

**NORTHERN DISTRIBUTION NETWORK:
REDEFINING PARTNERSHIPS
WITHIN NATO AND BEYOND**

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The aim of this publication is to analyze, raise awareness of and provide recommendations regarding the impact of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) on NATO in general and Latvia in particular. The approach chosen by the LIIA is a broad one, taking into account different transportation and trade routes as well as the prospective commercialization of the NDN after 2014. The publication is freely downloadable at www.liia.lv.

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Introduction

Andris Sprūds

The Transatlantic area and the wider Eurasia area have been in the middle of a dynamic shift of the tectonic plates of international politics and economics in recent years. The economic recessions, the turmoil in Arab world, and competition between integration projects in the neighborhood of the EU and Russia have been among a number of challenges and formative “game changers” with wider repercussions for global and regional developments. NATO efforts to stabilize Afghanistan have also brought mixed results, and difficulties with security and state-building in the country remain. As NATO prepares to withdraw its troops from the country dubbed the “Heart of Asia”, Transatlantic partners need to manage regional security implications as well as adjust strategically and identify their toolbox for further *modus operandi* and sustained relevance globally. Latvia, as a full fledged member of the Transatlantic community, is influenced by regional developments that may both contribute to apprehension, on the one hand, and create windows of opportunities, on the other, for constructive bilateral and regional engagements.

Transcontinental transportation has been one of the sectors shaped by political and economic developments. NATO has explicitly contributed to shaping the prospective maps of viable transportation corridors in the wider Eurasia region. The Northern Distribution Network has been just one of those re-established routes. This formidable endeavor has been set in place to supply troops in Afghanistan as well as to manage the withdrawal of hardware and equipment. The NDN, however, may become more than what can just be perceived as a military related activity with a limited time span. First, the NDN sets a precedent for potentially long-

lasting economic opportunities, creating new transportation routes and trade links, especially with partners in Central Asia and beyond. Second, the new transportation routes may serve as confidence building measures among a variety of stakeholders and provide the preconditions for a strategic positive sum game in the region. Last but not least, NATO demonstrates in the process the ability to adjust to the outside world and promote smart cooperation not only in military terms but also economic terms.

This publication essentially starts with an assumption that the transformative strategic environment may open windows of opportunities for cooperation in the wider Eurasian region in security and transportation. Transatlantic partners have a considerable role to play and some preconditions have already been established through the functioning of the NDN. Latvia in particular has proved its interest and ability to cooperate with various partners and participate in wider transcontinental transportation efforts. Positive developments and examples notwithstanding, formidable constraints remain. Continuing instability in Afghanistan, mistrust among the nations in the region and trade and transport route rivalries are among these challenges. Hence, our research endeavor aims to address issues related to a reconfiguration of the strategic setting and transportation corridors, identify the windows of opportunities and challenges, explain the determinant forces behind wider Eurasian security and economic developments, provide visions of possible future scenarios and analyze Latvia's place in this context.

The successful implementation of the current research project on the NDN and transportation routes in a transforming strategic environment was enabled by a number of joint efforts. The current joint research project takes full advantage of a long tradition of prolific cooperation between the Latvian Institute of International Affairs and its international partner institutions in the region and beyond. An international body of researchers was deemed as imperative to achieve the objectives of the

research project. The authors remained free to contribute their own idiosyncratic emphases and assessments, and this diversity of approaches was essentially perceived as an important element in reflecting the plurality of opinions and the multifaceted nature of a wider regional security and transportation agenda. NATO support was instrumental in funding this research endeavor. Moreover, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in the Baltic countries and Latvian Railway (*Latvijas Dzelzceļš*) also contributed considerably to bringing a successful result. Last but not least, this publication would be void without a reader attentive to the subject and interested in understanding the constraints and opportunities for security and transportation cooperation in the wider Eurasian area.

The Northern Distribution Network and Its Implications for Latvia

Māris Andžāns

The Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a network of transportation lines to supply and redeploy military missions in landlocked Afghanistan, has been considered an outstanding civil-military cooperation project that has no parallels. Military and civilian institutions and commercial companies from multiple countries have joined forces to run transcontinental transportation chains through Eurasia to and from Afghanistan.

Although it has faced different challenges – including political, bureaucratic, technical and natural challenges – the NDN has served both as a secure alternative and, for a certain period of time, as a substitute to the fragile and vulnerable ground lines through Pakistan. Apart from the primary effect mentioned above, it has also had other direct and indirect positive effects, including promoting interaction and confidence building among global and regional actors, economic benefits throughout the transit corridors, and the emergence of prospects for the commercialization of the NDN.

This article explores a range of different aspects of the NDN, including its establishment, the transportation lines it includes, the major actors involved, the volumes and types of cargo transported through it, the opportunities it provides and the challenges it has faced. Last but not least, the role of Latvia and the significance of this network to Latvia is also further explored.

The NDN as it started

Logistical support is an essential component of any military mission as it provides the resources on which a mission relies. Effective logistical support is of special importance to military missions in distant and hard-to-access areas – both the NATO led ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) and the US led Operation Enduring Freedom can certainly be considered as such. Afghanistan is a landlocked and mountainous country with underdeveloped transportation infrastructure, the use of which is further complicated by bad weather conditions during some periods. Because of Afghanistan's underdeveloped industry, almost everything needed to sustain both missions has had to be brought in from outside: not only weapons and ammunition but also construction materials, vehicles, spare parts, fuel, food, medicine, etc.

The term “Northern Distribution Network” (NDN) is attributed to a network of transportation lines that have been used to supply and redeploy the aforementioned missions in Afghanistan. It is generally assumed that this concept was elaborated by the US, which in 2008 launched the exploration of alternative ground lines to Afghanistan. Soon after, the practical execution of the concept was started and the first container train was dispatched to Afghanistan from Riga, Latvia, in February 2009. However, it is important to note that even though the concept was developed by the US, other NATO member states have also developed their own transportation lines to Afghanistan,¹ some even prior to establishment of the NDN by the US.

The basic reason behind the establishment of the NDN was a heavy reliance on southern ground transportation lines through Pakistan. By any definition, a single transportation corridor could be considered a potential “single point of failure”, especially due to the various risks this corridor faced – including political, bureaucratic, technical, criminal,

¹ Most notably the “Latvian Lead Nation Concept”, which provides contracts by the Government of Latvia open to other ISAF troop contributing countries.

terroristic, and natural. The transportation corridor through Pakistan gradually became increasingly congested and dangerous – it suffered not only from regular pilferage, but on certain occasions cargo disappeared or was destroyed by insurgents on its way to destinations in Afghanistan. Thus, both military missions relied on an obviously fragile and vulnerable transportation corridor, with the only operational alternative available being cargo transportation by air. However, the costs of transportation by air are considerably higher² and a lack of adequate aircraft can create additional challenges. The potential “single point of failure” became a failure in November 2011, when Pakistan closed its territory to supply lines following the so called “Salala incident” in which Pakistani soldiers were killed.

Theoretically, alternative ground lines to bypass Pakistan via other neighboring countries of Afghanistan – Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China – could have been considered. Although from geographical perspective the use of ports and ground transportation infrastructure in Iran would be one of the most feasible options, the potential use of it has been considerably limited by political relations between Iran and ISAF troop-contributing countries, especially the US. The border between Afghanistan and China offers only hard-to-access and underdeveloped infrastructure, which makes the potential use of it unfeasible even before looking at the potential political aspects of this option.

The rest of the countries bordering Afghanistan are part of a region which in the recent history has had regular cargo transportation ties with countries located on the Baltic Sea and the Caspian Sea, largely because of the completely interoperable 1520 mm railroad system that enables cargo transportation with no change of railroad wagons. Thus, railroad

² Although the costs of cargo transportation may vary due to a wide variety of factors, in the context of cargo transportation from Europe to Afghanistan, the costs of cargo transportation by air can be estimated at tenfold to the cost of transportation over ground lines.

infrastructure in the countries neighboring Afghanistan had technically unimpeded reach to ports in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Russia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Finland³. Regular transportation of cargo over these railroads was already done: for example, there was a regular container train line, “Baltika Transit”, from Latvia to Central Asia. Also, cargo transportation with trucks to Central Asian countries, including Afghanistan, was not uncommon prior to establishment of the NDN.

However, the physical availability of the infrastructure and commercial transportation chains alone was not sufficient. The crucial factor for the establishment of the NDN was gaining permission from transit countries to use their territory for cargo transportation to supply military missions. Although non-military (non-lethal) cargo had to be transported, users of the cargo at the destination would be foreign armed forces. Thus, concluding transit agreements to envisage transiting procedures, the types of cargo allowed and other issues was an important precondition for the establishment the NDN. If, for example, Russia or Kazakhstan would have denied their permission, regular transportation of supplies through the NDN probably would not be possible. Turkmenistan has to be mentioned in this context as it has disallowed the supply of military missions in Afghanistan through its territory (based on its neutrality policy). In addition, the arrangement of other organizational and technical procedures, especially those surrounding customs and border crossings, was also essential for the establishment the NDN.

More than a single line

It has already been noted that the transportation of commercial cargo between Central Asian countries, including Afghanistan, and the ports of the Baltic Sea and the Caspian Sea was already done prior to the establishment of the NDN and the transportation of commercial cargo has

³ This railroad system is also known as “wide gauge”, “Russian”, “Soviet”, etc. Nominal rail gauge in Finland is 1524 mm.

also continued throughout the operation of the NDN. Furthermore, NDN cargo, often called “NATO cargo”, normally is not marked with any visual signs that could differentiate it from commercial cargo and often it is transported in the same trains or even trucks as commercial cargo. Moreover, part of the cargo has been procured in the transit countries, and not all of the cargo sent to Afghanistan to supply foreign armed forces has been documented as NDN cargo to avoid the additional burdens this status would imply. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish precisely all the transportation lines of the NDN.

Probably the best known of the NDN routes is a set of routes starting in the Baltic States. Cargo transportation from Western Europe and the US as a part of the NDN through Latvia was launched in February 2009 when the first block train was dispatched from port of Riga to Afghanistan through Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (cargo transportation in Afghanistan with trucks). Later, other lines also starting in Latvia were developed: the combined railroad and road line through Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (the so called “KKT” route, with road transportation starting in Kyrgyzstan); road lines similar to railroad lines, some of which have also crossed Lithuania and Belarus; and cargo transportation by air through Riga airport. In addition, other routes have also been tested and/or used to a lesser extent – for example, the railroad line from Latvia to Ulyanovsk in Russia with further cargo transportation to Afghanistan by air.

In addition to Latvia, the other Baltic States have also entered the project. At the end of 2009 Estonia joined the network with the port of Tallinn as an entry point, mainly using railroads through Latvia, Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan or the alternative “KKT” route. In 2011, the port of Klaipeda in Lithuania also joined the list of entry points (however, to a lesser extent it had already been used by at least one of the NATO European allies to transport cargo to Afghanistan before) – most of the cargo has been transported further through Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan or through the alternative “KKT” route. Taken together, these

routes have been generally seen as the northern part of the NDN, or as the Northern Line of Communication (NLOC), by NATO.

Another set of lines, called as the Central Line of Communication (CLOC) by NATO, passes through the Caucasus. Initially, the main entry point was port of Poti in Georgia, from which cargo crossed Georgia and Azerbaijan by ground lines, then crossed the Caspian Sea to the port of Aktau in Kazakhstan and afterward by ground lines was transported to Afghanistan. This route was expanded to also include cargo transported by air through Azerbaijan, as well as by ground lines from Turkey, Iraq and Germany. The majority of cargo transported over the northern and the central part of the NDN has entered Afghanistan over its border with Uzbekistan by crossing the "Friendship" bridge over the Amu Darya river between cities of Termez and Hairaton.

