

**Confidential**

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# RUSSIA

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Russia Confidential editors report from Moscow:

AFGHANISTAN AFTER 2014: RUSSIAN CONCERNS,  
APPROACHES, AND FORMATS OF COOPERATION

ANNOTATION

*The Afghan problem - both in terms of the country's own future and its implications for regional and international security - is becoming increasingly urgent in connection with the pullout of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from the country.*

*On April 5, 2014 Afghanistan held the first round of the presidential election. The second round is scheduled for June 14. Predictably, the Taliban has stepped up its attacks, and there are mounting concerns that the armed rebels will be in a much better position to wreak havoc once ISAF has left the country in late 2014.*

*There are a huge number of questions on the agenda. Who can lead the Afghan reconciliation process after 2014? What is the best format for discussing regional security problems - bilateral, regional, or multilateral? What is the scenario for Afghanistan preferred by various players - quarantine or integration? Do the parties involved have the means and the capability to achieve a settlement in Afghanistan and resolve security problems in the region?*

*This issue of Russia Confidential focuses on Russian approaches to the problem of Afghanistan. It is based on exclusive PIR Center analysis, including commentary by leading experts and statements by Russian officials and diplomats made at PIR Center events.*

✓ ON RUSSIAN CONCERNS AND APPROACHES TO THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Various recent pronouncements create the impression that the Western partners believe their job in Afghanistan is mostly done; they prefer to view the Afghan campaign as a page that has already been turned. Russia does not share that view. Its Foreign Ministry is looking at the developments in Afghanistan with growing concern. Armed rebels have made use of the gradual Western troop pullout and the transfer of the security remit to Afghanistan's own forces to spread their area of control and influence over much of the country. Their clout has been bolstered by growing drugs production in Afghanistan, which rose by 50 per cent last year. Growing proceeds from the drugs trade potentially translate into more financing for terrorist groups. The rebels continue to plant explosives and mount suicide attacks against Afghan and foreign servicemen. The number of such attacks grew in the run-up to presidential elections.

➤ *Russia is especially worried by the situation in the northeast of Afghanistan, including the Badakhshan, Takhar, and Kunduz provinces. There are growing numbers of extremists gathering there, including members of the Taliban, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and other groups. The Russian Foreign Ministry estimates the overall number of militants in northern Afghanistan at just under 10,000 people. This is causing a lot of concern in Moscow because under certain circumstances, these forces could cause an outbreak of instability in the neighboring Central Asian states.*

The Russian Foreign Ministry believes that the new international mission should take these circumstances into account. It should also secure the approval of the UN Security Council. In addition, Kabul's own position must be taken into account when deciding the future UN mandate in Afghanistan after 2014.

➤ *The Afghans firmly believe that the days of international mentorship are well in the past, and Kabul now needs a partner rather than a shepherd. As for the Taliban and the program of reconciliation with them, Russia believes that the leading role in that process must be played by Kabul, the official Afghan government, and the body authorized by the government to facilitate that process, i.e. the High Peace Council.*

The Russian Foreign Ministry has a number of issues with the draft of the security agreement between Afghanistan and the United States, including the time frames proposed in that draft. The agreement is currently supposed to enter into force on January 1, 2015. It will remain in force until 2024, and possibly after that date as well. That could be interpreted as an arrangement for foreign troops to remain in Afghanistan indefinitely, unless one of the parties gives the other a two-year written notice of its intention to end the agreement. The draft also has some positive sides. In particular, the United States essentially undertakes a commitment not to mount attacks against third countries from Afghan territory, and not to station weapons of mass destruction in Afghanistan.

✓ ON THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE AFGHAN PROBLEM FOR RUSSIA AND THE WORLD

The international community is unlikely to be able to give Afghanistan the attention it requires over the next few years. Events in Afghanistan will obviously have to be viewed in the context of all the other international developments.

