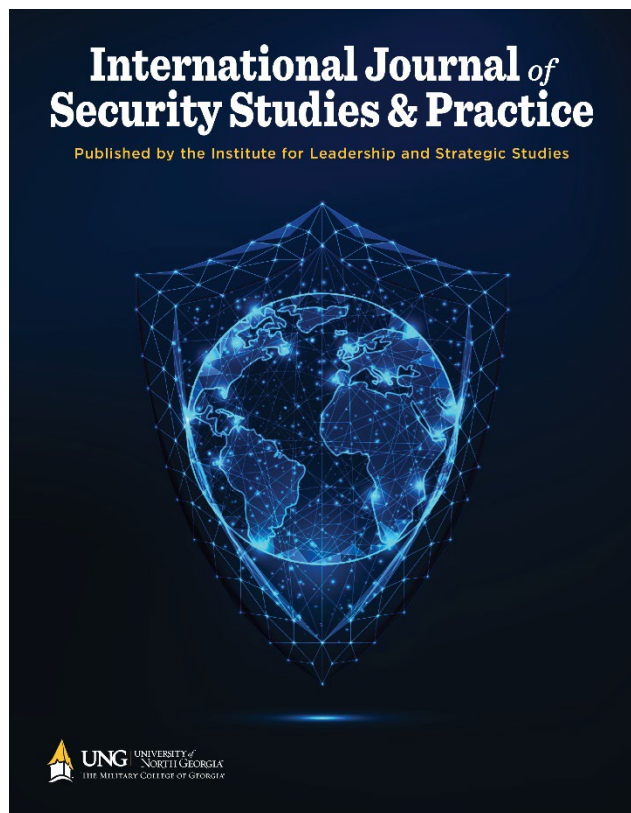


2023

## Regional Security Complexity and Multilateral Diplomacy: A Case Study of Afghanistan and its Regional Neighbors

Nilofar Sakhi

George Washington University, [nilofars@email.gwu.edu](mailto:nilofars@email.gwu.edu)



### Recommended Citation

Sakhi, N. (2023). Regional security complexity and multilateral diplomacy: A case study of Afghanistan and its regional neighbors. *International Journal of Security Studies & Practice*, 3(1), Article 4. <http://ijssp.ung.edu>

This Focus Article is brought to you for free and open access by Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *International Journal of Security Studies & Practice* by an authorized editor.

**Regional Security Complexity and Multilateral Diplomacy:  
A Case Study of Afghanistan and Its Regional Neighbors**

Nilofar Sakhi, Ph.D., is a professorial lecturer of International Affairs at the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University. She is also a Non-resident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council. Sakhi has written extensively on various aspects of traditional and nontraditional security, geopolitics of peace, peacemaking and peacebuilding processes, and human security. Her recent book is entitled *Human security and agency: Reframing productive power in Afghanistan*. Sakhi has a Ph.D. from George Mason University.

The author declares that there is no potential conflict of interest related to this article.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Nilofar Sakhi, e-mail:

[nilofars@email.gwu.edu](mailto:nilofars@email.gwu.edu)

## Abstract

Ensuring peace and security has been challenging for Afghanistan, particularly in the context of radical changes. **Domestically**, a constant change of government and political systems has dismantled the country's institutions. **Regionally**, the overlap of countries' interests in promoting and protecting peace and security in Afghanistan, along with the imbalance of power in the region, has created ongoing tension. In addition, the interconnectedness among various armed groups has linked the conflict to broader regions. The relationship between Afghanistan and its region is conventionally discussed from the perspective of security or economic cooperation. But there has been limited focus on the drivers of instability and insecurity in the region and the networks and countries involved in sponsoring those networks to realize their interests. Despite numerous bilateral agreements and multilateral efforts, the realization of regional cooperation remains limited to theoretical ideas. The recent unfolding events in Afghanistan—especially since the conclusion of the Doha process, which brought together regional actors to discuss Afghanistan's peace and security—have generated more questions about peace and security in Afghanistan as it relates to the role of each country in the region. There is also a growing recognition that Afghanistan's multifaceted and multidimensional conflict requires a domestic and regional approach to negotiate peace and stability in Afghanistan. Due to Afghanistan's dependency and its long-lasting reliance on major regional and global powers, the nature of interstate relationships among regional countries such as China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and India influence the peace and security in Afghanistan. This article discusses the regional actors and their role in the peace and security of Afghanistan, with a particular focus on Afghanistan's six bordering countries. Building on the Regional Security Complex Theory, it will explore the connectivity of regional insecurities and the interest-based drivers of conflict.

## **Regional Security Complexity and Multilateral Diplomacy: A Case Study of Afghanistan and Its Regional Neighbors**

Afghanistan is a landlocked country surrounded by six countries in the region—Pakistan, Iran, China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan—and a complex relationship with its neighbors, particularly Pakistan and Iran. Geographically, it is located at the center of South and Central Asia and surrounded by countries with nuclear weapons, including China, Pakistan, India, and Iran, which has a nuclear program. Afghanistan's geo-economic location has allowed it to serve as a convening point for the ancient trade route. Historically known as Silk Road, this route connected Central and South Asia and expanded to all parts of Asia. Discoveries of oil, uranium and gas have put Afghanistan on the map as an essential geo-strategic location and has driven the attraction of regional powers. The modern era of conflict, which began in 1978, has been highly shaped by outside or foreign forces and marked by several critical events, including

- the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989);
- the establishment of the Islamic State of Afghanistan through the Peshawar Accord (1992-1996);
- the emergence of the Taliban (1996-2001);
- the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as a result of the war on terror (2001-2021);
- the return of the Taliban (2021 to present day).

### **The 2018 Doha Process**

The Doha process aimed to address the regional impact of Afghanistan's ongoing conflict with the Taliban through periodic meetings between the Afghan government and representatives from neighboring and regional countries. One of the greatest faults of the Doha process was the

absence of an organized mediation platform to produce a signed agreement on issues concerning the peace and security of Afghanistan and its region. Instead, ad hoc meetings were held between the U.S. Special Envoy to Peace and Reconciliation, government officials from Pakistan, and U.S.-European allies. In addition, several regional conferences were held in Moscow, Beijing, Doha, Tehran, Tajikistan, and Islamabad to discuss Afghanistan's peace and stability and to leverage regional cooperation. Meanwhile, numerous Track 2 mediations were conducted with intellectuals, civil society members, and peace practitioners from Afghanistan and Pakistan, highlighting the significant issues that impede peace and stability in Afghanistan and its region. None of these initiatives produced an organized and sustained platform at the regional level to address the shared security threats to Afghanistan and its region, leaving the traditional and nontraditional security issues largely unresolved.

### **The Withdrawal of U.S. Troops From Afghanistan**

A significant shift occurred in the region due to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, bringing Russia and China to the forefront. At the same time, Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asian states attempted to align themselves according to their broader strategic and economic interests. In the post-withdrawal period, from September 2021 to today, several regional platforms have begun to address the emerging traditional and non-traditional security issues. However, this has had limited results.

