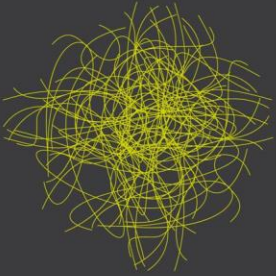


**Sources of
Tension in
Afghanistan
and Pakistan**

A Regional
Perspective



QUARTERLY MONITORING BRIEF

Report No. 1

December 1-February 29, 2016



**China is playing an active role in the
Afghan peace process now**

Afghanistan: Monitoring the Key Regional Powers

Malaiz Daud



**Russia is no longer cooperating with
the US in Afghanistan**



**Saudi Arabia remains the least
engaged of all the regional powers**



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**CIDOB Sources of Tension in Afghanistan & Pakistan: A Regional Perspective (STAP RP)
Quarterly Reports on “Monitoring the Key Regional Powers”**

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this series of quarterly monitoring reports (2014) is to monitor and track the actions, public statements of five key STAP RP regional actors (India, Iran, Russia, China, Saudi Arabia) on Afghanistan; the development of, and their participation in relevant international and regional discussion meetings, including the Istanbul Process, Heart of Asia, RECCA, SCO; the five key regional actors' economic decisions and agreements, including, but not limited to, the energy and infrastructure sectors, which have implications for the identified sources of tension in Afghanistan with regional implications (see CIDOB STAP RP Mapping Document at www.cidobafpakproject.com).

The Sources of Tension (SoTs) identified in the Mapping Document are used as reference points to determine relevance and are specifically monitored in Section 1.

The content includes short summaries by topic and by country, on actions taken, public statements made, regional meetings held and how these develop as mechanisms for dialogue, and the participation of the key regional powers in relevant regional and international events, as well as in subgroups of international fora, such as the Heart of Asia. Economic activity and investments by the key regional powers in Afghanistan are also monitored, together with progress on, and shifting alliances in planned or actual economic projects. A short subsection on commentary from the media (in English) is included in each section.

Section 2 focuses on the key regional powers. Section 3 looks at regional dynamics and cross-cutting issues; and conclusions on the events of the past quarter are presented in Section 4. Section 5 presents publications by think tanks and research institutions in the region.

1. THE CONTEXT

Governance

- Afghanistan's President launches a trust fund for [female victims of domestic violence](#).
- Afghanistan's First Vice President is reportedly [boycotting official engagements](#) over his presumed lack of influence within the National Unity Government (NUG).
- Afghanistan's President accepts [credentials of seven nonresident Ambassadors](#) to Afghanistan.
- German government pledges funds to the Kabul government for reintegration of [deported immigrants](#) back into the Afghan society.
- Electoral reforms process remains in tatters, as Afghanistan's Chief Executive Officer's Office [warns that without reforms, no elections](#) will be held.
- US and British governments [halt financial assistance](#) to the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC), after which President Ashraf Ghani appoints a new chairman and deputy chairmen to HPC.
- Tens of thousands of government positions remain [unoccupied](#).
- "Afghanistan is at serious risk of a [political breakdown](#) during 2016, occasioned by mounting political, economic and security challenges", warns James Clapper, National Intelligence Director of the US.
- Afghanistan's cabinet [approves the new regulation](#) of duties, authorities and establishment of the Independent Elections and Electoral Complaints Commission.
- Afghanistan is one of the most [dangerous countries for journalists](#), according to International Media Support (IMS).

Security

- Taliban [announce pre-conditions](#) for peace talks with the Afghan government. They are: official recognition of their office in Qatar, removal of the names of their leaders from UN's blacklist, removal of bounties for capture and killing of their leaders, freeing of Taliban prisoners and an end to the "poisonous" propaganda against the group.
- President Ashraf Ghani says that the IS will be [buried](#) in Afghanistan whose "atrocities have alienated the people".
- The sixth meeting of the Oversight and Coordination Body was held in Kabul to examine funding and requirements in Afghanistan ahead of the next NATO Summit in July to finalize [financial commitments](#) to the ANSF for 2018 to 2020.
- Civilian [casualties](#) hit new high in Afghanistan in 2015.
- Lt. Gen. John Nicholson is charged to take over the [command of American and NATO troops](#) in Afghanistan.
- US's Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction says the Afghan government only [controls 72 percent of territory](#).
- Violence in Afghanistan forces Obama to rethink [troop levels](#) beyond 2017.
- Kabul faces weeks of blackout as [Taliban destroy powerlines](#) in the northern province of Baghlan.
- "Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and China (Quadrilateral Coordination Group) held a [third round of talks](#) in Islamabad on February 6 to lay the groundwork for peace talks between Kabul and the Taliban".

