

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

**Europe:
Stakeholder
Perceptions &
Expectations On
Afghanistan &
Pakistan
Views from
Brussels,
Madrid & Oslo**

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EUROPE: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS & EXPECTATIONS ON AFGHANISTAN & PAKISTAN VIEWS FROM BRUSSELS, MADRID & OSLO

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As part of the final year's work programme for the CIDOB policy research project Sources of Tension in Afghanistan & Pakistan: A Regional Perspective, a series of meetings with European stakeholders in Brussels and Madrid were held in May and June 2016, to share the initial findings from focus group discussions and interviews in Kabul and Islamabad in the first quarter of the year; and to obtain feedback and reactions from participants. Outputs from the whole series of meetings were then taken to the project's funders and other Norway based stakeholders, to hand over to policymakers going forward, in a meeting on June 23 2016, in Oslo. The summary outputs from each set of meetings are presented below.

1. BRUSSELS

A meeting was held in Brussels by the project team¹, on May 19 2016, co-hosted by CIDOB and the European Institute for Peace, involving stakeholders from the European Union, the Belgian government, and civil society think tanks.

Afghanistan

Discussion took place on the regional initiatives including the Heart of Asia and the regional projects such as the TAPI and CASA 1000. It was noted that there is considerable enthusiasm for the latter in Tajikistan, and a certain level of confidence that "*security (for the initiative) will not be a problem*". However it was pointed out that there are none the less practical implications for ensuring security, and the possibly misplaced confidence that may impede the realisation of this and other similar projects. For example, the practical implementation arrangements for the TAPI are reportedly still vague.

None the less, such initiatives do provide opportunities for dialogue and are part of confidence-building measures that could lead to tangible results, in the view of one observer, even if the time frame is longer than anticipated, and the benefits smaller. However, should there be deeply-held expectations of groundbreaking interventions that are not seen to deliver, it was felt that there could be a negative reaction against regional cooperation. Regarding regional fora, even though

1. Dr. Emma Hooper, Project Director, Gabriel Reyes Legüen and Malaiz Daud, Project Team Members; Jordi Bacaria, Director CIDOB.

Pakistan is placing hopes in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as a mechanism for regional cooperation, the region itself is realigning and has a different composition than in the past. This could, as one observer commented, result in an initiative like the CASA 1000 (which realigns South and Central Asian countries for institutional administrative purposes, and aims for an economic integration that will bring countries together) having a positive role to play. The economic links and large projects involving Afghanistan and Pakistan can have a positive impact, and are important too as a forum for other discussions, including on security, underpinned by economic logic. The importance of private sector initiatives was emphasised, which are unlikely to be forthcoming until the security situation in the country improves. It was considered likely that Pakistan will reap more benefits – in the first instance – than will Afghanistan, despite the latter being at the geographic centre of the region. Until the security situation is resolved, this imbalance was considered likely to remain. None the less, a participant pointed out that since the Taliban have always benefitted from the transit trade through levying taxes in exchange for holding off attacks on convoys, a similar situation may occur in relation to the TAPI. It was noted that ironically the black economy (including drugs) is a factor of stability.

Geographic and strategic location were considered to be at the core of the initiative, and thus represent a missed opportunity for Afghanistan. Iran and Central Asia have both resources and energy to engage, whereas Afghanistan and Pakistan are both still striving for the realisation of their economic potential, which was considered unlikely to be fulfilled until the security situation has been resolved. One additional issue was considered to be critical in terms of achieving self-sufficiency in the energy sector, was that of getting energy supplied at a realistic price.

Water was identified as an important issue, and one participant considered that pressure needed to be put on Pakistan to resolve the situation. Issues in the latter country over dams, intra-provincial disputes and transmission issues, in addition to the Water and Power Management Authority (WAPDA) management and circular debt issues, all would require resolution.

Participants expressed interest in the possibilities for a peace settlement with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Discussion took place around the governance issues that had been raised by stakeholders in the region. Interest also centred around the fact that in Afghanistan, security (including the reported rise of Da'esh in the country) was not perceived by stakeholders to be all that important; that it was local and national politics, and the country's economic survival that preoccupied them most. "*Getting the politics right*" was an over-riding stakeholder preoccupation in-country, as was concern with constitutionality and making the current system work. A major governance problem is that because the government does not deliver, other (non state) actors do, thus filling the vacuum and undercutting government efforts. Although corruption was a concern, there was little consensus on what that actually means in the Afghan context. Questions were raised as to the trust deficit between citizens and government, but it was concluded that the issue of corruption is less of a citizen-government issue, than a national-international governments issue (as perceived from within Afghanistan).

