

Russia's strategies in Afghanistan and their consequences for B5 HC

by Marlène Laruelle¹

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INTRODUCTION

In July 2011, the first U.S. troops started to leave Afghanistan – a powerful symbol of Western determination to let the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) gradually take over responsibility for national security. This is also an important element in the strategy of Hamid Karzai's government, which seeks to appear not as a pawn of Washington but as an autonomous actor in negotiations with the so-called moderate Taliban. With withdrawal to be completed by 2014, the regionalization of the "Afghan issue" will grow. The regional powers will gain autonomy in their relationship with Kabul, and will implement strategies of both competition and collaboration. In the context of this regionalization, Russia occupies an important position.

Until 2008, Moscow's position was ambivalent. Some members of the ruling elite took pleasure in pointing out the stalemate in which the international coalition was mired, since a victorious outcome would have signaled a strengthening of American influence in the region. Others, by contrast, were concerned by the coalition's likely failure and the consequences that this would have for Moscow². Since 2009, the context has changed. The Obama Administration's "reset policy", the more nuanced international positions introduced by Dmitri Medvedev, and a sharper perception of the dangers emanating from Afghanistan have brought about a change in the Russian perspective. Critical discourse has become attenuated in tone and strategies of cooperation with NATO have been given greater prominence. The announcement of the ISAF's expected withdrawal in 2014 accelerated a reformulation of Russian interests in Afghanistan and, more generally, throughout the entire region.

This paper discusses the international and domestic drivers that shape the "return" of Russian influence in Afghanistan and analyzes the outcomes, strengths, and weaknesses of Moscow's strategies in this country. It concludes by examining their relevance for NATO.



Research Paper
ISSN 2076 - 0949
(Res. Div. NATO Def. Coll., Print)
ISSN 2076 - 0957
(Res. Div. NATO Def. Coll., Online)

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web site: www.ndc.nato.int
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Imprimerie Deltamedia Roma
Via Macedonia, 10 - 00183 Roma
www.deltamedia group.it

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² M. Laruelle, "Beyond the Afghan Trauma: Russia's Return to Afghanistan", *Jamestown Occasional Paper*, August 2009.



SPEAKING ON EQUAL TERMS WITH WASHINGTON

Internationally, Moscow welcomed the “reset policy” that the Obama administration launched in 2008, closing the book on years of tension with Washington during the second terms of Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush. The sources of this crisis in US-Russian relations were numerous: lobbying for NATO membership for Georgia and the Ukraine, the planned missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, and the five-day war with Georgia, which marked a setback for Russia-NATO relations and led to the suspension of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). The hardening of tone between the two capitals at the time allowed the Kremlin to make increasing use of self-assertive rhetoric on the international stage. However, Moscow wants anything but confrontation with the United States: it seeks equality with the world’s foremost power, and expects its great power status to be recognized by Washington.

From a Russian point of view, the “reset policy” has the advantage of acknowledging Russia’s status as consistent with that of a great power in a number of respects: its fundamental importance in the missile defense issue, with the signing of the New START Treaty; its role as an interlocutor in bilateral negotiations on global issues such as Iran’s nuclear program; and recognition of its size and location as essential factors in addressing the Afghan crisis.³ This greatly facilitates negotiations between Washington and Moscow. The subjects are traditional, historic, minimally controversial, and can give the illusion of a return to a form of bipolarity, as when the two great players decided the future of the world between them. Both the Russians and the Americans find this reassuring, and the Kremlin can thus enjoy the satisfaction of being on equal terms with the United States, which is not the case in other strategic sectors. This desire to strengthen the partnership with Moscow is equally evident in Europe, and on a more global scale within NATO. Secretary General Rasmussen has emphasized his desire for NATO to prioritize the relationship with Russia, notably through joint participation in the Cooperative Airspace Initiative, in submarine search and rescue exercises, and

in debates on the missile defense issue, which cannot be considered a truly collective domain since Russia is not a member of the Alliance.⁴

Russia’s position on Afghanistan and its growing cooperation with NATO within the “reset” framework offer Moscow an important showcase and allow it to make gestures towards Washington. This was already the case in 2001, after the events of September 11. Vladimir Putin, to the surprise of many members of the ruling elite, especially in the military, supported the U.S. intervention at the time and let the Pentagon open bases at Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan and Manas in Kyrgyzstan. The unity of purpose displayed with the United States on the Afghan issue was a key element of Putin’s policy of “revival” of the Russian state and its return to the world stage as a great power.⁵

Today Western strategies in Afghanistan rely increasingly on Russia, which in turn gains increasing visibility as a partner of the international coalition. The Northern Distribution Network (NDN), established in summer 2009, continues to increase in importance. On the basis of agreements signed with eight transit countries, it carried 40 percent of all non-lethal equipment (mainly food and fuel) to ISAF in 2010; this is expected to reach 75 percent by the end of 2011, as the Pentagon now seeks as far as possible to avoid the Pakistani Ground Line of Communication, which is overloaded and dangerous.⁶ Between February 27, 2009, the official start of the land transit, and the end of April 2011, over 25,000 containers were transported via Russian territory. A reverse transit route for all kinds of non-lethal cargo, including construction material, general domestic items, timber, and housing containers, has developed.⁷ At the end of 2010, Moscow also allowed the transit of Afghanistan-bound armored vehicles.⁸

In addition, Russia has opened its airspace. Kazakhstan did the same at the end of 2010. This means that U.S. Air Force cargo jets supplying weapons can now fly from U.S. territory over the North Pole to Bagram Air Base in about twelve hours and no longer need to stop to refuel.⁹ In April 2011, ISAF made its thousandth supply flight over Russia, having used the route to carry more than 150,000 soldiers to Afghanistan.¹⁰ Since spring

³ Andrew Kuchins, “Reset Expectations. Russian Assessments of US Power”, in Craig Cohen (ed.), *Capacity and Resolve. Foreign Assessment of US Power*, Washington DC, CSIS, 2011, pp. 114-123.

⁴ Andrew Monaghan, “NATO and Russia: resuscitating the partnership”, *Research Report*, http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2011/NATO_Russia/Resuscitating-partnership/EN/index.htm

⁵ Andrei Tsygankov, “Russia’s International Assertiveness: What Does It Mean for the West?”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2008, pp. 38-55.