Development

- US's Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction concludes: ["Afghanistan's economy remains in fragile and worsening condition"](#).
- A delegation [of EU on immigration](#) meets Afghan Foreign Ministry officials in Kabul to announce new measures by the EU countries – including deportation – to deal with the influx of new asylum-seekers, especially Afghans.

Afghanistan-Pakistan Tensions

- Afghanistan's new Envoy to Pakistan is optimistic that [divisions can be overcome through diplomacy](#).
- Leader of Pakistan's third largest party, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), [blames Pakistan for tensions](#) between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- Bilateral [interactions have increased](#) by many folds between the Afghan and Pakistani security forces.
- Pakistani and Afghan spy chiefs meet in Islamabad amid [complaints by the Pakistani government](#) that Afghan soil is used for attacks against Pakistan.
- President Ashraf Ghani says countries in the region, including China, Russia and [Pakistan](#), are sending their misfits to Afghanistan.

2. REGIONAL POWERS



1. INDIA	Who	The Source
1.1. Actions		
- January 24, 2016 India's new Ambassador to Kabul and Afghanistan's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs hold an introductory meeting at the latter's office in Kabul.	Official Website	Afghan Foreign Affairs Ministry
- January 24, 2016 India's new Ambassador to Kabul presents his credentials to President Ashraf Ghani.	Official Website	Afghan President's Office
- January 25, 2016 India's new Ambassador and Afghanistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs hold an introductory meeting , the former pledges cooperation in different areas.	Official Website	8am
- January 31, 2016 Afghanistan's Chief Executive Officer accepts the invitation to speak at the Jaipur Counter-terrorism Conference .	Official Youtube Channel	Afghan CEO's Office
- January 31, 2016 India's External Affairs' Minister approves 92 small development projects for Afghanistan.	Vikus Swarup	Indian Ministry of External Affairs
- February 1, 2016 India's Prime Minister hosts Afghanistan's CEO for a meeting, discussions held over a wide range of issues including cooperation between India, Iran and Afghanistan.	Official Facebook Page	Afghanistan's CEO
- February 2, 2016 Indian Prime Minister tweets : "India's support to efforts of Afghan people in building a peaceful, stable, prosperous, inclusive & democratic Afghanistan is unwavering".	Official Twitter Account	Indian Prime Minister
- February 9, 2016 India's Consul General in Herat receives a delegation of the Afghan Surgeons Society , promises to connect them with India's Surgeons Society.	Official Facebook Page	Indian Consulate General, Herat
- February 13, 2016 India's Ambassador to Kabul meets former President Hamid Karzai at the latter's residence.	Official Facebook Page	President Hamid Karzai
- February 16, 2016 India's Ambassador to Kabul travels to Herat and visits the Indian-funded Salma Dam .	Official Facebook Page	Indian Consulate General, Herat
- February 25, 2016 Indian cabinet approves 150 million US dollars for developing Chabahar Port in Iran.	Official Website	Mashaal Radio

1.2. Agreements (Negotiated/Signed)		
- February 1, 2016 India and Afghanistan sign an agreement to waiver visas for Afghan diplomatic passport-holders .	Official Facebook Page	Afghanistan's CEO
1.3. Public Statements		
- February 12, 2016 India's Prime Minister congratulates President Ashraf Ghani on his birthday, to which the latter replies by saying his birthday is actually on May 19th .	Official Twitter Account	HoffPost India



