Olcott 2010: 55). Also, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are the main exporters of electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan through the CASA-1000 project backed by the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank (The World Bank 2014).

9. Conclusion

A negotiated settlement could end more than 30 years of civil war in Afghanistan and help stabilize a region plagued with turmoil and violent extremism. However, the complexity of the conflict is a main obstacle to negotiations. An assessment of the different actors and their interests and relationships in the context of the overlapping and interconnected cleavages and sub-conflicts in Afghanistan and Central Asia reveals a multifaceted network of relationships. This report concludes with a visualization of this network based on the information provided in the previous chapters, a brief outline of three future scenarios, and a set of recommendations related to an inclusive peace process.

9.1 Network of relationships

Because of the interconnected nature of the sub-conflicts, in which political, economic, and strategic problems are heavily intertwined and which involve a variety of actors, no party alone can decide the fate of Afghanistan or shape the future of Central Asia. This uncertainty serves as an incentive to all parties, both state and non-state, to engage in various "hedging strategies" in order to prevent marginalization. For the states of the region, the lack of a legitimate forum or institutional framework that they can rely on in order to balance their interests further reinforces patterns of mistrust and misperception. A notable feature of the conflict is a shortage of static, reliable, and durable coalitions built on trust among the main parties. Instead, relevant actors constantly renegotiate, adjust, or shift their alliances, or rely on different actors to advance different goals. Overall, the relationships of the parties to the conflict are best described as a multifaceted network of sometimes contradictory alliances.
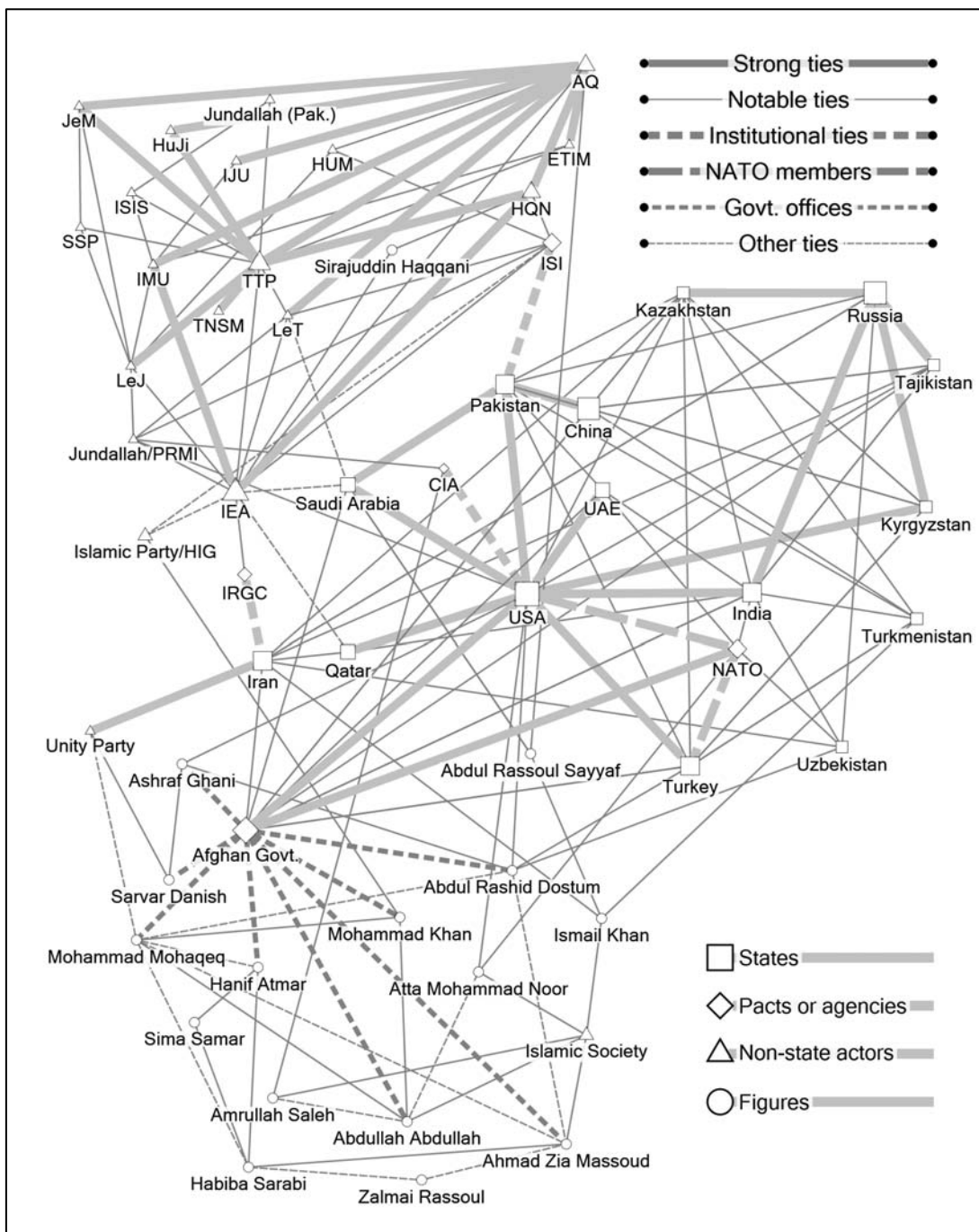
This network diagram visualizes the relationships between the parties assessed in the previous chapters. In order to capture the interplay between the domestic and the transnational dimensions of the Afghanistan conflict, notable Afghan warlords and other Afghan politicians are listed as individual figures. As the diagram demonstrates, some actors are placed at strategic locations within the network which enable them to play a key role in peace negotiations.

