

## THE AFGHAN TRANSFORMATION: PRIORITIES AND KEY PROBLEMS

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### ABSTRACT

**T**his article examines the Afghan transformation that has been manifesting itself in such spheres as security, politics, and the economy. It is fed by the withdrawal of the international forces from Afghanistan. But, according to the author, this process, which is of an all-encompassing

and systemic nature, is having a direct effect on the key aspects of society's vital activity, as well as, due to Afghanistan's particular geopolitical position, on the situation in Central and South Asia. Political and ethnic fragmentation is the main component in the current internal Afghan situation.

**KEYWORDS:** *Afghan transformation, Afghan national army and police, Afghanization of the conflict, armed opposition, Talibanization, political dialog, internal Afghan actors, national security, international community.*

“Unlike other wars, Afghan wars become serious only when they are over.”

*Sir Olaf Caroe*<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction*

The current stalemate situation that has ensued from the attempt to forcefully untie the so-called Afghan knot is showing the world once again how ineffective it is to resolve the problem by military means. The Afghan mission, or most likely another instance of foreign military intervention, began very successfully: the Taliban regime was overthrown by only<sup>2</sup> “100 officers of the Central Intelligence Agency, 350 U.S. special servicemen, and 15,000 Afghans” in less than three months.<sup>3</sup> All the political forces, apart from the Taliban movement, participated in the transitional “coalition” govern-

<sup>1</sup> Governor of the North-West Frontier Province in British India (1946-1947).

<sup>2</sup> For comparison: at present around 100,000 international servicemen (at the peak of the foreign military presence there were up to 140,000) and more than 350,000 Afghans (national army and police), not counting the contract soldiers from private security agencies and volunteers, are involved in the fight against the armed opposition or in its overthrow.

<sup>3</sup> See: S.G. Jones, “The Rise of Afghanistan’s Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad, *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 4, Spring 2008, p. 7.

ment formed.<sup>4</sup> But in so doing the main warning was ignored that had long been reflected in historical precedents relating to the sad fates of nations that tried to undertake similar action against the Afghan people.

Afghanistan is the heart of Asia and this is its historical mission. "Its prosperity," said Mohammad Iqbal Lahori, "brings prosperity to Asia, and its decay brings decay to Asia."<sup>5</sup>

These words of the poet and philosopher, the founding father of Pakistan, are still pertinent to this day; from the viewpoint of Central Asian security (and not only of this region) and in light of the imminent withdrawal of the coalition troops from Afghanistan, they act as a reminder.

The NATO Lisbon Summit (2010), which was held under the slogan of Afghanization of the conflict, set the deadline for the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan.

So one more foreign interference, which cost more than 100,000 Afghans and 3,000 coalition forces soldiers their lives, has entered its final phase; the mission that consisted of overthrowing the Taliban regime and removing the leader of al-Qa'eda has been accomplished.

Nevertheless, peace has not come to Afghanistan. The domestic political situation in the country remains fragile and its prospects in no way instill hope. The struggle for power and influence among the political forces belonging to different ethnic/confessional groups is intensifying against the background of the ISAF withdrawal and the upcoming presidential election. What is more, the positive results achieved are being cancelled out by the high level of corruption.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the efforts of the international community, the Afghan National Army and Police (ANAP), caught in a web of internal problems, is hardly ready to or capable of conducting an efficient struggle against the armed opposition. Under these circumstances, the position and influence of the Taliban as a party in a possible political dialog with the authorities are strengthening.

The situation that has emerged is largely reminiscent of a recent page in Afghan history associated with the withdrawal of Soviet troops from this country. The Afghan transformation, which is being regarded by many as a compulsory and necessary step toward withdrawal from the current situation, is arousing a certain feeling of *déjà vu*.

## Transformation in the Security Sphere

The withdrawal of the international forces from the country is the starting point and driving force behind the Afghan transformation.<sup>7</sup> In the internal Afghan context, this process is of an all-en-

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<sup>4</sup> Lahdar Brahimi, Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General for Afghanistan and architect of the first Bonn Agreement, post factum called the exclusion of the Taliban from the Bonn Agreement and, correspondingly, the formation of the transition government, a mistake (see: L. Brahimi, "A New Path for Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, Sunday, 7 December, 2008). Asad Durrani, former head of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan, also claims that in 2002, the Taliban's proposal regarding cooperation was rejected by the Kabul regime (see: A. Durrani, "Post-NATO Afghanistan: Implications for Regional Security," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 4, October-December 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from: *Statement by Hamid Karzai at the opening of the Istanbul Conference for Afghanistan: Security & Cooperation at the Heart of Asia*, 2 November, 2011, available at [<http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/4585>].