2. IRAN	Who	The Source
2.1. Actions		
<p>- January 30, 2016 Iran sends thousands of Afghans to fight in Syria, according to a new report by Human Rights Watch.</p>	Official Website	Tolonews
<p>- January 30, 2016 Iranian Embassy in Kabul announces that the marriages of Iranian women to Afghan men can now be registered at Iranian representations around the country.</p>	Official Website	8am Daily
<p>- February 1, 2016 Afghan and Iranian governments are discussing the possibility of importing electricity from Iran to Nimroz and Farah provinces of Afghanistan.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan President's Office
<p>- February 8, 2016 Iranian Ambassador to Kabul meets with the Afghan Minister of Finance to discuss economic ties.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan Minister of Finance
<p>- February 8, 2016 A meeting of the Joint Economic Commission of Afghanistan and Iran will be held in near future.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan Minister of Finance
<p>- February 9, 2016 Iran's Ambassador to Kabul discusses "trade transit" with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan at the latter's office.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs
<p>- February 9, 2016 Iran is ready to inaugurate "a railway project from the zero border point between Afghanistan and Iran through <i>Jenoway area</i> in Herat Province which is built by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran".</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs
<p>- February 11, 2016 Iran's Embassy in Kabul celebrates 37th anniversary of the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran, Afghan CEO is among the dignitaries in attendance.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan CEO
<p>- February 15 2016 Iran decides to issue visas on arrival to citizens of all but nine countries. Afghanistan is one of those countries.</p>	Official Website	Real Iran
<p>- February 16, 2016 Border security forces of Iran and Afghanistan have conducted 18 joint operations against terrorists and drug traffickers in the last calendar year.</p>	Official Website	8am Daily
2.2. Agreements (Negotiated/Signed)		
<p>- January 26, 2016 An MoU is signed between Iran, Afghanistan and Germany for training Afghan students in mining.</p>	Official Website	8am Daily
2.3. Media Commentary		
<p>- February 17, 2016</p>	Rania El	Reuters

Iran could decide fate of first global oil deal for 15 [years](#)

Gamal



3. CHINA	Who	The Source
3.1. Actions		
<p>- January 26, 2016 Chinese and Afghan Ministers of Foreign Affairs hold talks in Beijing, the former says: “Afghanistan, situated in the center of Asia, was a bright pearl along the ancient Silk Road”.</p>	Official Website	China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<p>- January 26, 2016 China and Afghanistan will enhance high-level exchanges. China also pledges to “build houses, train talents and improve people's livelihood. China will also help the country formulate infrastructure plan and blueprint its future development”.</p>	Official Website	China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<p>- January 26, 2016 China’s Vice President hosts the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs, pledges “firm support” and stresses “practical cooperation in such areas as economy, trade, people-to-people and cultural engagement, security and connectivity”.</p>	Official Website	China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<p>- January 27, 2016 China’s Minister of Foreign Affairs says Pakistan has a unique role in the Afghan peace talks and urges Pakistan to take part in the peace process. He hopes to strengthen communication with regional countries for peace and reconciliation.</p>	Official Website	The News
<p>- January 28, 2016 President Hamid Karzai visits China at the invitation of Shanghai Institute of International Studies (SIIS) and becomes a member of the international advisory board of the said institute.</p>	Official Facebook Page	President Hamid Karzai
<p>- February 1, 2016 China’s Ambassador to Kabul meets Afghanistan’s National Security Advisor, shows optimism for the efforts of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghanistan’s National Security Council
<p>- February 3, 2016 Spokesman of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemns a suicide attack in Kabul, in which 20 people are killed.</p>	Official Website	Tolnews
<p>- February 3, 2016 China and Afghanistan’s Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Office at Geneva discuss “One Belt, One Road” initiative among other issues.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan Permanent Representative at UNOG
<p>- February 6, 2016 China’s envoy to Kabul meets with President Ashraf Ghani, Quadrilateral Coordination Group meeting is discussed.</p>	Official Website	Afghan President’s Office
<p>- February 11, 2016 China’s Ambassador to Kabul attends celebrations of the Chinese new year at AISS, meets the new Afghan envoy to Beijing.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies
<p>- February 16, 2016 “First ‘Silk Road’ train arrives in Tehran from China bypassing Afghanistan”.</p>	Official Website	Central and South Asia Business
<p>- January 29, 2016</p>	Official	BBC Pashto

China's Army Chief arrives in Kabul on an unannounced visit to discuss security cooperation with Afghan counterparts.	Website	
3.2. Public Statements		
- January 26, 2016 Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs says China firmly supports Afghanistan's reconciliation process and reconstruction and that both countries should deepen their cooperation with a focus on development and security.	Official Website	China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs
3.3. Agreements Negotiated/Signed		
- January 26, 2016 China and Afghanistan agree to " discuss and sign the intergovernmental cooperation document on jointly building the 'Belt and Road'".	Official Website	China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- February 6, 2016 China is in the process of finalizing an agreement with the Afghan government for establishing rail links from China into Afghanistan.	Official Website	Afghan President's Office
3.4. Media Commentary		
- January 22, 2016 The Surprising Historical Truth About the 'Silk Road '	Akhilesh Pillalamarri	The Diplomat
- February 19, 2016 The US double game to contain China	Salman Rafi	Asia Times



