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RUSSIA AND AFGHANISTAN

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Analysis

The Afghan Problem from a Russian Perspective

By Victor Korgun, Moscow

Abstract

Afghanistan is once again a key foreign policy concern for Russia. The unstable situation in Afghanistan, and in particular the presence of illegal narcotics, Islamic extremism and corruption, threatens the stability of Russia and its strategic allies in Central Asia. To address these challenges, Russia is seeking to play an increasingly active role in the reconstruction and stabilization of Afghanistan at bilateral, regional and international levels. Therefore, Russia and the West have a common interest in Afghanistan, and Moscow is more than happy to work collaboratively with the Western-led international efforts in Afghanistan.

Recent History of Russian-Afghan Relations

For many decades, Afghanistan was a highly significant element within Soviet foreign policy. Moscow provided huge economic and military assistance to Afghanistan and from the late 1970's became embroiled in a war, which ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Following the break-up, Afghanistan was relegated to a peripheral interest for Russia. During this period, a civil war, or rather a power struggle, took place in Afghanistan between the various Mujahedin factions, leading to the disintegration of Afghanistan and subsequently to the emergence of the Taliban military and political movement. After the Taliban regime was removed by the NATO operation "Enduring Freedom" in 2001, a situation emerged in which a reconstruction of Afghanistan and a transition to peaceful democratic development was possible. As a consequence, opportunities also appeared for the restoration of traditional good-neighborly relations between Russia and Afghanistan.

After Operation "Enduring Freedom"

The Russian leadership actively supported the NATO counterterrorist operation in Afghanistan, even deciding not to object to the deployment of NATO forces in military bases in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. As part of the wider international support effort for this operation, the Russian government provided prompt humanitarian assistance to the Afghan population. Following the dismantling of the Taliban regime, the head of the interim administration, Hamid Karzai and other leaders of the country, paid an official visit to Moscow in the spring of 2002. During this visit, the two countries signed 17 agreements concerning the construction and restoration of economic infrastructure, energy projects, delivery of agricultural machines and equipment, industrial equipment and various types of modern techniques.

However, the two countries have not been able to effectively implement all of these agreements because Russian-Afghan relations are dependent on a complex array of factors: firstly, the situation in Afghanistan, secondly, Russia's relations with leading Western countries, primarily the US, and thirdly, the changing situation in the region of Central Asia and the wider world. In spite of the slow progress in bilateral relations, Moscow continues to support the international community's efforts towards fighting terrorism and Islamic extremism in Afghanistan and the region. Russia has also assisted the Afghan people in their efforts towards the reconstruction of their ruined economy and social sphere. Although Russia has only limited economic capacity to support Afghanistan, Moscow has attempted to make a contribution, a significant illustration of which is the remittance of Afghan debts to Russia, amounting to $11.5 billion.

Russian Interests in Afghanistan

Russian involvement in the reconstruction of Afghanistan is the result of a number of factors relating to Russia's national interests and its growing role within the global and regional system of international relations. In spite of the ousting of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan continues to generate threats and challenges to Russian security, and the security of Russia's allies in Central Asia. These challenges include drug-trafficking, Islamic extremism and terrorism, political instability and widespread corruption.

Illegal Narcotics

At the current time, the most dangerous threat to Russia emanating from Afghanistan is the production, unlawful circulation and smuggling of drugs. A considerable proportion of Afghan illegal narcotics go to Russia. In spite of claims by the Afghan authorities that drug production is steadily decreasing (in 2007 its volume was

8200 tons, in 2008 it is 7700 tons, a 6% drop), the volume of Afghan opiates illegally imported into Russia remains at more or less the same level. Almost 25% of all drugs produced in Afghanistan, which amounts to almost 4 tons of opium a day (enough to produce 6 million doses of pure heroin), enter Russia from Afghanistan's northern border via the territory of the Central Asian Republics.

Heroin is trafficked into Russia along several routes—across Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. A substantial amount of the heroin entering Russia is transported onto Western Europe, but most of it is consumed in Russia. Official statistics in Russia state that there are 2.5 million drug addicts in this country, with Russia now ranked as the world's No. 1 consumer of Afghan heroin. In recent years narco-mania has developed into a national crisis. Almost 30,000 people, mainly young, die of drug overdoses annually. Thus, Afghan heroin has become a real threat to the health of the Russian population, and a serious factor worsening the demographic situation. Therefore, the fight against Afghan drugs is a high priority in Russian foreign policy.

The problem of Afghan drugs is closely tied to the Taliban and its allies. Drugs are one of the Taliban's most significant, if not primary, financial source. The Taliban invest in drug production, provide protection for its harvesting, supply seeds and credits for farmers producing drugs (while often using violence), sell drugs, and collect taxes (known as *ushr*) from the producers of drugs in the territory under their control. Altogether they accumulate close to half a billion dollars income annually, of which taxes constitute 70 to 75 million dollars.

Islamic Extremism

Another serious threat to Russia and its allies is Islamic extremism, which constitutes both the ideology and political practice of the Taliban and other radical Islamist groupings linked to "Al-Qaeda". Despite the numerical increase of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the US-led International coalition forces, Islamists have systematically escalated hostilities against Karzai's government and NATO troops, expanding the area under their influence and control. According to the International Center of Cooperation and Security, in 2008 the Taliban maintained a military presence on 52% of Afghan territory. By the beginning of 2010 this figure has considerably increased: now armed groups of extremists operate on 72% of the country's territory, including the previously calm Western and Northern provinces, which are in immediate proximity to the Central Asian Republics.

The Taliban have close ties with extremist groupings operating in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, first of all the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb ut-Tahrir. Due to the efforts of the army and police in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the bulk of these Islamist fighters have been driven from these countries. However, most simply joined the ranks of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, who have established a convenient haven in neighboring Pakistan. In the spring of 2007, a large section of IMU militants based in Pakistan were eliminated by local tribal militia assisted by the Pakistani army. Yet, many continue to operate and have re-entered Afghanistan and joined local Taliban. The close cooperation between Central Asian Islamic extremists and Afghan Islamic extremists is an open threat to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as well as to Russia, because Moscow views the Central Asian region as its own area of responsibility and positions itself as a guarantor of regional security. Additionally, Afghan insurgents also threaten Russia by embracing Chechens connected with the remnants of separatist-movement in their homeland. This concern about Chechnya and the rest of the North Caucasus is why Russia is deeply interested in defeating Islamic extremism and terrorism in Afghanistan and the region. The recent suicide attacks in Moscow, which led to 40 civilian casualties, may be viewed as a striking illustration of this threat.

Corruption

Russia's other concerns are related to corruption in Afghanistan, which is becoming endemic to such a degree that Afghanistan is now only second to Somalia as the most corrupt state in the world. Corruption is corroding and destroying the reconstruction project in Afghanistan, leading the US administration of President Obama to identify the struggle against corruption as the main priority of its new Afghan strategy. Similarly to drugs, corruption can become a trans-border and hence transnational phenomenon. Indeed, corruption in Afghanistan is spreading and affecting power structures in neighboring countries, including some of Russia's most important allies and partners.

Contemporary Russian-Afghan Relations

As outlined, Russia faces a number of serious challenges and threats emanating from the territory of Afghanistan. As a result, Russia is directly interested in addressing these challenges, along with the Afghan people and world community, and thus Moscow actively participates in the war against narco-trafficking, the struggle with Islamic extremism, the revival of Afghanistan's

war-torn economy and the aim of returning Afghanistan to peaceful life. Moreover, Russia cannot ignore the destiny of the Afghan people, with whom it has a history of good neighborly relations. It is also considered that peace and stability in Afghanistan is necessary to create a stable security situation in the countries surrounding Afghanistan, including Russia.

Recently, new opportunities have emerged for Russia to engage with the rebuilding process in Afghanistan. In March 2009, an international conference on Afghanistan was held under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Moscow. A key conclusion reached during this conference was that a solution to the Afghan problem, while the current situation of stalemate between NATO forces and Taliban continues, does not seem possible without the involvement of Russia and its Central Asia allies, because of their rich experience in interaction with Afghanistan. This idea has found widespread support in the West, including from the US. Western politicians and military officials often appeal to Russia to use its past experience to contribute to a peaceful resolution of the situation in Afghanistan. The latest appeal of this kind was made by the Secretary General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who stated in a meeting with Prime Minister Putin on the 17th of December 2009, that he saw Afghanistan as a core issue of cooperation between Russia and NATO.

