

Chapter 8

Afghanistan and the Surrounding Region: Eyes Focused on the ISAF Withdrawal

The security environment of Inner Eurasia is on the verge of a major turning point. The stationing of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan—composed of military forces from the United States and other countries, with the purpose of maintaining security, and continuing since the beginning of the century—is scheduled to sequentially conclude by the end of 2014.

The ISAF, the key to Afghanistan stabilization, has aimed to both improve internal security while unifying the whole of Afghanistan through a legitimate, democratically elected government. Also, it has been called upon to gradually reduce the reliance on foreign troops that has lasted for a long time, and create a framework for the maintenance of security that is made up of Afghans themselves. However, the current situation is not necessarily moving forward in an ideal manner. The scale of the ISAF is gradually contracting in line with timeline of withdrawal by the end of 2014, but without the situation in Afghanistan stabilizing. The United States under the Obama administration, along with the other countries involved in Afghanistan, are faced with the necessity to make good on public pledges of withdrawal, given the need to respond to the burgeoning antiwar mood among their respective populaces. Meanwhile, the United States and the rest of the international community will likely sustain their presence in Afghanistan in another form into the future, in order to assist in the ongoing reform of the military and security organizations there and to continue their economic aid, as well as to support President Hamid Karzai and the successive administration.

At the same time, Afghanistan is gradually transforming itself into an independent player, moving away from the extreme state of dependence that it has had on the countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), especially the United States. Nevertheless, the prospects for that are not bright at all. For there to be a stable governance of Afghanistan, peace talks need to be held, especially with the Taliban, but too many indeterminate factors remain for that to play out.

1. The Thirteen Years of the Karzai Government

(1) Continuing Difficulties in Domestic Governance

The Karzai government, which was launched at the end of 2001, has striven to create a legitimate country with the blessing and support of the international community. In January 2004, a new constitution was enacted based on the separation of legal, administrative, and judicial powers, and incorporated opinions

solicited from all sectors of society, coming from more than a year of discussions at the Constitutional Loya Jirga (national grand council). Economically, the nominal gross domestic product (GDP) of Afghanistan grew an average of 9 percent annually between 2003 and 2012, with an estimated growth of 11.8 percent for 2012 alone.

Still, such rapid economic growth owes much to support from the international community, and is not a result of self-sustaining industries being fostered in Afghanistan. Also, under current circumstances, agriculture—which ought to be the main force of the country's economy—accounts for only some 30 percent to 40 percent of the GDP. Agricultural production, which relies on rainwater, suffers from violent swings between poor and bountiful harvests due to insufficient irrigation facilities, among other things. While the exact percentage depends on the year, around 50 percent to 70 percent of the country's budget comes from foreign assistance, and under present conditions, the fact is that personnel expenses for public servants, including the military and police, depend on foreign aid.

The Karzai government also suffers from many problems in terms of domestic governance. Many negative reports have been made about the governing ability of the Karzai government, such as the widespread corruption of his government and associated people and relatives, along with the delays in the restoration of public order. For example, according to a report by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), around half of the people in the country were asked to pay bribes in order to receive public services in 2012, with the total amounting to US\$3.9 billion. That figure represents approximately a 40 percent increase compared with 2009, with the military and police staff notably taking bribes. In the Corruption Perception Index released by the nongovernmental organization Transparency International in December 2013, Afghanistan ranked along with North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK) and Somalia at the bottom of the list of the 177 countries surveyed. In particular, the emergence of various scandals surrounding Ahmed Wali Karzai—the younger brother of the president and the speaker of the legislature of Kandahar Province (and who was assassinated in July 2011)—such as dishonest wealth accumulation and drug trafficking, served to trigger doubts both domestically and internationally about the legitimacy of the rule of the Karzai government. Moreover, in elections held at the national level, including two presidential elections, doubts arose both domestically and internationally about their fairness, despite some improvements

Table 8.1. Presidential elections since the fall of the Taliban regime

October 9, 2004 election (18 candidates)

Candidates	Votes	%
Hamid Karzai (transitional government president)	4,443,029	55.40%
Yunus Qanuni	1,306,503	16.30%
Hadschi Mohammed Mohaqiq	935,325	11.70%
Abdul Rashid Dostum	804,861	10.00%

August 20, 2009 election (32 candidates)

Candidates	Uncontested votes	Additional votes*	Total	%
Hamid Karzai (incumbent)	1,904,900	379,007	2,283,907	49.67%
Abdullah Abdullah	1,310,334	95,908	1,406,242	30.59%
Ramazan Bashardost	450,183	30,389	481,072	10.46%

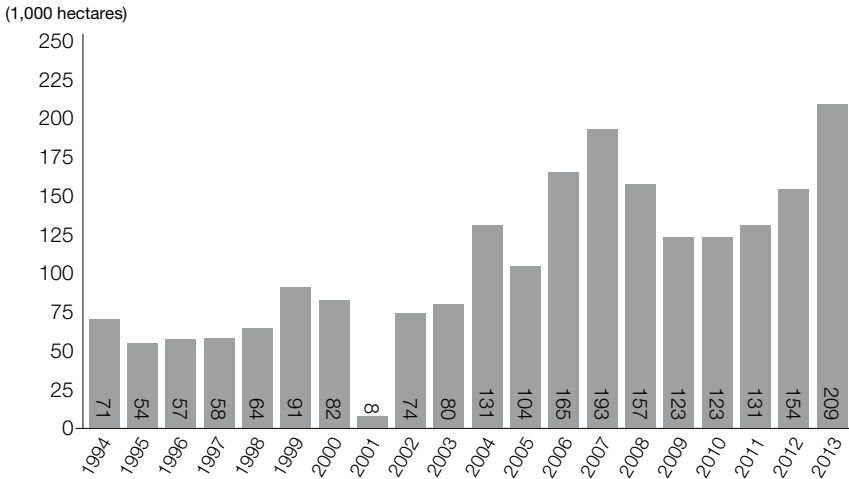
* Only those candidates with 10% or more of the votes. The "additional votes" in the 2009 election were added after investigations by the Afghanistan Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC).

Sources: Compiled from a report of the results of 2004 presidential election posted on the website of the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan as well as a report on the results of the 2009 presidential election, also on the same site.

made in certain periods. The August 2009 presidential election was especially rife with reports about irregularities and falsifications, leaving a slew of questions about the fairness of the results. The former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, who came second in the first round of balloting, with around 30 percent of the votes, protested about the fairness of the election, and withdrew his candidacy immediately before the final run-off balloting that took place in November of the same year (see Table 8.1).

