

Afghanistan, the New “Great Game”

With U.S.-led NATO forces scheduled to leave Afghanistan in December, Afghanistan, Central Asia, South Asia, and even the rest of the world are all uneasy. How will the dynamics among the big powers surrounding Afghanistan change in the future?

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China and India fill the U.S. Power Vacuum in Afghanistan

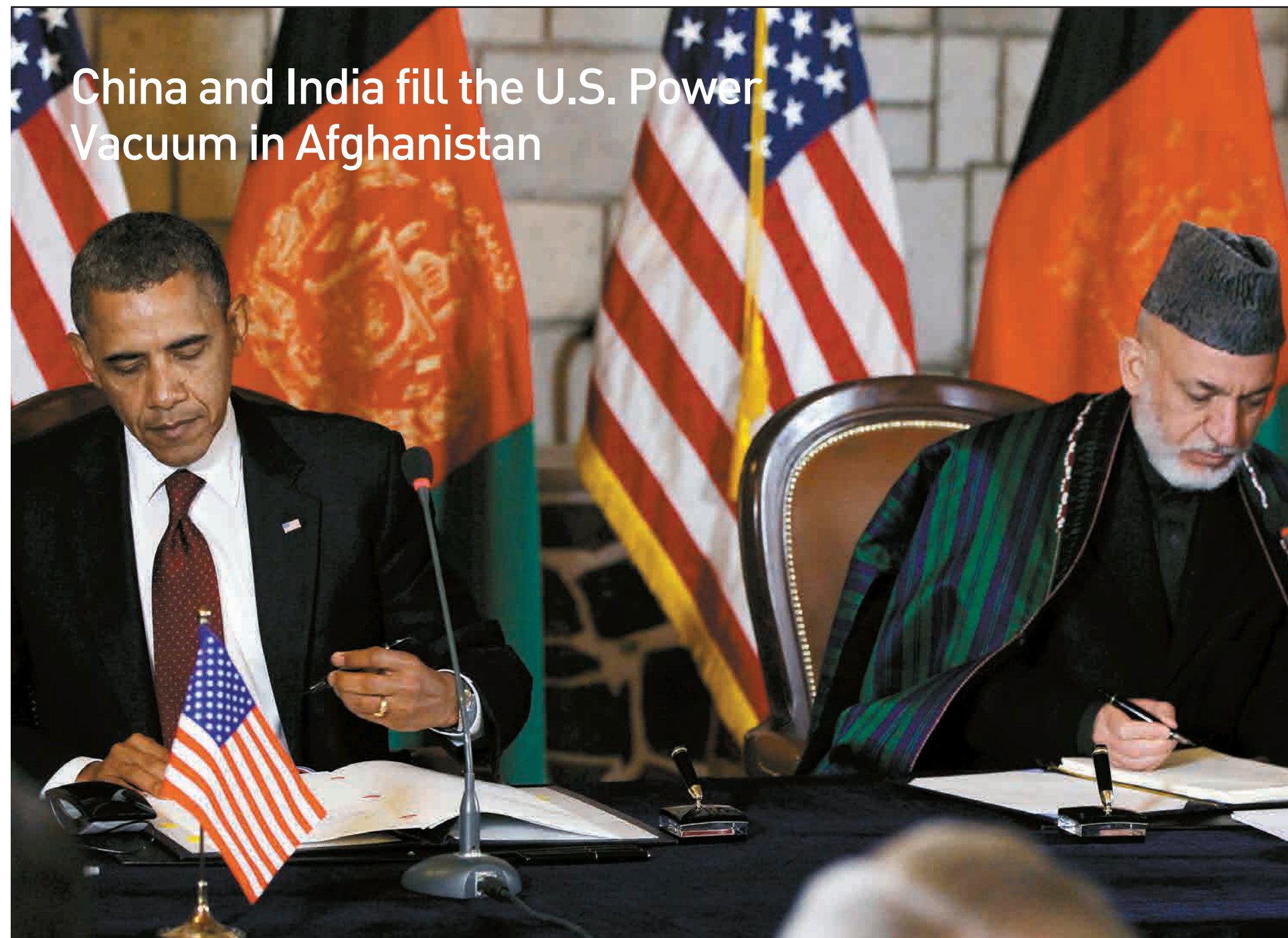
U.S. President Barack Obama (left),
Afghan President Hamid Karzai (right)

The year 2014 will be a decisive moment in shaping a South Asian political landscape focused on Afghanistan. After 2013 saw the installation of new governments in neighboring Iran and Pakistan, Afghanistan held presidential elections and India general elections in April 2014. Both countries had final election results after mid-May.

