



Study on Security Cooperation in the

Heart of Asia

Region



The Asia Foundation



Study on Security Cooperation in the Heart of Asia Region

July 18, 2016

Conducted by ATR Consulting

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary	3
List of Acronyms	4
Acknowledgements	5
Background and Context	6
Concept and Background to the Heart of Asia Process	7
Building Heart of Asia Countries' Commitment to the Process	7
Existing Studies on the Heart of Asia Process	9
Approach and Methodology	11
Approach	11
Research Questions	11
Methodology	11
Findings and Analysis	13
Looking Beyond the Traditional Definition of 'Security Cooperation'	13
Security Threats in the Region	14
a) The Most Acute Threats Reflecting the Complexity of the Situation	14
b) Lack of Consensus Regarding Perceived Threats to Governance	15
c) Indirect Threats: Irregular Migration, Narcotics-trafficking and Organized Crime	16
Security Cooperation Mechanisms in the Region	17
a) Regional Organizations and China's Role	17
b) Mechanisms with Limited Immediate Relevance Provide Potential for Support	19
c) Outlook for Harnessing Trilateral and Quadrilateral Mechanisms	21
d) Organizations with a Universal or Global Mandate	21
Obstacles to Effective Security Cooperation in the Region	22
Opportunities for Intensified Security Cooperation	23
a) Economic Integration and Trade Facilitation: the Best Identified Opportunity	24
b) Joint Initiatives to Control Borders and Fight Money Laundering: A Possible Focus for CBM	24
c) Other Potential Opportunities	25
Incentives for Intensified Security Cooperation	25
a) Developing the Economy and Enhancing Human Security	25
b) Incentives with Obvious Potential Impact	26
Policy Options for the Heart of Asia Process	27
a) Fostering focused dialogue and consultations through two-, three-, or four- way talks between members	28
b) Develop an Afghanistan Market Access Strategy	28
c) Link the design and implementation of Security Cooperation Plans to economic development projects	29
b) Develop an Afghanistan Market Access Strategy	29
e) Intensify cooperation in border regions	30
f) Facilitate high-level military interactions	30
Conclusion	31

Executive Summary

ATR Consulting analyzed the opportunities and challenges facing the Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process¹ using various research techniques including expert interviews in fourteen countries, desk review, on-line survey of regional experts, and media monitoring. Accordingly, ATR has developed recommendations for advancing the Process.

Due in part to the diversity of the different countries' perspectives, expert analysis of the current threats in the region varies greatly. Yet, they reach a consensus in identifying violent radicalization as the principal threat. They also agree on the risks caused by geopolitical tensions, and they comment at length on how it impacts their own country. While not all countries see Afghanistan as the only, or even the main, source of these threats, many stress Afghanistan's inability to control the spread of terrorism and violent extremism or accuse the country of flooding the region with narcotics. Throughout the Heart of Asia Region, the need to support Afghanistan in attaining peace and stability is recognized as a critical pillar to building a secure and prosperous region, as articulated in the Heart of Asia Process's goals.

Experts were not optimistic about the role of the existing regional security mechanisms in addressing the current regional security challenges in the Heart of Asia Region. They unanimously agreed that the existing security cooperation instruments should be strengthened further in the region, as they have done little in countering the region's security challenges. The Heart of Asia Process, with its broad-based membership and clear objectives, thus provides an opportunity to bring greater coherence to the efforts of the various regional processes and organizations and utilize their security and political leverages in support of a safe and stable Afghanistan and Heart of Asia Region. The Heart of Asia Process can harness the role of powerful Heart of Asia countries on security and economic matters in the region (and specifically their interests in Afghanistan) by supporting or complementing efforts made under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and other regional mechanism and processes. The Heart of Asia Process can also strengthen the economic cooperation agreements (under Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) or Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program) and military cooperation (under the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that thus far only cover Central Asian states.

Experts believed that conflicting geopolitical interests among some of the Heart of Asia countries was the main reason for lack of effective security cooperation in the Heart of Asia Region. Geopolitical tension has the potential of taking the focus away from Afghanistan and creating a cycle of mistrust between Afghanistan and its near neighbors. Experts also emphasize that the concept of security in the region is largely guided by the governing elites' interest in retaining power, thus undermining regional security cooperation in its true meaning.

Many experts see economic integration in the region as the only realistic approach to fostering peace, and hope that economic interests will overcome geopolitical tensions. They also advocate for increased efforts to design and implement joint border management initiatives to reach common objectives.

Based on this analysis, ATR Consulting proposes that the Heart of Asia Process adopts the following policy options:

- Harness forces, interests and relationships with other organizations, processes and mechanisms;
- Design and implement security cooperation plans in support of economic development projects;
- Cultivate economic, cultural, academic and social integration across the region;
- Intensify cooperation in border regions to improve general border environment; and
- Pilot possible military cooperation with Heart of Asia countries.

¹ Hereafter referred to as the Heart of Asia Process.

List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AAN	Afghan Analyst Network
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
BOMCA	Border Management Programme in Central Asia
BOMNAF	Border Management Northern Afghanistan
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CBM	Confidence Building Measure
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
EU	European Union
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
HoAP	Heart of Asia Process
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence (of Pakistan)
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KSOR	Collective Rapid Reaction Force
MTC	Military-Technical Cooperation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OBOR	One Belt One Road
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
SAARC	South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SOM	Senior Officials Meeting
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline
TUTAP	Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WB	World Bank

Acknowledgements

ATR Consulting's principal research team behind this report consisted of Johannes Chudoba, Lola Cecchinell, Naseem Jareer, Anne Jasim-Falher, Macklin Scheldrup and Usman Shah. The project relied to a great extent upon contributions of expert researchers on all fourteen of the Heart of Asia countries. We would therefore like to thank Adnan Anjum Akhtar, Gökem Atsungur, Aryaman Bhatnagar, Julia Clauss, Mahmoud Naderi, Nargis Rahmonova, Marko Rankovic and Gunda Wiegmann.

ATR consulting would like to extend sincere thanks to the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, particularly to the Directorate General for Regional Cooperation, for providing feedback throughout the study and for sharing valuable information.

Many thanks are also due to The Asia Foundation, particularly to Mr. Ahmad Forozi for his constant support.

ATR consulting also thanks Christian Bleuer, Charlotte Maxwell-Jones, Jon Novakovic, Francesca Recchia and Abdul Rahman Majeedi for their diligent assistance in the editing and designing of this report.

We would also like to thank the network of academics and experts in the Heart of Asia countries and across the globe, including the many Afghan officials and experts who generously shared their views on regional security cooperation. It was both inspiring and highly encouraging to receive input from so many engaged and committed contributors – we hope we have done your insights justice.

This report attempts to summarize and analyze a wealth of information gathered through research. Nevertheless, the literature and the number of experts on regional security cooperation are almost infinite, so this study has unavoidable gaps. The authors assume all responsibilities for any omissions or inaccuracies.

Lastly, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the European Union (EU) Delegation to Afghanistan who provided the support crucial for this research to be undertaken.

Background and Context

Four broad security challenges have emerged and grown since the end of NATO combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014 and the transition to the National Unity Government (NUG).

First, the shift of Western focus away from Afghanistan and toward the Middle East has been a source of concern and pessimism that has contributed to the growing number of Afghans seeking refuge in other countries. This shift, however, can also be seen as an opportunity, because it allows regional and international powers to play a greater role in supporting Afghanistan, and gives them the chance to modify their approach in building on their last twelve years of efforts.

Second, the emerging local iterations of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also referred to as Daesh or IS,² and the inflow of foreign fighters supporting various insurgent groups operating in Afghanistan constitute an alarming threat for the whole region, including Afghanistan. In Pakistan, journalists have reported arrests of IS operatives;³ in Tajikistan similar arrests have taken place;⁴ Russia and Uzbekistan have reported that some of their nationals were fighting in the ranks of IS in Syria.

Third, water security is increasingly threatened throughout the region and is at the core of many geopolitical tensions.⁵ The scarcity of water resources becomes all the more important in a region where the pressure on natural resources is increasing because of rapid population growth.

Finally, hopes of a negotiated peace with the Taliban have faded after talks between Afghanistan and the Taliban, facilitated by Pakistan, were put on hold. The first round of negotiations, held in Murree, Pakistan (July 7, 2015), were followed by the news of Mullah Omar's death (announced officially by the Afghan Government on July 29, 2015) and a subsequent battle for succession within the Taliban movement. Mullah Mansoor was appointed as the Emir of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, but was killed shortly after (21 May 2016) by a US drone strike, on Pakistani territory. The appointment of his successor, while less contentious than the previous, leaves serious doubts on the movement's willingness to pursue negotiations.⁶ In addition, exactly one month after the Murree Talks, a series of attacks conducted in residential areas resulting in high civilian casualties in Kabul.

The halt in negotiations could also have an impact on other countries in the region, notably China, because a more stable relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan could deprive Uyghur separatists of a safe haven. Indeed, greater security and stability in both countries would most probably annihilate the capacity of any foreign insurgency groups to operate from areas in which central governments would have regained full control. Such concerns are being addressed through the newly formed Quadrilateral Coordination Group (GCG), a platform comprised of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US, which bodes well for the chances of a lasting peace settlement in the region, but which does not preclude the evident need to incentivize bringing the Taliban to the negotiation table.

These issues have increasingly taken a regional dimension and are, directly or indirectly, impacting several Heart of Asia countries;

² Hereafter referred to as IS.

³ "Pakistan arrests 42 Daesh supporters," The Khaleej Times, January 5, 2016, <http://www.khaleejtimes.com/international/pakistan/42-daesh-supporters-arrested-in-pakistan>

⁴ "Seven Daesh Members to Jail for Terrorism in Tajikistan," Tajikistan, Sputnik News, December 4, 2015, <http://sputniknews.com/asia/20151204/1031236897/daesh-tajikistan.html>

⁵ For instance, in Kashmir; between Afghanistan and Pakistan; in the Fergana Valley in Central Asia; and along the Amu River, which is used for irrigation in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

⁶ Borhan Osman, "Taleban in Transition: How Mansur's death and Haibatullah's ascension may affect the war (and peace)", AAN, 27 May 2016, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/taleban-in-transition-how-mansurs-death-and-hibatullahs-ascension-may-affect-the-war-and-peace/>

therefore Afghanistan cannot address them alone. Moreover, the challenges that other Heart of Asia countries face intersect with the security challenges that are specific to Afghanistan. According to the experts, China is concerned that Islamist insurgents in Xinjiang are using Saudi-funded training camps in Pakistan;⁷ Pakistan's fear of Indian influence in Afghanistan has been a major obstacle to progress on cooperation, not only in terms of security, but also trade and energy security;⁸ and Russia's concerns about narcotics trade and use and the enduring reliance of the violent extremist groups on opiate production⁹ are intertwined with its security strategy of maintaining a sphere of influence in Central Asia. The interplay between actors and dynamics within Afghanistan is therefore very much connected to diverse issues that pertain to every other member state. For these reasons, Afghanistan is in need of an immediate attention of regional powers to increase the stability of the region as a whole.