Due to its geopolitical situation and strategic opportunities, Russia is able to influence Afghanistan through several channels: firstly, Russian-Afghan bilateral relations, which are repeatedly praised by both Russian and Afghan Presidents; secondly, cooperation with its allies and partners in Central Asia; thirdly, participation in regional organizations, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO); and fourthly, cooperation with international organizations, such as UN, OSCE, NATO.

At a bilateral level, Russia provides assistance to Afghanistan in economic reconstruction projects, previously financed by Soviet technical and economic aid (142 projects), geological exploration and personnel training, including police officers specializing in counter-narcotics. Although limited in scale, military technical cooperation between the two countries is also developing. Also, Russia is active in multilateral cooperation between the Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan, including in the energy sphere. At the present time, Tajikistan is completing the construction of the largest hydroelectric power station in the region, named "Songtuda", with Russian financial and technical assistance. The energy Songtuda produces will be transmitted to Afghanistan and further on to Pakistan.

The provision of assistance to NATO has been one of the most significant components of Moscow's recent Afghan policy. Russia has provided use of its air space and ground facilities for delivering various NATO goods to Afghanistan, including troops and weapons. An agreement on these arrangements was signed by Putin on the sidelines of the NATO Council session in Bucharest, April 2008. Additionally, as confirmed during the meeting of Anders Fogh Rasmussen with Russian leaders on 17 December 2009 in Moscow, Russia has expressed a readiness to expand cooperation. Such cooperation would also involve the Central Asian Republics, whose territory is used for the shipment of NATO's goods. A number of NATO states have concluded respective agreements with the Central Asian Republics, but it has proven to be a complex and drawn-out process for the West to deal with each of the Central Asian Republics individually. Taking this into account, it is logical that Russia proposes to establish direct contacts between NATO and CSTO, the latter comprising Russia and the Central Asian countries. From a Russian perspective, cooperation between NATO and CSTO should not be restricted to the transportation of NATO equipment, but may also include wider interaction in Afghanistan, for instance joint efforts to tackle drugs and terrorism. CSTO possesses rich experience in this area.

In addition, Russian membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is viewed as a way of impacting on the situation in Afghanistan. From its very beginning SCO set out to provide regional security and fight separatism and Islamic extremism. SCO already interacts with Afghanistan, within the framework of the SCO-Afghan Contact Group, which coordinates the efforts of the two sides in their struggle against terrorism and narco-trafficking. However, SCO faces a number of problems, which restrict its participation in Afghanistan. Firstly, its member states have ruled out a direct military presence in Afghanistan, and in any case SCO does not have its own armed forces. Secondly, its financial base is weak: last year its budget did not exceed $4 million, which barely covers its personnel expenses. Thirdly, owing to its limited financial resources, it does not have joint economic and social projects. Fourthly, there are many internal discrepancies among SCO member states, including political, military, economic, state borders, national and others. Thus, SCO is not a highly integrated organization. Finally, the SCO member-states have different goals in and linkages with Afghanistan.

Without doubt, they are united by common threats emanating from Afghanistan—terrorism, national separatism, Islamic extremism, narco-traffic, general instability. Yet, the scale and prioritization of these threats is perceived differently by the member-states. Russia is mainly concerned with Afghan narco-trafficking. This concern is shared by the Central Asian Republics. In addition, the Central Asian Republics are greatly concerned about the threat of Islamic extremism originating from Afghan territory. China is more preoccupied with ensuring its economic interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. At the same time, all of the SCO member-states are aware of the growing US political and military influence in the region. This complex array of dynamics makes it difficult for SCO's member-states to elaborate a unified international approach towards Afghanistan. Nonetheless, all are interested in the development of a peaceful and democratic Afghanistan and to this end support and are ready to contribute to the efforts of the international coalition in its fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Conclusion

Afghanistan, with all its problems, has once again become an important Russian foreign policy interest. Russia shares the aims of the international coalition in Afghanistan and supports the efforts of the world community to eliminate the threats emanating from Afghanistan. Therefore, within its capacity, Moscow is ready to play a more active part in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

About the Author

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Analysis

Afghanistan's Significance for Russia: Regional or Global Strategy?

By Natasha Kuhrt, London

Abstract

Afghanistan is of great significance for Russia, primarily in terms of security but also as part of its wider strategy to assert its influence in Central Asia. Russia is promoting the CSTO as a regional security force, but at the present time it is not capable of bringing security to Afghanistan. As a result, in spite of reservations about the strategy adopted by ISAF, Russia is hopeful that NATO's presence in Afghanistan is successful, and Moscow thus continues to provide the ISAF operation with support.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist acts, Russia stood shoulder to shoulder with the United States ready to combat terrorism wherever it might be. However, it very soon became clear that the objectives of Russia and the US were rather different. For Russia, the Taliban was a security headache with which it had been battling for some time, and that was intimately connected to developments in Tajikistan where Russia was engaged in a "peacekeeping mission". The Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 had confirmed that the continuation of conflict in Afghanistan was a real threat to the security of Russia's southern borders, and therefore directly affected Russian interests. Therefore, on the face of it, it was logical that Russia should welcome US attempts to tackle al-Qaeda and the Taliban, in particular because from the early 1990s Russian policymakers had nurtured hopes that the US and Russia would curb Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia together. However, contrary to Russian expectations, the US appeared to prefer bilateral relations with the Central Asian states, with energy, not Islamic fundamentalism, its main focus. Indeed, Russian academics and policymakers criticized the doctrine of "geopolitical pluralism" advanced by Zbigniew Brzezinski, which aimed to make the Central Asian states as independent as possible from Moscow, and which advocated that Washington prioritize partnerships with Turkey or China over Russia in its Central Asian policy. Furthermore, it argued that China should be viewed as a means of curbing excessive Russian influence in the region.

As it has become increasingly clear that the Taliban has not in fact been eliminated and that the US presence in Central Asia is not a temporary phenomenon, Russian views of the military campaign in Afghanistan have become far more ambivalent. Russia's initial support for the Afghan campaign, the "war of necessity" as opposed to the "war of choice" in Iraq, has lessened, and Russia now questions the legitimacy of the war and its extension into "AfPak". The democratization agenda of the Bush administration in Central Asia, entailing support for "colored revolutions" in the former Soviet space, became a major bone of contention between the US and Russia. The advent of the Obama administration with its awkward *leitmotiv* of a "reset" in bilateral relations, appeared to downplay democratization, as part of a general toning down of the more normative and prescriptive aspects of the US's Russia policy. This should have assuaged Russian concerns regarding Afghanistan. However, Russia has been cautious about the whole idea of "reset", seeing it as narrow and selective, and as not really addressing Russia's top-priority interests. For Russia, nothing less than a "reconfiguration" of the relationship will suffice, to include cooperation with regional security organizations sponsored by Russia.

Afghanistan's Place in Russian Foreign and Security Policy

The 2008 Russian Foreign Policy Concept places regional and subregional organizations sponsored by Russia at the forefront of Central Asian security, principally the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

While lacking in the energy resources of other Central Asian states, Afghanistan is still a potentially important transit state (*or a strategic backwater?).* However, in some respects Afghanistan's importance lies more in its role as a source of threats to Russian national security: Afghanistan is a supplier of narcotics to the Central Asian states, which in turn traffic and distribute drugs to Russia. As much as 90% of the heroin entering Russia originates in Afghanistan. Russia argues that Afghanistan's role as a prime producer of opium, principally for the manufacture of heroin, is a major security headache for Russia. The neighboring Central Asian states are all conduits for narcotics trafficking. Most of the drugs trafficked come from Northern Afghanistan, the stronghold of the erstwhile Northern Alliance, supported by Moscow.

An additional domestic dimension for Russia is that migrant workers from Tajikistan are involved in drugs trafficking and distribution. Only a small proportion of these drugs are consumed in the US or Europe, with the bulk of them being consumed in Russia. It is therefore argued that the US and Europe are only marginally interested in stopping narcotics trafficking. Moreover, ISAF's strategy of turning a "blind eye" to poppy growing is seen as disastrous by Moscow. Indeed the basis of the new NATO strategy of engaging with and even integrating former Taliban is viewed negatively in Moscow, as it is feared that this could lead to a resurgence of fundamentalism in the wider region, leading to destabilization far beyond Afghanistan. It has been suggested that Russia is concerned that the main purpose behind this policy is to consolidate a NATO base in Russia's "near abroad". Clearly, even though the prospect of NATO membership for Georgia is off the menu, Russia is still apprehensive regarding longer term NATO/US ambitions.