Apart from the ground lines already mentioned, other lines have been used: air transportation to Navoi in Uzbekistan with further ground transportation to destinations in Afghanistan; a railroad line to the port of Vladivostok in eastern Russia; ground lines from Germany through Poland and Ukraine before entering Russia or through Central and Southern Europe and Turkey; air transportation from Constanta in Romania; and some NDN cargo has also passed through the territory of Turkmenistan. Apart from the mentioned lines, additional ones have been offered for consideration – for example, a line through the port of Ust-Luga in north-west Russia that would bypass the Baltic States.

Some of the lines mentioned above have also been tested for or used for retrograde transportation (from Afghanistan), which is gaining in importance with the gradual reduction of troops in Afghanistan. It is also important to note that the lines and usage of the lines has been under constant change: some of them may not be in use any more and others might have been added. With the substitution of the subsistence prime vendor by the US, a shifting of routes with a focus on the Caucasus can be expected at the end of 2013.

Major stakeholders and statistics

Transportation services have considerable potential for positive interaction between the military and the civil sector because companies from the civil sector can often offer their services on the basis of pre-established transportation lines or build new ones on that basis. In supplying the military missions in Afghanistan, due to the limitations described above, the involvement of commercial companies was almost indispensable. In the case of the NDN, they had already established operational transportation chains that could be fully or partly used for NDN shipments (by offering experience, resources, representatives, and partners in transit countries and Afghanistan itself). Of the parties involved in enabling the NDN, there have been different state institutions, including military authorities, transportation, defense and foreign ministries, customs authorities, etc. However, a major part of the practical measures, including ocean, ground and air transportation, have been organized and executed by commercial companies. Probably the best known international companies contracted by the US have been “Maersk Line”, “Hapag-Lloyd”, “APL”, “Supreme” (and its successor “Anham”, as the subsistence prime vendor), while companies operating under the so called “Latvian Lead Nation Concept” have been “Gefco”, “Damco”, “DB Schenker” and “DSV Air & Sea”. However, many more commercial companies in different countries have been involved in cargo transportation – such as companies operating in ports and airports, including cargo terminals, railroad companies, specialized forwarding and logistics companies, trucking companies, warehouses, etc.

Although the already aforementioned term “NATO cargo” implicitly implies a military component, only non-military (non-lethal) cargo has been allowed to transit through Russia and Central Asian countries by ground. As was already mentioned, almost everything needed to sustain both missions has had to be brought in from the outside. The NDN has been used to transport various items, such as construction materials, spare parts, fuel, food, and hygiene products. Cargo has not only been

transported in intermodal containers, but also in other forms like tank cars and refrigerator cars (trucks). Transit time from the Baltic Sea ports to the border of Afghanistan has generally varied from approximately 10 to 30 days, largely depending on the transportation mode, the duration of border crossing procedures, congestion, technical procedures, weather conditions, etc.

Due to the reasons mentioned earlier, in describing problems surrounding the identification of the lines of the NDN, it is also difficult to provide precise statistical data for cargo transported through the NDN. In addition to the simultaneous transportation of commercial cargo, the use of the same vehicles for commercial and non-commercial cargo, procurements in transit countries, non-documented NDN cargo, and other factors have to be mentioned. As different kinds of cargo have been shipped, so have different methods and measurements of calculation (TEU, containers, tons, flights, trains, trucks, etc.) and different time-frames for calculations (calendar year or fiscal year, cargo leaving warehouse or crossing the border of Afghanistan or arriving to the destination warehouse, etc.) been used. Calculations are further complicated by the fact that also other countries apart from the US, including the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Finland and Germany, have used the NDN (most of these other states have used the “Latvian Lead Nation Concept”).

According to the Transportation Command of the US (USTRANSCOM), over 3,000 containers in 2009 (here and further in this paragraph – fiscal year)⁴, approximately 22,500 containers in 2010⁵, more than 42,000 TEU

⁴ United States Transportation Command, USTRANSCOM 2009 Annual Report, 14, <http://www.transcom.mil/foia/2009acr.zip>

⁵ United States Transportation Command, USTRANSCOM 2010 Annual Report, 15, http://www.transcom.mil/foia/FY2010_USTRANSCOM_Annual_Report.zip

containers in 2011⁶, and more than 49,000 TEU containers in 2012⁷ were transported through the NDN. Although larger amount of cargo has been transported according to the aforementioned statistics, the 100,000th container passing through the NDN was celebrated in port of Riga in June 2013 (this included US cargo only)⁸. According to information from USTRANSCOM, the NDN handled about 50% of all supplies transported by ground to Afghanistan in 2010⁹, 29% of sustainment cargo in 2011 and nearly 60% in 2012 (the rest being transported by air)¹⁰.

However, the numbers stated above provide sufficient information to evaluate the share of the NDN in Eurasian transportation corridors. According to the numbers above this line can be considered as critical for the sustainment of the military missions in Afghanistan; in a wider context, however, the amount of NDN cargo can be considered as modest. To take one example of the NDN entry points the port of Riga handled more than 362,000 TEU containers¹¹, port of Tallinn handled more than 227,000¹² and port of Klaipeda handled more than 381,000¹³ in 2012

⁶ United States Transportation Command, USTRANSCOM 2011 Annual Report, 15, http://www.transcom.mil/documents/annual_reports/FY2011_USTRANSCOM_Annual_Report.pdf

⁷ United States Transportation Command, United States Transportation Command 2012 Annual Report, 14, http://www.transcom.mil/documents/annual_reports/annual_report.pdf

⁸ However, it can be argued that the US has been by far the major user of the NDN. For example, of the cargo crossing the Baltic States, it can be estimated that approximately 95% of this cargo or even more is US cargo.

⁹ United States Transportation Command, USTRANSCOM 2010 Annual Report, 15.

¹⁰ United States Transportation Command, United States Transportation Command 2012 Annual Report, 14.

¹¹ Rīgas Brīvoostas pārvalde, Kravu apgrozījums Rīgas Brīvoostā 2012.gadā (tūkst.tonnu), 09.01.2013, http://www.rop.lv/lv/multimedia/downloads/doc_download/444-kravu-apgrozijums-rigas-brivosta-2012-gada.html

¹² Port of Tallinn, Cargo turnover 1999-2013 (sheet "Containers"), <http://www.portoftallinn.com/?dl=421>

¹³ Klaipeda State Seaport Authority, The second best cargo handling result within the period of the port history has been achieved, 09.01.2013, <http://www.portofklaipeda.lt/news/114/574/The-second-best-cargo-handling-result-within-the-period-of-the-Port-history-has-been-achieved/d.statistics>

alone (furthermore, the transportation of containers has not been a major part of cargo handled in these ports). At the same time, it has to be underlined that for many individual companies in transit countries the NDN cargo has become major part of their businesses (for example, some cargo terminals in ports and airports, trucking companies, specialized forwarding and logistics companies).

Opportunities and challenges

The positive effects of the NDN cannot be underestimated. First of all, the basic aim of the NDN has been achieved – an alternative set of lines to supply military missions in Afghanistan has been established. And its importance grew considerably with the complete lockdown of ground lines through Pakistan in November 2011, thus making the NDN the only available set of operational ground lines until Pakistan decided to reopen its ground lines in July 2012. During the lockdown the only other alternative operational way to deliver supplies would have been considerably less cost effective cargo transportation by air. The NDN has also been much more reliable in regards to security. In contrast to the ground lines through Pakistan, where regular attacks on trucks were reported, problems like these have almost not been present through the NDN (at least in territories outside Afghanistan). Thus, more cargo dispatched from warehouses has reached its final destinations in Afghanistan.

The NDN can also be considered a success story that illustrates changes in global politics since the end of the Cold War. Former adversaries, the US/NATO and Russia, along with other former Soviet Union republics, have engaged in common efforts to support the military missions of the US and NATO. At the same time, it has also provided additional grounds for practical cooperation between NATO and its partner countries, especially Russia and the Central Asian countries – for them, cooperation in this sphere has probably shown NATO in another light, one that also brings practical benefits. Although, from the other side,

the reasons behind this cooperation may include other geopolitical aspects – for example, fear of the Taliban regaining power in Afghanistan – it does not undermine the importance of this cooperation between former adversaries.

If considered in the context of cooperation among NATO allies in general and the “smart defense” concept in particular, judgment on the NDN can be twofold. From one point of view, the US and some other NATO member states, for example Germany, have acted mainly unilaterally to ensure the transportation of their cargo to and from Afghanistan (including individual procedures, commercial contracts, and transit agreements). From another point of view, however, multinational efforts, most notably the “Latvian Lead Nation Concept”, have been an example of effective multinational cooperation among NATO allies – containers to Afghanistan have been transported on the same trains or even on the same railroad platforms. Such consolidation of cargo has undoubtedly reduced costs and delivery times.

Although not considerable, the NDN has had some positive financial effects on the transit countries and Afghanistan itself, especially northern part of the country. Countries within the NDN have received direct and indirect income from tariffs and taxes. Those who have benefited directly are state companies and commercial companies – port and airport authorities, cargo terminals, railroad companies (infrastructure managers and carriers), specialized forwarding and logistics companies, trucking companies, manufacturers, and retailers of locally procured goods. As these companies have been linked with various other companies, the web of those that have benefited indirectly is even wider (for example, fuel retail companies or spare part companies).

It can be argued that through enabling and running the NDN, regional cooperation among the countries involved in it has also increased – possibly, it has also promoted the development of trust and confidence both between the US and transit countries and between the Central Asian countries themselves, including Afghanistan. Although it is hard to

estimate to what extent the NDN has facilitated cooperation and its further prospects in Central Asia, it has certainly demonstrated the feasibility of such cooperation, especially in regards to the prospective commercialization of the NDN. It is also hard to evaluate to what extent the completed, undergoing or prospective regional development plans, especially in the transportation sector (like the completed railroad line between Hairaton and Mazar-i-Sharif, the plans of other railroad lines, for example, connecting Tajikistan and Turkmenistan through Afghanistan), have been influenced by the NDN. But beyond any doubt, the NDN has practically demonstrated the potential for regional cooperation and has had positive effects on the inter-operability of procedures within both state and commercial sectors.

There have also been many challenges to enabling and running the NDN, and this section will not be able to provide an exhaustive list of them. Among stakeholders of all sorts, Uzbekistan has usually been named as the main source of obstacles for smoother cargo transportation through the NDN. It has been reported that the country has imposed stricter cargo transiting procedures (for example, complicated transit authorization requests for every train crossing its territory), imposed stricter customs procedures, allowed a narrowed list of materials that can be transported over its territory (the division line between military and non-military [lethal and non-lethal] materials has left some materials usually not considered as military [lethal] outside the list of allowed materials), and increased tariffs on cargo transportation both by road and by railroad. Thus, the ground lines through Uzbekistan have lengthened transit times and have resulted in higher costs. The search for alternative lines to bypass Uzbekistan has at least indirectly underlined these problems; this has included the “KKT” route and proposals to use the airfield of Ulyanovsk in Russia or the airfield of Shymkent in Kazakhstan to bypass Uzbekistan by air. However, some justifications for the actions of Uzbekistan can be identified by looking at the recent history when Uzbekistan had to face the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan – uncertainty about

the future of Afghanistan can certainly frame thinking in the context of the NDN. In addition, it has to be underlined that the risk of the smuggling of narcotics from Afghanistan adds additional concerns.

