

# Afghanistan in a Neighbourhood Perspective

*General Overview and Conceptualisation*

Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)  
PO Box 9229 Grønland, NO-0134 Oslo, Norway  
Visiting Address: Hausmanns gate 7

Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW)  
Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)  
PO Box 9229 Grønland, NO-0134 Oslo, Norway  
Visiting Address: Hausmanns gate 7

Design: Studio 7 [www.studio7.no](http://www.studio7.no)  
ISBN: 978-82-7288-350-7



Taxi heading for the Iranian border, Herat 2008. Photo: K. B. Harpviken



# **Afghanistan in a Neighbourhood Perspective: General Overview and Conceptualisation**

**Kristian Berg Harpviken**

This PRIO Paper forms part of a PRIO project called 'Afghanistan in a Neighbourhood Perspective' and was originally written as a report to the funder, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project will produce three more reports, one for each of the regional complexes. Project description and further publications may be found on <http://www.prio.no/Research-and-Publications/Project/?oid=50762208>

**About the author:** Kristian Berg Harpviken has a PhD in Sociology from the University of Oslo (2006), and is currently director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). His research interests include the dynamics of civil war (mobilisation, conflict resolution, post-war reconstruction and peacebuilding); migration and transnational communities; and methodology in difficult contexts. He has a particular interest in Afghanistan and the region.

© Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 2010.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without permission in writing from the copyright holder.

ISBN: 978-82-7288-365-1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Background*

When President Barack Obama launched his new strategy on Afghanistan and Pakistan in Washington in late March 2009, there was a reinvigorated interest in the regional dimensions of the problem. The Bush administration had a rather myopic view on the role of Afghanistan's neighbourhood: it was one issue and one country at the time, in contrast to the more comprehensive perspective that Obama announced. Constructive collaboration with long-standing enemy Iran in the early months after 9/11 took a serious blow when Bush included it in the so-called Axis of Evil in his speech of January 2002. Obama 2009, in contrast, has emphasized the importance of the region and his willingness to work with all parties, Iran included, to stabilize Afghanistan and to prevent Pakistan from imploding. The appointment of Richard Holbrooke as US Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan came with strong signals of a regional turn. The most concrete measures suggested in the March 2009 White Paper are a regional Contact Group and a new forum for security and economic cooperation, neither of which has come to existence by early 2010. Why has progress been so difficult to bring about? More importantly: does the underlying analysis of the relationship between Afghanistan and its neighbourhood give a realistic picture? To what extent does Obama's analysis differ from his predecessor's? If the analysis is flawed, are the policy prescriptions that follow equally so?

For over three decades, Afghanistan has been a battleground in which many of the states of the larger neighbourhood have been involved. The importance of fostering a concerted effort for Afghan peace and stability is increasingly agreed upon. Some analysts emphasize states and their security relationships and see Afghanistan as an 'insulator' caught between different regional state systems, each with a strong dynamic of their own. An alternative perspective – which also seems to inform the new US analysis – emphasizes various transnational networks, and sees Afghanistan as the 'core' of a larger conflict formation. This report takes the former perspective – codified by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2003) in the Regional Security Complex approach – as its starting point. It pursues the security dynamics of each of the core regions surrounding Afghanistan (South Asia, the Persian Gulf and South Asia), taking a comparative and historical perspective, with an emphasis on period since the late 1970s. It concludes that each of Afghanistan's three surrounding regions is characterized by deep security concerns that have little to do with Afghanistan. These concerns nonetheless inform their engagement in Afghanistan, which then comes to reflect conflicts and cleavages specific to the region. One implication is that for Afghanistan, it may be a more promising strategy to seek a unilateral non-offensive or neutral status, rather than security integration with its neighbours. While this would necessitate a forum of Afghanistan's neighbours in order

to foster understanding for the Afghan position, it suggests a dramatic departure for mainstream policy proposals with their emphasis on an integrated regional approach.

### *The Project*

This is the first of four papers to be written for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as part of the project 'Afghanistan in a Neighbourhood Perspective', and it presents an analytical framework and a general overview. Papers 2–4 will look at the role of Afghanistan in the general security dynamics of each of the three regions discussed in the current overview paper (Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and South Asia), and will be written by Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh (Sciences Po; PRIO). Papers 2–4 will all appear in the course of 2010. The project is financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>1</sup>

This paper is based primarily on two types of data. Firstly, the author has benefited from innumerable interviews and conversations with international policy-makers and analysts, as well as with people from Afghanistan and the region. Secondly, the paper draws extensively on existing analysis, both from the media and the scholarly literature. The forthcoming three papers will go further into existing documentation and draw on new rounds of interviews. Most importantly, the research team will link up with research institutions in the respective regions in order to host roundtables, in which preliminary findings can be presented and made subject to competent critique by local experts. At the time of writing, concrete plans exist for roundtables in New Delhi, Ashgabat and Moscow. We also intend to conduct roundtables in Teheran and Kabul, supplemented with visits to Dushanbe, Tashkent and Riyadh.

### *Afghanistan in the region*

Its current shape brought about by the need for a buffer between the British and Russian empires in the late 1800s, Afghanistan has always had to juggle between powerful regional interests. Over the past three decades of war, regional actors have played a major role: hosting refugees, giving sanctuary to armed groups, and supporting various factions militarily and financially. Many of the political tensions that resulted in armed confrontation are domestic, yet the scope of the wars has been seriously exacerbated as

---

<sup>1</sup> In part, research for the current paper has been financed by the Research Council of Norway, as part of 'State Failure and Regional Insecurity', a collaborative strategic institute program involving the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI). Jonas Gräns and Farrid Shamsuddin have provided excellent research assistance. I am grateful both for a general exchange of ideas and comments on earlier drafts from my colleagues in the strategic program: Jens Chr. Andvig, Pavel Baev, Axel Borchgrevink, Stein Sundstøl Eriksen, Pinar Tank and Ståle Ulriksen. I have also benefited from comprehensive comments by Shahrbanou Tadsjbakhsh. An article based on this paper will be submitted for review in *Comparative Social Research*, and, if accepted, will appear in volume 27 (2010).

neighbouring states – each informed by security concerns within their own regional context – has engaged with various groups. It is therefore understandable that the post-2001 Karzai administration had great reservations in engaging its neighbours, Pakistan in particular. The signals from Washington have gone in the same direction. Yet, the dominant role of the US, the massive presence of international troops, and the increasingly ambitious plans for an Afghan force build-up raised new concerns among the neighbours, and could not cordon the country off from its neighbourhood. Additionally, by engaging deeply with some states in the neighbourhood, while keeping others at an arm's length, the net effect in terms of conflict potential may have been negative. From 2005 onwards, policy statements from the Afghan government have in part reflected a new will to engage with the neighbours, also in various multilateral fora, but this reorientation has been converted into little concrete action. But what is the security significance of Afghanistan if we take a perspective from within each of the surrounding three regions? Let us turn to that question, examining, in turn, the security dynamics of each of three surrounding regions: South Asia, the Persian Gulf and South Asia.

#### *A South Asian Perspective*

Within the South Asian region, the overwhelming security issue is the conflict between India and Pakistan, which has at regular intervals led to armed confrontations on the disputed borderline in Kashmir. India aspires to be the regional hegemon, and its economic success and relative political stability have strengthened it considerably in recent years at the cost of Pakistan – a trend that has been reinforced by US policies, as manifest in the US-Indian deal on nuclear energy. For Pakistan, who sees its security relationship with India as existential, Afghanistan has traditionally been seen to offer 'strategic depth' – an area to which Pakistan could withdraw and regroup its forces in the case of a confrontation with India. Pakistan has engaged deeply with various Afghan groups which it thought would serve its interests, as well as with militant groups who have been willing to confront its big neighbour to the east. There are outstanding issues of considerable concern between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the disputed border and the shared Pashtun ethnic population being the most important, but India is the key security challenge. After 2001, India has built a significant presence in Afghanistan, while the Pakistanis have been kept at arm's length. Understandable as this is, it has not contributed to a sense of common security, and the potential for Indian-Pakistani tensions to continue to play themselves out on Afghan territory seems considerable.

#### *A Persian Gulf Perspective*

Within the Persian Gulf, the security dynamic has traditionally been tripolar – between Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The 2003 US intervention in Iraq did affect the regional dynamic in fundamental ways, bringing about massive US military presence and regime

change in Iraq, and producing considerable Iranian influence on Iraqi politics. Currently, the long-standing Iran-Saudi rivalry persists in the region, but seemingly with less direct influence on Afghan politics than was the case prior to 2001. The Saudis have become less engaged, while Iran's main concern now seems to be with a player outside the region, the US, with pressure related to the nuclear issue mounting. Somewhat ironically, the US and Iran have common interests in Afghanistan, and Iran contributed significantly to make the 2001 Bonn peace agreement possible, only to be rewarded by the US declaring Iran to be part of the 'axis of evil' a few weeks later. Against that background, ideas to build on common interests in Afghanistan to pilot a US-Iranian rapprochement face poor odds. Iran does want a stable neighbour to its east, also in order to stem direct threats such as drugs trade and illegal migration. Yet, with massive US presence in the country, and continued unease about the relationship with Saudi Arabia, Iran continues to hedge its bets by maintaining relationships to multiple parties. Beyond the region, this has fostered an alliance of three countries – Iran, India and Russia – that over the past few years have seen sufficiently common interests to join hands in supporting the anti-Taliban Alliance.