India and China jockeying for Afghanistan

Although plans have not yet been confirmed, the U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will leave Afghanistan by the end of this year, if everything goes as scheduled. The ISAF plans to withdraw most of its combat troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014; however, under a proposed bilateral security agreement between the United States and Afghanistan, some 12,000 troops are expected to remain in the country even after 2014 to assist Afghan security forces in areas such as training and intelligence sharing. Still, the size of the American troop presence in Afghanistan after 2014 remains unclear, as Afghan President Hamid Karzai has been refusing to sign onto the security agreement.

The issue of greatest and mounting concern surrounding Afghanistan is who will fill the vacuum left by the departing ISAF. After the presiden-





tial elections, if a new government in Kabul were to sign the security agreement being promoted by Washington, the Afghan security situation would not deteriorate badly right away. As the U.S. wants a gradual pullout, India and China will play more important roles in regional stability in South Asia over the long term.

India and China are already drawing frequent mention as countries that could replace the U.S. in Afghanistan. What these two countries decide will affect the power dynamics in Asia and even the world. This is a good reason why the moves being made by India and China deserve close attention.

China's changing policy toward Afghanistan

Since 1997, when then-President Jiang Zemin de-

clared that China should become a "responsible great power," the country has struck a different tone in the international community. However, the principle of "taking necessary steps (有所作为)," which essentially means to actively participate and play a vital role in international affairs, was never adopted in Afghanistan. Instead, China took the traditional principle of "hide capacities and bide time (韬光养晦)" advocated by Deng Xiaoping. As the U.S.-led withdrawal plan became concrete, China's strategy toward Afghanistan has shifted from one based on the principle of "hide capacities and bide time" to one based on "taking necessary steps."

Even though China shares a border with the eastern tip of Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor, China has been sitting on the fence on Afghan issues. Although that border is only 76 km long, it holds strategic importance as a supply route from China

Taking advantage of the security umbrella provided by the U.S. in Afghanistan, China has been conducting various projects in the country. But the traditional "hide capacities and bide time" principle cannot safeguard China's interests anymore.



The International Conference on Afghanistan was held on December 5, 2011, in Bonn, Germany, to discuss reconstruction and peace-building in the country.

to Afghanistan. The U.S. has asked China to open its border in the Wakhan Corridor in order to facilitate speedy operations in its war against terrorism in Afghanistan. However, China has refused to open the border, as it has also been reluctant to intervene directly in the Afghan situation. Also, China has been concerned that opening the border might incite terrorist groups advocating the independence of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Instead of direct intervention, China has quietly focused on economic cooperation with Afghanistan. Without contributing at all to the composition of U.S.-led NATO forces while still remaining under their protection, China has been conducting a range of natural resource development projects in the country, including oil drilling and copper mining.

However, following Taliban attacks on a Chinese-invested copper mine in Logar Province, the two countries agreed to cooperate on security in


Afghanistan. The agreement was reached in September 2012 when Zhou Yongkang (周永康), China's then-domestic security chief and a member of the ruling Communist Party's central Politburo, visited Kabul and held talks with President Karzai. As a result, China began training 300 Afghan police officers, and took a further step to train Afghan diplomats, health workers and agricultural engineers in cooperation with the United States. This reflects China's assessment that the strategy of "hide capacities and bide time" would not protect its interests anymore, thus leading it to support U.S. efforts for stability in Afghanistan. Moreover, China also realized that it could not remain a bystander anymore in the changing Afghan situation after NATO completes its scheduled pullout by the end of 2014. In other words, China has shifted its Afghanistan strategy to the "taking necessary steps" principle so that it can have a proper say in Afghan affairs. For instance, Beijing has recently asked President Karzai to agree to the security agreement proposed by Washington

A dilemma for India's "soft power diplomacy"

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and subsequent U.S. attacks on Afghanistan, the Pakistan-friendly Taliban regime fell, and a new government was established by the Northern

Alliance, an organization sympathetic to Indian interests. India was the first to reopen four consulates in Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Herat. Although India does not share any borders with Afghanistan, stronger relations with Afghanistan are essential in order to achieve its national goals, such as discouraging rival Pakistan's policy to promote pan-Islamism, expanding access to the Middle East and Central Asia, strengthening energy security, and eradicating homegrown terrorism. Since 2001, India has pursued an "arm's length policy" toward Afghanistan, focusing on economic assistance and keeping its distance on military and security.