### **Understanding Regional Dynamics**

The region boasts three kinds of countries:

1. *strong countries* that possess military and material power,
  2. *weak countries* that rely on the bigger powers in the region to gain security guarantees,
- and

3. *threatening countries* that are poor and dependent yet pose security threats as leverage to retaliate against the strong countries.

Despite the mutual distrust and convergence of interests among the regional countries, they are united in their need for cooperation to protect their respective security interests. As British political scientist Barry Buzan states, “In security terms, ‘region’ means that a distinct and significant subsystem of security relations exist among a set of states whose fate is that they have been locked into geographical proximity with each other” (Buzan, 1991, p.188). This common interest and geographical proximity propel them to maintain and collectively protect regional security. However, depending on whether a country is strong, weak, or threatening, the country’s actual power, perceived material power, and subjective power drive the construction, extent and limits on interstate and regional cooperation.

### **A Conceptual and Theoretical Framework for Regional Security:**

#### **Understanding Regional Security Complexity**

The concept of *regional security complexity* provides a comprehensive framework to examine and better understand each country's interlinkages and security concerns. Buzan identifies regional security complexity as a “group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another” (Buzan, 1983, p. 106).

Regional peace and security are interconnected and, to some extent, dependent on the capabilities of each country to manage its own domestic affairs, address protracted conflicts and enable conditions for state-building and nation-building. Weak states fail to prevent the drivers of

violence and insecurity and are prone to internal conflict, creating imminent risks to regional stability. Strategic interdependence among states in a regional system means that the presence of failed states makes a region highly prone to war (Miller, 2017, p. 160).

Failed states are the product of the incapability of governments to govern, provide political security, and prevent and protect against border security threats. These states impede domestic threats to social and economic structures and human security. They also breed domestic instability, mass movement of people across borders and a vacuum of power, which can be easily filled by domestically and regionally active non-state armed actors. At the same time, such conditions invite actors from outside the state with a particular agenda and interest to intervene and influence the domestic landscape. This not only fails to address the instability but connects it to other countries in the region and beyond. Richard Rosecrance, a prominent scholar of system theory, argues, “The interaction among and between these components is governed by the notion that variety in one component will be felt by variety in another, thus determining stability or instability of that particular international system” (Rosecrance, as cited in Indurthy, 1987, p. 101).

The presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, shifted the regional dynamics by creating perceptions of power, opportunities, and threats to the countries in the region. Countries like Iran, Russia and China saw the U.S.’s presence as both a threat and an opportunity. They assumed the U.S. military presence would limit the violent spillover from Afghanistan and reduce security threats by terrorist groups in the region. But these countries were also concerned about the long-term presence of their major rival stationed next door. The U.S.’s presence made countries realistically assess their power and influence in the region, perceiving the threats and opportunities posed by the U.S. forces in Afghanistan. While the presence of U.S. troops

demonstrated a symbolic image of power in the region the withdrawal of U.S. troops has resulted in a regional power vacuum and a major shift of this overarching perception.

With the current conflict in Ukraine, Iran's uprising, and Pakistan's health, economic and political crises, these countries are entangled in their own domestic issues. The additional and ongoing threats from the Taliban's militant and extremist takeover in Afghanistan have increased uncertainty for these countries and the region. Their concerns are legitimate. The Taliban takeover has emboldened terrorist groups in the region, and insurgent groups have been given sanctuary by the Taliban in Afghanistan, creating even further interconnected security issues.

Buzan explains that regional security complexity theory offers an approach to security which requires attention to both the macro-level of great power impact on the system, and the micro-level of local-state relations. In forcing attention to both levels, security complexes emphasize the mutuality of impact between them, with external influences tending to amplify local problems, and local problems shaping and constraining external entanglements and influences (1983, p. 112).

The interlinkages between and among Jihadi organizations are one example of the impact between macro, micro and local level relations impacting regional security. Transnational terrorist groups are fundamentally and ideologically driven and share tactical approaches to gain power, such as violence. They also exchange technical, financial, and logistic resources and support and shelter one another in times of high threats to their existence. Ideology, need-based interests, and similar tactical approaches create connectivity among these groups. Most notable are Al-Qaeda and its affiliated, country-based insurgencies, including Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP), which is active across the border in Pakistan; Jamat Ansarullah, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU); and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), currently known as Turkestan Islamic Party, which is



active in South Asia, Central Asia and the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China (United Nations Security Council, n.d.).

Like all other armed groups, these groups use violence to achieve their objectives. Any efforts that limit their opportunities for political and economic gains are threatened and dismantled. While these groups are considered a threat to national security by the state actors, in some cases, the state actors have instrumentalized the non-state armed actors covertly or overtly to pursue their political objectives in their respective countries and the region. Therefore, the clarity and genuine desire for regional peace and security cannot be realized until each state actor abandons all business involvement with the armed groups.

### **The Interests and Roles of Afghanistan's Neighboring Countries**

To understand the way forward, there must be clarity and agreement regarding the interests and roles of Afghanistan's neighboring countries. Identifying where each country stands in terms of realizing those interests and their relationship with Afghanistan provides one starting point. Most crucial to this discussion is the positioning of Afghanistan's most powerful neighbors: China, Iran, Pakistan and the weaker neighbors of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

### **China: Navigating Changing Interests**

China shares a narrow border with Afghanistan known as the Wakhan Corridor, a route that was once a portion of the Silk Road. This thoroughfare marked the beginning of the cultural exchange between China and Central, South and West Asia (Zhao, 2016) and facilitated trade and communication between these different civilizations. Traditionally used for international trade, the Silk Road connected different regions and instigated China's growth. It also created a long-lasting

impact on the culture and commerce of its neighboring countries and region. Due to China's security concerns, the Wakhan Corridor is closed to interstate activity and no longer plays the connecting role it once did.

China's modern diplomatic relationship can be traced to the 1950s, though at that time, Afghanistan had minimal influence on Chinese diplomacy. It was not until the 1970s that China extended its support to Afghanistan's resistance forces against Russia. However, Afghanistan mainly remained on the periphery of China's diplomacy, and China maintained little intention of building Afghanistan politically (Zhao, 2012).

By the turn of the century, Afghanistan had finally secured a more prominent role in Chinese diplomacy (Rajaye, 2019). The U.S.'s war on terror, initiated as a response to September 11, 2001, propelled China-Afghanistan relations into a new phase (Zhu, 2018). Since then, China has maintained an active engagement policy with Afghanistan and has continued to perceive Afghanistan as a security threat.