In terms of expectations from the National Unity Government, participants yet again singled out regional economic cooperation as a factor for creation of stability; the creation of as well as an enabling environment for economic activity; and noted insisted on the idea that the engagement of the private sector in Afghanistan would constitute a major confidence-building measure for investors, as well as people-to-people continuity. One participant noted that the establishment of a legislative environment that focuses on enforcement would substitute for the default option of recourse to the Taliban in order to obtain swift access to justice. The lack of this enabling environment was seen as hindering both development and cooperation. The security-development nexus was discussed, and the gap between expectations and delivery was commented on. In this regard, the international community's role in "dictating what the Afghan government should prioritise" was noted.

Three main expectations were put forward:

- i. Internal reconciliation and peace building with the Taliban**, and the need to talk from a position of strength, given that they are not going away any time soon. The need to talk from a position of strength as proposed by former President Karzai and to a lesser extent also by the NUG, was deemed to be very difficult. The consolidation of a political process and solution was considered to be undoubtedly problematic, but was seen as necessary, and as being the only way in which Afghanistan could progress on other issues. The concept of a divided Afghanistan was roundly rejected by participants.
- ii. Governance and the restoration of people's trust** in the government, so that people could live normal lives, sending their children to school, and having access to basic needs including economic opportunity. The survival of the NUG and the completion of its term of office were also singled out as important in that regard. Genuine electoral reform was identified as a priority.
- iii. Establishment of a perspective for the future via economic growth** -which was seen as critical in addressing the migration issue, among others.

The question was posed to participants about the nature and volume of support from Europe to Afghanistan in the coming ten years of the Decade of Transformation. Participants noted the importance of two upcoming conferences in this regard: the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016 and the Brussels Conference in October 2016. It was considered that there will be no disengagement from Afghanistan, and in terms of level of assistance, the aim would likely be to remain at or near current (undefined) levels of financial assistance. None the less, some technical difficulties were pointed out as remaining, "*some real, some just excuses*", including one-year time frames for budgets and the holding (or not) of the elections being two issues identified. Whilst it was acknowledged that there is the beginning of a decline in aid to Afghanistan, it was considered to be due to Europe's attention being focused elsewhere (Syria, Ukraine, Turkey) rather than for other reasons. The sub-issue of exactly how to provide development aid was acknowledged, though it was pointed out that there is now perhaps increased confidence in the Afghan government as a channel

for delivery. Modalities were suggested such as an increase in-budget support and working more with civil society. The bottom line was considered to be that, regardless, the EU has a political and financial commitment to keeping assistance to Afghanistan at the same level, at least till 2020.

Pakistan

In relation to Pakistan, the question was posed by stakeholders as to what extent the latter was an actor that had expectations from the regional powers versus being able to promote peace in Afghanistan, itself. The project team noted that resolving the energy and water crises remain key issues in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, although water appears to be regarded by Afghanistan as a factor for potential leverage over both Iran and Pakistan rather than a building block for improved relations. The issue of radicalisation via the educational system was raised; the credibility of the Tehrik Insaaf party led by Imran Khan and the likelihood of a change of political context in the coming future, in the context of the exposure to globalisation being experienced in particular by Pakistani youth was discussed. The example of China's aspiring middle class, together with changes in land inheritance laws that are aimed at dismantling feudal patrimonies was also raised by stakeholders in relation to the Pakistan context.

Stakeholders noted that the EU is trying to go beyond a trade-centred relationship with Pakistan, despite trade being at the centre of current relationships none the less. The Pakistan National Action Plan is considered to be "aligned" with what the EU would like to see in the country, though the problem of lack of adequate implementation was noted. From the Belgian perspective (whose foreign policy is embedded within that of the EU), Pakistan is seen as an important country which despite being full of contradictions, is too large and too critical not to deal with. Its resilience was noted, with both the positives and the negatives of the attribute. It was pointed out that the EU has a comprehensive set of instruments in place with Pakistan (the largest number of any South Asian country). It was noted that there are a number of positive factors about Pakistan, in terms of structures for dialogue, and an active ongoing dialogue in itself. Europe remains "*heavily engaged*" in Pakistan, despite a limited spectrum of perceived interests on the part of Pakistan itself – basically centred on the GSP+.² In that regard, a participant noted that "*Pakistan is not in fact a poor country*", despite its unequal income distribution.

It was noted that Pakistan's NAP is difficult to implement, and it has several points with which there is European disagreement. Difficulties arise when Pakistan's priorities do not align with those of the EU processes – the case of the memorandum lifting the ban on the death penalty was singled out as a point of friction. It was also suggested that "*Europe and the US need more modesty*" when dealing both with Afghanistan and with Pakistan (and that their traditions, history and social dynamics should be taken more into consideration); and that increasing radicalisation in the latter does not necessarily mean that people are all radical, and in the view of one participant "*radicalism*

2. See Annex 2 for a summary of EU instruments in place on Pakistan

will not destroy Pakistan". It was observed that the military have a vested interest in sustaining the country, and would be unlikely to tolerate a radical takeover.³ The international community should assist Pakistan improve its economy, which was seen as the backbone of the country's stability. Another two areas of assistance would be in improving the functioning of democracy, and there is a need to determine how to assist this most constructively;⁴ and provision of assistance on dealing with the energy crisis. Engagement with civil society was seen as key, and in particular, engagement with the private sector. In the education sector, it was noted that a counter-weight needs to be provided to the influence of the *madrassas* and a solution to this could be via the provision of more technical schools linked to the needs of the market economy.

