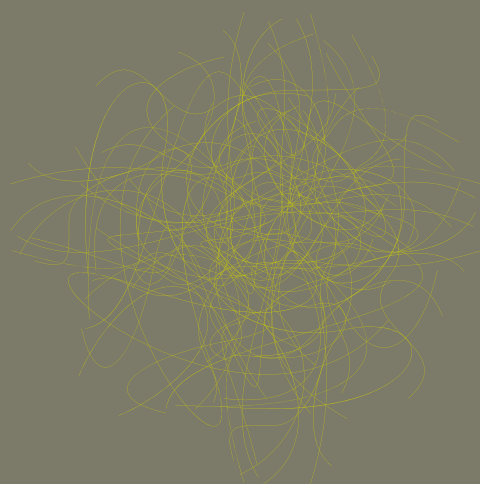


**Sources of Tension
in Afghanistan and
Pakistan: A Regional
Perspective**

**Perspectives
from the Region
in 2014:**



CIDOB Policy Research Project

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PERSPECTIVES FROM PAKISTAN ON AFGHANISTAN

Under CIDOB's "Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Regional Perspectives (STAP RP)" policy research project on the regional powers and their interests, this series is a product of field research visits to a number of the key regional powers identified in the 2012 Mapping Document <http://www.cidobafpakproject.com/> by the STAP RP project team.

Understanding the perspectives of the five main regional powers (India, Iran, China, Russia and Saudi Arabia) with an interest in outcomes in Afghanistan and Pakistan is a critical element in relation to this volatile region, which is currently in a state of flux as 2014 approaches. Identification of opportunities for dialogue, peace building, improved bilateral relationships and the development of regional organisations as mechanisms for dialogue, as well as examining how the regional powers see Afghanistan and Pakistan from a broader geopolitical and foreign policy perspective are key elements in enhancing this understanding.

This report is a product of meetings in Islamabad in October 2014, co-hosted by the Pak Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS). It is jointly authored by Emma Hooper and Gabriel Reyes Leguen.

While many experts contributed to the findings presented, the final responsibility for the content is that of CIDOB alone.

PERSPECTIVES ON AFGHANISTAN IN LATE 2014: THE VIEW FROM ISLAMABAD

Introduction

Recent meetings in Islamabad discussed the issue of where Pakistan stands on Afghanistan, as seen in the latter part of 2014.

The view from Islamabad focused on a number of key factors, including: (i) the importance of the role of China in both Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region; (ii) the question of strategic depth; (iii) the unresolved issue of the Durand line;¹ (iv) whether or not a concerted security strategy on the part of Pakistan existed; (v) the opportunities presented by the new Afghan unity government; and (vi) Pakistan's own internal challenges.

Discussions specifically examined the post-US withdrawal scenarios in Afghanistan and their strategic and political implications for Pakistan; Pakistan's own key post-2014 challenges domestically and in foreign policy terms; the impact of developments in the broader region on Pakistan and Pakistan's own emerging policy priorities; and how Pakistan's view of Afghanistan might have changed over the past period.

Pakistan, Afghanistan & Beyond

The recent political transformation in Afghanistan was seen as shaping events in both Central and South Asia, including on regional security, and particularly affecting China, Iran and Russia. The recent signing of the BSA by President Ashraf Ghani was viewed as signaling a shift in the security dynamic, with the withdrawal of foreign forces. Relations between Pakistan and Iran, and Pakistan and India were seen as being shaped by the respective aims at securing their national interests in Afghanistan. One participant commented that "*sectarian proxy financing by external actors is a real factor*". Specifically, it was noted that China has its own concerns over its western region, militarily speaking.



On the question of the Taliban in Afghanistan, it was considered that they are a reality to be dealt with, because of: (i) the fear factor and the legacy of the 90s; (ii) their predominantly Pashtun character (in contrast to that of the Afghan National Army – ANA), with consequent implications for Pakistan's own ethnic Pashtun population; and (iii) the fact that Afghanistan's economic and political problems were seen as having an ethnic dimension which has not been addressed for the past 13 years (e.g. by means of power sharing particularly at the local level). What was described as "*Afghanistan's trail of unresolved problems*" were considered likely to spill over the border to Pakistan; and a "*post-US Afghanistan*" could influence the geopolitics of the whole of South Asia, as well as its regional neighbours.