### ***Attempted Investments in Afghanistan***

Some argued that China has benefitted from the U.S.'s presence in Afghanistan and Iraq and has invested in oil and other resources in both countries without any serious engagement or consistent effort toward stabilization (Clarke, 2016). Despite its promises to invest in mega projects, China has never substantially invested in Afghanistan's political stability. During the period of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, for example, China provided economic aid and investments but did not provide any direct military involvement in Afghanistan (Ng, 2010).

China has been interested in extraction of mines in Afghanistan. The country has the largest reserves of various metal and minerals including gold, silver, copper, iron, aluminum uranium and platinum. However, when China committed to investing in the extraction of mines though the

Chinese mining company MCC (“White Paper,” 2011) they encountered sharp criticism and challenges when they contracted with Mes Ayenak in Logar province to mine copper at an archaeological site valued for its Buddhist monasteries and early human inhabitants (Klimburg-Salter, 2018).

Either way, a power vacuum was created when the U.S. troops withdrew from Afghanistan and Washington reduced engagement in Afghanistan. Some analysts believed that China would take advantage of the situation and seek control of the mineral resources in Afghanistan (Blumenthal et al., 2022). Others believed that China’s growing production of electric cars would prompt them to seek larger amounts of lithium. Based on China’s track record with previous investments and its recent engagement in Afghanistan, “it is unlikely that these mining projects will dot the Afghan countryside anytime soon” (Funaiole & Hart, 2021).

Since the Doha process began in 2018, China has become actively involved in Afghanistan’s peace and security affairs. China has been involved in peace talks related to Afghanistan and the Taliban since 2014. They have been most interested in, and have largely endorsed, talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government (Zhu, 2018, p. 286). Initially, China intended to take on the role of a mediator by holding a trilateral summit to resolve the conflicts between Afghanistan and Pakistan. China also expressed willingness to support the Afghanistan government in reaching reconciliation with various political factions in Afghanistan, including the Taliban and claimed that it closely cooperates with all parties for reconciliation (“Big Mediator,” 2015). China’s greatest concern seems to be its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Central Asia and Pakistan. Since the start of BRI, China’s interest in Afghanistan’s political processes has increased substantially where it extended cooperation with regional players to bring

Afghan political leaders together and explore paths to reconciliation (along with China's desire to preserve its security by becoming closer to the Taliban).

The survival and growth of China's regional economic projects are largely threatened by the instability in Afghanistan and the ensuing spillover of violence. The return of the Taliban has already emboldened some transnational insurgent groups, causing increased worry for China. The groups most likely to be a direct threat to China's economic expansion include the Al-Qaeda-linked East Turkestan Islamic Movement (i.e., Turkestan Islamic Party); the Uighur militant group in Afghanistan, some of whom fought together with the Taliban and al-Qaeda (Weinbaum, 2006, p. 16); the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). In addition, China is dedicated to making sure that anti-Chinese militancy does not expand or spill over from Afghanistan and that Uighur militants are not supported by the Taliban.

To date, China does not have any mega investment projects in Afghanistan, despite claims they have made in the past. China's only interests are to limit any violent spillover and mitigate the risks and threats associated with Afghanistan's insurgency and terrorism. This leaves China likely to scrutinize the drivers of insecurity, particularly those that have the potential to expand beyond Afghanistan's borders. China also has concerns about extremism among Muslims minority groups in the western region of Xinxiang. To gain security assurances and ensure that Afghanistan will not provide sanctuary for militant groups interested in targeting Chinese territory and its economic investment project in central Asia and Pakistan, China extended its cooperation with the Taliban since its takeover in August of 2021. Though China has not formally recognized the Taliban, they have made gestures to them by contributing to humanitarian assistance and politically supporting the Taliban.

China has also explored partnerships and economic investment projects in Afghanistan with the Taliban de facto government, such as the extraction of oil (“Taliban & China,” 2023) and lithium deposits (“China eyes Afghanistan’s . . . ,” 2023), something China has always been interested in, particularly for the growing industry of electric cars. Due to China’s lack of large economic investment projects in Afghanistan and a track record of unexecuted economic plans and projects, one has to be skeptical about China’s long term economic investment. That said, if these billion-dollar projects are operationalized and implemented in conjunction with long term plans, regional countries and the West will likely follow suit and become more involved in Afghanistan and develop closer cooperation with the Taliban.

### ***Partnerships With Pakistan and Iran***

China has close partnerships with countries in the region, especially Pakistan and Iran. In 2021, China signed a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement with Iran—a comprehensive political, strategic, and economic agreement. According to Khanmohammadi and Sun, this agreement outlines how “China will invest in Iran’s oil industry and cooperate with its national Gas Export Company, National Petrochemical Company, and infrastructure development. The agreement also includes cooperation in the fields of economy and trade, energy, military, and defense” (2022).

China’s interest in this strategic cooperation is connecting itself to the Persian Gulf. As Fulton argues, “China’s trade, contracting and investments are deeper, broader and more sustainable on the Arab side of the Persian Gulf than in Iran” (2022, p. 152). This suggests that China’s attempts at economic and political support will promote their interests. This strategic cooperation is also a part of the Belt and Road Initiative connecting China with West Asia through Iran. Similarly, China’s infrastructure investment in Central Asia, known as Silk Road Economic

Belt initiative, was launched in 2013 as the Central Asian component of the Eurasian BRI to facilitate trade development to link the regions of Central Asia and South Asia with China (Dave & Kobayashi, 2018). Successful implementation of these investments and outcomes requires security and stability in the region. Therefore, China must seek to build relationships with countries that could pose threats to the survival of its long-term investments.

### **Iran: A Geopolitical Rival**

Iran shares eastern borders with Afghanistan and a deep-rooted historical relationship through trade and cultural exchanges. Afghan refugees have fled to Iran since the 1980s, and the country hosts the second-highest number of Afghan refugees after Pakistan. However, the Iranian policy towards Afghan refugees has been unfriendly and abusive, violating its legal obligation to protect the most vulnerable. (“Iran: Afghan,” 2013)

Overall, the Afghanistan-Iran relationship has been shaky. Regardless of the kind of government in Afghanistan, tensions and disputes over water rights and river flows, the refugee crisis, and ideological issues have persisted between the two countries. The ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on Shia Islam and considers itself the guardian of Afghanistan’s Shia Hazara (Daragahi, 2022, p. 3). To that end, Iran supported and protected the Shia population of Afghanistan in the 1990s and maintained a close relationship with several Shia and Tajik leaders.

Iran also plays a vital role in the geopolitical rivalry and, having incorporated elements of Marxism-Communism and anti-Americanism, it has aligned more closely ideologically to China and Russia. In this regard, these three countries share core values and common skepticism of the West (Tabatabai & Esfandiary, 2018). Iran never wanted a long-term U.S. presence in Afghanistan and has targeted the United States with both soft and hard power. Iran opposed the Bilateral Security Agreement negotiated between Afghanistan and the United States while

supporting anti-U.S. insurgents. As one of the influential regional actors in Afghanistan, Iran has always seen Afghanistan as a threat to its security while simultaneously seeking opportunities to expand trade and accessibility to Afghan and Central Asian markets.