➤ *Several Middle Eastern countries have gone through a sudden change of government since 2011. There are grave doubts about the strength of the economic and political systems of other states in the region, including Afghanistan's neighbors in Central Asia. A huge area of instability is now taking shape to the south of Russia and to the west of China. For all its importance, Afghanistan is only a part of a larger tangle of problems.*

For example, very important elections took place in April 2014 not only in Afghanistan, but also in Iraq. On April 30 the country held a parliamentary election that was to determine the next prime minister. But just like Afghanistan, Iraq was plunged into a power vacuum after the poll. Political squabbling has delayed the formation of the new Iraqi government for many months.

Which of the two countries deserves more attention from the international community in 2014, Afghanistan or Iraq? Or is it perhaps Syria? Or will that attention be distributed in accordance with the interests of each of the players?

Despite dire military-political predictions, Russia and several other countries are showing interest in economic cooperation with Afghanistan. In September 2013 Kabul hosted a second meeting of the Russian-Afghan intergovernmental commission on trade and economic ties. During the meeting, the Russian and Afghan participants discussed the possibility of transit of non-military NATO cargos from Afghanistan via the *Northern Route*. The proposal had already been discussed by Russian and NATO specialists at the NATO-Russia Council. This is one of the opportunities for continued cooperation between Russia and NATO on Afghanistan in 2014. But in addition to that short-term project, the parties involved could discuss longer-term strategic goals. The problem, as always, is the lack of mutual trust between Russia and its Western partners, which has been exacerbated by differences over the events in Ukraine.



Map 1. NATO's *Northern Transit Route* to Afghanistan across Russia.  
Source: U.S. Department of Defense

✓ ON THE RUSSIAN MOD'S EFFORTS ON THE AFGHAN PROBLEM

The situation in Afghanistan remains unstable. According to estimates by the Russian Ministry of Defence, the fighting ability of the Afghan national armed forces remains low, despite their fairly large numerical strength. Desertion is a major problem; the number of deserters has reached about 60,000 servicemen over the past three years. There is little doubt that many of these people, who have received military training, will have joined the ranks of the Islamist militants.

Terrorists have stepped up their attacks following the decision to pull ISAF troops out of Afghanistan. Russia is worried by the growing numbers of armed rebels in the northern Afghan provinces that border on Russia's Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) allies. The Afghan government has little to no control over most of the border with Tajikistan, so Russia is taking steps to bolster the fighting ability of its Central Asian allies' armies.

➤ *The Russian MoD believes that the situation in Afghanistan will deteriorate after 2014 without external support. Extremists could once again seize power in the country. It is therefore necessary to conduct a comprehensive joint analysis of the situation and prepare an integrated plan of action to stabilize Afghanistan. The Russian MoD reckons that the plan should cover the next five to ten years. These efforts must involve a broader range of regional partners, and especially the CSTO. That organization has a good potential and some promising ideas regarding coordinated action on the Afghan problem.*

Cooperation on Afghanistan remains one of the top priorities for the NATO-Russia Council; the Russian MoD also attaches great importance to these efforts. As part of the practical steps for 2014, the Russian minister of defense made a proposal at the NRC ministerial meeting to set up an international mine clearance center on Russian territory. The proposal is now being fleshed out. The MoD believes that such a center could train specialists from Afghanistan as well as other countries, and help to form rapid bomb disposal squads for dealing with all types of mines. The Russian MoD also continues its efforts as part of OSCE programs to provide assistance to countries bordering on Afghanistan in eliminating surplus and unusable weapons and ammunition, strengthening controls over weapons arsenals, and training the personnel that ensures the security of small arms and ammunition.

Training centers in Russia operated by the MoD and the Interior Ministry continue to train counternarcotics and police officers from Afghanistan. The MoD is also studying the possibility of providing additional small arms and ammunition requested by the Afghan law-enforcement agencies.

➤ *The Russian MoD's approach emphasizes the need for a consolidated international effort, which Russia regards as the best way to go about resolving the problems facing Afghanistan.*

✓ ON THE ROLE OF THE CSTO IN ADDRESSING AFGHAN-RELATED SECURITY PROBLEMS

Russia currently holds the presidency of the key CSTO bodies. The priorities of the Russian presidency have been set out by Vladimir Putin. The main priority is the situation in and around Afghanistan. For the CSTO member states, the key problem is uncertainty over how that situation will unfold. The CSTO believes that the main emphasis should be on military-political activities rather than humanitarian efforts.

