



THE DITCHLEY FOUNDATION

Post-NATO Afghanistan: neighbours and friends

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NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan later this year threatens to leave the country in turmoil once again, with many uncertainties and questions over its future. How successful will the only recently trained Afghan army and police be in maintaining law and order, and containing insurgents? Can the Taliban and other rebel groups be brought into the political process in some way, and if so how? Economic development will be vital if the people are to be convinced of the benefits of a more peaceful and consensual future. There are mineral resources to be developed, but the security risks, and the problems of outside competition and corruption surrounding this process, are self-evidently high. How can economic opportunities be managed, and viable alternatives to poppy-growing provided? Where can the resources needed for the necessary infrastructure development come from? Is the concept of a new Silk Road realistic or fanciful?

The role of Afghanistan's neighbours will be crucial. One of the risks is that the country will once again be pulled apart along ethnic lines, with neighbours supporting in one way or another the various main communities, and the previous civil war starting up again. How can this be avoided? Can a degree of mutual agreement be forged which will allow the region to develop new prosperity through trade and investment? This means involving Iran and the countries of Central Asia, all of which have a strong interest in a peaceful and successful Afghanistan, as well as Pakistan and India. Can the rivalry between the latter two be better managed than hitherto? Meanwhile what might be the future role of powers like Russia and China?

How great or small will be the western influence in future, in security, political or economic terms? One uncertainty for now is the proposed security agreement between the US and Afghanistan, which would leave some US troops there. But leaving this aside, how far will western countries be prepared to keep up the kind of financial contributions needed to allow the Afghan government to maintain its security and police forces in their current form, and levels of aid spending to promote economic and social development anything like those in recent years? The temptation to want to close a chapter on Afghanistan may be strong in some quarters, but the risk of wasting 13 years of strong investment will also be high, including in sensitive areas like the progress made by women and girls.

The conference will aim to bring together practitioners and experts from Afghanistan, her neighbours and the wider international community, to debate these vital issues, and attempt to define ways of promoting positive outcomes and broad collective understanding.