The GSP+ instrument is considered important for Pakistan, including as a tool for engagement with the country beyond the economy and trade. The Five Year Engagement Plan⁵ was an attempt by the EU to rationalise the 2008 transition to democracy in the country, and requests for new types of assistance. The EU's rationale was to focus on 5-6 "new" areas going forwards. The trade sector has high visibility as a policy issue, yet paradoxically, trade development assistance was seen as "*largely irrelevant from the Pakistan point of view*" as one observer put it. Areas of engagement on new issues include substantial talks on counter-terrorism (as yet with few outcomes); non-proliferation and disarmament; and migration, in the context of the re-admission agreement. These, among others, represent what was termed "*substantial issues and problems*", with some stakeholders expressing optimism on the issue and others not. Overall, it was pointed out that the potential for broader engagement with Europe is very much there. One area that remains unaddressed, but "*should be*" is that of taxation, according to a participant.

Pakistan's influence in the European Parliament was commented on, with participants noting that (presumably those with large numbers of Pakistan-origin constituents) MEPs work hard to defend Pakistan's interests, and can have a strong influence when Pakistan is on the agenda of e.g. the GSP+.

As regards the regional powers, Pakistan's current closeness to China was regarded as being strategically aimed at meeting short-term infrastructure interests, and not as a long-term replacement of Western alliances. The EU's foreign policy agenda on Pakistan could be read as aiming at influencing domestic policy, since Europe wants to help Pakistan to develop into a fully-functioning democracy and a market economy. Should Pakistan reject the concept of a secular society,⁶ the EU risks being seen as pushy. Overall, there is a sense of a tendency towards moving back to the past in the EU's engagement with Pakistan within a regional context, encompassing Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Iran. At present, Pakistan was seen as "a solitary country" as one interlocutor put it, with troubled relations with all its neighbours, and with relations with Saudi Arabia no longer what they were. There was a short discussion about whether or not Pakistan is "hostile" to the Arab world, and the somewhat "schizophrenic" attitudes towards India were commented on.

3. This contrasts with the view expressed in March 2016 discussions in Islamabad, and in previous visits to the country in 2014 and earlier, about radical elements existing within the military especially in relation to Sunni-Shi'a sectarian tensions.

4. Again, also noted by interlocutors in Pakistan in March 2016.

5. See Annex 2.

6. See focus group discussion comments on secularism in Pakistan, in the STAP RP report of discussions with stakeholders in Islamabad in March 2016.

2. MADRID

A second consultation in this series similar to that in Brussels, was held in Madrid on June 3 2016, co-hosted by CIDOB and the Toledo International Center for Peace (CITpax), with participation by the Government of Spain and civil society stakeholders, to share findings from field visits and seek feedback and reactions from participants. The event took place under the Chatham House Rule.

Afghanistan

It was considered to be likely that the Afghanistan elections due to be held in October 2016 would be postponed at least till the end of the year, and that there were EU concerns, if this should be the case, on the impact on the upcoming Brussels conference on Afghanistan scheduled for that month. It was noted that this and the upcoming Warsaw meeting in July 2016 meant that the NUG would probably continue working on the pending issues and would likely work hard to to produce results ahead of the scheduled international summits (action taken on the recent appointment of Masoom Stanekzai as the head of the the National Directorate of Security (NDS) was cited as a positive example). The increasing – organised - political opposition to the NUG was considered a matter of concern although messages to the former as to the need to pressure the latter only through the existing constitutional framework was conveyed but the international community. Overall, the survival of the NUG was considered a priority at least in the short term as it was also acknowledged that President Ghani might be facing increasing problems and pressures by the end of the year. Overall, it was seen as essential that NATO and the West continue their support of the NUG, with a worst-case scenario for the international community being its sudden fall. In this regard, the appointment of a new Defence Minister from a technical background, and a new Director of the NDS were felt to be good signals of a reprieve for the NUG, which is perceived to be “the only game in town” as things stand. The recent agreement between the NUG and Gulbaddin Hekmatyar was seen as giving the government a breathing-space in a context where the continuation of the conflict has proved to be economically and politically very expensive.

