Key Findings/Recommendations

- The shipment of reconstruction materials to Afghanistan via Eurasian transit corridors—the web of transport routes often called the “Northern Distribution Network”, the NDN—is a broad-based, multilateral effort to provide direct support to Afghanistan’s political and economic stabilization.

- The establishment of resupply routes through the NDN is not itself a strategic objective. The NDN is tactical adjustment to conditions dictated by geography in the context of international efforts to promote Afghanistan stabilization.

- Afghanistan’s current situation is complicated by the dilemma that economic development cannot advance without security and yet security cannot be sustained without development. Economic development and strategic security in Afghanistan must go hand in hand. Achieving Afghanistan’s goals and the goals of the countries throughout the region will involve aspects of both soft and hard power.

- Afghanistan’s success at normalization is greater than a national objective—it is a goal that is truly international and will benefit all peoples throughout the region. International cooperation in Afghanistan’s stabilization is a mutually beneficial goal.

- The inventions of opportunists regarding the “Great Game” or the “scramble for Central Asia” are based on a misreading of contemporary political, economic and technological realities. These conceptions are out of touch with the real challenges of the future and do a disservice to international cooperation.

NB: The views expressed in this paper are entirely and solely are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek or GCSP.

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Introduction

A new approach to the role of Central Asian states in Afghanistan’s stabilization and reconstruction has been gathering momentum. The new approach is based in the recognition that the speed and sustainability of reconstruction of Afghanistan is dependent upon the reintegration of Afghanistan into the international community. Reintegration of Afghanistan into the international community, in turn, is at least in part dependent upon the capability to promote trans-border linkages of communication, trade, transport, water, power and investment. The Central Asian states and Kazakhstan play a vital role in connecting Afghanistan with markets, expertise, technology and cultural traditions that are critical in Afghanistan’s ascent from disastrous years of violent conflict.

The imperative of bringing an end to the protracted conflict in Afghanistan has shifted considerable attention to the network of transit routes for civilian and military transport passing through Afghanistan’s northern neighbors. Necessity is often the mother of invention. The shipment of stabilization and reconstruction materials through the Eurasian states was a necessity imposed by the vulnerability of the very limited transport infrastructure located in Afghanistan’s southern and eastern border regions. “Asymmetrical” attacks by insurgents on transport facilities in Pakistan in 2007 and 2008 made alternative transportation routes a necessity. The shipment of reconstruction materials to Afghanistan via Eurasian transit corridors—the web of transport routes that is sometimes referred to as the “Northern Distribution Network”, the NDN—emerged in response to transport vulnerabilities as a broad-based, multilateral effort to provide direct support to Afghanistan’s political and economic stabilization. The establishment of the NDN is a tactical and pragmatic adjustment to political and economic realities.

The shift of transportation to emphasize the northern routes was premised upon the emergence of a new political consensus to enable the new approach to resupply. Transit agreements have facilitated the transportation of materiel to Afghanistan since the international community’s refocus on Afghanistan
following the attacks on the U.S. in September 2001. But the logistical situation has changed dramatically in the past 18 months since new political agreements were reached to enable NATO International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) and U.S. materials to transit by land, sea and air routes through the Eurasian states. Today more than half of the supplies needed for Afghanistan’s reconstruction are passing through northern neighboring states. The shift to the use of land routes, which are generally about 10 percent of the cost of air shipment, has altered the routing of materials, brought economic benefit to the Eurasian states, and reduced the demand for air transport fuel. In these and other respects, the operational requirements imposed by the Afghanistan situation have contributed to forging a new approach to international cooperation in Eurasia.

As these changes take place there is a considerable amount of theorizing about NDN as an extension of bold geopolitical strategies. The idea of a “Great Game” is frequently raised in this context. The historical metaphor of the Great Game is a concoction of fertile imaginations which discern intrigue in any complex or confused situation. The political and economic situation in Central Asia is often complex and confused. Journalistic writers have created a great demand for colorful historical interpretations of contemporary events. But it is a mistake to impute the idea of a Great Power competition over oil, gas, natural resources and, even more clearly, the control over territory as constituting a motivating factor for today’s diplomats and policy makers in a globalized world. A claim over territory is a guarantee of controlling neither resources nor markets in today’s globalized world. It is not something that drives today’s policy makers. Diplomatic objectives in Central Asian relations are not rivalrous in the sense that economists use the term, that is, to characterize exchanges in which one side’s gain is proportional to another side’s loss and vice versa. Rather, state-to-state interactions in Central Asia are simply competitive in the sense that there are differences of interests among states but these involve exchanges that lead to mutual benefit. In the circumstances of the contemporary globalized world, is just as important for theorists and analysts to dispense with outdated and divisive “cold war” conceptualizing and attend to competitive and cooperative strategies as it is for diplomats themselves.

