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Regional Interests in the Afghan Peace Process

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The first official peace talks between the US and the Taliban, held in 2019, and the possible withdrawal of US troops announced by President Trump could end what has been almost 20 years of NATO presence in Afghanistan. For regional countries – Pakistan, India, Iran, Russia, and China – the developments offer an incentive to restructure the regional peace and security order.

When the US began official peace talks with the Afghan Taliban for the first time in Doha, Qatar in February 2019, there was great optimism that a new chapter in the 18-year conflict between the Taliban, the Afghan government, and NATO forces might be beginning. This is the closest the region has come to a political solution since 2001. A peace treaty with the Taliban would allow not only Afghanistan's political order, but also international involvement, the regional security architecture, and Afghanistan's position as a Western ally to be re-negotiated.

At the beginning of September, the US suddenly broke off negotiations after nine rounds of peace talks and refused to sign a framework treaty. Yet, now the US is showing renewed interest in resuming the process.¹ To engage in peace negotiations, the Taliban would, however, have to accept the Afghan government as a negotiating partner, which it currently views as a puppet regime, unlawfully set up in 2001.²

In February 2018, President Ghani had indicated as part of his peace initiative (the so-called Kabul Process) that the Taliban could be removed from international sanctions lists and recognised as a political party if it renounced violence. In the Doha process, the Taliban continued to advocate for an Islamic emirate. The question for the Afghan government and civil society is whether the Taliban will agree to minimum standards of liberty and pluralism and accept democratic transfers of power.

The course of the peace process, however, will be influenced not only by in-country developments,

but also by external dynamics. Afghanistan is a geostrategic interface between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, making it the playing field for regional and great power conflicts, such as

1. the India-Pakistan conflict,
2. Iran's nuclear showdown with the US,
3. Russia's rivalry with the US order, and
4. the conflict surrounding China's economic hegemony.

Regional countries and non-NATO members have gained influence and confidence since 2001. Particularly Russia and China are eager to shape developments by hosting regional or intra-Afghan dialogues with the Taliban. To assess to progress of the peace process and future regional relationships, it is worth considering the threat perceptions, strategies, interests and security dilemmas of the countries in the region. How do they define their interests in Afghanistan and the region? What is their scope of action? What roles do they play in the peace process? What powers might emerge as “winners”, and how can the “losers” be engaged?

Pakistan: Killjoy or Key to Peace

International observers consider Pakistan a “key country” for sustainable peace and stability.³ After 2001, Afghan-Pakistani relations were characterised by mistrust, mutual accusations of sponsoring terrorism, and unresolved territorial questions. In the 1980s, Pakistan joined the US and Saudi Arabia to play a key role in the rise of the Afghan Mujahideen in the struggle against

Soviet occupation. Later, Pakistan's intelligence service, the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), assisted in training and radicalising Taliban members in Pakistani religious schools. The Afghan Taliban movement is viewed as a group that is sponsored – and used – by the Pakistani state. Important parts of its leadership are located in Pakistan. The links that developed in the 1980s in the Afghan-Pakistani border region between the Taliban, criminal networks, and the Pakistani state continue to be felt today. Taliban leaders enjoy deep ties to Pakistan's state institutions, political parties, and economic lobby groups.

Afghan-Pakistani relations are tense, and one reason for this are Pakistan's ties to the Taliban.

Since the publication of President Trump's National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2017, Pakistan has been under pressure to engage with the Taliban constructively. Pakistan was expected to prevent indirect financing of terrorism and terrorist operations from its territory.⁴ At the same time, the US announced that it would strengthen its strategic partnership with India. Since then, a reorientation has taken place in Pakistan, which needs security guarantees from the US on the one hand, and on the other is dependent on financial support from Saudi Arabia and China – countries that now wish to push the peace process forward.

Despite these links, the Taliban movement is difficult for the Pakistani state to control, and also integrates elements that are critical of Pakistan. The young Taliban generation is thought to be more independent.⁵ Observers have long

viewed Pakistan not only as a beneficiary, but also a victim of the movement, part of which has been radicalised against the Pakistani state. Instead of “strategic depth” for the Pakistani state, “religious depth” has been created in Pakistan for Afghan fighters.⁶

Pakistan's influence on militant groups such as the Taliban is part of the principle of “strategic depth” postulated by the Pakistani military. It serves as insurance in the event of military escalation with India. However, criticism has been voiced on the Pakistani side that promoting



No negotiations: For India, the Taliban remain a pro-Pakistan force and a Pakistani instrument for promoting its interests.
Source: © Mohammad Shoib, Reuters.

militant groups has not created any lasting advantages.