Afghanistan is also of key significance to Russia's wider Central Asian policy: the so-called Russian "return to Central Asia" is an integral part of Russia's claim to great power status. The idea once put forward by Anatolii Chubais of a "liberal empire" provides an ideological basis to this strategy: in this formulation, Russia is presented as a "responsible" great power with commensurate responsibilities for ensuring the security of less "capable" states. This inextricable link was emphasised by Russia's ambassador to NATO, Dmitrii Rogozin, who, echoing the Foreign Policy Concept, warned that should the NATO campaign in Afghanistan fail, then Russia would be left *with no choice but to implement its multipronged involvement in the affairs of Central Asia* (italics added by the author). The consequences of the failure would primarily be an increase in the "narco-terrorist threat", and a general upsurge in fundamentalist sentiment, leading to the destabilisation of the entire region. For this reason, the nature and character of NATO's exit strategy from Afghanistan is vitally important from a Russian perspective.

Regional Security and Political Structures

The Russian National Security Strategy identifies the inadequacy of existing global and regional security architecture, and therefore advocates a greater involvement for Russia in developing such arrangements. This involvement is inextricably linked to the "beefing-up" of the CSTO, which in the National Security Strategy is identified as a means of countering regional military challenges and threats and ensuring long-term stability. The 2008 Foreign Policy Concept also elaborates the importance of the CSTO in detail. The Foreign Policy Concept notes that the "international authority" of the

CSTO should be strengthened and links developed with similar regional organizations, such as NATO. It also draws attention to US plans for a "Greater Central Asia", to include Afghanistan, Pakistan and even India, while acknowledging the importance of the US and other Western countries as providers of technologies and other resources for modernization. It is therefore recommended that a complex approach be taken, which would position Russia as an agent of modernization and, importantly, stability—the implication being that Russia needs to position itself as a competitor in the battle for this Greater Central Asia.

In the Foreign Policy Concept (signed into force while Bush was still President) it is suggested that the CSTO could stabilise the Afghan-Tajik border together with NATO, an undertaking that could even include Iran. Russia seeks to emphasis that its involvement via the CSTO offers the voice of "experience", noting its understanding of the balance of ethno-religious forces and groupings and its influence from the days of the Northern Alliance.

In spite of the fact that Russia continues to see NATO as a threat, cooperation on Afghanistan has continued: for example, Russia has allowed ISAF to use its territory for transit purposes, but, at the same time, Russia's opposition to NATO's tolerance of poppy growing continues to be a source of unease.

Key Regional Actors

Other key partners for Russia in the region include India, China and Iran. Both Russia and China have expressed their disapproval of Washington's policy of isolating Iran, viewing Iran as an important economic partner. Also, at one time Iran was considered a valuable ally against fundamentalism in Afghanistan, although reports that Iran is courting the Taliban make Iran a less certain ally in this respect. An additional complication to cooperation with Iran on Afghanistan is Russia's condemnation of nuclear proliferation, which is making it increasingly difficult for Moscow to support Tehran as disputes between Iran and the West continue over Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

India and China are both so-called "strategic partners" of Russia, and both have been critical of the NATO campaign in Afghanistan because of their concerns regarding the longer-term situation in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of NATO forces. Indeed, India is concerned that any NATO withdrawal might lead to a rise in Pakistani influence in Afghanistan and a concomitant increase in fundamentalism, leading to destabilisation. The India-NATO relationship over Afghanistan is further complicated by the fact that the US is trying to keep both Pakistan and India on-board; a recent US-India nuclear deal appeared to cement a special relationship between the US and India, but India remains anxious that the US may ignore its concerns because of its commitment to its existing wider "AfPak" strategy. India, like Russia, is very critical of NATO efforts to engage with or even to "buy off" the Taliban, considering this to ultimately imply a return to power of the Taliban. Any government in Kabul which is perceived by New Delhi as leaning towards Islamabad is a real concern. Attempts to revive the Primakovian notion of a Russia-India-China axis, which would ensure stability in Eurasia remain purely declarative at the present time. Moreover, with the US establishing increasingly strong strategic ties to India, such an axis appears less likely, although Russia-India-China energy projects cannot be ruled out.

Through the SCO and the "BRIC" dialogue, Russia has attempted to fashion alternative avenues for tackling the security challenges of the wider Central Asian region, and, with the BRIC idea, seeks ways to augment Russia's influence at a global level. However, as far as the SCO is concerned, China's prominent role in the organization, and Beijing's well-known aversion to military alliances and prioritization of economic over political and military objectives, mean that the SCO can hardly be seen as the mechanism to manage any "fallout" from Afghanistan. Moreover, Russia and China's longer term objectives in the region are not necessarily harmonious.

Domestic and Regional Dimensions

Russia's own attempts to assure security, for example increasing security along Central Asian borders, have been largely unsuccessful, with Central Asian border patrols remaining corrupt and ineffective. It is questionable whether Russia can, in the context of the CSTO for example, manage to stem narcotics trafficking without cooperation from NATO. Indeed, Lavrov appeared to acknowledge the continued need for joint cooperation when he stressed at a meeting with Hillary Clinton in January 2010 that "the international community still has not fully tapped the potential of the CSTO, in particular its antinarcotics efforts". In essence, Russia would like to see the CSTO engage in "global peacekeeping" as a way of legitimating this organisation. In the best-case scenario, NATO would acknowledge the CSTO as a dialogue partner. Unfortunately NATO has been reluctant to accord such a role to Russia. Thus, while in December 2009 NATO and Russia agreed on common threats and challenges to security in the twenty-

first century, little of substance has emerged from this common identification. In NATO's long-awaited new strategy (May 2010), there is little regarding this point; the most positive note consists of the strategy's approval of Russia's new military doctrine as "strictly defensive", which, given the "fact that NATO is a defensive Alliance" is taken as a "good starting point"—a fairly non-committal statement.

Conclusions

The lesson for Russia is that although it strives to be Central Asia's "protector", as a kind of semi-colonial civilizer, the uncertainty of regional power relationships and the complex mix of converging and diverging interests of the various powers, make it impossible for any one state to dominate the region. The existing regional fora favoured by Russia are still inadequate for tackling the myriad of problems in Central Asia. For this reason it is hard to see how Russia could take on the task of Afghanistan, if and when ISAF leaves. Whether other regional powers, for example, Iran step in, is an open question, but Russia must tread carefully: while it has little influence over Tehran, Moscow may not wish to risk alienating Iran, in particular as Tehran may see some merit in creating problems for NATO in Afghanistan by supporting its erstwhile enemy the Taliban. Meanwhile, Russia is on the horns of a dilemma: while NATO still represents a theoretical threat for Russia, its failure in Afghanistan would be an even greater security challenge, and might complicate Russian plans for the wider region. Therefore, from a Russian perspective it is positive that at the present time NATO will not willingly contemplate failure in Afghanistan; as Anders Fogh Rasmussen has said, Afghanistan represents a critical test of NATO's effectiveness.

About the Author

Natasha Kuhrt is a Lecturer at the Department of War Studies, Kings College, London. She is the author of *Russian Policy Towards China and Japan: The El'tsin and Putin Periods* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), and is currently working on a book on Russian foreign policy for Polity Press.

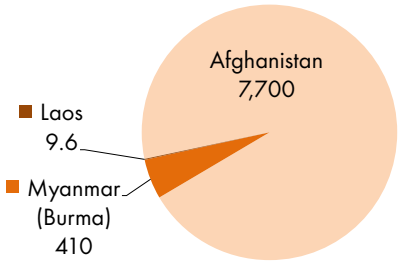
Further Reading

- Marlene LaRuelle, *Beyond the Afghan Trauma: Russia's Return to Afghanistan* (Washington D.C., Jamestown Foundation, 2009)
- Igor Safranchuk, "The Afghan Problem in the Regional Context", *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 3, July–September 2009.