The expansion of the underground economy, represented by poppy cultivation and the trafficking of drugs that accompanies it, is another severe problem for the society of Afghanistan. The crackdown on drug production and trafficking has had its ups and downs; according to UNODC statistics released in November 2013, the total area devoted to poppy cultivation in the country in 2013 was up 36 percent from the previous year, to the highest level ever of 209,000 hectares. The production of drugs had generally declined for a few years since 2008, but is now expanding to an unprecedented scale, primarily in the south and west (see Figure 8.1). The well-entrenched poppy production and its illegal trade hamper the

Figure 8.1. Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan (1994–2013)



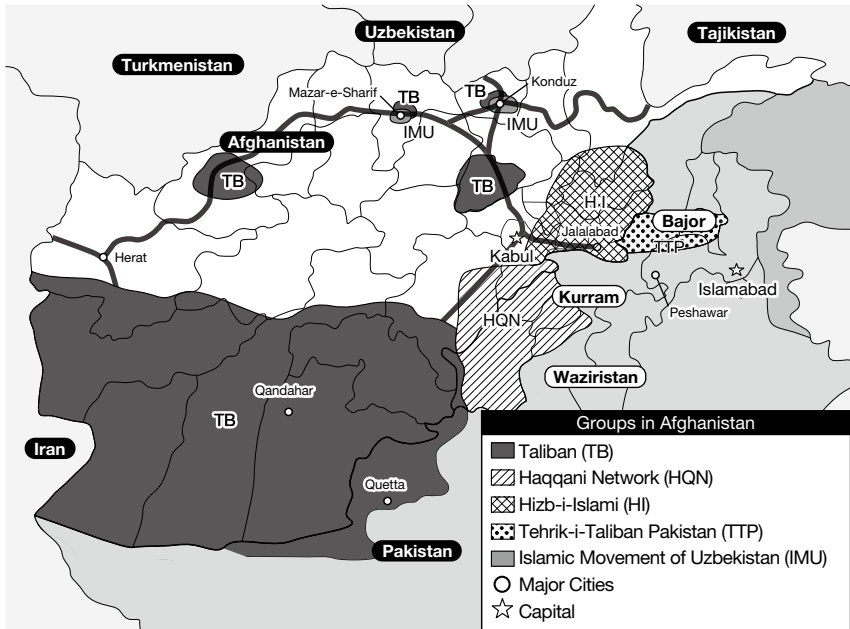
Source: UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2013: Summary Findings*, November 2013, p. 5.

normal development of the national economy, and are believed to worsen the public security situation as well as having deleterious effects on public health. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the Karzai government lacks sufficient ability to stem such kinds of crime, from which terrorist organizations derive income.

(2) The Taliban and Other Insurgencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan

The Taliban, along with its splinter factions, has consolidated its position as an opposing force to the rule of the Karzai government by placing bases and refuges in Pakistani territory while making inroads into Afghanistan territory. In addition, it has expressed its opposition to the presence of foreign troops, primarily Western, and their intervention in Afghanistan, and is continuing its armed struggle for the realization of Islamic rule. The Taliban had at one time seemed to have vanished into thin air because of the actions taken by the US military in Afghanistan after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but it was able to regroup afterwards, gradually coming to establish territories of effective control, including some areas within Pakistan. Since the latter half of the decade of the 2000s, it has restored its power in areas within Afghanistan as well, continuing its effective control of some regions out of reach of the Karzai government. According to the statements of the Taliban, it is

Figure 8.2. Areas controlled by various groups in Afghanistan



Sources: Compiled from Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2013), pp. 302-303, and other sources.

expanding the areas under its control in the east and south of Afghanistan, such as Nuristan Province. Meanwhile, several leading figures are emerging, such as Ismail Khan—currently minister of energy and water issues in the Karzai government, as well as leader of an armed faction in the western city of Herat—who, while holding important posts in the government, are calling upon people in their home regions to prepare for the revival of the Taliban after the withdrawal of the ISAF by arming themselves in self-defense.

There are several reasons why the Taliban maintains strength in certain areas of Afghanistan concurrently with the Karzai government in Kabul, and why it is crossing the border and continuing its activities. The first is the independent network maintained by the main ethnic group in those areas, the Pashtuns, including within Pakistan, giving the Taliban the room to maneuver. After the collapse of their government in 2001, the people who had belonged to the Taliban did not really vanish into thin air, but it is more accurate to say that they actually

returned to the places of their birth or the villages where their relatives lived, where they bided their time and prepared for subsequent developments.

The second reason is the fact that popular confidence in the governing ability of the Karzai government is so low that a certain segment of the residents of some local villages is believed to condone the activities of the Taliban. The Taliban has distributed propaganda condemning the United States and the Karzai government—video clips, pamphlets, and so forth—in order to win people's hearts and minds. Indeed, more urban residents welcome the Karzai government, which tolerates the freedom of thought and religion, than they would a Taliban government, which coerces people into abiding by mores based on fundamentalist Islam. As a matter of fact, anti-Karzai forces, including the Taliban, have had a difficult time trying to expand their area of influence or fixing their support, even if they may have been successful in bringing particular villages under their control. Meanwhile, some people tolerant of the Taliban are deeply rooted in primarily Pashtun regional villages, mainly in the south of the country, since the Taliban gives them a certain level of economic stability, providing political order while tacitly condoning such crimes as poppy cultivation and drug trafficking. It is thus fair to say that some people are forced to fight for the Taliban through intimidation, while others, owing to their poverty, join the Taliban willingly as a reliable way to earn their keep.

Throughout the decade of the 2000s, the Taliban split into smaller factions, and partially for that reason has come to gain the reputation of being a highly cohesive and uncompromising group. The authority of its leader, Mullah Muhammed Omar, remains strong, and the council he leads, commonly known as Quetta Shura, runs the Taliban for all practical purposes (simple references below to the “Taliban” will mean the group or movement led by the Quetta Shura). The name of Quetta Shura derives from the city Quetta in Balochistan Province, which lies within Pakistani territory near the Afghan border, and to which the major forces of the Taliban government, following its 2001 collapse, are thought to have fled and set up their base. Since the second half of the decade of the 2000s, the Taliban has made constant armed attacks, including terrorist acts, especially in the provinces of eastern and southern Afghanistan, expanding its power and placing certain areas under its control as of 2013. The Taliban also calls itself the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan,” the same name that had been used during the era of the Taliban government, thus denying the legitimacy of the Karzai government. In

addition, as will be stated later, it has set up offices abroad, carrying out diplomatic functions, such as negotiating with the United States and the Karzai government, among others.

One group that carries out activities apart from the Taliban is the Haqqani Network (HQN), also made up of Pashtuns, and historically speaking thought to have strong ties with the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan. The group is led by Sirajuddin Haqqani, son of Jalaluddin Haqqani, a Mujahidin active in the 1980s, and many of the higher posts in the organization are held by his relatives. It is based in areas of eastern Afghanistan, such as Paktiya and Ghazni Provinces, and is believed to control part of North Waziristan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. On September 8, 2012, the United States designated the HQN as a terrorist organization subject to sanctions.