In other words, India has concentrated on soft power diplomacy. The Indian government has pledged some two billion dollars in aid to Afghanistan, placing priority on human resource development, expansion of infrastructure, agricultural development, and other economic development.

But India's soft power-centered policy has been criticized for not preparing for the situation after the U.S. withdrawal. Although Afghanistan's security issues are directly related to its own, India has failed to take meaningful action. Moreover, some have criticized India's soft power diplomacy for not being respected and even disregarded by Pakistan, and for having the high possibility of setting off a proxy war against India. For these reasons, some insist that India should change its Afghanistan policy, shifting away from its strong focus on soft power diplomacy in order to strike a balance between soft power and hard power. 

This article makes reference to "India's Afghanistan Policy and its Limits," also written by the author and published in *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3.



People crossing the border from Afghanistan to Pakistan's Chaman city.

Afghan History Marred by the Invasion of Big Powers—Britain, Russia, and the U.S. Who Will be Next?



The current situation in Afghanistan has its historical roots in power struggles between Britain and Russia, and later between the Soviet Union and the United States. In the 19th century, Britain and Russia began the so-called "Great Game," at the center of which lay Afghanistan. Concerned about the Russian Empire's expansion into Central Asia, Britain invaded Afghanistan in 1838 in order to install a pro-British leader there. Thus began the First Anglo-Afghan War. The British viewed the Russian Empire's expansion into Central Asia as a direct threat to colonial British India. Britain launched a pre-emptive strike against Afghanistan, believing that Russia would surely target India next if Russian influence were to expand as far as Afghanistan.

But the British invasion failed after it met strong resistance from the Afghan tribes. Britain then changed strategy to maintain Afghanistan as a buffer state between the Russian Empire and British India. Under its "Go South" policy, the Russian Army occupied Tashkent in 1865 and absorbed Samarkand two years later in 1868.

As the Afghan government turned away a British diplomatic mission, but received a Russian mission in 1878, the British conquered Afghanistan again. Thus began the Second Anglo-Afghan War. After the war, Afghanistan's diplomatic sovereignty was handed over to Britain. This is when the British adopted a separation strategy for Afghanistan in earnest. The clearest example of this was the separation of the two largest Afghan tribes—the Pash-tun and the Baloch. With a view to dividing the two tribes, the British demarcated the eastern frontier of Afghanistan to set up the Durand Line between Afghanistan and British India. The Durand Line is a border approximately 1,930-km long that is shared by Afghanistan and present-day Pakistan, remaining a source of territorial and ethnic disputes between the two countries. Prior to World War I, Britain and Russia agreed in 1907 to end their conflict over Asia on the basis of mutual interest, after engaging in a longstanding heated competition for Afghanistan, Central Asia, and China. Out of a sense of urgency given Imperial Germany's expanding influence to Persia and Mesopotamia, they reached agreement to stop Imperial Germany from marching into the Middle East.

Afterwards, the Russians accepted British rule over Afghanistan and agreed to conduct all political relations with Kabul only through London. In turn, the British pledged to actively discourage any attempt by Afghanistan to encroach on Russian territory. As the Great Game ended, the so-called Anglo-Russian Entente was nullified after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The Afghan government declared its independence from British colonial rule and invaded British India through that colony's northern border. Thus began the Third Anglo-Afghan War, which ended in 1919 with the Treaty of Rawarupindi recognizing Afghanistan as a sovereign state.

During the Cold War, Afghanistan was once again trapped in another Great Game. Nothing much had changed in its historic destiny during that period, except that Britain was replaced by the U.S. Ironically, Afghanistan has now been invaded by both axes of the Cold War—by the Soviet Union in 1979 due to its socialism and by the U.S. in 2001 due to its extreme-right Islamism.