#### *A Central Asian Perspective*

Central Asia consists of five states that became independent in 1991, three of which border on Afghanistan. They all find themselves in a squeeze, on the one hand depending heavily on Russia as the heir to the Soviet Union and a regional hegemon, yet also seeking to strengthen their newly built independence. Afghanistan to the south is a problem, exporting drugs and unrest. While Afghanistan does not overshadow the preoccupation with regime stability and relations with Russia, it does affect both, not least through its role in hosting and fostering militant groups that are a threat also in Central Asia. Among the Central Asian states, there is not a strong sense of common security, and cooperation is mainly coming about through the roles of Russia and China. Uzbekistan aspires to hegemonic status within Central Asia proper, but is challenged by Kazakhstan, which has similar ambitions. Also in the relationship between the five Soviet successor states, there is little that is converted into an engagement in Afghanistan. There are relationships with various Afghan groups, but despite the common ethnic background of populations on both sides of the border, some 70 years of effective separation under Soviet rule has had a deep impact on networks, and it has also fostered rather incompatible political cultures. The detrimental effects on Afghanistan of the security dynamics within Central Asia may be of a lesser scope than is the case for both South Asia and the Persian Gulf, yet there is significant concern over the presence of US and NATO troops, and over Afghan militarization, and particularly Russia does keep a close eye and maintain local connections.



### *Tentative implications*

The analysis in the above is tentative, and will be followed by more detailed analysis of each region surrounding Afghanistan. Yet, we can already draw certain general implications for policy-making.

Traditional Security First: Within all of the three regions surrounding Afghanistan, security discourses remain traditional. Some of the concerns of neighbouring states – such as drugs and migration – relate to a broader security agenda, yet these issues are not conceptualized mainly as security related, and while important, they do not tend to dominate the agenda. Most regimes in the region are preoccupied with regime survival, in the face of internal threats, and with threats from other states within their respective regions, which they often see as existential. It is therefore not surprising that in none of the three regions do we see anything reminiscent of a security community, where the states within a region band together around common interests, based on mutual trust and embedded in strong regional institutions. Rather we see deep tensions, distrust and weak multilateral institutions. This creates a double bind for external actors wanting to contribute to genuine regionalism. Is the trick to affect attitudes to security so that regional collaborations can build on better foundations? Or is it to bring about concrete collaboration which will contribute to enhance trust through the power of example? Given the authoritarian orientation of many of the regimes in question, which is at the root of the preoccupation with regime survival, it is hard to foresee genuine attitude change without political change. Hence, the best bet for the short to medium term seems to be building on what there is, acknowledging the limitations that this entails.

Inertia: Regional security relationships are remarkably robust. Geography matters, and states that are located side by side develop relations – positive or negative – that are not easily escaped from. While distant powers – as we saw with the US and Russia in Afghanistan from the early 1990s – have the luxury of being able to disengage, those embedded in a long-standing regional relationship cannot choose this route. A related point is that the composition of regional security complexes are remarkably stable: the Persian Gulf region has changed the most, following intervention and regime change in Iraq; Central Asia is partially transformed as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union (yet old patterns of interaction persist also there); and the India-Pakistan rivalry continues to overshadow everything else in South Asia. From this follows a severe limitation on distant interveners, as they lack the ability to bring about quick change, as well as the ability for long-term sustained engagement. For states in the region, one obvious response is to wait the distant interveners out. Post-2001 strategies of many of Afghanistan's neighbours can easily be read in this light. Pakistan has declared its support for the war in Afghanistan (and at home), but continued to cultivate ties with Afghan armed groups. The Russians keep a very low profile, but continue to entertain

their networks. There is no silver bullet that can bring about regional security cooperation, but it is clear that unless external actors succeed in triggering genuine regional initiatives, they will not be successful.

Afghanistan and Security Cooperation: If Afghanistan is not at the core of any region, and if neighbours' concerns with the country are not at the top of their agendas, how can a collaborative neighbourhood effort for Afghanistan's future be brought about? The most common idea is to build a common forum, involving all neighbours at the very least. Such a forum may play a role in building trust and common understanding, but will do relatively little to overcome the fact that their engagement in Afghanistan is primarily reflective of security interests within their respective regional contexts. Therefore, the embryonic ideas of a unilateral Afghan guarantee of non-aggression towards its neighbours, which has been floated by the UN and the Afghan government recently, could present a more promising first avenue. Concretely, neighbours are concerned about the militarization of Afghanistan – both the presence of international forces and the buildup of the Afghan forces – and an Afghan unilateral non-aggression commitment followed up with concrete measures could be a first step. This does not necessarily make a renewed forum among neighbouring states irrelevant, but if both avenues are pursued, it is important that there is a certain strategic coordination, whereby unilateral Afghan initiatives are not undermined by bold initiatives at higher levels.

## **Afghanistan in a Neighbourhood Perspective: General Overview and Conceptualisation**

Through the three decades of war that Afghanistan has hosted, the neighbouring states have all in one way or another been engaged in the conflict, but have also seen their own security affected by it. There is encompassing agreement that the political futures of Afghanistan and that of its neighbours are crucially intertwined. The neighbouring states have a lot in common when it comes to their Afghanistan-related security concerns: transnational extremist movements; refugees and migration; drugs trade; and ultimately, foreign military presence. Despite these common concerns, which figure prominently on the security agendas of most states in the neighbourhood, it has proven inherently difficult to get Afghanistan's neighbouring states to commit to anything remotely resembling a concerted joint effort to foster peace and stability in the country. Why is this so? In this report I argue that Afghanistan's position at the intersection of three regions – each with a strong security dynamic of its own – systematically contravenes any initiative to foster a concerted neighbourhood effort.

That Afghanistan is at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East is entirely uncontroversial. What this means analytically, and what the implications are for policy, however, is less clear. Current analysis talks about Afghanistan and its neighbourhood as one region, tied together by common religion and ethnicity and various types of networks (cf. Rubin 2006). Shared identities and networks span borders and enable action over which the state has little or no control. Yet, the security concerns upheld by individual states, as they situate themselves within their respective regions, remain essential. And, while many of the states in the larger neighbourhood are weak in many respects, they tend to command significant coercive capacity. Traditional conceptions of security, in which protecting vital state interests is the primary aim and military power is the key instrument, remain dominant. Virtually all policy proposals that are in circulation are focusing on states and regional forums as the potential harbingers of change. For all of those reasons, this report places the main emphasis on states and their basic security orientation, and on the regional security dynamic that emanates from it.

My analytical point of departure will be the Regional Security Complexes (RSC) approach, as formulated in work by Barry Buzan dating back to the early 1980s (Buzan 1983), with later refinement in joint works by Buzan and Ole Wæver (Buzan and Wæver 1998; Buzan and Wæver 2003). The RSC perspective emphasizes the importance of geographical proximity between states, while insisting that no state can be part of more than one region. One implication is that the composition of regions rarely changes. For

Buzan and Wæver, Afghanistan is an insulator between three distinct RSCs – South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia – and it is likely to remain so. This bold proposition runs contrary to the widespread optimism of the immediate post-Cold War years, when it was hoped that a new Afghanistan would become a connector for various parts of the neighbourhood, not least linking the newly independent Central Asian states to South Asia. The beauty of the RSC perspective lies in its parsimony, but this also entails a risk of neglecting key issues, such as transnational dynamics within and beyond regional entities, which may also carry potential for innovative policy. The limitations of an RSC approach shall be critically assessed.

In the following, I will first lay out the main parameters of the RSC approach as it will be applied in this analysis. Next follows a brief exposition of Afghanistan, its history of conflict, and its regional positioning. I will then move to examining the role that Afghanistan plays within the security dynamic of each of the three surrounding regions, taking the vantage point of each in turn. In conclusion, I discuss the implications of this analysis for our understanding of the Afghan conflict, as well as offering a few concluding remarks of an overarching analytical nature.

### **Regional security complexes**

The Regional Security Complexes (RSC) approach has its roots in work by Barry Buzan dating back to the early 1980s (Buzan 1983), with later refinement in joint works by Buzan and Ole Wæver (Buzan and Wæver 1998; Buzan and Wæver 2003). A basic assumption is that geographic proximity matters for security, in the sense that states (or other referent actors) adjacent to each other do not have the option of disengagement, whereas distant actors do. A second assumption concerns interdependence: the mutual security interdependence among the units that constitute a RSC is of significantly higher magnitude than that between any of its constituent members and outside units. By implication, regions are seen as mutually exclusive. While other analysts (i.e. Lake 1997) insist that one unit may be a member of several regions – with superpowers potentially becoming a member of all the world's regions at one time or another – Buzan and Wæver see this as a confusion of levels. A third assumption – closely related to the proximity and interdependency assumptions – is that security relationships are durable.

RSCs are of different types. Mainly, they vary on two variables. Firstly, there is the question of structure: are they unipolar (containing a great power); bipolar (dominated by rivalry between two units) or multipolar? Polarity has major implications for regional security dynamics. Secondly, and related, there are variations in the crucial amity-enmity variable. Buzan and Wæver suggest a continuum in the maturing of an RSC, from

conflict formation to security regime to security community (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 471–472). In a regional conflict formation, enmity dominates, and there is no mutual trust and no institutions that can effectively constrain the use of force (Middle East, South Asia). In a regional security regime, mutual suspicion and fear of violence dominate politics, but are kept in check by working institutions (Southeast Asia). In a regional security community, there is a mutual understanding of security interdependence, and the actors do not perceive the use of force as an option (EU; North America). Not all regions fit neatly into one category; the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), for example, combines elements of conflict formation and security regime, with the imprint of Russian struggle to establish hegemony. The remainder of the Afghan neighbourhood, South Asia and the Persian Gulf, are characterized as pure conflict formations, with a total lack of both trust and regional security institutions.

The idea of regional security formations – as one form of RSC – has been taken up by Barnett Rubin and associates, who have modified it, and applied it explicitly to Afghanistan (Rubin and Armstrong 2003a; Rubin, Armstrong, and Ntegeye 2001). With reference to the literature on ‘new wars’ (Duffield 2001; Kaldor 1999), the main emphasis here is on transnational networks, which not only bring about the weakening of states, but are also nurtured by it. It is the central role of transnational networks, interacting with states, international institutions, forces of globalization, that distinguishes today’s wars from those of yesterday. While Buzan and Wæver, at least in later versions of their perspective, move beyond states as the only possible referent for security and talks about ‘units’, their primary analytical focus remains on the state. This saves them from the apparent contradiction of the new definition of conflict formations, which tends to see non-state entities as the main referent for insecurity, while states (and collaboration between states, as in the case of regional institutions) remain the prime referent for security. Undoubtedly, Rubin and associates are right in insisting on the (often detrimental) role of transnational non-state actors, but it comes with a risk of simplifying – even idealizing – the role of the state. In this report, I will be seeing transnational networks, and their manifestation in organizations and concrete action, as part of the conditions under which states operate. I will be placing particular emphasis on states’ perceptions of transnational threats. I will return to the possible limitations of such an approach in the conclusion.