In addition, Iran has had an unpredictable, uncertain, and complicated relationship with the Taliban. This is due in part to the geopolitical rivalry that began in 1996 when the Taliban seized control of Kabul and established a government that was recognized by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—Iran's regional rivals (Behraves, 2019). In 1998, when the Taliban were controlling most of Afghanistan, they killed Iranian diplomatic personnel and an Iranian journalist in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, which nearly resulted in a military response by Iran. In the 1990s, Iran supported the Northern Alliance Resistance Forces against the Taliban and in late 2001, Tehran actively supported the U.S. led coalition in ousting the Taliban-led government (Behraves, 2019). From 2010 onwards, Iran has built strong relations with various local and national Taliban figures and groups (Daragahi, 2022) to maintain influence in Afghanistan as the Taliban has regained power and strength.

Driven by its ideological assertions and rivalry with the U.S., Iran has bigger plans in the region. Though Iran has cultural affinities that connect it with Central Asian countries, particularly Tajikistan, Iran's strategic interests have, in many instances, aligned with the powerful countries in the region. Iran has a closer relationship with Russia, for example, due to their mutual interests in trade, military purchases, access to transportation routes and diplomatic cooperation (Manz, ed., 1994). Threats from Afghanistan, such as violence spilling over into Iranian territory, the flow of refugees and narcotics trafficking, have concerned Iran and caused them to engage with the ruling class in Afghanistan to address these crucial issues.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has promoted Iran's "Look to the East" policy, and in recent years, Iran has strengthened its partnerships with Russia and China to strengthen their economy and military. Iran's recent weaponry support to Russia in the war in Ukraine suggests that Iran is deepening its ties with Russia and China to confront Western influence in the region. Under such circumstances, Tehran pursues a policy of containment with Afghanistan to mitigate border issues, refugees and narcotics issues and mitigates potential security threats posed by jihadist and transnational terrorist groups throughout Afghanistan.

### **Pakistan: The Contentious Neighbor**

Pakistan shares the longest border with Afghanistan along the southern and eastern edges of the country. Despite a long-standing relationship between the two countries through a bilateral agreement to promote arts, culture and trade, prolonged conflict and disagreements persist. The core contentious issue between the two countries has been the border crisis. The Durand Line border was created in 1893 as a demarcation between Afghanistan and British India, separating people of the same culture, tribal affinities, and blood on either side. Historical evidence demonstrates that the Durand Line served the British interests and created a line of resistance against Russian expansion (Khan & Amin, 2020, p. 62) but did not consider consequential tribal issues.

Both sides of the Durand Line in Afghanistan and Pakistan are inhabited by the Pashtun ethnic group, who share the same culture, language, and tribal relationships. Therefore, the border is not seen as a rational demarcation for them. Both sides have underdeveloped infrastructure and remain largely unpoliced, with ongoing tensions and violent clashes. Since the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, no Afghan government has recognized the Durand Line with Pakistan, leaving it contested and one of the major sources of conflict between the two countries.



Overall, there has been a consistent lack of trust between Pakistan and Afghanistan's leadership on issues related to terrorism and counterterrorism. This is due in part to continual accusations from both sides against each other related to cross-border terrorism (Taye & Ahmed, 2021). Despite the significant movement of people between the two countries, the close cultural and religious ties, and the bilateral relationships related to trade and culture, the relationship between the two countries has been complicated and contentious.

Events in the past have played a crucial role in creating this complex and tense relationship and deepened this mistrust, the first of which goes back to 1947. After the creation of Pakistan, Afghanistan was the only country that opposed the admission of Pakistan into the United Nations because the Afghanistan government at the time did not recognize Pakistan as the legitimate inheritor of the Durand Line. This was particularly evident when Afghanistan extended its support to both the Baluch and Pashtun tribal groups in Pakistan, calling for the creation of a new “Pashtunistan” state (Hasan, 1962). Considering the changing nature of the conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan, an identity crisis does not seem to prominently factor into the ongoing tension between the two states. However, it has been an underlying cause—whether as border clashes or diplomatic tension between states. In addition, Pashtunistan remained a core cause of tension throughout different periods, fueled by border clashes in 1960, which further strained the diplomatic relationship between the two countries (Hasan, 1962, p. 16).

Pakistan has always struggled to secure influence in Afghan politics and with politicians, directly or through alignment with other foreign actors in Afghanistan. To pursue its policy of strategic depth, Pakistan supported and nurtured the Islamist militants in Afghanistan. As scholars Sumit Kapur and S. Paul Ganguly (2012) point out, by 1987 approximately 20,000 fighters per year were receiving training at seven Pakistani camps, with more being trained in Afghanistan.

Pakistan also funneled tens of thousands of tons of arms and munitions per year to the Afghan mujahideen. The policy of strategic depth that Pakistan pursued to safeguard its national interests after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan focused on reducing India's influence in the region and having access to the Central Asian market. Islamabad initially hoped the Taliban would provide Pakistan with strategic depth in the security and economic front in the region (Johnson, 2007). Indeed, the Taliban-Pakistan relationship was strengthened during the war on terror when the Taliban developed roots and established their businesses and lives there.

Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan, such as formalizing the international border, acquiring strategic depth, gaining access to the Central Asian market, and minimizing India's regional influence (Johnson, 2007), have resulted in an overt and covert active policy presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan utilized numerous approaches to realize its interests, including using the Taliban as a proxy. Pakistan has supported the Taliban from 1996 onward and provided them with sanctuary, weaponry support and training. In effect, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August of 2021 was a victory for Pakistan. This also meant that Pakistan could not access the Central Asian market to boost its economy, one of its most important economic strategies, due to the lack of stability and faltering transition in Afghanistan. Moreover, the Taliban takeover emboldened TTP—which was fighting against the Pakistan establishment and had strongholds on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border—causing ongoing border tension.

Since the Taliban assumed control in Afghanistan, TTP attacks against the Pakistan establishment have accelerated, leading to a deteriorating security situation in Pakistan. Due to the historical friendship and ties between Tehrik-i-Taliban Afghanistan (i.e. Afghanistan Taliban), the current rulers in Afghanistan are providing sanctuary and support to the TTP, creating tension and conflict between Pakistan and the Afghanistan Taliban. The tension has resulted in Pakistan

warning that it may attack TTP forces in Afghanistan. In return, Afghanistan Taliban warned Pakistan that they would retaliate as it would be an attack on Afghan soil. The statement is alarming and is a clear warning to both sides. However, if direct armed confrontation occurs, it will have in long-lasting impacts and severe negative consequences on regional security. In addition to the TTP, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Lashkare-e-Taiba, and Jaish-Mohammed insurgent and extremist groups based in Pakistan are causing security threats to Pakistan and risk causing armed conflict between the countries in the region.