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Troubled by Drugs and Islamic
Fundamentalism in Afghanistan,
Russia Views Eurasian Economic
Union as a Solution

Bloomberg



Russia must turn Afghanistan into a land of opportunity in order to regain the power it lost in Eurasia

This February 15th marked the 25th anniversary of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. As the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) took power in a military coup in 1979 and a civil war broke out between the communist government and resistance forces, the Soviet Union launched a military intervention in Afghanistan that December. This was at the request of the PDPA. During the ensuing nine-year war, 14,000 Soviet soldiers were killed and more than 50,000 wounded. Many researchers regard the nine-year conflict as having indirectly caused the Soviet

Union to collapse, as the already socially and economically stagnant country could no longer stand internally as a result of the war of attrition. Even though the Soviet Union has since disappeared, Afghanistan remains a painful reminder of the past and a symbol of wounded pride for Russia and its people.

Russia's complicated Afghan policies

This year, which marks the 25th anniversary of the

Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, is unlike any other. Russian newspapers and broadcasters have issued a flurry of special reports on the Afghanistan War. Politicians and scholars have taken the lead in stirring up public opinion on Afghanistan. Interestingly, the tenor of the discussion has not been to draw lessons from the Afghanistan War and pray for peace, but to reevaluate the significance of the war for Russia as "positive." Such actions have taken place against the background of Putin's historical revisionism, which views the Soviet Union as Russia's venerable forerunner, not as the evil empire. At the very least, Russian military officials assert that the Soviet Union has contributed more to Afghan stability than the United States.

But there's another reason why Afghanistan has been frequently seen in Russian media. A full withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)—namely, the U.S. and NATO forces—is scheduled by the end of 2014. Following the U.S. withdrawal, neighboring Russia will have to bear the burden of stabilizing dangerous Afghanistan. However, Russia doesn't seem to have been moving fast enough in dealing with Afghanistan and its neighbors. Rather, Moscow's Afghan policy seems inconsistent and confused, making the future hard to predict. This is because Afghanistan is a diplomatic hot potato for Russia.

Recognizing that everything happening in Afghanistan is a strategic challenge to its own soil, Russia fears a security vacuum left by the ISAF withdrawal. Russia is wary of the possibility that instability in Afghanistan could cross the border into Central Asia and even into Russian territory. On the other hand, Russia has consistently opposed the continuous stationing of U.S. and other Western military troops. At every opportunity, Rus-

sian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has stressed that NATO and the international community must not give up on Afghanistan, but at the same time he has dismissed the possibility of an extended stay for U.S. troops in the country. Russia has also flatly denounced the U.S. for concluding the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with Afghanistan.

Russia takes pragmatic approach, places priority on stabilization

Russia's top priority in Afghanistan lies in stabilizing the domestic situation and preventing any internal threat from crossing the border to Russia. To that end, Moscow has taken a pragmatic approach to Afghan issues, evidenced by the fact that it supported Ahmad Shah Massoud of the ever-antagonistic Afghan Northern Alliance with a view to overturning the Taliban even before the September 11 attacks. Russia has also tried to let the Karzai government, which succeeded the Taliban regime, join various regional cooperation platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In order to stabilize Afghanistan, Russia is willing to cooperate with China and India even as they dream of hegemony over Eurasia. In cooperation with Russia, India supported the Northern Alliance in its war against the Taliban in the 1990s, while China has supported Afghanistan within the SCO framework with backing from Russia. The trilateral Russia-India-China Consultation on the Issue of Afghanistan held in Beijing this January 16 clearly shows such a pragmatic approach on the part of Russia.

Among the many threats from Afghanistan, the spread of drugs is the most serious for Russia. Af-

ghanistan produces more than 90% of the world's opium. Much of its opium output passes to Russia via Central Asia and spreads to Europe. About 6% of the Russian population is addicted to drugs and 30,000 Russians die of heroin addiction annually, according to official Russian government statistics. Russia has criticized the U.S. armed forces for remaining indifferent to or even abetting Afghanistan's opium production. The Putin government often uses this issue to accuse the U.S. of being immoral.

The second threat is the possible spread of Islamic fundamentalism. While not as pressing as the drug issue, it is still a fearsome one for a Russia already troubled by Chechen terrorists. Russian high-ranking officials, such as Nikolay Bordyuzha, Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), an intergovernmental military alliance by seven post-Soviet states, and Zamir Kabulov, Russian special presidential envoy for Afghanistan, have warned of agitation made by Islamic extremist groups under the unstable Afghan situation. Such groups, which include the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), are one of the direct causes of security anxiety in Central Asia.

Will Afghanistan become a land of opportunity?