The idea of the Great Game is based on historical analogy. Serious historical scholars have questioned the tendency to attribute too much importance to such romanticized versions of history let alone as keys to understanding contemporary international relations. The expression was probably first used by Arthur Conolly (1807–1842), an military intelligence officer of the British East India Company’s Sixth

Bengal Light Cavalry. The concept was introduced into popular usage by the British novelist Rudyard Kipling in his novel *Kim* (1901). The Great Game refers to competition between Russia and Great Britain which came to a peak during the period between the Russo-Persian Treaty of 1813 and the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. The 1907 convention was signed by Russian and British foreign ministers. The Anglo-Russian diplomatic rapport which later emerged played an important role in contributing to the formation of the “Triple Entente”, the alliance of countries opposing the Central Powers in 1914 at the onset of World War I. In other words, the Great Game actually ultimately resulted in comity rather than confrontation.

The idea of conceptualizing today’s Central Asian circumstances in terms of historical metaphors leads to the interpretation of every sequence of events as a nest of intrigues driven by nefarious intentions. These interpretations piece together explanations on mixtures of hyperbole and surmise, inventing far more than they explain. Many journalistic foreign policy analysts interpret contemporary affairs in terms of imputed 19th century designs. The prolific and influential political commentator on Central Asian affairs, M.K. Bhadrakumar evaluated the U.S. presence in Afghanistan as “quintessentially a Clausewitsean war that is laden with the hidden agenda of dominating Middle Asia.” This school of thinkers anticipates only increasingly tense relations as competition over energy resources intensifies in the years ahead. A great deal can be attributed to “hidden agendas” with little out much recourse to facts.

There is uniform agreement among the countries of the region regarding the imperative of cooperating in order to bring Afghanistan’s armed conflict to an end in a way that promotes normalization and reconstruction. But here diplomatic agreement encounters shoals of suspicion and mistrust. States differ in the way they view the benefits and risks of differing approaches to cooperation. Cooperative strategies augur for different things to different parties. As Ajay Patnaik has pointed out, “Beijing views Central Asian states as a critical buffer for stabilizing and developing its Xinjinang region, while India views Central Asia as a region to contain terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan.” So while both Beijing and Delhi may set course to the same compass setting, they do so anticipating arrival at different destinations. The fact that common interests are not by themselves sufficient conditions for creating and sustaining enduring cooperation makes it critically important for diplomats and analysts to focus on the means to achieve the larger multinational objectives in Central Asia. As Patnaik summarized this,

“The ultimate goal is to make Central Asia and Afghanistan a region of greater international cooperation and not a theatre of a “New Great Game”.”

The Great Game metaphor creates distortions and exaggerations of various kinds. Steve LeVine recently described the current American policy in the Central Asian situation not as an intensified competition but a resigned acknowledgement of a Russian sphere of influence in the region: “Washington’s willingness to defer to Russia in the land of Kipling may mark the beginning of something larger: a new era in which the Great Powers attempt to tread more gingerly in each other’s backyards.” The plaintive complaint that the Great Game has been supplanted by a division of territory and the recognition of spheres of influence is just as basically misled as the idea of competition over Central Asian territory and resources. In fact nothing could be farther from the truth. In reality, the Obama administration’s approach to Central Asia is not much different than previous American administrations’ basic principles of foreign policy in the region. The U.S. has never announced a “strategy for Central Asia” because no strategy to separate Central Asia from its neighbors, to create an “American enclave”, or to compete for a permanent presence in the Central Asian region ever existed. Since the end of the Soviet Union the U.S. has uniformly stood in favor of national independence, democratic government, the observance of human rights, and economic development. The U.S. has regarded the resource-rich Central Asian region as offering opportunities for American-based firms and entrepreneurs but has never asserted its political influence to make the ground rules for the operation of American firms any different from those of firms from other countries of the world.