### **Afghanistan in a geo-political context**

Wikipedia, the web-based ‘Free Encyclopedia’, starts the Afghanistan article in its 1 January 2010 English version with a very helpful contextualization:

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a landlocked country in South-Central Asia. It is variously described as being located within Central Asia, South Asia, or the Middle East. It is bordered by Iran in the west, Pakistan in the south and east, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north, and China in the far northeast (Wikipedia 2010).

The fact that Afghanistan's regional belonging is blurred may seem trivial, but it is not. External bureaucracies may place Afghanistan firmly in one of the three regions, in pursuit of clear geographic divisions, while area experts will argue that it has strong affinities with all of them. Analysts also differ between seeing Afghanistan as the core of a larger conflict formation (Rubin 2006; Rubin and Armstrong 2003b), to seeing it as a mini security complex of its own (Buzan and Wæver 2003). The divergence of opinions raises a deeper question, which is whether Afghanistan in any meaningful sense can be said to form part of any of the regional entities surrounding it, or whether it is more usefully understood as a thing apart, as a country at the outer periphery of each surrounding region. In this report I argue that Afghanistan's relationship to its neighbours is best understood if we analyze the internal security dynamics of each of the surrounding regions, and look at how Afghanistan manifests itself. For that purpose, we have to look at the region not primarily from the vantage point of Kabul, but rather place ourselves in the neighbouring states from where we examine the overarching security discourses.

### *The emergence of a buffer state*

The shape of present day Afghanistan reflects the need, from the mid-1800s, for what is commonly referred to as a 'buffer state' between the British and Russian empires (Parthem 1983). From the south, the British were seeking to expand the territory under their control towards a defensible border, the so-called "forward policy" (Jenkins 1986: 178). To the north, the Russians were seeking to solidify and expand their control over Central Asia, and tensions between the two empires intensified throughout the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The buffer state started to materialise in the late 1870s, with the Gandamak Treaty, which concluded the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878–79). Following new Russian expansion, the northern boundary was redrawn in 1887, in large part following the Amu Darya River. By 1893, Britain and Afghanistan established an agreement regarding the southern boundary, which was named the Durand line after Britain's chief negotiator. The Afghan king claimed that the Durand line was agreed to 'under duress', and Afghan claims on the primarily Pashtun territories on the other side of the boundary, in present day Pakistan, have remained an issue of contention ever since. In 1895, the establishment of the Wakhan corridor, a narrow arm through a rather hostile mountain territory which extended Afghanistan to the Chinese border, brought the buffer logic to completion (Rowe 2010). In the process of establishing borders

acceptable to both imperial powers, existing tribal, ethnic or religious communities were split into different states.

Afghanistan maintained its status as a buffer state for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The deals of the late 1800s inherently made Afghan rulers dependent on the two neighbouring empires, on Britain in particular (Ghani 1990). In 1919, the Afghan King, receiving military support from the newly born Soviet Union, launched war against the British. The main outcome of the third Anglo-Afghanistan war (1919) was that Afghanistan regained the right to formulate its own foreign policy. This also concluded the trend, since the turn of the century, where the northern neighbour sought to counterbalance the British influence on Afghanistan. The Afghan response was a careful strategy of balancing between the two sides of non-alignment (*bi-tarafi* in Dari) which characterized the country's foreign policy well into the 1970s (Adamec 1991). Interestingly, in the period between the two wars, Afghanistan sought independence from the two major blocs by bringing in a third party, the Germans. During the Second World War, Afghanistan settled for neutrality. By 1947, the regional context changed dramatically, as the British withdrew from India, and as Pakistan emerged as Afghanistan's neighbour to the immediate South. The US stepped into the vacuum, cultivating an alliance with Pakistan. The Afghans insisted on *bi-tarafi* (Dupree 1980: 511; Newell 1972). Access for Soviet and US assistance was carefully balanced.

### *Tilting balance*

By the early 1970s, the balancing between superpowers started to falter (Harpviken 2003). Daud Khan – who had been Afghanistan's prime minister for a ten year period that ended in 1963, mainly as a result of his belligerent attitudes to Pakistan – took power in a bloodless coup in 1973. The 1973 coup was instigated by Daud, but relied on support from many within both the bureaucracy and the army. Importantly, the 1973 coup had the support of the Parcham faction within the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which was more moderate than the rivalling Khalq faction, but also had close ties to the Soviet leadership (Ziring 1987). Parcham support was instrumental for Daud's stabilization in the first years after the coup, and went hand in hand with an increasingly close reliance on the Soviets for development support, military competence and hardware. Even if Daud did try to keep the US aboard, the Afghan balance was tilted seriously in Soviet favour (Westad 2005: 299–300).

Growing Islamist movements were also a concern for Daud. Soon after the coup, a group of Islamist leaders fled to Pakistan, where they were welcomed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who despite the ideological distance saw the Afghan Islamists as a key instrument for

undermining Daud's regime. The core of the Islamist movement fled to Pakistan and unsuccessfully staged across the border attacks. They would most likely have remained a footnote in history, had it not been that after the 1979 Soviet intervention their ties to the Pakistani leadership and military intelligence became a key resource, as Pakistan selected the leaders of the exile-based resistance groups among them. Daud became increasingly worried about the Soviet tilt. He tried to limit the influence of the Parchamis in his own regime, and by 1977 he resorted to outright purges of communists of all brands (including the Khalq faction of PDPA and the China-oriented *Shula-e Jawed*) (Dupree 1980: 770–771; Hyman 1992: 76–77). Members of the PDPA felt increasingly under pressure, and quietly started the planning of a coup, against the strong advice of Soviet representatives. Confrontation between Daud and the PDPA escalated, and by April 1978, the PDPA – relying on its supporters within the army – instigated a successful coup. Reluctantly, the Soviets backed the new regime financially and by sending in advisers. Reluctance morphed into deep concern as the Khalqi powerholders proved not only politically impatient, but also more than willing to use forces of coercion to get reforms underway, which resulted in a number of spontaneous uprisings in various parts of the country (Shahrani 1984).

The year 1979 was dramatic in the region. In February, the Shah in Iran lost power to an alliance led by the revolutionary Islamist Khomeini, and the US lost its major platform in this part of the world. In Moscow, there was increasing concern that the communist revolution in neighbouring Afghanistan was going astray. By the end of the year, the Soviets intervened militarily in order to replace the Khalqi leadership in Afghanistan with Babrak Karmal, their own favourite candidate from the Parcham branch. The Soviets had mistakenly thought that their intervention would cause only modest international reactions (Bradsher 1999: 87–89). The rest of the world, and the US in particular, however, largely interpreted the invasion as an offensive manoeuvre and as a first step to expanding the Soviet influence in Asia, including securing access to the Arabian Sea. There were different factors weighing on the Soviet decision to intervene, but the motivations were overwhelmingly defensive rather than offensive. One key factor was the perceived need to install a more moderate leadership that could foster broader public support for reforms, in the place of the violent repression under the Khalqi leadership (Kornienko 1994; Westad 1994).

Overnight, Afghanistan had become a major battle ground of the Cold War, and it figured at the very centre of regional politics. From the North, the Soviets were directly involved with its military in a key role. Looking South, Pakistan, which received the larger share of refugees, filled the vacuum resulting from Iran turning its back on the US, and became the main bridgehead for support to the Afghan resistance movement. On the Western edge, an unconsolidated Iranian regime was virtually overwhelmed by the war



with Iraq (1980–1988), and despite its sympathy with the cause of the Afghan resistance, restrained its active support to radical Shia groups, worried that it could otherwise lose Soviet sympathy in its struggle with Saddam Hussein. China, also bordering Afghanistan and a key actor in the larger neighbourhood, declined to engage, despite approaches by the Afghan Maoist movement, by no means a negligible force in Afghan politics in the late 1970s (Emadi 1993). For Afghanistan, the 1980s was a decade characterized by the confrontation between two superpowers, whose engagement transformed the Afghan political landscape and introduced new forms of organization and warfare. But as borne out both by Iran’s reluctance to engage, and by Pakistan’s role as the broker for assistance to the resistance, neighbouring states – albeit informed by their own security concerns – played important roles in Afghanistan’s war.

### *Exit the superpowers*

As Afghanistan enters the 1990s, the superpower overlay is vanishing. The Soviet Union withdrew its forces in February 1989, after several years of preparation. Soon after, the US started to wind down its engagement. By fall 1991, the Soviet Union fell apart; by spring the following year, the Afghan communists under Dr. Najib’s leadership were forced to step down. In the absence of credible external support, the regime fragmented, as various factions formed alliances with their favourite groups within the resistance. The pivotal event was when the regime’s main militia commander, Abdul Rashid Dostum, struck a deal with groups within the resistance (Rubin 2002: 269–271). By then, various Afghan groups increasingly identified themselves in ethnic terms, and with a fairly clear pattern of support from various neighbouring powers: Uzbekistan supporting Dostum’s forces (the so-called Uzbek militia); Russia maintaining contact with various groups of northern origin, particularly Jamiat-e Islami (dominantly Tajik); Iran throwing its weight between the rather newly formed umbrella of Shia and Hazara groups, the Hezb-e Wahdat (Unity Party); and Pakistan keeping up its ties with the Pashtun dominated groups that had been set up in exile, privileging the Islamist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (Roy 1995). The vision of a liberated Afghanistan that would serve as a land bridge between the landlocked new Central Asian states and South Asia was soon overtaken by brutal ethnicized warfare, in which the various Afghan groups had different backers in the larger neighbourhood. Undoubtedly, in the absence of the superpower confrontation, the Afghan power dynamic was strong enough to reproduce itself in new formats, yet neighbouring states did significantly contribute to its exacerbation.