In comparison with the network of relationships before the 2014 presidential elections, President Ghani has been able to improve the overall position of the Afghan government by integrating warlords and other politicians with a variety of different backgrounds into the new administration. The emergence of a powerful political opposition which could become an influential political opponent of the new government has thus been prevented.

The United States remains a key player in the region in spite of the withdrawal of most of its military forces: It continues to be the most important international partner of the Afghan government and has strong alliances with other states in the region, most notably with India and Pakistan.

Two categories of actors deserve special attention when assessing the chances of a new round of peace talks in Afghanistan: Those who have ties with the insurgency, and those who are able to leverage ties with key players indirectly across the network. Pakistan, Iran, and Qatar continue to have ties or channels of communication with the Afghan Taliban that they could use in order to further facilitate the insurgents' participation in sustainable negotiations. Turkey, China, and Saudi Arabia have the potential to emerge as influential power-brokers, yet the involvement of the Arab States of the Persian Gulf, from where donations for militant Islamists continue to find their way into the region, is multifaceted.

9.2   Scenarios

As this report has shown, the conflict in Afghanistan, in both its domestic and in its regional dimension, is highly complicated and involves a wide range of actors. The current situation can be characterized as a "mutually hurting stalemate" (Zartman 2001: 1): In Afghanistan, no one is strong enough to win the war, but many are strong enough to prevent peace. The same can be said about the region: No state is strong enough to push through a regional political agenda that only serves its own goals, but many are powerful enough to keep the patterns of mistrust and hostilities alive, instead of shifting to a more cooperative regional environment.

As a result, it is complicated to predict the future of Afghanistan and the region. The following three scenarios are all possible based on the evidence presented in the previous chapters. The recommendations presented in the end of this report focus on the third scenario – an official, inclusive, multi-level peace process.

1. The **worst-case scenario** would be an escalation of the Afghan civil war which would send the country back to the 1990s. In such a scenario, the conflict of legitimacy between insurgency and government dramatically escalates because all efforts to end the war remain completely fruitless. Finally succumbing to violence from the insurgency, pressure from society, and internal conflict, the government of unity disintegrates into factions and tribal thinking. The states of the region fail to increase cooperation and to build trust, but are drawn into a spiral of increased mistrust and rivalry. As a consequence, various governments hedge their bets by beefing up support for their preferred Afghan proxies and other non-state actors across the region. As a result, Afghanistan would enter another decade of civil war in which the central government merely controls the urban centers. The Afghan Taliban and their allies expand their control in the rest of the country and different warlords struggle to carve out their own de-facto states in their strong-

holds. The level of violence would increase, and more civilians would be harmed and killed. For the radical wings of the different militant Islamist movements in the region, such an outcome would be good news, since political, socio-economic, and separatist grievances across Central Asia would grow, waiting to be exploited. Instability and chaos would also grow in Pakistan, and the region would turn into the stage of an increasingly violent, internationalized civil war.