### **Central Asia: Thirty Years of Limited Cooperation**

Central Asia consists of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, with the latter three countries sharing a southern border with Afghanistan. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the republics of the union were transformed into independent states. The five republics of Central Asia were situated in an unstable region and sought to continue their relations with Afghanistan, a country going through political, economic and security crises, including insurgency and civil war. While these republics share close ethnic, cultural, political, linguistic and historical ties with Afghanistan, they have also had an active Afghanistan policy due to their shared historical background, identity and geopolitical circumstances.

Among the five Central Asian states, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have had the most prominent interest and active role in Afghanistan. However, despite constructive plans for economic cooperation and political engagement to address the ongoing regional security threats there hasn't been a change in the situation. Timothy A. Krambs, a U.S. Army veteran, argues that Central Asia has low levels of security forces and the lack of cooperation on a variety of security related issues have led to their inability to cooperate in a unified effort to establish stability in

Afghanistan (Krambs, 2013). Martha Brill Olcott, an expert on Central Asia, argues that the countries in the region are all fragile and each of them are facing serious economic and political challenges (Allison & Johnson, eds., 2004, p. 5). With the mentioned challenges, these countries are concerned about the issues that could impact their survival and instability. They consider Afghanistan's instability as one of the major factors that could threaten their security and stability. With the cultivation of opium, the production of heroin, Islamic radicalization and national and transnational terrorism being the biggest concerns amongst these countries, it is no surprise that militancy, drug smuggling and insurgency are the most contentious diplomatic issues. In addition, Central Asian leaders have often expressed their fear that violence, insurgency and terrorism will spill into their borders from Afghanistan.

These countries have remained supportive of Afghanistan's peace and stability and expressed their support through declarations during regional summits and meetings. However, due to the struggles mentioned above, along with resource limitations and occasional Russian influence, the regional states have been unable to provide more support to Afghanistan's peace process, except to offer venues for diplomatic exchanges and meetings and encourage cross-border cooperation.

### **Tajikistan: Ethnic Connections and Transnational Tensions**

Afghanistan shares a border of approximately 1,200 kilometers with Tajikistan. Based on their common ethnicity, language and historical affiliations, the Tajiks in Afghanistan and Tajikistan have a sense of connection to a common identity. Multilateral relations between the two countries have existed since 1992 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tajikistan, 2020), which has facilitated trade, transit and cultural exchanges between the countries. However, their grievances,

the associations they have with their land and their independent perceptions of their own interests have prevented them from influencing each other.

The collective identity between these two countries inspires mutual sympathy and friendship, creating an opportunity to support each other during crisis. During different periods of war in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, particularly during the Tajik Civil War from 1992 to 1997, Afghanistan became a refuge for thousands of Tajik nationals who received shelter and accommodations from the Afghan government and other groups in society. From 1996 to 2001, during the armed conflict between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, Tajikistan supported the Northern Alliance (Umarov, 2013) where people crossed borders for safety and security. Tajiks from Tajikistan have also been involved in many of Afghanistan's wars and political processes, including serving in the Soviet military in Afghanistan (Atkin, 1992).

Some argue that Tajikistan is Central Asia's main source of instability due to its deformed and weak economy, overpopulation, unemployment and religious fanaticism, making it prone to conflict and outside intervention. Indeed, the breakthrough of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia has taken place largely via Tajikistan with the help of Afghan fundamentalists (Spolnikov, edited by Hafeez Malik, 1994, p. 111).

Tajikistan is also concerned about the consolidation of militant groups on the northern border of Afghanistan. For example, the Taliban put the Tajik Islamist militant group, Jamat Ansarullah (with the goal to overthrow the Tajikistan government and being banned in Tajikistan), in charge of security in five districts in Northern Afghanistan. Moreover, since the Taliban takeover, there have been escalating tensions with Tajikistan including a crisis over cross-border transit. Ongoing tensions and the lack of consistent border management (i.e., indiscriminate border

openings and closing) have disrupted general transit and economy-based transportation between the two countries.

Along with these recent incidents, nontraditional security threats such as narcotics trafficking, and the influx of refugees are driving Tajikistan to consolidate its security ties with other powerful countries in the region. They have traditionally depended on Russia for security and have a long-term diplomatic, cultural and economic relationship with Iran.

From Tajikistan's perspective, the insurgency along the Afghan-Tajikistan border is a threat to their security. They have based their foreign policy largely on the political stability of Afghanistan. Their ultimate desire is to see the Tajik ethnic group also in power positions in part because ethnic tensions are seen as the cause of long-standing conflict and instability. In addition, Tajikistan has economic interests in Afghanistan and has been an exporter of electricity to Afghanistan, which has the potential for increased revenue.

### **Uzbekistan: Pragmatically Encouraging Economic Development**

Uzbekistan and Afghanistan share a border of 160 kilometers and have close cultural ties through the Uzbek ethnic population. Afghanistan Uzbeks live in the northern region of Afghanistan, are closely connected with their ethnic kin in Uzbekistan and have been a politically active group in Afghanistan, traditionally represented through the political party, Junbish-i-Milli-Islami Afghanistan (National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan).

Like other countries in the region, Uzbekistan has the potential to generate domestic instability and radicalization due to internal factors, particularly the history of radicalized groups in Fergana valley. Since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan has been particularly concerned about the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an armed fundamentalist group formed in 1998 and led by Tahrir Yuldashev and Juma Namangani. In the mid-1990s, Yuldashev

and Namangani were forced to flee Uzbekistan due to a government crackdown and fought in the Tajik Civil War. Yuldashev and Namangani are believed to have cooperated with the Taliban in Afghanistan in the late 1990s and received financial support and Al-Qaeda training (Hanks, 2010). IMU is also believed to have assisted the drug traffickers in alliance with the Taliban and was active in Pakistan's South Waziristan province which borders Afghanistan (Peimani, 2009, pp. 200-201). IMU has close ties with Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, has been active in insurgency and terrorist operations in Central Asia, and are closely related to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in terms of their ideology concerning the Islamic emirate and Jihad. In addition, the IMU opposes the current government in Uzbekistan and intends to overthrow it and establish an Islamic state (Mann, 2002). With the Taliban takeover, IMU can be emboldened, and the Taliban can provide them sanctuary for their operations in training.

The other Islamic fundamentalist group, Hizb ut-Tahrir al Islami (i.e., Hizb Tahrir) (Party of Islamic Liberation), has adopted an expansionist approach to rebuilding the Islamic caliphate to embody all Muslims. In this caliphate, the society will be organized according to Islamic standards, and a regime will be based on Sharia law (Chaudet, 2006). Hizb Tahrir and IMU are seen as serious threats by the government of Uzbekistan and all other Central Asian countries because of the direct threats they pose to the very existence of political systems and institutions.