It was against this background that the Taliban movement emerged in the fall of 1994. It did not take long for Pakistan to throw itself behind this new actor – contributing money, arms, military advice – thereby playing an instrumental role in the Taliban’s sweeping

success which brought it to take over the capital, Kabul, as early as fall 1996 (Harpviken 1997). Entering Kabul, the Taliban also inherited Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda leadership, who stayed behind when the ruling alliance evacuated. The international community's isolation of the Taliban regime, only recognized by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, served as further encouragement of the Taliban-Al Qaeda alliance. This did not deter Pakistan from continuing its support, hopeful that the Taliban would eventually gain control and constitute the 'friendly government' in Kabul that was seen as pivotal in relation to the threat from the East, India. Other neighbouring states, for varying reasons, were sceptical of the Taliban, whose alliance with Al Qaeda increasingly also meant the hosting of various resistance movement from the larger region. Yet, while continuing to support their respective allies on the Afghan battleground, the engagement of the neighbours (except Pakistan) can at best be described as lukewarm, and testifies the extent to which other security concerns figured more prominently on their agendas.

### *The US-led intervention*

The terror attacks on 11 September 2001 had led to the U.S. war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. By this time, the various anti-Taliban forces in the country had joined the so-called Northern Alliance, most prominently composed of the Tajik-dominated Jamiat-e Islami, the Uzbek-dominated Jombush-e Milli and the Hazara-dominated Hezb-e Wahdat. The alliance was one of necessity, but mutual trust was in short supply, following the grave atrocities of the 1990s, where all these groups had at one time or another fought each other. Externally, the three main groups in question had the support of Russia, Uzbekistan, Iran (in that order), and increasingly of India. All neighbouring states declared its support of the US-led effort, although in hindsight, it seems clear that Pakistan pursued a dual track, in which maintaining a Taliban capacity went hand in hand with sharing intelligence with the interventionists. The US-led intervention in 2001, followed by large scale military presence, partially served as a lid on the direct engagement of neighbouring states with military groups, although it is clear that old relationships are cultivated, in the expectation that one day the international forces will depart.

### **The regional complexes of Afghanistan's neighbourhood**

From the vantage point of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Buzan and Wæver define Afghanistan as an insulator between distinct RSCs, South Asia, the Middle East, and the CIS. For them, the buffer concept is reserved for a state (or a 'mini-complex', set of states) within a RSC

which keep rival powers apart. An insulator is located at the boundary between complexes, keeping them apart - it is 'a zone of indifference' (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 483).<sup>2</sup> As an insulator, Afghanistan constitutes an entity of its own in a world divided into regions. Afghanistan 'draws in neighbouring states, but its internal dynamics is strong enough to keep the larger dynamics separate' (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 111). This proposition is a rather bold one; not only does it imply that domestic dynamics was driving the war of the 1980s, when Afghanistan became one of the major battlegrounds of the so-called Cold War, it also suggests that the virtual insulation is robust and is likely to endure.

The Buzan and Wæver proposition runs contrary to the widespread optimism of the immediate post-Cold War years, when it was hoped that the newly independent Central Asian states would be linked to South Asia via an Afghan land bridge, an escape from their dependence on Russia. A peaceful Afghanistan would allow the development of new transportation infrastructure, including a gas pipeline linking Central Asia to the subcontinent (Rashid 2000). The idea of Afghanistan as a connector of regions, with gas pipelines playing a major role, was briefly revived in the aftermath of the 2001 intervention. A later initiative, the US-driven vision of a 'greater Middle East', launched in 2004, suggested that Afghanistan should be integrated westwards through a wave of economic liberalization, democratization and social reforms. Writing now, more than a decade and a half after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in the ninth year after the intervention in Afghanistan, we can safely conclude that Afghanistan has not developed into the land-bridge that was hoped for in the early 1990s. Neither has it become part of a 'greater Middle East'. Following an RSC logic, we should not find this to surprising: the surrounding regions have a strong internal dynamics, and Afghanistan is virtually doomed to serve as a shock absorber where the tensions inherent in the surrounding regional complexes interact with existing domestic tensions to further deepen the conflict.

Let us take this logic along to look at the dynamics within the security complexes in Afghanistan's neighbourhood, focusing on the three decades from the late 1970s onwards. It is only by looking at the Afghan situation from a vantage point outside that we can realistically assess the analytical contribution of the RSC perspective. In the following, I will be examining the security dynamic of South Asia, the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, with a view to understand the internal regional dynamic of each in its own right, but also to assess the significance of Afghanistan. Using the RSC approach as a point of departure, I will define the security structure of each region. Then I shall analyse its evolution, particularly over the past three decades, from the late 1970s. I shall in

---

<sup>2</sup> Other insulators in the present world are Burma, Turkey, and the Sahel states.

particular follow up on processes and patterns of organization that runs contrary to an RSC approach, such as enduring security relations that cuts across the delimitations between regions, and transnational entities that integrate the Afghan dynamic with that of its neighbouring regions.

### *A South Asian perspective*

The overwhelming security issue in South Asia is the conflict between India and Pakistan, which has at regular intervals led to armed confrontations on the disputed borderline in Kashmir. The region also includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, yet the overriding regional security dynamics is bipolar, between the two nuclear-armed states (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 106). There are multiple regional organizations; most importantly the South Asian Association for Regional Security (SAARC), but the India-Pakistani rivalry has hampered its effectiveness. Rivalries between the superpowers – US, Soviet (later Russia) and China – have considerable impacts within the complex, but it never became a key scene of the Cold War. The basic dynamics of the South Asian complex was not altered with the end of the Cold War. Post-2001, however, one may see the seeds of change, as India's economic success and relative political stability strengthens its position vis-a-vis Pakistan, a trend that has been reinforced by the US tendency to favour India, for example through opening up for collaboration on nuclear energy. Several analysts point to a possible disintegration of the Pakistani state, which is facing multiple internal threats from ethno- and religio-political groups, as the factor that is most likely to upset the balance in the region (e.g. Cohen 2004).

Afghanistan is important to the South Asian complex in several ways, most of which have to do with India-Pakistan enmity. Most importantly, Pakistan – undoubtedly the weaker party in the equation – looks to Afghanistan for 'strategic depth'. In the case of an escalation of tensions with India, possibly a military attack, Pakistan would rely on Afghanistan for regrouping its forces (Weinbaum 2006: 6). A worst case scenario is a close alliance between Kabul and Delhi, which the Pakistani security establishment believes would be used for active cross-border stabilization.

A different concern is with ethnic unrest in Pakistan, particularly amongst the Pashtun population, and, related, the unsettled status of the Pak-Afghan border (Rubin and Siddique 2006). In pursuit of a friendly Afghan government, which does not stimulate ethnic unrest in Pakistan, the latter has quite consistently favoured the radical Islamic groups. The prospect of Pashtun mobilization transcending the border is certainly a main concern for the Pakistani security elite, and an effective agreement on the status of the

border would be a positive step. As Frédéric Grare (2003: 196) points out, discussing the often counterintuitive alliances between Pakistan and various radical Afghan movements, ‘the Indo-Pak dispute is still [post-2001] the main determinant of Pakistan’s Afghan policy’. As Nathan {, 2010 #12429} also points out, this bipolar security dynamic dominates the stage in the South Asian region, effectively precluding other issues from entering the agenda, and preventing the emergence of effective common security institutions.

Against this background, let us move back to the final months of 1979. Pakistan was under the rule of military dictator Zia ul Haq, who had just executed his democratically elected predecessor, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and was internationally isolated. Seeing the strong international reactions to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan grasped the opportunity of establishing itself as a broker of international support to the Afghan resistance (Iran was not a candidate, given the 1979 revolution). The US was a primary source of money and arms, but its support for the resistance was complemented by substantial contributions from other sources, particularly Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the US also provided significant financial assistance to Pakistan directly. Pakistan’s military intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) took control over the distribution of arms, financial support, and training of personnel (Yousaf and Adkin 1992: 97–99). The net effect was a solidification of the military role in Pakistani politics. For Pakistan, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan provided a direly needed opportunity to reengage as a full member of the international community.

India, despite providing some technical-military assistance to the PDPA regime and maintaining political ties just like it has with previous regimes, had minimal visibility in the Afghan conflict during the 1980s. Opening up its military bases to Soviet use was out of the question (Chellamy 2001). The main concern here was probably not to provoke a reaction from the US – which was closely tied in with Pakistan for its Afghan mission – and this could prove detrimental for an India that otherwise was steadily enhancing its relative power vis-a-vis Pakistan.

Even from 1992, when the PDPA regime fell, India did not scale up its presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, was heavily engaged, brokering two failed peace agreements between the former resistance groups, but was increasingly frustrated by the inability of its main protégé, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, to act constructively and contribute to a more Pakistan-friendly government. Rather, it was the Pakistani-sceptics of what would later become known as the Northern alliance – Jamiat-e Islami, Hezb-e Wahdat and Jombush-e Milli – that had the upper hand in government. This frustrated the Pakistanis to the extent that when the Taliban emerged – apparently as a spontaneous protest to local warlord repression – Pakistan was quick to start supporting the new

movement. The declining US interest in Afghanistan had served as an open invitation to Pakistan to further strengthen its grip (Mackenzie 1998: 96). In the latter half of the 1990s, Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan was at an all-time high, despite serious concerns with the ongoing fighting in the north, as well as the Taliban's disregard for advice from Islamabad.