Whilst there is little direct impact on the Central Asian states, they remain significant in the regional context because of the economic development factor, due to their location, and relations with India and China as fast-growing economies competing for a lead role in the region. One participant termed the Central Asian states as "victims" of Afghanistan's

1. One participant commented that there is a lack of understanding on it in the minds of Pakistan's policy makers. This lack of a clear understanding was seen as hampering stability in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.



political circumstances, having no power to influence, but whose own security situation is affected by Afghanistan. India was regarded as very active in Afghanistan, and as having strengthened its own role including in relation to its economic interests, with a growing interest in the energy-rich Central Asian states, in the mining sector, and in containing Pakistan in Afghanistan. However it was noted that “Pakistan is not allowing nor disallowing an Indian presence in Afghanistan”: New Delhi needs to recognise Pakistan’s discomfort with a heavy Indian presence in Afghanistan, but it is seen as legitimate for India to have a relationship with the latter. Recent Indian reactions on the political level were seen by some participants as “pointing to a large Indian presence in the Pakistani territories of FATA, KPK and Balochistan”.



Russia, in the view of participants, faces a number of challenges, including the security threat from the troubled states of Chechnya and Daghestan, which were seen as having inhibited Russia’s stance on Afghanistan. Indeed, the comment was made that “Afghanistan could turn its guns towards Moscow”, should it feel inclined. Russia’s main concern in relation to Afghanistan is the drug trade - which impacts directly on Russia itself - and Western coalition forces, who some participants saw as responsible for the growth in poppy cultivation in Afghanistan (recently having undergone a dramatic upsurge).



China was seen as continuing to manage the regional situation by itself and likely to play an increasingly large role in Afghanistan’s reconstruction and stabilisation post 2014, including as a “facilitator”. Trade between China and Afghanistan is considerable in volume, and China is the main exporter, as well as the single largest foreign investor, in the country. In this regard, it was considered significant that President Ghani’s first foreign visit was to China, whose main interest is the economy, rather than security per se. “Both Afghanistan and Pakistan need economic prosperity and China is the vehicle for both” as one participant noted. The development of Gwador port (with support from China) was regarded as having great potential, noting at the same time that India has offered to develop the Chahbahar port in Iran. In this regard, one participant commented that India would never allow China access to the Indian Ocean and is collaborating with Iran to contain and isolate Pakistan.

Iran was regarded as having a permanent strategic interest in Afghanistan, including preventing it being used as a platform to undermine Iran or its status as a regional power; and one participant saw Iran as a spoiler that will continue to provide support to the Northern Alliance, regardless. Iran’s support of Shi’a communities in Afghanistan was seen as “giving security to Iran’s national interests”. In marked contrast to STAP RP analysis and recent STAP RP meetings in Tehran², in the Pakistan round table, Iran was seen as “perturbed” by the anti-Shi’a sectarian violence in Pakistan, especially in Quetta, Balochistan. It was further noted that there have been differences between Iran and Pakistan in the past, which continue in the present day (referring to recent border clashes in Balochistan-Sistan provinces). However, in the view of one participant, these did not involve state complicity on the part of Pakistan, though it was noted that the state cannot control the border area. Another considered that the militant Jundullah group said to be operating in Balochistan “was used by the CIA to create destabili-

2. See Perspectives from the Region 2013 & 2014: No. 7 The View from Tehran; and the STAP RP paper by Roberto Toscano on Iran’s Role in Afghanistan, January 2012.

sation". Saudi Arabia's (continuing) proxy wars with Iran in the broader region were seen to have impacted both Pakistan and Afghanistan. One participant noted that "there are some problems between Pakistan and Iran, particularly in the Mand area of Balochistan, around smuggling and weak security forces, that require an improved law and order situation there.

Notwithstanding what one participant termed "*Nawaz Sharif's appeasement policy*", and the recognition that India has the largest economy in the region; a large market and is an important regional power, India was the subject of considerable, albeit disturbing, discussion during the round table. It was remarked that the Indian role in Afghanistan could only be offset from within Pakistan. One participant commented that there is a multi-dimensional threat to Pakistan stemming not only from Afghanistan. Pakistan is currently facing what was termed a "*belligerent India*" on its eastern border, and the consequences of the stance of the Modi government towards Pakistan were of considerable concern. Modi was described as the "CEO" of India, but it was pointed out that only time will tell whether the "old Modi" of the Gujarat riots or the new "reincarnated" version as Prime Minister will prevail. A participant commented that India is likely to convey to both China and the US that they should "*either be with us, or be with Pakistan*". In a context of increasing bilateral tensions, including over what was termed India's aggressive policy on Kashmir - a core destabilising issue in bilateral relations - one commentator remarked that "*there is a need to be pragmatic and reassess Pakistan's position on Kashmir*", and that it would be "*better to negotiate with India earlier, before the situation worsens further down the line*". Whilst it was seen as possible for Pakistan to face up to India on two fronts, disturbingly, the comment was made that "*there is no space for conventional warfare*" and that the nuclear first-use option remained, noting that "*India should be careful*"; and that if India threatens Pakistan's core areas, "*Pakistan would react, and it would be disastrous*".