Judging from the fact that the self-professed “Taliban” organizations of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), mainly active inside Pakistan carrying out terrorist acts, and the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), based in southern Punjab Province, are composed of federations of highly indigenous forces, as well as from the fact that they frequently employ suicide bombs as their mode of attack, they should be regarded as different organizations from the Taliban itself. The TTP was formed in December 12, 2007, after an assembly of more than forty ethnic leaders of separatist militiamen in North Waziristan. Held together by blood ties and strong links to local communities, it has repeatedly carried out terrorist activities outside of Pakistan, including several failed attempts. They are the ones who, on October 9, 2012, shot Malala Yousafzai, a 15-year-old girl who used her real name to make an appeal in the media for the need for females to be educated, and who condemned the destruction of girls’ schools by Islamic fundamentalists. Also, as for terrorist acts in the United States, the TTP was involved in a failed subway bombing in New York in September 2009, as well as a failed car bombing in Times Square in the same city in May 2010. For that reason, the TTP has been the target of attacks by the United States inside Pakistan during terrorist clean-up operations. Several of its leaders have been killed so far in US drone attacks, including chief commander Hakimullah Mehsud on November 1, 2013.

Several other illegal armed groups are also believed to be secreted in the mountainous regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, representative of which are the Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former Mujahidin, ever since the military intervention into Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, and the

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), prominent among groups from the former Soviet states of Central Asia since their independence. The IMU fled oppression by the Uzbek authorities and transferred their base of operations to Afghanistan at the end of the 1990s, and suffered devastating damage during the military operations conducted by the United States after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, including the murder of its leader at the time. However, they were able to maintain bases within Pakistan even after that, and still maintain a certain level of power. The IMU is also a focus of attacks by the US military, with its leader Abu Usman Adil, who had been hiding inside Pakistan, killed by a drone attack in April 2012.

As for the influence wielded by those armed insurgents on neighboring countries, there were reports in May 2013 that Chechen and Uzbek youths, trained militarily by al-Qaeda and the Taliban inside Afghanistan territory, have been hiding near the borders of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. Still, the predominant view among experts in Russia is that there is little probability that such groups will infiltrate across international borders into the former Soviet states of Central Asia in the near future.

2. Afghanistan's Foreign Policy and the Destabilization of the Region

(1) Transformation into an Independent Player?

President Karzai originally became leader of the Afghanistan government having been asked by the United States. During the George W. Bush administration, a highly intimate bilateral relationship was maintained between the two sides, with a direct line of communication set up between the two presidents. The US journalist Bob Woodward has commented that a regular TV conference was held almost every other week. However, President Obama broke the tradition set by his predecessor, probably because of his desire to get away from the posture of relying on personal relations with national leaders, as well as his intention to avoid having to dwell personally on strategic details. The Obama administration thus clearly developed a position of eliminating the Karzai government's reliance on the United States. In January 2009, immediately before he took office, Vice-president-elect Joseph Biden visited Kabul together with Senator Lindsey Graham (Republican, South Carolina), and the accusations exchanged between him and President Karzai came to be symbolic of subsequent developments. The United

States criticized the corruption of the Karzai government and the excessive favors bestowed on the president's aides and relatives, while President Karzai vented his dissatisfaction with the civilian deaths and injuries caused by US military attacks. Also, according to the new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan announced by the Obama administration on March 27, 2009, the focus of antiterrorist activity was to be shifted from Afghanistan to Pakistan, with the aim of dismantling the terrorist networks active inside Pakistan.

However, judging the results in hindsight, the response of the Obama administration to the Karzai government has been eclectic. In the decade after 2003, including the period of the Obama administration, it has been revealed that the United States continued to funnel money to the Afghan president through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). According to news reports in April 2013, several hundreds of thousands of dollars to several million dollars in cash were delivered each month. The Karzai government used the money in various ways, including attempts to mollify warlords and as benefits given to presidential supporters. Some have thus pointed out that ironically, "the United States was the greatest source of corruption in Afghanistan."

President Karzai's dissatisfaction with the United States has also mounted, and is believed to derive the recognition that the American system to support Afghanistan—security and otherwise—and its policies toward that country are not in line with Afghan interests. For example, in October 2012, President Karzai accused the United States of duplicity in fighting Afghan enemies, criticizing the fact that although the US military was acting to quell rebellions within Afghanistan, the US government was not supplying the Afghan military with sufficient equipment and hardware to make that happen. Also, he has repeatedly condemned the fact that US military operations have caused the deaths of countless innocent civilian lives. Under those circumstances, public opinion in Afghanistan does not actively support the presence of foreign armies, including the US military. At the same time, it is also true that the US military cannot be said to have paid sufficient consideration to the local population. On February 20, 2012, it was revealed that US soldiers had mistakenly burned a copy of the Koran at the US-operated Bagram Airfield outside Kabul, setting off anti-US demonstrations throughout Afghanistan. The occurrence of such incidents, rooted in a lack of consideration for Afghanistan's culture and religion, amplified the mistrust of the Afghan people toward the foreign troops stationed in the country.

The countries of the West, particularly the United States, are proceeding with the transfer of security operations to local Afghan forces, on account of the prolonged nature of the Afghanistan mission and the heightened antiwar mood among their own populations owing to the increase in casualties. Because of the policy shift by the Obama administration and the growing dissatisfaction of the Karzai government toward the United States, as well as the mistrust of the Afghan people toward the foreign troops stationed in the country, the Karzai government, over the medium and long-range future, is attempting to escape from its extreme dependence on the United States and other countries of NATO, so as to become an independent player, at least as far as foreign relations are concerned. For example, ever since 2004, President Karzai has continued to participate as a guest in the annual summit conferences of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a dialogue framework for regional security whose full members are China, Russia, and the former Soviet states of Central Asia. For Afghanistan, the SCO serves as an ideal forum in which to appeal for cooperation with the major powers of central Eurasia adjacent to it, such as China and Russia. In 2012, it was granted formal status as an observer of the organization. In addition, Afghanistan is working to deepen bilateral relationships with neighboring countries—above all India and Iran—while pursuing a balanced foreign policy in Eurasia. However, as will be shown in the following section, the relations with its most important neighbor, Pakistan, are not being strengthened so easily.

(2) Direction of Domestic Politics in Pakistan and Its Tenuous Relationship with Afghanistan

Ever since its establishment as a country, Afghanistan has been a destabilizing factor for Pakistan's national security. The current border between the two nations was based on the Durand Line, an artificial line drawn between British India and Afghanistan at the end of the nineteenth century. Because of that, Pakistan's management of its border with Afghanistan has been exceedingly fragile. Also, the Cold War was a period of heightened tensions between the two countries, including the so-called Pashtunistan issue, which was a movement by Pashtuns in Afghanistan toward self-government, leading to armed clashes near the Pakistan border on account of weapons provided by the Soviet Union, aiming at weakening Pakistan. Even after the Karzai government was formed, the bilateral relationship between the two countries has remained essentially unchanged.