⁶ Joshua Kucera, “Child Labor and U.S. Military Cooperation in Uzbekistan”, *Eurasianet.org*, May 5, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/taxonomy/term/2325>

⁷ “One year on: ISAF’s trans-European supply routes are a success”, NATO website, May 26, 2011, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_74763.htm

⁸ “Afghan-bound armored vehicles to be allowed through Russia”, CNN, November 25, 2010, http://articles.cnn.com/2010-11-25/world/russia.nato.afghanistan_1_armored-vehicles-foreign-minister-sergey-lavrov-isaf?_s=PM:WORLD

⁹ Elisabeth Bumiller, “Kazakhstan to Permit Military Overflights to Afghanistan”, *The New York Times*, April 12, 2010, www.nytimes.com/.../13kazakhstan.html

¹⁰ Lalit K. Jha, “1000th ISAF supply mission transits through Russia”, *Pajhwok Afghan News*.



2011, a new agreement between the United States and Russia has allowed the United States to airlift weapons, military equipment and armed forces through Russian air space, with a maximum of 4,500 flights per year in each direction.¹¹ For Russia, the NDN is a financial windfall. Over land, the national railway company RZhD derives substantial benefits from this transit and has regularly increased its fees for freight. In air transport, Russian cargo companies like Vertical-T, UTAIR, and the Russian-Ukrainian company Volga-Dniepr have taken full advantage of these new supply lines to Afghanistan.¹²

Russia also plays an important role in the U.S. presence at Manas, a key logistics hub for the United States. The idea, widespread in Western media, that Moscow regularly pressures the Kyrgyz authorities to demand the closure of the base is to a degree misleading. Moscow has much less interest than Beijing in seeing it closed; the Wikileaks cables released in late 2010 confirmed that China's activism on the matter was stronger than Russia's.¹³ Moreover, threats of closure have come directly from Bishkek – for example, those launched by Kurmanbek Bakiyev in 2009. The rent Washington pays has become a key component of the Kyrgyz state budget, and the Kyrgyz authorities thus use the base for financial blackmail. When Moscow protests against the American presence, it is not actually asking for the closure of the base, but is really sending signals to Washington about the long-term influence of the Pentagon in its “near abroad”. Moreover, Moscow is directly benefitting from this U.S. presence. The supply contract that provides half of all of the base's jet fuel is important not so much as a source of revenue for Russia (the amount the United States pays is important for the Kyrgyz budget, but not for the Russian budget or for Gazpromneft, the subsidiary of Gazprom responsible for this supply), as for the tremendous leverage it gives Russia over the United States.¹⁴

Yet it would be simplistic to limit the perspective to this “American factor” in analyzing the Russian position on Afghanistan. Three other factors must be taken into account: in terms of foreign policy, the growing relevance of a long-term strategic rapprochement with Western interests against the backdrop of the reconfiguration of powers in the 21st century; in terms of the “near

abroad”, midway between foreign and domestic policy, Moscow's management of its relationship with Central Asia; and in terms of domestic politics, awareness of the danger posed by drug trafficking. Afghanistan therefore embodies the security challenges that Russia faces in the decades ahead: those inherited as a legacy of bipolarity, those arising from the transformation of Russia into a nation-state learning how to manage relations with its post-Soviet neighbors, and those posed by non-traditional, 21st-century threats.

AFGHANISTAN IN RUSSIA'S CHANGING GEOSTRATEGIC GLOBAL POSITIONING

In terms of its global strategic position, Russia has been evolving for some time. The new National Security Concept for 2020, adopted in 2009, advances more nuanced and subtle arguments than the previous document, reflecting changes within the international security environment.¹⁵ First, the Concept defines security much more broadly, meaning that it includes energy security, soft security challenges, the environment, health, education, technology, and standard of living. The emphasis placed on these latter elements goes hand-in-hand with Dmitri Medvedev's focus on societal ‘modernization’.¹⁶ The definition of enemies and dangers has also changed. Even if a number of prisms inherited from the Cold War still shape Russian perceptions, today Moscow tries to take into account two categories of danger: non-traditional threats (failing states, drug-trafficking, migration, and human security), and strategic uncertainties (potential rapid changes in the domestic or international orientation of its neighbors).

Russia's relationship with China, for instance, is characterized by strategic uncertainty and has in part to be understood through what is not said or what is said only in counterpoint. The anti-Chinese discourse of the Russian elites, hitherto reserved for the private sphere,¹⁷ has recently been on the increase. Experts recognize more and more that Russia's future will largely depend on its rising power differential with China. Over the medium term, the Russian leadership is by no means ready to accept the status of being China's “junior partner” and is not prepared to view China as a

¹¹ “Look! Up in the sky! US military overflights signed into law”, *Russia Today*, March 10, 2011, <http://rt.com/politics/us-russia-flyovers-afghanistan-nato/>

¹² Nikita Mendkovich, “Afganskii soiuz Rossii i Ameriki”, *Afghanistan.ru*, November 15, 2010, <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/18843.html>

¹³ In a cable released by Wikileaks, the United States is allegedly able to prove that China offered the Kyrgyz authorities three billion dollars to close down their base at Manas. See D. Trilling, “China Gives U.S. Base Advice”, *Eurasianet.org*, November 29, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62454>

¹⁴ Mystery at Manas: Strategic Blind Spots in the Department of Defense's Fuel Contracts in Kyrgyzstan, Report of the Majority Staff, Rep. John F. Tierney, Chair Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, December 2010.

¹⁵ On the “National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020”, see *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 62, 2009.

¹⁶ Mark A. Smith, Medvedev and the Modernisation Dilemma, The Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, November 2010.

¹⁷ Vladimir Shlapentokh, “China in the Russian Mind Today: Ambivalence and Defeatism”, *Europe Asia Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2007, pp. 1-22.



great strategic, political, and cultural power.¹⁸ Another direction, the “South”, is the most complex area for Russian security concerns. It is a large entity with fuzzy borders, comprising the new federal district of the North Caucasus that was created in 2010, as well as the three states of Transcaucasia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), the five states of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan), and two southern neighbors (Iran and Afghanistan). The security threats coming from this area as a whole are the most non-traditional which Russia faces (Islamic insurgency, uncontrolled migration, drug-trafficking, failing states, and nuclear issues), and geostrategic relations there are the most uncertain. Russia’s southern borders are impossible to secure, and the feeling that the danger is at once exterior and interior, in relation to Russia’s Muslim populations and to migration, makes securitization strategies very difficult to plan.