Domestically within Afghanistan, the problem of the polarisation of society and politics between Pashtuns/non-Pashtuns was singled out, with the comment that this requires "*harmonisation*" within Afghan society itself, noting what was perceived as "*an anti-Pakistan bias*" on the part of the non-Pashtun population, who tend to have both higher levels of education and to be more present in the establishment.

In terms of where Pakistan stands on Afghanistan, security was regarded as the most challenging issue. Most agreed that a negative relationship with Afghanistan post-2014 would not be in Pakistan's interests. Pakistan needs a stable Afghanistan, because stability in the one is directly proportionate to that in the other. It was considered that President Ghani is an "economic" president that is likely to bring a changed relationship with Pakistan "*without playing into foreign hands*". In the view of participants, there should be an enhanced connectivity between the two countries on governance, security and the institution of bilateral educational and cultural links, as well as shared economies, and joint efforts to restore peace and security in the face of militancy. The trilateral relationship between Pakistan, Afghanistan and China was emphasised in terms of being of mutual interest. It was considered that the involvement of China could be instrumental in lowering



levels of mutual mistrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and in making the region politically stable and economically viable, in a context wherein respective interests are better served. Afghanistan's economy needs rebuilding from scratch: examples were cited of areas for investment which included the transit trade, horticulture, manufacturing, mineral exploitation, all of which present considerable opportunities for both countries. In terms of Pakistan's interest in Afghan national security, it was noted that what were termed "*patronising statements*" by Islamabad are taken seriously by Kabul and should be avoided, if only because they create impediments in relations with other countries in the region. Overall, it was considered that Pakistan should have a policy of non-interference in Afghanistan, a comment repeated by a number of interlocutors; and that it is not within Pakistan's responsibility (or capacity) to bring peace to Afghanistan, the Durand line issue notwithstanding.

Post-US Withdrawal Scenarios Affecting Pakistan

Post-2014 withdrawal scenarios in Afghanistan and their strategic and political implications for Pakistan posited by participants noted the "*ongoing debate in Pakistani society at present*" in this regard. Noting that the intentions of the incumbents appear to be good, it remains to be seen how the unity government alliance and in particular the distribution of posts at the local level will play out.

The cloud over the BSA having lifted, the issue of immunity provision to US soldiers is likely to be the next bone of contention. A further unresolved issue is how the Pakistan-US military relationship will play out and what might be the new emerging threats in the absence of "boots on the ground", given the continued presence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and their unpredictable reactions to the new political and security scenario. A restive situation in Afghanistan will impact on Pakistan. Although Operation Zarb e Azb has cleared parts of the tribal areas of Pakistan, the militants are thought to have dispersed across the (porous) border with Afghanistan into safe havens, and are likely to return. The issue of military contractors in Afghanistan will remain contentious, and it was noted that their likely opaque terms of engagement will be hard for state actors (including Pakistan) to decipher. It remains to be seen whether the interests of military actors will coincide with those of Pakistan, which could lead to proxy conflicts if this is not resolved prior to troop withdrawal. In this regard, the window of opportunity is small but critical, in terms of how the equation of future relations may play out.

As for the threat posed by IS, though there is talk of an IS presence in Pakistan and Afghanistan, it does not – yet – appear to be a concrete one. It was noted that mergers between new emerging terror groups are easier to bring about than between states. Nonetheless, a participant noted IS's role in transforming post-*jihadi* discourse, commenting that the latter is moving towards a critical phase in relation to development of a countering framework to it, in relation to both regional and domestic security.