Pakistan is currently engaged in the process of constructing a democratic political system. After President Parvez Musharraf, whose background was in the military, left office in 2008, a civilian-led coalition government was revived in the country. Also, revisions to the constitution in 2010 greatly reduced the authority of the president, which had been expanded during the Musharraf years, such as the power to disband the lower house of the parliament. Meanwhile, it has now become compulsory for the prime minister to give suggestions about important personnel changes in military, such as the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, as well as the chiefs of staff of the respective branches of the military (army, navy, and air force). In such a way, the executive branch of the government and its responsibilities have come to be centered on the prime minister. On May 11, 2013, for the first time in Pakistan's history, a general election for the lower house of the parliament was held after five years of continued civilian government. The result was a landslide victory for the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz), or PML-N, led by Nawaz Sharif, and a new coalition government was launched with his party in the driver's seat. Prime Minister Sharif had originally shown a flexible approach toward the TTP, and though he had demonstrated a cautious attitude toward dialogue with it after taking office, preparations were made toward peace talks. However, as mentioned earlier, the leader of the TTP, Hakimullah Mehsud, was killed by US drone attacks in November, bringing the peace talks to a standstill. In addition, the TTP has pledged to take revenge on the Pakistani government.

The progress of democratization in Pakistan in recent years was made possible only with the undergirding of military support. The real power at the top of the military in Pakistan has been Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the chief of army staff. He had held that post since 2007, taking it over from President Musharraf, who was holding the post concurrently with his presidency, but he left it on November 29, 2013, when Gen. Raheel Sharif became chief of army staff. That was the first change of chiefs of army staff since the constitutional revision of 2010, which made it mandatory for the prime minister to give advice on top military personnel matters, as mentioned previously, and demonstrated that the Sharif government was on good terms with the military.

The Pakistani government is skeptical about how the security situation in Afghanistan will be after the withdrawal of the US military and the ISAF. It is making all-out efforts, unprecedented in recent times, to mop up terrorists and carry out border patrols in areas adjacent to the Afghanistan border, particularly

in FATA. However, the number of victims of terrorist attacks remains high, having peaked in 2009 at around 4,000 casualties of security-related personnel, including soldiers, then declining thereafter, but since then is still believed to be registering around 2,000 casualties yearly. The number of civilian terrorist victims also peaked in 2009 and declined afterward, but still exceeded 1,000 as of 2012. In that manner, Pakistan, even with its formidable military, is plagued by problems in the maintenance of its territorial integrity, a function that lies at the heart of being a sovereign nation. At the same time, the Pakistani government not only condemns the terrorist attacks within its borders, but also criticizes the drone attacks made by the US military nominally to deal with those terrorists as an infringement of its national sovereignty, saying that they threaten the rights and safety of the Pakistani population.

Furthermore, a volatile situation exists between Pakistan and Afghanistan as far as border management is concerned. According to Afghanistan authorities, there was a shootout with Pakistan on May 1–2, 2013, in Nangarhar Province, adjacent to the Khyber Pass, with a total of ten deaths and five injuries on both sides. However, Pakistani Chief of Army Staff Kayani, while still in his post, took pains to build a relation of trust, carrying out consultations on border management with his counterparts in the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the ISAF, even

proposing the training of ANA officers within Pakistani territory. While that is partially thought to be a measure taken to compete with the training provided to the ANA by India, there are efforts being made between Afghanistan and Pakistan to foster bilateral military trust building, with a certain level of progress deemed to have been made. In addition, Britain, as the former suzerain power in this region, has made attempts at mediation, with a tripartite summit having taken place twice already, in February and October 2013.

(3) Russia and post-Soviet Central Asia

Russia has overcome the trauma of the failure of its military intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and has progressively developed a bilateral relationship with that country both politically and economically. Also, most Russian political leaders have come to look upon the stabilization of Afghanistan as a major security issue for Russia. For example, in an interview that took place in the beginning of November 2013, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu spelled out the three main military threats Russia is facing, namely, international Islamist terrorism, the continued expansion of NATO to Russia's borders, and the withdrawal of Western coalition forces from Afghanistan in 2014.

Russia is also going ahead with the buildup of military hardware and its operation in Central Asia to cope with the Afghanistan situation. In the aforementioned interview, Defense Minister Shoigu suggested that the Russian 201st division in Tajikistan, whose numbers had been on a downward trend, would be strengthened. Specifically, by the end of 2013, it was to be reinforced to around 80 percent of manpower capacity, and additionally to 100 percent by the time of the Afghanistan presidential election of April 2014. He also mentioned the policy of promoting the updating of hardware and the advancement of technology. In addition, the number of Russian personnel stationed at the Kant Airbase in Kyrgyzstan, where the Russian Air Force maintains a military presence, is to be doubled, with additional helicopters and aircraft added by the end of 2013 to be used in operations in mountainous areas.

Also, Russia has shown a posture of dealing with changes in Afghanistan within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which it has formed together with the former Soviet states of Central Asia. On September 23, 2013, a CSTO summit meeting was held in Sochi, with leaders of the member nations attending. At the meeting, discussions were made to provide additional collective assistance to Tajikistan to reinforce its national border with Afghanistan.

The stabilization of Afghanistan is a matter of great concern not only to Russia, but also to the former Soviet states of Central Asia, intimately related as it is to their own security. Those countries are maintaining their cooperation with the countries of NATO by supporting the activities of foreign militaries in Afghanistan through the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a supply route for ISAF activities, while also pursuing independent countermeasures by utilizing the frameworks of such groups as the CSTO and SCO.

However, big changes are soon to take place in the US military presence in Central Asia. In June 20, 2013, Jogorku Kengesh, the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan, voted to close the Transit Center at Manas—used since 2001 for missions in Afghanistan—by July 2014. Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev had publicly pledged to shut down that transit center ever since taking office in 2011. On October 18, the US Department of Defense announced that it would replace Manas as a transport center with another one in Romania. According to media reports, the Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base near the Black Sea coast is to be used for the transportation of personnel and materiel, including those used in the mission to withdraw from Afghanistan.

(4) Searching for Partners in the Vicinity: Afghanistan's Relations with India, Iran, and China

In recent years, India has been notably restoring its relations with Afghanistan, which had been turbulent for many years ever since the period of the Cold War. As a friend to the Soviet Union, India had supported the socialist regime that was set up after the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, India did not recognize the Taliban government that was launched in the mid-1990s, as it was being aided by Pakistan, and instead supported the Northern Alliance, including Ahmad Shah Massoud, who had successively served as defense minister, etc. in Mujahidin governments after the fall of the socialist government in Afghanistan. India restored diplomatic relations with Afghanistan once the Karzai government came into power, and it now maintains four consulates around the country besides its embassy in the capital. As far as economic relations are concerned, bilateral trade has especially burgeoned since the latter part of the decade of the 2000s, with India now Afghanistan's second largest export market after Pakistan. On October 4, 2011, India and Afghanistan signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement, the first security-related agreement between the two countries. It provides for assistance to help rebuild

Afghanistan's infrastructure and institutions, education and technical assistance to rebuild indigenous Afghan capacity in different areas, encouraging investment in Afghanistan's natural resources, and extends duty-free access to the Indian market for Afghanistan's export products. In addition, it lays forth a long-term policy direction for supporting the process of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

It is thought that India puts high value on its relationship with the Karzai government partially because it believes it can check Pakistan by maintaining good relations with that government and its soon-to-be-chosen successor by expanding its influence in the country, trying to parlay its position to its own advantage. India had kept its distance from the Taliban government, which was able to expand its power in Afghanistan in the 1990s thanks to the encouragement and support provided by Pakistani security and intelligence, and it seems to have kept a consistent diplomatic stance as far as that point is concerned. On the other hand, the expansion of India's presence in Afghanistan has incited terrorist incidents, with the Indian Embassy in Kabul and embassy staff lodgings having been attacked three times: in July 2008, October 2009, and February 2010. Those criminal incidents are thought to have been perpetrated by the aforementioned HQN, which has been said to receive support from the ISI.