To be sure, Afghanistan is more than just a series of threats. Clear economic benefits also exist for Moscow. Russia has taken a pivotal role in the ISAF logistical support routes (Northern Distribution Network) and enjoyed ample economic benefits from the military mobilization of Russian heli-



Poppies harvested in Kabul, Afghanistan

copters for various NATO operations. With an increasing number of Russian companies making inroads into Afghanistan each year, Russia-Afghan trade reached approximately USD one billion in 2012. While Russia's chief export items to Afghanistan are petroleum and weapons, Russian companies are also undertaking projects to repair Afghan military facilities and join infrastructure expansion projects as subcontractors.

Russia doesn't seem to care much about the results of Afghan presidential elections held last

April 5, because it knows that, no matter who is elected, Kabul will be interested in strengthening its economic cooperation with Moscow. Despite a troublesome shared history, Afghan elites have relatively positive feelings toward Russia. In particular, entrepreneurs are more likely to be Russia-friendly than other elite groups.

Now the Russian government and academics are working hard to make post-2014 Afghanistan an opportunity to regain Russia's lost influence in Eurasia. If Russia can make the most of this oppor-

tunity, it will at least be able to strengthen its influence in Central Asia, and largely gain the upper hand in its relations with NATO. And if Russia is able to bring into its fold Central Asian states wary of the Afghan factor in the Moscow-led CSTO, NATO will have to part with tradition and accept the CSTO as a partner. This coincides with Putin's ambition to push for an Eurasian Economic Union; therefore, Russia must turn Afghanistan into a land of opportunity as it seeks to expand its influence in Eurasia. ©

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Will the Changing Situation Bring a Breakthrough to Stalled Afghanistan Pipeline Projects?

The name Afghanistan generally conjures up images of terrorism, such as the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden. But even just a glance at a map, can easily yield something much more important: Afghanistan sits right in the middle of Eurasia. For thousands of years, this territory has long been an important crossroads. In particular, it was highly esteemed by British historian Arnold Toynbee, who described it as a “roundabout” of the ancient world that connected East and West, North and South.

But this roundabout has always been destined to see joy mingled with sorrow. Afghanistan has won renown not only as the “highway of civilizations,” but also as the “highway of conquest.” In ancient times, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Timur, and Babur all passed through Afghanistan on the way to conquer India. More recently the old British Empire, the former Soviet Union, and the United States have all invaded Afghanistan.

TAPI project, a touchstone of geopolitical development

The geopolitical importance of Afghanistan, forgotten since the 19th century, was highlighted again in the 1990s. In addition to serving as a route for transporting crude oil and gas from Central Asia to Western Europe, the U.S. has envisioned it as a South Asian route to bypass Russia and Iran. As the U.S. invaded Afghanistan together with NATO forces, a conspiracy theory started to gain prominence: the U.S. invasion of Iraq was to secure energy resources, and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan was to secure an “energy pipeline.”