Participants noted that Afghanistan has not completely closed the door on its relations with Pakistan, despite the Kabul bombing in mid-April, and despite the political cost to President Ghani himself. There seems to be a pragmatic recognition that anti-Pakistan rhetoric should not go too far. Discussion took place around Afghanistan’s and Pakistan’s mutual antipathy and fundamental misunderstanding on their respective motives behind their at times prickly bilateral relations. The disconnect between the elites and the broader population in Afghanistan with the “Afghan reality” was raised, with the idea being put forward that if policies were put in place that were closer to the needs and aspirations of the mass of the country’s inhabitants, this gap would begin to be addressed. It was pointed out that the disconnect is relative, and location-dependent, but that there is certainly a disconnect overall with the (super)imposed needs-based approach advocated by the West. It was suggested that this phenomenon is the biggest problem faced by the National Unity Government, and without resolving it, the latter will not survive. One

participant suggested that the “security card” was frequently played as a default response for not taking forward interventions such as the CASA 1000 that could potentially change the region economically.

In that regard, in the regional context, the CASA 1000 was considered by a participant to potentially be a source of conflict with Uzbekistan, due to Russia’s interests - (the latter is seen as pushing the narrative on a Daesh presence in Afghanistan to further its own interests). The “mythology” around the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was suggested as being a convenient justification for many concrete actions and statements by concerned stakeholders, including Russia’s talking to - and even supporting - the Taliban, to fend off certain non-state actors in the region (which was pointed out by one participant as having been confirmed). Russia clearly views Daesh as the common enemy. Russia’s important role in relation to energy sources was also pointed out. It was noted that there is considerable negativity towards Pakistan in Central Asian perceptions, hence a shift by the latter towards Iran. One participant suggested that Pakistan preoccupies the Central Asian countries far more than does Afghanistan.

Overall, the regional powers were seen as “*all betting on different horses*”, with Russia and Iran talking to the Taliban, and with the role of the weaker regional powers up for grabs. Some appear to be even supporting the dissolution of Afghanistan into separate entities, but within Afghanistan, this is absolutely not on the table, with a strong support for maintaining territorial integrity. Given these scenarios, continued support for the NUG was seen as essential, and that it is possible this may go in the direction of also pressuring Iran and Russia not to straddle all sides. The danger of exporting Western categories of analysis on Afghanistan were pointed out by one participant, because these are not always relevant or appropriate, such as the imposition of western intellectual categorisations of problems. Afghanistan was described in this regard “*as a sponge that is constantly both taking in and letting out water*”. The distortions incorporated by the West on the Afghan reality were commented on, and the question was raised as to whether this would be likely to continue, since a point could hypothetically be reached in which elements come to power in Afghanistan that are not at all favourable to unity, let alone the interests of the West. This could have grave consequences.

The lesson has been learned from the migration crisis in Europe – in relation to Afghanistan at least – that Europe is a factor of attraction from those living in a country in crisis. It will therefore be very important for the EU to help address the prevailing conditions of insecurity in Afghanistan, (including from Europe’s migration perspectives). The use of migrants as political bargaining chips was noted, including in the context of the Afghan government and the EU potentially using this in Brussels in October.

The decentralisation issue was brought up by some participants and seen as key, both as a structural issue in relation to electoral fraud in the past, and in relation to representation by the provinces in government. If implemented well, this could provide a form of local involvement in government and could help in fighting the current disaffection of the population vis à vis a central government which is seen as not

catering for its citizens needs. (The STAP RP papers on decentralisation and power structures were noted in this regard.) Reconciling this with prevailing power structures and the patronage system being used by the President to shore up the NUG were noted, as was the potentially positive role of local mayors in this regard, depending on what basis they were appointed. Political decentralisation also implies economic decentralisation, and hence both money and corruption play an important role in any future solution. It should be the international community's aim at all costs, to avoid a Somalia-like scenario of client statelets and institutional disintegration, which could inadvertently occur as a result of ill-thought-through support for decentralisation. A participant commented that the international community should stop seeking perfectionist solutions, under which "*the best is the enemy of the good*".

The sense was expressed that rhetoric expressed by Pakistan over the recent killing of Mullah Mansoor on Pakistani soil in a drone attack, which resulted in a radical discourse delivered by the Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani, stopped short of going too far, deliberately to avoid overstepping the mark on Afghan-Pakistan relations - similarly, as was the deliberately muted response on the part of Pakistan which could have come across far more strongly on the apparent infringement of Pakistani territorial sovereignty by the US in the Balochistan targeted killing. The President's radical speeches emanating from Afghanistan were seen as benefitting the NUG domestically, but were tempered by realism, therefore, on the need not to alienate Pakistan too far. The jury is still out on how the new Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada will affect the former's stance on Afghanistan. The importance of having strong (Taliban) leaders with whom to negotiate was noted, due to the risk of the Taliban's fragmentation benefitting Daesh.

The overall conclusion on the NUG was that it was to no one's advantage to push the issue of the elections in the upcoming Warsaw and Brussels meetings, and it was not pushed in the Anti-Corruption Summit held in London in May 2016, given that substantial pledges will be required from the international community, to sustain Afghanistan over the next five years. In this regard, it was considered very unlikely that NATO would pull out entirely from the country, and that the international community is still behind Afghanistan. "*The fall of Afghanistan would be a chaos that nobody wants*", as one participant put it. The corruption issue however is likely to be insisted upon in Brussels in October, which leaves the NUG six months to present a positive face. The main challenge for the international community now is to put pressure on the NUG to implement some much-needed reforms, but not to the point of putting President Ghani's administration on the brink of collapse. This also calls for a certain restraint on the part of the international community in the management of the discourse (positive and negative messages regarding the situation of the country).

