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## **Afghanistan after the US Withdrawal: A Look from Kyrgyzstan**

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### **Introduction**

US-led NATO operation in Afghanistan opened a new phase in the strategic game between the US and Russia, since the US obtained a stronghold in Russia's "near abroad", in Kyrgyzstan. Now, United States is evacuating its air base in Kyrgyzstan, and this will radically change the situation in Afghanistan, after 2014.

The American physical presence in Central Asia was authorised by Russia and regional powers' consent, as the expansion of extremism in Afghanistan was to the disadvantage of all regional states. The thread of extremism and the US-led operation of coalition forces in Afghanistan created unexpected - open or covert - alliances between Russia, China, Iran, India, Central Asian republics and the US.

The operation is conducted by NATO with 49 troop contributing states named as International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The coalition forces include most of European countries, and it consists of a long list of countries from El Salvador to Togo. The main contributor is the US. As of June 2013, 68,000 of the total 97,920 troops are from the US.<sup>1</sup> In June 2011, 101,000 of the total 140,000 troops were American soldiers. Indeed the operation was led by the US, and their withdrawal is followed by other members of ISAF. France, Canada and Australia had already left Afghanistan; second biggest contributor, Great Britain with 8,000 soldiers, will also leave by the end of 2014.<sup>2</sup>

After the withdrawal of the US troops even wider, deeper, more constructed and lasting alliances are required in the formation of an Afghan-led solution to the complex situation in Afghanistan. Regional states were not among the contributors of ISAF. The closest ally to Afghanistan was Azerbaijan. After the withdrawal, regional powers are expected to take more active role in Afghanistan. A shift might occur replacing the US-led ISAF operation to an Afghan-led operation with the support of regional states.

Because the key air base of the US troops operating in Afghanistan was stationed in the capital of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, this article will first give some information about the air base, and then it will focus on the implications of the US withdrawal from Central Asia with a look from Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>1</sup> International Security Assistance Force, "International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Key Facts and Figures", June 24, 2013, retrieved from [http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/20130624\\_130624-mb-isaf-placemat.pdf](http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/20130624_130624-mb-isaf-placemat.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> "Q&A: Foreign Forces in Afghanistan", *BBC*, June 18, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11371138>.

## **Manas Air Base in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**

The air base was opened in December 2001, right after the 9/11 attacks. It was one of the two US military air bases used during the “Operation Enduring Freedom” launched against Taliban, which held power in Afghanistan, since 1996. The other US military air base was in Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbekistan. Following the “May 2005 Unrest” in Andijan, Uzbekistan, US-Uzbek relations are strained and the US had to withdraw its forces from the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base in November 2005.<sup>3</sup> Since then, Manas Air Base is the only US military air base operative in the war in Afghanistan outside of Afghanistan itself. Kyrgyzstan is also the only country in the world with US and Russian military bases, and it will remain so until July 2014.

The mission of the air base is defined as fourfold: “air refuelling, airlift, onward movement of forces and humanitarian assistance and developing partnerships for the long term”.<sup>4</sup> Refuelling of planes during flight (air-refuelling) is a significant mission for the operation with long-ranged flights both on the way to and from Afghanistan and for planes operating on Afghan airfield. Equipment and troops deployed from other bases in the west to Afghanistan were all transferred through Manas Air Base, which was unofficially called “gateway to hell” by the troops. The humanitarian assistance, which was defined among the four missions, is the weakest of realized goals.

There are 1,200 troops stationed in the air base with an additional 900 international contractor personnel. 700 of the contractors are Kyrgyz;<sup>5</sup> others are from a variety of countries with specialists from Western countries and interpreters from Afghanistan. The air base transits yearly 50,000 troops to Afghanistan.

On July 11, 2014, the military air base will be closed on the insistence of the Kyrgyz government. The closure of the air base came to agenda in 2006, after the election of the Kyrgyz President Bakiyev. Actually, when Bakiyev came to power after the “Tulip Revolution” (2005) by ousting the former President Akayev, it was thought that Bakiyev was supported by the US, and this was a successful move on the “grand chessboard”.