In this changing international context, where Russia must manage the growing power of Asian giants, particularly its neighbor China, and face non-traditional threats coming from the “South”, the West in all its manifestations (the United States, the European Union, the OSCE, and NATO) appears to be an ally rather than an enemy. Relations with the United States and the EU can be tense for geopolitical reasons (eastward enlargement), or on account of divergent political viewpoints, but the risk of armed conflict has disappeared. In Russia’s main strategic documents, the level of geopolitical uncertainty with the West is low, notwithstanding the sometimes aggressive rhetoric concerning NATO. The NRC common agenda for cooperation on counterterrorism, counterpiracy, counternarcotics, the promotion of international security, and missile defense reflects the relationship’s new orientation within the framework of the NATO-Russia Joint Review of Twenty-First Century Common Security Challenges.

There are still ambiguities in Russian policy towards NATO. On the one hand, some scholars in Western-oriented think tanks, such as Igor Yurgens’ Institute of Contemporary Development, encourage Russia to associate itself with the West and even to join NATO in order to be able to confront the challenges of the

21st century.¹⁹ Without going that far, the Russian establishment is increasingly turning towards the West, despite its critics; some have advanced an idea of a “three-branched Western civilization” (the United States, Europe, and Russia), which allows Moscow simultaneously to be against the West and a part of it.²⁰ On the other hand, there are still many elements of tension or disagreement and Russian strategic documents insist on a declining influence of the West in international affairs – debates on the Libyan and Syrian questions highlight the divergences in Western viewpoints.²¹ The Kremlin also points at potential conventional threats which NATO poses to Russian interests – with tensions centred mainly on the new NATO members in Central and Eastern Europe – and its unenthusiastic approach to Moscow’s new European security treaty proposal.

The Russian rapprochement with NATO in Afghanistan must be understood within this wider, ambiguous framework. Indeed, the main strategic documents avoid taking a clear stance on this relationship in the context of the Afghan crisis. The two Foreign Policy Concepts of 2000 and 2008 state that the conflict in Afghanistan creates a real “threat to security of the southern CIS borders”. However, whereas the first of these documents simply refers to Russia’s desire to “interdict the exportation of terrorism and extremism from that country”,²² the second mentions collaboration “with other countries concerned, the United Nations, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and other multilateral institutions”²³ – and in doing so omits any explicit reference to involvement of NATO. As for the National Security Concept of 2009, this remains curiously quiet on Afghanistan, limiting itself to recalling that the international situation is negatively affected by the unresolved conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Near East, and the Korean peninsula.²⁴

These contradictions or silences can be partly explained by the multiplicity of actors that define the priorities of Russian foreign policy, globally as well as in the specific case of Afghanistan. The Russian elites are indeed deeply divided in their reading of security priorities, depending

¹⁸ Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience. Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics*, Washington, London, Brookings Institution Press and Chatham House, 2008; Andrei Tsygankov, “What Is China to Us? Westernizers and Sinophiles in Russia’s Foreign Policy”, IFRI.NEI.Visions, no. 45, 2009, www.ifri.org/downloads/ifritsygankovengrus-siachinanov2009.pdf

¹⁹ “Head of Russian think-tank mulls prospects for cooperation with NATO”, INSOR, September 7-10, 2010, http://www.insor-russia.ru/en/_press/monitoring_of_press/8753

²⁰ I. Krastev, “Russia as ‘the Other Europe’”, *Russia in Global Affairs*, July-August 2007, pp. 33-45.

²¹ See “Russia and the Middle East Crises”, *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 98, July 2011, <http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad/details.cfm?lng=en&id=130883> See “Russia and the Middle East Crises”, *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 98, July 2011, <http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad/details.cfm?lng=en&id=130883>

²² The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, June 28, 2000, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>

²³ The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, June 12, 2008, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>

²⁴ Strategia natsionalnoi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii do 2020 goda [The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020], 12 May 2009, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>



on such variables as their ideological leanings (more or less anti-Western) and the choice of a short- or long-term time scale to project Russia's interests. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is quite powerful because it manages relations with Kabul and, more importantly, with members of the international coalition. The military staff should not be disregarded, because they are in charge of cooperation programs with the Afghan army. The Russian delegation at NATO (particularly its head, Dmitry Rogozin) has played a key role in the evolution of the Russian narrative on Afghanistan. Viktor Ivanov is also an important figure, since Russian interest in the fight against drug trafficking has grown: a veteran of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, and close to Putin since the early 1990s, he is Director of the Russian Federal Service for the Control of Narcotics and Chairman of the State Anti-Narcotics Committee.

Large state enterprises that are traditionally important in shaping Russian foreign policy, like Gazprom and Rosneft, are more or less absent from the Afghan scene, while companies in the construction sector such as Tekhnopromexport or Soiuzvneshtans are better represented. The situation might change, however, were Gazprom able to join the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline consortium. Beyond diplomatic contacts at the highest levels, on a day to day basis Moscow's "Afghanistan policy" is realized through circles linked to the Soviet past. Former Afgantsy (veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979-1989) have revived their networks there in order to mediate trade.²⁵ Former siloviki (members of the power structures) linked to Afghanistan also help to boost interest in contemporary Russia – for example, Yevgeni Primakov, former Director of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Members of the Russian-Afghan Business Council (RADS), led by Abubakar Arsamakov, and Zamir Kabulov, Special Representative of the Russian President for Afghanistan and former Russian Ambassador to Afghanistan, are key mediators for business and security issues.