<sup>6</sup> Afghanistan ranks 180th among 183 world states in terms of corruption level (see: K. Gannon, "Taliban Popular Where U.S. Fought Biggest Battle," *The Washington Times*, 11 December, 2012, available at [<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/dec/11/taliban-popular-where-us-fought-biggest-battle/>]).

<sup>7</sup> A three-phase ISAF withdrawal plan has been drawn up. Its first phase began in July 2011 with the withdrawal of 650 U.S. servicemen from Parwan Province to the north of Kabul (see: *Afghanistan, an IHS Jane's Special Report*, October 2011, p. 26).

compassing and systemic nature and directly influences the key aspects of society's vital activity; due to Afghanistan's special geopolitical position, it also has an influence on the stability and security of Central and South Asia.

This situation is explained primarily by the fact that at the current stage the ISAF is acting as an effective instrument for counteracting the armed Afghan opposition; the presence of the coalition forces is creating relative stability of the country's political system. Moreover, the presence of the foreign military contingent ensuring the functioning of Afghanistan's so-called wartime economy is an important means for forming the country's budget and sources of personal income. In the current situation, carrying out political and economic reforms is an invariable condition of the Afghan transformation along with ensuring security.

Afghanization of the conflict (that is, placing the responsibility for the country's domestic and foreign security on the shoulders of the Afghans themselves) and achieving independence of the ANAP is the cornerstone of the transformation in this sphere. In this case, independence implies combat-readiness and efficiency of the Afghan army and police.

At present, the size of the ANAP, "the backbone of long-term security and stability,"<sup>8</sup> amounts to 352,000 people, 195,000 of whom belong to the army and 157,000 to the police.<sup>9</sup>

Afghanistan's military budget, which is formed from international aid, amounts to around \$4 billion. A military education system has been created: the National Defense University, National Military Academy, and Literacy Center are functioning, and a sergeant training system—the bastion of the Afghan army—is being formed.<sup>10</sup> Afghani servicemen go through regular internship in the NATO member states.

Nevertheless, the question of whether the ANAP is independently capable of opposing the armed opposition after 2014 remains a topic of serious discussion within the expert community. Reaching a unanimous opinion is made difficult both by external conditions and by the realities of Afghanistan's present-day domestic political life.

*Efficiency*—this is primarily the ANAP's ability to carry out military operations without external support; it primarily implies internal solidarity and unity of the army and police. The latter, in turn, ensues from common goals and tasks at the national level, that is, achieving efficiency of the armed forces rests on both a physical and spiritual (ideological) foundation.

*The viability* of the Afghan armed forces (both today and after 2014) directly depends on external financial aid. The roots of this dependence run quite deep and are largely related to an artificial change in the natural course of development of the country's history, on which the British colonial policy has had a significant influence.

The stability and constancy of the above-mentioned aid is the key factor in strengthening the material and technical base of the armed forces, as well as the guarantee of their complete control by the authorities. The absence of the necessary financial and material aid could lead to a weakening in Kabul's position and the establishment of contacts between separate groups existing in the army and police and representatives of the armed opposition.

There have already been similar examples in Afghanistan's contemporary history: for example, the fall of the Najibullah regime (March 1991) was mainly the result of the Soviet Union ceasing its assistance to the country in December 1990. In this respect, the decision made at the international donors' meeting during the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan to give the country \$16 billion serves as a kind of signal both for the government and for the country's armed opposition. In so doing, the

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<sup>8</sup> *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, United States Plan for Sustaining the Afghanistan National Security Forces*, Department of Defense, USA, April 2012, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> See: *The Economist*, 27 October-2 November, 2012, p. 55.

main problem for the donor states is still the absence of a real struggle against corruption and an efficient mechanism for implementing international aid.

According to the Pentagon's last report, only one of the Afghan National Army's 23 contingents is capable of functioning independently without the support of the ISAF.<sup>11</sup> In so doing, special emphasis is placed on the absence of heavy weapons and complete dependence of Afghanistan's armed forces on air support from the NATO forces. As of the present, all the operations (including joint) have been carried out with air support from the international forces. The airplanes (30) and helicopters (50) at the disposal of the Afghan army are "either out of service, or have essentially completely exhausted their resources and are in need of major repairs."<sup>12</sup>

The configuration of Afghanistan's political power is a kind of reflection of the country's geographical landscape, on which social life largely depends; it was precisely this factor that caused a certain amount of diversity of the ethnic, religious, cultural, and civilizational appearance of the Afghan people. The events of recent years have upset the fragile balance that existed among the various components of Afghanistan's multiethnic society. The complex and contradictory nature of ethnic and confessional relations in Afghanistan is manifested in the army and police, which are integral components and derivatives of society.