4. RUSSIA	Who	The Source
4.1. Actions		
<p>- January 26, 2016 Russia's Ambassador to Kabul meets the Afghan Minister of Finance to discuss preparations for the third meeting of the Afghan-Russia Joint Economic Commission (JEC) to be held in Kabul in the near future.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan Minister of Finance
<p>- January 30, 2016 Russia decides to downsize its military presence in Tajikistan despite increased threats from Afghanistan because of dwindling resources.</p>		Russian News Agency (TASS)
<p>- February 1, 2016 Russia's Ambassador to Kabul holds a meeting with Afghanistan's former Minister of Interior Affairs.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Mohammad Umer Daudzai
<p>- February 3, 2016 Russia's Ambassador to Kabul holds a meeting with Afghan President's High Representative for Good Governance, expresses his government's desire for training Afghan military and police forces.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Ahmad Zia Massoud
<p>- February 10, 2016 Afghanistan's National Security Advisor and Russian envoy to Kabul meet to discuss Afghanistan's joining the International Anti-Daesh Coalition and the third meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan National Security Advisor
<p>- February 20, 2016 Russia backs off from cooperating with Americans in Afghanistan, pledges 1.2 billion dollars to reinforce Tajikistan's security forces against any threat emanating from Afghanistan.</p>	Mujib Mashal and Andrew E. Kramer	Afghan National Security Advisor
<p>- February 23, 2016 Russia's Ambassador to Kabul hands over ten thousand AK47s to the National Security Advisor of Afghanistan.</p>	Official Facebook Page	Afghan National Security Advisor
4.2. Public Statements		
<p>- February 15, 2016 Speaking of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group meetings, Russia's Special Envoy for Afghanistan says Russia will no longer be joining "useless events" organized by the US "on the fly" for its pre-election interests.</p>	Official Website	The New York Times
<p>- February 19, 2016 Russia is concerned by the activities of Daesh and Taliban in Afghanistan, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman says.</p>	Official Website	Mashaal Radio
<p>- February 25, 2016 Russia's Special Envoy to Kabul says: "We are urging the Taliban to do this [participate in peace talks] and we hope that they (talks) will start as soon as possible to prevent the beginning of a new combat season".</p>	Official Website	Tolonews
4.3. Media Commentary		

- February 16, 2016Russia and Turkey: On the edge of military [confrontation](#)Artem
KureevRussia
Direct

5. SAUDI ARABIA

Who

The Source

5.1. Actions

- February 16, 2016

[51 hunters, including Saudi nationals](#), arrive in Herat with hunting birds. Afghan government had already reprimanded a number of its officials last year for allowing Arab hunters in the west of the country last year.

Official
Facebook
Page

Tolonews

5.2. Public Statements

- January 26, 2016

Saudi Arabia [condemns](#) a terrorist attack in the center of Kabul, which it says “violates Islamic teachings, values and humanitarian principles”.

Official
Website

Arab News

- February 28, 2016

A spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia [condemns](#) the terrorist attacks in Kabul and Asadabad in Afghanistan and offers his country’s condolences to the families of victims and the Afghan government.

Official
WebsiteSaudi
Gazette

5.3. Media Commentary

- January 7, 2016

Saudi-Iran tensions concerning to [Afghanistan](#)

Editorial

Afghan
Online
Press

- January 25, 2016

Ending the agony of [Afghanistan](#)

Editorial

Saudi
Gazette

- January 31, 2016

There are big [changes underway](#) in Saudi Arabia

Editorial

The Week

- February 7, 2016

Dialogue will ease the tension between Iran and Saudi [Arabia](#)

Sultan
Barakat
and Fraus
MasriThe
National

3. REGIONAL DYNAMICS AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

January 24, 2016: Chinese President Xi Jinping courts Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran for its “One Belt, One Road” initiative ([Link](#)).

January 25, 2016: Ambassadors of EU, Great Britain, Germany and France to Kabul declare that lifting of international bans on Iran will have regional impact, particularly boosting Afghanistan’s economic growth ([Link](#)).

January 27, 2016: Afghanistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs holds a meeting to kick off the Implementation and Coordination Process of the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) ([Link](#)).

January 29, 2016: Pakistan is tempted to buy Turkey’s main battle tank, Altay ([Link](#)).

January 29, 2016: India and Pakistan extend the 1976 Rail Communication Agreement for another three years until 2019 ([Link](#)).

February 2, 2016: Afghanistan officially announces joining the international coalition against the Daesh ([Link](#)).