As a platform for regional cooperation and dialogue, the Heart of Asia Process offers a timely and relevant pathway to consensus and to planning initiatives that tackle core regional security issues. This study aims to reveal and analyze the emerging forces, interests, and relationships that can be harnessed to bring about a paradigm shift in regional security cooperation.

Concept and Background to the Heart of Asia Process

The Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan, henceforth referred to as the Heart of Asia Process (HoAP), has since 2011 brought stakeholders together to discuss the challenges of the region at large with a focus on Afghanistan and the threats posed by the growing presence and strength of non-state actors. The participating states are: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and the UAE¹⁰. The ability to network and cooperate across political borders as well as across linguistic, socio-economic, and educational divisions is one of the core factors that have contributed to the success of non-state actors. Governments have struggled to match the pace of change and have been much less effective at networking and cooperating.

Three major realizations drove the Heart of Asia Process:

1. Most of the problems Afghanistan faces have a regional character in terms of their causes and their effects;
2. Addressing the challenges Afghanistan faces requires a regional approach; and
3. Afghanistan has often been treated as an object rather than an active protagonist of discussions on the future of the region. The Heart of Asia places Afghanistan at the center of the process and allows Afghanistan to determine its own agenda in dialogue with regional partners¹¹.

Building Heart of Asia Countries' Commitment to the Process

Early conceptions of the Heart of Asia Process envisaged it a purposeful shift from the existing security paradigm in an effort to stabilize the region and transform Afghanistan from, "a besieged garrison into a kind of Asian roundabout."¹² At first, the Afghan

7 Shamil Shams, "Why China's Uighurs are joining jihadists in Afghanistan," Deutsche Welle, July 24, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/why-chinas-uighurs-are-joining-jihadists-in-afghanistan/a-18605630>

8 William Dalrymple, "A Deadly Triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan and India," The Brookings Essay, June 25, 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2013/deadly-triangle-afghanistan-pakistan-india-c>

9 Paul McLeary, "Afghanistan: Still King of Opium," Foreign Policy, July 30, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/30/afghanistan-king-of-opium/>

10 Supporting states and bodies are: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, the European Union (EU), France, Finland, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States of America (US).

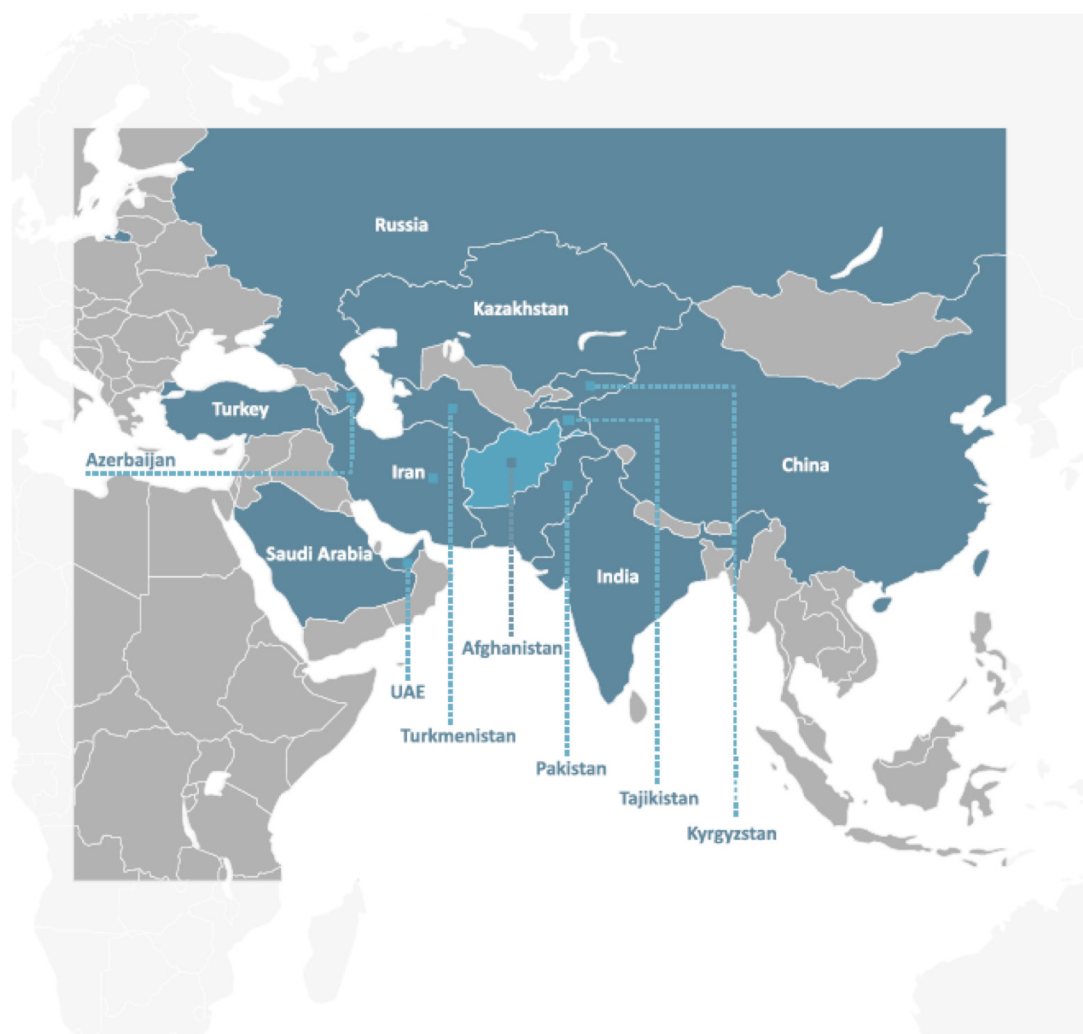
11 S. Reza Kazemi, "Will the 'Heart of Asia' start beating? A Review of the Regional Cooperation Process," Afghanistan Analysts Network, August 29, 2014, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/will-the-heart-of-asia-start-beating-a-review-of-the-regional-cooperation-process/>; Richard Ghiasy and Maihan Saeedi, "The Heart of Asia Process at a Juncture: An Analysis of Impediments to Further Progress", Afghan Institute for Strategic Stu; www.aiss.af/images/pdf/final.pdf.

12 Speech by the British Afghanistan-Pakistan Representative Ambassador, Sherard Cowper-Coles, Oxford, May 9, 2013, in Marissa Quie, "The Istanbul Process: prospect for regional connectivity in the Heart of Asia" Asia Europe Journal, 2014, Volume 112, pp. 285-300.

government sought to achieve a binding agreement of non-interference with UN support. Such an agreement was to include mechanisms for verifying commitments. These initially canvassed overtures produced the eventual Afghan-Turkish initiative with Western backing.¹³

Initially, it was felt that key regional actors would not fully commit to a process that they did not set up or control directly. There was a prevailing view that the Heart of Asia Process was, above all, an attempt by the US to dominate the region through a dependent Afghan government¹⁴. In other words, the Heart of Asia was seen as a US attempt to contain the influence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Delegates from several countries at the initial 2011 conference in Istanbul expressed reluctance to commit to a new security arrangement, which they viewed as duplicating the work of ten other organizations¹⁵.

Map 1: Heart of Asia Member States



Similar issues with buy-in were evident in other countries across the region. Some neighboring countries have openly described the Heart of Asia as part of a US effort to legitimize their presence in Afghanistan. Likewise, analysts pointed out that Pakistan would remain reluctant to contribute to an initiative centered on Afghanistan and that also included India¹⁶. Early Heart of Asia

13 Joachim Krause and Charles King Mallory IV, *Afghanistan, Pakistan and Strategic Change: Adjusting Western Regional Policy*, Routledge, 2014.

14 Shoaib A. Rahim, "Heart of Asia Conference: An Approach to Heal the Regional Heart," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, December 12, 2015, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/opinions/heart-asia-conference-approach-heal-regional-heart>.

15 Joachim Krause and Charles King Mallory IV, *Afghanistan, Pakistan and Strategic Change: Adjusting Western Regional Policy*, Routledge, 2014.

16 "The Reified Heart of Asia," *The Afghan Tribune*, December 8, 2015, <http://aftribune.com/the-reified-heart-of-asia/>.

discussions were thus often characterized as either antagonistic, devoid of substance, or both¹⁷.

However, especially since the 2013 Heart of Asia conference in Almaty¹⁸, the Heart of Asia countries have proven able to overcome these concerns and demonstrated how the dialogue has created the means for consensus-building around shared security and economic interests in the region.¹⁹ In addition, the process has been reinvigorated under the administration of President Ashraf Ghani, who has demonstrated his commitment to the initiative²⁰ and whose accession has been fortuitous accompanied by apparently thawing relations between relatively new administrations in Islamabad and New Delhi.²¹ Subsequently, at the December 2015 conference in Islamabad, a joint declaration was adopted. It reaffirmed Heart of Asia countries' recognition of mutual sovereignty and territorial integrity, and they committed to refraining from the use of force against one another and to advancing the promotion of regional peace and cooperation.

Existing Studies on the Heart of Asia Process

Existing analysis on the Heart of Asia is sparse. There are several articles by the Afghanistan Analysts Network and a 2014 report by the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies,²² and the Process has also been mentioned in a number of recent reports analyzing Afghanistan and the region.²³ The Heart of Asia website contains some useful materials, including a report on funding modalities.²⁴ In 2013, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) launched a regional Track Two initiative to help shape post-2014 strategies that includes a joint declaration welcoming the endorsement of the Heart of Asia Process.²⁵ There have also been some academic, policy and popular works in the fields of political science and foreign policy which have elaborated, from various perspectives, on the numerous challenges that the process faces and the opportunities that could be taken advantage of with regard to security and economic cooperation²⁶.

As can be seen in the list of sources at the conclusion of this report, there is no scarcity of reports on Afghanistan. The research team placed a particular emphasis on accessing sources in multiple regional countries and in a variety of languages. The fact remains, however, that there is virtually no study specifically dedicated to the Heart of Asia Process as such, despite the fact that

17 Justin Vela, "The Struggle for the Heart of Istanbul," *Foreign Policy*, June 3, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/06/03/the-struggle-for-the-heart-of-istanbul/>

18 Reza Kazemi, "Afghanistan Conference in Kazakhstan: Will the Heart of Asia Start Throbbing?" *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, April 25, 2013, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistan-conference-in-kazakhstan-will-the-heart-of-asia-start-throbbing/>.