With increasing international attention to Kashmir, and pressure on Pakistan to prevent insurgent groups from training and operating on its territory, Afghanistan also became useful as a base area for various groups engaged in Kashmir. In the process, networks between Afghan and Pakistani radicals, as well as with Al Qaeda activists, were strengthened. The Pakistani intelligence worked closely with various radical groups, seeing them as a foreign policy tool (Roy 2001). The Indians, of course, were well aware that many of the armed insurgents operating in Kashmir and elsewhere were trained in Afghanistan, under Pakistani guidance, and took the first steps to strengthen its ties with the *de jure* government who by the late 1990s controlled only some ten percent of the country's territory.

In the aftermath of the 2001 intervention, the India-Pakistan rivalry related to Afghanistan has taken on an entirely new form. Indian visibility in Afghanistan went from low to high, as the country built up an extensive diplomatic presence, with a large embassy in the capital, and four consulates, including in the cities of Jalalabad and Kandahar, both of which are within close reach of the Pakistani border. India also acted quickly in becoming a significant contributor to aid programs, with a multifaceted and highly visible effort that compared in scope only to the larger Western donors. India was warmly welcomed by the new regime. Many of the ministers, Karzai included, had lived in India, and they had good connections and positive sentiments for the Indians. The new Indian presence was of a scope that clearly signalled long-term interest. Pakistan, on the other hand, had unwillingly had to accept the demolition of the Taliban regime. Given the overarching security orientation, it made things considerable worse to observe the instalment of a new government cultivating its ties to India, while it was seeking to keep Pakistan at an arm's length. In the words of one Pakistani observer, a former military officer turned politician who this author met in Peshawar in 2006: 'Pakistan has lost everything'. By 2004, it was widely believed, also in Pakistani decision-making circles, that India were both funding and arming insurgents in Baluchistan as well as in Waziristan, stirring the pot in both of the civil conflicts that Pakistan was engaged in (Yusufzai 2006). The standoff between India and Pakistan is a staple, but the balance of influence in Afghanistan has been turned upside down since 2001. Given the almost existential character that the relationship with Afghanistan has for Pakistan, the consequences, both for Afghanistan and for South Asia at large, may be substantial.

Developments in Afghanistan also paralleled larger trends, no less worrying from a Pakistani perspective. Pakistan has always been the smaller brother in the relationship, and the loss of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1971 had made that even clearer. But the 1990s and early 2000s were characterized by considerable progress, economically and otherwise, in India, while Pakistan stagnated. In Islamabad, the fact that India was solidifying its position as the undisputable regional hegemon was not taken lightly. It made things no better that the US were clearly pursuing regional stability in South Asia through a further strengthening of India as a regional hegemon (Jonson 1996). Both countries are self-declared nuclear powers that stand outside the non-proliferation regime, yet it was the Indians that got a deal with the US, effectively permitting US transfer of dual-purpose material and equipment. For the US, counterbalancing China was probably a key motive in striking the deal. Yet, seen from Islamabad – where China is considered a major ally, pivotal to Pakistan’s effort to balance Indian supremacy – the deal was a real blow. First placed on the agenda in June 2005, almost five years later, by early 2010, there have been no traces of a similar offer to Pakistan.

The US interest in the region has been fluctuating gravely. But what about other security relationships with various powers at a lesser distance? For South Asia, the China factor is important. Pakistan and China are long-standing allies, who exchange mutual diplomatic support on conflictual issues (from Kashmir to Tibet), collaborate economically (including the Karakorum highway and the new deep Gwadar deep sea port at the Hormuz strait), and in the military domain. The two countries share the perception of India as a main threat, and for Pakistan, the alliance with China is clearly aimed to counterbalance Indian hegemony. Yet, even though China shares borders with both India and Pakistan, its superpower stature and its pivotal security interests in eastern parts of Asia, it is hardly an integral part of the South Asian security dynamic. In relation to Afghanistan, an alliance has developed since the last part of the 1990s between India, Iran and Russia, joining one key actor from each of the three surrounding regions. For this trio, the shared interest lies in stemming the tide of radical Islam and the Taliban, and they share a deep suspicion of Pakistan, including of its engagement with radical groups. In Afghanistan, this has resulted in what appears to be a loosely coordinated effort to support the so-called Northern Alliance, within which the three countries each have their favourite groups. The India-Iran-Russia trio seems a marriage of convenience, but with interesting implications for present day Afghanistan, and even more so for a future one where the US-led alliance has withdrawn.

### *A Persian Gulf perspective*

Within this Persian Gulf, the main current tension is over political-ideological leadership in the Islamic part of the world, with Iran and Saudi Arabia – respectively Shia and Sunni dominated – as the main contenders. The overwhelming character of the Iran-Saudi bipolar relationship, however, is recent, and replaced a tripolar one, with pre-2003 Iraq being a major actor in the region. The political-ideological contention is not only a war of ideas, it does materialize as firm security threats; in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988); the Iraqi intervention in Kuwait (1991); as well as in more low key conflicts throughout the region, exemplified recently in the escalation of conflict in Yemen, where the Saudis see a strong Iranian hand that threatens their own stability. Identity issues are important, and are brought to the fore through the existence of population groups that span state boundaries, such as the Kurds, and the existence of religious minorities in many of the region's states (such as the Shia in northern parts of Yemen). Control over energy resources, transport routes, and pricing of oil and gas are always high on the agenda.

Despite the strong set of issues that are specific to the Gulf sub-complex, however, the interdependence with the Levant – particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – is considerable. Some actors, such as Syria, play a key role in both sub-complexes, yet is most durably integrated in the Middle East. As Jubin Goodarzi has convincingly demonstrated, the Iranian-Syrian alliance has – despite massive ideological difference – been fairly stable over the past three decades, its foundations laid in the 1979–1982 period (Goodarzi 2009). The Gulf states identify with the Palestinian – and the Arab – cause, besides being a substantial source for various political and religious entities throughout the larger region and beyond. Nonetheless, the Persian Gulf region is here seen to encompass Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, as well as the countries on the Arabian Peninsula: Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The overarching enmity between the three, now two, dominant states, with a fairly constant overlay of superpower politics, has effectively prevented the emergence of functioning regional security institutions (Ismael and Ismael 1999). Mutual confidence is low, each country being preoccupied with its own security in the most direct sense.

In the Buzan and Wæver scheme, the Persian Gulf belongs to the larger Middle Eastern security complex, which stretches from Morocco in the west to Iran in the east. Buzan and Wæver (2003: 188-189) argues that within this large area, security interdependencies are of a scope that merits seeing it as one regional complex, but at the same time points to three distinct sub-complexes; the Maghreb, the Levant, and the Gulf. This conceptualization does illustrate the inherent problems with standardizing definitions in the analysis of international politics. While the larger Middle East may be sufficiently interconnected to be tagged as a security complex, it is so at a considerably higher level of



abstraction than many of the other complexes in the scheme. Several of the sub-complexes – the Persian Gulf being a case in point – potentially have a higher degree of interconnectedness than many complexes elsewhere in the world. In the interest of comparability, we focus on the Persian Gulf sub-complex, while keeping in mind the particular status of the larger Middle Eastern area on processes within the region.

Within the Persian Gulf area, the two main actors in relation to Afghanistan are Iran and Saudi Arabia, whose battle for Islamic leadership has also been played out there (Ahady 1998; Hussain 1991). Saudi-Arabia has a long-standing relationship with Pakistan, and has used its financial strength to gain influence in many parts of the Islamic world. After the 1979 revolution, Iran has actively promoted its potential as the main political force in the Islamic world, generally with limited success (Chubin and Tripp 1996). Iran's effectiveness has been hampered by the limited appeal of its radical Shia ideology, and the country's engagement in conflicts of a nearly existential character – the war with Iraq in particular – has encouraged a good measure of pragmatism in relation with other states. As a major superpower, the US has fostered a close alliance with the Saudi rulers, focusing both on energy and security, with one of its primary ambitions being to stem Iranian influence. Undoubtedly, Iran's standoff with the US, from 1979 onwards, has also affected its policies on Afghanistan.

Iran has taken a special interest in Afghanistan's Shia minority, who is in large measure identical to the Hazara ethnic group. The Hazara occupies Afghanistan's mountainous central areas. Amongst the country's larger ethnic groups, the Hazara is the only one that does not have a population with the same identity across the border (there are Hazara migrant communities in Pakistan and Iran, but interspersed with other dominant identity groups). For this reason, the religious Shia identity – shared with Iran's majority, a state-bearing identity after Khomeini came to power in 1979 – gained huge significance (Grevemeyer 1988). When the Hazara found that the Afghan exile party structure, set up in Pakistan in the early war months, did not have room for them, the only option was to seek support in Iran (Harpviken 1998). The reception was lukewarm, but radical Islamist groups did receive considerable support, and amongst the Hazara, the 1980s were characterized by internal struggles that probably cost many more lives than the communist versus resistance struggle. This has come in tandem with a social, political and economic revolution for many Hazara, who as a group now have an unprecedented representation in Afghan politics. Despite the establishment of the Unity Party – Hezb-e-Wahdat – in 1989, internal tensions between Islamist and ethnicist projects run high (Ibrahimi 2009). Iran, however, while continuing to cultivate its ties with Shia groups, expanded the set of favoured groups already around 1992 to encompass all of the Farsi-speaking groups (later known as the Northern Alliance). Iran's support to Afghan groups have been overwhelmingly based on religious (Shia) or cultural (Farsiwan) ties, just as in

the Middle East, but still reflects less an expression of solidarity than a pragmatic choice on the Iranian side on how to most effectively secure its own interest. While Afghanistan itself has never been the main concern in Iranian foreign policy, it has been important not to exacerbate insecurities by getting an adversary – in the form of the US, Pakistan, or an alliance of both – in power on its eastern border.