Pakistan

There was a discussion of India-Pakistan relations, both per se and in relation to Afghanistan. A possible game changer was noted in recent

India-US rapprochement, together with the involvement of the former in Afghanistan in security (training the military) and its representation in-country (four consulates country-wide). The former was noted as an issue for the Pakistan military who, given the nature of Indo-Pakistan relations, were not comfortable either with India's training of Afghan soldiers nor with New Delhi's increasing presence in the neighbouring country. What was seen as Indian activity on Pakistan's soil (in FATA and Balochistan) was commented upon, as was Pakistan's reported involvement in terrorist activity in India. The number of Indian consulates in Afghanistan is viewed with suspicion by Pakistan, as are its commercial interests in the country. These factors, together with strong anti-Pakistan feeling in Afghanistan, result in a complex chemistry of confluence in different sources of tension.

The view was expressed that there is a need for a certain pragmatism over India on the part of Pakistan, though it was also noted that it was essential for the latter's economic future to be independent from that of India. An improved economy was seen as potentially de-fusing some of the mutually hostile attitudes. It was further noted that younger members of the military elite in Pakistan were considered likely to be more realistic on dealing constructively with India and open to the need for more balanced relations. The need to "deal constructively with" India, with China as a key involved actor for both it and for Pakistan, yet also for Pakistan to balance its relations with the US. These factors were regarded as creating an opportunity going forward.

In relation to Pakistan's domestic problems, it was noted that ethnic and sectarian tensions, splits between income groups and growing polarising social fissures across the country pose considerable challenges for the government and the country as a whole. The socio-economic fracture was regarded as the most disturbing and the most dynamic of these. There was discussion around the polarisation being experienced within the country over radicalisation and secularism, youth disaffection from the prevailing political and socio economic context, and the possibility of the latter leading to a rupture of the social contract with the government. The lack of any positive dynamic on these at the present (and in the past 20 years) in Pakistan was remarked upon. The nexus between social cohesion, the interests of the elites and the legitimacy of the army in the face of external threats was commented upon.

On the positive side, migration out of Pakistan was seen as having brought benefits to Europe including indirectly via the transmission of remittances and values back to Pakistan. For Spain, the EU Readmission Agreement (EURA) is an important discourse, and it was noted that a recent Pakistani delegation visiting Spain pointed out that the Agreement is not functioning well, and that Pakistan would like to see a better dynamic, improved functioning and more respect of the fundamental rights of Pakistani immigrants and refugees.

An improvement in the economy was regarded as a potential tool for advancing a positive dynamic and healing the prevailing issues. The GSP+ , exports and increased export activity from Pakistan were seen as important elements in creating employment, including among youth, though the current mismatch between educational qualifications and employability were pointed out.

Pakistan's human rights record was noted as being poor, but that the member states of the EU are taking a pragmatic view that youth, employment and commerce are more conducive to a positive engagement on rights issues, rather than castigations – albeit, not unconditionally. The change in the discourse on human rights in Pakistan for the worse since early 2015 (when the Peshawar school attack occurred) was noted, including the re-imposition of the death penalty. It was observed that there is a tendency now however in the language of Pakistani politicians to express a desire to fight radicalization as opposed to just focusing on counterterrorism (corroborated in the STAP RP focus group discussions in Islamabad in March 2016). But some interlocutors wondered whether this was a tangible reality or just a political discourse. Human rights issues in Pakistan are “*taken very seriously by Spain*” (especially but not only the heavy application of the death penalty) and the deterioration of these including for minorities, was noted, with the topic continuing to be put seriously on the table going forward.

The CPEC and its viability was discussed, in the context of Pakistan seeing it as a game changer for the country's economy and the fundamental economic axes for the future of the region, but with questions on how that might play out in relation to existing fissures. The involvement of western actors in the development of the CPEC might in that sense have an effect – although as yet it is not clear whether this will be positive or negative - on the existing and future dynamics. It was also noted that there are important questions on why the corridor will be routed via certain parts of the country, which would likely exacerbate inter-provincial inequality and ethnic tensions in some provinces. It will be important that Balochistan is not left even more isolated and excluded as a result of CPEC, including because of the ethnic tensions around the nationalist struggle there. The separatist dynamic is an important one, and the imposition of China's presence on Balochistan is likely to have important implications. If the CPEC should turn out to benefit China more than Pakistan, there is a possibility of internal fissures increasing across the latter. In terms of CPEC's economic impact, the question arises of who pays what, and for whose benefit (again, something raised by discussants to the project team in Islamabad in March 2016) – the issue of who would bear the cost of the 13000 men protecting the corridor was mentioned as an example of concern.