Uzbekistan has been involved in Afghanistan's affairs both politically and economically. It has emphasized economic development through bilateral trade, building infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, reconstructing the Kabul-Mazare Sharif highway and implementing electricity transmission projects. It has also brought parties from the region together for collective action for Afghan stability and peace.

Uzbekistan has been organizing regional events about Afghanistan in 2008, including a program to reunite Afghanistan's six neighbors and three key stakeholders (NATO, the U.S. and Russia). This 6+3 initiative, proposed by President Islam Karimov, piggy-backed the 6+2 (the six countries bordering Afghanistan plus Russia and the United States) group that existed between 1997 and 1999. With the addition of NATO at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 (Yuldasheva, 2012), this initiative was considered by experts to be a wise and reasonable approach to assembling all parties with a stake in Afghanistan to address stability and peace. However, the main shortcoming of this initiative was the exclusion of representatives from Afghanistan, a critical driver for any political reconciliation (Laruelle, 2014).

Since the Taliban takeover, Uzbekistan has played a leading role in facilitating humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and facilitated events for economic connectivity in the region. Its policy for Afghanistan focuses on peace and stability through economic integration. The Uzbek government has also convened multilateral events, such as the Tashkent Conference with 30 countries from the region and beyond (Imamova, 2022). This event demonstrated Uzbekistan's policy of integrating Afghanistan into an economic connectivity plan and highlighted Afghanistan's role as a connector for South and Central Asia's economic development. The conference's agenda in Tashkent included implementing the 750-kilometer construction of the Railway Route (Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar, i.e., Kabul Corridor), a clear model of connectivity. Uzbekistan believes an unstable and economically weak Afghanistan is a threat, and economic integration is seen as a necessary policy to address that threat. Another example is from The Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies, an entity of the Government of Uzbekistan, which conducted an annual meeting called Asian Leaders Consultative Meetings where heads of state



from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan come together to discuss regional issues. One of the major themes at the event was Afghanistan's security and development.

The competition between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan on the economic and political fronts exists despite the ongoing cooperation to address critical issues, such as security. Their alignment and non-alignment with regional powers derive from such competitions. Therefore, some in the region oppose multilateral events, and even if they participate, there is no genuine intention to address the issues raised in those events. Uzbekistan has been open to the U.S.-supported regional platforms but expressed concern about the other ones. As Laruelle, rightly points out, the Uzbek Security Council "emphasizes Uzbekistan's refusal of Moscow-backed multilateral institutions, distrust of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and openness to U.S. geopolitical organization" (Laruelle, 2014).

Uzbekistan's Afghan policy seems to be the most pragmatic of the Central Asian countries. It is based on the idea that developing Afghanistan's economy will lead to stability and peace. But this policy requires border security and some level of political stability in Afghanistan, which Afghanistan has failed to constitute. Further, Tajikistan's electricity export requires Tajikistan to have a more active policy of engagement with Afghanistan regardless of who is in power in Afghanistan. Moreover, the deterioration of security in the northern provinces of Afghanistan and the rocket attacks in 2022 by the Islamic State from the Afghanistan border town of Hairaton have been alarming. The Taliban have provided shelter to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in northern Afghanistan, and threats like this concern Uzbekistan and further drive its policy of active engagement with Afghanistan forward.

## **Turkmenistan: Relative Peace**

Turkmenistan shares an 800-kilometer border with Afghanistan and cultural ties with Turkmen ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Turkmenistan has a positive-neutral foreign policy towards Afghanistan, inspiring a neutral peacefulness, non-participation in military alliances and blocs, and conflict resolution through political and diplomatic means (Rahmanov, 2022).

A bilateral relationship between the two countries has allowed Afghanistan to import electricity from Turkmenistan. TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India), a multi-billion gas pipeline project designed to increase economic growth and connectivity and bring 33 billion cubic meters of Turkmen gas to energy-starved South Asia for 30 years, was signed in 2016 and initially expected to be completed in 2019. However, the realization of the project has been challenged due to political instability, regional stances, and insecurity in Afghanistan.

There have not been any large-scale attacks or insurgencies along the Turkmenistan-Afghan border that have required an active engagement policy. That said, Turkmenistan is concerned about its southern border, including risks from narcotics trafficking and the spillover of violence. Turkmenistan's concern is to prevent armed incursions of terrorists and militants. According to statements from Turkmen leaders attending conferences, the overarching plan is to integrate Afghanistan into world economic relations and infrastructure development to ensure the security and stability of the country and the region.

## **Regional Multilateral Diplomacy**

Several regional processes on Afghanistan's peace and security have been initiated, but there are still questions as to how effective they have been in ending the prolonged conflict and violence. Multilateral forums to promote peace and regional security have been unsuccessful in

creating regional consensus on transnational issues. They have also failed to create peace and reconciliation for the following reasons:

1. **The lack of interest-based negotiation in these processes**, specifically, the interests of the countries involved in these platforms were not negotiated. For example, water issues, territorial issues, identity issues, and narcotics networks were highlighted as challenges but neglected to include a concrete plan of collective action.
2. **The region consists of mostly economically and militarily weak countries, and this has created a dependence on countries with more resources and power.** Hence, some countries depend on sponsors and funders for their domestic and regional politics, undermining autonomous decision-making and preventing meaningful cooperation to address security issues.
3. **The interconnectivity of insurgency, cross-border affiliations and ties of militant networks.** This interconnectivity, in certain cases, has encouraged the expansion of these networks and accompanying violence and states' covert or overt affiliations with some of those networks.
4. **The interstate conflicts and competitions over resources** have undermined the implementation of agreements made at the end of the regional and interstate forums.
5. **The geopolitical competitions between global and regional actors** in which the weak states get involved or are utilized for their survival and growth. The weak states in the region struggle for survival and align with powerful actors for resources and defense and security assurances from other regional actors. The neighboring countries of Afghanistan tend to use their position as victims of Afghanistan's violent spillover and

have failed to create concrete measures to address the security crises emerging from Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a weak state that has always been seen as a threat to its neighbors and is prone to conflict and foreign intervention. Yet the current situation can be used as an opportunity to bring regional consensus on the one common interest raised and expressed by the neighboring countries: security. The key is to find an architectural structure that best addresses the insecurities of all. As mentioned by Krambs, “Afghanistan is not only pivotal in the maintenance of regional security but is also crucial to the region’s economic and political development” (2013). This argument holds weight if there is an enabling environment in Afghanistan and its region, but for this to happen the regional security crisis needs to be addressed through a multilateral platform by addressing the above-mentioned challenges.

### **Conclusion**

It is crucial to clearly address the interests of Afghanistan and its neighboring countries in the region. First, the causes of conflict are due to overlapping and unaddressed country interests which have not been completely covered in multilateral platforms and internationally facilitated negotiations. Second, to highlight, security and protection, which are common issues for all the regional countries, is in the interests of all the countries.