A regular army is an attribute of any sovereign state and a guarantee of the regime's stability, whereby it is bonded by a single national goal. However, in order to retain their power and maintain a balance among ethnic groups, political regimes have had to rely on irregular forces in the form of volunteers belonging to different groups or militarized subdivisions especially created for these purposes.<sup>13</sup> In so doing, the latter acted as a reliable tool for suppressing national/people's uprisings.

Nevertheless, the Afghan rulers have always had their sights set on forming a regular army. Emir Abdurahman-khan (1880-1901) was the first to attempt this at the end of the 19th century, believing the army to be a key tool in strengthening the centralized Afghan state. Material support<sup>14</sup> and a rational attitude toward society's traditional role in this process ensured the relative success of this undertaking.<sup>15</sup>

Another similar attempt is related to the name of Amanulla-khan (1919-1929), who introduced a lottery call-up system. A lottery was held among people with IDs, although it excluded the participation of elders, which caused discontent and national uprisings.

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<sup>11</sup> See: *The Economist*, 12-18 January, 2013, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> A. Karpov, "Perspektivy razvitiya voenno-politicheskoi obstanovki v Afganistane v sviazi s vyvodom inostrannykh voisk," *Zarubezhnoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 7, 2012, p. 13. At present, Afghanistan's air force is for the most part deployed in Bagram (more than 40 units), Kandahar, and Shindand. Their capabilities are expanded by means of facilities in Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Jalalabad.

<sup>13</sup> This practice was begun by Afghanistan's founding father Ahmad Shah Durrani, who made active use of the Qizilbash and tribes of Kohistan as a counterbalance to the Pushtun tribal armies. This role was also given to Najibullah's special guards, who were mainly ethnic Tajiks subordinate neither to the Ministry of Defense, nor the Ministry of Internal Affairs. A. Dostum's 53rd division (at the end of the 1980s), the numerical strength of which reached 40,000 people (1991), served as the backbone of the regime and its only effective mobile reserve (see: B.R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 2nd ed., Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 157, 160).

<sup>14</sup> British subsidies, a kind of reward for Afghanistan's buffer status, were actively used to maintain the army of recruits. Beginning in 1882, emir Abdurahman-khan received an annual subsidy of 1.2 million Indian rupees, which increased to 1.8 million after an agreement on the so-called Durand Line was signed in 1893 (see: B.R. Rubin, op. cit., p. 49).

<sup>15</sup> Traditionally, the Afghan tribes were endowed with certain government functions: tithes and taxes were imposed on them and they were responsible for calling the regular tribe members to war, etc. Abdurahman-khan did not violate this tradition, retaining the leading role of village or clan elders. He used the system of indirect call-up, according to which a recruit was nominated by choosing one person from a group of eight people. In so doing, the other families were to pay for his upkeep, which also promoted an increase in money into the treasury (see: L. Temirkhanov, *Vostochnye pushtuny (osnovnye problemy novoi istorii)*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1987, p. 7; B.R. Rubin, op. cit.).

Nor did the efforts of the communists to introduce mandatory army service by offering different benefits and privileges lead to desirable results.<sup>16</sup> The attempts of the Taliban were the reason for the rebellion that occurred in 1997 in the very heart of the regime, Kandahar, when their recruiters were killed by the rebels; later the ultimatum of the tribal leaders in Paktia, Khost, Paktika, and Gardez led to the removal of governors of these provinces (2000).<sup>17</sup>

From the contemporary and historical viewpoint, this kind of phenomenon in Afghan society is more legitimate than coincidental. There is a stable drop in the number of recruits from the southern provinces of Afghanistan populated mainly by Pushtuns: Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Zabol, Paktika, and Gazni. They account for only 1.5% of the total number of recruits, although they comprise 17% of the country's population.<sup>18</sup> This trend is one of the reasons for the ethnic imbalance<sup>19</sup> and fragmentation in the armed forces, which is fraught with negative consequences.

Nevertheless, the use of irregular forces is still an integral part of present-day Afghanistan. In particular, the local Afghan police is being formed and actively used with the direct support of special U.S. forces. It serves as a fulcrum for maintaining stability in the Afghan village, and its ranks are replenished by local residents.