Statistics

The Global Production and Consumption of Opiates

World Opium Production in the Major Cultivating Countries 2008 (metric tons)



Source: UNODC World Drug Report 2009, http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2009/WDR2009_eng_web.pdf

Figure 2: Estimated World Heroin/Morphine Production in the Major Cultivating Countries 2008 (430 metric tons)

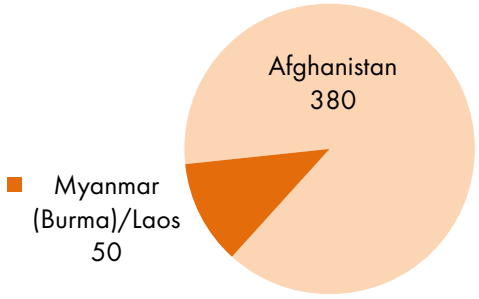
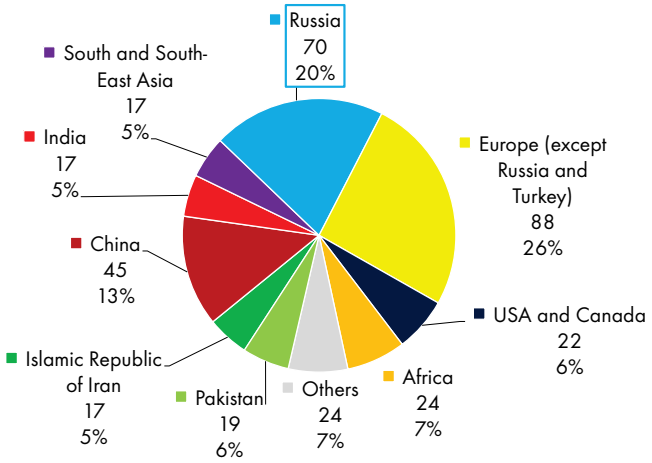
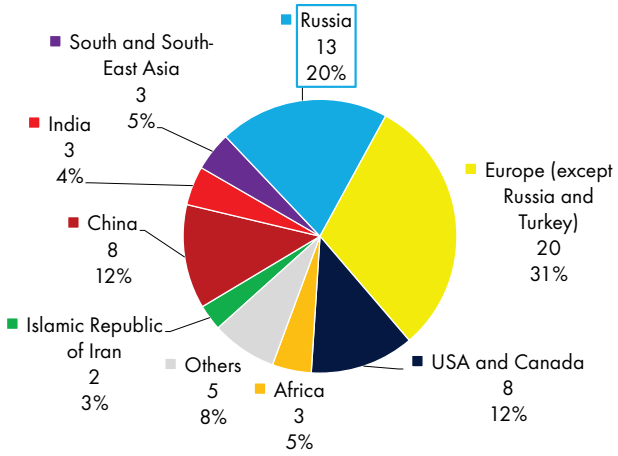


Figure 3: Global Heroin Consumption (340 metric tons*) 2008



** Of the 430 tons referenced in Figure 2, about 90 tons are seized, leaving 340 tons for consumption.*

Figure 4: Global Opiate Market Value (US$ 65 billion per year)



Source: Addiction, Crime and Insurgency. The transnational threat of Afghan opium, UNODC, http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Afghanistan/Afghan_Opium_Trade_2009_web.pdf

Analysis

Why Russia Is Cooperating With the West in Afghanistan

By Dick Krickus, Washington

Abstract

In spite of fears that the West is exploiting UN mandated military operations in Afghanistan to secure control of vital hydro-carbon and pipeline assets in Central Asia, the Kremlin has joined the American-NATO forces in an attempt to crush the jihadists in that war-torn country. A Taliban return to power would facilitate the flow of heroin from Afghanistan to Russia; and the jihadists would promote insurgencies throughout Central Asia and use it as a pathway into Russia proper, where foreign jihadists already are encouraging armed uprisings, terrorist strikes and assassinations in the North Caucasus. As a consequence, Russia has offered modest assistance to the American-NATO military venture; for example, it has provided an air and land corridor to supply the troops in the war zone. In addition to denying the Taliban a return to power, the Kremlin hopes to be an active player in shaping Afghanistan's post-war strategic environment. In the meantime, it is encouraging NATO to give China and other powers in the region the opportunity to help pacify Afghanistan through existing institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Extending a Hand

While relentless in complaining about NATO's eastward advance to their borders, Russian authorities have supported the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in its drive to prevent the Taliban from returning to power in Afghanistan. At the July 2009 Moscow summit, Presidents Dmitri Medvedev and Barak Obama pledged to stabilize Afghanistan by fighting terrorism and stemming the flow of narcotics from the embattled country. While the alliance wages armed conflict against the jihadists, Russia—still suffering from "Afghanistan fatigue"—has offered non-lethal assistance to Hamid Karzai's government. Moscow has provided intelligence, trained anti-drug personnel, helped rebuild the country's dilapidated infrastructure, and has sold the Afghani army weapons, helicopters and communications equipment.

The transit of non-lethal and lethal supplies to ISAF via air and land corridors through Russia to bases in Afghanistan has been Russia's most highly publicized contribution to the effort. The Russian supply route complements the existing dangerous route that involves a land corridor from the Karachi port through the narrow Pakistani Khyber Pass into Afghanistan. Jihadists have attacked convoys carrying supplies over this route, killing many truck drivers and destroying a significant amount of cargo and numerous vehicles.

In particular, Russia has provided air and land corridors as part of the Northern Distribution Network. About 2 flights a day carry supplies to NATO units in Afghanistan and the deal provides for a total of 4,500 flights to be conducted on an annual basis. Furthermore, the U.S. transit base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan provides most of the jet fuel that U.S. aircraft use in Afghanistan and about 30,000 U.S. troops have passed through it on their deployment to the war zone.

Simultaneously, extensive cargo moves through Latvian ports, across Russia, via Termez in Kazakhstan and ultimately onto Afghanistan. Black Sea ports are also connected to this network. U.S. officials have estimated that by the spring of 2010 about one-quarter of the alliance's non-lethal supplies was transported in this fashion. The annual savings as a consequence exceeds $100 million annually.

Russia is prepared to provide Afghanistan with helicopters, arms and ammunition that its army can deploy in its struggle against the Taliban albeit through commercial rather than pro-bono deals. In addition, it is training Afghan police and providing intelligence that has a bearing on military operations throughout the war zone.

Critics Object to Russian Policy

Some members of Russia's military and political elite oppose helping Western operations in Afghanistan. They deem it ill-advised for several compelling reasons:

Military Intervention In Afghanistan Has Enhanced Western Influence in Central Asia: The Americans and Europeans covet Central Asia's energy assets and the pipelines that carry the region's oil and gas to international customers. Their intrusive military campaign may thwart efforts to integrate the region's hydro-carbon wealth into Russia's economic modernization drive and its campaign to re-establish hegemony throughout

Eurasia. Thinking along these lines explains why some in the Kremlin favor closing the Manas Transit Center that the Americans operate in Kyrgyzstan.

An American Defeat In Afghanistan Will Enhance Russian Security: A setback in Afghanistan will force the "arrogant" Americans to acknowledge their declining political and military influence, and to reconcile security disputes with Russia over NATO enlargement, the missile defense system, and Russia's claim that is has special spheres of influence in the former Soviet space that includes Central Asia.

A NATO Setback Will Enhance The Prospects for a New European Security System: Should the NATO operation in Afghanistan fail, the Europeans will have to acknowledge the futility of "out-of-area" operations. That conclusion would encourage them to embrace the new European security system that President Dmitri Medvedev has advocated.

Obama's Exit from Afghanistan Is Only a Matter of Time: Obama's grand strategy for Afghanistan rests on achieving daunting security and economic goals that are not politically sustainable over the long run. The Taliban will neutralize the West's military might by simply avoiding major head-to-head battles and await the day that public outcries to "bring the boys home" compel American and European leaders to do just that. What is more, the highly touted development component of the Obama plan represents nothing less than nation building in one of the most backward societies on earth. Given the huge and expanding U.S. deficit, how plausible is it that any administration in Washington will pour billions of dollars into Afghanistan over many years to get that difficult task done? Why help the Americans then in what is a lost cause?

Leaders Back Cooperation

These objections cannot be easily dismissed, but Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and President Dmitri Medvedev have endorsed Russian-Western cooperation in Afghanistan for a number of vital strategic reasons.