Other Issues Noted

A new source of tension, which will affect bilateral relations as well as communities going forward is that of water management. Tensions on this between Iran and Afghanistan are already running high, and could lead to a potential outright Iran-Afghanistan conflict. This is paralleled with similar tensions between Afghan and Pakistan, over water. The topic is highly sensitive, both for the UN system, the international community and the Afghan government. Among other, reportedly neither Iran nor Pakistan is interested in improving water infrastructure development (dams etc) in Afghanistan, because the latter would retain 70% of the water, with a massive economic impact on its neighbours.

It was reiterated that Pakistan is essential to solving the Afghanistan situation, whether the involved stakeholders like it, or not. The two countries have a complicated relationship based on an undeniable reality, yet

also founded on profound misunderstandings and lack of communication on the two countries' respective motives vis à vis one another.

3. OSLO

As in previous meetings in Europe, the project team shared findings from Kabul, Islamabad, and the Brussels and Madrid stakeholder meetings, under the Chatham House Rule.

Afghanistan & Pakistan

Discussion opened with comments on the links between security and the implications of any future failure of the National Unity Government, and whether or not the Afghan National Army would split along ethnic or other lines if this occurred.

The importance of the Quadrilateral Process of peace talks with the Afghan Taliban was underlined. I, and it was noted with considerable surprise that little issue has been taken internationally, with the fact that the talks seem to have disappeared, despite their being critical for the peace process, and despite the high levels of financial and political investment in the process by Pakistan, China, and the US, and their importance for Afghanistan and President Ghani's agenda.

The project team noted the repeated comments made by those met in Kabul in April, that the international community "will not let Afghanistan fail" and the expectations vis à vis a continuation of the financial support at the same level as previously (though not necessarily militarily, however); the notable lack of emphasis on security; and the positive analysis of the performance of the ANSF despite its acknowledged limitations. In that regard, new enablers offered by India were shifting the balance towards the positive in the ANSF's performance.

In the Pakistan context, the potential strategic link with the maintenance of strategic ambiguity and the state's unwillingness to tackle socio-economic injustice was noted. A participant raised the issue of the need to widen the analysis to include greater emphasis on the economy as a positive route towards peace, going forward. The business community's resistance to trade with India was commented on (in direct contrast to the expression of views by some of the business community met by the project team in Islamabad in March). In particular, it was pointed out that the farmer community felt that if dairy production was opened up to Indian competition, they would go bankrupt.

China's interest in stability in both Afghanistan and Pakistan was noted in the context of a discussion on the CPEC, as well as the external element to domestic conflicts and China's involvement in the region, as was the Indian and US interest in not seeing China's role there rise too high.

The view was expressed that Norway wishes to encourage regional cooperation. It is a longstanding partner of Afghanistan, and it will support the ANSF, whilst recognising that military support and aid assistance will not give the country stability on their own. A real political process is

required, with the Taliban becoming involved in government. The question was posed as to whether the wider understanding exists internationally that patience is required from the international community, and that war on the Taliban is simply not an option. There is at the same time an unprecedented level of support for the ANSF, despite the lack of consensus on state survival. The importance of negotiations with the Taliban is therefore critical. A discussion followed on the depth or otherwise of the support for the war policy, within Afghanistan, with the conclusion being that the Taliban's statements (made to the project team in April in Kabul) on elections being necessary "but not in their current form" with coopted candidates and restrictions on those allowed to vote, indicated the width of the gap in the views on how to run the country.

Brussels & Madrid Meetings

In relation to the earlier meetings in Brussels and Madrid, the question was posed as to whether there had been discussion on the contribution of drone strikes to radicalisation, and the border management issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan on the Line of Control with India, and the Durand Line with Afghanistan. It was pointed out that other than in the broad context of border management being an issue, these points were not raised by concerned stakeholders.

A discussion then followed on the nexus between water, borders and security, the different manifestations of the water problem in different geographical locations within Afghanistan, and between India and Pakistan, and whether the EU could assist with these. It was pointed out that sources of tension could also become sources of cooperation, if the opportunity were seized, noting that recent data indicate that for two sets of countries sharing water resources, there is a lesser propensity for armed conflict than those who do not share them.

Discussion took place around what would be the "appropriate" response by the Western partners of the NUG, with the former as stakeholders with legitimate interests and expectations of their own, yet simultaneously seeking the right balance to encourage the sovereign government of Afghanistan to do what it considers right. The risk of "going too far" in "lecturing" to the Afghan government on what it should do, was noted. It was considered that there is now a realisation by US policymakers that their interests are in fact not convergent with those of the Afghan government on a number of issues, especially on the peace and reconciliation file. One view is that supporting the Afghan government militarily and financially is an affordable, and do-able exercise. The other view is that US and Western interests are being held hostage in Afghanistan, coupled with incredulity that things could have got to this point, and a realisation that the US is unwilling and/or unable to exert the influence that many think they have, on the country.