FACING THE LACK OF LONG-TERM STRATEGY TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA

Afghanistan is also part of a broader framework concerning Russia's security, economic, and political involvement in Central Asia. Moscow conceives of the region within an essentially security-oriented framework: it presents the risk of failing states, Islamism, and drug trafficking. Russia wants to be able to anticipate, or at least to limit, regional instabilities that originate in Central Asia and their projection on to its territory. The military partnership with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan is therefore the major vehicle of Russian influence. Moscow's main tools in this sector are the training of military personnel, a joint doctrine and shared security space, arms sales, common exercises, the Ayni and Kant military bases, and the CSTO multilateral structure.²⁶ In the economic domain, Russian influence is decreasing. Moscow has lost its monopoly on Central Asian hydrocarbons, Kazakh uranium, and more generally on the region's commercial interests. China and the EU have overtaken it as Central Asia's main trading partners. Through the Eurasian Economic Community, the Customs Union, and potentially also the Eurasian Union which Vladimir Putin evoked in October 2011, Russia's strategy is to promote an integrated space with some republics in terms of transport and communications in order to stop the advance of geopolitical dissociation between Russia and Central Asia as a result of Chinese pressure.²⁷

Politically, Moscow hopes to preserve "friendly regimes" in Central Asia, but this notion is paradoxical. Tashkent and Ashgabat are not Moscow's political allies as such, but their isolation from foreign influences and their authoritarian tendencies serve Russian interests. Bishkek is able to advance more pro-Western arguments (for instance, following the establishment of Roza Otunbayeva's parliamentary regime in 2010), while also remaining pro-Russian. Tajikistan is increasingly critical of Moscow, and the Kazakh elites want to preserve their autonomy in the face of possible Russian interference. What is most at issue is thus an axis of convenience. Regime changes in one of the republics or in the Kremlin could put a rapid end to these circumstantial political alliances. Moscow does not want "unknown opposition forces", often believed to be linked to terrorist or fundamentalist organizations, to take over – which gives

²⁵More in M. Laruelle, "Beyond the Afghan Trauma: Russia's Return to Afghanistan".

²⁶Sébastien Peyrouse, "Russia-Central Asia: Advances and Shortcomings of the Military Partnership", in S. Blank (ed.), *Central Asian Security Trends: Views from Europe and Russia*, Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011, pp. 1-34, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=1063>

²⁷Stephen Blank, "Toward a New Chinese Order in Asia. Russia's Failure", *NBR Special Report*, no. 26, March 2011; I. Danchenko, E. Downs, and F. Hill, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back? The Realities of a Rising China and Implications for Russia's Energy Ambitions", *Brookings Policy Paper no. 22*, August 2010; Mark A. Smith, *The Russo-Chinese Energy Relationship*, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, October 2010.



grounds for supporting the current regimes. However, the Kremlin appears increasingly aware of the difficulties raised by the nature of the Central Asian regimes. It is starting to give discreet encouragement to prospective reforms by the governments concerned, for fear that Egyptian- or Tunisian-type situations will occur there under the effect of the political “cocktail” of political repressions, social and economic depression, and the securement of the country’s riches by a reduced elite. That is the assessment expressed by the Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Grigorii Karasin, at an April 2011 hearing at the Duma on the problems of Central Asia,²⁸ although Russian experts do not unanimously subscribe to the parallel with the Arab spring.²⁹

Though Russia managed in the 2000s to regain the influence in Central Asia that it had lost in the 1990s, it is advancing no long-term strategies in the region. It continues to live off its Soviet legacy, increasingly challenged by other international actors. Moscow is, however, so sure of its soft power assets in Central Asia that it sometimes forgets to cultivate them. Its political compatibility with the regional regimes may be temporary, since Russian minorities there are not valued, Moscow does not prioritize the promotion of Russian language and culture, and fails to utilize the growing flows of labor migrants as a tool for its rapprochement with Central Asia. Among the Russian establishment, a generalized disdain for what it sees as a region of delayed economic and cultural development that had no choice but to turn towards Russia in order to avoid Islamism and Chinese domination provides the negative context in which Moscow fails to concede the economic, geopolitical, and societal utility of Central Asia.³⁰ One of the weaknesses in Russian strategic thinking is its difficulty in envisaging a constructive way to combine Central Asia with Afghanistan.

Russia is concerned about the developing influence of “extra-regional powers” in Central Asia, but knows that it is not in a position to take total responsibility for the region and thus supports the presence of some other international actors. In this strategy, the Afghan issue may become a key driver of Russia’s commitment and legitimacy in the region. It allows it to justify its security presence there as based on a request from the

Central Asian states. The two smallest ones, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, know they cannot cope with major destabilization without the help of Russia, either on a bilateral basis or via the CSTO. Moscow plans to open a small center in the Osh region, under the control of the FSB, in order to monitor both drug trafficking and the Islamist movements. Dushanbe’s resistance to the idea of a return of Russian border guards to the Tajik-Afghan frontier may be difficult to sustain,³¹ except if the United States becomes far more involved alongside the Tajik authorities. Kazakhstan has no securitization strategies at the regional level that do not include major Russian participation. Even Uzbekistan would possibly be willing to seek Russian aid in the event of serious tensions. The Chinese have never hidden their support for Russian control over the region’s security, as this allows them to focus on economic issues. India too approves Moscow’s presence in the region,³² and NATO has an interest in the Russians taking over part of regional security after the ISAF troops leave.

The Russian establishment maintains an ambivalent stance towards this security commitment. It likes to be recognized a key player in the Central Asian scene – a sign of great power towards the West and China, and a tacit acknowledgment of Central Asia as a sphere of natural interest. But at the same time it is legitimately concerned about becoming more involved in what is considered as an Afghan/Central Asian quagmire or burden. Moscow feels that the more military presence it has in the region, the more it will have to bear the costs of potential destabilizations, not only financially, but also politically and in terms of human losses. The “sphere of influence” tends thus to be seen more and more often as a “sphere of responsibility”. But the great weakness of Russia’s position in Central Asia being centered on the Afghan issue remains the difficulty the Kremlin has in thinking of unified strategies integrating Central Asian economic development and the stabilization of neighboring Afghanistan. Indeed, it was only from 2010 on that Russian interest in the trans-Afghanistan TAPI gas pipeline project and the CASA-1000 electricity export project was expressed, while for many years China considered its investments in Central Asia, and especially in Tajikistan, in conjunction with those made in Afghanistan.