All the states of the South Asian, the Eurasian and the Middle Eastern regions share interests in the stabilization of Afghanistan. But not all states anticipate the same form, same scale and same pace of stabilization. The greatest international challenge for Afghanistan’s future is finding a multilateral formula for advancing the interests of all despite the fact that the paths may not involve equal benefit to all parties at all times and at the same rates.

The U.S. is destined to have an increasingly less assertive set of initiatives with respect to Central Asia. This is conditioned in part by the growing importance of fiscal constraints on American foreign policy calculations, but even more importantly by the increasingly apparent and now more widely acknowledged fact that, aside from a vital strategic interest in successful normalization in Afghanistan, the U.S. has presently and will continue in the future to have very limited commercial and strategic

7 Peter Bergen, The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America and al-Qaeda (Free Press, 2011).
interests in Central Asia. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there was considerable anxiety in western countries that world communism might somehow revive itself. But Russia and China today have no communist aspirations. The other states of the former USSR are among the least enthusiastic supporters of expansive and hegemonic foreign policies of any country in the Eurasian region. So, the post-Soviet transition has passed into history without communist recidivism. It is true that Central Asia’s mineral and energy resources play a large and increasingly important role in world commodity markets, but that role directly affects Asian and European countries much more than it affects the U.S. With respect to governance and human rights, America has in the past and can be expected to continue in the future to maintain the position that human rights, market-based economics and democratic practice are closely intertwined and profoundly better than alternative policies characterized by mercantilism and despotism. The 21st century is one in which that is increasingly apparent to all except state-monopolists and despots themselves. The U.S. role in Central Asia is at best the role of a broker and moderator. As Afghanistan normalization proceeds, an increasing amount of responsibility for international security will naturally shift to the countries themselves and to multilateral institutions.

The “Afghan Problem”

The importance of infrastructure coordination on a broad regional scale throughout Central Asia and South Asia is widely recognized as a challenge and has been a priority of nation-states and international organizations. In terms of the interconnectedness of the physical infrastructure of transportation, communication and power, the south Asian region is the most underdeveloped region of the populated parts of the globe. Afghanistan’s stabilization heavily depends on the ability to foster a renaissance of infrastructure development. Political leaders have repeatedly proclaimed their commitment to policies geared to increase trade, coordination, cooperation, investment, policy harmonization, and mutual beneficial economic development.

A number of formal agreements were forged to underwrite these efforts. The UN-sponsored Bonn conference in December 2001 was specifically focused on establishing an interim government in Afghanistan. Soon afterward, attention turned to regional cooperation. The states endorsed the Good Neighborly Relations Declaration of 2002, the Berlin Agreements of 2003, the Dubai Declaration of 2003, the Bishkek Conference statement of 2004, the Kabul Conference statement of December 2005. The conveners of the Afghanistan London Conference in early 2006 urged the states of the region to go further in harmonizing infrastructure development projects on a regional basis. Afghanistan 5-Year
Development program put a high priority on transportation and energy development, with the goal of improving transportation and power infrastructure. The 2009 Hague Conference called for increased cooperation in terms of the Afghan National Peace and Reintegration Program. The 2010 London Conference at Lancaster House called for increased regional cooperation and more effective international partnership.

The effort to promote regional economic cooperation was spearheaded by the Asian Development Bank. The ADB in 1997 started a comprehensive lending and technical support program for financing infrastructure to help the Central Asian states integrate into the international community. This work was buttressed by the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and, after the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Community, the Eurasian Development Bank. In July 2007, the European Union announced a comprehensive, integrated cooperative initiative, the “EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership.” The EU strategy was designed to increase the European Union’s engagement in Central Asia. Development, regional cooperation and political stability are the basic pillars of the EU strategy. There was also great emphasis within the specialist community of greater commitment to Afghanistan’s successful economic development and stabilization. The idea of a “Greater Central Asia” was intended to emphasize the importance of transportation, communication and trade linkages in Afghanistan’s strategy, calling for a “Modern Silk Road Strategy” which could be “one of the most promising ways forward for the U.S. and NATO in Afghanistan.”

These forms of cooperation have all run head on into what is called the “Afghan Problem.” The reality is that in Afghanistan’s current situation economic and political development cannot advance without security. Without peace and security, commerce and social development is stunted. At the same time, without economic development security is impossible to long maintain. Continuous and increasing pressure by security forces chills commerce, impedes social and political interaction, and tends to create a “top-down” bias in the whole society.