It has been assumed that the quality of transportation infrastructure gradually decreases with every country to the east towards Afghanistan. For the “KKT” route the main problem has been underdeveloped road infrastructure, the use of which has been further complicated by bad weather conditions at some points. However, problems of infrastructure in Central Asia have been an obstacle not only in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan but also in Uzbekistan. Truck drivers have complained about roads (both the quality of the surface of roads and the maintenance of them, especially in wintertime) and lengthy border crossing procedures that can also be seen in railroad transit (especially between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan).

Although the railroad from Hairaton has been extended to Mazar-i-Sharif, it has not been fully utilized for cargo transportation so far (there has also not been confirmation that it has been effectively used for supplying or redeploying the military missions in Afghanistan). Thus, the main entry point to Afghanistan over the so called “Friendship” bridge has been also the major “bottle neck” where most of the cargo from different ground lines comes together. Moreover, the “Friendship” bridge itself poses limits as it has been built for dual uses – both for railroad and road transportation, with one railroad track only. Also, railroad rolling stock, cranes and other equipment at the Hairaton transport junction have not been sufficient to effectively manage incoming cargo. Although this has gradually improved in recent years, road infrastructure in Afghanistan also cannot be considered as adequate.

Another problem, especially in Central Asian countries, has been inappropriate rules and inappropriate rule of law – the non-implementation or inefficient implementation of rules (including a lack of knowledge and abilities) and corruption. This can be especially attributed to border guard and customs authorities, whose procedures cannot

always be considered logical and efficient, thus slowing down smooth cargo transportation. According to companies operating through the NDN, they have not only faced corruption but have felt that the NDN has possibly even promoted corruption – for example, “facilitation fees” are expected (advised) for smoother border crossing and for smoother inspection of documentation when a truck is stopped by a law enforcement authority. With the amount of cargo increasing through the NDN, carriers may have been considered as an additional way to increase income.

The aforementioned points have directly influenced the costs of cargo transportation. It has been generally assumed that the costs of cargo transportation through the NDN are considerably higher than those using ground lines through Pakistan. However, there are logical reasons for this as the ground lines through Pakistan are considerably shorter and include only one transit country – Pakistan itself. But, for example, the primary railroad route through Uzbekistan includes at least four countries and considerably larger distances to be covered. The costs of cargo transportation to Afghanistan have differed greatly depending on the modes of transportation, the transportation lines, the companies involved, the weather conditions, the rules of the respective transit countries, the actual situation in commercial markets, the availability of rolling stock, etc. In general, it has been assumed that the costs of using the NDN are two to three times higher than those of using ground lines through Pakistan. But, at the same time, they are still approximately ten times lower than the costs of air transportation.

Another point to be mentioned is the competition sparked by the NDN. Probably the most visible competition has been between ground entry/exit points of the NDN, which has resulted in additional ground entry/exit points since the beginning of the NDN (for example, in the Baltic Sea region, Tallinn and Klaipeda were added to Riga, and offers for Ust-Luga to be added as an entry/exit point have been expressed). Although the establishment of the NDN itself was driven by a need for the

diversification of supply routes, the need for diversification was primarily attributed to entry/exit points in Afghanistan itself. However, instead of building a wider network of entry/exit points in Afghanistan, a wider network of ground entry/exit points at the other side of the ground lines has been established and cargo from these points has been transported to the same limited transportation infrastructure in Afghanistan.

The NDN and Latvia

As was already outlined, the Baltic Sea ports, Riga among them, were in a favorable position to become a part of the NDN as there were already established transportation chains with Central Asia (like the regular container train line “Baltika Transit” from Latvia to Central Asia, based on the completely interoperable 1520 mm railroad system). Latvian state institutions and commercial companies already had wide experience cooperating with Russia and the Central Asian countries. Two additional favorable factors for establishment of the NDN through Latvia have to be mentioned: its membership in NATO (including being one of the ISAF troop contributors) and its strategic partnership with the US.

Most of the NDN cargo has arrived in the port of Riga and been transported onwards either to Riga airport for direct flights to Afghanistan or by road and railroad to Afghanistan (via the lines described in “More than a single line”). Some of the cargo originates in Latvia as a result of local procurements, and some arrives by ground lines from other countries. In May 2012, regular retrograde cargo transportation began through Riga airport and since December 2012 retrograde transportation using railroad infrastructure has also been done.

The organizing principles of cargo transportation can be divided into two general categories. The first includes the transportation of cargo of the US which has used its own contracts with commercial companies and their subcontractors. This part constitutes the vast majority of overall

NDN cargo¹⁴. The second category comes under the so called “Latvian Lead Nation Concept”, through which the government of Latvia in cooperation with NATO and the Movement Coordination Centre Europe (MCCE) offers contracts with commercial companies that are open to other ISAF troop contributing countries. The essence of this concept is that it provides simplified and prearranged transportation procedures and offers multiple countries the chance to form block trains that can travel to Afghanistan faster and more cost effectively than by separate railroad wagons. The primary user of this concept has been the United Kingdom.

Even though the initial expected maximal amount of cargo to be transported to Afghanistan through Latvia has never materialized¹⁵, since 2009 more than 81,000 TEU of cargo have been transported to and from Afghanistan through Latvia¹⁶ (the income from the transit of one TEU has been estimated at up to approximately 500 euros)¹⁷ and local procurements have also been made in Latvia. Although the overall numbers of the NDN are modest (especially regarding the overall statistics surrounding ports and railroads [see the statistics for the port of Riga in “Major stakeholders and statistics”]), NDN cargo cannot be evaluated as insignificant – for some companies in Latvia it has become major part of their businesses and accordingly a number of workplaces have depended on NDN cargo¹⁸. One of the main winners is probably Riga

¹⁴ See footnote 8.

¹⁵ According to some expectations – up to 700 containers every week (for example: Артем Ефимов, Афганский путь вот-вот откроется, Бизнес&Балтия, 11.05.2009, 2.; Viesturs Radovics, Sāk apgādāt NATO spēkus Afganistānā no Rīgas, Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze Latvijai, 12.05.2009, 7).

¹⁶ Latvijas Republikas Satiksmes ministrija, Izvērtē Latvijas infrastruktūru pārvadājumu tālākai attīstīšanai ar Afganistānu, 15.08.2013, http://www.sam.gov.lv/?cat=8&art_id=3756

¹⁷ Latvijas Republikas Satiksmes ministrija, Uz Afganistānu nosūtīto nemilitāro kravu apjoms trīskāršojies, 06.01.2011, http://www.sam.gov.lv/satmin/content/?cat=8&art_id=2111/

¹⁸ It is hard to determine precise number of workplaces as for many of NDN related their obligations have not been limited to NDN cargo only. However, it is clear that some

airport, in which in the first half of 2013 cargo transported to and from Afghanistan constituted 67% of all of its handled cargo¹⁹.

However, more than benefit in financial terms, the value of the NDN for Latvia has to be evaluated in other terms. Cargo transportation to and from Afghanistan can be considered Latvia's contribution to the ISAF mission, as it provides an alternative and secure set of transportation lines to supply the mission²⁰. For Latvia, which is not a major troop contributor to the mission, any additional way to support the mission is significant. The NDN has not only engaged Latvian authorities in closer cooperation with Russia and Central Asian countries, but has become if not the most then certainly one of the most visible engagements with the US. The NDN has been widely covered by Latvian mass media – although there have been some securitization elements²¹, most of the reports can be considered positive.

In addition to what was already mentioned, the NDN has also served as a promoter of Latvia internationally. It has not only become one of the main issues Latvia is known for in NATO, but it has also attracted more attention from international players. The NDN has not only been widely covered by Latvian mass media but has also been noticed by international mass media. As normally Latvian affairs are not widely covered in

employers, Riga airport and companies operating in Riga airport and Port of Riga among them, have established new workplaces to handle NDN cargo.

¹⁹ Aizvien intensīvāk tiek apkalpotas Afganistānas kravas Rīgas lidostā, Delfi.lv, 13.07.2013, <http://www.delfi.lv/business/transports-logistika/aizvien-intensivak-tiek-apkalpotas-afganistanas-kravas-rigas-lidosta.d?id=43480325>

²⁰ Latvia has also seconded an official as NATO/ISAF transit liaison officer (as a voluntary national contribution) to assist ISAF troop contributing countries with transit issues from his position in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

²¹ For a research that includes also analysis of securitization moves of the NDN in Latvia see: Māris Andžāns, "Militāra un ekonomiskā sektora mijiedarbība Latvijā: kravu pārvadājumu uz Afganistānu piemērs", in Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte. Zinātniskie raksti: 2010. gada sociālo zinātņu nozares pētnieciskā darba publikācijas: Ekonomika. Komunikācija. Politika. Socioloģija. Sociālā politika un sociālais darbs. Tiesības, Rīga: Rīgas Stradiņa universitāte. 2011, 303-310,

http://www.rsu.lv/images/stories/dokumenti/publikacijas/zinatniskie_raksti_2011/socialie/10-249-ZR_soc_LV_2011.pdf

international mass media, any positive report can draw attention and can bring other positive effects – for example, by raising potential for attracting other kinds of cargo. Although it would be hard to estimate whether cargo transportation to Afghanistan has already attracted additional cargo, this transportation chain has been highlighted by Latvian authorities and transportation companies as a proof of its security and the capability to establish and run new transportation lines over Eurasia.

Latvia has also engaged in efforts to widen concept of the NDN by actively promoting the commercialization of it – for example, in May 2012 and June 2013 Latvian institutions in cooperation with commercial companies organized high level workshops on transcontinental transportation routes, with the main focus devoted to Afghanistan. Also, a part of the national development aid activities has been directed to Afghanistan by training Afghani experts (for example, in June 2013 two cooperation agreements between Kabul Polytechnic University and Latvian education establishments were concluded). Moreover, Latvia-US technical assistance cooperation projects in Uzbekistan aim to improve the procedures of customs and border guard services that could enhance transit procedures on the border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

Conclusions

The NDN was established in 2008 as a set of alternative ground lines to the fragile and vulnerable ground lines through Pakistan. In November 2011 ground lines through Pakistan were closed, and the NDN became the only operational way to supply troops in landlocked Afghanistan by ground. Even though commercial ground lines already existed before and some countries had already used them for smaller supplies, complex efforts had to be employed to ensure the flow of greater volumes of cargo.

The NDN includes far more than a single transportation line – in the beginning Latvia and Georgia were the main ground entry points, but gradually, partly as a result of competition, other entry points were added

to expand the geography of the NDN to include other parts of Europe and Asia as well. These transportation lines have not only included railroad transportation but also road transportation and air transportation. Altogether, at least 13 countries, the major one being the US, have used the NDN to supply and redeploy their troops. The bulk of the practical measures, including ocean, ground, and air transportation, have been organized and executed by commercial companies, taking advantage of the procedures and experience that was already established. Although the oft used term “NATO cargo” may implicitly imply military cargo, through the ground lines in Russia and Central Asian countries only non-military (non-lethal) cargo has been transported. Even though it is hard to provide precise statistics due to a number of factors, it is clear that more than 100,000 TEU of cargo has been transported through the NDN. This amount has been significant for the sustainment of the military missions in Afghanistan – however, in the context of broader regional transportation statistics, this number can be considered modest. At the same time, it is important to note that for many companies NDN cargo has become major part of their businesses.

The positive effects of the NDN cannot be underestimated. First of all, an alternative set of ground lines to supply the military missions was established and gained considerable importance with the complete lockdown of ground lines through Pakistan in November 2011. Although more expensive and more time consuming, the ground lines of the NDN have been much more secure than ground lines through Pakistan. The NDN has also illustrated changes in global politics since the end of the Cold war, as former adversaries, the US/NATO and Russia, along with other former Soviet Union republics, have engaged in common efforts to support military missions led by the US and NATO. Multinational efforts surrounding the NDN have also been an example of effective multinational cooperation among allies. The NDN might also have increased cooperation among countries in the region and thus facilitated trust and confidence among them. Last but not least, the NDN has demonstrated the possibility

and potential for the commercialization of the NDN, which, if would become a reality, would result in new trade opportunities and would promote prosperity and peace in the region.