Enhancing Russian Security: Afghanistan is the primary source of what many Russians deem their most devastating social problem: drug addiction. The UN reports that Russian addicts consume almost the same amount of heroin that all of Europe consumes and a disproportionate number of drug addicts who die from substance abuse worldwide live in Russia. The trend lines are soaring upward and show no signs of leveling out. Consequently, Victor Ivanov, the head of Russia's Federal Drug Control Agency, has urged NATO to embrace an aggressive poppy eradication program in Afghanistan. (NATO has rejected this solution since so many Afghans depend upon poppy production.) Under renewed Taliban rule, the flood of narcotics would likely surge and it is imperative that heroin supply lines from Afghanistan to Russia be interdicted. It is noteworthy that even after the awful bomb attacks in the Moscow metro, polls show that Russians fear drug addiction more than terrorism, with 65 percent naming drugs and 60 percent citing terrorism.

Turning to the political-military threat, a Taliban return to power in Kabul would have dire consequences for Russia. The triumphant jihadists would direct their attention to Russia's 20 million Muslim residents in a "struggle for religious liberation" from the rule of "unbelievers." More to the point, for some time now, foreign terrorists have provided weapons and trained anti-government fighters in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and other parts of the North Caucasus. As a consequence, there have been mounting deaths resulting from armed combat, terrorism and assassinations throughout the region. At the same time, the jihadists have carried the fight deep into Russia proper as evidenced by the St. Petersburg train and Moscow subways attacks. Moreover, the content of their propaganda no longer carries the message of national independence but Islamic jihad. The domestic fighters are serious about installing an Islamic Caliphate in Russia and even if that goal exceeds their capabilities, they can create daunting security problems for Moscow. In addition to guerrilla warfare and acts of brutal terrorism, they can destroy rail lines, power plants, energy pipelines and other vital infrastructure crucial to Russia as its strives to grow and diversify its economy.

It is against this backdrop that Russian officials and analysts have concluded that Russia must "upgrade" its cooperation with Europe and America in fighting Islamic jihadism wherever it appears in Eurasia.

Safeguarding Central Asia: In referring to Central Asia, Dmitri Trenin and Alexey Malashenko have observed: "Russia fears a rise in Islamic radicalism across the region and a revival of rebel activity in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It does not have sufficient confidence in the solidity of the Central Asian regimes or in its own capacity to insulate the region from the influence of a victorious Taliban."

The Fergana Valley knits together Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and is home for about half of their collective population. Should the Taliban regain power in Afghanistan, they are likely to promote insurgencies throughout that area and compromise the security of pro-Russian governments there. Needless

to say, such mayhem would have a deleterious impact upon the extraction and delivery of local hydro-carbons to Russian companies who see them as more or less a Russian resource. It is prudent, therefore, for Russia to provide whatever assistance that it can muster to promote an outcome in Afghanistan that does not place Central Asia at risk.

Promoting Links with Regional Powers and Organizations: While cooperating with NATO in Afghanistan, Russia must closely manage relations with neighboring states like Pakistan, Iran and China. It also seeks to develop fledgling security organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the top priority, or the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a secondary priority. The Kremlin has urged Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen to expand NATO's relations with both bodies.

Russian defense analysts cite Pakistan as an existential threat to stability in the region. Fedor Lukyanov, the editor of *Russia in Global Affairs*, has observed, "The chances of irresponsible radical forces acceding to power there are probably quite high." And while "Something extraordinary must happen to Pakistan for nuclear weapons to end up in somebody's hands…", this outcome "is possible."

Analysts who think in such sober terms cannot take comfort in the observation that a Taliban victory in Afghanistan would embolden jihadists in Pakistan. Even if they do not achieve power in Pakistan, they can foster widespread instability in a country that possesses nuclear weapons and fissile material that may wind-up in the hands of individuals who might be willing to use them—perhaps not against adversaries in Pakistan but in neighboring India, or Russia. The prospect that this worst-case scenario materializes may be low, but the loss of lives could be high and the fall-out from this tragedy could spawn a nuclear exchange between Pakistan and India.

Russian officials continue to look with greater favor toward India than Pakistan since the latter played a crucial role in the Soviet Union's defeat in Afghanistan while during the Cold War and today India enjoys harmonious relations with Moscow. The Kremlin welcomes efforts on the part of India to support Afghanistan in its fight with jihadists who have killed Indian troops in Kashmir and innocent civilians in Mumbai. Delhi also has become a major customer for Russia's military hardware.

Like Russia, China has had to cope with a restive Muslim minority that occupies the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. In a bid for independence, Uighurs have resorted to armed conflict. At the same time, China has extensive commercial ties to Central Asia—mainly seeking access to its hydro-carbon wealth—and covets Afghanistan's mineral assets and its ability to provide a pathway to the Indian Ocean.

The fight against a common enemy then is a bond between Beijing and Moscow and it contributes to Russia's campaign to work with China to balance mutual interests against American influence in Central Asia and the Far East. Through the SCO, Moscow hopes to cooperate with China (and India and Iran as well) in challenging American hegemony in Central Asia and beyond, while at the same time cooperating in the struggle against the jihadists.

While Russia's engagement with the Americans may cause some concern in Beijing, like their counterparts in Moscow, the Chinese Communist Party leadership welcomes—with reservations—a successful American-led effort to deny the Taliban a new strategic base in Afghanistan. There are rumors in Washington that the Chinese actually offered President Bush troops to achieve that outcome, but he refused them because his Republican base would find such a prospect abhorrent. Also, the Chinese government has endorsed sanctions against Tehran for not complying with UN demands that it halt efforts to develop a nuclear arsenal, but they have yet to include the "bite" that U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton favors.

Moscow, of course, sees relations with Iran from a different and broader strategic perspective: in addition to economic incentives, Russia desires to maintain harmonious relations with Tehran to enhance its image with its own Muslims as well as those abroad. Officials in the Kremlin likewise remind their American counterparts that Iran could play a positive role in preventing the Taliban's return to power and in stabilizing post-war Afghanistan.

Re-Setting Relations with the West: Arguably, Russian-American cooperation in Afghanistan is the most important test in the near term of how well Washington and Moscow have reset their relations. Furthermore, Russian cooperation with NATO is consistent with Medvedev's call for a new European Security system.

Participating in Post-War Afghanistan: One of the major reasons why Moscow wants to play a role in advancing a positive outcome in Afghanistan is the expectation that it will have a voice in shaping its post-war architecture. If Russia had to sit on the sidelines, it would have to accept whatever outcome the victorious powers dictated.

So, while there may be some Russian strategists who counsel their political masters to make mischief in Afghanistan by not cooperating with alliance forces there, those who favor it have more prudent calculations on their side.

Conclusion

When all is said and done, Russian security analysts cannot forget the following compelling fact: American and NATO forces are targeting the very jihadists that feed the needs of Russian drug addicts; that have provided armed assistance to insurgents in the North Caucasus; and that threaten pro-Russian regimes throughout Central Asia. In particular, Central Asia represents a vast region that is ripe for jihadist intervention, constitutes a pathway into Russia and simultaneously threatens the Kremlin's energy-driven economic development strategy. The outcome of the struggle in Afghanistan then is certain to have an impact upon Eurasia's future.

It is against this backdrop that Russia has powerful incentives to support ISAF troops that are seeking to prevent the Taliban's return in Afghanistan. This is why it has provided air and land corridors as part of the Northern Distribution Network. The Kremlin anticipates that this cooperation will earn it a place at the post-war negotiating table thereby enabling it to determine the fate of Afghanistan and shape the future of the entire region.

Foreign Minister Lavrov's recent report favoring a tilt toward the West is consistent with Moscow's support for the ISAF, but prudence dictates that Russian strategists provide an answer to the disconcerting question: what measures must Moscow take should the Obama plan fail to deny the Taliban a return to power in Afghanistan? That outcome would force it, and to a lesser degree NATO, to confront a monumental security problem.