While Pakistan is putting pressure on the Taliban to motivate them to negotiate, Afghanistan remains sceptical of how sincere and sustainable those efforts are. A large part of Afghanistan's population and political elite believe that Pakistan has an interest in an "unstable" or "susceptible" peace. The accusation is that Pakistan has adjusted its tactics, but not its goals. The idea being that Pakistan encourages the old Taliban leadership, which is now prepared

to compromise, to engage in peace talks, while retaining the young, pugnacious Taliban as a "war machine".⁷ Meanwhile, Pakistan feels that it is being confronted with exaggerated expectations of its ability to influence the Taliban and blamed when there are setbacks in the peace process; it demands that Afghanistan be held more responsible.

The task is now to constructively involve Pakistan with its established relations to the Taliban, and to use these contacts to achieve a treaty. Pakistan can continue to play the killjoy



if it perceives its interests to be threatened. It is therefore necessary to decouple the Afghan peace process from the India-Pakistan conflict. Moreover, the intra-Afghan process must be complemented by a trilateral dialogue involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

India: Soft Power with Strategic Interests

India is taking a low-profile approach to the Afghan peace process and exercising great security policy restraint. It has instead established itself as a solid partner in development cooperation. India is the fifth largest bilateral donor in Afghanistan; in the region, it ranks first, ahead of China and Iran. After 2001, India sent no troops to Afghanistan, but has trained members of the Afghan army in India since 2011. India's Afghanistan policy remains a cautious balancing act against Pakistan as a political – and China as an economic – rival.

Since 2011, the country has had a strategic partnership treaty with Afghanistan and, of all states in the region, has shown the greatest loyalty to the Afghan government, its most important ally against their common enemy, Pakistan. Indeed, India enjoys a good reputation in the Afghan society. It is one of the most popular destination countries for study or medical stays, and one of the few countries for which Afghans can still easily receive a visa.

India is one of the strongest proponents of the Afghan government in the peace process. India insists on an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled peace solution, expressing its dissatisfaction that the Afghan government was left out of the Doha process. India is a strong supporter of the Afghan constitution; any treaty with the Taliban would thus have to protect the democratic order. Behind this lies the concern about the restoration of a pro-Pakistan Taliban emirate.

The country is one of the few countries that still refuse official negotiations with the Taliban. For India, the Taliban remain a pro-Pakistan force and a Pakistani instrument for promoting its interests. In the Indian military and in

think-tanks close to the government, there is a widespread view that the Taliban should be fought more militarily. The international courting of the best channels of communication with the Taliban has prompted the Indian leadership to reconsider starting official negotiations with the Taliban's leadership.

As the Taliban's sharpest critic, it may well be difficult for India to reap strategic benefits from a dialogue with the Taliban beyond information gathering. Taliban involvement could mean serious loss of influence for India. The country does not share the distinction between "good" and "bad" Taliban introduced by the West at the 2010 London Conference. On the other hand, Indian leadership has developed a differentiated understanding of the Taliban over the years; for instance, the Taliban is no longer viewed as a monolithic pro-Pakistan bloc.⁸

The Indian government is concerned that Pakistan is supporting the Taliban to frustrate Indian efforts in Kashmir, India, and Afghanistan. India suspects Pakistani interference in numerous attacks both in India and abroad. Moreover, Afghanistan is also potentially interesting with respect to India's energy security. India desires access to Central Asian energy resources, especially since Iran ceased to be its most important source of oil due to increased US sanctions.

To the outside world, India propounds a purely development policy strategy. India maintains infrastructure and education projects throughout Afghanistan, as well as diplomatic missions in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Jalalabad, and Kandahar, prompting accusations of espionage from Pakistan. The stationing of troops has been discussed repeatedly in Indian politics, but has so far been ruled out. Military involvement would be too expensive and would needlessly irritate Pakistan. It could also cause some to accuse India of being an occupying power, and exacerbate Hindu-Muslim tensions at home. India's foreign policy discussion, however, includes vocal criticism that the soft power approach has given India no strategic advantages

and does not adequately consider its interests.⁹ The Afghan-Indian friendship is also becoming increasingly strained as Afghan society no longer desires to be a pawn in an Indo-Pakistani proxy war.