12 See the EU Central Asia Monitoring Unit materials. http://www.eucentralasia.eu/
The only resolution of this dilemma is to find a formula by which “soft power” and “hard power” go hand in hand. There are many variations of this formula, but there are two basic models of operation. One model—the counter-terrorism model—focuses on directly countering terrorism by emphasizing intensive intelligence, smart weapons, precision ordnance, unmanned aerial surveillance and remote controlled intervention, surgical raids by highly specialized commandos, and balancing of regional warlords, rewarding them for beneficial information or action. This model implies a relatively small “footprint” of foreign combat forces. The other model—the counter-insurgency model—is directly oriented toward disestablishing insurgents and degrading their capacity through a “clear, hold, build” strategy. This approach implies large-scale, close-contact intervention with great emphasis on establishing stability and then shifting responsibility to the Afghan National Army and the national police forces for maintaining stability. The footprint of this model is much larger.

The two approaches emphasize different levels of presence. Some analysts see the “large footprint” as problematic, arguing in favor of the withdrawal of foreign combat troops on the premise that the presence of combat troops counters particular insurgents but also acts as a progenitor of internecine conflict. “The only meaningful way to halt the insurgency’s momentum is to start withdrawing troops. The presence of foreign troops is the most important element driving the resurgence of the Taliban.”

Others analysts argue that the Afghanistan situation demands direct attention: engagement cannot succeed through remote control. This view maintains abandoning the innocent civilian population to power-hungry extremists dwelling within their midst is to court disaster: “Withdrawing international troops with the threat that any regrouping of jihadi’s or al-Qaeda can be countered by air power and special forces would simply return the country to the control of jihadi’s. Air power has not proven successful against insurgents or terrorist bases. Neglect would allow the region to descend into further chaos, as it did in the 1990s.”

The “Afghan problem” has remained a continual impediment to the expected resolution of conflict in Afghanistan. The apparent conflict between any policy and its countervailing effects led many people to agree with the assertion of Boris Gromov, the Soviet General who commanded the forces leaving Afghanistan in 1989 and who later became an influential Moscow oblast Governor, that Afghanistan was the “graveyard of empires”—a place from which no Great Power returned intact.

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The Afghanistan problem is obviously formidable. Several years of committed activity have left a situation that was less than anticipated and less than what is necessary. Even after several years of tactically successful military operations under U.S. and ISAF auspices, the strategic goal of Afghanistan’s stabilization did appear to be formidably elusive. Improvements in the quality of governance in Afghanistan seemed hard to achieve and even harder to sustain; insurgents seemed to be able to elude neutralization; and opium production seemed to resiliently circumvent law enforcement. As U.S. State Department documents indicated, terrorist attacks in Afghanistan rose dramatically during the period 2005 to 2008. In a foreboding assessment of the war’s progress, America’s highest ranking soldier, Admiral Michael Mullen, the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the U.S. House Armed Services Committee in September 2008, “I am not convinced that we are winning.”

Shortly after assuming office in January 2009, President Barack Obama announced a new strategy for Afghanistan in March 2009, emphasizing the role of Pakistan in stabilization and calling for a strategic review in autumn 2009. On Dec. 1, 2009 in a speech at West Point, President Obama announced increased engagement in Afghanistan with the objective of beginning withdrawal from combat operations in July 2011. The plan called for a “sharpened focus on shifting the focus of Afghanistan’s neighbors from competition in Afghanistan to cooperation and economic integration.” In July 2010 the Commander of forces, General Stanley McChrystal was removed from command. General David Petraeus assumed command of ISAF forces. In line with the revised strategy, the number of troops grew by the end of 2010 to roughly 131,000 in the anticipation that a surge for tactical objectives would improve the conditions to prepare on a strategic level for the transition of responsibilities to local partners.

A chorus of independent, experienced, informed, and skeptically optimistic voices has been critical of the geostrategic results of international cooperation in Afghanistan. Anthony Cordesman of the Center for International and Strategic Studies has warned of the essentially unpredictable effects of conducting “counterinsurgency in broken states, population-centric strategies, and armed nation building.”