Any points of convergence between IS and the Pakistani Taliban were seen as bringing difficulties for state actors. It was noted that Al Qaeda



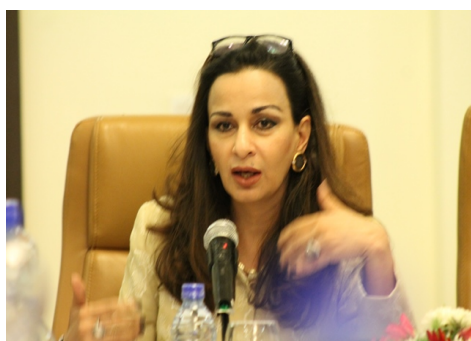
is not territorially-based, though both IS and the TTP are, and therefore if the latter merged, the question would still remain on how they would find co-existence in territorial terms. It would appear clear (including from PIPS research) that the IS threat is not confined to the Middle East. Discussion focused on the differences and similarities between Al Qaeda and IS, including over holding territory and in operational strategies. Emerging scenarios in the militant landscape were seen as including the TTP not remaining a central entity; Al Qaeda maintaining its position in the short term; and a rise in IS-inspired groups within Pakistan all as being likely. In this regard, financing the conflict economy was seen as not straightforward, requiring large (but unquantified) amounts of resources. However, financial supply lines were thought to be still intact, from mosques, charities, etc, but the question remains of which groups will appropriate the greater share of the conflict economy and that these would most likely be the most ideologically-inspired ones.

The literature on IS currently circulating in Pakistan is being distributed either by IS itself, or by non-state actors sympathetic to it, who are trying to create a new threat. IS was termed by one participant as *"an anti-Shi'a movement created by the US to bring in Al Maliki in Iraq"*. The IS factor was seen as something affecting both Afghanistan and Pakistan, given that the Taliban are still a reality on Afghan soil, and the growth of the IS network beyond the Levant. There has reportedly been some influence on Afghanistan and pro-IS leafleting and graffiti in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. If this is true, it would mean the continuation of militancy in the region, which was viewed as disastrous: *"this form of militancy is not serving Islam. And nor do the Taliban"* as one participant commented.

Any future reconciliation between the various factions within Afghanistan was seen as requiring the active support of both Pakistan and Iran. Should attempts be made to gain additional "space" to further their own interests, this was regarded as not only a continuation of a vicious circle, but as *"digging their own graves"*. In terms of what was termed the strategic space, it was noted that while FATA has been retaken by the government, it still remains a strategic space that must be dealt with. The September 2014 announcement by the chief of the TTP, Maulana Asmatullah Muawiya in which he announced he was abandoning armed struggle in Pakistan to continue it in Afghanistan was raised by one participant as a relevant example, as well as the fact that the matter was taken seriously in Afghanistan, although there has been no political or military response from Pakistan. The issue of safe havens (on both sides of the border) remains a bone of contention between the two countries. Without agreement on the issue, it was considered that *"some (militant) groups may go out of control"*.

Regarding the continued US presence in Afghanistan, it was considered that *"the mess created by the US and NATO should be cleared up by them"*; and that since the Taliban have been *"kept alive"* by the US, it is in their own interests as well as those of the region, to address that issue. One participant noted the strength of perceptions, as opposed to reality: the perception is that Pakistan created the Taliban, whereas in reality, Pakistan sided with the US against them, and supports both the BSA and US policies on the Taliban. It was pointed out that favourable factors in Afghanistan include the increased professionalism of the ANA,





despite continuing problems, and the independent Afghan media, which appears to be united against the Taliban. The feared weakening of Afghanistan in the light of US withdrawal appears to have been avoided, and the Afghan Taliban were seen by participants as weaker than previously. One participant commented that they should be integrated into Afghan politics and dialogue. Should the Afghan government fail to do so, it would have to engage with them militarily and the fallout would be bad, especially on Pakistan. Whilst Pakistan “does not want to interfere”, participants strongly advocated a political solution to the Taliban problem. In the view of some, avoiding a future civil war in Afghanistan rests on how well the unity government in Kabul can coalesce around a single agenda. Factors impacting on this coalescence were identified as the economy, the IDP (internally displaced people) issue, and achievement of political consensus. Pakistan-Afghanistan relations will depend on how these intertwined transitions take place. Some participants stressed that strategic depth is likely to remain as a policy in both countries until stability is achieved. In this regard, the transition from a “state to militant”, to a “state to state”, relationship was seen as key.

Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US have a triangular relationship around the non-formal narcotics economy, which is not only a mainstay of the (overall) informal economy but also of the transit and border trade. The failure of the US to address the issue in Afghanistan due to prevailing politico-economic realities at the time, was noted, as was the fact that if the informal economy feeds conflict, the narcotics economy will perpetuate this. The solution would be to channel the informal economy into other directions. While the concept of strategic depth was considered by some participants to be totally dead, others saw it as still important for Afghanistan (rather than as formerly for solely for Pakistan). Indeed, one participant remarked that it is in fact a reverse strategic depth policy that is currently in place (a concept of strategic depth applied, amongst others, to the economy and understood here as including Afghans seeking economic education and health opportunities beyond their country – namely in Pakistan). Given the shared border between the two countries, the issue will not go away.

Overall, addressing US-Pakistan-Afghanistan relations was seen as needing to be prioritised, and that President Ghani is a cause for optimism in this regard.

Pakistan’s Domestic Challenges

Weak governance, and institutional weaknesses were identified as Pakistan’s biggest challenges in late 2014. Interestingly, the economy – seen in 2013 as the most overwhelming challenge apart from militancy – was not highlighted in particular by participants, until specific questions on it were raised.

Participants noted that Pakistan’s economy is being sustained by the IMF and the World Bank, due to the country’s pivotal role in the region and its stability. The black economy was regarded as doing well, and signs of affluence including in the emerging middle class, remittances from abroad, were noted. Recent economic figures for Pakistan were regarded as “rosy”, and uneven due to the political events during the summer

of 2014 and the effects of militancy on the economy. Terming Pakistan's economy as "a war economy", as one participant put it, "*Pakistan has been a war zone for the past 35 years, which accounts for lack of investment*". The prevalence of urban-oriented economic policies in the face of little or no investment in rural areas was noted, including in relation to the mismatch with population distribution. What were termed "deep rooted" economic problems were seen as requiring total fiscal reform, including taxes, public finances, privatisation, investment and savings, whilst the need to address the quality aspects of economic growth was also stressed.



Weak political leadership, lack of security, lack of rule of law or access to justice, and a lack of checks and balances or indeed what were termed "motives" for economic development were all singled out. The example was given of FATA, which had been cleared of militants by the military, but no system has yet been brought in to replace (militant) local level organisation. One participant noted specifically that "*Pakistan needs to strengthen itself internally*", including because whatever happens in Afghanistan affects Pakistan (as noted earlier), and vice versa. On the other hand, the destabilising effects of internally displaced Pashtuns for both Afghanistan and Pakistan were singled out as a factor that is likely to make itself felt in the coming years.



Governance was noted as being a function of the institutional capacity of the state. In this regard, participants noted the failure in Pakistan to fulfill the state's responsibility for maintenance of law and order. As examples, it was pointed out that the state has delegated responsibility for the latter to private actors (eg security firms) due to the lack of capacity within the law enforcement sector. The outsourcing of opposition to terrorists (eg in Kashmir) was also noted. When the state outsources responsibility, it is weakened. The shift in the balance of power towards the military was also perceived as having weakened the civil service, despite the successes of democratic transition in government. Overall, the decline in the capacity of civil institutions including the civil service in recent years was seen as a major challenge. In terms of the existence of a coherent national security policy, a participant pointed out that despite the existence of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NCTA), established in 2009, no policy is currently applied, mainly due to turf wars over the control of the NCTA. There appears to be no clear consensus on militancy, terrorism and violent extremism, which were regarded as frequently seen from a parochial perspective. The lack of an inclusive political culture was also commented on, despite some changes for the better. "Strong provinces mean a strong Pakistan. *Devolution was implemented only from the provinces to the districts, not from the centre to the provinces*".



The police in general were seen as under-resourced, poorly trained and equipped, with no moral values (leading to corruptibility). However, the Punjab police were seen as somewhat more efficient but also poorly trained. This was regarded as a reflection of failing state institutions. Disaster management, in particular flood relief was seen by some as a major issue and as presenting a challenge to both administration and governance.



In the education sector, illiteracy levels were singled out: although actual literacy levels are improving, the question of the type of literacy attained

was raised. A participant noted the three school systems (madrassa, private -including street schools- and public) fail to deliver an education. A participant decried the state's surrender to militancy in relation to educational curriculum changes in KP, which reportedly includes Islamist slogans. Another participant commented on the need for a counter-narrative to militancy, and the links with educational curricula and teaching, as well as the formation of mind sets in relation to the state narrative. One participant felt that the state has abandoned responsibility for education, in the face of militancy. The shrinking of the space for discussion and dialogue was also noted in relation to the Asia Bibi blasphemy case as an example, which contrasts with the situation in India, the US and the UK in terms of freedom of speech.