Iran: Foreign Neighbour in the Security Dilemma

A direct neighbour and Afghanistan’s largest trading partner, Iran is pursuing an increasingly proactive strategy. As the American-Iranian conflict has escalated and the US sanctions tightened, Iran has become critical of Western stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan and of the Doha peace process. The country therefore supports alternative approaches to peace and hopes for a “post-American stability” that provides sufficient security guarantees for Iran and the region. In Afghan society, Iran remains a neighbour that is viewed with some suspicion, and about which political opinions diverge.

Iran is critical of US involvement in Afghanistan and calls for more Afghan independence.

Iran has an interest in a stable Afghanistan as an economic partner that does not join an alliance that opposes Iranian interests, and does not represent an extremist danger. The 900-kilometer-long Afghanistan-Iran border makes Iran vulnerable to transnational terrorist groups and drug trafficking. Since 2015, the Islamic State (IS), an anti-Shiite terrorist organisation, has posed a potential threat with its regional offshoots and has executed isolated attacks in Tehran and Iranian provinces. The NATO training and advisory mission in Afghanistan, for which the US provides more than 8,000 of the total 16,000 soldiers, and Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS), an American anti-terror campaign, are double-edged operations from

Table 1: Troop Contingents by Countries as Part of NATO Mission Resolute Support (as of July 2018)

Country	Troop strength (or upper limit)
1. USA	8,475
2. Germany	1,300
3. Italy	895
4. Georgia	870
5. Romania	693
6. UK	650
7. Turkey	506
Other countries	2,840
Total (39 countries)	16,229

Source: Own illustration based on NATO 2018: Resolute Support Mission, 6 Jul 2018, in: <https://bit.ly/2NjLCTI> [5 Nov 2019].

an Iranian perspective. Iran has no interest in a hasty withdrawal of US troops that would risk further destabilising the country. On the other hand, the country fears the establishment of a permanent anti-terror military base that the US hopes to negotiate with the Taliban.

Iran demands that the peace process be Afghan-led and not monopolised by individual countries. It also demands protection for the democratic and republican constitution. It may initially be surprising that Iran is concerned about democratic institutions and expressing worry that the values and rights achieved for women and minorities may be sacrificed in peace negotiations. But Iran has no interest whatsoever in having an Islamic emirate as a neighbour that might provide support to a pro-Sunni balance of power. In recent years, Iran has established contacts and direct communication channels with the Taliban, but refuses to establish permanent relations, or even cooperation. Their commonalities tend to be anti-Western, instead of political or religious.

Within Afghanistan, political opinion about Iran is divided. On the one hand, the country is an important regional investor. It has replaced Pakistan as Afghanistan's largest trading partner. It is influencing reconstruction with infrastructure measures such as the construction of clinics and a branch of the Iranian Payame Noor University. Working with Afghanistan and India, Iran has expanded its Chabahar port on the Indian Ocean into an alternative transport route. Only 170 kilometers from Pakistan's port of Gwadar, Chabahar opens a trade route for Afghanistan and India that is independent of Pakistan. Demand for Iranian visas for business trips, stays for medical treatment, or study is high among Afghan citizens. But there is also scepticism and distrust towards Iran among the Afghan public. Iran cultivates political, religious, and cultural relations with the Shiite minority in Afghanistan, especially the Hazara. The Fatimiyoun militia, which is fighting for Iran in Syria, is made up almost entirely of Afghan Hazaras.

Iran's behaviour is directed at the US. The greatest threat to the Iranian regime comes from the US and its allies in the Persian Gulf. As long as the US and its allies maintain or escalate sanctions and military pressure on Iran, the country will use any means of influence in the region, be it via Afghan Shiite mercenaries in Syria, or via tactical support of the Taliban, in order to counter the threat. Iran is thus a neighbour that is embroiled in regional conflicts, but whose participation is important for the success of the peace process.

Russia: Alternative Peace Partner despite a Spotty Record?