19 "China, Russia Pakistan hold talks on Afghanistan Issue," *Xinhua News*, April 3, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/03/c_132283265.htm.

20 Whereas the political will of the Karzai administration had come under question, see: Richard Ghiasy and Maihan Saeedi, "The Heart of Asia Process at a Juncture: An Analysis of Impediments to Further Progress. Policy Paper," 2014, *The Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies*, Kabul.

21 Catherine Putz, "confirmed: Ghani to Attend Heart of Asia Conference in Islamabad, India Foreign Minister, Sushma Swaraj is also to attend," *The Diplomat*, December 8, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/12/confirmed-ghani-to-attend-heart-of-asia-conference-in-islamabad/>.

22 S. Reza Kazemi, "Will the 'Heart of Asia' start beating? A Review of the Regional Cooperation Process," *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, August 29, 2014, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/will-the-heart-of-asia-start-beating-a-review-of-the-regional-cooperation-process/>; Richard Ghiasy and Maihan Saeedi, "The Heart of Asia Process at a Juncture: An Analysis of Impediments to Further Progress," *Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies*; www.aiss.af/images/pdf/final.pdf.

23 Habib Wayand "The 'Heart of Asia' Conference: A Fresh Start?" *The Diplomat*, December 7, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/12/the-heart-of-asia-conference-a-fresh-start/>

24 See various documents at: www.heartofasia-istanbulprocess.af/cbm-documents/.

25 "Envisioning Afghanistan Post-2014: Perspectives and Strategies for Constructive Conflict Resolution from the Neighborhood," *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, November 17, 2013, www.fes-afghanistan.org/media/pdf/Joint_Declaration_on_Regional_Peace_and_Stability.pdf

26 Omar Sadr, "Rethinking stability for Afghanistan Socializing Great Powers in a Multilateral Order," in Rajen Harshe and Dhananjay Tripathi, *Afghanistan Post-2014: Power Configuration and Evolving Trajectories*, 2016, Routledge, New York; Sandra Destradi, "Difficulties of Regional Cooperation for Afghanistan: An Alternative Interpretation," *Strategic Analysis*, Volume 39, Issue 2, 2015; Arvid Bell, "Afghanistan and Central Asia in 2015: An Over view of Actors, Interests and Relationships," Report No. 132, *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF)*, 2015, <http://hsfk.de/>; Thomas R. Caetano, "Security and Stability in Afghanistan: Involving Afghans in Protecting Their Communities," in *Managing Afghanistan's Mineral Wealth: Can Afghanistan's Mineral Wealth Be Used to Rebuild the Economy*, Task Force 2015, University of Washington, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/>; Joachim Krause and Charles King Mallory IV, *Afghanistan, Pakistan and Strategic Change: Adjusting Western Regional Policy*, Routledge, 2014; Marissa Quie, "The Istanbul Process: prospects for regional connectivity in the heart of Asia," *Asia Europe Journal*, 2014, Volume 112, pp. 285-300.

security concerns and foreign policy priorities of participating and supporting countries are rapidly evolving, from Saudi Arabia's engagement in Yemen to China's push for the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative and its implications for Pakistan and India, to Russia's foreign policy toward the West and the Central Asia.

Approach and Methodology

Approach

Much of the available literature on the subject tends to analyze security either from a US-centered perspective²⁷ or from a Western-centric academic point of view.²⁸ Both approaches address a range of security issues and interests at stake for the nations and the region as a whole, but they only provide insights on a limited part of the overall picture.

An ambitious, multi-level triangulation and consolidation process was designed and implemented over a six-month period to enable the twelve-member research team to effectively cover the breadth of issues and perspectives in the fourteen Heart of Asia countries with six working languages.

Research Questions

The research questions identified as the cornerstones of this study are the following:

- 1) What are the most relevant security threats in the Heart of Asia region that relate to Afghanistan?
- 2) To what extent have existing security cooperation mechanisms in the Heart of Asia region been successful?
- 3) What are the most important obstacles to effective security cooperation in the Heart of Asia region?
- 4) What are the key opportunities, and what incentives does each Heart of Asia country have for intensified security cooperation?
- 5) What are the most promising policy options for the Heart of Asia Process?

Methodology

1. Desk Study

Each of the twelve researchers conducted an in-depth desk study for his or her focal countries, regularly consulting with the four cluster leads on the most relevant data and analysis. The four cluster leads, in turn, continuously exchanged findings and shared initial analysis in weekly Skype conferences.

2. Surveys

A total of 222 respondents shared their insights via an online survey conducted in the six main languages of the Heart of Asia region. Requested to self-assess their level of expertise on each Heart of Asia country, respondents described themselves as “experts” in 431 cases (i.e. just under two countries per respondent on average), and as “leading experts” in 128 cases. Afghanistan had the highest number of leading experts, followed by Tajikistan.

3. Bilateral Semi-structured Interviews

In order to better interpret the results of the survey and to provide room for more in-depth feedback, the research team conducted over 50 semi-structured bilateral interviews with high-level respondents from a broad range of governments, international organizations, universities, and think tanks.

27 Tom Gregg, “Is a Regional Pact to Stabilize Afghanistan Possible?” Center on International Cooperation, 2010, cic.es.its.nyu.edu; Ashley J. Tellis, Aroops Mukharji, “Is a Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 6, 2010, carnegieendowment.org.

28 Kristian Berg Harpviken, “Afghanistan in a Neighborhood Perspective,” Policy Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO), 2010, file.prio.no/Publication_files/Prio/Harpviken

4. Media Monitoring

Given the turbulent developments over the weeks and months in which the majority of this research was conducted (first half of 2015), daily media monitoring with regular brief updates by country clusters was particularly important for the research team to keep abreast of the most recent analytical input.

5. Data Analysis

While primary data analysis was limited to the results of the online survey (supported by written comments and triangulated with interviews and published reports), secondary data was used in a number of analyses of correlations among a variety of socio-economic data. The full wealth of materials collected goes beyond what can be presented in this study, but will hopefully be utilized in further studies to come.

6. Limitations to the Study

In addition to the ubiquitous constraints of time and fund, the research team was faced with a number of challenges. While the team was carefully selected to facilitate research in the six main working languages in the region, given that there are far more sources readily available in English than in any of the other languages, the predominance of English-language sources could not be avoided. In combination with lack of access to government officials, this means that despite the research team's best efforts, a Western-centric bias could not be avoided.

Findings and Analysis

... the world will no longer have a single superpower that brings order to international politics. Instead, it will have a variety of powers -- nations, corporations, global crime and terror groups, human rights organizations -- jockeying, mostly unsuccessfully, to achieve their goals. International politics is transforming from a system anchored in predictable, and relatively constant, principles to a system that is, if not inherently unknowable, far more erratic, unsettled, and devoid of behavioral regularities.
www.foreignaffairs.com/randall-l-schweller/the-age-of-entropy

Looking Beyond the Traditional Definition of 'Security Cooperation'

The available definitions of security cooperation are outdated, as they are based on a largely bipolar system of balancing superpowers. The present international system is marked by a decline in the major powers' ability to reach accords and end conflicts. The complexity and unpredictability we face in dealing with multi-country and multi-level threats is particularly notable in Afghanistan and the surrounding region.

The U.S. Department of Defense narrowly defines security cooperation as a military tool to “promote specific US security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide US forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.”²⁹

Russia is a major player in the security frameworks of some Heart of Asia countries. The Russian term used is Military-Technical Cooperation (MTC), defined as “a system of interstate relations which involves supplying foreign countries with military weapons, equipment and technology, providing military and technical services [as part of] a Russian foreign policy instrument designed to mark Russia's presence in a region and influence a region's balance of forces.”³⁰

The problem about all the regional arrangements is that they are concerned with the «security» of the governing elites only and do not see different views as anything other than disloyalty or subversion to be repressed. Retired senior UN official, March 2015

In this study, we acknowledge that security challenges extend beyond issues related to military capability, and therefore we have chosen to understand regional security³¹ by a much broader designation, inclusive of human security. Consequently, our understanding of security cooperation goes beyond the collaboration of specialized institutions.³²

Unsurprisingly, the perspectives on security and threats in the region are as varied as the countries involved in the process. As discussed in detail below, one can distinguish between those who, despite their talk of comprehensive approaches, place an almost exclusive emphasis on “hard security,”³³ (terrorism, insurgency, or foreign invasions) and those who see most of the security threats as results or symptoms of root causes that have more to do with socio-economics and governance than with traditional “enforcement-based” security.

29 “Multinational Operations,” July 16, 2013, United States Department of Defense, www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA542006

30 “Military and Technical Cooperation as a Factor in the Growth of Russian Influence,” Russian Military Review, No. 6, June 2004, dlib.eastview.com.ww2.lib.ku.edu:2048/sources/article.jsp?id=6514773

31 Albrecht Schnabel, “Appendix 2C: The human security approach to direct and structural violence, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook, 2008, www.sipri.org; “Human Security: Approaches and Challenges,” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2008, unesdoc.unesco.org.

32 For a more detailed academic background please refer to the Copenhagen School: Buzan, Barry: A Framework for Regional Security Analysis, London: Macmillan, 1986

33 Niklas Swanström, “Traditional and Non-Traditional Security Threats in Central Asia: Connecting the New and the Old, Institute for Security and Development Police, August 2010, <http://isdip.eu/publication/traditional-non-traditional-security-threats-central-asia-connecting-new-old/>

Similarly, there is a clear distinction between experts from inside and outside Afghanistan, primarily in terms of whether Afghanistan is a “source of threats” or is a battleground for threats that originate well beyond its borders.³⁴ For example, the post-Soviet governments of Central Asia, with the partial exception of Kazakhstan, relentlessly portray Afghanistan as a source of threats to their own domestic stability. Meanwhile, Chinese respondents have a more nuanced and less alarmist view of Afghanistan’s effect on regional security.

The majority of respondents viewed violent radicalism of non-state actors as the principle security threat to the region and they believed that all Heart of Asia countries must get together and act collectively in order to counter such threats.³⁵ At the same time, this common threat offers regional opportunities for the Heart of Asia Process to spur a region-wide dialogue on the challenges and potential means of addressing them.

Security Threats in the Region

a) The Most Acute Threats Reflecting the Complexity of the Situation

Overall, experts felt that the Heart of Asia was facing three acute threats in particular: violent radicalization, geopolitical tensions, and human security issues (including poverty and lack of citizens’ access to basic public services).

While the drivers of **violent radicalization**³⁶ might differ by country,³⁷ there was consensus that this issue should now be placed at the top of the region’s agenda. The rise of violent radicalism is a major concern for Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, both within their own borders and in the surrounding countries. However, concerns about radicalization go beyond just the territory of these countries.