Tellis has argued “the regional approach to Afghanistan—understood as an effort to incorporate all of Kabul’s major neighbors into a cooperative enterprise led by the United States, and aimed at stabilizing Afghanistan through successful counterterrorism, reconstruction, and state-building—is unlikely to succeed, first and foremost, because the key regional stakeholders have diverging objectives within Afghanistan.”

Robert Blackwill has urged a less enmeshed transition strategy geared to relinquish the objective of societal control in favor of the idea of preparing a balance among competing forces within Afghanistan’s society.

Despite the complexities of the “Afghan problem”, the most successful aspect of the Afghanistan policy was the effort to spur greater integration with neighbors. As S. Frederick Starr put it, “The reopening all these age-old transit routes across Afghanistan is the single greatest achievement of U.S. foreign policy in the new millennium.”

Transport Vulnerabilities and the Evolution of the “NDN”

The factor that refocused western and Eurasian attention on the larger framework of regional and transregional cooperation in Afghanistan’s stabilization efforts was the emergence of asymmetrical insurgent tactics in Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. A series of particularly damaging insurgent attacks in Pakistan targeting U.S./NATO supply lines took place during the latter half of 2008 and early 2009. As much as 75 percent of the cargo to support military operations and development programs in Afghanistan previously had been shipped through Pakistan, passing through a small number of precarious transport corridors, constrained by chokepoints and subject to disruption. As a result of insurgent attacks, carriage of supplies through the Khyber Pass along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border was for brief periods repeatedly interrupted. These events in Pakistan shifted attention from the southern routes to Afghanistan’s northern access routes. The existing transit routes for supplies entering Afghanistan from the north passed across European and Eurasian countries and then through the Central Asian countries.


The only feasible geographical alternative to the Pakistan-based transportation was through the northern border of Afghanistan. This combination of port, air, rail and road facilities, from the perspective of Afghanistan’s normalization operations, came to be referred to as the NDN. The negotiations which led to the establishment of a series of new bilateral security cooperation agreements between the U.S. and the Eurasian countries and between NATO and the Eurasian countries shifted much greater emphasis to Afghanistan’s bordering Central Asian neighbors.

The NDN was a tactical adjustment, not a strategic policy change from the point of view of NATO or the U.S. But the NDN had a direct political and economic impact on Central Asian states. The significance of the shift of attention from the southern supply routes was dramatically underscored by the Kyrgyz government’s announcement in early February 2009 of rescission of base rights at Manas Air Base near Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The air base had been playing a pivotal role for as a key northern transit node, particularly for NATO-ISAF and U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) soldiers on their way to and from Afghanistan. The Kyrgyz decision raised alarm regarding the reliability of partners in the effort to stabilize and normalize Afghanistan, provoking considerable commentary and speculation over the sustainability of the NDN.

After the terrorist attacks on America in September 2001, a number of Eurasian countries had consented to over flight arrangements for military operations in Afghanistan. Military base arrangements were hastily arranged with the Central Asian states. The Central Asian states viewed U.S. military operations in Afghanistan committed to elimination of terrorist threats as also protecting their interests by combating insurgency groups which had spawned disarray in Central Asia. A major initiative in the improvement of international cooperation to support Afghanistan reconstruction was announced by Uzbek President Islam Karimov in April 2008 when he stated at the Bucharest NATO conference that “Uzbekistan stands ready to discuss and sign with NATO the Agreement on providing for corridor and transit through its territory to deliver the non-military cargos through the border

junction Termez-Khayraton, practically the sole railway connection with Afghanistan.”

Russia also offered transit to NATO at the Alliance’s 2008 Bucharest summit, but the outlines of these agreements were still not clear.

Following U.S. requests, statements of assent to open corridors were made by Eurasian political leaders throughout the region, culminating in Russian President Medvedev’s statement in June 2009. This was the first in a series of new, bilateral agreements between the U.S. and the Eurasian countries by which the countries provided for transport of supplies necessary for ISAF and U.S. normalization operations in Afghanistan. The agreements were announced by U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, William Burns, following meetings with political leaders in the Central Asian states and in Russia in early July 2009. The agreements reflected a broad consensus among the Eurasian countries of the stakes involved in Afghanistan normalization. In July 2009 the Kyrgyz government of Kyrgyzstan agreed to establish a new “Manas Transit Center,” taking the place of the U.S. military base.