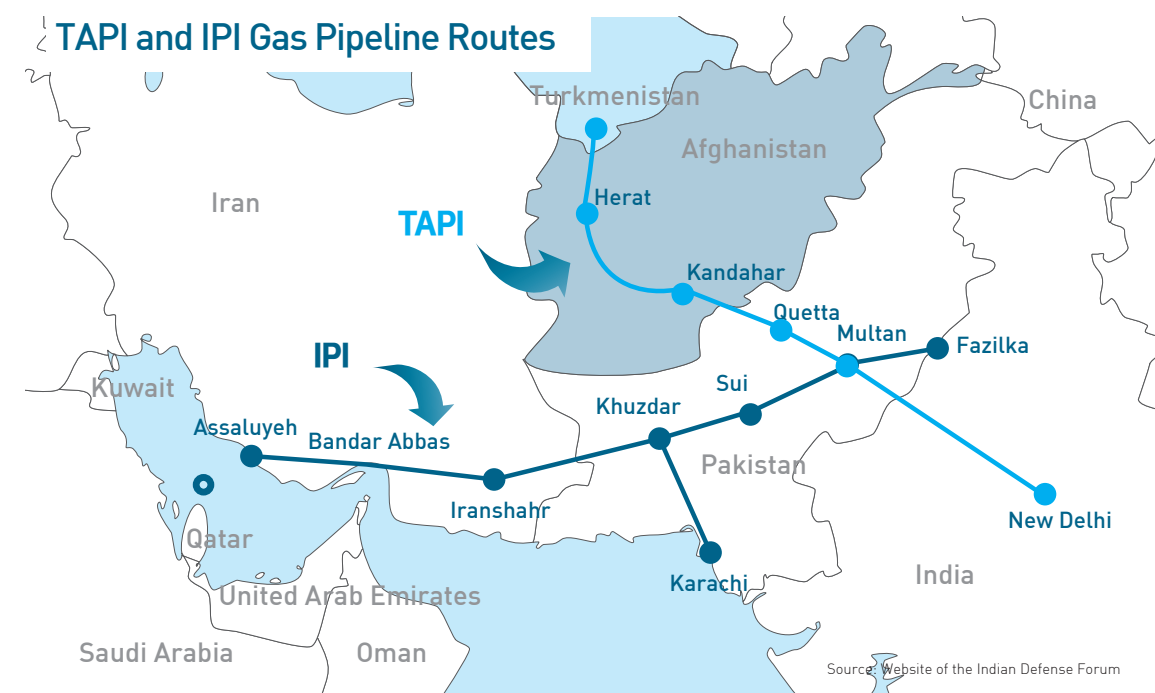


Afghanistan connects the Arabian Sea and the Caspian Sea, which hold the world's largest and second-largest energy resource reserves, respectively. With this geopolitical location, the country could serve as a gateway for transporting oil from Kazakhstan and natural gas from Turkmenistan, which has the world's fourth-largest natural gas reserves.

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project gained new life after the Asian Development Bank (ADB) released a feasibility study in 2008. With strong support from the U.S., four countries agreed on the project. The U.S. wants to weaken Russia and China's influence in Central Asia, while seeking stability in the South Asian region. The U.S. also needs the TAPI project for Afghanistan's economic development (power supply) after it withdraws from the coun-

try by the end of this year, and to secure revenue (an estimated transit fee income of USD 300-500 million annually). With Pakistan facing severe power shortages and India's increasing energy demands, much hope hangs on the project. As Turkmenistan plans to boost its annual gas exports to 180 billion cubic meters by 2030, it will need to develop various transportation routes. In 2009, Turkmenistan together with China opened a 2,200 km pipeline connecting north Turkmenistan to Chinese Xinjiang via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. That pipeline took just two-and-a-half years to build.

In 2012, transit fees for the TAPI project were agreed upon, and soon after Turkmenistan signed an agreement for the sale and purchase of natural gas. Turkmenistan agreed to establish TAPI Ltd., a joint venture to oversee implementation of the



Energy Resources in Central Asia

	Oil reserves (end 2012) (Million barrels)	Oil production 2012 (1,000 barrels/day)	Gas reserves (end 2012) (Trillion m ³)	Gas production 2012 (Billion m ³)
Azerbaijan	7,000	872	0.9	15.6
Kazakhstan	30,000	1,728	1.3	19.7
Turkmenistan	600	222	17.5	64.4
Uzbekistan	600	68	1.1	56.9
Russia	87,200	10,643	32.9	592.3
Middle East Total	807,700	28,270	80.5	548.4

Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy, June 2013

TAPI project, by the end of 2013, and appointed the ADB as transaction advisor. Also, the parties agreed that a consortium leader for the TAPI project would be finalized in the first quarter of 2014. It is positive news for TAPI that sanctions imposed against Iran by the West will hamper the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) project, because Pakistan will have to focus on the TAPI as its sole gas supply route, as India has.

However, no significant progress has been made so far. No company has stepped up to offer its technology and knowhow to the TAPI project, because the Turkmen government never allows participating companies a stake in its gas fields. Without incentives, no company will join the project given the tremendous investment and risk involved. Although the ADB has estimated that the pipeline project would require an investment of USD 7.6 billion, other experts estimate that the TAPI will cost at least USD 10-12 billion.

The Afghan government has pledged to deploy about 7,000 troops to guard the TAPI pipeline, but the security situation surrounding the TAPI remains murky. Along the 1,735 km TAPI pipeline, the 735 km Afghan leg runs through the provinces of Herat, Helmand, and Kandahar. As the stronghold of the Taliban, Kandahar is constantly at the center of terrorist events. The next 800 km runs through Pakistan, where instability and repeated diplomatic troubles with India could cast a cloud over the TAPI project at any time. Under such circumstances, the project is highly likely to remain a “dream project,” even though four countries have announced plans to complete the project by 2017 with a view to transporting up to 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas a year.

South Korean companies should keep close watch on the changing situation in Afghanistan and progress on the TAPI project, and prepare to seize any business opportunities that may arise.