Given the news about foreign fighters moving from the Heart of Asia members into Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria,³⁸ the issue of radicalization has taken center stage. The governments of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan have also expressed concern about radicalization within their own countries, and further expressed a willingness to cooperate, despite their problems being on a far smaller scale than Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Countries that have previously not considered radicalization a serious problem now list it as a priority. In addition, some Heart of Asia countries address radicalization from another angle, framing it as part of their long-standing mistrust accusing certain countries of promoting radicalism and nurturing radical groups as proxies to achieve regional interests.

Geopolitical tensions are also considered by experts to be particularly severe threats to the region. Besides old tensions (Russia vs. US, India vs. Pakistan, Iran vs. Saudi Arabia, etc.), constantly evolving relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iran’s nuclear agreement with the US, Saudi Arabia’s involvement in the conflict in Yemen, and China’s One Belt, One Road initiative constitute

34 Speech by the President of Afghanistan’s National Security Adviser, Secretary of Security Council of the IRA Mohammad Hanif Atmar, Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation See www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/5AE629B1C7B4097543257E2900647345 versus mil.ru/mcis/multimedia/video/more.htm?id=5369@morfVideoAudioFile

35 Interview with senior UN expert, April 2015.

36 “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Preventing Radicalization to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU’s Response” ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/doc_center/terrorism/docs/ecvr_best_practice_core_report_en.pdf

37 For further analysis on the factors that drive radicalization, see: Alex P. Schmid, “Radicalization, De-Radicalization, Counter-Radicalization: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review,” International Center for Counter-Terrorism, the Hague, March 2013, www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf

38 See e.g. Peter R. Neumann, “Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s,” Insight, ICSR, Department of War Studies, King’s College London, icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syria-iraq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/; “Security Council Actions to Counter Terrorism,” United Nations Security Council, <http://www.un.org/en/terrorism/securitycouncil.shtml>.

both new opportunities and possible risks that might fuel existing tensions. Experts highlighted how investments from Heart of Asia countries in Afghanistan are mostly led by geopolitical objectives (such as Saudi Arabia competing with Iran on the cultural and education sectors) rather than by actual Afghan needs.

While the concept of **human security** (food security, economic stability, access to education, etc.) only rose to prominence in 1994 with the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Report,³⁹ the idea that security is not just the absence of violent conflict between states lies at the heart of the UN Charter (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).⁴⁰

In the Heart of Asia region, specifically in Afghanistan, breaking the vicious cycle of recurring violence and insecurity is contingent upon the government's ability to promote **good governance, economic growth, and respect for the rule of law**. Their absence was identified as the root cause of instability by most experts, including Afghan experts who believed that, should the government be more responsive to people's needs, violent radicalization and geopolitical rivalries would not take root in Afghanistan.

Human security (with a focus on economic development rather than good governance) constitutes the cornerstone of China's foreign policy on enhancing security in the region. Pundits in Tajikistan also see poverty as the root cause of growing radicalism. In Turkmenistan some commentators believe that poverty could bring the country to civil war.

b) Lack of Consensus Regarding Perceived Threats to Governance

While the **lack of central governments'** control over certain frontier areas is seen as relevant only in a few countries, it is irrelevant for countries that are able to exercise relatively effective control over all parts of their territory, such as Kazakhstan, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan and others.

In the same vein, the issue of **separatism** is clearly seen as "not relevant" by a majority of respondents and is considered a threat only in few countries. China in particular is very concerned with separatism, while Iran and Pakistan deal with the issue at a lower level (e.g. Baluch separatism). At the 2014 Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) Summit, President Xi Jinping called upon the 47 members to "have zero tolerance for terrorism, separatism and extremism, [to] strengthen international and regional cooperation, and [to] step up the fight against the three forces, in order to bring a life of happiness and tranquility to the people of this region."⁴¹

While China may publicly identify separatism as a main threat to stability, other countries of the Heart of Asia often frame the issue differently or do not name it directly. Azerbaijan, for example, frames it within its own conflict with neighboring Armenia and stresses the occupation of its territory rather than separatism. In Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the potential for ethnic minorities to form separatist movements is discussed in the media, but is muted and denied as a real problem in the official government discourse.

The analysis of experts varies when they consider local governments' rather than central governments' ability to control territory. The majority of respondents see **dissatisfaction with local authorities** as a "very relevant" threat. In comments and interviews,

39 Human Development Report 1994, United Nations Development Programme, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1994, hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr_1994_en_complete_nostats.pdf

40 "Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice," 1945, www.un.org/en/documents/charter/; "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/.

41 "Statement by H.E. Mr Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China," Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), 2014, www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_http://www.s-cica.org/page.php?page_id=711&lang=1eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml.

this was explained in terms of local authorities being the primary point of contact between the government and the population. Disenchantment with local government easily translates into a lack of enthusiasm for initiatives coming from the capital, not least because in most of the member countries there are significant gaps between the center and the periphery. Such gaps may manifest in terms of economy, society, and geography, for instance in the form of urban-rural schisms, or schisms between dominant and minority cultures across the region.

The Heart of Asia could be more effective by pursuing joint efforts to mitigate the first three factors (radicalization, geopolitical tensions, and human security) rather than by focusing on measures related to central government control and enforcement.⁴² In this regard, the Heart of Asia could work with the SCO and complement its efforts. Since the Heart of Asia has eight members more than the SCO, it can provide a larger platform and feedback loop that could reinforce and expand the scope of existing measures, including the SCO cooperation in the sphere of customs (Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Aid in Customs Affairs), measures related to international information security and the expansion of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) to anti-narcotics functions. Also, the Heart of Asia has the potential to transform smaller dialogues (Pakistan – China, Afghanistan – Pakistan, or Pakistan – Iran – Turkey) into region-wide consensus building discussions. In the same vein, the Heart of Asia could replicate or expand the bilateral agreement between India and China on military and intelligence exchange about terror groups and their activities.⁴³

c) Indirect Threats: Irregular Migration, Narcotics-trafficking and Organized Crime

Irregular migration is not primarily seen as a security threat. While tensions exist and can easily rise in the two major recipient countries for migrants from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan (as seen following Pakistan's recent forced return of Afghan refugees), both migration and the consequent tensions are symptoms, rather than root causes, of the human security issues cited above.⁴⁴

The Central Asian countries, despite being neighbors and sharing long borders, are not popular destinations for irregular migration from Afghanistan. However, ongoing destabilization of northern Afghanistan could produce more refugees and asylum seekers who may have no choice but to go north (at present, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan host only a few thousand Afghan refugees). Irregular migration could easily become an issue that the Central Asian countries of the Heart of Asia may find progressively more important. Iran and Turkey, meanwhile, feel that they are increasingly burdened by the growing transit of Afghan asylum-seekers on their way to Europe, many of whom are not successful and end up stranded in Iran or Turkey. Finally, Saudi Arabia has a very different relationship with Afghanistan in terms of migration, with Afghan children being occasionally trafficked to the country for a variety of purposes (forced labor, sexual abuse etc.). While Russian-aligned governments and experts describe drug trafficking as the most deadly threat coming out of Afghanistan, others disagree.⁴⁵ Some even go so far as to say that as a security threat, narcotics trafficking is overstated. For example, many analysts note that **drug trafficking** in Central Asia is not necessarily an “anti-state” activity, but rather one that has reached equilibrium with law enforcement bodies of several governments in the region. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are often cited as examples.

With a potential annual global market value of 60 billion USD and tens of thousands of deaths attributed to drug abuse,⁴⁶ narcotics trafficking cannot be ignored. However, the causal linkages with security threats remain unclear, and narcotics trafficking is unlikely

42 The weighted average response for this question is 2.01, i.e. at the center of the “relevant” range, i.e. this does not mean that insurgencies or the reach of the central government can be dismissed as critical issues. See e.g. easo.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Afghanistan-security-situation.pdf

43 “India, China to exchange intelligence,” Daily Excelsior, November 22, 2015, <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/india-china-to-exchange-intelligence/>

44 “2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile – Afghanistan,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486eb6&submit=GO

45 David Mansfield, “The Devil is in the Details: Nangarhar’s continued decline into insurgency, violence and widespread drug production,” Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, February 2016, areu.org.af/Publications.aspx?ContentId=7&ParentId=7&FirstAuthor=30

46 “World Drug Report 2014,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2014; www.unodc.org/wdr2014/en/drug-use.html

to be the most effective entry point for policy interventions to increase security cooperation in the Heart of Asia region.⁴⁷

Organized crime has developed a global reach, and the countries of the Heart of Asia region are by no means immune to the influence of transnational criminal networks.⁴⁸ Particularly through the work of the UN, a clearer picture of the connections between organized crime and anti-government actors, including the Taliban, is beginning to emerge.⁴⁹

The fact that this threat so far was not seen as very relevant brings us to two main caveats: 1) organized crime can be seen to some extent as an alternative governance structure and as a symptom of insecurity and instability rather than as a root cause; and 2) more importantly, organized crime is by definition extremely difficult to track and effectively combat. The progress that can be made on this issue at the level of the Heart of Asia is therefore likely to be very limited in the short to medium term.⁵⁰

Security Cooperation Mechanisms in the Region

Security cooperation mechanisms in the region are not very well known, and experts chose not to express views on them, citing insufficient knowledge. It also appears that pundits are not very optimistic when analyzing the efficiency of the existing mechanisms. This lack of enthusiasm is best articulated by Dr. Avinash Paliwal of King's College in London, "Most of these multilateral fora have done little other than produce commentary. They are important, but not necessarily effective."⁵¹

a) Regional Organizations and China's Role

China appears to be one of the most promising actors within the Heart of Asia for promoting regional growth and stability. It is also an important supporter of Afghanistan through its positive role in two security cooperation mechanisms, namely the SCO and the trilateral agreement between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China. In addition, China is increasingly active in the diplomatic sphere, participating, along with the US, in various trilateral or quadrilateral stability and security meetings on Afghanistan,⁵² thus stepping into a new role in the region despite commentators' contentions that China's main interests remain economic. China's influence in these mechanisms could be amplified and expanded through the Heart of Asia Process.

The **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** is the Chinese government's preferred forum of cooperation and in several statements, the Heart of Asia seems almost subservient to the SCO. However, this position appears to be evolving, especially since Afghanistan received observer status in 2012⁵³ and applied for the accession process in late 2015. Several experts from across the region welcomed the Chinese focus on this forum, arguing that since the SCO is comprised of regional players not militarily involved in Afghanistan, the organization has the potential to lead political reconciliation talks between different national and

47 William Byrd and David Mansfield, "Drugs in Afghanistan – A Forgotten Issue? Implications and Risks for Transition," Peace Brief, No. 126, May 18, 2012, United States Institute of Peace, www.usip.org/sites/default/files/drugs%20in%20afghanistan.pdf.