Pakistan's Emerging Policy Priorities in the Region Post-2014 Transition

The three recent major transitions in the region – Pakistan's democratic transition to another elected government; that of Afghanistan; and Narendra Modi's prime ministership in India – will be important for Pakistan's future, and present opportunities for cooperation.

In Afghanistan, it was pointed out that all its neighbouring states support the current unity government. This does not mean that the former do not have different, at times competing, interests which could at times cause problems. The desire for stability is therefore the key unifying factor in the region, as well as between Pakistan and Afghanistan themselves.

If Indo-Pak relations remain tense, as at present, there could be a negative blow back on Afghanistan, because this rivalry was seen as transferable by proxy. The prevailing situation with India is indeed tense, despite initial hopes of detente on Modi's assumption of power and his outreach to Nawaz Sharif. One participant (in contrast to several others) believed that this would not explode into something major, but nor would it make rapid progress.

Trade relations would likely be (negatively) affected, and were seen as remaining stalled for some time. In contrast with the Karzai Government era, Ashraf Ghani's administration was perceived as presenting a number of opportunities, including for more cordial bilateral relations.. It was therefore considered that there is now a clear window of opportunity for improved relations, despite some sources of tension remaining, including the historical problem over the Durand Line, currently dormant but which can always flare up, and which needs to be addressed. One participant warned, on the other hand, that *"a return to a Taliban government would be a nightmare for us"* (and was furthermore noted as being unlikely). Pakistan's positive role in the recent Afghan elections (sealing the border against militants) was seen as having contributed to the mainly peaceful election process.

China was identified as having a very important role, with the potential to act as a stabiliser in the region. China in turn was seen as desiring strategic depth in terms of the stability of Afghanistan and Central Asia (due to its Uyghur separatist problem and to be able to benefit fully

from natural resource extraction in Afghanistan, particularly minerals. The China-Pakistan historically strategic partnership has now moved to encompass a focus on trade, energy and infrastructure connectivity, not solely strategic and military cooperation. Major infrastructure developments with Chinese assistance were regarded as important for Pakistan's connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia, economically.

Three main areas were identified as key for Pakistan in terms of policy towards the region: (i) security; (ii) normalisation of relations with India (where there has however been little progress); and (iii) trade (both bilateral and transit) as a driver of peace and stability, with great economic potential. One problem that was identified in this regard is that Afghanistan appears to want the extension of trade to India, via Pakistan, which the latter will not currently accept due to prevailing political and security concerns. This is hampering progress and the situation is unlikely to change until bilateral relations between India and Pakistan improve.

Discussion diverged on whether Pakistan actually has a security policy or not. One participant commented that Pakistan's policy is either non-existent or hidden, in part due to civil-military power struggles, and that there is a greater sense of what Pakistan does not want in Afghanistan, than what it does.

In terms of dealing with the militants, it was suggested that Pakistan should seek Afghanistan's help in denying the TTP safe havens across the border. It was recommended that an integrated national security policy should be developed; that no "third authority" should be supported in Afghanistan; that the Durand Line issue should be dropped altogether, since it is not seen as an issue in Afghanistan, only in Pakistan.

The threat from India (to Pakistan) within Afghanistan was seen by one participant as exaggerated. Pakistan should focus on the geo-economy and free trade issues, gradually. Moves should be made to establish a security pact with Afghanistan (*"instead of with terrorist groups"* as one interlocutor put it). Without this, Pakistan will face a security threat further down the line. Yet another participant considered that Pakistan does indeed have a security policy, under the control of the military not the civil government. This policy was considered to focus on Afghanistan, India and Balochistan's border with Iran. Pakistan therefore has an interest in supporting the three transitions in Afghanistan, particularly on security. However this can only be realised in the absence of supporting militant groups such as the Haqqanis and providing safe havens within Pakistan. North Waziristan was seen as a gauge of Pakistan's resolve in this regard.

In terms of the challenges to reconciliation in Afghanistan, participants identified some of what were seen as the current risks for the process: the unpredictable behaviour of the Afghan Taliban; the recent killings of some of the latter in both Pakistan and inside Afghanistan, which seem to indicate internal rifts; and what were termed *"the regional dynamics of the end game"* which centre on confusion and mutual distrust. There are consequently compelling reasons for Pakistan to contribute constructively to a political reconciliation in Afghanistan, though this was seen as being complicated by the latter's provision of additional strategic space to India.

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