The Taliban, as a militant and ideological group with historical ties with transnational terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, and regional militant groups such as TTP, Turkestan Islamic Party, IMU and Jamaat Ansarullah, in addition to the longtime relationships among them are based on a shared fundamental ideology and sharing resources pose a direct threat to security of the countries in the region and the west. On the other side, the internal crisis of governance, repression, human rights abuses, gender apartheid, poverty, and ethnic conflict is unsurprising. For one, it led to the

mass exodus of people (refugee crisis) and closed the doors for freedom and participation. This has increased the grievances of people and has created a rise in domestic instability and an enabling environment for radicalization where insurgents and terror groups can recruit and expand their area of influence by taking advantage. In the long term, this will have a spillover effect and could impact the regional countries.

Since the Doha agreement was signed, not one of the countries in the region recognized the Taliban despite having had a close relationship with the Taliban.

The region is dominated by authoritative states, particularly China, Russia and Iran who have extended their diplomatic cooperation to the Taliban. Relying on interest-based relationships however, they aim to limit Afghanistan's security crises from affecting them. With the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, China, Iran and Russia demonstrated their closeness through diplomatic engagements, bilateral meetings and partnerships where they also admired their models of social control. Iran also supported and cooperated with Russia on the Ukraine war which means Iran will expect Russia to provide political and weaponry support when it is in crisis. Currently, Iran seems to have close ties with China, despite domestic instability on the rise. This demonstrates the fact that Iran wants to show its own population and western powers that it has the backing and support of regional powers. These countries are against Western influence in the region and their close relationship conveys a strong message to the western countries to limit their influence. Though they have pushed the Taliban through ongoing and closed diplomatic relationships to form an inclusive government and protect human rights, the fundamental geopolitical interests and nature of these authoritative governments does not translate to genuine concern or commitment to these issues. To achieve their security and economic interests in the region, these countries will

pursue close relationships with the Taliban de facto authorities regardless of considering the nature of the Taliban governance system.

On the other side, the Central Asian countries seem to have adopted a policy of containment and engage with the Taliban in order to limit the security crisis that could emerge from Afghanistan.

There have been several regional platforms to address the security crisis in Afghanistan and its region post-U.S. withdrawal, but have not fully covered all the security complexities due to the existing dynamics among the countries in the region and their overlapping interest in Afghanistan.

Similarly, the failure of the Doha negotiations and the lack of regional elements raise questions about the effectiveness of regional platforms and peace and regional security processes. The evolution of threats, the reorganization of terrorists and insurgent groups, and the leakage of the domestic security crisis into other borders has had an impact on other countries in the region. In other words, this requires a rethinking of the security architecture in the region. The Afghan conflict is negatively impacting its border countries. Those countries should deal practically with practical decisions to address the causes of traditional and nontraditional threats from Afghanistan and to cope with the spillover of crisis in the region.

Multilateral forums need to go beyond formal statements and Track 1 approaches. It is time to integrate bottom-up approaches that involve state and non-state actors from different sectors to facilitate interest-based negotiations focused on security. Negotiators have the potential to play an important role in changing and shifting the positions of interest groups who have a stake in conflict and peace.

Considering the interconnectedness of security issues, the region may need a regional security architecture, including norms, processes, practices, and relationships. This could be developed by nations of the region to protect and enhance regional security or by ongoing evaluations to address domestic drivers of the insecurities in their respective countries. One-off events and meetings involving high-ranking government representatives have resulted in formal statements highlighting key issues. But the fundamental causes of the conflict and insecurities remain unaddressed and appropriate implementation remains challenging.

Regional dialogue requires inclusivity of all the countries that are interconnected through identity, religion, culture, political history or territory. Exclusion of any of these perpetuates the exclusion of the underlying issues connected to insecurity and conflict. Fundamental issues related to access to water, identity, border, narcotics, refugees and ideology should be prioritized, negotiated and formalized with relevant treaties and policies that can resolve interstate conflicts. Above all, the international relations of the countries in the region, their alignment and realignment with one another, and the western power based on each country's national interest, must be taken into serious consideration during the negotiation process. Such a process—if it continues as an interest-based negotiation involving the United States, Central Asian states, Pakistan, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan and China—has the potential of defining and designing a new security architecture for the region. This is challenging though, especially when unresolved and underlying security issues and political tension among the countries with strategic competitions remain. It requires some form of resolution or compromise prior to the implementation of such a process, especially where it has the potential to address interconnected and complex security issues.

## References

- Allison, R., & Jonson, L. (Eds.). (2001). *Central Asian security: The new international context*. Brookings Institution Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctvddzv6m>
- Atkin, M. (1992, November). *Tajikistan's relations with Iran and Afghanistan*. The National Council for Soviet and East European Research. <https://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceeer/1992-806-18-2-Atkin.pdf>
- Behraves, M. (2019, February). *What does Iran want in Afghanistan?* Aljazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/190204092658549.html>
- Big mediator: China offers to broker stalled Afghan talks with Taliban. (2015, February 15). [www.rt.com/news/231891-china-taliban-talks-pakistan/](http://www.rt.com/news/231891-china-taliban-talks-pakistan/)
- Blumenthal, L., Purdy, C., & Bassetti, V. (2022, August 3). *Chinese investment in Afghanistan's lithium sector: A long shot in the short term*. Brookings. [www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2022/08/03/chinese-investment-in-afghanistans-lithium-sector-a-long-shot-in-the-short-term/](http://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2022/08/03/chinese-investment-in-afghanistans-lithium-sector-a-long-shot-in-the-short-term/)
- Buzan, B. (1983). *People, states and fear: The national security problem in international relations*. The University of North Carolina Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1961913>
- Buzan, B. (1991). *People, states and fear, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.: An agenda for international security in the post-cold war era*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. [https://www.academia.edu/4780500/People\\_States\\_and\\_Fear\\_An\\_Agenda\\_For\\_International\\_Security\\_Studies\\_in\\_the\\_Post\\_Cold\\_War\\_Era\\_Barry\\_Buzan](https://www.academia.edu/4780500/People_States_and_Fear_An_Agenda_For_International_Security_Studies_in_the_Post_Cold_War_Era_Barry_Buzan)
- Chaudet, D. (2006, August). Hizb ut-tahrir: An Islamist threat to Central Asia? *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 26(1), 113-125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000600738822>



China eyes Afghanistan's lithium reserves, offers to invest USD 10 billion. (2023, April 15). *The Economic Times of India*.

[https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/china-eyes-afghanistans-lithium-reserves-offers-to-invest-usd-10-billion/articleshow/99521732.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/china-eyes-afghanistans-lithium-reserves-offers-to-invest-usd-10-billion/articleshow/99521732.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

Clarke, M. (2016, June). 'One belt, one road' and China's emerging Afghanistan dilemma. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 70(5), 563-579.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2016.1183585>

Daragahi, B. (2022, May). *Afghanistan: Where US-Iranian interests may yet intersect*. Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AC-Talibans-IB-v4.pdf>

Dave, B., & Kobayashi, Y. (2018, April). China's silk road economic belt initiative in Central Asia: Economic and security implications. *Asia Europe Journal*, 16(3), 267-281.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10308-018-0513-x>

Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement. (n.d.) *United Nations Security Council*.