The NDN has not been a simple enterprise and has faced a variety of challenges and controversies. Among stakeholders of all sorts, Uzbekistan has usually been mentioned as the main source of obstacles for smoother cargo transportation because of its stricter transit and customs procedures, limitations on the materials it allows to transit and higher tariffs, resulting in higher transit times and higher costs. Furthermore, in general the whole Central Asian region has problematic transportation infrastructure – especially road networks, the use of which is further complicated by bad weather conditions. As the bulk of NDN cargo from different ground entry points arrives in Afghanistan over the “Friendship” bridge, this has become one of the main “bottle necks” slowing down traffic. Another problem, especially in Central Asian countries, has been inappropriate rules and inappropriate rule of law – the non-implementation or inefficient implementation of these laws and corruption (it has to be noted that cargo transported through the NDN has not only faced but possibly even promoted corruption to some extent). The aforementioned factors have had a negative impact on costs of cargo transportation, which have been higher than those of ground lines through Pakistan. Partly due to the problematic aspects summarized above, with the substitution of the subsistence prime vendor by the US, reliance on the northern part of the NDN could decrease. Instead, increased focus on routes to bypass Central Asia, primarily through the Caucasus, and greater reliance on air transportation can be expected.

Although for some commercial companies in Latvia the NDN has been major part of their business and a number of workplaces depend on NDN cargo, in general, the impact of the NDN for Latvia has to be evaluated primarily in non-financial terms. The facilitation of cargo transportation to and from Afghanistan has to be considered as a contribution to the ISAF mission. The NDN has also engaged Latvian authorities in closer

cooperation with Russia, the Central Asian countries, and the US (the NDN has also become one of the most visible US engagements in Latvia). Last but not least, the NDN has served as a promoter of Latvia internationally – Latvia's role in the NDN has not only become one of the main issues for which Latvia is known in NATO, but it has also attracted more attention from the international mass media. Latvia has also become one of the main promoters of the commercialization of the NDN and has targeted part of its development aid to Afghanistan.

The further development of the NDN, both as retrograde cargo transportation from Afghanistan and as its commercialization, can be expanded as a process with no losers. Through common efforts it can strengthen cooperation among NATO allies, it can foster the development of relations with Russia and the Central Asian countries and among these countries themselves, and through commercialization and consequent trade opportunities it can promote prosperity and peace in the region. To achieve this, all stakeholders, both from governmental and private sectors, should further engage in common efforts to reduce political, bureaucratic and technical barriers to make the transportation lines of the NDN commercially feasible. Without effective cooperation in all of these spheres, the peak of the NDN, at least in its northern part, might already have been reached.

Not only “Containerspotting” – NATO’s Redeployment from Landlocked Afghanistan

*Heidi Reisinger*²²

On 31 December 2014, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, the largest military mission of NATO, will be history. In line with the political decision taken at NATO’s Lisbon Summit in 2010, ISAF troops will be leaving. With them will go all their equipment: a range of items, from weapon systems and armoured vehicles to chairs, kitchens and fitness centres used by more than 100,000 troops and approximately the same amount of civilian personnel. This is a gigantic project. If one thought getting into Afghanistan was difficult, getting out is a lot harder. It represents the biggest multi-national military logistical challenge in modern history. Millions of tons of materiel have to be de-militarized, dismantled, handed over, sold, scrapped, recycled, donated to the Afghans and/or third nations, or transferred home. More than 125,000 containers and 80,000 military vehicles have to be disposed of or brought back home to NATO nations and NATO partner countries. If the containers and the vehicles were placed one after the other, end to end, they would form a line as long as the distance from Berlin to Paris.

This “redeployment” is a national responsibility, with NATO playing an important coordination role and it is not only a question of logistics. It is an integral part of the overall ISAF campaign plan, and it is a full spectrum

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effort which has to be coordinated with the national plans of the ISAF nations, in line with the build-up of the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the transfer of security responsibility to Afghan partners. All this has to take place parallel to current active combat missions. Moreover, it has to take into account the requirements of NATO's scheduled follow-on mission to ISAF, "Resolute Support": the focus of this new mission will be to train, advise and assist, although the final set-up has yet to be determined.

As in a good short story, future perception of this important military mission will depend to a considerable extent on its ending – a successful and orderly redeployment. It will also be a moment of truth and of responsibility: history is full of dramatic examples of withdrawals from Afghanistan. When the last Soviet soldiers were brought home, it was clear that the Soviet Union was "leaving behind a war that had become a domestic burden and an international embarrassment for Moscow"²³.

NATO nations and their partners are determined not to repeat this pattern. They are well aware that ending this operation will be a difficult task for all parties involved. Looking for common solutions with long-standing Alliance members and partners seems to be natural under these challenging circumstances. So what are NATO countries and NATO partners doing to manage the challenge of redeploying from Afghanistan? And how does that affect NATO as an organization?

This paper endeavours to give a taste of the different logistical aspects of redeployment, and also the significant political implications. It analyses the most pressing challenges for ISAF redeployment and takes a look at the answers NATO has thus so far given to this challenge.

Successful redeployment would be, *inter alia*, an example of Alliance cooperation and coherence: in keeping together NATO member and partner nations, ISAF redeployment is both a challenge and a chance to create efficient collaboration patterns in military logistics that will impact

²³ Bill Keller, Last Soviet Soldiers Leave Afghanistan, The New York Times, 16.02.1989.

NATO operations far beyond 2014. The way NATO manages this challenge will significantly impact on the political future of the Alliance internally, and also the way it is seen from the outside.

No blueprints: if you can redeploy from Afghanistan you can redeploy from everywhere

The virtual line of containers and vehicles mentioned above would be long enough to cover the distance between Berlin and Paris. For military logistics, the drama lies more in the fact that this long line would not be long enough to connect the Afghan capital Kabul with the closest deep sea port. The port of Karachi in Pakistan is more than 1,300 kilometres from Kabul, and almost 2,000 kilometres from Mazar-i Sharif. Afghanistan is a truly landlocked country, with poor infrastructure; distances have to be measured not only in kilometres or miles, but also in relation to the number of hours needed to cover them. The border crossing points are limited and difficult to use. If one also considers the extremes to be faced in terms of climate and terrain (up to 90% of the country is made up of desert or mountains, with sharp differences in elevation), it is no exaggeration to describe the whole operation as a logistic nightmare²⁴. In addition, many of the neighbouring and therefore potential transit countries are hardly known for their easy-going willingness to cooperate. Iran is a story in itself, an important partner and neighbour of Afghanistan but clearly not a partner of NATO. Pakistan is increasingly thought of as part of the problem, not of the solution. In Afghanistan's northern neighbourhood, the Central Asian States of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan therefore become an essential part of the equation. Like a number of other transit nations, they are long-standing members of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, but challenging (even, in some places, impossible) as transit areas. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, not

²⁴ A.P. Betson, Nothing is Simple in Afghanistan: The Principles of Sustainment and Logistics in Alexander's Shadow, *Military Review* 92(5), 50-57.

direct neighbours of Afghanistan, are on the long route north- and westwards – as are countries such as Russia and, to a certain extent, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. It has to be emphasized that most of them have been supporting NATO's mission in Afghanistan since the very beginning and offer all their infrastructure and airspace for ISAF cargo, sometimes without any caveats and in the face of grave domestic public concern. However, the routes in and out of Afghanistan are as reliable and strong as their weakest parts.

The Alliance does not have any blueprints for a redeployment project on this large a scale. While operations in Bosnia and Kosovo shaped the awareness of military planners regarding the challenge of drawdown and produced lessons learnt, these are of limited use for ISAF.

The US might benefit from its experience of leaving Iraq. However, this experience too is not readily applicable to Afghanistan, as Iraq's infrastructure and its proximity to Kuwait (with easy access to storage and container ports) made withdrawal from there comparable to a "cake walk." Compared with Iraq, even reaching the national borders is a far more problematic proposition in Afghanistan. In addition, the enormous problems of moving goods within the country are compounded by the question of how to reach the nearest deep sea port, involving several days of driving through dangerous areas and on difficult terrain.

Host nation support is crucial

A crucial factor for any kind of military (re-)deployment is, of course, the support of the host nation, normally delineated in the Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA). Possible continued presence of troops is a visible sign of this support. In the case of Iraq, there was no invitation for the US to stay, that complicated the situation. In Afghanistan, the scheduled follow-on mission after the end of ISAF has been mentioned above. NATO will be thus negotiating a SOFA with Kabul. This will be along the lines of the US-Afghan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), which is currently under negotiation, and will determine the conditions and goals of further

military presence in Afghanistan. This means that post-ISAF arrangements and agreements will try to leave scope for a shift from an operational to a partnership perspective.

Agreements such as the SOFA and BSA might appear essentially technical. However, for the fragile Afghan state they raise crucial questions of pride and national sovereignty. The Afghan President wants to avoid any heteronomy, even if well-meant, and to determine the terms and conditions of any agreements. With the prospect of Afghan presidential elections, scheduled for April 2014, local politicians are jockeying for position and do not want to be regarded as pushovers. The post-ISAF agreements and SOFA negotiations will be as challenging as today's regulations are controversial. According to the existing agreements, all ISAF-related players have complete and unimpeded freedom of movement or action throughout the territory and airspace of Afghanistan; importantly, all transactions they undertake in support of ISAF are exempt from Afghan taxes and duties.

However, the modern military practice of outsourcing services has created difficulties in relations with the host nation. Accusations that suppliers not only serve ISAF, but also use it as a cover to do other business without paying taxes to the Afghan authorities, have proved extremely embarrassing. Some companies have been heavily fined, but have refused to pay, and as a result, have been forced by the authorities to cease deliveries. NATO military logistics staffs were forced to deal with these cases and find alternatives, possibly by re-routing cargo, so as to keep supplies running.

Another challenge to NATO is the decree by Afghan President Karzai forbidding the use of private security companies to secure logistical supply routes within Afghanistan. This decree was driven primarily by the goal of transferring such security responsibilities to the Afghan state; a secondary motivation was to put a stop to the profitable dealings of private security companies and shift the proceeds to the Afghan public sector. Provision of security services is now the responsibility of the

Afghan Public Protection Force, reportedly less professional than the private security companies and under-resourced. NATO supply lines within the country are thus, at present, seriously impaired. Unless the freedom of movement required for NATO-related activities within Afghanistan can be guaranteed without any ifs or buts, the Alliance's redeployment could be affected adversely. NATO's follow-on mission to ISAF will be less affected by such questions as there will be very little surface theatre movement. Most movement of military personnel and equipment is likely to be by air.

The more NATO transfers security responsibility to the Afghan authorities, the more self-confident Afghan partners will become. The Alliance should realize that this will not always make things easier. Redeployment and continuing engagement will therefore necessarily depend on political coordination between NATO (especially the US, as the largest contributor) and the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). Strong political support for major border crossing points (Heyratan, on the Uzbek border; Torkham and Wesh, on the Pakistani border) and transit routes to neighbouring states are not sufficient, if convoys sometimes come practically to a standstill within Afghanistan itself. Deteriorating or inefficient host nation (and local) support may become the main obstacle for efficient redeployment.