February 3, 2016: Turkmenistan and Tajikistan fail to reach an agreement on the Afghan segment of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan (TAT) rail link ([Link](#)).

February 4, 2016: International Contact Group (ICG) for Afghanistan holds its seventeenth meeting in Berlin ([Link](#)).

February 9 2016: Women’s Regional Network holds a meeting in Colombo, with participants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka present ([Link](#)).

February 9 2016: Convicted American David Headley Coleman implicates Pakistan’s intelligence agency in 2008 Mumbai attacks ([Link](#)).

February 10 2016: Pakistan’s Director General Intelligence Bureau says IS is growing in Pakistan ([Link](#)).

February 11 2016: Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan holds a meeting of European Ambassadors to Kabul to discuss refugee crisis ([Link](#)).

4. SUMMARY OF TRENDS FOR THE QUARTER

2015 was the bloodiest year since the collapse of the Taliban government in 2001. 2016 has already witnessed widespread bloodshed across the country. Security remains a major concern, prompting some to believe that Afghanistan's polity is at real risk of falling apart. Afghanistan's National Unity Government (NUG) has muddled through but is still taking high-risk steps such as pursuing peace talks with the Taliban. On the other hand, thousands of Afghans have arrived in Europe and many are stranded in Greece.

The region is in a flux in the aftermath of Russia's decision to end cooperating with the US in Afghanistan. Russia's decision is another step in denting the relations with the Afghan government after it was revealed last year that Russian authorities had opened channels of communication with the Taliban. However, Russia recently provided thousands of AK47s to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

China was the most active of the regional powers in the quarter in question. Arrival of China's Army Chief in Kabul is yet another indication of China's growing interest in its war-torn neighbor. Chinese officials attended the fourth meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) in a continuation of high-level contacts between the two governments.

Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, was the least active of the regional powers, condemning a couple of bombings in Afghanistan. India's engagement also did not see a dramatic change. Cooperation between Afghanistan and India continues unabated after a minor downturn in relations following President Ashraf Ghani's rapprochement to Pakistan. Iran's decision not to include Afghanistan in its visa-on-arrival scheme was not a big surprise. Overall, the relations between Kabul and Tehran remained cordial.

5. PUBLICATIONS FROM THE REGION

January 21, 2016: Osmani, Rohullah. *TAPI gas pipeline: are sino-US relations a zero-sum game?*, The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst. Available [here](#).

January 25, 2016: Haidari, Ashraf. *How to end Afghan refugees' plight*, Observe Research Foundation (ORF). Available [here](#).

January 26, 2016: *The New Afghanistan: A Transformation in Progress*, Embassy of Afghanistan in Washington. Available [here](#).

January 26, 2016: Hamdani, Yasser Latif. *Bacha Khan, Faqir of Ipi and the Afghanistan angle*, Pak Tea House. Available [here](#).

January 27, 2016: Lister, Charles. *Jihadi Rivalry: The Islamic State Challenges al-Qaida*, Brookings Doha Center. Available [here](#).

January 29, 2016: Koshkin, Pavel. *Why even the best Russian think tanks struggle to influence foreign policy*, Russia Direct. Available [here](#).

January 31, 2016: Roy, Bhaskar. *Pakistan-Saudi Nuclear Weapon Collaboration? Challenge To Middle-East Stability – Analysis*, Eurasia Review. Available [here](#).

February 1, 2016: Kortunov, Andrey. *What should Russia do to Solve the Syrian Crisis?*, Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). Available [here](#).

February 3, 2016: Sazhin, Vladimir. *Iran is Making a Comeback*, Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). Available [here](#).

February 4, 2016: Saran, Samir and Rej, Abhijnan. *Engage the Dragon on Balochistan*, Observer Research Foundation (ORF). Available [here](#).

February 10, 2016: O. Wolf, Siegfried. *The Latest Attempt for a Roadmap for Peace in Afghanistan – A Lost Cause?*, IndraStra. Available [here](#).

February 10, 2016: Ruttig, Thomas. *The New Taliban Deputy Leaders: Is there an obvious successor to Akhtar Mansur?*, Afghanistan Analyst Network (AAN). Available [here](#).

February 18, 2016: Sial, Safdar. *Pakistani Afghan relations after Karzai*, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre. Available [here](#).

February 25, 2016: Majidi, Nassim, van der Vorst, Vivianne and Foulkes, Christopher. *Seeking Safety, Jobs, and More: Afghanistan's Mixed Flows Test Migration Policies*, Migration Policy Institute (MPI). Available [here](#).