It is no secret that the CSTO is especially worried about the situation in the northern Afghan provinces, i.e. the parts of Afghanistan that border on the CSTO countries. According to various estimates, there are currently 5,000 to 7,000 armed extremists in those provinces. Some of the people coming to power on the local and provincial level there have close links with extremists.

There are growing numbers of suicide bombers, which contributes to tensions on the Tajik-Afghan border. Last year, the CSTO sent a mission of experts to the region in order to assess the situation. The mission included representatives of the CSTO secretariat and of the member states. After the mission reported its findings, the Collective Security Council meeting held in Sochi in September 2013 approved the decision to strengthen Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan. These efforts were to include urgent assistance over a three-month period and a longer-term program of assistance to Tajikistan. A total of 1 billion roubles has been allocated for that purpose. In practical terms, the money will be spent on rebuilding the entire Tajik-Afghan border infrastructure that was allowed to deteriorate in recent years.

The CSTO arsenal also includes other instruments. These include the CSTO collective rapid response forces that can be deployed in the region in the event of rising tensions. The CSTO security forces also conduct regular counternarcotics operations.

Operation Channel is conducted by the CSTO's own forces and the counternarcotics agencies of other states, including Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) members. Afghan representatives were also involved in recent operations.

➤ *To summarize, a fairly logical set of tangible measures is being taken to ensure the security of the CSTO's southern borders. The goal, however, is not to create a "sanitary cordon" on the border between the CSTO and Afghanistan. The CSTO regards Afghanistan as a partner for dialogue and cooperation. Since drug-related issues and terrorism are a shared problem, the CSTO is ready for close cooperation with Afghanistan in dealing with that problem.*

Apart from the counternarcotics and anti-military track, there is a very powerful political track in the CSTO framework. Discussions in that track center on a broad range of problems, from positions on the situation in Afghanistan to assistance in ISAF cargo transit and security in Afghanistan.

The CSTO maintains cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union, the SCO, and the CIS on these problems. It is also working in close contact with the UN, including special representatives of the Secretary-General and the Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia. There were also contacts with the OSCE in November 2013. The two organization's secretaries-general agreed that the CSTO would take part in training border service officers at the OSCE border service college in Dushanbe. In other words, the CSTO is open to broad cooperation with all the relevant organizations, while also taking into account the different goals and the differences in approaches to various issues.

Nevertheless, as numerous statements by CSTO representatives can attest, the organization has been unable to establish any meaningful cooperation with NATO. Over the past ten years, the CSTO has formulated six different proposals on cooperation with NATO in various areas. But NATO's doors remain closed to the CSTO, which means many lost opportunities.

✓ ON AFGHANISTAN'S PLACE IN THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION'S AGENDA

Security is not the only area in which Afghanistan could take part in the SCO cooperation framework. The SCO itself, meanwhile, is seriously thinking about engaging the relevant Afghan agencies in various economic programs.

On December 6, 2013 several countries held a meeting in Moscow to sign a memorandum on creating an energy club. The club is an informal venue for discussing the entire range of energy security and energy cooperation problems. It will include not only SCO member states but also the countries that have observer status and dialogue partners. Afghanistan was one of the first countries to support that initiative and to sign the memorandum.

The third area is the provision of comprehensive assistance to the government of Afghanistan by the SCO member states. These efforts are mostly being undertaken in a bilateral format, but the SCO could play an important role in coordinating efforts in this area.