Tulip Revolution occurred at a critical period, when colour revolutions of Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004) - with American support - were shaking Russia’s sphere of influence. Similar to other “colour revolutions”, also before the Tulip Revolution of Kyrgyzstan, civil society leaders were trained by experts from the US, the Ukraine and Georgia to promote democracy, opposition newspapers were printed by US sponsored Freedom House, and during the “revolution” NGO’s played a leading role. One of the first declarations of the new President

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<sup>3</sup> “US Plane Leaves Uzbek Base”, *BBC*, November 21, 2005; retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4457844.stm>.

<sup>4</sup> “Bi-Monthly Newsletter”, *Transit Center at Manas* retrieved from <http://www.transitcenteratmanas.com/us/important-documents/134.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Matt Millham, “Kyrgyzstan Bill likely to End US Use of Air Base at Manas”, *Stars and Stripes*, June 20, 2013; retrieved from <http://www.stripes.com/news/kyrgyzstan-bill-likely-to-end-us-use-of-air-base-at-manas-1.226777>.

Bakiyev was, however, to increase the lease or to close the American air base. Indeed, Russia and China were critical towards the presence of a military air base in Central Asia, and in June 2005, after the US tension with Uzbekistan, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) demanded a timeline from the US to evacuate their air bases. The closure of the air base in Uzbekistan was carried out, but the US extended the use of the Manas Air Base by increasing the payment for the air base and related activities. In 2009, President Bakiyev once again pressed for the closure of the air base, but again the rent was increased yearly from \$17 million to \$60 million, and the lease was extended for another five years. Additionally, the name of the air base was changed to “Manas Transit Center”, which did not bring changes to the actual function of the air base, and it is still generally called “Manas Air Base”.

After another popular uprising in 2010, President Bakiyev was toppled, and a new government came to power. When the incumbent President Atambayev was elected in 2011, he promised that the lease of the transit centre (air base) will not be extended for another term.<sup>6</sup> Most people, both the citizens of Kyrgyzstan and international observers, thought that this was just another bluff to increase the rent, but Atambayev was resolute in closing the transit centre on the deadline of the final lease, July 11, 2014.

In 2013, Atambayev’s determination to close the transit centre was under discussion among the Kyrgyzstani politicians and with the US officials; in June 2013, the closure was approved by the Kyrgyz parliament.<sup>7</sup> Finally, on October 17, 2013, the US announced that they will carry out the transfer of the transit centre to an air base in Romania, Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base, on the Black Sea. The distance of the new air base to Kabul is three times longer than the Manas Transit Center, and the air-refuelling is not accepted by the Romanian government, which will be carried out by a yet undefined air base in southwest Asia. Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base was previously used by the US during its Iraq operation in 2003, and it was listed among the “black sites”, where infamous interrogations of suspected terrorists were executed.<sup>8</sup>

The Manas Air Base was economically very beneficial to Kyrgyzstan. In addition to the yearly payment for the lease, there are many extra costs, such as the service fees (ca. \$21 million), contributions to aeronavigation (ca. \$30 million), military local spending (ca. \$ 1.5 million) and most significantly jet fuel payments (ca. \$99 million) in 2013.<sup>9</sup> This presented a very significant income for Kyrgyzstan. The lease was directly paid to the state, and because of Kyrgyzstan’s weak taxation resources, this was crucial for state revenues. Therefore, President Atambayev’s declaration on the closure of the air base was not taken seriously until recently. Most Americans in Bishkek still complain about the “insanity” of Kyrgyz

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<sup>6</sup> “Manas Contract will not be Renewed in 2014, Kyrgyz Premier Says”, *Central Asia Newswire*, August 15, 2011; retrieved from <http://www.universalnewswires.com/centralasia/viewstory.aspx?id=4642>.

<sup>7</sup> “Manas: Kyrgyzstan Backs Closure of US Airbase”, *BBC*, June 20, 2013; retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22988967>.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Carroll, October 18, 2013, “DOD to Shift Air Transit from Manas to Romania”, *Stars and Stripes*, retrieved from <http://www.stripes.com/news/dod-to-shift-air-transit-from-manas-to-romania-1.247953>.