Delays anticipated for exploitation projects

In 2010, Western media outlets clamored over a tremendous amount of untapped natural resources worth about USD one trillion allegedly buried in Afghanistan—from crude oil, natural gas and coal to minerals, such as copper, iron ore and lithium, and including precious metals and rare earths. In particular, northern Afghanistan is highly likely to have rich natural gas deposits, as the region is connected to Turkmenistan’s major natural gas reserves through the Amu Darya Basin. In the past, the Soviet Union developed gas fields and built a gas pipeline in Afghanistan to supply 2.5 billion cubic meters of Afghan gas annually to Uzbekistan. More recently, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has begun commercial production after being granted a gas concession by Kabul.


But continued delays are expected for mineral exploitation projects in Afghanistan. In 2007, the China Metallurgical Group (MMC) pledged to invest USD 3 billion in the Aynak copper mine. However, MMC has recently struggled with the Af-

ghan government since asking Kabul to cut royalty payments by almost half to 10 percent, delay production to 2019, release it from an agreement to build a power plant and copper smelter, and postpone the laying of a railway. Also, a consortium led by the state-run Steel Authority of India, has been granted with mining rights for three blocks of the Hajigak iron ore mines. However, the project is at standstill, mainly because Afghanistan’s parliament has delayed the approval of a new mining law and it is hard for the consortium to raise the USD 11 billion that it would need for the project. The original bid proposed the building of an Afghan steel plant that could produce 6.2 million tons per annum, an 800MW power plant, and a transmission line network, but was scaled down last August to a 1.5 million ton-per-annum steel plant with a price tag of USD 1.5 billion.

These trends in Afghan mineral development trend signify that the country’s massive mineral deposits are highly likely to remain just “treasure beneath one’s feet.” The Hajigak iron ore mines and Aynak copper mines are located in Bamiyan, famous for the Buddhas of Bamiyan. If the project can get back on track, it is likely to face

opposition from overseas NGOs.

Keeping close watch on the NATO withdrawal

Afghanistan held presidential elections early this April and U.S. and NATO troops are scheduled to leave the country by the end of the year. It is highly likely that the rule of law in Afghanistan will deteriorate, and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) will not be conducted properly, similar to what happened in Iraq. Despite such adversities, the interests of neighboring countries in TAPI have not yet reached the stage of giving up on their dreams. If the project continues under harsh conditions, many opportunities will still exist for South Korean companies. This is because South Korean troops have contributed to provincial reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan since the first troop deployment in 2010. South Korean companies should keep close watch on the changing situation in Afghanistan and progress on the TAPI project, and prepare to seize any business opportunities that may arise. 



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South Korea's Reconstruction Experience Provides Hope for Afghanistan



About a dozen agriculture officials listen to Prof. Park Mi-hye talk about crop cultivation at a laboratory in the College of Life & Environmental Sciences, Konkuk University.



A massive Buddhist statue, which remains partially damaged, at an ancient Buddhist site in Mes Aynak, Afghanistan.

After undergoing continuous civil war and unrest for the past three decades since it was invaded by the former Soviet Union in 1979, Afghanistan has seen its fundamentals for economic development significantly damaged. While 67.8% of the Afghan population engages in agriculture, only 12% of the country's land area of 79,000 km² is arable, much of which is prone to chronic natural disasters such as drought, flooding, and earthquakes. To make matters worse, only 6% of Afghanistan's arable land is being cultivated due to poor water supply. During the war, narcotics production thrived. About two million farmers, or 9% of the total population, still grow opium poppies, producing 92% of the world's opium.

South Korea draws on its experience to support Afghan reconstruction

Afghanistan has very poor access to health care. In one area just 42 km from the capital Kabul, more than a third of the residents must travel at least 10 km to obtain medical services. In a 21st century abundant with state-of-the-art health care facilities, Afghanistan's average life expectancy is only 43 years. Afghans think that people in their early 50s have lived long enough. To them, living more than that is a bonus.

Meanwhile, human rights infringement against Afghan women is rampant. Even after the fall of



If South Korea adapts its experience to Afghanistan's circumstances and situation, it will be able to support Afghanistan in a differentiated manner.

the Taliban regime, the social status of Afghan women has not improved much. Many women still suffer physical and mental agony for not wearing a burqa, for working or going to school, or for escaping their husbands' beatings and ill-treatment. Unable to endure such suffering, some women have even burned themselves to death.