On another contentious issue, NATO and GIROA are following the same line. Major transit countries have raised the question of whether a new United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) might be necessary for the follow-on NATO mission after 2014. This question raises the sensitive issue of Afghanistan's right to self-determination. The Afghan leadership refuses all attempts to rule the country from the outside, and reserves the right to have the GIROA take all necessary decisions in Kabul. However, the possible need for a new UNSCR holds enormous consequences for ISAF troops and their drawdown. Almost all transit agreements/arrangements are entirely tied to ISAF and the ISAF-sponsoring UNSCR. The implication, therefore, is that a new UNSCR would

entail the need to renegotiate those transit agreements, possibly with the added complication of price rises and/or further caveats.

Logistics is a national business – but coordination is essential

Bringing home all the equipment and material that was dragged into Afghanistan for more than 10 years of operations would be difficult, even if NATO was leaving en bloc. However, it is not that simple. To be precise, it is not NATO but the troop-contributing nations (TCNs) who are leaving: 28 NATO nations plus 21 partner nations and NATO's Joint Forces Command Brunssum²⁵. NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan is therefore comparable to a situation in an apartment building, with all 50 tenants moving out at the same time.

Like each and every tenant in this analogy, every nation is responsible for its own material and equipment. Logistics are a deeply national business. Everybody has to pay for the re-transit of their own materiel. In NATO jargon, this is a classic case for the principle of "costs lie where they fall". There is no NATO common funding for the redeployment action, except in the case of NATO-owned equipment, NATO Headquarters and NATO theatre airports of debarkation.

The analogy of tenants moving out also explains why logistics are a national business. Every family has household goods which it wants to see treated properly – dad's watch collection, mum's crystal glasses, and so on – not to mention the items that nobody wants other people to see. Most countries behave the same way, when it comes to military logistics and the highly classified IT systems used there: military logistics is very much about software, barcodes, classified information and national capabilities. Pooling and sharing is often not possible, given the incompatibility of IT systems. This is seen in the case of the two biggest troop contributors, the US and the UK, which both use nationally developed software that was not

²⁵ As operational command with responsibility for ISAF, JFC Brunssum is representing the NATO-owned or NATO-funded installations and equipment.

entirely interoperable with the Alliance system until recently. It can be regarded as a major step that converter tools now make this interoperability possible and allow the required data to be read.

Like the families in the apartment building, every TCN has to compete for advantageous conditions with the actors who now find themselves almost literally in an El Dorado: the logistics companies and the transit nations. This situation cries out for common and coordinated action – what NATO calls Multinational Logistics Solutions.

Though re-transit is a national business, it involves a range of very diverse players: (1) the TCNs, made up of 28 NATO allies and 21 non-NATO countries engaged in ISAF; (2) NATO as an organization, mainly NATO headquarters in Brussels, its strategic command (ACO/SHAPE) in Mons, Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum, ISAF headquarters in Kabul and the NATO Support Agency (NSPA)²⁶; (3) the Afghan partners (actually a large and very diverse group), (4) the transit nations, such as Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; (5) last but not least, the commercial logistics companies which will be transporting most of the ISAF cargo.

According to Alan Estevez, the US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Logistics, the biggest contractors involved in the move are the world's largest container lines – such as Copenhagen-based A.P. Moeller-Maersk A/S, the American President Lines unit of Singapore-based Neptune Orient Lines Ltd, and Hamburg-based Hapag-Lloyd AG²⁷.

²⁶ The NATO Support Agency (NSPA) is NATO's Integrated Logistics and Services Provider Agency, combining the former NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA), the Central Europe Pipeline Management Agency (CEPMA) and the NATO Airlift Management Agency (NAMA). See <http://www.nspa.nato.int/en/index.htm>

²⁷ Gopal Ratnam, Leaving Afghanistan is a \$7 Billion Moving Task for U.S., 12.05.2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-05-13/leaving-afghanistan-is-a-7-billion-moving-task-for-u-s.html> and Ernesto Londoño, Scrapping Equipment Key to Afghan Drawdown, The Washington Post, 19.06.2013, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-06-19/world/40067061_1_afghanistan-war-mine-resistant-ambush-protected-sustainment-command/2

Charter airlines – mainly the Russian Volga-Dnepr and the Ukrainian Antonov, with the world’s largest fleet of AN-124 and IL-76 cargo planes – are also playing a large part in the withdrawal. In recent years, they have specialized in oversize cargo charter flights and ISAF nations’ needs.

Removals companies (mainly Afghan and Pakistani) have also found ISAF an increasing source of business opportunities, as the shipping companies take out contracts with local trucking firms which carry the cargo to ports. The drivers risk their lives on Afghan and Pakistan roads, but this work earns them far more in a few days than they usually earn in a month (or even a year).

All these different actors and companies, big and small have to be brought together and coordinated, as the re-transit of materiel has to fit into the overall operational plan. This requires that all the parties involved show flexibility, transparency and real team spirit, especially among ISAF nations as local companies, warlords and businesses have nothing to gain from efficient redeployment.

A challenging mixture of logistics and politics

Bringing the millions of military and non-military items back from landlocked Afghanistan to the seaports on the East and West coasts of the US, to Leipzig, Sydney or Stockholm would be challenging enough in itself, but the logistic difficulties are only a part of the overall endeavour. Some might even call it the easy part, as most other steps are contingent on complex political developments, over which NATO has only marginal influence. Redeployment is not only about transporting military goods to and from a difficult and distant region, but handing over installations, responsibility, and therefore political power. Not to forget that everything has to be done in the context of – and simultaneously with – active combat missions. A US commander gets to the heart of the problem: “If we’re

knee-deep in combat operations, the natural tendency is to hold on to materiel ... just in case”²⁸.

Two scenarios are illustrative of the difficulties involved, and are briefly considered below.

1. If a nation is, for example, responsible for running an airport or a military base, it can pack and leave only when responsibility has been successfully transferred to the Afghans or, in certain cases, to another international organization. If there is no such transfer, the facility must be restored to the same standard as when NATO took over. This challenging mixture of military logistics and political action has to be coordinated by NATO: every step has to be integrated into the campaign plan, which includes the development of Afghan capabilities as well as the handing over of political and military responsibility.
2. If the installation is to be closed down and dismantled so as to leave empty desert, then questions such as scrapping, selling, dumping and recycling have to be addressed. To ensure uniform standards of base closure, NATO’s Allied Command Operations (ACO) has issued a directive for all ISAF nations, with detailed guidelines and advice.

A senior German logistics officer in the German Armed Forces Operations Command (Einsatzführungskommando der Bundeswehr) summarizes the principles as “what went in goes out again: no mountains of rubbish or scrap heaps must be left in Afghanistan. Nothing that could be dangerous for people or the environment must remain”²⁹.

The sheer number of sites and bases that have already been closed could give a misleading impression of the ISAF base closure programme. Approximately 800 bases, big and small, are involved. Of these, more than 600 have already been closed or transferred. This may sound impressive,

²⁸ Nate Rawlings, Return to Sender, Time, 18.03.2013, 30.

²⁹ Rückkehr aus dem Krieg, documentary by Sabine Rau, Christian Thiels und Jürgen Osterhage, Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk 2013, <http://www.ardmediathek.de/das-erste/reportage-dokumentation/die-story-im-ersten-rueckkehr-aus-dem-krieg?documentId=15759562>

but experts know that the facilities concerned were mainly the low-hanging fruit. The really important ones, in troubled areas, have not yet been touched.

Finally, ISAF's follow-on mission, Resolute Support, has to be further specified, in order to make a reasonable decision on which bases might be required. This squaring of the circle, which takes into account a variety of political developments and decisions, represents the most pressing challenge to military planners and logisticians.

The cost factor – the search for creative solutions

In times of severe budgetary restraints, cost effectiveness is a central requirement. Even if the estimated sums are as secret as many other logistic details, what is certain is that redeployment will cost a fortune. For the US, which holds the lion's share of materiel deployed in Afghanistan, the estimates range from 2 to 7 billion USD³⁰.

As an example to illustrate the scale of costs, bringing a standard cargo container from Northern Afghanistan more than 5,000 kilometres to Germany costs the German tax payer between 7,500 and 40,000 euros. The estimated 4,800 German containers alone would thus cost 36 million euros, if transported in the cheapest way available. This is of course not possible, as military and sensitive equipment has to be flown out for 40,000 euros per container. The estimated costs for air transit alone will be 150 million euros³¹.

For more than twelve years, 50 nations have brought in equipment and supplies to maintain more than 100,000 troops and the same number of

³⁰ Gopal Ratnam, *Leaving Afghanistan...*, and William La Jeunesse, *Uncle Sam's Yard Sale: Gov't Looks to Unload Afghanistan War Hardware*, Fox News, 18.08.2013,

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2013/08/18/it-could-be-uncle-sam-biggest-yard-sale/>

³¹ *Operation Rückzug: Die Bundeswehr verlässt Afghanistan*, documentary film by Jürgen Osterhage and Thomas Kaspar, ARD-Studio Neu-Delhi, phoenix 2013, <http://www.doku-stream.org/operation-ruckzug-die-bundeswehr-verlasst-afghanistan-doku-3/>;

Frank Wahlig, *Ende eines Kampfeinsatzes*, 13.09.2013,

http://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/parteien_und_programme/afghanistan3132.html

civilian and contracted personnel – from basic everyday necessities, medical treatment and entertainment to resources to maintain and service military equipment. The analogy with the apartment building shows the structural challenges but trivializes the dimension of ISAF redeployment: the issue here is about infrastructure and equipment that has to be taken care of in the ballpark of a city such as Geneva.

There are several possible ways of deal with the issue: (1) hand the resources concerned over to Afghan partners; (2) sell them; (3) dismantle them and then sell them; (4) donate them. Each of these alternatives would be cheaper than redeploying it as cargo.

For some time, nations have been doing “aggressive housekeeping” (once again, the analogy of the apartment building is appropriate here). This can mean identifying what will be needed in the next month or and maybe also during the follow-on mission and get rid of everything else. Thus it is that, in recent months, no charter flight bringing supplies to the troops in Afghanistan has flown back empty. The US is busy flying out equipment by Boeing C-17 cargo aircraft from Bagram airport, where a plane takes off or lands every minute and a half³².

Many items are not only cheaper but also easier to scrap than to bring home. Even properly functioning military equipment might thus end up as “gold dust” on Pakistani scrap markets – especially US heavyweight vehicles, known as MRAPs (Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles), designed to protect troops in transit from improvised explosive device (IED) attacks and ambushes. These MRAPs are bulky and heavy (14 tons and more), cost the US taxpayer about a million USD each, and it sometimes would not pay off to bring them home (or to US bases in Europe)³³. For German heavy vehicles too, the same logic applies and it is alleged to have occurred that troops “used them as target practice” (i.e. shoot them to pieces) with redundant ammunition. This sounds perverse,

³² Nate Rawlings, Return to Sender...

³³ Ernesto Londoño, Scrapping Equipment...

but meets two objectives: getting rid of excess or time-expired ammunition and making it possible to sell transportable pieces of metal for scrap.

Returning to the analogy of the tenants in the apartment building, what else would “John Doe” do to lower the costs? He and his children could sell their possessions through internet platforms and at flea markets. Something similar is taking place in this “largest retrograde mission in history”, as a senior US logistics officer puts it³⁴. Experts might also call it “Uncle Sams’s biggest yard sale”³⁵. Pakistani markets are being flooded with equipment originating from the ISAF troops. It is impossible to determine where this comes from: if it is sold by traders, or stolen in the almost daily attacks on supply and retrograde convoys.

Online too, good bargains can be found. As soon as inventory has been transferred to US storage outside Afghanistan, it might be decided that US troops do not need the equipment any longer and it can be sold on www.govliquidation.com. Almost anything, from aircraft parts to field gear and even whole vehicles, can be purchased.