Russia's Afghanistan policy has shifted greatly over the past 20 years. After the heavy losses suffered in the struggle against the Mujahideen in the 1980s, Russia pursued a more cautious policy for a long time. Russia's intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 gave rise to international jihad in Afghanistan and the Muslim world and marked the end of the Soviet Union. In October 2001, Russia joined Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran as one of the non-NATO countries to support the US-led anti-terror coalition to oppose

the Taliban. Russia then supported the US in its stabilisation efforts and in its struggle against a resurgent Taliban. In the last few years, Russia has played a much more proactive role that is linked to its desire to establish a security architecture directly shaped by the regional actors.

Russia has a vital interest in Afghanistan's stability and territorial integrity. Russia does not want Afghanistan to become a new focal point for transnational terror groups and drug cartels that pose a threat to Russia and neighbouring Central Asian countries. Combatting terrorism and drug trafficking plays hence an important role.

The proclamation of the IS offshoot "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan Province" (ISKP) in Afghanistan in January of 2015 prompted Russia to change its strategy towards the Taliban movement. In recent years, Moscow has established contacts with the Taliban and is now seeking a political solution with them. Tactical contacts began as early as 2006, when a military victory over the Taliban was proving increasingly difficult. The Russian leadership confirms channels of communication for information exchange, but denies cooperating with the Taliban, let alone arming them. Russian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Zamir Kabulov confirmed that Russia and the Taliban share an interest in combatting the IS.

In the "Moscow process", a parallel effort to the US-led Doha process, Russia succeeded in bringing conflicting parties in Afghanistan to the table with the Taliban. Russian Ambassador in Kabul, Alexander Mantytskiy, emphasises Russia's support for an "intra-Afghan dialogue". Russia believes that this dialogue must include not only the Afghan government, but a cross-section of Afghan society. At the same time, Russia is not concerned about the US-Taliban negotiations.¹⁰ While the country has characterised the peace talks in Moscow as complementing the US Doha process, other observers view the Moscow format as an "alternative peace diplomacy".¹¹ The regional formats express the desire of the countries in the region to shape the process and ensure consideration of

legitimate regional interests. At the same time, behind such formats is a criticism of American influence and a concern about a permanent, albeit reduced, US military presence.

The Afghan government and critical voices are ambivalent towards Russia's role in the peace process. Following the Moscow negotiations in February 2019, local media accused the country of marginalising the Afghan government and upgrading the Taliban. Russia, on the other hand, considers the Afghan government to be too dependent on – and influenced by – the US and other foreign powers.

Russia's legacy in Afghanistan is mixed: while it introduced modern infrastructure, such as the Makryan housing quarter in Kabul, it also introduced the Kalashnikov. Now, Afghan actors are exhibiting an increasing openness towards Moscow's peace efforts. Bilateral relations are also less inhibited. On Russian national holidays, both former Taliban functionaries and former members of the Mujahideen can be seen celebrating in the Russian embassy.

What role will Russia play in the peace process? Western observers view its initiatives as a reaction to the US-led peace process. Russia sees Afghanistan as part of its own extended region and naturally wants to shape the security architecture there. Moscow welcomed the initial stabilisation efforts on the part of the US and NATO when it was not yet foreseeable that Western forces might remain permanently. After almost 20 years, Russia is promoting a security architecture shaped in the region and emancipated from the West. The country is betting on other political actors in the peace process. Russia's relations to former President Hamid Karzai were much closer than its relations to current President Ghani. Among Afghan supporters of Karzai, many of whom are extremely critical of both Ghani and the US, Russia continues to draw supporters. At the same time, Moscow has no interest in a hasty withdrawal of troops that might leave a security vacuum in its wake. Russia now sees involving the Taliban as one way of ensuring unity and governability in Afghanistan.

China: Pax Economica for Afghanistan

China has so far avoided taking a visible leadership role in Afghanistan. Its Afghanistan policy is driven by economic considerations for its “New Silk Road” project and focusses on safeguarding national security interests. Sharing an 80-kilometer-long border with Afghanistan along the Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan's northeast, China is also interested in effective border controls to prevent passage of drug smugglers and terrorist groups.