The issue of decentralisation in Afghanistan was raised, and caution was advised on the West getting involved in it, since it was considered to be entirely an internal matter. There was a question raised on whether this was an Afghan Taliban demand, but the consensus was that the Taliban's interests lie in a highly centralised governmental structure (which some would see as a Pakistan agenda, it was pointed out).

The most affected, marginalised, voiceless stakeholder, constrained in its exercise of agency was seen to be the 5 million or so Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. This population has no access to any political forum in either country, and are important (quite apart from humanitarian considerations) because the Taliban have dealings with them. The issue of what becomes of them, what scope there is to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem is thus key, as is that of how this can contribute to peace making. The rationale for Europe to engage with Afghan refugees as the continent's second largest new refugee population will likely force this to be put on the upcoming European agenda.

There was a brief discussion on the European perceptions (as expressed in the Brussels and Madrid meetings) on *madrassas* in Pakistan, and links with radicalisation, as well as on the security proxy wars in the region.

The Taliban & the Region

In the regional context, a participant considered that “nothing has changed, yet the region has changed”. Whilst there is widespread regional support for the NUG in Afghanistan, the problem is the “curse of foreign assistance” for the latter. Addressing the monopoly on violence in a context of lack of resources was seen as a key issue. In 2001, the goals of the international community in Afghanistan were to prevent it from being an operating ground for Al Qaeda and international terrorism. This goal has basically been achieved, but the goal posts have shifted from defeating the Taliban, to nation building, which – in the view of one participant – has failed.

It is now clear that the Taliban cannot be defeated militarily, though they can be contained, and even if a new US administration reverted to the approach of the Bush presidency years, talking to the Taliban is a must – albeit not at the expense of the gains of the past fifteen years. Recent statements by Sartaj Aziz in Pakistan (March 2016), on the hosting of the Taliban on Pakistani soil, and hence the level of Pakistani influence over the Taliban, may be interpreted as saying that at the present time, Pakistan's influence over the latter has decreased, even though Islamabad still emphasises that it “can deliver them” to the table. This was considered to be likely due to Mullah Mansoor's overtures to Iran and Russia, and the perception that the Taliban are slipping out of the Pakistani sphere of influence. In that regard, there was some discussion of to what extent the killing of Mansoor in a recent drone strike demonstrates the public realisation that Pakistan has effectively failed to “deliver” on the Taliban. In which regard, the high degree of ambiguity around whether or not Pakistan knew about, or was consulted on the strike against Mansoor was noted, with some participants putting forward the view that Pakistan was not complicit, despite the fact that some, including Afghanistan, is likely to think so – hence the ambiguity. According to some, the defining pattern of Mullah Mansoor's leadership was to reduce dependence on Pakistan, hence his multiple trips to Iran and the Gulf, to develop regional options for support and to develop the Taliban's regional relations. It was further pointed out that, despite the strike, the US remains apparently fully committed to supporting the Afghan peace process, including as demonstrated in a recent

speech (June 2016) by the US Special Representative for Afghanistan & Pakistan (Richard Olson) to the Atlantic Council, in which he spelled out the continued US commitment to the policy of reconciliation with the Taliban, and explicitly states that the US does not think that the conflict can be resolved on the battlefield.

Discussion followed on what the Taliban wanted the West to see, and what was the reality, including over whether or not the former really want to capture and hold cities in Afghanistan (the consensus being no); as well as on the multiple roles of the US government- only one of which is to ensure the stability of the current government and the extent to which the international community sees itself as the “saviour” of the Afghan state, and recognises that the war cannot be won militarily. The current Afghan government view is that the Taliban are unwilling to go to the negotiating table, did not attend the Quadrilateral Group’s talks in March, and hence there is only one choice left – to fight the Taliban. The issue arose of whether the West is being instrumentalised by the Afghan President, hence leaving the former with less control over outcomes.

None the less, there was a sense among participants that President Ghani’s robust speech about the battlefield on April 25 was more for public consumption than necessarily a real reflection of Afghan policy. The bottom line appears to be that there are mutually-held perceptions by all concerned, that none of the stakeholders appear to be ready yet for peace, whatever the actual reality – as a mutually hurting stalemate (which in Zartman’s theory leads to negotiations - has not yet been reached. The participants were of the view that the Taliban still have a vision of state capture, but via a “long war” strategy. Questions were posed about the Taliban’s current leadership structure, the presence of Sirajuddin Haqqani, who was considered to be less important now than previously. It was pointed out that the presence of Taliban hardliners in the leadership structure is in fact a good thing for peace negotiations (as per international examples) since it can bring stakeholders on board. Furthermore, in most if not all peace-building situations, fighting has always gone on in parallel with negotiations.