[www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq\\_sanctions\\_list/summaries/entity/eastern-turkistan-islamic-movement](http://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/eastern-turkistan-islamic-movement)

Fulton, J. (2022, February). The China–Iran comprehensive strategic partnership: A tale of two regional security complexes. *Asian Affairs*, 53(1), 145-163.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2022.2029073>

Funaiole, M. P., & Hart, B. (2021, September 28). Afghanistan is no treasure trove for China.

*Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/28/afghanistan-china-rare-earth-minerals-latin-america-lithium/>

Hanks, R. R. (Ed.). (2010, October). *Global security watch: Central Asia*. ABC-CLIO.

<https://www.abc-clio.com/products/c8247c/>

Hasan, K. (1962, September). Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. University of California Press.

*Asian Survey*, 2(7), 14-24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3023688>

Imamova, N. (2022, July 27). Nearly 30 nations engage with Taliban at Tashkent conference.

VOA South & Central Asia. [www.voanews.com/a/almost-30-nations-engage-with-taliban-at-tashkent-conference-/6676107.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/almost-30-nations-engage-with-taliban-at-tashkent-conference-/6676107.html)

Indurthy, R. (1987). The systems and subsystems approaches: A critique. *The Indian Journal of*

*Political Science*, 48(1), 96–125. [www.jstor.org/stable/41855868](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41855868)

Iran: Afghan Refugees and Migrants Face Abuse. (2013, November). *Human Rights Watch*.

[www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/20/iran-afghan-refugees-and-migrants-face-abuse](http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/20/iran-afghan-refugees-and-migrants-face-abuse)

Johnson, R. (2007). *Oil, Islam, and conflict: Central Asia since 1945*. Reaktion Books.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26330803>

Kapur, S. P., & Ganguly, S. (2012). The jihad paradox: Pakistan and Islamist militancy in South

Asia. *International Security*, 37(1), 111–141. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23280406>

Khan, R., & Amin, T. (2020). Geopolitics and strategic interests of the British in the tribal areas

of the northwest frontier and its administration. *Central Asia*, 87(Winter), 55-66.

<https://doi.org/10.54418/ca-87.120>

- Khanmohammadi, S., & Sun, D. (2022, March). China-Iran strategic cooperation agreement in the changing international system. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 16(1), 27- 45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2022.2051316>
- Klimburg-Salter, D. (2018). Contextualizing Mes Aynak. *University of Edinburgh Press Journals*, 1(2), 213-238. <https://doi.org/10.3366/afg.2018.0015>
- Krambs, T. A. (2013). Central Asia and the Afghanistan security dilemma: Amelioration, retrograde, or status quo? Central Asia's role in regional security regarding Afghanistan after 2014. *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, 12(2), 1–26. <http://connections-qj.org/article/central-asia-and-afghanistan-security-dilemma-amelioration-retrograde-or-status-quo-central>
- Laruelle, M. (2014). Assessing Uzbekistan's and Tajikistan's Afghan policy: The impact of domestic drivers. *Central Asian Affairs*, 1(1), 108-132. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142290-00101008>
- Malik, H. (Ed.). (1994). *Central Asia: Its strategic importance and future prospects*. St. Martin's Press.
- Mann, P. (2008 April). Islamic movement of Uzbekistan: Will it strike back? *Strategic Analysis*, 26(2), 294-304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160208450045>
- Manz, B. (Ed.). (1994). *Central Asia in historical perspective: First edition*. Westview Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429501784>
- Miller, B. (2017). *International and regional security: The causes of war and peace*. Routledge. <https://mfa.tj/en/main/view/17/relations-of-tajikistan-with-afghanistan>

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan. (2020, December 12). Relations of Tajikistan with Afghanistan. <https://mfa.tj/en/main/view/17/relations-of-tajikistan-with-afghanistan>
- Ng, T. P. (2010, September). China's role in shaping the future of Afghanistan. Carnegie Endowment Policy Outlook, 1-13.  
[https://carnegieendowment.org/files/china\\_role\\_afghanistan.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/china_role_afghanistan.pdf)
- Peimani, H. (2009). *Conflict and security in central Asia and the Caucasus*. ABC-CLIO.  
<https://publisher.abc-clio.com/9781598840551?startBookmarkIdx=200>
- Rahmanov, A. (2022). Turkmenistan's neutral foreign policy: Peace, security and sustainable development. *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 27(1), 122-137.  
<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2559576>
- Rajaye, E. (2019). China-Afghanistan relations in the post-Taliban period. *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, 23(3/4), 124-0-4.  
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2313307075?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>
- Tabatabai, A., & Esfandiary, D. (2018). *Triple-axis: Iran's relations with Russia and China*. I. B. Tauris. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2020.1811142>
- Taliban and China firm agree Afghanistan oil extraction deal. (2023, Jan 6). *BBC News*.  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-64183083>
- Taye, S., & Ahmed, S. Z. (2021, April). Dynamics of trust and mistrust in the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship. *Asian Studies Review*, 45(4), 557-575.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2021.1910798>

- Umarov, K. (2013). *Trade and economic relations between the republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*. University of Central Asia–Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA) Working Paper, 13.  
<https://ucentralasia.org/media/ur1bxqym/uca-ippa-wp13-tajikafghantrade-eng.pdf>
- Weinbaum, M. G. (2006). *Afghanistan and its neighbors: An ever-dangerous neighborhood* (Vol. 162). US Institute of Peace.  
<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr162.pdf>
- White Paper: Mes Aynak. (2011, December). *Alliance for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage*. Washington DC. [www.archinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/white-paper-mes-aynak.pdf](http://www.archinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/white-paper-mes-aynak.pdf)
- Yuldasheva, G. I. (2012). *Uzbekistan and the Afghan reconciliation process*. George Washington University The Elliott School of International Affairs Central Asia Program.  
<https://centralasiaprogram.org/uzbekistan-afghan-reconciliation-process>
- Zhao, H. (2012 March). *China and Afghanistan: China's interest, stances, and perspective*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fspublic/legacy\\_files/files/publication/120322\\_Zhao\\_ChinaAfghan\\_web.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fspublic/legacy_files/files/publication/120322_Zhao_ChinaAfghan_web.pdf)
- Zhao, H. (2016 June). Afghanistan and China's new neighbourhood diplomacy. *International Affairs*, 92(4), p. 891-908. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12654>
- Zhu, Y. (2018). China's Afghanistan policy since 9/11: Stages and prospects. *Asian Survey*, 58(2), 281-301. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26494047>