Following the revolution in February 1979, Iran had few friends in the world. The US had lost its major ally in the region, and when the Soviets intervened in Afghanistan at the end of the year, the reactions were harsh. The Iranian revolution, and particularly Khomeini's 'neither East nor West' doctrine, contradicted the bipolar paradigm in world politics, contrary to the war in Afghanistan, which quickly evolved into a classic cold war confrontation. With the revolution, the rivalry with Saudi Arabia over leadership amongst Muslim states was refreshed, inspired by Iran's gained credentials as an 'Islamic state' (Ahady 1998). At the same time, Iran's principal support to the Iraqi opposition had led it into open war with Iraq (1980–1988), and it became important for Teheran not to alienate the Soviets into supporting Iraq in that war (Hunter 1987). Hence, Iran maintained diplomatic relations with Kabul, and found itself forced to constrain its support for the Afghan resistance, despite ideological affinities, leaving the main supportive roles to the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The exception to the rule was the Afghan Shias, who were now permitted to set up offices in Iran. Rivalry with the Saudis would have invited a much more active Iranian role, but locked into an all-encompassing war with Iraq, as well as being on hostile terms with the US, Iran had to act pragmatically and constrain its engagement.

The 1990s started with the US-led war on Iraq, supported by Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region. Iran, despite its longstanding rivalry with Iraq, did not welcome this display of superpower force in its neighbourhood; neither did it welcome the Saudis collaboration in the war. To Iran, the relationship with Russia remained a priority (McMillan 2006). Even during the years of armed conflict in Tajikistan, Iran took great care not to alienate Russia, in spite of its engagement with the Islamist opposition (Rashid 2000: 200). In Afghanistan, the fall of the PDPA regime had given way to new rounds of warfare, this time between former partners in the resistance. Iran moved from the relatively narrow approach of the 1980s, where support to Islamist Shia groups were dominant, to a broader approach, building relationships with most of the non-Pashtun groups, and particularly the Tajik-dominated Jamiat-e Islami (Harpviken 1998: 194).

In the latter half of the 1990s, Iran's pattern of support coincided almost perfectly with that of India and Russia. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, continued to work in close alignment with Pakistan, which by the mid-1990s meant support of the Taliban, a group that the Iranians detest (the Saudis were later to reassess its policy, as Taliban-Al Qaeda

ties grew stronger). Again, we see that patterns of conflict and cooperation endure. The policies pursued by Iran and Saudi Arabia, both significant actors in the Afghan conflict, largely reflect concerns within their own security complex (including its superpower overlay). The most dramatic episode between Iran and Taliban-ruled Afghanistan occurred in the fall 1998, triggered by the Taliban's killing of nine diplomats at Iran's consulate in Mazar-e Sharif. The Iranians were outraged, but also saw that this was an opportunity to get international sympathy (Rubin and Batmanglich 2008). Troops were mobilized along the border, and the Taliban responded by regrouping their forces. On the home front, Iran emphasized the Taliban onslaught on non-Pashtun populations, both Shia and other. The underlying Iranian conviction, however, was that Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the US were working closely together to consolidate Taliban power. The key to defusing was not found in the Iran-Taliban relationship, but in addressing regional security dynamics, convincing the Iranians that the US and Saudi Arabia opposed the Taliban (and Pakistan's support for it), manifested in the 1999 Security Council sanctions regime (UNSC 1999).

The 2001 intervention in Afghanistan brought semi-permanent US presence to the neighbourhood. Most of the states in the region saw this as a mixed blessing, but it was particularly unwelcome for Iran, who after having collaborated extensively in facilitating the 2001 military campaign as well as in brokering the Bonn peace agreement, found itself declared part of the 'axis of evil' by Washington in early 2002 (Parsi 2007: 223–237).<sup>3</sup> Things got worse with the Iraq intervention in 2003; now Iran found itself surrounded by states hosting the forces of an increasingly hostile US. The debate on Iran's nuclear program loomed in the background, and the threats and accusations exchanged between Iran and Israel reached unprecedented levels. The real concern was that the US – or Israel, with US acceptance – would take the military campaign to Iran. For Iran's power elite, it has been painfully evident that the US would very much like to see regime change in Iran, and that various actors in the region – both governments and non-state actors – could be seen as useful instruments in bringing it about. Ultimately, as Barzegar (2010: 176) points out, the objective is to redefine the regional security order, constraining Iran's role in it as much as possible.

---

<sup>3</sup> As US President Obama has reinvigorated interest in a regional approach to Afghanistan's problems, the suggestion that given the common US and Iranian interests in Afghanistan, this can be used to foster confidence between the two states Barnett R. Rubin and Sarah Batmanglich. 2008. 'The U.S. and Iran in Afghanistan: Policy Gone Awry'. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The problem with this approach, from an Iranian perspective, is that it was tried in 2001, but violated by the Bush regime, and the inclination now is to go for a comprehensive political process in which all outstanding issues are addressed, or nothing. Kayhan Barzegar. 2010. 'Iran's Foreign Policy Strategy after Saddam'. *The Washington Quarterly* 33, 1, pp. 173-89..

Ironically, as the immediate US success in Iraq was replaced by massive resistance, the US inclination to move militarily against Iran was muted, while Teheran now found itself freed of both the Taliban and the Saddam regimes. Iran gained considerable influence in post-2003 Iraqi politics through its careful manoeuvring with Shia groups of variegated ideological orientation (Nasr 2006: 241–242). Saudi-Iranian relations remained tense, but the Saudis had a limited engagement on the Afghan scene in the aftermath of their Taliban-adventure of the 1990s, which had turned out to be contrary to their own interests. The US-Afghan Declaration of Strategic Partnership, signed in Washington in May 2005, fed into Iranian concerns that the US could use their presence in Afghanistan to threaten Iran. Karzai was positive to sign a pact with Iran, but was instructed by his Washington counterparts not to sign such an agreement, which caused further unease in Teheran.

Iran kept its Afghan engagement up, both at the central level, where many of its old associates are in key positions, and in the areas close to the Iranian border, where it is heavily engaged in reconstruction and development. For Iran, there is a need to be present in Afghanistan, in order to know what the US and its allies are doing, potentially as an opening to a constructive dialogue with the US. With Iraq in turmoil, the tri-polar rivalry of the Gulf complex is reduced to a bipolar one, and in post-Taliban Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia's miscalculations are now converted into gains for Iran, which it now works hard to secure. Apart from the changing role of Iraq, however, the security dynamic in the Persian Gulf is characterized by continuity, not least in Iran-Saudi relations, but always against the backdrop of strong superpower involvement. Even for Iran, there is a remarkable consistency in the regional security orientation between the Shah and the post-1979 Islamist regime, despite the turnaround in relations with the US.

#### *A Central Asian perspective*

Central Asian security dynamics, argues Roy Allison (2008) convincingly, is best characterized as a form of 'virtual regionalism': "To Central Asian rulers the central objective of such [i.e. security] coordination through macro-regional frameworks has been to reinforce regime security." (Allison 2008: 198). In post-Soviet Central Asia, what we have now are states-in-the-making, with authoritarian rulers who heed an authoritarian Soviet legacy, and whose main security concern is with domestic threats to regime stability. As to extra-territorial security threats, the key ones are transnational, in the form of radical groups that operate across state boundaries. These groups are chiefly of a radical Islamic character, as other political alternatives have been effectively muted (Olcott 2005: 27). Several of the groups in question operate in more than one state, some of them also beyond the region. However, the preoccupation with transnational groups is

also derived from the concern over regime stability. Similarly, each of the states in Central Asia proper – Kirghizia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan – have sought to maintain good links to Russia, who is effectively a guarantor for the regimes of the day, but at the same time also a regional hegemon from which one wants a certain independence.

There is considerable continuity between the Soviet and the post-Soviet eras, and each of the five states struggles to balance between fostering independence from, yet continuing to uphold the still so crucial relationships to, Russia. In addition, both the US and China seek to strengthen their influence, and post-Soviet Central Asia can be said to have an overlay of superpower competition, with China, Russia and US all seeking to expand their economic and political influence. Progress towards genuine regional cooperation has been hampered by civil war and unrest. Regional cooperation is hampered by a lack of mutual trust between the countries in the region, and by rivalry between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan for becoming the dominant regional power (Roy 2000: 193). Ultimately, for regional cooperation to evolve, it is a precondition that there is a sense of common security challenges among the states in the region (Allison 2004: 473). This has barely been the case in the first almost two decades following 1991.

For Buzan and Wæver (2003:397–439) the five Central Asian states are part of the CIS regional complex, within which Russia has lost control over the states referred to as ‘Eastern Europe’ during the Cold War. Russia strives to maintain hegemony within a region that encompasses four distinct subcomplexes – the Baltic states, the ‘western states (Belarus, Ukraine), the Caucasus as well as Central Asia – commonly referred to by Russian leaders as the ‘near abroad’. Each of the four subregions has a strong security dynamic of their own, but what unites them is that Russia constitutes a hegemon in the subcomplex, which is also reflected in the way that alliances aiming to balance Russia’s dominances transcend boundaries between subregions. Just as above, where we focused on the Persian Gulf as a subcomplex of the Middle East, we will here be focusing on Central Asia as a subcomplex of the CIS. There is a key difference between the two cases though, in that the former had three subcomplexes with distinct memberships, whereas the latter is constituted by four subcomplexes that share a common hegemon. It is also worth noting that several analysts within an RSC tradition talk about regional mini-complexes in Central Asia, such as the conflict-ridden Fergana valley, at the intersection of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (e.g. Jonson 1996) even though we will not be doing so here.

Afghanistan is not a key concern for the Central Asians, apart from being a place where transnational militants may find sanctuary and alliance partners, as they did when the Taliban were in power. This possible threat is most relevant to the states bordering

Afghanistan – Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – but only the latter has engaged seriously to affect political developments there, through its support to the Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum. Hence, at the most general level, the relationship with Afghanistan is remarkably stable, reflecting primarily a concern that challengers of domestic power can find support there. As such it is a virtual blue copy of Russian concerns with radical Islamic movements in the so-called ‘near abroad’, of which Central Asia is a key part (Rashid 2000). A different concern relating to Afghanistan is drugs, which is both sold in, and transiting through, Central Asia, with considerable impacts. While this is a concern to the Central Asian states, it does seem that a preoccupation with security in its most traditional sense, as opposed to wider concepts of a human security type, largely keeps such issues off the security agenda.