South Korea has dispatched a public-civilian-military team to support reconstruction in Afghanistan, one of the world's poorest countries. The dispatch carried out in cooperation with the United States is expected to help the reconstruction effort, taking advantage of South Korea's experience as a country that emerged from the Korean War with a per capita income of 73 dollars to become one of

the world's dozen largest economies. Of course, it is difficult to compare the situations of South Korea right after the Korean War and that of present-day Afghanistan. However, South Korea has accumulated experience that is vastly different from that of the U.S. and other countries conducting provincial reconstruction projects in various parts of Afghanistan. South Korea has the experience of overcoming a situation similar to that of Afghanistan and making progress in economic development while also realizing political and social advancement. If South Korea can adapt its experience to Afghanistan's circumstances and situation, it will be able to support Afghanistan in a way that other supporting countries cannot.

Rural, human resource and urban development—three axes of Afghanistan's reconstruction plan

The crux of the reconstruction project is to teach people to fish rather than just giving them fish. At the heart of the mid-to-long-term plan to rebuild and revitalize Afghanistan is the use of carrots and sticks, focusing on the three axes of rural, human resource, and urban economic development.

As rural areas have unique problems different from those of urban areas, programs should be tailored to the rural areas. These programs aim to improve living standards, increase income, develop infrastructure and the rural economy, and expand educational opportunities. To that end, it is necessary for local governments, NGOs and the ISAF to render continuous support, and strong government-led assistance will increase the possibility for success.

With government support and help, massive investment projects should be carried out to improve infrastructure, followed by campaigns to revamp lifestyles and ways of thinking in rural areas. In the case of agricultural development, for example, a system to boost inter-village competition using South Korea's Saemaul Movement (New Community Movement) as a benchmark could be introduced to Afghan rural areas to instill self-motivation. Local residents could be encouraged to donate even small amounts of money to reconstruction projects, say a bridge building project, to boost a sense of participation and to share in the rewards upon completion of the project. Because assistance that is 100 % external is doomed to failure. The first stage of de-

velopment should focus on elementary and middle school education, constantly developing human resources starting from improved literacy rates to enhanced technical skills. The Afghan government should provide all elementary and middle school students with compulsory public education. Likewise, it is necessary to make vocational and technical training programs compulsory for high schools, and for companies that require highly skilled workers. The government should offer tax breaks and create a special fund to establish state-owned or state-run vocational training centers. It would be helpful to introduce an incentive scheme that offers tax reductions and other subsidies for companies that want specially trained workers if they train a certain number of employees or build their own training facilities to provide training opportunities to their workers during working hours.

Parwan Province, strategically located north of the capital Kabul, Afghanistan's political and economic center, has great economic potential. It is also strategically important for transportation. Highway 1 penetrates the heart of Parwan Province and leads to the major populous city of Kabul in the northern Hindu Kush region. Highway 1 runs through the most populous district in Parwan Province. This highway, which connects Panjshir and Kapisa to the east, and Bamiyan to the west, is a hub for transporting people and goods. It is also a primary route for transporting pilgrims to the destroyed Buddhas of Bamiyan. This signifies that the tourism industry can become a potent source of Afghan economic growth. If infrastructure, such as the Parwan economic corridor or special economic zone, is properly in place in the vicinity of Highway 1



Young Afghan men attend an induction ceremony at the Afghan-Korean Vocational Training Center (AKVTC) on March 7, 2011. The Center offers vocational training in various fields including auto maintenance, construction, and electrical work. [JoongAng Photo]

and Bagram Airfield, it will play a pivotal role in economic development in not only Parwan Province, but also in the capital Kabul and nearby regions.

Shared visions should come first for Afghan reconstruction projects

The path to economic development and modern society is long and winding, and is filled with many stumbling blocks. Success depends on having a concrete vision for the future coupled with mid-to-long-term goals. It is hard to imagine delay-

ing such a critical journey. But if the Afghan government, NGOs, and stakeholders drag their feet and delay action, an opportunity for a united Afghanistan to become prosperous will also be delayed. If planned projects are realized, the living standards of the Afghan people will surely improve. Therefore, these projects should be followed by education for Afghan people focusing on realistic expectations, long-term benefits from the projects, and anticipated goals. Fulfilling these goals will be possible only when each and every person has a shared dream and actively participates in realizing a common vision for Afghanistan. ☺