<sup>9</sup> “TCM Financial Contributions”, Transit Center at Manas, March 31, 2013; retrieved from [http://www.transitcenteratmanas.com/images/stories/tcm\\_econ\\_impact\\_march\\_2013\\_eng.pdf](http://www.transitcenteratmanas.com/images/stories/tcm_econ_impact_march_2013_eng.pdf).

insistence, and they underline “their economic contributions to Kyrgyzstan”.<sup>10</sup> It is even argued that Kyrgyzstan is not in a position to pay employees by the end of the year without air base’s revenues.

### **The Position of Russia and Central Asian Republics**

The increasing number of financial agreements with Russia shows that Russia will cover economic losses of Kyrgyzstan. Russia aims to consolidate its influence in Central Asia, and since 2001, it considered the US presence as a threat. In September 2013, Russia forgave Kyrgyzstan \$500 million debt in exchange for extending the lease of its air base in Kant, until 2032, and they promised \$1.1 billion worth defence arms. This is directly related to the withdrawal of American troops, but before that in the beginning of 2013, when Kyrgyz new strategic development plan (“National Sustainable Development Strategy for the Kyrgyz Republic for the Period of 2013-2017”<sup>11</sup>) was announced, it was clear that more than half of the projects for the development of Kyrgyzstan would be financially supported by Russia.

Russia also strengthened its presence in Tajikistan. After Kyrgyzstan, Russia also extended the lease of its air base in Tajikistan in October 2013, until 2042. In addition to it, Russia is also taking the control of the Ayni Air Base near the Tajik capital Dushanbe. India invested \$70 million between 2002 and 2010 to use the Ayni Air Base, but now the air base will station 7.000 Russian troops.<sup>12</sup> India will continue to use another air base, Farkhor, in Tajikistan.

Russia defined its priorities as fight against terror and drug trafficking. Russia is consolidating the border of Afghanistan with its move in Tajikistan. The mountainous terrain on the border of Afghanistan and Tajikistan makes the protection of borders a very difficult task. The same mountainous terrain continues through the porous border between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which creates an easy access for terrorists to move from Afghanistan to Kyrgyzstan and then to Uzbekistan or to Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China. The long border between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan cannot be well protected as well. These borders can easily be passed by drug-smugglers reaching Russia and then Europe. Indeed, this is the most active drug-trafficking route stretching to Europe.

Russia was concerned on the US role in Central Asia. US policy on Central Asia was mainly based on Brzezinski’s ideas on Eurasian geostrategy declared in his book “The Grand Chessboard” (1998), where he argued that Eurasia cannot remain under the domination of one power. Central Asia should be an open sphere of influence.<sup>13</sup> Russia, on the other hand, claims that the US is trying to build a unipolar world, while calling for multipolarity in

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<sup>10</sup> The author of this article lives since 2010 in Bishkek Kyrgyzstan. Information used in this article without citation is based on the author’s observations and communications.

<sup>11</sup> *Strategiya Ustoichibogo razvitiya Kyrgyzkoi Respubliki na period 2013-2017 gody*, (January 21, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> “Russian Army Base Deal with Tajikistan Key to Regional Security - Lawmaker”, *Ria Novosti*, October 7, 2013; retrieved from [http://en.ria.ru/military\\_news/20131007/183983310.html](http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20131007/183983310.html).

<sup>13</sup> Zbigniew, Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York: Basic Books, 1998.