48 "The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, 2010. www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/TOCTA_Report_2010_low_res.pdf

49 "Letter from the Security Council Committee SCR 1988 / 2011," United Nations, 2015, www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/79; Mark Shaw, "Drug Trafficking and the Development of Organized Crime in Post-Taliban Afghanistan," in *Afghanistan's Drug Industry: Structure, Functioning, Dynamics & Implications for Counter-Narcotics Policy*, Darby, PA: Diane Publishing, 2006; "The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010, mcn.gov.af/Content/files/AFGHANISTAN-DRUG-REPORT13-FINAL-ONLINE-161214.pdf.

50 Expert inputs via survey and interviews.

51 Interview with Dr Avinash Paliwal, April 2015.

52 "Statement of the Quadrilateral Meeting among Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States," Embassy of the United States, Kabul, Afghanistan, Press Release, December 10, 2015, <http://kabul.usembassy.gov/pr-121315b.html>; "Afghanistan, U.S. and China hold trilateral meeting," The Kabul Times, March 11, 2016, <http://thekabultimes.gov.af/index.php/newsnational/8172-afghanistan,-u.s.-and-china-hold-trilateral-meeting.html>.

53 "Chinese Vice Ambassador to UN Wang Min," March 16, 2015: world.people.com.cn/n/2015/0317/c1002-26703285.html; Richard Ghiasy and Maihan Saeedi, "The Heart of Asia Process at a Juncture: An Analysis of Impediments to Further Progress. Policy Paper," 2014, The Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, Kabul, p 24.

political groups within Afghanistan.⁵⁴

Richard Ghiasy notes in this regard, “With the anticipated inclusion of Iran, Pakistan and India to the SCO, considering China’s politico-economic clout, and the incredibly ambitious One Belt, One Road initiative, the SCO’s influence will only grow.”⁵⁵

The potential for the SCO’s involvement in security grew under Russia’s presidency and its plan to create a center on security threats and challenges at the SCO’s Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). In line with Russia’s priorities, the center will initially focus on counter narcotics.⁵⁶ At the summit of the SCO in Dushanbe in September 2014, the discussion focused on military cooperation in combatting regional instability, with China steering the conversation towards using the SCO to combat “religion-involved extremism and internet terrorism.”⁵⁷ However, the SCO is currently hamstrung due to the lack of a common “worldview” between its members, and it is thus relegated to the status of an umbrella platform for negotiating bilaterally.⁵⁸

For instance, among security experts in Kazakhstan, the role the SCO could play in responding to a Central Asian security crisis is questioned,⁵⁹ with Moscow supposedly attempting to transform the SCO into a security organization and Beijing trying to limit its development to the economic sphere. This weakness might grow with the planned accession of India and Pakistan, which will change the dynamic of Sino-Russian patronage over the core region of the Central Asian states, which have displayed similar political strategies, and risk further challenging the consensus-building processes.

Nevertheless, many experts viewed the SCO as a powerful regional institution that could serve the Heart of Asia Process countries to strengthen ties bilaterally with one another in the region. On the other hand, the Heart of Asia could also serve as a laboratory, where initiatives are first tested through Confidence Building Measures (CBM) before being institutionalized through the SCO in the region.

The Trilateral Agreement between Afghanistan, Pakistan and China is also praised, at least indirectly, by most commentators, who state that it has great potential for influencing one of the most worrying causes of instability in the region: Afghanistan/Pakistan tensions. However, the progress in this mechanism will require Pakistan’s genuine participation.

In comments and interviews, respondents noted that China’s influence on Pakistan has been particularly useful in this area. There is scope for momentum in the near future, as China agreed to support proposals to enhance economic cooperation.⁶⁰ China thus appears to be flexing its muscles in Pakistan to foster constructive bilateral dialogue with Afghanistan, a dialogue that has real potential to generate greater cooperation and integration. This trilateral dialogue may well hold the key to actualizing the kind of regional connectivity and cooperation that the Heart of Asia Process aims to achieve.⁶¹

54 Huansheng, Zhao & Kuchins, Andrew C., “China and Afghanistan: China’s Interests, Stances and Perspectives,” A Report of the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program, 55 March 2012, csis.org/files/publication/120322_Zhao_ChinaAfghan_web.pdf

Interview with Richard Ghiasy, April 19 2015.

56 “SCO RATS representatives attends seminar of Central Asian experts on regional cooperation and effective measures fighting foreign terrorists,” March 6, 2015, ecrats.org/en/.

57 Chinese President proposes anti-extremism treaty, urges joint efforts to combat internet terrorism,” Xinhua, September 12, 2014, news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-09/12/c_133639464.html

58 Interview with Jeffrey Mankoff, Deputy Director and Fellow, Russia and Eurasia Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., March 12th 2015.

59 Roger N McDermot, “Central Asian Security Post-2014: Perspectives in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan,” Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), 2013, http://www.diis.dk/files/media/publications/import/extra/rp2013-12-mcdermott-kazakhstan_web.jpg_1.pdf.

60 “First Round of China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue Held in Kabul”, February 10, 2015, www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1236606.shtml

61 Shannon Tiezzi, “The China-Pakistan Alliance: The Key to Afghan Stability?”, The Diplomat, February 11, 2015, thediplomat.com/2015/02/the-china-pakistan-alliance-the-key-to-afghan-stability/

Experts' hopes toward this trilateral agreement spring from the strong Chinese influence over Pakistan and the Chinese government's focused and well-articulated regional strategy for economic development, the One Belt, One Road initiative. The policies under this initiative go beyond economic intentions, but it is unclear how China will maintain security around these large projects. Officials point out that the scheme can only succeed if the disputes around borders are well managed and security is guaranteed. The trilateral agreement may be most effective in this respect; complementing the efforts made by Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Heart of Asia could play a role by designing and implementing CBMs that would solidify political gains made under this agreement.

b) Mechanisms with Limited Immediate Relevance Provide Potential for Support

Given that the *raison d'être* of the Heart of Asia is promoting and supporting existing processes and organizations, there is great room for improvement. For instance, the Heart of Asia could be employed as a complementary process to promoting economic cooperation by both redirecting the process and building momentum where parties have stagnated, or by expanding it with promising initiatives that could be implemented beyond the membership of these organizations.

The Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) both focus on energy, transport, trade, and economic cooperation and as such are not directly relevant in the realm of security cooperation.⁶² They could, however, support such cooperation by creating an enabling environment for political negotiations or by anchoring political agreements to common economic interests.

The ECO's ambitious objective is to establish a single market for goods and services, but members' fears of greater economic integration have only allowed timid steps in promoting trade and economic cooperation in the region. This reluctance towards regional cooperation could be addressed through the Heart of Asia Process, in order to establish specific trade agreements that either enable political efforts or anchor them. For instance, Heart of Asia could replicate and adapt for specific member countries the agreements that were recently signed between Iran and Turkey to boost trade.⁶³

In addition, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan hope to boost energy exports to Afghanistan and Pakistan in the future. This would have to include a security component for the electricity and gas infrastructure within Afghanistan, hence building the ground for future cooperation on security issues within CAREC. Some experts in Afghanistan also argue that trade facilitation and a strong transport network in the region could significantly influence geopolitical agendas and thus address one of the main threats to security cooperation.

The Colombo Plan drew a number of negative assessments of its effectiveness. Some of the criticism of the Colombo Plan harkens back to its Anglo-centric origins,⁶⁴ but the main cause of concern is that it has largely skirted security issues in its efforts to promote regional cooperation.⁶⁵ Yet, the Colombo Plan has concentrated its attention on Afghanistan, notably in terms of technical assistance and reduction in drug demand.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has the potential to contribute to security cooperation in the region, but its focus on over fifteen issues and the paralyzing impact of the enmity between India and Pakistan⁶⁶ significantly reduces its efficacy. In late 2014, Pakistan blocked three key, India-led initiatives aimed at raising connectivity by establishing a joint electricity grid and enhancing road and rail links across the eight member states. Pakistan's motivation is that future economic

62 Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), www.carecprogram.org/.

63 "Turkish President visits Iran despite tensions over Yemen," *Al-Arabiya*, July 4, 2015, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/04/07/Turkish-president-visits-Iran-despite-tensions-over-Yemen.html>.

64 "A problematic start to the New Colombo Plan," *The Conversation*, April 4, 2014, theconversation.com/a-problematic-start-to-the-new-colombo-plan-25213.

65 "The Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific," www.colombo-plan.org/.

66 "The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation," www.saarc-sec.org/.

prosperity following improved regional connectivity is untenable as long as it benefits India and removes the strategic leverage that Pakistan currently wields by being the arbiter of Afghan land access to South Asia.⁶⁷

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) covers twelve Heart of Asia member countries. While Russia attained observer status in 2005 and China has applied for it,⁶⁸ India, despite having the world's second largest Muslim community, has not been involved in OIC since it was ejected in 1969. As can be seen in the February 2015 OIC Executive Committee's Final Communiqué, "Combating Terrorism and Violent Extremism," the OIC has a very broad scope of interests, and Afghanistan is not the focus of its attention.⁶⁹

Furthermore, prominent member states such as Saudi Arabia are mostly focused on countries such as Iran, Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, with Afghanistan holding only a marginal position in Saudi foreign policy. Nevertheless, experts believe Saudi Arabia could still play a valuable role in Afghanistan, especially with regard to its influence with the Pakistani government.

Carrying the heritage of Soviet military structures, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was designed to mobilize large multi-national coalitions in wartime under joint command. In addition to its original regional collective-defense groups, the CSTO has developed joint peacekeeping and rapid reaction forces, consisting largely of elite military units, to counter terrorism and support conflict-mediation between CSTO member states. The CSTO's Collective Rapid Reaction Force (KSOR) is designed to conduct lower-intensity operations, including peacekeeping, counter terrorism, counter insurgency, emergency response, and combating drug trafficking and other transnational criminal activity.⁷⁰

Afghanistan has been an observer since 2013, and Iran has had observer status since 2005.⁷¹ The most recent CSTO summit in Tajikistan was attended by almost all heads of states, defense ministers, and foreign ministers. Very few multilateral organizations could demonstrate this level of interest and engagement. Of most relevance to Afghanistan, the CSTO summit in September 2015 included Afghanistan as one of the main topics of discussion.

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) is explicitly dedicated to enhancing cooperation for promoting peace, security, and stability in Asia, but experts interviewed for this assessment rarely mentioned this organization. The lack of confidence in CICA's contribution to security cooperation may have to do with its size and slow pace of action – its first summit took place in 2002, a full decade after it was proposed by Kazakh President Nazarbayev.