²⁸ « Stranam Tsentral’noi Azii noujny reformy, chtoby izbejat’ povtoreniia sobytii v Severnoi Afrike » [Reforms in Central Asian countries are required in order to avoid a repeat of the events in North Africa], Regnum, 13 April, 2011.

²⁹ It should be noted that Russian experts on the region relativize the similarities between the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, on the one hand, and in Central Asia, on the other. See, for example, “Central Asia in Stagnation”, op. cit.

³⁰ Marlène Laruelle, “Russian Policy on Central Asia and the Role of Russian Nationalism”, *Silk Road Papers*, Washington DC, The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, April 2008, http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2008_laurelle_russias-central-asia-policy.pdf

³¹ Alexandr Artemiev, “Tadzhikistan vyvodit Rossiia iz sebia”, *Gazeta.ru*, March 3, 2011, http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2011/03/03_a_3544913.shtml

³² Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse (eds), *Mapping Central Asia: Indian Perceptions and Strategies*, Farnham, UK, Ashgate, 2011



THE DRUG ISSUE AS A SYMBOL OF RUSSIA'S DOMESTIC FRAGILITIES

Since 2008, the drug issue has shaped the "return" of Afghanistan as a more specific concern on the Russian agenda. Russia has the unenviable status of being the world's leading consumer of heroin, using 70 tons per year, or around 21 percent of world consumption according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).³³ The country has between four and six million drug users, mainly young people in both urban and rural areas, according to these calculations; this figure has increased more than ninefold over the last decade.³⁴ The Federal Anti-Drug Agency estimates that each year 10,000 Russians die of an overdose and that another 70,000 deaths are drug-related.³⁵ Moreover, this consumption has a major effect on the spread of the HIV crisis because the country has banned methadone treatment and needle exchange programs. According to the UNODC, Russia now has a 1 percent HIV prevalence rate among its young people and the fastest growing HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world.³⁶ This situation is a part of the more general debate on the country's demographic crisis and the related absence of efficient state policy to deal with the downturn in its citizens' health, with particular regard to male mortality from acts of violence.³⁷

Since 2008 and the appointment of Viktor Ivanov as Director of the Federal Anti-Drug Agency, the Russian position on the issue has become more radical. Ivanov has consistently denounced the social and health threats that drug trafficking poses to Russian society.³⁸ The economic burden of drug-related crime is also important, though difficult to measure. Some of Ivanov's concerns are not made public: they are related to the role of certain siloviki, well established in Central Asia, in drug trafficking, which threatens the very structure of the security services and the political control the Kremlin exercises over them.³⁹ Moscow considers the narcoproblem to be international rather than domestic: it feels victimized by the explosion in the production of

opiates that occurred with the presence of the ISAF in Afghanistan and the correspondingly sharp rise in the country's status as a transit route between Central Asia and Europe.⁴⁰ Indeed, opium production in Afghanistan increased from 185 metric tons in 2001 to 3,400 in 2002, reaching a peak of 8,200 in 2007 before dropping back to 6,900 tons in 2009.⁴¹ A third of the production passes via the northern route, that is, via Central Asia and Russia; this is chiefly destined for Russian consumption and, to a lesser extent, for the European market.⁴²

Since 2009, Moscow has spoken of "narco-aggression" from Afghanistan and denounced the laissez-faire approach of the international coalition on this issue, accusing it of having allowed the production of opium to increase dramatically since 2001. With the nomination of Yuri Fedotov as UNODC Executive Director in June 2010, Russia hopes to lead the anti-drug campaign and has sent additional staff from the Federal Agency to the UNODC office in Kabul.⁴³ Moscow has also increased its financial contributions to UNODC to US \$ 7.5 million, establishing an annual contribution level of US \$ 2 million as from 2011, and plans to contribute US \$ 500,000 annually from 2011 to 2013 to support the State Drug Control Agency of Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁴ Russia's desire to return to the Tajik-Afghan border and settle in southern Kyrgyzstan, a trafficking hub, clearly expresses its concerns about the inability of the Central Asian regimes to act as a blockade. In spring 2010, Moscow sent NATO and Gil Kerlikowske, the Director of the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy, a list of twenty drug barons and nearly 200 laboratory locations in Afghanistan.⁴⁵ It asked for the eradication by force of opium poppy fields. The request was unsuccessful, because there is no alternative income to offer the Afghan people, and both the Karzai government and the international community refuse to punish the peasant population. However at the end of October 2010, Russia and the United States conducted a highly symbolic joint operation to destroy four laboratories near the Pakistani border.⁴⁶ The Kremlin probably hopes to use its growing

³³World Drug Report 2010, Vienna, UNODC, 2010, pp. 41 and 45.

³⁴ Illicit Drug Trends in the Russian Federation, Vienna, UNODC, April 2008, p. 10.

³⁵International Narcotics Control Strategy Report – 2008, US Embassy in Russia, 2008, <http://moscow.usembassy.gov/incsr2008.html>

³⁶ Illicit Drug Trends in the Russian Federation, p. 6.

³⁷Nicholas Eberstadt, "Russia's Peacetime Demographic Crisis: Dimensions, Causes, Implications", *NBR Report*, May 2010.

³⁸Timofei Borisov, "Geroin i kapusta. Glava narkokontrolia Viktor Ivanov predlagaet vvesti pozhiznennyi srok za kilogram tiazhelykh narkotikov", *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 12 October 2008, <http://www.rg.ru/2008/12/10/narkotiki.html>

³⁹ Anonymous interviews with Central Asian and Russian experts on drug trafficking, June and September 2010

⁴⁰ Mariia Ivanova, "NATO stimuliruet narkotrafik", *Vzgliad*, 19 February 2009, <http://vz.ru/society/2009/2/19/258008.html>

⁴¹ UNODC, World Trade Report 2010, New York, UNODC, 2010, p. 137.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 48-53.