2. In a **status-quo scenario**, a collapse of the Afghan government can be prevented through negotiations conducted by President Ghani and CEO Abdullah with warlords, international supporters, and the insurgency, yet a diplomatic breakthrough that would bring the Taliban back into the political process cannot be accomplished. The government of national unity finds a common agenda and increases legitimacy in the eyes of the people by fighting corruption and tackling economic and social problems. Still, only some factions of the insurgency join the political process, and other groups continue the armed struggle. While the Afghan government continues to receive US and international support, and while it does not face the risk of being overthrown by force, clashes between its security forces and insurgent fighters continue. There may be some reforms to the political system, and, potentially, a slight increase of trust between Afghanistan and Pakistan, yet the war does not end. Regionally, there might be some progress in policy areas on which there is overall agreement, but no "big push" for more integration. As a result, Afghanistan and Central Asia will enter a decade of "muddling through," which leads to no further deterioration of the security situation, but also no peace for Afghanistan and no hope for a more peaceful and more prosperous future for the region.

3. Finally, there is the **end-of-war scenario** in which the war in Afghanistan will come to an end as the result of inclusive peace negotiations between the government and the insurgency. It is difficult to project the path of negotiations, or even the elements of a potential settlement. Based on the previous chapters, this report recommends treating the Afghanistan conflict as intertwined with regional politics in Central Asia. The sequencing of official talks should be based on a careful analysis of all Afghan, regional, and international actors which takes their internal factions and contradictions into account. A multi-level, inclusive process should be designed in order to de-escalate the violence and to make the "end-of-war scenario" more likely.

An important goal of an inclusive negotiation process is to replace a system dominated by mistrust and hedging strategies with a system dominated by trust and cooperation. Negotiations should first address those cleavages and relationships with a high level of violence and risk of escalation. If the intra-Afghan conflict of legitimacy, the regional security dilemma, and the complicated relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan are de-escalated by means of negotiations, Afghanistan and Central Asia would move a big step closer towards a cooperative and more peaceful future.

In orchestrating a peace process, the three scenarios are a useful reference point when assessing a party's alternative to a negotiated agreement: While many parties might prefer a "muddling through" over a negotiated settlement with painful concessions, the number of parties that would prefer the "worst-case scenario" over the same agreement is much lower. Hence, parties resisting accommodation through negotiation should be confronted with the constant risk of Afghanistan collapsing into even more chaos, as long as no substantial and credible steps towards an agreement are undertaken.

9.3 Recommendations

It is extremely complicated to address all sub-conflicts in Afghanistan and Central Asia at the same time, or to build trust across the entire network. Prior to the identification of the parties' red lines and "non-negotiables," it is also difficult to predict possible results. Only exploratory talks can shed light on where concessions, compromises, and creative solutions can be found. Hence, negotiations should first address those cleavages with a high level of violence and risk of escalation, while leveraging those relationships that are essential in this particular context. These recommendations are grouped into two sets of suggestions. The first one deals with the challenge of successfully setting the table for a negotiation process, the second one with key issues to be addressed once this has been accomplished.

The guiding premise should be that only a multi-level peace agreement that eventually secures the buy-in from all relevant parties to the conflict will be sustainable and guarantee lasting peace in Afghanistan and beyond. In a mutually hurting stalemate, a "ripe moment" occurs when the parties realize they cannot win a war relying on the use of force and subsequently engage in negotiations. It is hard to assess whether the conflict in Afghanistan already reached this "ripe moment": On the one hand, the insurgents might see a chance to gain influence in the context of the establishment of a new government and the withdrawal of most international troops if they beef up their attacks. "There is an emerging consensus in Afghanistan that the insurgents will only talk seriously after testing the military strength of Afghan forces once the internationals exit" (ICG 2014: 5), an anticipation proved by the attacks on the day of the inauguration of the new government (Clark 2014c) and several prominent attacks in Kabul since then. On the other hand, the Taliban have shown willingness to negotiate in Qatar, where they opened an office in 2012, as well as in several other exploratory talks since then, most recently in a new round co-facilitated by China. Previous negotiation attempts between the Taliban and the US failed; according to the Taliban, because of "Washington's failure to fulfill the conditions for peace negotiations to proceed" (Ayman 2013: 14). Even though the peace process will take a long time, all negotiation attempts from all parties should be taken seriously. This requires all parties to the conflict to not use a ceasefire merely in order to prepare the next round of attacks, or to constantly blame others for not living up to expectations in terms of building trust, but to seriously engage in accommodation through dialogue. Some examples that might facilitate a negotiation process and help setting the table are the following:

- NATO and the US should accept that they are parties involved in the conflict instead of pretending to be neutral actors whose sole interest it is to keep the peace. This includes, for instance, an admission of "mistakes made in their approach to Afghanistan before and after 2001" (Foxley 2013: 38). In order to build trust, the US could, in close collaboration with the Afghan government, offer an **unlimited cease-fire and enter negotiations with the insurgency without conditions**. The Afghan government, the US, and NATO should also guarantee that members of insurgency participating in exploratory talks are not going to be arrested, persecuted, or attacked during the armistice. Such a process would have to be designed in a way that a further reduction of the "state's already thin monopoly of the use of force" (ICG 2012: 23) can be prevented.

- While it will be very difficult to convince the insurgency to join official negotiations, most scholars argue that it is not impossible. A main incentive could be **international political legitimacy in return for integration** in the existing political system in Afghanistan. One of the main challenges is that the Afghan insurgency is not one united group with a representative leadership. While the HIG signaled willingness to join negotiations, the Haqqani network seems to be more opposed, and different factions of the Taliban disagree (Jack-

son/Giustozzi 2012: 9; Giustozzi 2013: 2). Following the transition of the Taliban leadership from Mullah Omar to Mullah Mansour, these divisions are likely to erupt again, possible preventing the new Taliban leadership from embracing a clear stance towards peace talks. Therefore, a successful armistice would not necessarily mean that all violence in Afghanistan would cease immediately. However, when in 2008, Kai Eide, then Head of UNAMA, successfully lobbied ISAF, the Afghan government and the Taliban for a stop of military operations on world peace day, security incidents fell by an impressive 70%. Hence, with the official buy-in from the Taliban leadership, and with the support of a significant part of the insurgency, it is possible to de-escalate the armed conflict considerably.

- In a long-term perspective, a **coordinated framework** is necessary in order to facilitate negotiations. The Afghan High Peace Council (HPC) has been trying to initiate talks with Taliban leaders, yet it never gained enough legitimacy. Up until now, negotiations "have been very poorly coordinated, if at all" (Sheikh 2013: 7). Initiatives are lacking a common agenda and "bargains are being cut with any and all comers, regardless of their political relevance or ability to influence outcomes" (ICG 2012: i). The different tracks have to be synchronized in one negotiation framework that is accepted by all parties to the conflict.

- To be successful, the process leading to negotiations and the negotiations itself should be accompanied by a **mediator.** While the UN is not perceived as a neutral actor by all parties, major Afghan Civil Society Organizations could potentially establish a mediation team representing the country's ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. Afghan-led negotiations could facilitate the insurgency's buy-in, and traditional ways of conflict resolution could be included. National institutions that could assist and provide resources are the HPC and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. For the organization and mediation of negotiations on the international level, Afghan Civil Society Organizations could ask relatively neutral yet influential states, such as Turkey, Germany, and China, as well as international organizations such as the UN and CICA to appoint a mediating task force. The mediator's main task would be to guarantee transparency and inclusiveness and to promote the coordinated negotiation framework suggested above.

- A key task in the first phase of peace negotiations is the identification of the red lines of the different parties. This can only be successful within an environment of trust. To this end, further **confidence-building measures** are conceivable, such as prisoner exchanges and a removal of Taliban leaders from the UN sanctions list. Another proposal is the involvement of

    "the Taliban in 'joint' projects with a group or groups they trust [which] might give the Taliban a more tangible stake in society. […] Once they have taken a small step to support development of the country (this is how it should be presented) it becomes harder for them to reverse direction. They become accountable and responsible for their work". (Foxley 2013: 38)

- The representatives of the insurgency who join negotiations should be convinced that they can **change the political system within the framework of the constitution** of Afghanistan. A major incentive is that most of them are based in Pakistan, but long for more independence from the ISI (Waldman/Wright 2014: 23). Instead of blaming a Taliban/ISI alliance for instability in Afghanistan, Afghan politicians should frame negotiations as a chance for the Afghan Taliban to emancipate themselves from their Pakistani patrons. As a political party, they would have the right to act openly but independently within Afghanistan and they could influence the political developments as long as Afghans vote for them. To signal the willingness of the Afghan government to open this road, a discussion about changes to the constitution in the Loya Jirga could be proposed. The Government of National Unity plans a reform of the constitution in order to transform the position of the CEO into a Prime

Minister within the next two years. Possible issues to be reformed that could be of interest to the Taliban as well to other parties could be:

– *Decentralization:* During their election campaigns, Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani have announced their support for a decentralization of the political system in order to better represent the diversity of the country. While the Taliban did not officially announce their support for this policy, it might be in their interest, since it reflects their decentralized structure (Waldman/Wright 2014: 14).