China currently holds the CICA chair. Trying to develop a more self-reliant, entirely Asian-led, multilateral security system is clearly a key foreign policy goal of Beijing. CICA, however, is currently just a mechanism, not an organization, i.e. its resolutions are of a purely declarative nature. CICA's main areas of cooperation — such as counter terrorism — overlap with those of the SCO, but CICA does not have the SCO's core competencies.⁷²

67 Rajeev Sharma, "Solving the China-Pak problem: Modi must put SAARC on the back burner, First Post, November 28, 2015, m.firstpost.com/india/solving-the-china-pak-problem-modi-must-put-saarc-on-the-back-burner-1825443.html

68 "OIC and China Stress Development of Strategic Relations," Organization for Islamic Cooperation, April 29, 2015, www.oic-oci.org/oicv2/topic/?t_id=10040&ref=3974&lan=en&x_key=China

69 "Extraordinary Open-ended Meeting of the OIC Executive Committee on 'Combating Terrorism and Violent Extremism' Final Communiqué," Organization of Islamic Cooperation, February 15, 2015, www.oic-oci.org/oicv2/topic/?t_id=9783&ref=3884&lan=en&x_key=Afghanistan

70 Richard Weitz, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization: Past Struggles and Future Prospects," Russian Analytical Digest, No. 152, July 2014, www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/RAD-152.pdf

71 Richard Weitz, "Iran and the SCO: new opportunities, new challenges," The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, August 2015, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13255-iran-and-sco-new-opportunities-new-challenges.html>

72 Mu Chunshan, "What is CICA (and Why Does China Care About It)?" The Diplomat, May 17, 2014, thediplomat.com/2014/05/what-is-cica-and-why-does-china-care-about-it/

c) Outlook for Harnessing Trilateral and Quadrilateral Mechanisms

Trilaterals in general, and in particular the trilateral mechanism of Afghanistan and its closest neighbors, Iran and Pakistan, have repeatedly been perceived as the answer to some of the region's most pressing problems. By and large, however, they have been hampered by complicated bilateral relations or by strong divergence among the members.

Since 2009, in conjunction with ECO talks, trilateral dialogue between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran has focused on enhancing cooperation in political, security, socio-economic, and cultural areas. Undermining the trilateral nature of this group, however, is the dominance of bilateralism in their relations. The Afghan government mostly deals with Iran and Pakistan directly as opposed to within the trilateral forum. Yet, Iran's recent interest⁷³ in attending the Afghanistan / Taliban talks, and with the presumed resettlement of some Taliban leaders in Iran (as reported by the AAN),⁷⁴ this trilateral dialogue might well become a promising mechanism for sharing information and building consensus. The Heart of Asia could support this by adding momentum and helping resolve possible blockages.

The Afghanistan-Iran-Tajikistan trilateral agreement was also seen as a promising arrangement, given the shared linguistic and cultural heritage between the three countries. However, a fundamental obstacle is the difference in political systems and worldviews,⁷⁵ which pit the theocracy of Iran's statesman-clerics against Tajikistan's increasingly secular position⁷⁶ and Afghanistan's lack of a clearly defined stance.⁷⁷

Various quadrilateral agreements were all seen by experts as ineffective because they simply reiterated commitments announced at the inception of the Heart of Asia Process. Notably, the field research was conducted prior to the emergence of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which comprises Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US, a Heart of Asia observer state, and aims to produce the foundations for a sustainable regional peace. Despite the promise that this quadrilateral presents, it would appear that persistent obstacles stand in the way of negotiations with the Taliban⁷⁸. However, since the QCG was conceived out of the Islamabad Heart of Asia conference, it bodes well for the process, providing an exemplar for the potential of the dialogue process to allow for various parties to transcend problematic issues and converge around shared interests.

d) Organizations with a Universal or Global Mandate

The three organizations listed below could be considered potential supporters of the Heart of Asia, as they could lend expertise or political weight to its initiatives.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) ranks at the top among a comparison of nineteen mechanisms. Survey respondents clarified in their comments and interviews that the OSCE has, together with its member countries in Central Asia, succeeded in both providing consistent support and bringing together stakeholders in an environment of mutual respect.

73 Jawed Zeyartjahi, "Tehran Backs Afghan Peace Talks: Iranian Diplomat," Tolo News, January 1, 2016, <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/23094-tehran-backs-afghan-peace-talks-iranian-diplomat>

74 Borhan Osman, "The Murree Process: Divisive peace talks further complicated by Mullah Omar's death," August 5, 2015, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-murree-process-divisive-peace-talks-further-complicated-by-mullah-omars-death/>

75 "Tafawat nizamhay siyasi mana' ta'sis talwizyon mushtarak Farsi zuban ast," BBC Farsi, January 17, 2012, www.bbc.co.uk/persian/world/2012/01/120117_16_tj_persian_joint_tv.shtml

76 "Tajik Leader Calls For 'Secular' Development Concept," Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Europe, March 10, 2016, www.rferl.org/content/tajik-leader-call-for-national-concept-for-development/26909599.html

77 S. Reza Kazemi, "Afghanistan Conference in Kazakhstan: Will the 'Heart of Asia' Start Throbbing?" Afghanistan Analysts Network, April 25, 2013, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistan-conference-in-kazakhstan-will-the-heart-of-asia-start-throbbing/>

78 Ankit Panda, "Road to Quadrilateral-Backed Peace Talks Uncertain as Taliban Refuse to Participate," The Diplomat, March 7, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/03/road-to-quadrilateral-backed-peace-talks-uncertain-as-taliban-refuse-to-participate/>

The findings from the expert interviews are not as positive. Experts in only three countries highlighted the OSCE's achievements, listing the establishment and successful running of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan,⁷⁹ the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, Tajikistan,⁸⁰ and the establishment of the Minsk Group, an important security forum for Azerbaijan. This organization was instrumental in brokering the ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia 21 years ago.⁸¹ Since then it has worked to build dialogue, de-escalate violence between armed forces in and around Karabakh, and facilitate high-level meetings between the two countries.⁸²

With the highest number of responses and the highest score in the "very effective" and "effective" columns, the United Nations (UN) takes second place in this comparison. Among the organization's key advantages are its universal membership and the breadth of mandates and expertise it covers within its many sub-organizations.⁸³

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was ranked as one of the less effective regional mechanisms.⁸⁴ This is not surprising, given that International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has been struggling to stabilize Afghanistan for almost fourteen years of operations. This military intervention suffered, among other things, from the paradox that it was at the same time too broad and diverse, yet not inclusive enough to be effective. Furthermore, NATO has steadily reduced its presence in Afghanistan, and most member countries have withdrawn entirely. Increasingly, cooperation with NATO has been replaced with bilateral cooperation with its dominant member state, the United States.

Obstacles to Effective Security Cooperation in the Region

While the diversity of perspectives comes out strongly in other parts of the study, there is one point on which all respondents agree; geopolitical tensions are cited as the most relevant obstacle to security cooperation in the Heart of Asia region.⁸⁵ These tensions are often short-sighted and denote an absence of long-term vision for the region, due, in part, to the lack of strong leadership within many of the HoA countries.⁸⁶

The Cold War was a static and relatively bipolar confrontation; the current tensions and violence sweeping across the region have become extremely complex, multifaceted, and fluid. Many of these geopolitical rivalries serve to pull attention away from Afghanistan.

For instance, Saudi Arabia could potentially be an important player in facilitating dialogue between Afghanistan and Pakistan because of its traditionally strong ties with Pakistan, but its foreign policy priorities are predominantly focused on Iran's influence in the region, which is playing out through the war in Yemen. Azerbaijan's conflict with Armenia also brings the focus away from Afghanistan, as it involves Iran and Russia.

79 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Academy, <http://www.osce-academy.net>.

80 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Staff College, www.oscebmssc.org/; see also "Combatting Terrorism," Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, www.osce.org/secretariat/terrorism

81 "21 years pass since declaration of ceasefire between Azerbaijan and Armenia," APA, May 12, 2015, en.apa.az/news/226924

82 "Minsk Group: Armenia and Azerbaijan presidential meeting is being prepared," News Am, May 1, 2015, news.am/eng/news/264827.html

83 See e.g. United Nations Security Council Counter-terrorism Committee, www.un.org/en/sc/ctc ; unrcca.unmissions.org .

84 "ISAF's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014)," September 1, 2015, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm .

85 See e.g. "Geopolitical Faultlines – the Case of Afghanistan," The International Relations and Security Network, December 5, 2011, www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Special-Feature/Detail/?lng=en&id=134666&contextid774=134666&contetid775=134664&tabid=134664

86 Iran and Russia have been more supportive of Armenia's position and have at times attempted to mediate. See: Abdollah Ramezanzadeh, "Iran's Role as Mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis," in Bruno Coppetiers (ed.), *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, VUB University Press, 1996, <http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0701.htm> ; "Russia, Iran mull Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," Trend, January 26, 2016, <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/2485613.html> .

Afghanistan finds itself sandwiched between various geopolitical priorities of several major regional powers, with Pakistan trying to block Afghan access to the Indian market, India planning to open an alternative route through the Chahbahar port, and the dilemma of supporting Saudi Arabia's intervention into Yemen or Iran's interests in the region.

Finally, the floating nature of Afghan-Pak relationship, which recently faded again after steps taken by President Ashraf Ghani to strengthen bilateral ties proved unproductive, constitutes one of the main obstacles to future cooperation. Second only to geopolitics, **vested interests and a lack of political will** were cited as relevant obstacles by most respondents in the survey. Likewise, in the interviews, the predominant view is that security in the region is largely determined by governing elites' interest in retaining power.

Intertwined these problems are also the **overriding national interests**, which are seen as the third most important obstacle to security cooperation. While key actors themselves may not openly state it, "national interest" has come to mean, above all, the interests of elites, pursued with the assistance of national governance structures. This is illustrated by ideologically or economically driven activities discreetly funded by some ruling elites from oil / gas rich countries. National interests are sometimes very complex and directly translate into geopolitical tensions, be it Pakistan's growing needs for water and energy, or Chinese separatism threats and unrest in Western China and Tibet.