Why not leave equipment to the underequipped Afghan units or greedy transit nations? ISAF nations are aware that donating or selling materiel to the Afghan partners or transit nations is tricky. Equipment can fall into the wrong hands, or can be used against peaceful demonstrators. Local authorities may not have adequate budget and personnel skills to operate and maintain. Therefore most nations have to approve any such sales through their foreign military sales programmes, which represent a considerable bureaucratic hurdle.

While NATO is not involved in donation deals with transit countries, it fully coordinates all donation projects to Afghan partners. NATO’s Training Mission to Afghanistan (NTM-A), which is an integral part of ISAF and will also end on 31 December 2014, is the single point of contact with

³⁴ Ernesto Londoño, *Scrapping Equipment...*

³⁵ William La Jeunesse, *Uncle Sams’s Yard Sale...*

the ANSF concerning all donations of ISAF installations and equipment – whether Alliance-funded or nationally funded. This ensures a coordinated handover, with the added advantage of minimizing any donations which do not make sense, could create problems or would simply serve the national interests of the donor (getting rid of unwanted materiel). In NATO terms, the Alliance does not want to leave a burden to the Afghans.

Clear thought must be given to which equipment Afghan partners can handle not only today but also tomorrow. A German TV crew who visited a former Bundeswehr base in Faizabad, only six months after the handover to Afghan special police forces, was surprised that the facility was not fully operational; in other words: nothing was working. Cars were at a standstill, toilets blocked, water unavailable, the power generators (which had been specially bought to serve the Afghans' needs) out of order. The Afghan police battalion had run out of spare parts and gasoline, and tried to muddle through the Afghan way³⁶.

Transit nations, who sometimes have extensive “shopping lists”, should also consider carefully whether donated parts of different weapon systems would really enhance their capabilities. As a Tajik expert puts it: “We would shoot a little, ammunition will run out, and the weapons will turn into scrap, because, first, there is no money to buy them, and second there is no corresponding [support] agreement”³⁷. (*Editors' note: please refer to map 1 in the annex.*)

Transit nations: There was a road in, there must be a road out

NATO nations have several possibilities for transporting cargo into and out of Afghanistan. The easiest way surely is to use large cargo aircraft. This is the most costly way, but also the safest and fastest. For all kinds of

³⁶ Rückkehr aus dem Krieg...

„Adjusting” the German camp in Kunduz to Afghan needs prior to its hand over in October 2013, cost the German tax payer 25 million euros. Also this investment will fall on stony ground if the ANSF does not manage to establish a functioning supply chain.

³⁷ Abdullo Habib in an interview with the Avesta news agency, 07.03.2012, quoted by BBC Monitoring, 08.03.2012.

combat and sensitive gear, it is therefore the only means of transportation that can be used. However, for furniture, air conditioners and all kinds of commodities, the Ground Lines of Communication (GLOCs) are available and will be used.

All routes on the ground have their advantages and disadvantages. There is no land route that works reliably enough not to require alternatives. In addition, most land routes can be used only with “multimodal” transit, i.e. by combining different means of transportation.

1. The Southern GLOC (SGLOC or PAKGLOC) is through Pakistan. Cargo has to be driven by truck and loaded on to container liners in Karachi. This route, especially for TCNs deployed in the South and East of Afghanistan, is the most favoured line of communication. Due to political disputes between Pakistan and the US, this important route was closed for eight months from late November 2011 to July 2012. The closure and the resulting problems are well remembered by the logistics officers. When Pakistan closed the border crossing points and impounded the 10,000 containers (in many cases food supplies) which ISAF nations had lined up in Karachi for transit in both directions, this resulted in considerable wastage and legal problems. Since reopening, the route has functioned well, but further disruptions could occur at any time.

Even if the SGLOC/PAKGLOC is considered to be the most efficient route, frequent losses and damage to cargo as a result of possible insurgent/criminal activity will have to be taken into account. For sensitive and sophisticated cargo, nations will therefore have to find other ways out.

2. The Central LOC through Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, the Southern Caucasus and Turkey might become one of the most frequently used routes out of Afghanistan. Close cooperation and combined efforts between NATO member Turkey and NATO partners Georgia and Azerbaijan make this LOC attractive. Turkey has even extended its

railway network³⁸. Germany, ISAF's third biggest troop contributor, will fly most of its own equipment out on chartered flights from Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan to Trabzon in Turkey. There, a German logistics unit re-routes cargo and vehicles by road to a modern deep sea port, for loading on to container ships and chartered roll-on/roll-off (RORO) vessels³⁹. By the end of the withdrawal, half of an estimated total of 4,800 German containers will have been transferred by this route. This solution will not prove cheap, but is very reliable. It gives Germany the advantage of not having to stand in line with other TCNs waiting to pass the bottleneck of Uzbekistan on the Northern route.

3. The Northern LOC (NGLOC), through Central Asia and Russia, seems to be almost as famous as the ancient Silk Road. ISAF nations have not put greater effort into any other line of communication⁴⁰. Transiting through Afghanistan's northern neighbour Uzbekistan, then through Kazakhstan, Russia and Latvia to the Baltic Sea, this route has been extremely successful for supplies entering Afghanistan. The big TCNs like the UK, Germany, France, Spain and, of course, the US continue to use it extensively. Washington started to work on this route in 2006, when relations with its former prime partner Pakistan became more and more difficult. The US' Northern Distribution Network (NDN) is identical to NATO's NGLOC, but it is based on bilateral legal transit

³⁸ Unfortunately and expectedly, Armenia is not part of this important regional cooperation. The conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia casts its shadow even over the totally unrelated issue of ISAF redeployment. Even the use of maps has become complicated. Political maps, i.e. with national borders indicated, seem to be avoided in NATO expert rounds, so as not to end up in endless political discussions about occupied territories. New members and partners have introduced considerable difficulties into the work of the Alliance in this respect; see also the FYROM case (Turkey recognizes the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia by its constitutional name), or the tensions between Turkey and Israel.

³⁹ Roll-on/Roll-off ships are designed to transport wheeled cargo.

⁴⁰ Heidi Reisinger, *How to Get Out of Afghanistan: NATO's Withdrawal through Central Asia*, NDC Research Paper 79, Rome, June 2012, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=341>

agreements that go beyond the NATO agreements⁴¹. The NDN could almost be called a sustainment concept that includes transit/transport. It will therefore have a particularly important impact on post-ISAF cooperation of transit nations.

The establishment and operation of the NGLOC would not have been possible without the lead nation role played by Latvia, which is keeping NATO nations and NATO partners together in this venture. Latvia is the main hub for sustainment via the NDN and NLOC. During many years Latvia has maintained a high level of commitment to the hub, the functionality, and development. This support has paid dividends to the ISAF mission, in particular for sustainment activities during the PAK GLOC closure mentioned above.

Latvia has also assigned a NATO Liaison officer to Tashkent with the purpose of being the ears and eyes on location in Uzbekistan and do trouble shooting at lowest level. The function is dedicated to all transit issues which may occur during transit of ISAF cargo via Uzbekistan.

Although many transit nations are involved, the NGLOC works flawlessly for goods entering Afghanistan. For re-transit, however, this route has so far performed far below expectations. Insiders estimate that approximately 54,000 containers had left Afghanistan until July 2013, but less than 100 made it through the NGLOC. Today only two containers a day pass through Uzbekistan, the first country on the long ground route north and westwards. The NGLOC is considered to be secure – there are no cases of pilferage known. It is reliable and cost-effective, but suffers from problems mainly caused by the Uzbek bureaucracy and something that can only be described as an irrational

⁴¹ The NDN encompasses the Central Lines of Communication (CLOC) and the Northern Lines of Communication (NLOC). NDN LOC's includes multimodal routes to Turkey via Baku and Trabzon, the Ulyanovsk multimodal LOC, the Ground LOC via Uzbekistan and the TKK route.

fear of anything entering Uzbekistan from Afghanistan⁴². There seems to be only one solution to these problems: to circumvent the country. Given the weather conditions and limited infrastructure, the KKT bypass through Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan is probably not a game changer, but could become increasingly important. Due to rough road conditions and severe weather challenges this route is complicated to use mainly during the fall, winter and spring season. The same is true for the US-only Trans-Siberian route by truck to Russian sea ports in the Russian Far East. Some nations have tested to the feasibility of overflying Uzbekistan. Other nations suffering from “Uzbek fatigue” have opted for completely different solutions, as seen in the example of Germany airlifting its westbound equipment to Trabzon. In other cases, nations have set up hubs in the Middle East. The NLOC, despite the enormous political support it enjoys, was therefore not yet able to fulfil its potential. Kazakhstan has offered the use of its port at Aqtau on the Caspian Sea, and recently also developed a modern multimodal transit centre in Shymkent. Russia, which has always supported ISAF transit, has offered the Ulyanovsk airport and transit centre, despite sharp domestic opposition. Ground routes via Uzbekistan cannot be fully used unless the Uzbek portion is properly functioning. At present, NATO is trying to fulfil Uzbek requirements for equipment to make border control and customs procedures more efficient (forklift trucks, cranes etc.). In addition, a US-provided scanner is being installed at the Afghan border and another is waiting to be delivered for use at the Kazakh border.

Creative solutions cost money. As already mentioned, one of these was to fly equipment out to Ulyanovsk in Russia, and then continue via road and rail. A Proof of Principal, as NATO calls the trial run, was very successful, but unfortunately more expensive than other multi-modal

⁴² This fear of opening the door to organized crime, with drug and arms trafficking, seemed to have been confirmed when the first ISAF re-transit container entered Uzbekistan. Inside, the Uzbek customs officials found weapons which had been forgotten under a seat.

options or even flying directly home. Unlike Turkey, Russia offers an all-inclusive service to avoid having military personnel from NATO nations on Russian territory. Use of the Ulyanovsk facility is thus subject to the nations concerned signing contracts with Russian cargo airlines. At the time of the trial, this involved an unacceptable level of expenditure. A container transported by ground routes and dispatched in Ulyanovsk cost three times more than other multimodal (fly-rail-sail) options.

Overall, it is fair to state that all the ground LOCs – especially the NGLOC/NDN – work well and are reliable as far as *inbound* cargo on its way to Afghanistan is concerned. However, redeployment is about *outbound* cargo which is leaving Afghanistan. Apart from costly solutions involving one or more flights, only the SGLOC through Pakistan is fully operational. All the others have good potential, but are severely hampered by the bottleneck in Uzbekistan, bad weather and road conditions or missing rail connections.

NATO has entered into transit agreements which ISAF nations can use with all the relevant transit nations (Pakistan, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). Two further transit nations, Georgia and Azerbaijan, offer their airspace and infrastructure as if they were de-facto NATO members. Some ISAF nations also have bilateral agreements with transit nations: these bilateral arrangements are tailored to national needs and go beyond the NATO agreements. Irrespective of these, it is a remarkable step forward – and an important gesture of partnership – that the transit nations have entered into agreements with NATO without any particular advantage to themselves, and have made their infrastructure available to the ISAF nations.

It was mentioned before that these agreements are tied to ISAF. When ISAF ends, it will be an open question whether “ISAF” re-transit arrangements can continue. Only the agreement with Pakistan explicitly includes transit after December 2014. The question of ISAF redeployment

after 2014 might become pressing: currently, it seems likely that some ISAF nations' redeployment will extend into 2015 – or even 2016.

ISAF is now in NATO's DNA

In the course of more than a decade of common military action in Afghanistan, the Alliance has reached its highest level of interoperability ever in many areas. This is seen in terms of Alliance coherence, common understanding and the implementation of the Comprehensive Approach, as well as the attempt to work together in areas that have previously been the exclusive preserve of individual nations. ISAF redeployment is therefore a catalyst for common logistics, in which NATO acts as a true broker, enhances information sharing and multinational cooperation, synchronizes national and Alliance action and deconflicts where necessary.