➤ *How can the SCO format be useful in terms of multilateral cooperation on Afghanistan? First, the leading regional powers are SCO members. This is a regional community of which Afghanistan would like to be part once again, as its own government has said on several occasions. Part of the SCO's attraction is that it is free of conflict; it has also accumulated valuable experience in developing regional security cooperation, including Afghan-related security issues.*



In March 2009 the SCO sponsored a large international conference on Afghanistan; Russia held the rotating SCO presidency at the time. The conference was attended by more than 36 delegations, including some fairly senior ones. These included several international organizations, the UN Secretary-General, a NATO delegation led by a deputy secretary-general, and an EU delegation. Interestingly, the CSTO and NATO delegations had some very productive discussions at the conference. The documents adopted by the participants included a conference declaration, statements by SCO member states, and a plan of action on Afghanistan. The event was a notable success, and it would be useful to hold more such events in the future.

➤ *The scenario for Afghanistan "written" by the United States is now drawing to a close. Some elements of it will remain, but the next scenario has yet to be determined. Clearly, that scenario will be formulated somewhere within the SCO borders. The SCO member states are Afghanistan's neighbors; they are also very influential neighbors, and they all have a tangible interest in what goes on in the country. So far, the SCO has not been very active on that front. It has mostly been watching the situation and waiting for the previous scenario to run its course. It is clear that the SCO does not really want a continued U.S. presence in the region. The fundamental cause of this problem is the lack of trust: an outstretched hand is being pushed away. Quite possibly, tomorrow no-one will want to stretch his hand any more, and countries will go their own way. This issue is much broader than just the problem of Afghanistan, although the Afghan problem is at the center of it.*

✓ ON THE POTENTIAL OF WORKING ON THE AFGHAN TRACK VIA BRICS

BRICS is not really a security-oriented organization; its mission is more about foreign trade. Nevertheless, the *Peace and Security* basket is becoming more prominent on the BRICS agenda. For example, ahead of and during the latest summit in South Africa, the topic of Afghanistan in the *Peace and Security* basket (including Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction) drew a lot of attention, albeit Brazil and South Africa were somewhat less interested in it than the other BRICS members.

➤ *At least three countries - Russia, India, and China - could provide valuable assistance to Afghanistan using the BRICS format. It cannot be ruled out that some decisions will be made at the Fortaleza summit in Brazil on July 15, 2014.*

✓ ON RUSSIA'S INTERESTS IN COOPERATING WITH THE WESTERN COALITION IN AFGHANISTAN

In view of the problem of providing security in the North Caucasus and in Russia's Central Asian allies, Moscow's priorities include countering terrorism and international extremism, which are to a great extent *fuelled* from Afghan territory. By continuing to insist that it wants NATO troops to defeat the terrorists, Moscow has created a dilemma for NATO. If the West believes that it has accomplished its mission in Afghanistan, it should report before the UN Security Council, which issued the mandate for that mission. If, however, the mission has not been accomplished, then the pullout of NATO troops is premature, and they must stay in Afghanistan to finish the job.

Although Russia-NATO cooperation on Afghanistan continues, the nature of that cooperation is not strategic. Its prospects depend not only on the parties' position on Afghanistan, but also on NATO's willingness to find a compromise with Moscow on many other international issues which Russia is worried about. Another important factor is the effectiveness of the U.S. and NATO forces' campaign against extremists in Afghanistan. For that reason, many in Russia question the decision by the United States and NATO to withdraw all their combat troops from Afghanistan.

This issue of *Russia Confidential* makes use of articles and remarks made at PIR Center events by: Kirill Barskiy, special envoy of the Russian president to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; Albert Khorev, acting head of the Afghanistan Department at the Russian Foreign Ministry's Second Asia Department; Vadim Kozyulin, senior researcher at PIR Center; Viktor Korgun, head of the Afghanistan section at the Oriental Research Institute's Middle East Department (until January 2014); Vladimir Orlov, PIR Center President; Elena Suponina, head of the Asia and Middle East Center at the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies; Viktor Vasilyev, Russia's plenipotentiary representative at the CSTO; and Dmitriy Zaporozhets, deputy head of the First Directorate of the Main Department for International Military Cooperation at the Russian MoD.

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*Moscow - Geneva, June 2014*

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The Club's doors are always open for you and your colleagues!

Best regards

**Dmitry Polikanov**  
**Chairman**  
**Trialogue Club International**

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