The irregular forces enjoy significant independence. What is more, they are largely competing with the regular forces. The Karzai government, which agreed under pressure to implement the idea of creating the local police, is now accusing the U.S. of "creating parallel groups and structures" of Afghan forces uncontrolled by the authorities.<sup>20</sup>

Such problems as desertion, illiteracy,<sup>21</sup> drug use among the staff, low level of management, corruption, and ties with criminal groups prevent the armed forces from undergoing reform and becoming efficient. The worst of these problems is desertion; for example, in the first half of 2011, one out of seven servicemen abandoned the military.<sup>22</sup> In 2012, this index amounted to around 10%. In some cases, the statistics on the number of recruits and deserters coincide. The main reasons for the high level of desertion include servicemen worrying about the safety of their families (who may be threatened by the Taliban), unwillingness to serve far from their home, financial difficulties, ethnic contradictions, and so on.

On 2 May, 2012, a bilateral agreement on strategic partnership was signed between the U.S. and Afghanistan. According to this document, American servicemen are permitted access to facilities that belong to the Afghan armed forces.<sup>23</sup>

After 2014, the American servicemen mission will consist of training the ANAP and opposing al-Qa'eda. The details of this issue were to have been enforced in a separate special bilateral agreement on security, the terms of which have not yet been approved by the sides. There are

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<sup>16</sup> In particular, in 1987, 92% of all the recruits were people from Kabul (see: A. Arnold, "The Ephemeral Elite: The Failure of Socialist Afghanistan," in: *The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, ed. by M. Weiner, A. Banuazizi, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1994, p. 58).

<sup>17</sup> See: A. Rashid, *Taliban: The Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond*, I.B. Tauris, London, New York, 2010, pp. 80, 103.

<sup>18</sup> See: *Afghanistan, an IHS Jane's Special Report*, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> At present, ethnic Tajiks predominate in the army and police, including among the officers (also high-ranking).

<sup>20</sup> *The Economist*, 2-8 March, 2013, p. 56.

<sup>21</sup> In 2012, more than 112,000 people, that is, one third of the entire ANAP, signed up to take literacy courses organized within the framework of the NATO training program (see: *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, Department of Defense, p. 5).

<sup>22</sup> See: *Afghanistan, an IHS Jane's Special Report*, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> See: *Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, available at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/2012.06.01u.s.-afghanistanspasignedtext.pdf>].

disputes over issues relating to defining the status of the American servicemen,<sup>24</sup> closing all American prisons/detention centers in Afghanistan, and transferring the prisoners to the Afghan authorities. In turn, the Afghan authorities are considering the possibility of giving immunity to American servicemen in conjunction with the indicated demands.

## Political Transformation as the Foundation of Internal Afghan Stability

The political system is intended for executing state power, that is, determining national goals and tasks, distributing material benefits, and ensuring security. So the government, which has all the legitimate powers and means at its disposal, acts as the main component of the political system and is the guarantor of its stability. The stability of the economic system and efficiency of the security system depend on the sustainability of the political system.

According to this logic, political transformation should occupy a central place in the priorities of the Afghan reforms; however, it has been overshadowed by security problems.

The presidential election to be held in 2014 and the establishment of a political dialog with the Taliban movement are the key issues (priorities) of political transformation. Solving these equally important and interrelated tasks is largely the responsibility of the Afghans themselves (in contrast to the security problems) and depends on their political will, desires, and ability to find a compromise and consolidate the domestic political forces.

The first centralized national Afghan state was created in 1747; since then all power (military, economic, and ideological) has been concentrated in the hands of one person. Top priority has been placed on the narrow interests of family, clan, or tribe; patronage, kinship, and nepotism have been the most important factors in organizing public and state life.

In this respect, N. Shakhvani notes: "The primary reason for the failure has been the unwillingness or inability of the leadership to shift from a tribal political culture anchored in person-centered politics to a broader, more inclusive, participatory national politics based on the development of modern national institutions and ideologies."<sup>25</sup>

In such conditions, the continuity and legitimacy of power are the most important factors in political stability. Since 1933, there has not been one peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan and, while the 2014 presidential election will be legitimate, it will be an unprecedented event in the country's contemporary history (the "peaceful transfer" from Babrak Karmal to Mohammed Najibullah is the only exception).

According to the present Afghanistan Constitution, the same person cannot be elected president for more than two terms in a row. This constitutional provision is preventing current Afghan Head of State Hamid Karzai from being legally nominated for a third term. But several aspects of Afghan political life are arousing concern in the opposition and international community.