It started with the small things. Even agreeing on a common term for the winding down of ISAF was an issue for the TCNs in Brussels. Is it "pullout", "withdrawal", "drawdown" or "reduction"? No: it is redeployment. This is a rather technical term, which does not imply any judgment of the mission. It leaves open whether it is accompanied by a significant reduction of troops. In addition, this term describes an action which is more than a logistic task, which should be considered as an operation in itself, but which is still a part of the overall campaign plan. The redeployment of ISAF troops and equipment is also about such questions as force protection, strategic communication, base closure, demilitarization, dismantling and disposal. All of this raises important questions regarding standardization. As NATO nations have to find the answers to these questions, ISAF as a mission is a driver not only of interoperability, but also of logistics synchronization, harmonization and coordination. ISAF redeployment can therefore be seen, *inter alia*, as an important step towards common logistics support solutions.

Predictably, when it comes to redeployment, there is no easy answer to the famous Kissinger question of whose telephone number should be

dialled at NATO. Who owns this endeavour, in which political and operational aspects are interwoven on all levels?

Experts talk about the architecture of ISAF redeployment, as an attempt to coordinate many stages in decision-making. This involves not only strategic political issues dealt with at NATO Headquarters, but also strategic military questions handled by the Alliance's strategic command; the entire ACO chain of command is also part of this architecture, including ISAF Headquarters in Kabul and the ISAF TCNs.

NATO Headquarters has formed a task force, led by the Assistant Secretary General for Operations and co-chaired together with representatives of the International Staff and International Military Staff. This task force mainly provides political-military strategic support and guidance from ACO; it negotiates in close collaboration with military experts from SHAPE, with partners and with transit nations. The task force also ensures political coordination with the ISAF nations, and encourages their cooperation on logistic matters.

As mentioned above, ACO has issued a directive to give nations guidelines on all relevant redeployment questions. These range from the architecture of redeployment, clarifying roles and responsibilities of the involved NATO bodies and ISAF nations, to concrete directions regarding how to leave a site. Irrespective of the ISAF drawdown, ACT is currently working on a redeployment doctrine.

To come back to the Kissinger question and give a clearer answer regarding who to call: for political strategic issues, call NATO Headquarters Operations Division; for military strategic issues, the SHAPE J4; concerning donations to Afghan partners, call ISAF/NTM-A Headquarters in Kabul.

NATO's central role as an organization is to: 1) provide political support and guidance, convincing ISAF nations to overcome national reflexes, be transparent and share information about their deployment plans and equipment; 2) support and coordinate the political process of transferring security responsibility to Afghan partners; 3) embed the redeployment phase politically into a long term partnership strategy with

Afghanistan; 4) establish and politically support the various LOCs, negotiate and maintain transit agreements that can be used by NATO and ISAF nations; 5) develop standards and guidelines regarding how the Alliance (including the non-NATO TCNs) should leave theatre (donation, disposal etc.); 6) coordinate, synchronize and deconflict national (re-) deployment plans; and 7) coordinate these national plans with NATO capacities and the ISAF campaign plan.

NATO as an organization has grown significantly in this ongoing process of redeployment. Nations, jealous of their sovereignty and wishing to preserve their self-sufficiency, showed little willingness in the past to share (re-)deployment information and assets. They now understand the complexity and necessity of coordination far better. NATO's subject matter experts are in close contact with national planners, but they are aware that they can only ask, not task. Nations can change their mindset only gradually: they must be convinced of the benefits offered by sharing and cooperation.

There are a number of tools which help keep all NATO players informed and share responsibilities.

At regular intervals, the TCNs are invited to a Redeployment Logistics Conference at SHAPE, where NATO gathers information about national redeployment plans, synchronizing and deconflicting them while ensuring consistency with NATO redeployment capacities and the overall campaign plan. The conference in May 2013 saw the active engagement of 26 out of the then 50 TCNs. Given that the 26 nations were the main troop contributors; this can be regarded as a very good level of participation, indicating growing understanding of the need for common logistics⁴³.

As for any operation, SHAPE created and developed the strategic level Multinational Detailed Deployment Plan (MNDDP) for redeployment. This is integrated into the ISAF campaign plan at the theatre level and

⁴³ Many TCNs have very small troop contingents that do not require explicit redeployment planning, or have bi-national agreements with a major troop contributor such as the US or UK.

represents the central tool to monitor, coordinate and deconflict national redeployment plans in line with Alliance capacities. The full use of this tool has made a huge improvement: it is particularly helpful to the ISAF theatre Commanders and the nations, enabling them to understand the complexity involved in deconflicting the TCNs' national plans.

NATO can gather and coordinate the information provided by the nations about their plans and needs, and suggest pooling and sharing arrangements. NATO can suggest and offer mutual support solutions and commercial solutions, with the assistance of the NATO Support Agency (NSPA). However, this does require that the nations themselves engage.

NATO had to push hard for multinational solutions and got little response in the beginning. At the ISAF meetings, there were many questions such as "Do you want to have 50 glass crushing facilities or individual contracts for base closure?" It is obviously hard to overcome ingrained national patterns and do more and more with partners "the NATO way".

Some nations come together almost naturally. In Helmand province, for example, the UK, Estonia and Denmark are sharing a vehicle-washing facility. Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan are working together so as to make the CGLOC transit route a success.

The biggest supporters of common logistics solutions are the new members who, together with non-NATO nations, are right on top of multinational solutions and close cooperation. The latest logistics exercise, organized by NATO's Multinational Logistics Coordination Center (MLCC) in Prague and host nation Slovakia in June 2013, is emblematic in this respect. Thirty-five nations, including NATO member states and partner countries, took part in this largest-ever logistics exercise, where four multinational so-called Smart Defence projects were successfully tested.

It is also a newer NATO member who acts as lead nation for the NLOC. By constant political support for this critical supply line and in general by maintaining close cooperation between NATO member states and non-

NATO transit nations, Latvia has demonstrated that one small and relatively new Ally can make an important contribution.

In order to maintain close contact with transit nations, the network of liaison officers in the region has proved an effective tool. There are transit liaison officers in Uzbekistan, and Pakistan, as well as US border teams in Pakistan and Uzbekistan at the border crossing points mentioned above.

For the sake of completeness, the special case of NATO property or NATO-owned equipment should also be mentioned. Emphasizing that the redeployment of equipment is nationally organized and funded means omitting the more complicated case of such equipment. If the items concerned are no longer needed to meet the Minimum Capability Requirement (MCR), they have to be redistributed, written off and deleted from NATO lists. This sounds easy, but the example of the two NATO-funded airports of debarkation, Kabul and Kandahar, shows that matters are more difficult in practice. Processing of these facilities, which will probably not be used by Resolute Support, has proved no easy matter. Without digging too deep into directives, it should be clarified that the NATO committees or bodies which authorized the initial funding must also be involved in the redeployment procedures.

After me, *no flood* – special concerns

ISAF redeployment involves not leaving behind such eyesores and hazards as military scrap on street corners, dangerous equipment or polluted sites⁴⁴. But what about the silent army of helpers?

Local Afghan contractors have made clear how concerned they are about what will happen to and with them and their families after the magic date of 31 December 2014. Will they be accused, ostracized, attacked, or even killed as collaborators? Many ISAF nations have therefore set up programmes to support their Afghan helpers. However,

⁴⁴ The few exceptions will essentially regard ISAF vehicles which were blown up by IEDs, and whose extrication would mean risking lives again.

far less attention is given to the thousands of contractors coming from third countries. Nobody knows exactly how many contractors work for ISAF, but experts estimate that the number of contractors by far exceeds the number of troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. It must therefore be assumed that a minimum of 120,000 contractors are working for ISAF troops in Afghanistan. Many of them are employed by private commercial companies; others come individually from all over the world to work for ISAF.

This “army” of civilian contractors seems to be a world of its own. In some military camps, which are the size of small towns and need huge numbers of service workers, contractors can in some cases, live in areas like ghettos.

All contractors known to NATO are covered by the Military Technical Agreement and are therefore, as service providers to NATO/ISAF, exempt from taxation and customs duties. All employees are required to show a passport and a visa to access ISAF bases.

The contractors in turn employ subcontractors, often very hard-working individuals (sometimes referred to as “ghosts”) who lead a completely shadowy existence. They have no official legal status. Many arrive with no invitation or visa (sometimes even without a passport): they are “just there”. Needless to say, nobody has a clear idea of the amount of equipment used by contractors and subcontractors, making any prospect of an organized drawdown unlikely complex prospect.

Since the appearance of this phenomenon, it has always been a touchy question who exactly monitors and supervises the civilian contractors. For several years it seems to have been a question of ad hoc muddling through – which could become a problem for redeployment, if NATO does not want to leave behind this huge work force. There is reason to fear that many contractors will stay behind, unaccounted for – they have no better place to go. They will stay on base and try to make a living. When the base is closed, they will become “leftovers” for NATO to handle.

It will be up to ISAF nations to take care of their civilian contractors, support them when it is time to leave Afghanistan, or take them with them. NATO is endeavouring to ensure that nations will not simply end the contracts and turn the contractors adrift.

Another open question and hot potato for NATO/ISAF is communication, both with the Afghans and with the public in the various ISAF nations. Strategic communication is traditionally difficult for multinational organizations. Richard Holbrooke memorably asked, “How can a man in a cave outcommunicate the world's leading communications society?” Still, we seem not to have learned how to “get the message out”⁴⁵. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it was clear why NATO nations went into Afghanistan; but this certainty faded away – and, with it, public support for ISAF. Why NATO is now wrapping up the campaign seems to be even less clear.

On the other hand, the simple logic of the Taliban seems crystal-clear: they are leaving – we won. NATO and ISAF nations therefore *have to* communicate the truth, even if it is more complicated. NATO has to explain again and again what redeployment is, and what it is not. It is not a rush to the exit, and it does not mean abandoning Afghanistan and the Afghans. On the contrary, as part of a wider transition, the whole engagement is based on a long-term strategy of building up the ANSF, transferring security responsibility and finally moving from operations in Afghanistan to partnership with Afghanistan⁴⁶.

The more the Afghans can assume their sovereign responsibilities, the more ISAF activities and ISAF troops can be reduced. Redeployment is therefore also a sign of trust that the Afghans can handle their own

⁴⁵ Richard Holbrooke, Get the Message Out, The Washington Post, 28.10.2001, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/13/AR2010121305410.html>

⁴⁶ This “Enduring Partnership” is oriented to the long term. NATO favours the setting up of a multinational helicopter wing, with Afghanistan as a partner nation. Even if having Kabul contribute to a NATO mission with this capability might be a totally unrealistic prospect today, NATO is trying to plant the seeds of such cooperation.

business. It is a mark of success. Last but not least, ISAF redeployment is a central and natural part of the ISAF campaign plan, and should be a central and natural part of any military campaign plan.

Redeployment in a nutshell – do it the NATO way

There's never a good time, or no time is better than now. It was stated at the beginning of this paper that the ISAF mission will be judged to no small degree by its ending. Most Afghan problems could not be solved by NATO and its partners, but the country was given a real chance to develop in a different direction than in previous decades.

Redeployment should therefore be seen as a natural part of the ISAF mission, which offers not only challenges but mainly opportunities. Afghanistan today is not comparable to the failed state of 2001. Today, the Afghan authorities are able to take over security responsibility and determine the country's political development.

Only for and with the Afghans. Acting in concert with the Afghan government and local Afghan support is crucial for success, in all phases and aspects of the ISAF redeployment and the follow-on mission Resolute Support which will concentrate on train, advise and assist. Conceptually, for NATO as an Alliance, Afghanistan will shift from an operational issue into the partnership area. NATO is prepared to work with Afghanistan as a partner in the long run.