About the Author

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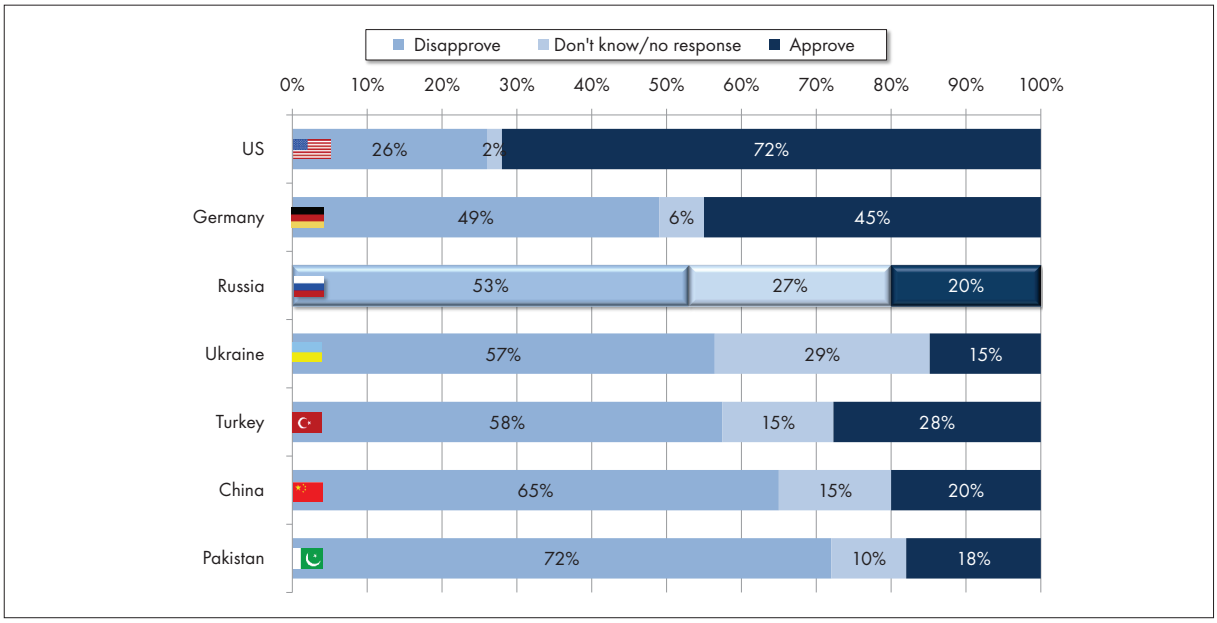
Recommended Reading

- Dmitri Trenin and Alexey Malashenko, "Afghanistan: A View from Moscow", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010.
- Andrew C. Kuchins and Thomas M. Sanderson, "The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan," Center For Strategic and International Studies, January 10, 2010.
- Samuel Charap, "Assessing the 'Reset' and the Next Steps for U.S. Russia Policy," Center for American Progress, April 2010.

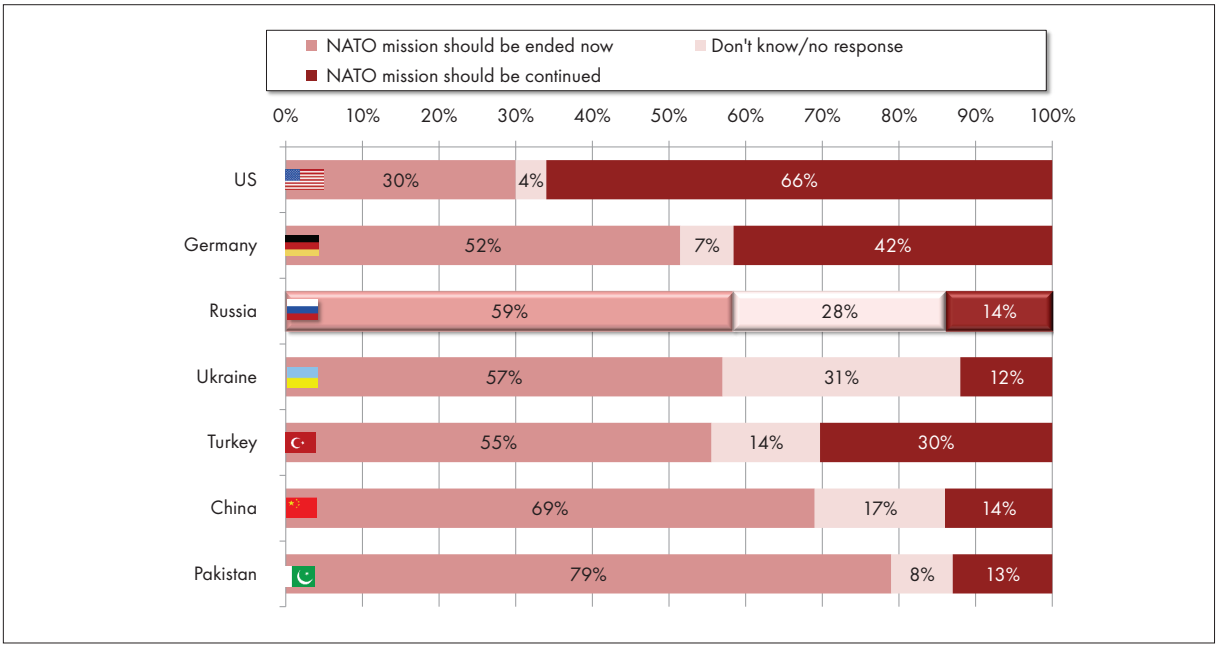
Opinion Poll

Russian Attitudes to the War in Afghanistan in International Comparison

As you may know the UN has authorized a NATO mission in Afghanistan, manned by forces from the US and other countries. This mission is meant to stabilize Afghanistan and help the government defend itself from Taliban insurgents. Do you approve or disapprove of this mission?

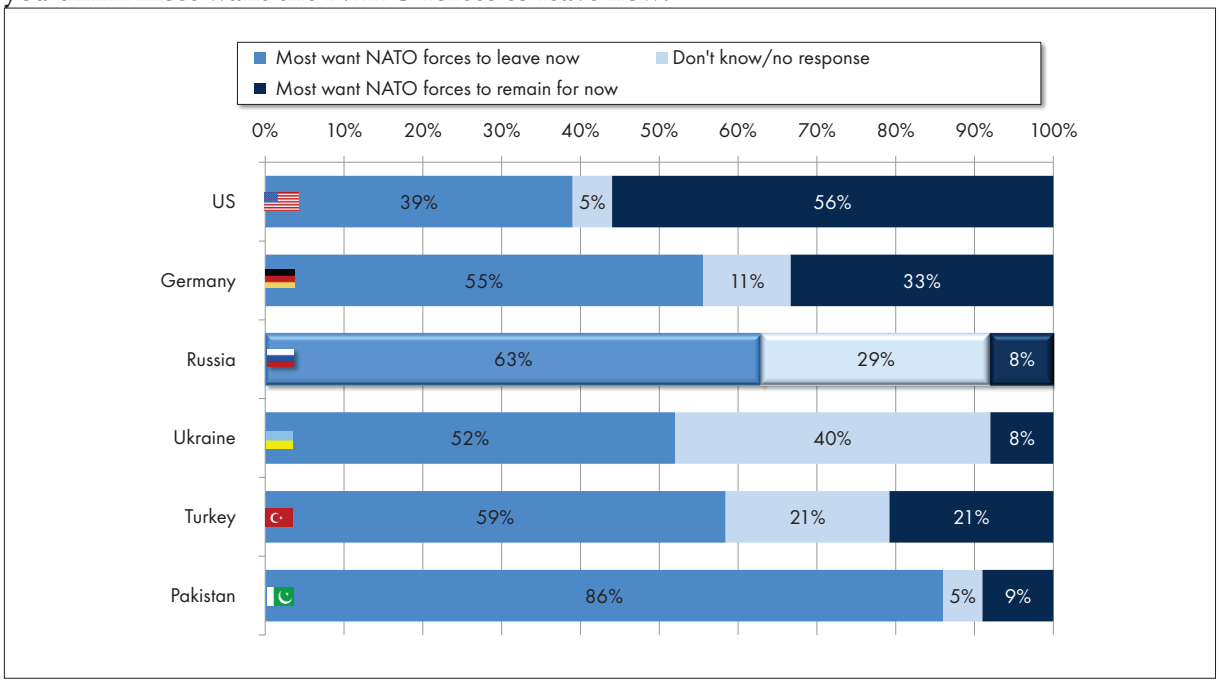


Do you think the NATO mission in Afghanistan should be continued or do you think it should be ended now?