It is important to note that **lack of leadership** is seen as less of an obstacle to security cooperation than most other factors. There seems to be a consensus that leadership capacity can indeed be developed, if there is sufficient political will to transcend national-level priorities and display the leadership required to address issues at the regional level. The perceived lack of personal ties between leaders was identified by respondents as an obstacle that could hinder Afghanistan / Tajikistan cooperation. However, it would appear that there has been some progress on this front, with joint meetings between President Emomali Rahmon and President Ashraf Ghani in 2015⁸⁷ and joint statements regarding the need for leaders to cooperate in order to tackle shared security challenges.⁸⁸

The lack of resources and the cultural / communication barriers were only considered marginal challenges, both in the survey and in the interviews. One Afghan expert noted China's recent interest in better understanding Afghanistan, which was relatively poorly understood by the Chinese in the past. Chinese think tanks linked to the government now pay regular visits to Kabul and meet pundits, former government officials, and intellectuals to gain a better grasp of the cultural environment, a necessary step for China to undertake political efforts to stabilize the relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Opportunities for Intensified Security Cooperation

a) Economic Integration and Trade Facilitation: the Best Identified Opportunity

The most prominent opportunity identified by this study is **enhancing trust, free movement, trade, and access to resources through closer cross-border cooperation**. A number of efforts to this end have been launched over the past decade, providing lessons learned and best practices.⁸⁹ Perhaps the best example among the Heart of Asia countries is the Kashmir Peace Bus, which has intermittently linked the capitals of Indian- and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. Despite several closures during the past decade-and-a-half of operation, the gesture has not only eased tensions by allowing people-to-people contact across conflict

87 "Tajik, Afghan presidents hold first talks in Russia," Avesta, July, 10, 2015, <http://www.avesta.tj/eng/5761-tajik-afghan-presidents-hold-first-talks-in-russia.html>

88 Abaseen Zaheer, "Regional, International Cooperation needed to curb Daesh: Ghani," Pajhwok, July 10, 2015, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2015/07/10/regional-int%E2%80%99l-cooperation-needed-curb-daesh-ghani>

89 "European Union - Japan Conference on Tajikistan-Afghanistan Border Management and Cross-Border Collaboration," Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Tajikistan, March 4, 2014, eeas.europa.eu/delegations/tajikistan/press_corner/all_news/news/2014/20140220_en.htm

lines, but has also served to release some pressure at the leadership and policy level and encouraged greater trade exchange as a confidence building measure.⁹⁰

Several experts in Afghanistan strongly believe that the only realistic approach to fostering peace in the region is **economic integration**, accomplished by helping economics surpass other geopolitical interests (such as the fear of open conflict in India-Pakistan). At the moment, there are hardly any links between South and Central Asia, whether in terms of transportation (no flights between Pakistan and most Central Asian countries, one weekly flight only between Afghanistan and Central Asia (Tajikistan), poor road access between those countries, and no railway linking any of these countries) or in terms of policy (difficulties obtaining visas, unfavorable trade policies, restrictive rules for investing in most countries).

Despite its proximity, Pakistan's private investments in Central Asian countries are close to nil. Linking countries that share languages and underdeveloped markets can offer both significant economic opportunities for all of them and in turn enhance security.

Similarly, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline (TAPI) is a project that, in addition to stimulating economic development, could both contribute to bridging the energy gap in all concerned countries and bring an opportunity for peace-building initiatives.

Other initiatives could also be beneficial for overall stability in the region, such as the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) electricity-sharing plan being developed with the support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank (WB). According to this plan, funds would be provided to construct infrastructures such as transmission lines in order to create a shared South-Central Asia regional electricity market with lower costs and higher energy efficiency.

b) Joint Initiatives to Control Borders and Fight Money Laundering: A Possible Focus for CBM

Border management has received great attention and international support over the past decade.⁹¹ So far, however, the accomplishments have been rather modest.⁹² While donors have tried to emphasize the “joint” aspects, considering borders points of connection rather than separation, most officials on the ground are more concerned with demonstrating their government's sovereignty than with facilitating good neighborly relations or freedom of movement and trade.

To use border management as a real opportunity to enhance security cooperation, the messages conveyed both internally and externally will have to clarify that borders are, above all, connecting points for law-abiding, peaceful citizens. Crime and violent extremism can be combatted far more effectively across borders where officials on both sides work together on a shared interest, rather than regarding the other side of the border as “enemy territory.”

A further factor that needs to be considered is the type of borders. Those countries that share borders with Afghanistan have very specific and obvious concerns. Some of these countries have different shared borders with other countries. The India-Pakistan border, for example, requires a different type of attention than the Afghan-Pakistan crossing territories.

Other countries reveal counterintuitive findings. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, for example, have very poor cross-border relations that have occasionally resulted in firefights between opposing border guards. Azerbaijan does not recognize the current lines of control

90 “Cross-LoC trade, travel will be strengthened as CBMs: Mufti,” Kashmir Times, May 16, 2015, www.kashmirtimes.com/newsdet.aspx?q=41050

91 See e.g. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Staff College, www.oscebm.org/en ; “Border Management in Central Asia,” United Nations Development Programme, www.tj.undp.org/content/tajikistan/en/home/operations/projects/democratic_governance/bomca/

92 “Border Management in Central Asia,” United Nations Development Programme, www.tj.undp.org/content/tajikistan/en/home/operations/projects/democratic_governance/bomnaf

with Armenia as a legitimate border. The challenge here will be to transform what could be a strategy of national isolation for Heart of Asia countries (border control) into an opportunity for cooperation (joint border management).

The relevance of **fighting money laundering and the financing of terrorism** is rated as high by most respondents. The broad efforts of the Heart of Asia, including the UAE, to contain anti-government elements' capacities by limiting their funding streams appear promising.⁹³ Certain Heart of Asia countries are listed as being highly vulnerable to money laundering. While some high-ranking government officials may be involved in this activity, tying the counter-money laundering efforts with combating the financing of terrorist activities could provide a clear incentive to cooperate in this area.

c) Other Potential Opportunities

Suggestions from experts on information sharing have included, for example, common databases for customs and relevant anti-government elements. Past and existing efforts along these lines, such as the Paris Pact Initiative on counter narcotics,⁹⁴ have been hampered by a broad range of obstacles, including the reluctance of participating countries to share confidential information via multi-lateral mechanisms. So, rather than attempting to establish comprehensive systems for all Heart of Asia countries, **it may be wiser to start with focused and limited steps at a bilateral or trilateral level.**

Information-sharing on improvised explosive device (IED) support networks was also considered, but to a lesser extent. This is an issue that would only directly concern Afghanistan, Pakistan and to some extent Turkey, with other countries' involvement not hinging on their own internal national interests. These issues might therefore be better dealt with in specifically targeted mechanisms that have fewer participating countries.⁹⁵

Among the characteristics of effective security cooperation mechanisms cited most often in survey comments and interviews, joint operations, such as those currently conducted by the CSTO in Tajikistan,⁹⁶ were regarded as the most relevant and productive. Furthermore, the CSTO has increasingly elevated the importance of Afghanistan in its security initiatives.

Incentives for Intensified Security Cooperation

a) Developing the Economy and Enhancing Human Security

Boosting trade and investment are by far the most highly rated incentives for fostering greater stability in the region. While declarations of intent alone will not be sufficient to achieve this, with China's overall foreign and economic policy focused on economic expansion in the Heart of Asia region, this appears to be the most relevant option.

Immediate contributions to greater stability in Afghanistan and the region could include the completion of Afghan infrastructures for electricity imports from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the resumption or expediting of Chinese projects inside Afghanistan, the TAPI pipeline from Turkmenistan (now confirmed through the signature of the TAPI shareholders agreement on October 24, 2015 and the starting of the construction of the project in Turkmenistan on December 13, 2015), and the easing of border restrictions, which could facilitate trade and make the Heart of Asia region more attractive for investment.

The **fulfillment of human potential**, an intended consequence of economic development, is also ranked high as an incentive for

93 See e.g. "FATF Action on Terrorist Finance," February 27, 2015, www.fatf-gafi.org/topics/fatfgeneral/documents/fatf-action-on-terrorist-finance.html.

94 "Paris Pact: A Partnership to Combat Illicit Traffic in Opiates Originating in Afghanistan," www.paris-pact.net/

95 See e.g. "Coordinators' Report on Improvised Explosive Devices," 2014, United Nations, [www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/.pdf](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/.pdf); milengcoe.org/Links/Documents/20140114_NU_C-IED%20Report_RC%20Project%20article.pdf

96 "Russian Military Aircraft Deployed to Tajikistan for Joint Drills – Defense," Sputnik News, May 14, 2015, sputniknews.com/military/20150514/1022122220.html

intensified security cooperation.⁹⁷ For this to succeed, regional cooperation programs with a focus on human security must clearly explain from their inception the short- and long-term benefits for both people and governments of moving beyond more traditional hard-security concerns.

b) Incentives with Obvious Potential Impact

For some countries, including Afghanistan, where security accounts for the largest part of government spending, the prospect of being able to **relocate funds currently earmarked for security to other sectors** is a key consideration.⁹⁸ China and India may have large GDPs and a tax base to maintain their large security forces, and countries like Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Saudi Arabia have regular oil and gas revenues for military and law enforcement expenditures, but countries like Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan cannot similarly afford to allocate resources towards their countries' security structures.

In a region that has a strong tendency to personalize institutional power, it seems relevant to consider the personal motives of individual leaders as incentives for security cooperation. As these motives and incentives vary strongly between different parts of the region, it is difficult to generalize the region as a whole. Some countries have regular transfers of leadership, while other countries' policies are heavily dependent on the personal decisions of a president who will likely be in power for life.

97 Karim, Mahin, "The Future of South Asian Security - Prospects for a Non-traditional Regional Security Architecture," National Bureau of Asian Research, 2013, www.nbr.org/downloads/pdfs/PSA/NTS_projectreport_April2013.pdf

98 "Afghanistan: Balancing Social and Security Spending in the Context of Shrinking Resource Envelope," International Monetary Fund, 2013, www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2013/wp13133.pdf

Map 2: Proposed Route for TAPI Gas Pipeline Project



Policy Options for the Heart of Asia

Policy options for the Heart of Asia Process look at how to effectively establish and develop common interests among participating countries. Following the CBM model currently in place, they refer to a specific set of countries for which the issue is relevant. Because of the flexible nature of the Heart of Asia Process, there is more room for manoeuvre and discussion that could lead to significant decisions, vital for regional integration. The absence of veto allows smaller group of countries to take initiatives (through CBM for instance), despite the potential disagreement of others, offering opportunities for demonstrating the benefits

Any of the following policy options can only be successful if the decision is followed by strong political will and pushed by heads of state with enough leadership abilities to convince other countries to go beyond the many short-term and short-sighted political tensions.

a) Fostering focused dialogue and consultations through two-, three-, or four- way talks between members

Increased levels of interaction between Afghanistan and its neighbors will improve understanding and identify common interests, which could materialize into more productive relations or political agreements.

Discussions in a small forum are more focused and productive than in larger fora, and parties express themselves more openly. Afghanistan will have the chance to reach common ground with other states, to be better represented at larger multilateral gatherings.

Meetings should be regular, with focused agendas, to maintain momentum.

Agendas should deal with more localized subsets of usual Heart of Asia topics, such as refugees, cross-border movements of insurgents, counter-narcotics, money laundering, etc.

b) Develop an Afghanistan Market Access Strategy

A Heart of Asia Market Access Strategy has to build demand for Afghanistan's products and markets, while simultaneously facilitating the bilateral opening of markets between Afghanistan and Heart of Asia countries.

Building this demand will support and give momentum to political negotiations, as business interests within Heart of Asia countries learn of the opportunities available within the Afghanistan economy.