Central Asia, which is the “near abroad” of Russia. Russia supports the formation of a bipolar or multipolar world, which requires restricting the US influence in Russia’s “near abroad”. Russia’s insistence on the withdrawal of the US troops from Kyrgyzstan was based upon these strategic theses. While realistically Russia benefitted from the US operation in Afghanistan and even opened space for American presence, Russia was against the long-term presence of the US in Central Asia.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from these strategic evaluations, the war on terror in Afghanistan was for the benefit of Russia. Afghanistan was functioning as a magnet pulling Islamic extremists from Central Asia and Russia to be isolated or even destroyed in Afghanistan. For example, since the beginning of the “Operation Enduring Freedom”, the leading cadres of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) moved to Afghanistan, joined Taliban and later Al-Qaida to learn armed fighting. They were stating that they would go back to the Fergana Valley to launch an attack on the Uzbek government. When Afghanistan was under Taliban control, IMU tried to enter Uzbekistan through Batken region of Kyrgyzstan between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The first attempt was made in 1999, and it was repeated in 2000. Both attempts confronted by armed resistance of the Kyrgyz army, and IMU had to retreat. Later, American operations forced them to move from North Afghanistan on the border of Tajikistan to Afghan-Pakistan border. In the following years the leading cadres of IMU were killed, while they were fighting on the side of Taliban or al-Qaeda.

After the ethnic clashes in South Kyrgyzstan of 2010, some Uzbeks left Kyrgyzstan to join Islamic extremist movements, and later comeback for revenge. Until now, it is estimated that they are busy with fighting in Afghanistan.

## **The Position of the US**

The US was for a long time physically detached from Central Asia. 9/11 attack and the US operation to Afghanistan opened the doors of Central Asia for the US presence. The US targets were controlling energy sources of Central Asia; restricting Russia’s influence in the region; and fighting the “war on terror”.<sup>15</sup> Only the final one was the declared and legitimate objective of the US. This objective was accepted by other countries, such as Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian republics, as the US was the only power to undertake the costly and dangerous military mission. This gave the US the opportunity to have a foothold in Central Asia rich with energy resources.

An undeclared but clear objective was that the US aimed to control the energy sources to maintain its position as a world power. It is often recited that whoever controls energy, controls the world; US goal to control hydrocarbon energy sources in Central Asia and West

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<sup>14</sup> Sergei Markenov, “Avoiding Zero-Sum Game in Central Asia”, *Russia Direct*, June 16, 2014, Retrieved from <http://www.russia-direct.org/content/avoiding-zero-sum-game-central-asia>.

<sup>15</sup> S.V. Kulkarani, “India’s Engagement with Central Asia: Exploring Future Directions”, *Annual International Studies Convention 2013*: 7; retrieved from [http://aisc-india.in/AISC2013\\_web/papers/papers\\_final/paper\\_137.pdf](http://aisc-india.in/AISC2013_web/papers/papers_final/paper_137.pdf).

Asia was a direct result of this formulation. Although the US was talking on opening Central Asia to a multitude of international actors, it operated against Russia's interests as it was seen in the example of creating alternative pipelines to Russia, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline connecting Azerbaijani oil and gas to Turkish port on the Mediterranean. This pipeline was later aimed to be connected to Turkmen and Kazakh oil and gas pipelines as well. This would end Russian monopoly on the transportation of Azerbaijani and Central Asian hydrocarbon sources, and also weaken Russia's political influence.

Restricting Russia's influence in its "near abroad", especially on the energy rich countries, was considered as the undeclared US target. Russia wanted the US to announce that it will really leave Central Asia after the declared and legitimate target of its presence is achieved. Toppling the Taliban government in Afghanistan was indeed achieved within a month after the US operation was initiated in October 2001. Another target, punishment of the Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, was achieved by killing him in an operation in May 2011. A month later, President Obama announced the withdrawal of troops. It was followed by a process of transferring the security control to Afghan forces in the summer of 2011 in Bamiyan. On June 18, 2013, last districts on the eastern border and Kandahar were transferred to Afghan Armed Forces.<sup>16</sup> The withdrawal will be completed by the end of 2014, after fighting the last battles against Taliban and Al-Qaeda, and leaving the ground to Afghan forces. The role of foreign troops was expected to be restricted by training Afghan forces. In June 2013, Afghan Armed Force was 185,000 soldiers strong, which is replacing 100,000 soldiers of ISAF.<sup>17</sup> There is also a trained Afghan police (Afghan National Police) with 157,000 personnel.<sup>18</sup>

After long insistence of the Russian and Chinese governments, and additionally Afghan government's decision not to extend the bilateral agreement with the US,<sup>19</sup> ISAF is leaving Afghanistan. Considering the strategic chess game between the US and Russia, now, Kremlin has got the victory but the question is what to do with it!