In the region, recent Iranian statements that “a serious Taliban threat” has recently been disarmed inside Iran implies that if this is being admitted publicly, the Iranian government is seriously concerned about the Afghan Taliban. Overall, Wahhabi *jihad* was considered to be more of a concern for Iran than Al Qaeda, and hence, the former is more worried about Da’esh than Al Qaeda. It would therefore be logical if Iran were to want to establish a non-aggression pact of some sort with the Taliban.

From the economic dimension, competition between the “complementary” but in fact, competing ports of Gwadar and Chahbahar, together with the water issue, may signal the start of a new phase in regional relationships, in which the economy may compensate for the former obsession with security. China’s enhanced role in Afghanistan will bring it up against the same problems as those faced by the West, and China itself is far closer to the region geographically. What the West can do about Afghanistan will be explored in July in Warsaw, and in October in Brussels, but China needs to ask itself the same questions, including how to create the breathing space to allow a political solution to emerge, whilst still supporting

the Afghan state financially. This was seen as one of the few practical ways in which the West could contribute to solving the stability issue, alongside provision of sufficient military support to prevent the state from collapsing. Consequently, the region and the West face the same problem – the creation of the space necessary to allow things to unfold; the broad desire for peace and stability; and provision of enough support to prevent stakeholder collapse. A contrasting view was that continued (military and other) intervention in Afghanistan would provide the space to prevent peacemaking, including because states which receive assistance have to cede some of their sovereignty.

The different elements of change which have altered the positions of Iran, Russia and the UN Security Council, were seen to include: the differences between Da'esh and Al Qaeda; the India-Pakistan relationship; possibilities for peace within Afghanistan itself; the youth of the country who clearly want a very different future; the traders who are losing out; whether or not Afghan elites have a more tenuous grip on power than actually appears to be the case – all of which signal that change is on the way, but that there is as yet an insufficient critical mass to bring in actual change. The implications of these regional and internal changes need to be better and more fully grasped. Afghanistan will remain relevant for Europe; and Pakistan remains highly relevant both for the region and for Afghanistan, including, but not exclusively, because of the nuclear option. All of which comes at a time when Western conference commitments notwithstanding, its staying power is wearing down, just as the situation is getting interesting once again.

ANNEX 1

PEOPLE MET

BRUSSELS & MADRID

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Emilio Cassinello, Director General, Toledo International Center for Peace (CITpax)

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Shalene Datta, Researcher, European Parliament

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Emma Hooper, Director of the STAP RP project, Senior Associate Researcher CIDOB

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Jordi Bacaria, Director, CIDOB

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Halvor Berggrav, PRIO
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Anne Stenersen, FFI Terrorism Research Group
Arne Strand, CMI
Michael Semple, Queens University Belfast
Amb. Roberto Toscano, Senior Research Associate, CIDOB, former Ambassador of Italy to Iran and India, member of STAP RP project team
Mohammed Saber Yaqin, First Secretary, Afghanistan Embassy to Norway

ANNEX 2

EU Engagement with Pakistan⁷

1976 – signature of first EU-Pakistan comprehensive agreement

2004 – EU-Pakistan Cooperation Agreement (the current legal basis for the relationship)

2008 – following Pakistan’s return to democracy, the EU increased its commitment to underline support for democratic institutions

2012 – EU-Pakistan 5-year Engagement Plan came into force (a framework to develop and upgrade bilateral political relations on six strategic issues: political cooperation, security, governance, human rights, migration, trade and energy). The Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP, formerly Instrument for Stability - ISP) contributes to the EU’s engagement in these areas, including provision of electoral support for the 2013 legislative elections. Four IFS actions (EUR 2 million) have been implemented by civil society to work on mediation, negotiation, dialogue and counter extremism in “regions of persistent instability and conflict”.

2012 – First ministerial-level Strategic Dialogue launched in Islamabad

2014 – Second ministerial-level Strategic Dialogue held in Brussels

2014 – EU-Pakistan Joint Commission agrees to enhance dialogue on human rights and to start a local EU-Pakistan energy dialogue

2014 – October, the third meeting of the EU-Pakistan Readmission Committee took place in Brussels. Dialogue on migration, especially re-admission, is an EU priority.

2014-15 - EUR1.9 million reserved for interventions on child protection, rights of religious minorities, combating violence against women, under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

2014 – EU granted Pakistan trade preferences as part of its Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+)

2014-2020 – EU development assistance to Pakistan under the current Multiannual Financial Framework has increased, with an indicative allocation under the DCI of EUR 653 million (up from EUR 425 million in 2007-2013).

⁷ See Laurence Vandewalle, Directorate General for External Policies, European Parliament: Pakistan: Terrorism Impedes Development, section 4 The EU and Pakistan.

For more information on the project visit our website:
[http://www.cidob.org/es/temas_regiones/asia/
sources_of_tension_in_afghanistan_pakistan_
regional_perspectives](http://www.cidob.org/es/temas_regiones/asia/sources_of_tension_in_afghanistan_pakistan_regional_perspectives)