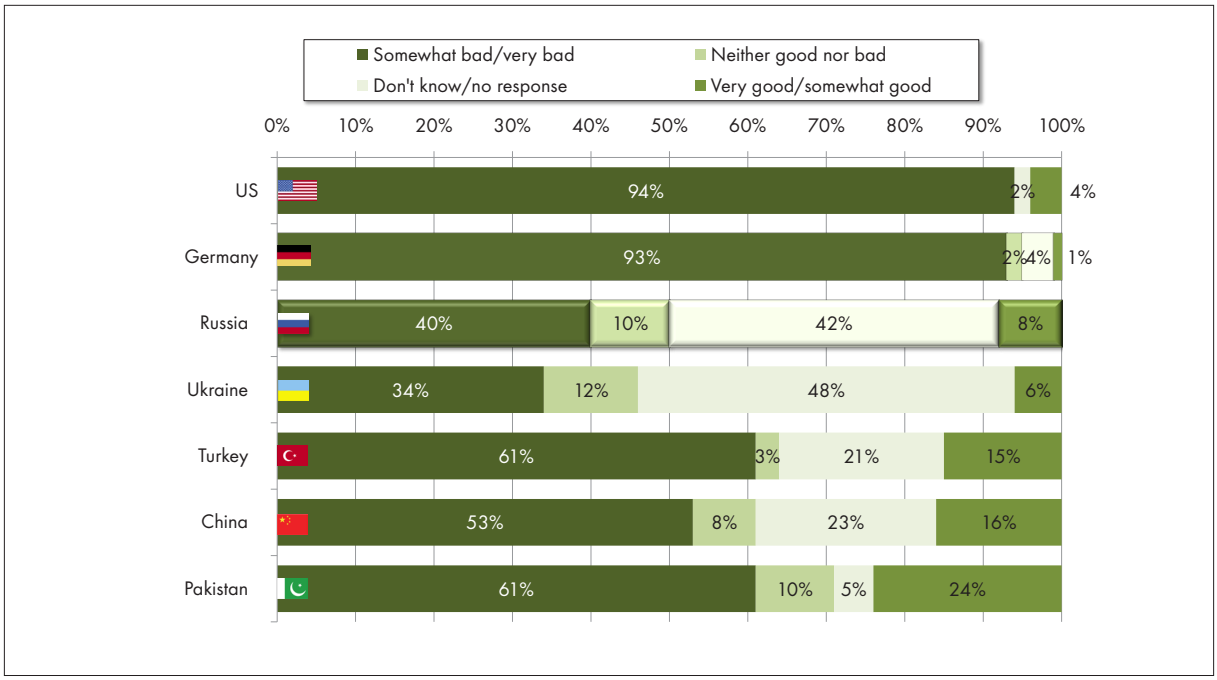


Source: Representative opinion polls by WorldPublicOpinion.org (probability sample in the case of China), April–June 2009, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jul09/WPO_Afghan_Jul09_quaire.pdf

Do you think that most people in Afghanistan want NATO forces to remain for now, or do you think most want the NATO forces to leave now?

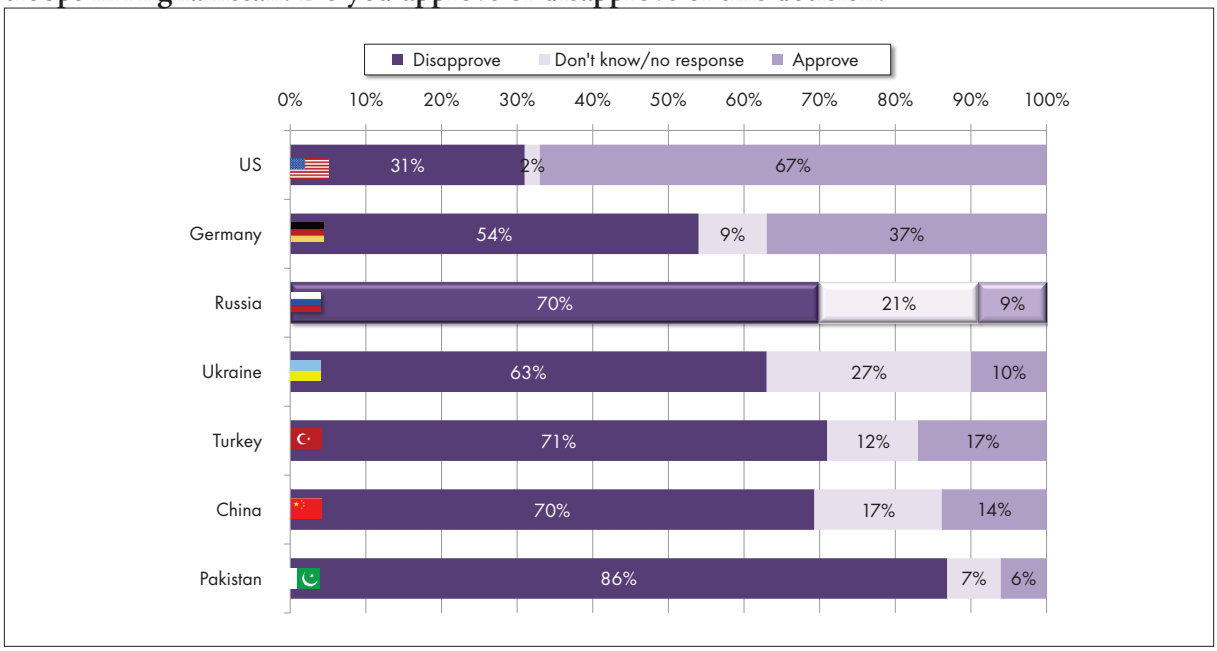


If the Taliban were to regain power in Afghanistan do you think this would be very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad?



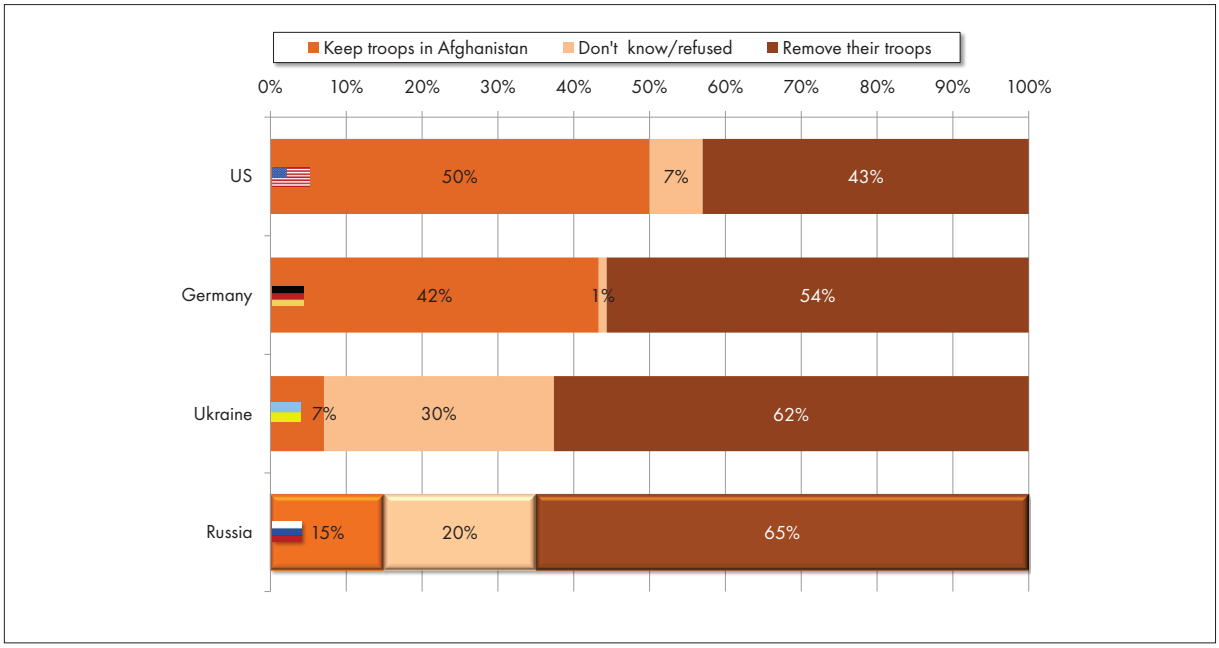
Source: Representative opinion polls by WorldPublicOpinion.org (probability sample in the case of China), April–June 2009, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jul09/WPO_Afghan_Jul09_quaire.pdf

As you may know, the Obama administration decided to increase the number of American troops in Afghanistan. Do you approve or disapprove of this decision?