China's focus in Afghanistan is not on nation-building or establishing political institutions, but on securing resources, markets, and transport routes. Afghanistan is an important transit country between Central Asia and the Indian Ocean, with a wealth of strategic resources, making it the ideal candidate for China's Silk Road project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹² The vision initiated in 2013 by President Xi Jinping of an economic and transit route from the Pacific to the Mediterranean shaped by China and passing through more than 60 countries had previously omitted Afghanistan for security reasons. Official statements indicate that that will change as soon as possible.¹³

China is interested in Afghanistan in the context of its Silk Road project. The uncertain security situation is the only remaining difficulty.

The Chinese state and Chinese investors are prepared to expand their activities as soon as the security situation allows. China is Afghanistan's third largest trading partner, after Iran and the US. So far, the country has primarily imported a few strategic products such as saffron, pine nuts, marble, and carpets. It has invested in resources such as copper and oil rights and in the infrastructure necessary for its BRI project.



Presence of the US: After almost 20 years, the NATO-supported era of Pax Americana in Afghanistan may come to an end. [Source: © Goran Tomašević, Reuters.](#)

It envisions a “Five Nations Railway Corridor” from China through Afghanistan to the Mediterranean Sea. China’s most important link and showcase project for the “New Silk Road” is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), initiated in 2015, with Afghanistan’s nemesis, Pakistan. Chinese leadership has announced, to Pakistan’s chagrin, that it would like to expand CPEC to Afghanistan.

China is currently attempting to create an image for itself as a development partner. In 2018, the country founded the National Development and Cooperation Agency. In the past ten years, the country has provided around 240 million US dollars in development aid, much less than India or Western donors. As Afghanistan’s neighbour, China also has vital security interests. The greatest threat it sees is its own domestic militant groups finding space to retreat, recruit, and radicalise in Afghanistan. The separatist group, East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), founded by Chinese Uyghurs, were long considered the biggest security threat. Due to concerns about Islamist extremism in the Xinjiang province, border trade was only hesitantly expanded. Since the infiltration of IS terrorist militias into Central Asia, China’s Afghanistan strategy has focussed more on security policy. China is concerned about links between ISKP and ETIM members. In February 2018, Chinese IS fighters threatened their country with attacks for the first time.

China has a vested interest in the success of the peace process and supports both the US and Russian negotiations. Starting in 2015, it entered the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) with the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to begin official negotiations with the Taliban. In May 2018, Beijing was once again issued invitations via the Shanghai Cooperation Group (SCO) to an Afghanistan Contact Group for peace and reconstruction.

Pakistan is one of China’s strategic partners; one could thus expect the country to have a pro-Pakistan stance in the peace process. However, some governments hope that China will have a “civilising” influence on Pakistan’s role in the

peace process, and a constructive influence on Afghan-Pakistani relations. China has an interest in reducing Afghan-Pakistani tensions – not least to advance its CPEC project. In December 2017, it invited Pakistan and Afghanistan to the first trilateral foreign ministers meeting in Beijing. While the EU hopes that China will keep Pakistan in check, China believes that the West overestimates its ability to influence Pakistan and that exerting too much pressure on Pakistan is counterproductive.¹⁴

Beijing opposes support for the Taliban and advocates military pressure, but at the same time favours politically involving the Taliban. China’s position on the Taliban has become more moderate over the years. In the 1990s, the Taliban was a political opponent that supported groups that were hostile to the Chinese state. Today, it is perceived as a national group whose agenda does not oppose China.

China’s political neutrality and military restraint are becoming increasingly difficult as its geo-economic interests develop. China will be forced to take on more security policy responsibility than it previously has if the US withdraws its military. In the last few years, Beijing has announced an enhancement of military aid to Afghanistan, closer anti-terror cooperation, and has invested in border security. China’s failure to send troops is considered “free-riding” in US circles. According to official statements, increased Chinese responsibility for border security and the fight against terrorism would also be in US interests.¹⁵

The Regional Order after the US Withdrawal

After almost 20 years, the NATO-supported era of Pax Americana in Afghanistan may come to an end. How will non-NATO states such as Iran, Russia, China, India, and Pakistan influence the future order and assume responsibility for regional security? And how will regional relations develop once the Taliban has been integrated politically? Despite current tensions with the US, the Ghani government stands for a pro-Western order. Integrating the Taliban politically would

strengthen non-Western voices that are critical of the US. The countries in the region that favour an alternative, post-American order, such as Russia, Iran, and China, could use their Taliban contacts for political and economic purposes. In exchange for removal from international sanctions lists, the Taliban must distance themselves from al-Qaida and extremist elements within its own movement and ensure that the fight against transnational terrorist groups in Afghanistan can continue. For Pakistan, rehabilitating the Taliban is not necessarily advantageous: the Pakistani leadership would then have to deal with the Taliban as an independent actor that plays by international rules. India, which has so far refused official contact with the Taliban, would lose influence in Afghanistan if the Taliban were legalised.