As a nation ruled by a Shiite religious authority, Iran lies in opposition to the Taliban, which is a radical Sunni group. For that reason, Iran has pursued the building of relations with the Karzai government, which it considers to be somewhat a "better" partner than the Taliban. It is reported that the secret funding given to President Karzai by the CIA, as mentioned above, was encouraged by the fact that Iran had already been transferring money to him. However, Iran is said to have halted that funding thereafter. In December 2011, Iran signed a mutual defense treaty with Afghanistan, and views the long-term stationing of the NATO in that country as problematic. For that reason, it is opposed to the signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement between the United States and Afghanistan.

In addition, Iran is leery about the influx of extremists into the eastern border areas of the country who would affect the security of the area, including branches of the Taliban active in Afghanistan, and the Jundullah, an illegal, extremist Sunni group based in Balochistan Province. Moreover, just as in the case of the former Soviet states of Central Asia, it treats the stoppage of the transborder flow of illegal weapons, drugs and people as an important issue. As far as that is concerned,

an Iranian police official interviewed by the Russian media in November 2013—while assessing the Afghan government as being in a position to manage its own problems—criticized the US military stationed in that country as effectively condoning and protecting poppy cultivation, as it fears that locals would be alienated by a prohibition of such cultivation as the only cash crop in Afghanistan and side with the Taliban.

China is focusing attention on Afghanistan from the perspectives of its own security as well the economy. The existence of Uighur separatists in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, who are thought to have undergone combat training in Afghanistan and Pakistan, is a security concern for China domestically, and the Chinese government has repeatedly described them as having become a terrorist group. In 2013, also, there were reportedly several “terrorist attacks” plotted by Uighurs in the Autonomous Region. Also, the incident that occurred on October 28 in Tiananmen in Beijing, with a car being recklessly driven and bursting into fire, was described as a terrorist attack by Uighur independence fighters. After the incident, Meng Jianzhu, the secretary of Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China (CPC), on a visit on November 1 to the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent, mentioned that the East Turkestan Islamic Movement was behind it. Partially to quell the antigovernment Uighur forces in its country, China has been promoting coordination with countries in Central and South Asia to reinforce security. One example of that is the visit to Afghanistan on September 22, 2012, by Zhou Yongkang, a member of Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC, and responsible for both the security and justice divisions. He became the first Chinese Politburo member in forty-six years to visit Afghanistan, during which China exchanged an agreement with Afghanistan saying that it would cooperate with police training, funding, and equipment.

China is also actively pursuing the construction of a relationship with Afghanistan that is based on economic interests. An enterprise symbolic of that is the development of the Aynak copper mine in Logar Province. After a competitive bidding process, the Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC) was awarded a 30-year lease for the mine starting in 2007, with production slated to begin in 2014. However, the plans have not necessarily all gone ahead smoothly. The MCC enterprise has encountered the problem of the preservation of important antiquities found at the mining site, with no prospects of commercial production in sight.

Other resource-related developments include the participation by the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) in the development of three oil wells in the Amu Darya mining area, namely, Kashkari, Bazarkhami and Zamarudsay. According to news reports, those are not doing so well either, with the security situation worsening on account of interference by local warlords.

3. Efforts at Engagement by the International Community toward Stabilization

(1) Maintenance of Security within Afghanistan after the ISAF Withdrawal

The international community intervened in Afghanistan because of its fears that security threats would spread if the country became unstable. The intervention will not conclude with the ISAF withdrawal in 2014, but rather the countries involved are called upon to maintain a lower-profile posture, acting in a less forcible manner, so as to foster and support the capacity of Afghans themselves to function as actual security forces.

In December 2009, President Obama decided to send an additional 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan (called the “surge”) by the first part of the following year, after which a regular review of the situation would be made, with consideration to be made in July 2011 of the timing of changes in the military mission. In fact, in the second stage of the new Afghanistan policies announced in June 2011, the policy direction was determined in which 10,000 US troops would be removed from Afghanistan by the end of the year, with the additional troops in the surge to be withdrawn by the summer of 2012, and the process of transition to Afghan responsibility for security to be completed by 2014.

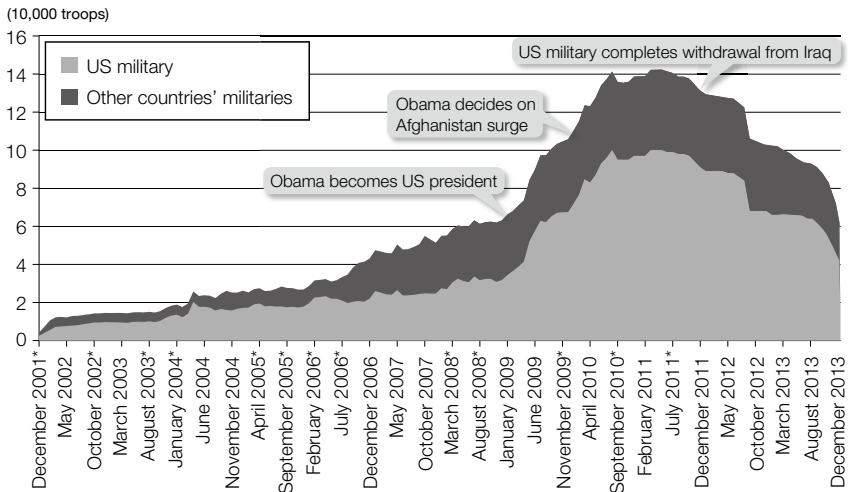
In the joint declaration made on May 21, 2012, at the Chicago summit of the nations contributing to ISAF along with the Afghan government, held in conjunction with the NATO summit, it was reaffirmed that ISAF’s mission, along with that of the US military, would draw to a close by the end of 2014. It was also announced that NATO and the Afghan government would continue their close partnership beyond the end of the transition period, demonstrating the direction that the international community would take toward the stabilization of Afghanistan after the transition was finalized. In that, it was decided that NATO would take the place of ISAF in a noncombat mission to be called “Resolute

Support,” emphasizing training, advice and support.