⁴³ Andrei Greshnov, "FSKN RF uvelichit svoego predstavitel'stva v Afganistane – Ivanov", *RIA Novosti*, March 16, 2010, <http://ria.ru/society/20100316/214782363.html>

⁴⁴ "Russian Federation pledges more than US\$ 7 million to UNODC", UNODC, 18 January 2011, www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2011/January/russian-federation-pledges-more-than-seven-million-dollars-to-unodc.html

⁴⁵ Dmitry Solovoyov, "Russia gives U.S. Afghan drugs data, criticizes NATO", Reuters, 23 May 2010, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2010/05/23/us-russia-usa-drugs-idIN-TRE64M1UZ20100523>

⁴⁶ "Russia, US: together against drug trafficking", *The Voice of Russia*, 23 November 2010, <http://english.ruvr.ru/2010/11/23/35471007.html>



involvement in the NDN to pressure the United States for a more affirmative stance on the danger of letting Afghanistan feed the world's market for heroin.

But Russia also needs to do more in terms of combating drug addiction at home in order to make its international concerns more credible. The measures implemented to respond to the double challenge of Russia's drug consumption and demographic crisis have been rather ineffective. With the exception of a campaign to reduce road accidents, the authorities do not seem concerned about losing a considerable proportion of their working-age human capital to violent deaths. Reviving births through financial mechanisms is easier than making significant modifications to the social patterns linked to violent male deaths or to drug consumption, involving far more complex explanatory factors. In June 2011, the Duma declared "total war" on drugs and is in the process of preparing new, stricter laws that would force addicts into treatment or jail and that would treat dealers "like serial killers".⁴⁷ It remains to be seen whether this forceful solution is the right one and whether the government will be capable of enforcing it and of really offering addicts an alternative. But it is likely that the fight against drug-trafficking will become a preferred domain of NATO-Russia cooperation in the years to come.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE RUSSIAN PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

Do these multiple drivers that shape Russia's strategies in Afghanistan lead to outcomes? Moscow's strengths and weaknesses are related to elaboration of its own strategy for Afghanistan, the establishment of networks and lobbies, its economic presence in Afghanistan, its role in national reconstruction and consolidation of the central state, and its ability to project solutions after 2014.

The weight of the players linked to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan and, more generally, Russia's overall rehabilitation of the Soviet past have obviously tainted dealings between Moscow and Kabul, with many issues linked to the history of relations between the two. Both sides have sought to discuss the years 1950-1979 with

a constructive voice and to ignore the decade of war. In Kabul, the stakes are high. The Karzai government needs to diversify its partners and to avoid U.S. domination. Pro-Russian lobbies have been reactivated in Kabul and the northern provinces, concentrating in particular on Mazar e-Sharif, home of former Northern Alliance warlords, and on the Afghan intelligentsia, especially in academia and the military.⁴⁸ However, like other actors in Afghanistan, these pro-Russian lobbies are not motivated by a principled solidarity with Moscow, but by stakes internal to Afghanistan and its inter-group balance, which does not give the Russian establishment much room to maneuver.

Russia can also access some Pashtun networks via former communist groups. During the Russian-Afghan forum in Moscow in May 2009, the presence of numerous Pashtun businessmen and politicians – such as the deputy from Nangarhar, Mohammad Hashim Vatanval, who is known for being close to the Taliban – was noticed. Of course Northern Alliance members criticized this, but it represented a positive new element of Russian policy in Afghanistan towards Pashtun delegates.⁴⁹ Some observers, such as Andrei Serenko, have even spoken of new Russian activism in the south of Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan.⁵⁰ However, all of these networks lack strength across the country because anti-Russian groups, strengthened by the memory of the decade of conflict, are also powerful and even tried to persuade the Afghan parliament to pass a decree demanding compensation for the Soviet occupation.⁵¹ Russian influence on the elites is thus far less substantial than that of Pakistan or of India, perhaps even of Iran, but it has clearly bounced back.

On the economic level, Russia might become more ambitious. Bilateral commerce between Russia and Afghanistan resumed in 2007, after the Paris Club announced a reduction in Afghan debt, forgiving 90 percent of the 11 billion dollars that Kabul owed (mostly consisting of late fees), and providing for the payment of the remaining 730 million U.S. dollars over a period of 23 years.⁵² This led to the revival of bilateral exchanges between Russia and Afghanistan, which rose from 68 million dollars in 2007 to 190 million in 2008, and then to almost 500 million in 2010.⁵³ The exchanges are limited

⁴⁷ Tom Parfitt, "Russia defies growing consensus with declaration of 'total war on drugs'", *The Guardian*, 8 June 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/08/russia-total-war-on-drugs>

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹"Pashtuns have Moscow", *Islamic News*, 15 May 2009, <http://cnobbi.com/2305.html>

⁵⁰Andrei Serenko, "Na 'linii Diuranda' poiavilis 'russkie talibany'", *Afghanistan.ru*, 29 May 2009, <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/14815.html>

⁵¹"Afganskije vlasti vystavijat Rossii schet za sovetskuiu okkupatsiu", *Gazeta.ru*, 19 March 2010, <http://www.gzt.ru/topnews/world/afganskije-vlasti-trebuyut-ot-rossii-rasplatitsya-/296948.html>

⁵² "Sotrudnichestvo s Afganistanom. Obshchie voprosy", *Mezhregional'nyi Tsentr Delovogo sotrudnichestva*, no date, http://www.mcds.ru/default.asp?Mode=Review&ID_L0=6&ID_L1=27&ID_L2=191&ID_L3=1922&ID=&ID_Review=147935

⁵³"Afghanistan & Russia To Establish Joint Trade Commission", *Khaama*, 14 June 2011, <http://www.khaama.com/afghanistan-russia-to-establish-joint-trade-commission>.



to certain sectors. Russia exports mainly kerosene, metals, wood materials, foodstuffs (particularly sugar and flour), machine parts for aviation, and medicines. Afghan exports are minimal and include traditional products like dried fruits and carpets. The transfer of technologies and the export of manufactured products remain extremely limited, because Russia is not competitive in this area.⁵⁴

Russia's investments are at the heart of Russian-Afghan economic relations. The current government has offered to take over the Soviet legacy in Afghanistan and reconstruct or modernize around 140 projects that Moscow built in 1950-1980.⁵⁵ Russian enterprises like Tekhnopromexport are in charge of restoring several Soviet-built hydroelectric stations, such as the one in Naglu, and of renovating the Salang tunnel, which links Kabul to the northern provinces. The Industrial Bank of Moscow announced that it was ready to finance the restoration of a facility in Kabul that produces residential housing units and of the Dzhebal us-Siradzh cement plant, two companies that Kabul had privatized, before reversing its decision in 2009.⁵⁶