### **Afghanistan's Need for Multivector Policies after Withdrawal**

The withdrawal of the US will change the power game in Afghanistan. There is a potential of win-win in the cooperation of different countries in Afghanistan. The power struggle in the Greater Central Asia is generally evaluated within the zero-sum-game discourse of the "New Great Game" between the US and the United Kingdom with other NATO allies on the one side and Russia and China on the other side. Actually Russia and the US are the main players and others have minor significance. China is not a direct ally of Russia. It is considered as the balancing power by some Central Asian leaders; China's priority is expanding only

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<sup>16</sup> "Q&A: Foreign Forces in Afghanistan", *BBC*, June 18, 2013, retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11371138>.

<sup>17</sup> "Q&A: Foreign Forces in Afghanistan".

<sup>18</sup> Mirvais Khan and Amir Shah, "Another Female Police Officer Shot in Afghanistan", *Yahoo News*, September 15, 2013, retrieved from <http://news.yahoo.com/another-female-police-officer-shot-afghanistan-062545180.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Noorullah Shirzada, "How Many US Troops are still in Afghanistan", *CBS News*, January 9, 2014, retrieved from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-many-us-troops-are-still-in-afghanistan>.

economically in Central Asia and Afghanistan for the time being. China constructs transport infrastructure to export its commodities and pipelines to import oil and gas necessary for further economic growth.

The New Great Game is very clearly witnessed in Kyrgyzstan, and the limits of the American and Russian power is also seen obviously. Kyrgyzstan is considered by great powers as a relatively stable and small country, which is financially easy to deal. However, when the ethnic clashes in South Kyrgyzstan started in June 2010, none of these international actors were in a position to intervene and stop fighting sides. In spite of the invitation of the Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbayeva, and despite of the fact that this was a golden opportunity for any actor to increase its influence, no step was taken. The calculated disadvantages were more than the advantages. Interference would inevitably trigger firing arms, which would create enmity towards the intervener.

After the events in South Kyrgyzstan, beginning with the second half of 2010, it was witnessed, how a multivector foreign policy came into effect in Kyrgyzstan. Many countries, including China, Turkey, South Korea, Japan etc., took a much more active role in Kyrgyzstan, incomparable to their previous position. This change was of course made possible by Russia and US, because it was more feasible and realistic to build the stability in Kyrgyzstan by a multitude of international actors. This policy was also welcomed by Kyrgyzstan, because it would give them more flexibility and more autonomy.<sup>20</sup> Cooperation of different countries created a win-win situation.

The bulk of problems in Afghanistan are far more complex than in Kyrgyzstan. Even before the Soviet occupation, Afghanistan was a poor country on its way to modernization. The search for modernization, however, found resistance in rural areas from communities with traditional believes. The efforts of King Amanullah in 1920s collapsed because of traditional resistance it triggered. During the Cold War, Afghanistan again sought to make reforms for modernization. A balanced foreign policy between the US and the USSR helped Afghanistan to invest in dams, irrigation, electricity infrastructure and education.<sup>21</sup>

However, the radical social change attempt of the communist PDPA in 1978 was confronted again with a similar opposition. Afghanistan slipped from a balanced policy between superpowers to the battleground of superpowers, following the Soviet intervention in 1979, and the American support for Islamic extremists. After the end of the Cold War, Afghanistan became again the battleground of the new American doctrine on the global threat; this time it was against Islamic extremism. Since late 1970s, wars and civil disorder devastated the country increasing the toll and vitality of the problem to be solved.

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<sup>20</sup> Y. Emre Gürbüz, "Kyrgyzstan: in Search for Stability", *Insight Turkey*, Fall 2013: 191-205.

<sup>21</sup> For alternative views of Afghanistan before 1979 see Elizabeth Bumiller, "Remembering Afghanistan's Golden Age", *New York Times*, October 17, 2009, retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/18/weekinreview/18bumiller.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/18/weekinreview/18bumiller.html?_r=0); and Mohammad Qayoumi, *Foreign Policy*, May 27, 2010, retrieved from [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/27/once\\_upon\\_a\\_time\\_in\\_afghanistan](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/27/once_upon_a_time_in_afghanistan).