– *Provincial governors:* Currently, the provincial governors are appointed by the President. In the context of the decentralization, this task could be transferred to the provincial councils. This could be a plus for the insurgency, since they are more likely to be able to influence politics on district and provincial levels, especially in their Southern strongholds. Furthermore, the role of the provincial governors should be defined more precisely. With more clearly defined and locally integrated positions, the provincial governors could also play a significant role in reconciliation programs (Semple 2009: 58–59).

– *Election law:* According to the Government of National Unity reform plans, a new election law will be implemented before the 2015 parliamentary elections. A broad participation in preparation and organization could lead to a higher degree of acceptance of the results. Since it is probably unrealistic to get the insurgents' buy-in already for this round of elections, the government could try to convince the insurgency to at least not openly attack the elections, but to only "boycott" them.

When addressing changes to the constitution, it is important to be aware of ethnic tensions: "Claims of discrimination or unfair distribution of resources or power are a major potential cause of social unrest and violence" (Sheikh/Greenwood 2013: 33). Another challenge is that not only members of the government, but also international actors and their constituencies are opposed to an inclusion of insurgent groups into the political system: The US Congress would not accept a negotiation approach that could lead to a perceived threat of American national security. The restriction of human rights will also not be acceptable for important external stakeholders. However, the Taliban already control a significant part of Afghanistan, and their territorial influence is likely to expand without a peace agreement (Waldman/Wright 2014: 14). Opinion polls among Afghan elders suggest that for them, the "best-case scenario for the future was a peace settlement, where the Taliban would be incorporated into a coalition government" (Giustozzi 2014: 25).

As previously analyzed, Taliban commanders and fighters are motivated by diverse and often local motives (Bew et al. 2013: 47). Consequently, parts of the Taliban could feel that they are not included in formal negotiations and might join factions opposed to a peace agreement, such as the *Mahaz-e Fedayeen* (ICG 2014: 6). A new generation of young and radical Taliban might not be willing to denounce their affiliation to international jihadist organizations (Bew et al. 2013: 47). Additionally, "certain power-holders, including warlords, drug-traffickers and local commanders, have an interest in continuing instability, given the profits available in the war economy" (Waldman/Wright 2014: 13). For these reasons, "one might expect an intensification of violence in those periods when peace talks take place" (Sheikh 2013: 11).

Efforts to integrate insurgents on a lower level into the political system have been made in programs such as the *Prosay-e Tahkim-e Solh* and the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP). These programs are based on the idea that many fighters are not motivated by political reasons and thus can be convinced to lay down their arms if given the right incentives. These programs have not been successful, mainly because they failed to address insurgents actively included in fighting and could not provide alternatives and protection against the Taliban

(Ayman 2013: 5–6; Semple 2009: 55). All these issues have to be considered when sequencing peace talks. Once a peace process has been successfully launched, the following suggestions might be helpful in order to avoid impasse and secure sustainability:

- Because of the risk of radicalization of local insurgents and of the failure to reconcile individuals, confidence-building measures should not address only the Taliban leadership, and not only their Islamic Emirate, but the **broad range of the Afghan insurgency**. "Any deal that appears to give preferential treatment to the Taliban is likely to spark a significant backlash" from other militant groups (ICG 2012: ii).

- The Afghan insurgency is a mainly national actor and should be given the chance to integrate itself into the political system. A tricky issue is the status of US and NATO troops in Afghanistan. The Taliban demand their complete withdrawal which is unacceptable for the Afghan government. A possible way out could be a **referendum**: Taliban, government, and NATO and US all claim to have the best interest of the Afghans in mind, so no one should have objections to asking the people if they support a limited, military assistance presence for an interim timeframe. Potentially, such an idea could be floated in order to test the willingness of the insurgency to accept voting as a national decision-making tool if it is not associated with the current constitution and related elections (which the Taliban do not recognize).