In December 2012, Hamid Karzai submitted a draft law to the parliament for perusal that envisages establishing new limits (voting qualifications) for candidates to the post of head of state. Accord-

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<sup>24</sup> Barack Obama said during Hamid Karzai's visit to Washington: "Nowhere do we have any kind of security agreement with a country without immunity for our troops" (*Afghanistan: Obama Wants Immunity for Soldiers Who Remain after 2014*, available at [<http://theaseantimes.com/4971/afghanistan-obama-wants-immunity-for-soldiers-who-remain-after-2014/>]).

<sup>25</sup> N. Shahrani, *Resisting the Taliban and Talibanism in Afghanistan: Legacies of a Century of Internal Colonialism and Cold War Politics in a Buffer State*, available at [<http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/M.-NAZIF-SHAHRANI.pdf>].

ing to this draft law, the candidate should have free command of two languages (Dari and Pushtu), have no less than 10 years in civil service, have a university diploma, not have any disabilities or physical defects, and so on.

Afghanistan occupies second place (after Cambodia) in terms of the number of disabled persons per capita, while Kabul is the most mined capital in the world.<sup>26</sup> Many leading political figures (in particular former minister of internal affairs Hanif Atmar and former parliament speaker Yunus Kanuni) and potential presidential candidates have physical injuries they acquired in fighting or as the result of terrorist acts. The requirement relating to time in office realistically removes members of the Taliban from office. As for the provision on having a university diploma, it largely removes the warlords (who remained all these years in Afghanistan) from the list and increases the possibilities of the technocrats or so-called Westerners.

It should be noted that many people believe the true intention of this act to be an attempt to remove people Hamid Karzai finds unsuitable from participating in the election campaign to attain the post of head of state with the aim of tilling the necessary ground for his “successor/chosen one.” These presumptions have some validity in light of Makhmud Karzai, Hamid Karzai’s brother, rejecting U.S. citizenship in order to take active part in the country’s political life,<sup>27</sup> and Makhmud Karzai’s statement regarding support of Abdul Kaium (Hamid Karzai’s second brother), if nominated for the post of president.

Moreover, the outlines of a political struggle can be seen all the more clearly in these trends, the most significant element of which is traditionally the so-called ethnic factor. The Council for Cooperation of Afghan Political Parties and Alliances (CCAPPA), uniting 21 Afghanistan’s political parties and 30 public organizations, is a real internal Afghan force.<sup>28</sup> The National Front says it will nominate one candidate for the upcoming presidential election.<sup>29</sup>

“By 2015, the Taliban, Hezb-e-Islami, and other armed groups will give up armed opposition, transform from military formations into political, and take active part in the country’s political and constitutional life, including the national elections...The NATO/ISAF forces will withdraw from Afghanistan, leaving the Afghan national security forces as the only legal armed forces called upon to ensure security and protect the Afghan people.”<sup>30</sup> The optimism of the High Peace Council of Afghanistan heard in this forecast is generated by the hope that a constructive dialog will be established with the armed opposition.

A dialog with the armed opposition is an integral part of achieving stability in Afghanistan, and all the sides in the conflict, which are official Kabul, the U.S./NATO, the Taliban, and Pakistan, are looking at this opportunity through the prism of their own interests.

In 2010, the High Peace Council of Afghanistan was formed, which called for establishing a political dialog with the armed opposition. The priority areas in achieving it are reintegration, which presumes incorporating members of the armed opposition into Afghan society, and reconciliation, which implies their inclusion in the government.

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<sup>26</sup> See: J.E. Stern, *Karzai’s Stealth Bid to Fix the Elections*, 18 December, 2012, available at [[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/18/does\\_afghanistan\\_need\\_a\\_dictator](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/18/does_afghanistan_need_a_dictator)].

<sup>27</sup> On the eve of the presidential election in 2009, a law was adopted that banned people with dual citizenship from participating in elections. As a result, some of the contenders, including Ali Jalali, former Afghan minister of internal affairs (2003-2005), were unable to participate in the election.

<sup>28</sup> The Council’s members include such political heavyweights as Abdullah Abdullah, Abdul Rashid Dostum, Mohammad Mokhakik, Ahmad Zia Masud, Amrullah Saleh, Hanif Atmar, Atta Muhammad Nur, and others.

<sup>29</sup> “Afganskaia oppositsiia dvinet na prezidentskie vybory edinogo kandidata,” 28 January, 2013, available in Russian at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1359361920>].