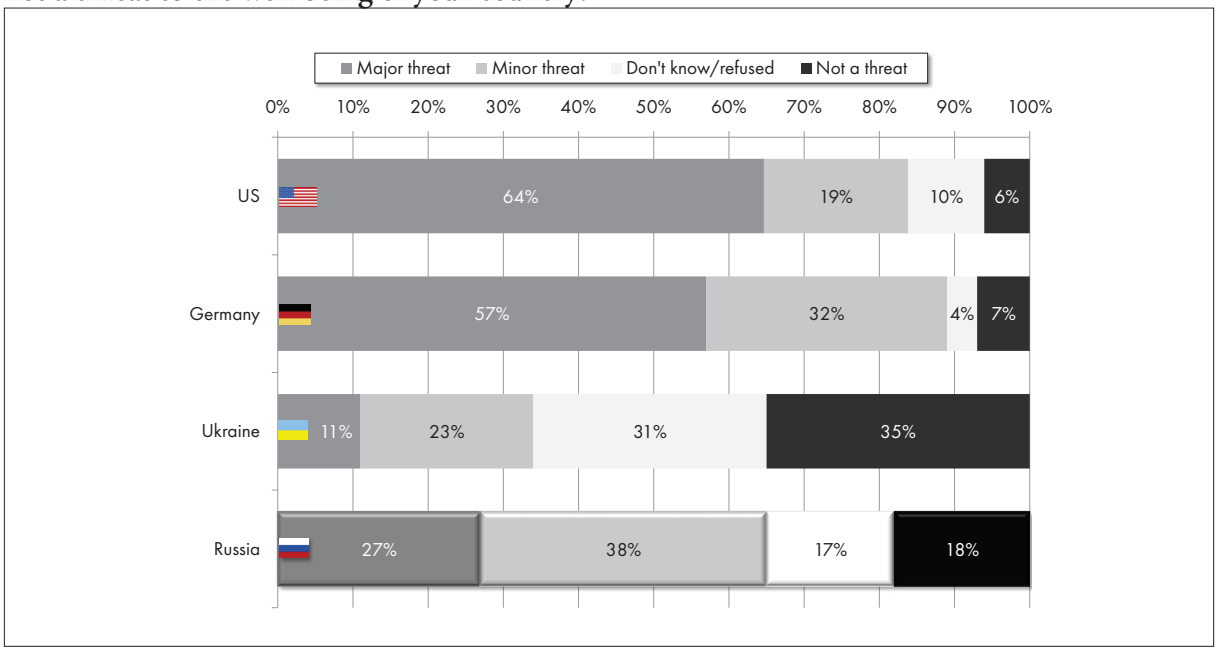
Source: Representative opinion polls by WorldPublicOpinion.org (probability sample in the case of China), April–June 2009, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jul09/WPO_Afghan_Jul09_quaire.pdf

Do you think the U.S. and NATO should keep military troops in Afghanistan until the situation has stabilized, or do you think the U.S. and NATO should remove their troops as soon as possible?

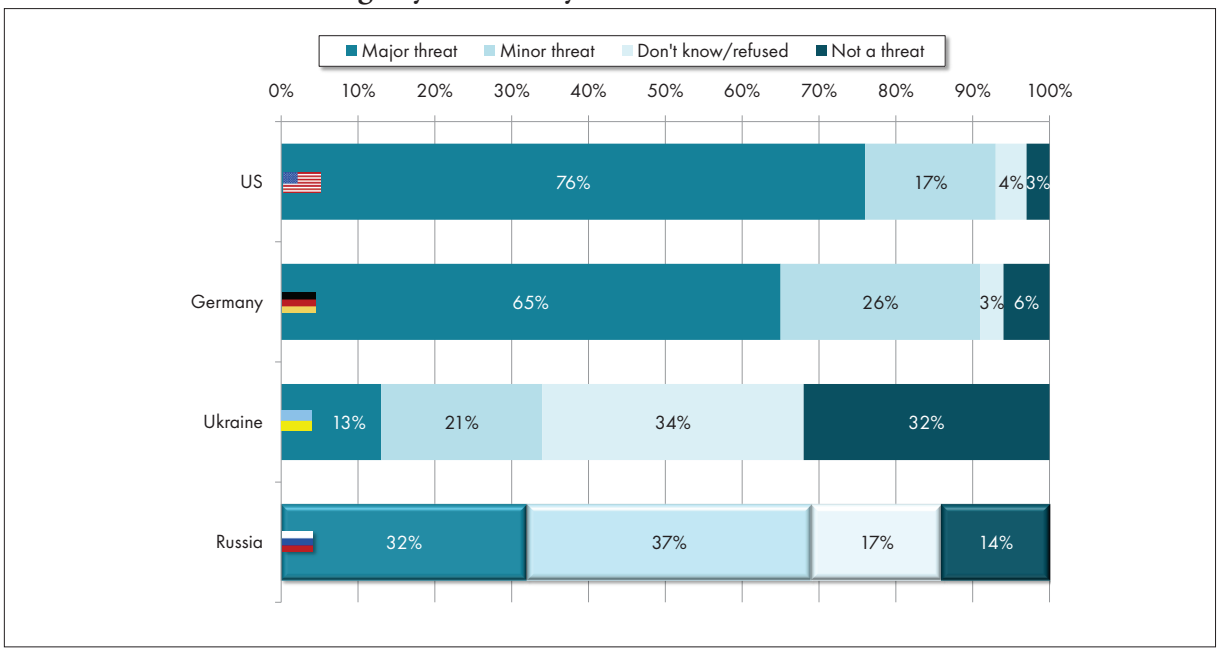


Source: Representative opinion poll by Pew Global Attitudes Project, August–September 2009, http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/1407.pdf

If Islamic extremists took control of Pakistan, would this be a major threat, a minor threat or not a threat to the well-being of your country?



If the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan, would this be a major threat, a minor threat or not a threat to the well-being of your country?



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About the Russian Analytical Digest

The Russian Analytical Digest is a bi-weekly internet publication jointly produced by the Research Centre for East European Studies [Forschungsstelle Osteuropa] at the University of Bremen (www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de), the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich), the Resource Security Institute and the Institute of History at the University of Basel (http://histsem.unibas.ch/seminar/). It is supported by the German Association for East European Studies (DGO). The Digest draws on contributions to the German-language Russland-Analysen (www.laender-analysen.de/russland), the CSS analytical network on Russia and Eurasia (www.res.ethz.ch), and the Russian Regional Report. The Russian Analytical Digest covers political, economic, and social developments in Russia and its regions, and looks at Russia's role in international relations.

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Founded in 1982, the Research Centre for East European Studies (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) at the University of Bremen is dedicated to socialist and post-socialist cultural and societal developments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.
In the area of post-socialist societies, extensive research projects have been conducted in recent years with emphasis on political decision-making processes, economic culture and the integration of post-socialist countries into EU governance. One of the core missions of the institute is the dissemination of academic knowledge to the interested public. This includes regular email services with nearly 20,000 subscribers in politics, economics and the media.
With a collection of publications on Eastern Europe unique in Germany, the Research Centre is also a contact point for researchers as well as the interested public. The Research Centre has approximately 300 periodicals from Russia alone, which are available in the institute's library. News reports as well as academic literature is systematically processed and analyzed in data bases.

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In its teaching capacity, the CSS contributes to the ETH Zurich-based Bachelor of Arts (BA) in public policy degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army and the ETH and University of Zurich-based MA program in Comparative and International Studies (MACIS); offers and develops specialized courses and study programs to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students; and has the lead in the Executive Masters degree program in Security Policy and Crisis Management (MAS ETH SPCM), which is offered by ETH Zurich. The program is tailored to the needs of experienced senior executives and managers from the private and public sectors, the policy community, and the armed forces.
The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network (ISN), and in cooperation with partner institutes manages the Crisis and Risk Network (CRN), the Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security (PHP), the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network (SSN), and the Russian and Eurasian Security (RES) Network.

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The Institute of History at the University of Basel was founded in 1887. It now consists of ten professors and employs some 80 researchers, teaching assistants and administrative staff. Research and teaching relate to the period from late antiquity to contemporary history. The Institute offers its 800 students a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in general history and various specialized subjects, including a comprehensive Master's Program in Eastern European History (http://histsem.unibas.ch/bereiche/osteuropaeische-geschichte/).

Resource Security Institute
The Resource Security Institute (RSI) is a non-profit organization devoted to improving understanding about global energy security, particularly as it relates to Eurasia. We do this through collaborating on the publication of electronic newsletters, articles, books and public presentations.

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