The scaling down of the ISAF military presence and the transfer of security authority has proceeded steadily in line with the policy direction laid forth in the aforementioned NATO Summit. According to a report by the Brookings Institution, there were less than 50,000 US troops still in Afghanistan as of November 2013, down from the peak of 100,000 reached in 2011. In addition, the level of the ISAF military presence had come down to about 27,000 as of August 1, 2013 (see Figure 8.3). As for the Australian Defence Force (ADF)—Australia representing the non-NATO country that dispatched the most troops to Afghanistan—a total withdrawal of its main forces stationed in Uruzgan was completed by the end of 2013.

The nature of the presence of the US military after the withdrawal of the ISAF was to be stipulated by the “Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” commonly known as the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA). When President Obama made a surprise visit to Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan on May 2, 2012,

Figure 8.3. Numbers of foreign troops in Afghanistan (2001–13)



Note: Figures for US military are approximate. Those for other countries are estimates in certain cases (months marked with an asterisk).

Source: Compiled from Brookings Institution's online data on Afghanistan

he and President Karzai signed the bilateral document known as the “Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan” (which came into effect on July 4, 2012). Even so, there was no explicit mention in the agreement concerning the scale and conditions of the US military presence in Afghanistan from 2015 onwards. The issue of the positioning of the US forces in Afghanistan was intermittently discussed between the two countries thereafter, with the two governments agreeing on a framework for a “security agreement” by November 20, 2013. As of July 2013, the US military announced that it would like to have the enduring framework in place by October 2014 so that there would be about ninety days before the current mandate ends and the new NATO operation begins.

Meanwhile, the highest decision-making organ of Afghanistan, the Loya Jirga, approved the BSA on November 24, 2013. According to the Afghan media, it was decided that the US military was to maintain a presence of some 5,000 to 10,000 troops in Afghanistan from 2015 onwards.

The Loya Jirga recommended that President Karzai sign the agreement before the end of 2013, a stance that was also welcomed by the United States. However, President Karzai said that further negotiations were necessary, and that his successor as president should be the one signing it, thus refusing to swiftly sign it himself. President Karzai has set down new conditions for his approval, including the complete halt of military operations on civilians’ residences, as well as the return of all Afghan nationals held at the base in Guantanamo Bay. In response to that, United States National Security Adviser Susan Rice, Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and others have urged President Karzai to reconsider, stating that a complete withdrawal of the US military and NATO forces would become unavoidable in 2015 and thereafter unless the agreement was signed swiftly. On December 21, 2013, moreover, NATO began negotiating with Afghanistan concerning a status of forces agreement involving support to be made after the ISAF withdrawal. Those negotiations, however, are predicated on the conclusion of the signing of the BSA between the United States and Afghanistan.

While government-level negotiations toward the conclusion of the BSA are experiencing complications, the US military is moving forward with preparations toward the construction of bases for a continued military presence at the troop level, including Special Forces. For instance, Camp Marmal has been built adjacent to the international airport outside the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in Balkh

Province, located in northern Afghanistan, with the German air force representing the main bulk of the forces there. The camp has continued to be the base for missions carried out by the US military special forces group known as Task Force 373. Mazar-e-Sharif, an important transport point near Uzbekistan, lies at the center of a region once controlled by Uzbek forces led by Abdul Rashid Dostum during the years of the Taliban regime in the 1990s, and has traditionally kept its distance from Pashtun rule. According to media reports, US military special forces have deployed more than sixty helicopters at Mazar-e-Sharif besides the ISAF, and the local provincial governor has condoned their stationing there in 2014 and onwards. That is why it is believed that the US military will continue its presence in Mazar-e-Sharif in 2015 and later.

(2) Support for the Reform of Afghanistan's Military and Security Organs

In order to build up Afghanistan's own security capacity, the authority for security in the country will be transferred from the ISAF to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), which is primarily composed of Afghan soldiers and police. The transition will be made in accordance with the roadmap adopted by the NATO Summit in Lisbon, held in November 2010, and has been advancing incrementally since July 2011. The 2012 NATO Summit in Chicago made the evaluation that the transition process was advancing smoothly.

On June 18, 2013, procedures were begun for the transfer of the authority for maintaining security across Afghanistan from the ISAF to the ANSF. The ANSF thereby took command of security maintenance in the country, with the ISAF changing its role to the position of simply providing support for that. The ANSF was to have 352,000 members by October 2012, but the outlook is for that to be reduced to around 230,000 from 2014 onwards owing to concerns that the larger number would impose a tight financial burden on the Afghan government. The yearly cost of maintaining security forces on that scale is estimated to be around US\$4.1 billion, with the Afghan government supplying US\$500 million, the non-US members of NATO providing US\$1.3 billion, and the rest to be shouldered by the United States. The ISAF Commander's Statement on Security Situation, issued in September 2013 (as the summer 2013 version), described the capabilities of the ANSF as such: "It's clear that the ANSF have tactical overmatch vis-à-vis the Taliban." It went on to say that "ANSF capabilities are not yet sustainable, but

they have made significant and very real progress,” particularly pointing out that “in the fielded force, the Afghan Air Force (AAF), logistics and intelligence are particular focus areas for improvement.” However, it also cited doubts about the training level of ANSF troops and their offensive capabilities.

The transfer of security maintenance functions from the ISAF to the ANSF will likely have a considerable impact on the Afghan economy and governmental finances. The Afghan government is forced to depend on the international community for most of the funds supporting ANSF personnel costs because it has not yet achieved economic self-sustainability. While such a financial state can hardly be described as a viable form of government for managing a state, it is probably necessary to keep that support system going for the time being, as it is the consensus of the international community to support the stability of the country and the interior of the Eurasian continent. On the other hand, some have pointed out that most of the support for Afghanistan at present goes toward security, leaving little left for support for reconstruction and development. While there ought not to be a choice between giving security or development more priority, the reality is that the current support system prioritizing security is inevitable, so as to maintain the integrity of the state and for future stability.

If one broadens one’s perspective to include multinational support frameworks that encompass such neighboring countries of Afghanistan as the former Soviet states of Central Asia, the important roles played by the United States and the European Union (EU) become even more striking. In June 2013, the EU conducted its first-ever senior official security dialogue with the nations of Central Asia. Deputy foreign ministers from across the region attended, with discussions focusing on strategies and programs to deal with drug trafficking. The plan is to regularize the dialogue framework in the future. The United States is also continuing dialogues with the countries of Central Asia through annual bilateral discussions, which, while also including the US Department of State, are

effectively being led by the US Department of Defense. A recent accomplishment of such talks was the formulation of the US-Central Asia Counternarcotics Initiative (CACI), in which the United States decided to give US\$4.2 million to improve the ability of five ex-Soviet Central Asian states to disrupt drug trafficking originating from Afghanistan. The initiative also coordinates closely with the US Department of Defense's counternarcotics programs in Central Asia, funded to the tune of US\$101 million.