Today, the infrastructure for development, the investment in mines, hydrocarbon resources, agriculture and education are not better than they were 35 years ago. Afghanistan also lacks a functioning government with an institutionalized, well-structured and clean political apparatus and a bureaucracy reaching the rural areas. Afghanistan strongly needs financial sources and a functioning state apparatus, for investing in infrastructure and production, but they have neither capital nor income to invest. The solution will come through Afghan-led attempts, but the complexity of the problem requires the support a multitude of international actors.

The priority is in the central government's need of military support, which was sustained by the US. Even under the US support, the Afghan government was not in a position to implement a sustainable development plan. US presence was not able to solve the problems, but it could only contain them for some time. The retreat of the US will create a power vacuum in Afghanistan, and the situation will most probably get worse.

### **The Possible Results of a Triumph of Extremism in Afghanistan**

It is highly expectable that decentralization of power will continue bringing instability to Afghanistan, which will lead to the growth of extremism. The most significant problem, which can spiral to the whole region, is terror. It can very easily turn to a safe haven for terrorists, which was the pretext of the US intervention and the support for the US intervention by all governments in the region, including Iran, Russia and China.

A possible seizure of the Afghan government by extremists will most probably result in continuous attempts to expand. Not only because of Jihadist goals on creating a Caliphate in Central Asia but also because Afghanistan has limited resources, and it is very hard for any state to survive on minimal resources and with no access to the world.

The first regions to be affected by a regime change in Afghanistan will be Central Asia and Pakistan. In Central Asia the success of extremism seems to be less possible in the immediate future. Extremism seems to have reached its peak point in Central Asian republics for now. If extremism will grow in Central Asia, extremist groups will probably remain localized in the Fergana Valley, until a radical shift occurs.

Even if extremism cannot triumph in Central Asia under given conditions, the terrorist acts will definitely give great harm to Central Asian republics. In the last decade, the extremists had weak influence in Central Asia, and they were rather moving to Afghanistan and recently to Syria to join the war. Illegal border crossings from Tajikistan were rarely reported, but two recent events on Chinese borders indicate another potential of threat. In January 2014, 11 Uighurs from China were killed in Kyrgyzstan near the border after clashes.<sup>22</sup> It was announced that they were Islamic Uighur separatists in search for arms. It is estimated that

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<sup>22</sup> "Criminals near the Kyrgyz- Chinese border were Uighur separatists", *Kabar*, January 24, 2014, retrieved from <http://kabar.kg/eng/law-and-order/full/8970>.



Uighur separatists will continue their search for arms. Afghanistan and Uighur region are not far away and mountainous terrain will help mujahedeen to ally with Uighur separatists.

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are increasing security measures to confront the threat spilling over from Afghanistan. Uzbekistan revised its laws, and President Karimov “warned citizens who have left the country to join Islamic extremist groups and train at terrorist camps that if they return home they will go to prison”. The threat is real. Uzbek mujahedeen have turned to experienced fighters in Afghanistan, and they are known as experts of making explosives in Afghanistan. There is increasing activity is being reported in North Afghanistan, and the number of Uzbek mujahideen in war-torn areas is not low. In January 2014, 33 Uzbeks died in a single air strike of Pakistani forces in Pakistani tribal areas.<sup>23</sup>

Kyrgyzstan also announced its concern that “border conflicts have increased. There are external challenges and threats: terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking. But the main challenge for Kyrgyzstan today is the Afghan factor.” As a precaution the borders are jointly patrolled with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan construct new border posts.<sup>25</sup> Even if the return of the mujahedeen will not bring a regime change in Central Asian republics, it will still create some harm.