<sup>30</sup> *Peace Process Roadmap to 2015*, High Peace Council, November 2012 [[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/121213\\_Peace\\_Process\\_Roadmap\\_to\\_2015.pdf](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/121213_Peace_Process_Roadmap_to_2015.pdf)].

Moreover, the Afghan National Peace and Reintegration Program, which became the ideological continuation of the Afghan government's Peace through Reinforcement initiative, is being implemented with financial support from the international community.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, there are several internal and external factors that prevent consent being reached in Afghanistan; they include corruption, the absence of law and order and stability (which is related to the government's inability to take the situation under control), alienation of the government from the population, etc.

The forces acting on the Afghan political scene are heterogeneous. In addition to Hamid Karzai's government and the so-called Northern Alliance, which occupy the dominating position, there are also other political parties and civil society institutions in the country; the CCAPPA acts as the foundation of the anti-Taliban opposition. Pakistan is still the most important external factor, which does not share the same viewpoint as either official Kabul or the U.S. on key issues.

The Taliban is sticking to its guns in its irreconcilability to the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan. This irreconcilability goes against the U.S.'s Afghan strategy, which envisages the further military presence of coalition troops in the country.

According to Asad Durrani, leaving operational forces at the Afghanistan bases "is already an actual guarantee of the fact that the conflict in this country will be permanent... Essentially, one of the sides must fully and completely leave Afghanistan."<sup>32</sup>

This is creating a kind of vicious circle: a political dialog with the Taliban has to be established for withdrawing the foreign troops, on the one hand, while talks will begin only after the U.S. and NATO troops leave Afghanistan, on the other.

In turn, the main demands of the U.S. and Karzai's government require a break in relations with al-Qa'eda and respect for Afghanistan's current constitution, in which women's rights have a special place.

In this respect, we justifiably ask: To what extent are these preliminary conditions acceptable to the Taliban, which, according to the "admission by the chairmen of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, is stronger today than it was before the U.S. 'surge' of forces in 2009"?<sup>33</sup>

According to Ashley Tellis, an expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Taliban accepting these terms is tantamount to acknowledging defeat after a ten-year war.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the declared strategy for withdrawing the coalition troops could cause disintegration and fragmentation of the internal political forces; at the same time, it could increase the activity of the insurgent groups.

The Taliban is not a monolithic organization.<sup>35</sup> The Afghan armed opposition implies the Taliban itself with its headquarters (shura) in Quetta, the Haqqani Network<sup>36</sup> (the most combat-ready and

<sup>31</sup> These two programs resulted in reintegrating more than 5,000 oppositionists into peaceful life (see: *Afghanistan, an IHS Jane's Special Report*, p. 27). But the reintegration efforts are not yielding the desirable results. The reintegrated members of the armed opposition, as regular fighters, do not have the right to vote in political decision-making. What is more, many of them are returning to the ranks of the Taliban.

<sup>32</sup> "Vremia SShA proshlo. Eks-glava razvedki Pakistana Asad Durrani o voine, kotoruiu vedut Vashington s Islamabadom," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, No. 5633 (257), 16 November, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> J.M. Smith, G. La Manno, "India Key to U.S. Afghan Success," *The Diplomat*, 2 June, 2012, available at [[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/18/does\\_afghanistan\\_need\\_a\\_dictator](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/18/does_afghanistan_need_a_dictator)].

<sup>34</sup> See: *2014 and Beyond: U.S. Policy Towards Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Testimony by Ashley J. Tellis, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, 3 November, 2011, available at [[http://carnegieendowment.org/files/1103\\_testimony\\_tellis.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/1103_testimony_tellis.pdf)].

<sup>35</sup> See: Th.R. Pickering, "Negotiating Afghanistan: When? With Whom? About What?," *PRISM*, 3, No. 1, 2012 p. 24; H. Mendkovich, O. Hessar, "Afganskije taliby v Pakistane—struktura i strategija," 4 June, 2012, available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/news.php>].

<sup>36</sup> M. Mullen, the then chairman of the U.S. Army Joint Headquarters, called the Haqqani Network "the veritable arm" of the IRP's Interdepartmental Intelligence Service (see: "Special Report, Pakistan," *The Economist*, 11 February, 2012, p. 5).



radical part of the movement), as well as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami (the Islamic Party of Afghanistan). Front shuras also function along with the Quetta shura.