Prior to the 1991 implosion of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian republics did not have a foreign policy of their own. As discussed above, the Soviet Union ended up in Afghanistan not because it had aggressive geopolitical designs of gaining access to hot waters in the Indian Ocean, as the dominant interpretation in the 1980s had it, but because many of the power holders saw it as the only way of preventing a communist ‘revolution’ in a neighbouring country from failure. The concern over a potential radicalizing impact on Muslims within Central Asia was not part of that original calculus. As Ahmed Rashid (Rashid 2001: 34) points out: ‘Tens of thousands of Central Asian conscripts fought for the Soviet army in Afghanistan and many were deeply affected by the mujahedin’s Islamic zeal.’ One example is Juma Namangani, the later leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, who served as a paratrooper in Afghanistan in the 1980s (Naumkin 2003: 22). The dimensions of such phenomena among Soviet Central Asians are uncertain, yet it seems that we do here have a parallel to the so-called blowback effect hitting the US in the 1990s, when many of its former allies in the Afghan war turned against it. While largely symbolic at the time, it is also worth noting that Afghan mujahedin, encouraged by Pakistani intelligence, conducted raids in Central Asia, which has had lasting impacts on mutual confidence.

When the former Soviet republics gained independence in 1991 as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, neither of them had a developed policy on Afghanistan, and all of them had more immediate worries in the domestic transition. Nonetheless, when Tajikistan was thrown into civil war in 1992, major parts of the armed opposition found support in Afghanistan, where there were also refugee camps which served as safe havens for the fighters. By 1997, when the Tajikistan peace agreement was signed, the Afghan government, under immense pressure from the Taliban, turned around and backed the agreement, in return being offered Russian support, including access to the Kulyab air base in southern Tajikistan (Hyman 1998: 114–115). Also the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) had bases in Afghanistan in the 1990s, from where it

launched attacks into Central Asia. Despite the concern with Afghanistan as a possible retreat for its opposition, however, the Central Asian states were primarily concerned with controlling domestic unrest and militancy, and with maintaining the international links – primarily with Russia – that it needed to succeed.

The 1990s became an unruly period for Central Asia. The Russian presence was subdued, to the extent that by the end of the decade, there was reason to ask whether it had a privileged hegemon status. Other powers – China and the US, but also Iran, Turkey and others – sought to strengthen their influence in the area, exploiting Russia's weakness to gain access to natural resources and new markets. Most of the challengers had limited success, China being the major exception. But as the Russian economy and military capacity started to recover just after the turn of the millennium, it also became evident that the political culture and network of the Soviet era, combined with infrastructure, were effective forces in pulling the Central Asians in with Russia.

Not surprisingly, the 2001 intervention that removed the Taliban from power in Afghanistan was supported by the Central Asians, who allowed transit transports as well as use of bases. But the Central Asian exposure to what MacFarlane (2004: 460) has described as a 'competitive pull' from the three superpowers only intensified. Expectations for what to get in return from the US for collaborating on Afghanistan were on the rise. US motivations in Central Asia are being questioned, and US insistence on democracy both in Afghanistan and the 'greater Middle East' has a bad resonance with autocrat Central Asian leaders. Five years into the new millennium, US influence in Central Asia seemed to be waning.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), spearheaded by China, with Russia and four Central Asian states (Turkmenistan is the exception, as it is in most regional initiatives) as members, is gaining momentum (Norling and Swanström 2007). Starting out with a focus on border demarcation in the region, energy security has emerged as the main issue for the SCO, to the possible dismay of the US, and despite the great Chinese-Russian conflict potential that goes with it. Although Afghanistan has now gained observer status in the SCO, the trend in Central Asia (and within SCO) is not to give further significance to Afghan affairs, despite the possible link with domestic threats.<sup>4</sup> In 2005, the SCO called for the US to withdraw from bases in Central Asia, and by November the US withdrew from the Khanabad base in Uzbekistan (but maintained use of Manas airbase in Kirghizia). As the insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan

---

<sup>4</sup> By early 2010, a suggestion to extend membership to Iran and Pakistan has been floated (the two, alongside India and Mongolia, already have observer status) 2010. 'Security Bloc Considers Adding Iran, Pakistan'. *The Associated Press*, 4 February 2010.. If this line is pursued, it would significantly alter the character of the SCO.

intensified, it became increasingly clear that logistical access through the CIS would be helpful. Russia and the Central Asians kept the pressure on by signalling, yet frequently restraining, cooperation with the international forces fighting in Afghanistan.

For Central Asia, the line of demarcation towards Afghanistan is even sharper than for the two other surrounding regions. This may seem counterintuitive, given the serious impacts of the Afghan situation in the region. Despite a common history, however, the long period of effective border control under the Soviet Union did have serious impacts on interaction at all levels. Post-1991, Russia has remained the key point of reference, greatly aided by Soviet infrastructure, political culture and networks, even though other powers have challenged Russian hegemony. Finally, there is also an obsession with domestic security, in the sense of securing regime survival. Yet, even though militant opposition groups have had close links to Afghanistan, the southern neighbour has not become a key security concern for the Central Asians. The inability of the five Central Asian republics to act in concert, both on Afghanistan and more generally, undermines their effectiveness, and has offered the opportunity for Russia to regain influence in the region.

### **Concluding remarks**

What is it about the security dynamics in Afghanistan's larger neighbourhood that serves to virtually block any movement towards a concerted effort for strengthening peace and security in Afghanistan? Taking Buzan and Wæver's thinking on Regional Security Complexes as a point of departure, this report focuses on the dynamic within each of the three regions that border on Afghanistan: South Asia, the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. The narratives of each region give considerable support to the view that the three regions surrounding Afghanistan are distinct security regional complexes. We have also examined the security concerns in the surrounding states and regions that relate to Afghanistan in a most direct sense – transnational militants, migration, drugs – which are important, yet do not have the same direct, existential and enduring character as the key security issues within each complex. Seen from the regions that surround it, Afghanistan remains at best a secondary concern. One implication is that the post-2001 Afghan government has limited room for manoeuvre in affecting its regional neighbourhood. Not only is the security policies of neighbouring countries anything but Afghanistan-centric, but the country also falls short on institutional and human capacity, and it has little to offer its neighbours. Only if the neighbouring states develop a common understanding of how Afghan instability threatens their security, and come to share the view that the best cure is a stable Afghanistan, can we expect the emergence of a concerted effort among its neighbours.



But an RSC-guided analysis is also less than satisfactory in several ways. Perhaps most importantly, it tends to underplay the weight of the transnational networks that span Afghanistan's borders and which ties it in with the security dynamic of its neighbours. The alternative perspective offered by Barnett Rubin and associates, under the heading Regional Conflict Formations (RCFs), emphasizes such networks, hence placing Afghanistan at the core of a larger regional formation rather than seeing it as an insulator between distinct regions (see also: Harpviken 2010; Leenders 2010; Ulriksen 2010). The problem with the Rubinian RCF perspective, however, is that it presumes that the relationships between states match transnational patterns of non-state interaction. But, political decision-makers in the neighbourhood, even if they acknowledge non-state and transnational threats, think of security in conventional terms, focusing on relations between states. Patterns of stately interaction – amiable or not – also define the pattern for state-based responses. This is why, even if transnational threats may be becoming increasingly important, states in the Afghan neighbourhood remain preoccupied with region-specific threats. While Buzan and Wæver's RSC approach can be criticized for dealing with the transnational primarily from the perspective of states, it does help understand the critical question of why states in the neighbourhood, despite common transnational threats, are loath to engage in constructive cooperation.

A number of other criticisms of the RSC approach are easier to tackle. One is that such an approach risks overplaying the strength of a region's borders. Rather than seeing Afghanistan as distinct from South Asia, one may talk about degrees of inclusion, seeing the country as somewhat peripheral, yet a member (as it would also be in Central Asia and the Persian Gulf regions). Undoubtedly, Afghanistan's importance in the dynamic of the surrounding regions may be considerable, but its importance varies fundamentally over time, and it is never the main issue. A second critique would be that states in various regions may form strong ties. Cases in point would be the India-Iran-Russia alliance in Afghanistan or the Iran-Pakistan enmity. Both of these, however, have proved unstable, and are better understood as tactical alliances driven by deep-seated relationships within the respective regions. There is also the question of the role of superpowers and major powers. In the case above, we have seen that superpower intervention – as underlined by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan by the early 1990s – is inherently unreliable: distant powers come and go at their own discretion, neighbours stay put.

In essence, the application of an RSC approach, where the dominant trend is to see the country as the core of a larger (conflictual) region, to the case of Afghanistan, highlights its analytical value. The approach helps us distinguish between fundamental security relationships and fluctuating alliances. It gives primacy to the regional setup, but roots this in the insistence on agency of states and other key actors. It may come across as

deterministic, even defeatist. If the rather unhelpful engagement of Afghanistan's neighbours in the country's conflict over the past 30 years is motivated by deep-seated conflicts in their respective regions – as in the case of Pakistan's existential fear of India – then it seems to be a long and complicated way to resolution that presumes the building of functioning security communities in the surrounding regions. Yet, an RSC perspective may also inform a more optimistic perspective: If neighbours' involvement is not first and foremost inspired by issues that have to do with Afghanistan, then there must be ways in which to ensure that their conflicts are not played out on Afghan ground. In the case of Pakistan and India, for example, could the existential enmity between the two manifest itself in less destructive ways, and on a different playing field? If so, then the embryonic ideas within the UN and the Afghan government by early 2010 – of a unilateral Afghan guarantee of non-aggression towards its neighbours – would actually be a promising first step.