Pakistan seems to be closer to be deeply affected by changes in Afghanistan. Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi from Pakistan states that “the tide of militancy that kept Afghanistan on the boil all these years is now flowing in reverse, into Pakistan. A resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan would accentuate this situation, and could create grave problems here for both the government and the military.”<sup>26</sup>

Taliban was supported by Pakistan, but Taliban is only one of the political groups in Pakistan among other Islamist and political groups. The rise of Jihadist groups to power in Afghanistan will alter the power struggle in Pakistan, which will have much stronger effects in the region also spreading to India. Afghanistan has limited potential to harm other countries, but Pakistan is a powder keg – not only regionally but also globally with its diaspora.

Another problem is drug-trafficking, which is the only source of income for many Afghans. Hypothetically, growth of opium can be eradicated immediately in areas under government control by employing modern technology, but its immediate extermination will only create more problems impossible to be solved. The solution of this problem only by force will create more poverty, instability and extremism, unless alternative sources of income will be created for the people of Afghanistan. So far, wheat and cotton growth is being supported, but cotton is no match for the cheaper Pakistani cotton and they are never as profitable as opium.

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<sup>23</sup> Zamira Eshenova, “Karimov Prepares for Terrorists”, *Radio Free Europe*, January 24, 2014, retrieved from <http://www.rferl.org/content/uzbekistan-imu-terrorism/25241539.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Shavkat Turgayev, “Raiymberdi Duishenbiyev: The main challenge for Kyrgyzstan at the state border today is the Afghan factor”, *24.kg News Agency*, September 23, 2014, retrieved from <http://eng.24.kg/cis/2013/09/23/28056.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Kaliya Duishebayeva, “Five frontier posts to be constructed on Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border”, *24.kg News Agency*, June 19, 2013, retrieved from <http://eng.24.kg/community/2013/06/19/27334.html>.

<sup>26</sup> M Ilyas Khan, “Why Pakistan Fears Foreign Pullout from Afghanistan”, *BBC*, retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25034112>.

Putting an end to opium cultivation is not only a consequence of international anti-drug policies, but it is also for the benefit of creating a stable government in Kabul and beyond. Drug-trafficking feeds bribery and corruption within the state, and it also increases the power of local groups by creating a source of revenue and a clientelist relationship outside of the state control. Drug-trafficking is not only a source behind the decentralization of the state, but it also feeds the extremist propaganda against corruption. To put it briefly: Illegal money increases corruption, which leads to a non-functioning state apparatus, injustice and decentralization, which in turn support the breeding ground of extremism. The drug-trafficking is also one of the fundamental sources of bribery and corruption in Central Asian republics. Corruption and drug use is again one of the main anti-propaganda themes of Islamists in Central Asia.

### **Concluding Remarks on a Possible Solution**

The complex situation in Afghanistan can be turned to an opportunity for creating wider cooperation between regional countries. The failure in Afghanistan is to the disadvantage of all states in the region: The secular Central Asian republics' stability will be shaken by terrorist attacks of extremists. China's problem with separatists will be further enhanced. Russia will try to fight extremism in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and will be affected more by terrorist actions in its cities. Iran will be involved by the rise of anti-Shia extremism and Sunni Balochs, who are related to Baloch in Pakistan, might also be influenced by separatist ideas. The power struggle in Pakistan will shift in favour of the extremists, which will also affect India. The dangers thread all, and the solution can only be achieved by participation of all states in the region.

As mentioned above, in Kyrgyzstan the severity of problems softened the power struggle of great powers opening space to third countries. The problems in Afghanistan are more complex, and they require a wider and deeper cooperation. Realistically only a multitude of international actors can handle the severe problems Afghanistan faces, and it is an obligation for all countries in the region to cooperate. The best scenario would be the creation of stronger cooperation in Asia in order to solve this complex problem.

Regional cooperation will not only minimize the threat but it will help to the realization of the New Silk Road for regional economic connectivity and intraregional trade with roads, media and internet,<sup>27</sup> cultural and scientific exchange, and network for the transportation of goods, oil, gas and electricity. The New Silk Road is proposed by the former US Minister of Foreign Affairs Hillary Clinton for a solution to the Afghan problem, and it lost its appeal with the US withdrawal. A possible election of Mrs. Clinton as the new US President in 2016 can revive this policy, but the problem requires immediate solutions and neither US support nor her comeback are not on the table for now. The project should be revived by all related countries.