In the meantime, researchers, referring to the results of conversations with members of the Haqqani Network and Hezb-e-Islami, claim that these groups are willing to hold talks and recognize the leading role of the Quetta shura in the talks.<sup>37</sup> But the matter concerns direct talks not with corrupted puppet Kabul, but with Washington.

The headquarters of the armed opposition command is directly in the territory of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (IRP). This shows the technical impracticality and unrealistic nature of the Taliban's defeat in its Pakistan "refuge."<sup>38</sup> Moreover, this will allow Pakistan to manipulate the movements of the Taliban (mainly of its higher leadership) and arm it with levers of influence on the U.S. and Kabul.

At present, many members of the Taliban movement, including former ministers and governors,<sup>39</sup> are in Pakistani prisons. In 2010, mullah Muhammad Baradar, the second person in the hierarchy of the Taliban after mullah Omar, was arrested by the Pakistani special services. This is how the Pakistani authorities gave the Taliban, Kabul, and the U.S. to understand that they will not allow Islamabad to be excluded from the negotiation process. A whole series of political events shows that the efficient role this country is playing in the negotiation process is recognized: the visit by leader of the High Peace Council S. Rabbani to Islamabad and inclusion of the IRP in the permanent working group on the Council's Road Map, the meeting of heads of state and special services in London, and so on.

It should be noted that in 1988, the Geneva conventions were signed between two sides—Afghanistan and Pakistan. In contrast to possible talks at which the Taliban might hold a key position, the mujaheds were not present at the signing of the conventions in Geneva.

In this way, Pakistan has never refused support of the Taliban movement or any other group (Hezb-e-Islami or the Haqqani Network). These third forces act as an effective tool for ensuring the IRP's national security,<sup>40</sup> and Pakistan makes skillful use of them in realizing its vitally important interests, which include the following:

- establishing a government loyal to Pakistan in Afghanistan (that is, not controlled by India) that does not have claims about the legitimacy of the Durand Line (the Pakistani-Afghan state border line);
- preventing the appearance of a hostile Indian ring around Pakistan;
- using Afghanistan as a strategic rear in a war with India.

In current conditions much depends on whether Pakistan can make the Taliban sit down at the negotiation table, which, in turn, objectively meets Pakistan's deep-seated interests. Nor should we forget that the project called the Taliban can produce a reverse effect and cause aggravation of internal political instability in IRP.

<sup>37</sup> See: Th.R. Pickering, op. cit.; *2014 and Beyond: U.S. Policy Towards Afghanistan and Pakistan*.

<sup>38</sup> *U.S. Afghan Policy: The Big Questions*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 9 November, 2009, p. 10. According to Dorronsoro, "Pakistan literally holds the key to the talks with the upper crust of the Taliban movement" (see: G. Dorronsoro, "Afghanistan: At the Breaking Point, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 2010, p. 35).

<sup>39</sup> In particular, former Taliban Minister of Defense mullah Obaidullah Ahund died in Pakistani jail (see: N. Mendkovich, O. Nessar, op. cit.).

<sup>40</sup> Ahmed Rashid notes that Pakistan's foreign policy is still deeply rooted in the Cold War syndrome (see: *Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan*, Transcript by Federal News Service, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., 22 March, 2012, p. 1).

On the whole, however, the conflict in Afghanistan has promoted an increase in ethnic/inter-confessional violence, a spread in religious extremism, and Talibanization of Pakistani society.

## Economic Transformation: Transition from a Wartime to a Peaceful Economy

The main tasks of the economic transition are to transfer Afghanistan's wartime economy to a peaceful economy, prevent an outflow of capital, fight corruption, raise the efficiency of the mechanism for implementing international aid, and so on.

The main weakness<sup>41</sup> of the Afghan economy lies in its dependence on external aid. According to the World Bank, in 2010, foreign aid to Afghanistan amounted to \$15.7 billion, which is equal to the country's GDP.<sup>42</sup>

The New Silk Road project supported by the Barack Obama administration is regarded as an alternative to the presence of the coalition forces and, correspondingly, to Afghanistan's wartime economy. However, according to researchers, this initiative is not financially supported<sup>43</sup> and is "more of a vision—or wishful thinking—than a precise and realistic strategy."<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, the implementation of the New Silk Road strategy testifies to the fact that Afghanistan cannot develop without economic cooperation and without integrating its infrastructure into the transportation routes of the regional states. Afghanistan has real opportunities to become an important link in the development of alternative transportation routes, an energy system, regional trade, and diversification of the transit of Central Asian hydrocarbon resources to the world market (in this case, the interest of Central Asia and Afghanistan in security issues coincide).