## References

2010. 'Security Bloc Considers Adding Iran, Pakistan'. *The Associated Press*, 4 February 2010.
- Adamec, Ludwig W. 1991. *Afghanistan's Foreign Affairs to the Mid-Twentieth Century: Relations with the U.S.S.R., Germany and Britain*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Ahady, Anwar-ul-Haq. 1998. 'Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Conflict in Afghanistan'. In *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, edited by W. Maley. New York: New York University Press.
- Allison, Roy. 2004. 'Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia'. *International Affairs* 80, 3:463-83.
- Allison, Roy. 2008. 'Virtual Regionalism, Regional Structures and Regime Security in Central Asia'. *Central Asian Studies* 27, 2:185-202.
- Barzegar, Kayhan. 2010. 'Iran's Foreign Policy Strategy after Saddam'. *The Washington Quarterly* 33, 1:173-89.
- Bradsher, Henry S. 1999. *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buzan, Barry. 1983. *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*. Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Buzan, Barry, and Ole Wæver. 1998. 'Liberalism and Security: The Contradictions of the Liberal Leviathan'. 23. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute.
- Buzan, Barry, and Ole Wæver. 2003. *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chellamy, Brahma. 2001. 'Fighting Terrorism in Southern Asia'. *International Security* 26, 3:94-116.
- Chubin, Sharam, and Charles Tripp. 1996. *Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order*. London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies.
- Duffield, Mark. 2001. *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*. London: Zed Books.
- Dupree, Louis. 1980. *Afghanistan*. second ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Emadi, Hafizullah. 1993. 'China's Politics and Developments in Afghanistan'. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* vol. 28, no. 1-2:107– 17.
- Ghani, Ashraf. 1990. 'The Afghan State and its Adaptation to the Environment of Central and Southwest Asia'. In *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan*, edited by H. Malik. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Goodarzi, Jubin M. 2009. *Syria and Iran : diplomatic alliance and power politics in the Middle East* London: I.B. Tauris.
- Grare, Frédéric. 2003. *Pakistan and the Afghan Conflict, 1979-1985. With and Afterword Covering Events from 1985-2001*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Grevenmeyer, Jan-Heeren. 1988. 'Ethnicity and National Liberation: The Afghan Hazara between Resistance and Civil War'. *Colloques internationaux; Le Fait Ethnique en Iran et en Afghanistan*:211– 8.
- Harpviken, Kristian Berg. 1997. 'Transcending Traditionalism: The Emergence of Non-State Military Formations in Afghanistan'. *Journal of Peace Research* 34, 3:271-87.
- Harpviken, Kristian Berg. 1998. 'The Hazara of Afghanistan: The Thorny Path Towards Political Unity: 1978-1992'. In *Post-Soviet Central Asia*, edited by T. Atabaki and J. O'Kane. London: Tauris.
- Harpviken, Kristian Berg. 2010. 'Introduction: Troubled Regions and Failing States'. *Comparative Social Research* 27.
- Hunter, Shireen T. 1987. 'The Soviet Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran'. In *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan*, edited by H. Malik. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Hussain, Mushahid. 1991. 'Regional and Arab Approach to the Afghan Issue'. Peshawar.
- Hyman, Anthony. 1992. *Afghanistan under Soviet Domination, 1964– 91*. third ed. London: Macmillan.
- Hyman, Anthony. 1998. 'Russia, Central Asia and the Taliban'. In *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, edited by W. Maley. New York: New York University Press.
- Ibrahimi, Niamatullah. 2009. 'The Dissipation of Political Capital among Afghanistan's Hazaras: 2001-2009'. 2. London: London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Ismael, Jacqueline S., and Tareq Y. Ismael. 1999. 'Globalization and the Arab World in Middle East Politics: Regional Dynamics in Historical Perspective'. *Arab Studies Quarterly* 21:129-44.
- Jonson, Lena. 1996. 'Russian Peacekeeping and Tajikistan'. Paper read at Russia and International Peacekeeping, at Oslo.
- Kaldor, Mary. 1999. *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Kornienko, G. M. 1994. 'The Afghan Endeavour: Perplexities of the Military Incursion and Withdrawal'. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* vol. 17, no. 2:2-17.
- Lake, David A. 1997. 'Regional Security Complexes: A Systems Approach'. In *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, edited by D. A. Lake and P. M. Morgan. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Leenders, Reinoud. 2010. 'Strong States in a Troubled Region: Anatomies of a Middle Eastern Regional Conflict Formation'. *Comparative Social Research* 27.
- MacFarlane, Neil S. 2004. 'The United States and Regionalism in Central Asia'. *International Affairs* 80:447-61.

- Mackenzie, Richard. 1998. 'The United States and the Taliban'. In *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*, edited by W. Maley. New York: New York University Press.
- McMillan, Joseph. 2006. 'Saudi Arabia and Iraq: Oil, Religion and an Enduring Rivalry'. 157. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.
- Nasr, Vali. 2006. *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Nathan, Laurie. 2010. 'Power, Security and Regional Conflict Management in Southern Africa and South Asia'. *Comparative Social Research* 27.
- Naumkin, Vitaly V. 2003. 'Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan'. Berkeley: UC Berkeley: Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies.
- Newell, Richard S. 1972. *Politics of Afghanistan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Norling, Nicklas, and Niklas Swanström. 2007. 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Trade, and the Roles of Iran, India and Pakistan'. *Central Asian Survey* 26:429–44.
- Parsi, Trita. 2007. *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealing of Israel, Iran and the U.S.* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rashid, Ahmed. 2000. *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*. London: I B Tauris.
- Rashid, Ahmed. 2001. 'Talibanisation and Central Asia'. In *Talibanisation: Extremism and Regional Instability in South and Central Asia*, edited by D. Groves. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.
- Rowe, William C. 2010. 'The Wakhan Corridor: Endgame of the Great Game'. In *Borderlines and Borderlands: Political Oddities at the Edge of the Nation.State*, edited by A. C. Diener and J. Hagen. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Roy, Olivier. 1995. *Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War*, The Inaugural Leon B. Poullada Memorial Lecture Series. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.
- Roy, Olivier. 2000. *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*. Edited by A. Danchev, The Library of International Relations. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Roy, Olivier. 2001. 'The Transnational Dimension of Radical Islamic Movements'. In *Talibanisation: Extremism and Regional Instability in South and Central Asia*, edited by D. Groves. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.
- Rubin, Barnett, and Andrea Armstrong. 2003a. 'Regional Issues in the Reconstruction of Afghanistan'. *World Policy Journal* 20, 1:31-40.
- Rubin, Barnett R, and Abubaker Siddique. 2006. 'Resolving the Pakistan-Afghanistan Stalemate'. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.
- Rubin, Barnett R. 2002. *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (2nd edition). New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Rubin, Barnett R. 2006. 'Central Asia and Central Africa: Transnational Wars and Ethnic Conflicts'. *Journal of Human Development* 7, 1:5-22.
- Rubin, Barnett R., and Andrea Armstrong. 2003b. 'Regional Issues in the Reconstruction of Afghanistan'. *World Policy Journal*, Spring:31-40.
- Rubin, Barnett R., Andrea Armstrong, and Gloria Ntegeye. 2001. 'Draft Discussion Paper I: Conceptual Overview of the Origin, Structure, and Dynamics of Regional Conflict Formations'. New York: Centre on International Cooperation, New York University.
- Rubin, Barnett R., and Sarah Batmanglich. 2008. 'The U.S. and Iran in Afghanistan: Policy Gone Awry'. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Shahrani, M. Nazif. 1984. 'Introduction: Marxist «Revolution» and Islamic Resistance in Afghanistan'. In *Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan*, edited by M. N. Shahrani and R. L. Canfield. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California.
- Ulriksen, Ståle. 2010. 'Webs of War: Managing Regional Conflict Formations in West Africa and Central Africa'. *Comparative Social Research* 27.
- UNSC. 1999. 'UN Security Council Resolution 1267'. New York: UN Security Council.
- Westad, Odd Arne. 1994. 'Prelude to the Invasion: The Soviet Union and the Afghan Communists, 1978– 1979'. *The International History Review* vol. 16, no. 1:49–69.
- . 2005. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wikipedia. 2010. 'Afghanistan'.
- Yousaf, Mohammad, and Mark Adkin. 1992. *The Bear Trap: Afghanistan's Untold Story*. Lahore: Jang Publishers.
- Yusufzai, Rahimullah. 2006. 'A New Proxy War?' *Newsline*, June 2006.
- Ziring, Lawrence. 1987. 'Buffer States on the Rim of Asia: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and the Superpowers'. In *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan*, edited by H. Malik. Basingstoke: Macmillan.



---

# Afghanistan in a Neighbourhood Perspective

*General overview and Conceptualisation*

---

For over three decades, Afghanistan has been a battleground in which many of the states of the larger neighbourhood have been involved. The importance of fostering a concerted effort for Afghan peace and stability is increasingly agreed upon. Some analysts emphasize states and their security relationships and see Afghanistan as an ‘insulator’ caught between different regional state systems, each with a strong dynamic of their own. An alternative perspective – which also seems to inform the new US analysis – emphasizes various transnational networks, and sees Afghani-

stan as the ‘core’ of a larger conflict formation. This paper takes the former perspective – codified by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in the Regional Security Complex approach – as its starting point. It pursues the security dynamics of each of the core regions surrounding Afghanistan (South Asia, the Persian Gulf and South Asia), taking a comparative and historical perspective, with an emphasis on the period since the late 1970s. It concludes that each of Afghanistan’s three surrounding regions is characterized by deep security concerns that have little to do with Afghanistan.

These concerns nonetheless inform their engagement in Afghanistan, which comes to reflect conflicts and cleavages specific to the region. One implication is that for Afghanistan, it may be a more promising strategy to seek a unilateral non-offensive or neutral status, rather than security integration with its neighbours. While this would necessitate a forum of Afghanistan’s neighbours in order to foster understanding for the Afghan position, it suggests a dramatic departure from mainstream policy proposals with their emphasis on an integrated regional approach.

---