The interests of Russia, China, and Iran converge to a great extent. They all have a special interest in fighting transnational terrorism and drug trafficking, as well as in safer trade and energy transit routes. In Afghanistan, they are not pursuing nation-building or large-scale development policy strategies, but instead seek pragmatic alliances that will secure their foreign, energy, and security policy interests. They would accept the Taliban as an ally if it ensured that their interests were protected. This pragmatic approach to the stabilisation of Afghanistan differs from the Western model of nation-building and strengthening political institutions. These countries welcome US withdrawal, but demand that it be orderly and responsible.

The regional states, especially India, Iran, Russia, and China, are proponents of a peace process led by Afghanistan, but by this they really mean a security architecture that remains within the regional sphere of responsibility and safeguards their national interests. In future, they will have to be measured against their foreign policy actions.

—*translated from German*—

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- 1 The points addressed in the Doha process include (1) the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, (2) the guarantee that Afghanistan will not serve as a safe haven for transnational terror groups, (3) a cease-fire, and (4) an intra-Afghan dialogue that includes the Afghan government. A draft formulation for the first two points had already been agreed to.
- 2 In June, there was a German-mediated intra-Afghan dialogue including the Taliban and government representatives in their functions as “private persons”.
- 3 Among them was German Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas during his visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan in March 2019.
- 4 The reference is primarily to the *Haqqani* network, which is based in Pakistan and has ties to al-Qaida. Since the peace process was begun in 2010, the Taliban has been designated an “insurgent” and no longer a “terrorist” group.
- 5 Comments by a former Taliban functionary in an interview on 3 May 2019 in Kabul. The old Taliban generation is characterised by large, polygamous family associations: wives and other relations usually find safe places to live only in Pakistan. The young Taliban generation is said to be more logistically and politically independent.
- 6 Pakistani decision-makers are conscious of the self-created danger posed by the Taliban, which now threatens their own country. See Ahmed, Mutahir 2014: *Pak-Afghan Security Dilemma. Imperfect Past and Uncertain Future*, Lahore, p. 152.
- 7 Cf. Yunus Qanuni, leading figure in the *Jamaat-e-Islami* party, in an interview in Kabul on 25 April 2019, and Ismael Khan, former governor of Herat Province, in an interview in Herat on 28 April 2019.
- 8 Paliwal, Avinash 2017: *My Enemy's Enemy. India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the US Withdrawal*, Oxford, p. 251.
- 9 D'Souza, Shantie Mariet 2019: *The Limits of India's Soft Power in Afghanistan*, *Fair Observer*, 18 Mar 2019, in: <https://bit.ly/2FoY7sO> [30 Jul 2019].
- 10 Mantyskiy, Alexander 2019 in: *Afghanistan Times*, 28 Mar 2019, p. 12.
- 11 Cf. Glatz, Rainer/Kaim, Markus 2019: *Der Wandel der amerikanischen Afghanistan-Politik*, SWP-Aktuell 11, Feb 2019, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, in: <https://bit.ly/2CkxTW2> [6 Nov 2019].
- 12 The Afghan media are predicting an Indo-Chinese competition for Afghanistan's lithium reserves. *Afghanistan Times* 2019: *Who's Interested in Afghanistan's Lithium?*, 28 Mar 2019, p. 3.
- 13 Stone, Rupert 2019: *Slowly but surely, China is moving into Afghanistan*, in: *Afghanistan Times*, 20 Feb 2019, p. 7.
- 14 Stanzel, Angela 2018: *Fear and Loathing on the New Silk Road: Chinese Security in Afghanistan and Beyond*, Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, p. 6, in: <https://bit.ly/2JkKegw> [25 Oct 2019].
- 15 *Afghanistan Times* 2019: *Chinese Troops Sit on Afghanistan's Doorstep*, 20 Feb 2019, p. 3.