- A bilateral component of a treaty system that defuses the regional security dilemma could be a **non-aggression agreement** between Afghanistan and Pakistan, including a prohibition of the support of armed groups in the other country and credible verification and monitoring mechanisms. Pakistan would stop interfering in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan, and Afghanistan would accept the Durand line as the official border between Afghanistan and Pakistan and declare its neutrality concerning Pakistani-Indian relations. Such an inclusion of Pakistan into the peace process would not only have a positive impact on economic development, but would also help to reach out to the Afghan insurgency and reduce incentives to Pakistan to hedge their bets by strengthening its ties with the Taliban.

- An "all-in" solution to the security dilemma could be a **Standing Conference for Security and Co-operation in Central Asia** modeled on the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. As the Istanbul Process has shown, a main obstacle would be the willingness of relevant states, such as Russia, Iran, and Pakistan, to commit themselves to long-term, multilateral frameworks. Turkey may have the potential to mediate and to give a project for more regional integration another push. Given its strong cultural and historical connection with Afghanistan, Turkey is perceived as a friendly state and has already made significant efforts at initiating peace talks and summits with Afghanistan and Pakistan. China also has recently embraced intra-Afghan reconciliation efforts and could also play a more active, productive, facilitating role in regional politics. The "Gulf stream" of money from the Arabian Peninsula into the region can be turned into an asset, if it is not channeled to projects which primarily serve geostrategic and sectarian purposes and ultimately strengthen militant Islamist movements that also the donors cannot control. The Arab States of the Persian Gulf should thus be encouraged to increase their economic aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, especially in education, health care, and housing.

- To support this process, the US and the international community should commit to long-term support for Afghanistan and the region, potentially in the form of a "**Stability Pact for Central Asia.**" From a Western perspective, further assistance and involvement in Central Asia could both have a strategic and a humanitarian motive: Decreasing interest of EU and US in the region combined with the withdrawal of NATO troops could invite a greater in-

volvement and influence of other powers such as Russia, Iran, and China (Kassenova 2014: 29). But also, after more than a decade of war and NATO military involvement, it would be cynical to simply retreat without committing to correcting mistakes and mitigating the consequences of one's own presence. Peace in Afghanistan can only be achieved with domestic reconciliation, regional cooperation, and international support. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan would be a benefit for all neighboring countries and for Central Asia.

Official, inclusive peace negotiations in Afghanistan might not be successful. Perhaps the frictions within the insurgency are too strong, the political environment is too hostile, and the conflict is too intertwined with regional politics. But it is an option worth trying. Even some Taliban commanders see peace and security as their final goal: "I want the world to remove their young guys from Afghanistan, not to see them killed, and them not to kill our young guys; and not to cause our women and children to cry, or to make your women and your children cry" (quoted by Waldman 2010: 6).

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Abbreviations

AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network
ACCI	Afghan Chamber of Commerce & Industries
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ANCB	Afghan NGOs Coordination Bureau
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
APRP	Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program
AQ	Al-Qaeda
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BLA	Balochistan Liberation Army
BLF	Baluch Liberation Front
BSA	Bilateral Security Agreement
CASA	Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project
CBM	Confidence building measures
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CDC	Community Development Council
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSHRN	Civil Society & Human Rights Network
CSIS	Center for Strategic & International Studies
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EAU	Eurasian (Economic) Union
EIJ	Egyptian Islamic Jihad
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
EU	European Union
FAS	Federation of American Scientists
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Pakistan)
FCCS	Foundation for Culture and Civil Society
FSB	Federal Security Service (Russia)
FSKN	Federal Drug Control Service of the Russian Federation
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIP	General Intelligence Presidency of Saudi Arabia
Govt.	Government
HA	Heart of Asia
HIG	Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus

HPC	High Peace Council
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
HQN	Haqqani Network
HSM	Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen
HuM	Harkat-ul-Mujahideen-al-Islami
HuJi	Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami
HuT	Hizb-ut-Tahir
ICG	International Crisis Group
IEA	Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
IJU	Islamic Jihad Union
IMFEAU	Implantation militaire française aux Émirats arabes unis
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IP	Istanbul Process
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRoA	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (Pakistan)
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISW	Institute for the Study of War
JeM	Jaish-e-Mohammad
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
LeI	Lashkar-e-Islam
LeJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba
MCC	China Metallurgical Group Corporation
MİT	Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı; National Intelligence Organization (Turkey)
MUJWA	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDN	Northern Distribution Network
NDS	National Directorate of Security (Afghanistan)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPR	National Public Radio
NYU	New York University
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OFS	Operation Freedom's Sentinel
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PRMI	People's Resistance Movement of Iran
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RSM	Resolute Support Mission
QIA	Qatar Investment Authority
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SCOP	Supreme Court of Pakistan

SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
SSP	Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline
TIKA	Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency
TNSM	Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi
TTP	Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
US; USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAMY	World Assembly of Muslim Youth
WHO	World Health Organization
WML	World Muslim League

Map
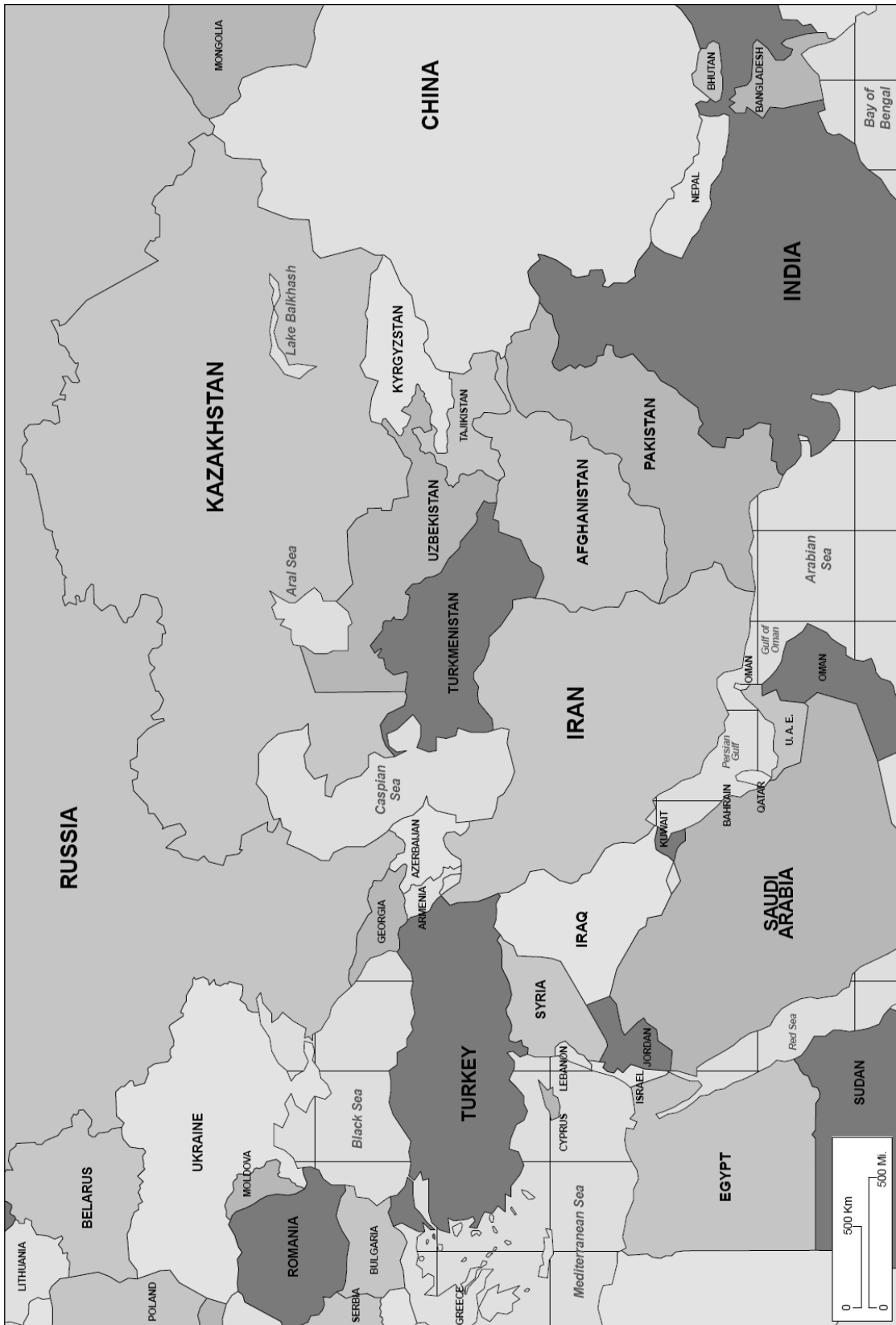
Source: Cartographic Research Laboratory, College of Arts and Sciences at The University of Alabama.