ANSF and the Process of Transferring Security Authority

The ANSF is composed of the ANA, the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Afghan Air Force (AAF). As of October 2013, the ANA had 185,300 personnel, including some 11,000 special forces, while the ANP had approximately 152,600 personnel, and the AAF around 6,600. The current ANA was rebuilt in 2002, after the intervention of the US military, and boasts corps and brigades around the country, including one division based in Kabul, composed of two brigades. The ANP, a paramilitary organization under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, is composed of (1) traffic police, (2) uniformed police (including firefighters), (3) crime prevention police, which comprises the divisions responsible for narcotics control, terrorist countermeasures, and criminal investigation, (4) civil order police, organized to respond to emergency situations in urban areas and to crush rebellions, including counterterrorism, and (5) border police. The AAF, reconstructed in 2007 out of part of the army, is composed of volunteer soldiers, all of whom require two guarantors and must undergo criminal and drug investigations before being accepted. While the total number of female personnel in the ANSF is more than 2,000, representing a ratio of less than 1 percent, the fact is advertised abroad as evidence of a modern aspect of the makeup of Afghanistan's military.

All those organizations, which are responsible for internal and external security in the country, have been rebuilt and continued to expand under the Karzai government. Also, support by Western armed forces has led to enhanced equipment and personnel training, expanding the areas in which those organizations have taken over the authority to maintain public order. *Inteqal* (Dari and Pashtu for "transition"), the name of the process for the transition of the lead responsibility for security in Afghanistan from Western military forces to the ANSF, started on March 11, 2011, in the first sector (three provinces, including the capital Kabul, along with four cities, including Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat), and has since expanded to other sectors successively. On June 18, 2013, transfer of authority began in the fifth and final sector (primarily the provinces in the southeast of the country along the Pakistani border). The withdrawal of forces from ISAF countries is steadily advancing in tandem with that process.

Insofar as the reform of Afghan security forces is concerned, the EU and its member countries are pursuing long-term support, including the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA), developed for training border management officials stationed at Afghanistan's borders with Central Asian countries, as well as the reform of the police and judicial system. At the same time, the United States, while still devoting most of its energy to military matters, has adopted policies that emphasize training and materiel support for security forces within a shorter time frame.

(3) Developments in the Peace Talks with the Taliban

The United States has implemented various nation-building policies in Afghanistan, aiming at reconciliation and the reunification, by trying to incorporate a variety of ethnic groups, including moderates from the various Taliban-related groups. The new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan of March 2009, mentioned previously, also clearly referred to a policy of carrying out negotiations with the Taliban. The United States has been making contact with various groups of the Taliban behind the scenes, and is said to have been carrying out unofficial negotiations, in certain cases, with Pakistani officials also present. Besides meeting with the mainstream faction of the Taliban, the Quetta Shura, the United States and the Karzai government were also believed to have been approaching the HQN before it was designated as a terrorist organization in September 2012. However, such approaches did not necessarily go through the systematic process of international negotiation. The Karzai government tried to systematize negotiations by creating a High Peace Council in September 2010, headed by former President Burhanuddin Rabbani. However the interests of the separate ethnic groups making up the council conflicted with one other, and the assassination of Rabbani in September 2011 shut down that channel of dialogue for the time being.

In January 2012, the Taliban announced that it was ready to set up an overseas office in the Middle Eastern country of Qatar. The negotiations to open the office experienced many complications, however, such as the announcement by the Taliban in March 2012 that it would halt dialogues aiming at reconciliation with the United States because of a breakdown in the preparatory consultations concerning the exchange of prisoners. Still, it was announced once again on June 18, 2013, that the Taliban had opened its office in Doha, the capital of Qatar,

making it seem likely that bilateral negotiations with the United States would officially commence. The Karzai government took objection to the United States conducting full-fledged negotiations with the Taliban. On June 19, 2013, one day after the Taliban set up an embassy-like office in Doha, with the sign and flag of the Islamic Emirate of

Afghanistan, President Karzai announced that he had broken off discussions concerning the security agreement with the United States regarding the scale and status of the US troops stationed in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the ISAF, citing his opinion that “the actions and statements of the US government are contradictory” concerning negotiations with the Taliban.

At any rate, no consensus has been reached by the countries and organizations involved concerning such matters as the positioning of the Taliban in the peace talks and the makeup of the negotiation partners. In July 2013, the Taliban announced the temporary closing of its office in Doha, putting the official bilateral negotiations between the United States and Taliban on hold. Also, as stated earlier, while the United States and Afghanistan are continuing to negotiate a security agreement, which has reached the stage of awaiting the signature of the Afghan president, President Karzai has taken the stance of pursuing the possibility of negotiating with the Taliban on his own during that process. When visiting Islamabad in August 2013, Karzai tried to get Prime Minister Sharif to help broker a reopening of negotiation channels with the Taliban, centering on the High Peace Council.

(4) Support for Reconstruction of the Civilian Sector in Afghanistan

Assistance for the reconstruction of the civilian sector of Afghanistan—after going through the steps of the Bonn Agreement of December 2001, the Afghanistan Compact of 2006, the final drafting of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) in March 2008, the holding of the London Conference in January 2010, and the holding of the Kabul Conference of July 2010 with the attendance of supporting countries—has currently reached the stage of reviewing

National Priority Programs (NPPs), by which the various fields contained in the ANDS are being prioritized. Through those processes, it has been internationally agreed that 80 percent of aid money will be provided in accordance with the provisions of the NPPs, with half the total amount to go through the budgeting processes of the Afghan government (putting it “on-budget,” so to speak). According to the Second Bonn Agreement of December 2011, marking the 10th anniversary from the original Bonn Agreement, the decade between 2015 and 2024 has been positioned as the “Transformation Decade,” with the international community to give Afghanistan continual economic assistance.

On July 8, 2012, the Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan was held, with the participation of representatives from fifty-five countries and twenty-five international organizations involved in the support of Afghanistan’s recovery, including Afghan President Karzai, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. It was the first time in ten years that a conference had been held in Tokyo by the countries supporting Afghanistan. At the Tokyo Conference, it was announced that a maximum of US\$16 billion in assistance would be provided in the four-year period through 2015, aiming at having the international community send a strategic message related to the support of Afghanistan’s reconstruction in advance of the Decade of Reform. Also, it was agreed to create the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, a mechanism under which the “mutual commitments and accountability of Afghanistan and the international community for the sustainable development of Afghanistan” would be “checked and reviewed on a regular basis” (every other year, as a rule), thus affirming the principle of mutual accountability, in which both the international community and the recipient, the Afghan government, would improve the governance of the support process, including anticorruption measures.

The Tokyo Conference was significant in that it made clear the nature of the international community’s assistance framework for Afghanistan’s reconstruction starting in 2015. Still, it is necessary to note that part of the US\$16 billion in assistance money represented funds previously pledged by Japan and the other countries, and was not necessarily all new. Moreover, strong initiatives need to be taken to prevent the recurrence of the conventional evil of creating an overall mechanism without the participating countries following up by developing individual policies related to it.