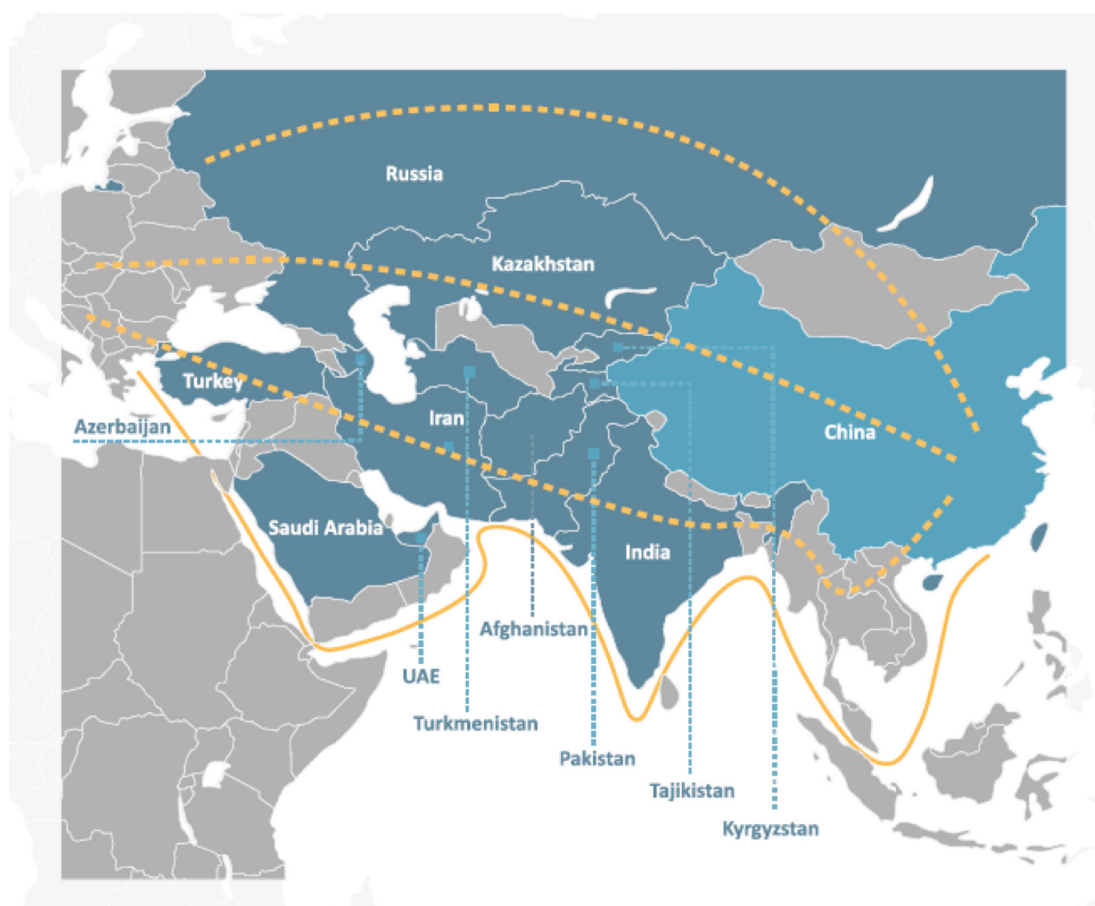
The marketing strategy would leverage Afghanistan's strengths in a consistent manner across a selection of initially targeted Heart of Asia countries.

The market access improvements for the sector must include not only improvements with regard to tariffs but also improvements in the regulatory environment such as certification procedures, customs cooperation and assurances, and product standards. Bilateral negotiations with enthusiastic partners should be prioritized to kick-start the development of the Afghanistan export industry, and to begin shaping the domestic market, to prepare for access by the larger markets within the Heart of Asia countries.

Subsequent Heart of Asia studies will be able to provide detailed economic incentives for such an approach, not only in terms of pure trade and employment but also with regards to subsequent stability allowing redistribution of defense and border control budgets.

Integration of economies is widely accepted as a foundation for long-term peace and cooperation, as in continental Europe. The negotiations surrounding the Indian-Iranian-Afghan initiative to establish a port at Chabahar, in Iran, alone provided the opportunity for greatly increased dialogue.

Map 3: Approximate Routes of One Belt One Road Projects



c) Link the design and implementation of Security Cooperation Plans to economic development projects

In the short-term, soft measures to boost regional stability will require support to give those measures time and space to take effect. This support should come in the form of Security Cooperation Plans entered into by all parties to major economic development projects.

Security Cooperation Plans outline what contributions or activities can occur between participants that increase the security and overall success of major economic development projects. Training, joint exercises, intelligence sharing, secondment opportunities, etc. can fall within these plans.

The TAPI project presents itself as the best candidate for immediate establishment of a Security Cooperation Plan, ideally with support from Russia or China, or both, to ensure greater effectiveness and chance of success. Experience in implementation of such Plans would place Afghanistan in good stead to contribute to similar initiatives within China's OBOR policy.

d) Support 'Major Partner Knowledge Development' within the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Heart of Asia's chances for long term relevance and committed major power participation will grow larger as Afghanistan invests in developing subject matter experts. Afghanistan should continue to improve its understanding of the economic objectives laid out by major powers, and address all issues, security and otherwise, that hinder these objectives. In turn, diplomatic efforts should promote Afghanistan's successes in pivoting towards the major powers.

e) Intensify cooperation in border regions,

Borders should be transformed from buffer zones into zones of cooperation. Borders within the region are a source of significant local-level tension, which can on occasion affect national-level interactions. Steps must be taken to de-escalate tensions and transform these zones into areas of social, economic and security interaction.

Relatively low-tension borders should be identified for pilot initiatives, such as the introduction of formal communication lines between local commanders and increased freedom of movement.

Special Economic Zones can be created between border control points to facilitate cross-border trading with minimized need for customs interference. This can be based on the Thai experience with its many neighbors.

In the medium turn, it is also possible to identify touristic zones in border areas, in which residents from a country can experience the culture and traditions of a neighboring country without visa requirements. Such approaches have been successfully conducted at the borders between China and North Korea, Mexico and the USA, and North Korea and South Korea.

f) Facilitate high-level military interactions

The prevalence and influence of militaries in the region's public sphere should be acknowledged and embraced.

Afghanistan should advocate on behalf of, and shape its military for, initiatives with Heart of Asia participating countries that increase trust, personal relationships and interoperability, such as:

- In-line, advisory and liaison postings of foreign officers in the Afghan National Army and National Directorate of Security
- Short-term officer exchanges
- Establishment of scholarship programs
- Improved training and Terms of Reference for diplomatic defense posts overseas
- Joint counter-insurgency and counter terrorism exercises

Conclusion

This report has demonstrated that the Heart of Asia region is defined by dynamic and fluid phases of transitions, at all levels of politics and society. Rather than an attempt to provide definitive answers, this report has aimed to collect a variety of perspectives on six key research questions.

Pessimistic views on the effectiveness of multilateral mechanisms such as the Heart of Asia Process have been proven unfounded. China's active interest in the process is now evident in its being both a host and an active promoter of key processes.

The December 2015 conference in Islamabad saw a joint declaration reaffirming members' recognition of mutual sovereignty and territorial integrity, and India and Pakistan announced that they had decided to resurrect bilateral dialogue and issued a joint statement committing to talks on long-standing impasses such as Kashmir. This is evidence of the great potential of the Heart of Asia Process that can be harnessed as a vehicle for advancing members beyond stagnant positions.

Efforts and momentum need to be sustained. Whether this takes the form of a transition to a formalized security mechanism, greater ownership by Pakistan, Russia or China, or increased links with other organizations or fora, the Heart of Asia must distinguish itself by continually evolving to match the region's needs.

1) What are the most relevant security threats in the Heart of Asia region relating to Afghanistan?

All fourteen countries in the Heart of Asia have been involved in conflicts within the past five years; ten are currently engaged in conflicts of varying intensity. Of the fourteen, ten countries have been involved primarily in internal conflicts, yet the public discourse is predominantly about external security threats. While it is more politically palatable to externalize, the Heart of Asia Process could help member states recognize the commonalities of their internal threats, with options for joint mitigation

Three security threats stand out as most relevant: a) violent radicalization, b) entrenched geopolitical tensions, and c) human security issues. Clear connections lie between each. Radicalization, for example, would not spread as readily if there were effective, citizen-oriented governance, or without sovereign support of anti-government groups in other countries.

2) To what extent have existing security cooperation mechanisms in the Heart of Asia region been successful?

It is hard for any organization or mechanism to claim success in fostering security cooperation in the region.

While hope rests on China's increased engagement in the region, the Afghanistan / Pakistan / China trilateral has yet to deliver in terms of improved security cooperation.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was often listed as being potent, but more on the basis of future potential, with its combination of China and Russia, than on actual achievements.

These two mechanisms, as well as others such as the ECO and CAREC, could be harnessed or complemented by the Heart of Asia Process, which bears more influence in some areas because of its broad-base membership and regional stability objective.

3) What are the key opportunities for intensified security cooperation in the Heart of Asia region?

Three opportunities for intensified security cooperation were identified: enhanced joint border control initiatives; intensified economic cross-border cooperation to enhance trust, free movement, trade and access to resources; and strengthened efforts to

counter terrorist financing.⁹⁹

These issues are already addressed by multiple programs, from the EU to the Asian Development Bank. The Heart of Asia Process could better align donors' and member countries' interests and facilitate scaling up.¹⁰⁰ Shared assessment, evaluation and lesson learning exercises could be particularly useful in this regard.

4) What key incentives do the Heart of Asia countries have for intensified security cooperation?

Heightened economic potential through boosts to trade and investment were universally acknowledged as the strongest incentive for all fourteen Heart of Asia countries to cooperate on reducing conflict. Confidence in this link is being demonstrated by China's promotion of its One Belt One Road strategy and simultaneous increased interest in regional security cooperation.

5) What are the most promising policy options for the Heart of Asia countries?

The Heart of Asia member countries should continue to play to their strengths, and acknowledge their current limitations as a bloc. Broadly, the policy recommendations can be surmised to two key points.

Firstly, that the flexibility and dynamism of existing member relations be leveraged to represent the Heart of Asia goals at more established multilateral organizations, and ensure that those initiatives are contributing to regional stability.

The second is that this flexibility contributes to increased economic integration, with Afghanistan at the center of improved regional relations through trade. Developing Afghanistan's domestic markets for international access represents the key tenet of the Heart of Asia; that the stabilization and regional integration of Afghanistan represents an opportunity for a guaranteed return on investment for all Heart of Asia members.

⁹⁹ www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/bptable.html

¹⁰⁰ www.heartofasia-istanbulprocess.af/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Counter-Terrorism-CBM-Recommendations_-final.pdf