Implementation of the NDN was not effortless. The NDN did not simply spring into existence but was the result of considerable policy adjustments. Moreover, even after the NDN framework of action had been negotiated on paper, implementation proved to be an incremental process. It was not until 2009 that NATO began negotiating specific transit rights with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and these talks took almost a year to complete. The first trial shipment of NATO cargo, consisting of 27 containers of construction materials and food supplies, departed from Riga, Latvia, in May 2010. In November 2010 the air transit agreement with Kazakhstan was announced. International cooperation shifted into higher gear with the extension of the Termez to Hairatan railway. Further plans are envisioned to extend it yet further to a capacity of 4,000 metric tons of cargo per month. Until upgrades are completed, this Uzbek-Afghan Implementation of the NDN was not effortless. The NDN did not

30 Address by President Islam Karimov at the NATO Summit (April 4, 2008) http://mfa.uz/eng/press_and_media_service/news_and_events/040408e_2.mgr
simply spring into existence but was the result of considerable policy adjustments.\textsuperscript{37} Moreover, even after the NDN framework of action had been negotiated on paper, implementation proved to be an incremental process.\textsuperscript{38} Border crossing is likely to remain a choke point. Meanwhile, railway experts have questioned whether the existing rail route through Uzbekistan is capable of handling the amount of traffic envisioned by the US military and its allies. Consequently, yet greater expansion is anticipated.

Major steps toward international cooperation on the Afghanistan resupply transport routes emerged in the latter part of 2010 as a number of international forums refocused their efforts. The NATO Lisbon summit in November 2010 resulted in a broadly-based and coordinated commitment to the expansion of transport and communication relations. President Obama specifically referred to withdrawal, transition and long-term cooperative commitment in Afghanistan, saying “we have full agreement on our new Strategic Concept, tomorrow our NATO allies, ISAF partners and the Afghan government will work to align our approach on Afghanistan, particularly in two areas: our transition to full Afghan lead between 2011 and 2014, and the long-term partnership that we’re building in Afghanistan.”\textsuperscript{39} The OSCE Astana Summit in December 2010 reflected a similar commitment. The final communiqué noted “We underscore the need to contribute effectively, based on the capacity and national interest of each participating State, to collective international efforts to promote a stable, independent, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan.”\textsuperscript{40}

A New Security Environment

The NDN is essentially tactical and not strategic. It does not address the more serious large-scale security cooperation framework. The NDN is a trans-Eurasian cooperative endeavor. But it is much less than the establishment of a new security community that some political leaders imagined would flow out of the common recognition of threats of insecurity. The idea that anew security architecture could be established which would draw all the countries of Europe and Eurasia into a single international organization capable of providing security regulation for the entire region to all parties’ satisfaction seems, at least for the time being, to require more discussion. The closing communiqué of the OSCE


\textsuperscript{40} “Astana Commemorative Declaration: Toward A Security Community.” OSCE (December 2, 2010) http://www.osce.org/mc/73962
Astana summit referred to the need to move from dialog to action. But the communiqué also carried weighty constraints on how that action could be realized, noting “Within the OSCE no State, group of States or organization can have any pre-eminent responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the OSCE area or can consider any part of the OSCE area as its sphere of influence.”

The new cooperation over NDN is not a product of wishful thinking. It does not spell the “end of history.” It is the recognition that the implications of continued disorder in Afghanistan have a greater price for the Central Asian and Eurasian states than for Europe and far-distant North America. Boris Gromov and Dmitry Rogozin underscored the importance of the realist interpretation of Afghanistan’s situation and its likely future implications. The two political leaders plainly stated: "We insist that NATO troops stay in the country [Afghanistan] until the necessary conditions are provided to establish stable local authorities capable of independently deterring radical forces and controlling the country.”

Finding new forms of effective cooperation is the greatest challenge facing the international community. As Ali Jalali argued, “Despite the presence of international military forces in Afghanistan and the stated commitment of the United States, United Kingdom, and NATO to uphold the independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of Afghanistan, the country is still vulnerable to those neighbors’ influence, and that has the potential to either spoil or promote Afghanistan’s development.” Afghanistan’s northern neighbors have a role to play in the region’s stabilization. If the Central Asian and the Caucasus states are more active, they can be more productive in contributing to regional stabilization and normalization.

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41 Ibid.
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