4. Year 2014: Afghanistan at the Crossroads

The success of the presidential election to be held on April 5, 2014, will be an important indicator ascertaining how Afghanistan will be governed in the future. Also, a fundamental condition for the success of the election is whether or not public order can be secured domestically. The fall 2013 version of the ISAF Commander's Statement on Security Situation praises the work made by the Afghanistan Ministry of Interior Affairs on that matter, saying that it has made significant improvements in comparison with the preparations made before the 2009 election. At the same time, though, plenty of problems remain, including incidents of election obstruction, such as violence inflicted on election management staff workers and threats made to voters, as well as the problem of voter education.

Under the current Afghan constitution, a president is banned from having a third term of office, and President Karzai has repeatedly affirmed that he would abide by those provisions of the constitution and not run in the next presidential election. On November 19, 2013, the independent senior election commission announced the names of eleven presidential candidates who had met the proper qualifications (see Table 8.2). Quayum Karzai, the older brother of the president, was deemed the successor candidate to the current Karzai government, but he withdrew from the race on March 6, 2014 to support Zalmay Rasoul's bid for the presidency. Also, a strong candidate outside of Karzai's circle is Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who made a strong showing in the 2009 presidential election and who was one of the first persons to announce his candidacy this time. He has formed links with Tajiks since the time of the Soviet invasion, and was formerly active as an aide to the leader of the Northern Alliance, Ahmad Shah Massoud. He also has experience in the Karzai government, having served as foreign minister between 2001 and 2005. He kept a distance from President Karzai after leaving that post, taking up the mantle of Massoud, who was assassinated right before the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In 2010, he formed the National Coalition of Afghanistan, also known as the Coalition for Change and Hope, bringing together several opposition parties, and which went on to capture 90 of the 249 seats in the parliamentary elections held the same year.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has publicly stated that it would send a mission to support the April presidential election. Also,

Table. 8.2. Candidates in 2014 Afghanistan presidential election

Name	Birth Year	Profile
Abdullah Abdullah	1960	Leader of opposition coalition, National Coalition of Afghanistan. Graduate of Kabul Medical University. Foreign Minister (2001–05). (Came in 2nd in the previous election.)
Dawoud Sultanzoi	1952	Graduate of Kabul University. Lived in the United States in the 1980s. After serving as a commercial airline pilot, entered politics in 2002.
Abdul Rahim Wardak	1945	Graduate of Cadet University, etc., also teaching there. Previously on Kabul City Security Committee. Previously deputy defense minister and defense minister. (Withdrew from race in March 2014)
Qayoum Karzai	1956	Holds M.A. from University of Southern California. Older brother of current president. National assembly member since 2008. (Withdrew from race in March 2014)
Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai	1949	Holds Ph.D. in anthropology from Columbia University. Finance Minister (2002–04). President of Kabul University. (Came in 4th in previous election.)
Sardar Mohammad Nadir Naeem	1965	Cousin of first president of Afghanistan, Mohammed Daoud Khan (1973–78). Lived in the UK until recently. Works for insurance company. (Withdrew from race in March 2014)
Zalmai Rasoul	1942	Graduated from medical school in France. Top secretary for King Mohammed Zahir Shah (1933–73).
Qutbuddin Helal	1952	Graduate of Cadet University, etc. Worked in Ministry of Defense until 1978. In exile in Pakistan until 2003. Member of the old Hekmatyar faction.
Gul Agha Sherzai	1955	Commander of Mujahedin. Governor of Qandahar Province (to 1994). Governor of Nangarhar Province (2004–13).
Abdul Rab Rasoul Sayyaf	1944	Holds M.A. from Al Azhar University in Egypt. Vice-president in Rabbani administration.
Hidayat Amin Arsala	1942	Holds M.A. in economics from Southern Illinois University. Member of Roma Group (former King Mohammed Zahir Shah faction). Has served as finance minister, foreign minister, and vice-president.

Source: Order of candidates as same as on the site of the Independent Electoral Commission of Afghanistan. Information about profiles was compiled by the author from a feature about the presidential election on the website for Tolo News, one of the country's major media.

a group of foreign election observers will be sent with the support of the United Nations, just as in the 2009 presidential election, to the election board of appeal. Although such an expression of interest by the international community ought to signify that a fair election will be held, the Karzai government has suggested that

it would reject the foreign observers, saying that such involvement by foreigners in the election weakens Afghanistan's national sovereignty. As stated before, though the ANSF will be the main organ responsible for maintaining public security in the election process as well, the ISAF is responsible for the safety of the independent senior election commission, flights made by foreign observers in Afghanistan while conducting their activities, and medical and other types of support. No matter how the election turns out, the new government needs to be a legitimate one that has gained the confidence of the people, given that it will be the main force in the process of national integration from 2014 onwards. For that reason, furthermore, the election needs to be conducted through a peaceful and democratic process.

Meanwhile, as far as national unity is concerned, there is little likelihood of approaching and reconciling with the Taliban—the greatest source of concern vis-à-vis the future security situation in Afghanistan—no matter which of the presidential candidates listed in Table 8.1 leads the next government. The successor to President Karzai will probably continue not to accept negotiations with the Taliban, while former foreign minister Abdullah has shown no interest in the option of dialogue with the Taliban, given the history of enmity with that group since the days of the Northern Alliance. Still, a review of the relationship with the Taliban is unavoidable if Afghanistan is to be rebuilt, and the next government will be called upon to find some way out of that problem.

Besides the Taliban, Afghanistan faces the latent problem of how to bridge the ethnic and regional gaps in the country. Seen from the perspective of their ratio of the total population, furthermore, Pashtuns will indubitably play a vital role in the building of Afghanistan in the future. However, it will be indispensable, for the purpose of national unity, for consideration to be given to other ethnic groups in the north that are relative minorities, such as Tajiks and Uzbeks, as well as to various other groups. The new government will thus, all the more, have to pursue reconciliation and cooperation with various ethnic groups throughout the country, and not just with the Taliban.

As far as the economy is concerned, the vision of building a natural gas pipeline, to be called the TAPI pipeline after the four countries it runs through—Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India—is a positive piece of news for Afghanistan, as its realization would bring about the self-sustaining development that it has set its sights on. On May 23, 2012, Turkmenistan reached an agreement

on sales contracts with Indian and Pakistani natural-gas transport companies, with a memorandum of exchange (MOE) also exchanged with Afghanistan dealing with long-term cooperation. The plan to transport natural gas produced in southern Turkmenistan—which boasts the world's fourth largest reserves of natural gas—through Afghanistan and other countries on the way to India, had first been entertained in the 1990s. However, it was long shelved on account of problems in countries along the route, including the conflict in Afghanistan and the prolonged difficulties there. Once the natural gas pipeline starts operating, economic benefits will accrue not just to the countries producing the oil but also those lying along the path of the pipeline, such as Afghanistan. Moreover, the construction of the 1,800-kilometer-long pipeline is expected to attract foreign investment to Afghanistan for the fostering of domestic industry as well as the development of resources, starting with natural gas.