However, during his visit to Moscow in January 2011, Hamid Karzai invited Russian companies to avoid being limited by the Soviet legacy and to become more ambitious. Moscow admittedly has a considerable potential for investment in Afghanistan focused on the reconstruction of Soviet structures (power stations, hospitals, schools, technical institutes), transport (roads, tunnels, bridges), extraction of raw materials, and communications. It can also target the civil aviation market, with expected growth in internal flights. The holding company Soiuzvneshttrans is currently negotiating with the Afghan transit company Afsotr for the purchase of 49 percent of its shares, in exchange for the delivery of approximately 500 trucks.⁵⁷ However, until now, Russian companies have been timid and have lost several tenders in the mining sector and in communications: they are competing with mostly Chinese and sometimes Iranian companies, and do not always submit attractive bids for major international contracts. They still hope to regain a foothold in the

oil and gas basins of the northern provinces (Sari-Pul, Faryab, Djaunzjan, and Balkh), which were developed in the Soviet period and whose infrastructure for exports to Central Asia still exists. Kabul would also like to see increased oil supplies from Russia.⁵⁸

Russia, meanwhile, seems increasingly interested in the TAPI gas pipeline project, launched in the mid-1990s with support from the Asian Development Bank and greeted enthusiastically by Washington with a view to rapprochement between Central and South Asia. The project was relaunched in late 2010 with the signing of a new agreement among the four presidents,⁵⁹ and the Kremlin now understands that it cannot prevent its implementation if the other donor countries want it.⁶⁰ Moscow thus prefers to be associated with it in order to keep an eye on the evolution of Turkmen gas exports, which are increasingly eluding its grasp with the strengthening of the Sino-Turkmen gas partnership. Although Kabul seems to support the Russian involvement, Ashgabat is naturally opposed and does not want Gazprom to have a say over its strategic opening to new markets. In August 2010 Moscow also joined the CASA-1000 project, which seeks to export Kyrgyz and Tajik electricity to Afghanistan and South Asia, at a meeting in Sochi between the presidents of Russia, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan.⁶¹

In terms of military cooperation, the Russian presence has increased in recent years, with the agreement of NATO. Russia had already provided nearly 200 million dollars in weapons, training, and military assistance to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2006.⁶² Today Rossoboronexport hopes to secure a place in the local market thanks to the Soviet past, since the Afghan police force widely uses Soviet-era Kalashnikov assault rifles and machine guns despite the availability of military supplies offered by the United States. At the end of 2011, as part of an assistance program to the Afghan army and police, Moscow resumed its supply of small arms to Kabul.⁶³ But the role of Russia is expected to increase with the purchase by Washington of 21 Russian MI-17 military helicopters for the Afghan army.⁶⁴ Moscow is

⁵⁴ "Islamskaia respublika Afganistan", Ministerstvo Ekonomiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2009, http://www.economy.gov.ru:80/wps/wcm/connect/a5ae708040ccb99d9913bf90e96aee3b/IRA_afganistan.doc?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=a5ae708040ccb99d9913bf90e96aee3b&CACHE=NONE

⁵⁵ More in M. Laruelle, "Beyond the Afghan Trauma: Russia's Return to Afghanistan".

⁵⁶ "V ozhidanii rossiisko-afganskoi 'perezagruzki", Afghanistan.ru, 18 January 2011, <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/19322.html>

⁵⁷ "Bolshaia igra Rossii", Afghanistan.ru, September 24, 2010, <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/18417.html>.

⁵⁸ Dmitri Saveliev, "Itogi vizita Khamida Karzaia v Moskvu. Vremia ekonomicheskogo diplomatii", Afghanistan.ru, January 23, 2011, <http://www.afghanistan.ru/?id=27>

⁵⁹ "Presidents Sign Accord in Ashgabat on TAPI Pipeline", RFE/RL, 11 December 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/tapi_pipeline_approved/2245135.html (accessed February 24, 2011).

⁶⁰ Sébastien Peyrouse, *Turkmenistan. Strategies of Power, Dilemmas of Development*, Armonk, M.E. Sharpe, 2011.

⁶¹ "Sochinskii sammit daet Rossii shans stat' chestnym maklerom' na Srednem Vostoke", Afghanistan.ru, August 17, 2010, <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/18106.html>

⁶² "O rossiisko-afganskikh otnosheniakh", Ministerstvo Inostrannikh Del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 27 February 2009, www.mid.ru/ns-rasia.nsf/1083b7937ae580ae432569e7004199c2/9258c824737051ca43256d9700331b25

⁶³ "Russia starts delivery of small arms to Afghanistan", RIA Novosti, 2 November 2010, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20101102/161182502.html>.



also preparing to play a new role by training Afghan pilots and national security forces.⁶⁵

The Russian position on the expected departure of ISAF troops in 2014 is of concern. Like the other foreign players involved in Afghanistan, Moscow is waiting for decisions to be taken by Washington and for the U.S. announcement of an exit strategy before it takes a stance on the issue. Despite the recurrent criticisms regarding the lack of Western success, it has no solution to offer for stability in Afghanistan and stands only to suffer from a return to power of the Taliban. It supported the idea put forward by the West and the government of Hamid Karzai of negotiating with the moderate Taliban, but made no secret of its doubts concerning the chances these negotiations had of success or the level of respect a reinstated Taliban government would show for the constitutional order.⁶⁶ While the Kremlin does not wish for the complete disengagement of the United States, which would have a negative impact on the regional balance, it could hardly accept the creation of an American safety belt around Afghanistan, which would mean increased U.S. military presence in Central Asia. Moscow thus supports the proposals put forward by the United Nations and NATO to foster regional approaches, and hopes to participate in elaborating the new regional cooperation frameworks that could be unveiled at the May 2012 summit on Afghanistan.