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<sup>27</sup> Stephen Kaufman, "'New Silk Road' Vision Offers Afghanistan a Brighter Future", *Iipdigital*, United States of America Embassy, October 28, 2013, retrieved from <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2013/10/20131028285286.html#axzz2rXGYhKvG>.

Another project proposed to create economic revenues for Afghanistan and to establish regional cooperation is Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project. Similar to Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project is also against Russia's monopoly on oil and gas. When the stability of Afghanistan was achieved under the strong rule of Taliban, US signed agreements to implement TAPI, but Osama bin Laden led attacks to American targets and Taliban support for bin Laden ended this deal. Today this project is still also far from being implemented. If the continuing enmity between Pakistan and India makes this project hard to realize, the security question in Afghanistan makes it impossible to find financial support.

The construction of a transit road connecting Central Asia to Pakistan and India through Afghanistan and putting Afghanistan also on the east-west route by the revival of the Silk Road also faces same problems with TAPI. Additionally geographical obstacles of the mountainous terrain increase the economic costs of this project.

Another project about turning Afghanistan to a transit country is the CASA-1000 (Central Asia, South Asia) project, which will supply Pakistan with Kyrgyz and Tajik electricity through Afghanistan. It is expected to increase Kyrgyz and Tajik revenues by power export and to end electricity shortages in Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> The project is promising, but it is confronted by the same problems as TAPI and the New Silk Road.

The main problem is how Afghan security and stability can be achieved? Militarily neither Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus and Armenia, nor Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are in a position to replace ISAF, NATO (or US) yet. They need to be strengthened by accepting more countries and increasing coordination. Indian Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh's acknowledgement during the SCO Heads of Government meeting in Tashkent on November 29, 2013, that "India would like to see all countries under SCO umbrella vanquish terrorism from their territories"<sup>29</sup> is encouraging. This was not only a call for the member states (SCO) but also for states with observer status, i.e. India, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Mongolia.

Afghanistan's national military is being trained and maintained by some countries, which needs to be preserved for an Afghan-led security take over. Although foreign assistance is obligatory, it is worth to emphasize that the new period should be Afghan-led, because US presence has increased enmity towards foreign soldiers, and foreign intervention will create suspicion and confront some resistance.

Military assistance is obligatory but it is not enough. It is clear that Afghanistan's economy should be improved, which can be achieved by constructing of transportation infrastructure connecting Central Asia and South Asia. The rich and unexploited mines of Afghanistan are another crucial source of revenues, which are vital for the reconstruction of a stable

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<sup>28</sup> CASA-1000 official Website on <http://www.casa-1000.org/index.php>.

<sup>29</sup> "India Pitches for Greater Role in Afghanistan", *IRNA*, November 30, 2013, retrieved from [http://www.irna.ir/en/News/80927957/Politic/India\\_pitches\\_for\\_greater\\_role\\_of\\_SCO\\_in\\_Afghanistan](http://www.irna.ir/en/News/80927957/Politic/India_pitches_for_greater_role_of_SCO_in_Afghanistan).

government in Afghanistan. Win-win strategies should be constructed with all possible participating countries joining the process in 2014.

However, deeply rooted tensions between the Asian states hinder the implementation of joint international projects. The problem between India and Pakistan is far from being solved. China is in SCO with Russia and Central Asian republics, their long lasting border dispute with India is being solved recently; they have good relations and mutual economic agreements with the US, but still China is considered as a strong rival and a threat by all of them. Although common concerns might bring them together, it is more possible that competition will create new alliances. Unexpected alliances can occur between the US, Russia, China, India, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Central Asian republics.

It is clear that the cooperation is for the benefit of all countries in the region and it is sine qua non for success. Although it is hard to expect a wide regional cooperation, it is also true that only severe problems, such as natural catastrophes, can create necessary conditions to change hostile foreign policies and help forming new foreign policies. Afghanistan is a man-made catastrophe, and it has to be solved by widest possible international cooperation. Despite the fact that it seems very hard to establish wide alliances against the common threat, the danger of the worst scenario can become the leverage to make it happen. This is indeed an obligation for all regional actors.

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