There is no doubt that peace in Afghanistan can be reached by integrating this country into regional cooperation.

It must be noted that implementing economic projects, including the New Silk Road project, directly depends on domestic political stability/efficient state management and territorially safe conditions for existence. In Afghan conditions, these interdependent areas of transformation presume synchronicity of the measures adopted within their framework. So, without refuting the opinion of several researchers regarding the primary importance of economic reform,<sup>45</sup> we think that the main condition for successful implementation of specific projects is the existence of an efficient government and reaching the necessary level of security.

Implementation of the New Silk Road strategy, along with the Afghan problem, is also being hindered by such factors as the mutual hostility between India and Pakistan, domestic political insta-

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<sup>41</sup> See: *Afghanistan, an IHS Jane's Special Report*, p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> See: "Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014," The World Bank, 2012, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> See: "U.S. Military Participation in Central Asia and its Influence on U.S.-Central Asia Relations," *Expert Forum on Central Asia*, Issue 1, April 2012, available in Russian at [[http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/images/Policy\\_Forum\\_1-RUS.pdf](http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/images/Policy_Forum_1-RUS.pdf)].

<sup>44</sup> "Discussion of the New Silk Road Strategy," *Expert Forum on Central Asia*, Issue 2, June 2012, available in Russian at [[http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/images/Policy\\_Forum\\_2-RUS.pdf](http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/images/Policy_Forum_2-RUS.pdf)].

<sup>45</sup> "Economic development in Afghanistan is not something to be pursued after political stability and security have been established; rather, it is what must be achieved in order to forge political stability and communal peace" (see: S. Frederick Starr with Adib Farhadi, *Finish the Job: Jump-Start Afghanistan's Economy*, A Handbook of Projects., Silk Road Paper, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and the Silk Road Studies Program, 2012, available at [<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1211Afghan.pdf>]).

bility in the IRP itself, and the undeveloped Central Asian market. According to Geoffrey Pyatt, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, “interregional trade in South Asia is the lowest in the world, amounting to 1.5% of the GDP.”<sup>46</sup> For example, trade between India and Central Asia (including Afghanistan) amounts to approximately \$1 billion, while Pakistan’s export reaches \$10-15 million a year.<sup>47</sup>

Another important problem is ignoring the real state of affairs in the region; the matter concerns the outsider position of Iran, which has a common border with Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. This country cannot be pushed beyond the boundaries of the region, if for no other reason than because a large number of Afghan labor migrants and refugees are employed in its economy. According to some data, there are between 2 and 3 million Afghan refugees at present in the IRI.<sup>48</sup> Due to geographic and historical conditions, the development of Afghanistan’s western provinces, mainly Herat (one of the country’s key economic centers), depends on integration into the transportation routes of the IRI.

This dependence is also intensified by the development of the Mashhad-Khaf-Herat rail branch (with subsequent access to Mazar-e-Sharif), which ensures access to the sea ports of the Persian Gulf (thus lowering Afghanistan’s dependence on the Pakistani ports in the Arabian Sea). On the whole, this branch of the regional transportation route is an integral part of the historic Silk Road.

### *Conclusion*

National security traditionally implies protecting the vitally important interests of three fundamental entities: the individual, society, and the state. But the U.S. and its allies define the concept of “national security” rather narrowly, implying mainly that it means the stability of large cities that are strategically important from the military viewpoint (whereby more than 80% of the Afghan population live in rural areas) and of the political regime. This one-sidedness is caused by the fact that the main objective of NATO’s presence in Afghanistan is the war on terror. It is thought that Afghanistan’s current and long-term instability is based on a lack of understanding of the scope of the security problems and the incautious attitude toward the objective needs of the country’s population.

Success of the Afghan transformation relies on consolidating the interests of the internal Afghan actors and harmonizing aims/tasks at the national level. However, Afghanistan’s current political system is still characterized by fragmentation, both political and ethnic. In these conditions, the country’s political elite faces a dilemma: either a centralized state/strong Kabul, or a decentralized state/recognized Kabul with strong regions. So a choice has to be made between domination and/or leadership.

The international community holds direct moral responsibility for the current situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s transformation into a refuge for terrorists and extremists, a world center of drug manufacture, and a weak link in regional stability is a direct consequence of international/foreign interference in the internal affairs of this country.

Ignoring the Afghan problem is fraught with negative consequences for both regional and international security.

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<sup>46</sup> “Discussion of the New Silk Road Strategy.”

<sup>47</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> See: Th. R. Pickering, *op. cit.*, p. 31.