But Russia has limited capabilities in terms of security architecture when it comes to Afghanistan. The Russian establishment is seeking to bolster the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), in order to make it more effective in Central Asia and to ready itself for the security situation post-2014.⁶⁷ But the Organization will have difficulty finding a role for itself to play in Afghanistan: Turkmenistan is not a member of it, Uzbekistan has always refused to participate actively in it, and NATO does not want to see the CSTO, and hence Russia, supervise its relations with the Central Asian governments and the operations of the NDN, and thus become a cumbersome interlocutor for the West in the region. Moscow also tends, much more modestly, to promote the role of the Shanghai Cooperation

Organization [SCO], but this institution lacks the capacity or financial means for operations in Afghanistan, even in a humanitarian or soft security role. The common will of Russians, Chinese, and Central Asians to act jointly is actually very limited.⁶⁸

In addition, the strategic partnership with India does not seem to have taken off: military-industrial cooperation remains delicate as New Delhi is often annoyed at the delays and the price rises imposed by Russia, and the two countries were unable to come to an agreement to share the Ayni military base in Tajikistan.⁶⁹ Even if Moscow renewed contact with the Pakistani authorities in 2010, the Kremlin is not an influential player in Islamabad, or trying to become one. It prefers to let India – and the United States – monitor the potentially failing Pakistani regime. Russian-Iranian relations, despite a deterioration in 2010, are still positive compared to the U.S. deadlock in dialogue with Tehran, but are nevertheless not consistent with Russia's taking on a decisive role. Moscow thus seems destined to remain a limited player in the Afghan neighborhood, and in fact it is with the West that it has the most prospects for cooperation.

⁶⁴ Craig Whitlock, "U.S. military criticized for purchase of Russian copters for Afghan air corps", *The Washington Post*, 19 June 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/18/AR2010061805630.html>

⁶⁵ Muhammad Hassan Khetab, "Russia to equip, train Afghan police", *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 23 January 2011, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2011/01/23/russia-equip-train-afghan-police>

⁶⁶ See for instance the different points of view expressed on afghanistan.ru, in particular the opinions of Russia's Center for the Study of Contemporary Afghanistan.

⁶⁷ Joshua Kucera, "Russia: Moscow Strives to Clarify Vision for Central Asian Alliance", [Eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64248), 30 September 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64248>

⁶⁸ Alexandre Cooley, "The Stagnation of the SCO. Competing Agendas and Divergent Interests in Central Asia", *PONARS Memo no. 85*, September 2009.

⁶⁹ Marlène Laruelle, "Russia Facing China and India in Central Asia: Cooperation, Competition, and Hesitations" in M. Laruelle, J.-F. Huchet, S. Peyrouse, and B. Balci (eds.), *China and India in Central Asia. A new "Great Game"?*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 9-24.



CONCLUSIONS

Is the Russian presence in Afghanistan sustainable over the long term? Moscow's networking capacities among the Afghan elites are limited as compared with those of other influential powers, such as Pakistan, India, and Iran. Russia faces two disadvantages: it represents the interests of non-Pashtun Afghans – but it is they who are most open to international cooperation and want a secular state – and it is hated by part of these Afghan elites, who well remember the decade-long Soviet war. Despite these obstacles, the international community must prepare for the regionalization of the Afghan issue and thus the delegation of influence to Kabul's neighbors. In this context, Russia, like the Central Asian states and India, is closer to the Western agenda. Russia's Afghan networks are intrinsically linked to those of the Central Asian states, and thus require better coordination between Moscow, Tashkent and Dushanbe. Once the withdrawal of the ISAF is complete, these networks could be coordinated with those of the United States and Europe, so as to create a common front of secular, modern, and Western-oriented Afghan leaders.

On the military level, Russia probably does have long-term assets to offer the Afghan armies in terms of updating its tradition of military-industrial aid and officers' training. A large part of the upper ranks of the Afghan military were trained in the Soviet Union and are more oriented towards Russia. Renewal of such cooperation would maximize the potential of the Russian military in symbolic sectors that are important to Moscow, including aviation and law enforcement agencies. Afghanistan's economic needs are so great that all actors are welcome. Russia has long-term potential in crucial domains for the development of Afghan society, such as infrastructure, the extraction industries, and energy, even if it faces growing competition from China. However, in contrast with the latter, Moscow can contribute to competence-building: it is not merely content to extract resources, but can train new Afghan elites in technical jobs, a role that it played in the 1950s.

Unlike Pakistan and Iran, Russia has no "Afghan agenda" that poses a major problem for its neighbors, while China wants to be left out of domestic debates but take advantage of Afghan riches. It is therefore in NATO's interest to prioritize Russia, but the disadvantage of this strategy is that it entails the need to know what role the Central Asian states will play in it. Moscow will continue to be an increasingly indispensable partner thanks to the NDN, but its transit role will be fundamentally altered once the ISAF troops and material have been evacuated. The United States will probably try to implement new

partnerships in Central Asia, in particular with the Uzbek authorities but perhaps also with the Tajik and Turkmen authorities; Moscow's chances of being associated with such agreements are only limited, except potentially in Tajikistan. Though NATO-Russia cooperation through the CSTO is going to be difficult in Central Asia, the development of joint strategies around the struggle against drug-trafficking or the training of local border guards seems to hold more promise.

Afghanistan is therefore set to become one of the major cards in the NATO-Russia relationship. It is natural that the most tense relations are those in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, a "shared neighborhood" between the EU/NATO and Russia, as the stakes related to the respective spheres of interest and their symbolic recognition are high for all the actors concerned. In Afghanistan, the differences of interpretation between NATO and Russia are less accentuated. The NRC might, for instance, prepare for the ISAF exit from Afghanistan and discuss approaches to longer-term security and cooperation in the region. Political divergences over value issues should not be denied, as they are important, and Russia considers itself the target of discriminatory and threatening behavior by NATO. But these divergences do not prevent the construction of common agendas in strategic terms. Several elements could be put on the negotiating table: the overall regional architecture for Afghanistan; the place granted to Kabul's neighbors; the role of the West and Russia in the post-2014 period; issues surrounding Russia-NATO coordination in relation to the states of Central Asia; and the setting up of joint mechanisms to fight drug trafficking in producing countries, transit countries, and consumer countries. The more constructively Russia engages on these issues, the more NATO too will benefit.



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