Difficult but doable. Redeployment involves complicated logistics, but getting out ISAF equipment is mainly a question of time, risk and money. NATO's mission in Afghanistan illustrates the modern understanding of "tooth to backbone" – the idea of the tooth to tail ratio no longer applies.

For NATO as an organization, ISAF is a perfect example of how collective logistics can be implemented. This is far from limited to multinational action, as it adds the NATO dimension with regard to such essentials as command and control, common funding and common contracting. In other words, NATO ensures the all-important connection among members and partners, as an indispensable broker.

No way back to a kind of pre-ISAF mode. ISAF nations should appreciate and further enhance the level of interoperability – also between member states and partners – and common logistics, resisting their national instincts to get things done alone. However, the mindset of common logistics and doing it the NATO way has to be put into practice constantly: a professional, efficient and coordinated ISAF redeployment is not the end of the story. Redeployment is more than dealing with cargo and containers: it is also a key factor in NATO's future as an expeditionary political-military Alliance.

Russia's Policy on Transportation Corridors in Central Eurasia and the Political Risks of a Commercialization of the Northern Distribution Network

Andrei A. Kazantsev

The development of new transportation projects connecting West to East and North to South in Eurasia, which could potentially take a significant portion of freight traffic from maritime routes, is potentially a good opportunity for Russia to overcome the dependency of its economy on raw materials and find new sources of income. These projects also promote a general atmosphere of cooperation in Russian-Western relations and in Russia's relations with its neighbors in Central Eurasia and Asia. The commercialization of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) is one of these projects. However, there are significant political and geopolitical risks for the successful commercialization of NDN.

The NDN and the Russian system of international transportation corridors

In the Middle Ages Russia substantially benefited from its position within the trade routes connecting Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and China. Archeologists have discovered huge deposits of Arab coins, used widely throughout Islamic world, on Russia's territory. The "Khazaran - Varangian" trade route from the Baltic Sea to the Caspian Sea was especially important in this respect. This route flourished during the existence of Khazaran Khaganate and the Golden Horde. Its significance diminished due to the appearance of maritime routes in the age of exploration. Since that time, recovering these transit trade connections

has always been Russia's dream. The milestones of this policy included Peter I's wars on the Baltic and Caspian seas, the Russian conquest of Caucasus and Central Asia, the construction of the Trans-Siberian railroad at the very end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, and huge infrastructural projects in Soviet times.

Russia's policy on transportation at present combines its economic and geopolitical interests. It includes the following elements:

- First, the development of Russian ports and transportation systems to avoid dependency on foreign ports and systems. The best example of this policy is the development of Russian Baltic Sea and Black Sea ports in order to avoid dependency on the Baltic States and Ukraine;
- Second, cooperation with former Soviet Union countries, especially with the countries that participate in the process of Eurasian integration with the purpose of forming a common "transportation space"⁴⁷;
- Third, hindering the development of "alternative" transportation corridors through Central Eurasia that either bypass Russia and break Moscow's monopoly in the sphere transportation or do not correspond to Russia's strategic interests; Fourth, the development of international transportation corridors linking Europe and Asia, North and South, that go through Russia and promote Russia's position both from an economic and geopolitical point of view.

The commercialization of the NDN from the point of view of many of its Russian critics in many respects contradicts these principles – here I will give their arguments in a short, descriptive form and I will critically analyze these arguments and the underlining principles in the next sections of this paper. It was not initiated by Russia, but by United States and NATO. Russian leadership is afraid that it would not promote Russian, but rather American geopolitical interests. Russian critics are afraid that

⁴⁷ Концепция формирования Единого транспортного пространства Евразийского экономического сообщества утверждена решением Межгоссовета ЕврАзЭС от 25 января 2008 г. № 374, <http://www.evrazes.com/docs/view/68>

the NDN will promote connections between Central Asian states and South Asia according to the Wider Central Asia doctrine, and this contradicts to the idea of Eurasian integration. From a practical point of view, Russians are unsure about stability in Afghanistan and do not want to invest much into the country. Finally, the NDN uses the Latvian port of Riga and Russian critics would prefer either railroad connections or the use of Russian ports. Finally, the NDN is associated with NATO, which is very negatively perceived by the Russian establishment, while the EU is perceived much more positively.

One can try to refute these arguments by saying the following: Russia is itself interested in stability in Afghanistan and Central Asia and, therefore, the project to create a Wider Central Asia can also work in its interests. Russia realizes that the project would link Central Asia with South Asia through Iran and that this does not contradict Eurasian integration. Security risks surrounding Iran, taking into account its nuclear program and other factors, are also very high and, moreover, Russian cooperation with Iran negatively affects Russian-American and Russian-Israeli relations, which are also important for Moscow. Russia itself wants to develop cooperation with the EU, which includes the Baltic states, and Putin even proposed in his electoral article⁴⁸ the formation of a Wider Europe based on the same principles and norms that would include the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union. And it is impossible to cooperate with the EU without cooperating with NATO, because EU member-states are also member-states of NATO.

However, the problem is that all these arguments will not silence Russian critics of the commercialization of the NDN. The reason for this is the underlying deep mistrust within the conservative part of the Russian establishment towards everything that comes from the West. Hence, the change of Russian attitudes towards the NDN and other similar

⁴⁸ Владимир В. Путин, Новый интеграционный проект для Евразии – будущее, которое рождается сегодня, 03.10.2011, <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>

alternative projects (for example, Transcaspian projects) depends much on the balance of liberal and conservative forces within the Russian leadership (this issue, with respect to transportation issues, is analyzed in the following sections).

All the discussed arguments represent rational aspects of international relations. However, there is also the problem of perception, and of mutual understanding or misunderstanding⁴⁹. From this perspective, there is a huge gap in understanding between America and Russia. Russian leadership sees the NDN as a concession to America in the strategic sphere, which has been closely connected to the war on terror in Afghanistan. It does not perceive the NDN in a commercial perspective at all. Moreover, Putin believes that he did not receive a reward for this concession with, for example, a more positive American attitude towards Russia's influence on the Post-Soviet space. At the same time, the Kremlin is very suspicious of any attempt by the USA to use the war in Afghanistan to change regional structures or balances of power in Central Asia. From this point of view, the NDN should be closed immediately after 2014. The commercialization of the NDN would probably be perceived as a "trick" in this direction. American leadership either does not understand or ignores all these concerns from the Kremlin.

By developing new transportation projects Russia wants to extensively use existing infrastructure and the legacy of previous periods. This is one of the reasons for its dislike of new projects, such as the NDN.

Except for new "Eurasian structures" (EvrAzEC, the Customs Union, the Common economic space, the planned Eurasian Economic Union, etc.) there are still some forms of interaction in the Post-Soviet space based on old CIS structures. The Council on railroad transport of the CIS and the Electric Energy Council of the CIS must be mentioned in this regard. Now these Post-Soviet integration organizations are more nominal than real structures. However, they are based on objective commonalities. These

⁴⁹ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton: 1976.

include old Soviet and even pre-Soviet infrastructure, such as the specific width of railroad track (1520 mm), which is different from the European standard, and which was established when the first Russian railroad from Moscow to Saint Petersburg (including the smaller railroad from Saint Petersburg to Tsarskoe Selo) was constructed. On the borders of the area with 1520 mm width railroad tracks, boxcars and sleep-carriages should be changed to ones corresponding to the standards. As a result, the Council on Railroad Transport of the CIS is *de facto* a council of the countries with 1520 mm width railroad tracks, and the representatives of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and even Finland have traditionally regularly participated in them. Hence, infrastructural similarity is a reason for successful cooperation even outside the territory of the former Soviet Union. Finland as a country with 1520 mm width railroad tracks, and as a country with traditionally friendly relations with Russia it has established in the Post-Soviet period especially effective cooperation with Moscow. In 2003, the corporation "Russian Railroads" signed an agreement with Finnish railroads on cooperation in freight and passenger traffic. The example of Russian-Finnish cooperation in railroad logistics can be a good example for Russian cooperation with the Baltic States, as well. These forms of dialogue can be also used for the talks on the NDN's commercial future. Within the territory of the former Soviet Union and the Baltic States there is also a traditional complementarity in the production of electricity, which creates a necessity for trans-border electricity exchange. For example, South Kazakhstan produces electricity using coal power stations. Coal generation of electricity does not provide the necessary level of power during the periods (including the evening period of each one day) that maximum of electricity consumption is reached. Therefore, Kazakhstan in these periods depends on electricity produced by Kyrgyz hydro power stations. The same situation regarding the exchange of electricity exists between North Kazakhstan and Russia. The exchange of electricity can be fulfilled even in situations of not very friendly political and strategic relations (such as relations between Russia and Azerbaijan

and, especially, Russia and Georgia on the South Caucasus, as well as relations between Russia and the Baltic States in the Baltic region). *De facto*, the system of regional exchange of electricity for the purpose of balancing production and consumption in specific periods that was established during the Soviet times still functions throughout the whole territory once controlled by the former Soviet Union (including the Baltic States). The only exceptions are Armenia and Turkmenistan, which for different reasons (such as bad relations, with, respectively, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan) function within an Iranian system of electricity exchange.

This system of electricity exchange based on Soviet-time electric grids unifying all Central Eurasia and linking it to Europe is a good basis for further infrastructural programs, including transportation and the exchange of electricity. At present, Russian electric corporations are especially interested in selling electricity to European and East Asian markets (especially the Chinese market). Russian authorities also support projects for energy transportation from Central Asia to South Asia through Afghanistan (CASA – 1000, etc.). As it will be argued at the end of this paper, some potential synergies that exist between CASA – 1000 and the NDN can be used to create a more complex international transport corridor (after all, developing all possible connections between Central and South Asia is one of the main ideas of such doctrines as Wider Central Asia and The New Silk Road).

If all political and geopolitical problems and risks associated with the commercialization of the NDN that I have listed are overcome, how would it fit into the system of transportation projects that Russia is developing at present?

According to Russian plans, there are three directions for developing new international transportation routes⁵⁰. These include:

⁵⁰ ОАО "РЖД" в мировой транспортной системе,
http://inter.rzd.ru/static/public/ru?STRUCTURE_ID=5009

1. The modernization of the Trans-Siberian railroad and the formation of an effective transportation system from Europe to East Asia.
2. The development of Russian-Kazakh cooperation with the purpose of integrating Kazakhstan's traffic connections with the western regions of China into the Russian system of transportation.
3. The development of an integrated "North-South" transportation corridor that should establish direct connections between the Baltic Sea region and the Persian gulf through the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. On Russian territory the main route goes from Saint Petersburg to Astrakhan (2,513 km). This is a project to restore the ancient "Khazaran – Varangian" route that was so important for the Russian economy in the Middle Ages. It will also help Russia bypass the overloaded straits between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. This route should finally connect Europe with India and Pakistan. According to Russian calculations, about 20-25 million tons can be transferred through this route by 2030.

The agreement to implement the "North-South" project was signed in Saint-Petersburg in September 2000 by Russia, Iran and India. In May 2002 an agreement on the official opening of the international transport corridor was signed by the same countries. Later Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Oman and Syria joined the project. Turkey and Ukraine also have plans to join the project. Kazakhstan is the most active player in the project because it will help the country overcome transit dependency on Russia. It should be underlined that some of the ideologists of the project propose completely eliminating Russia's dependency on European ports (Finland and the Baltic States). For example, one of the articles on the project published in a magazine on Russian railroads proposes the construction of a new artificial port in the neutral waters of the Finnish gulf with the purpose of effectively

competing with the ports of Finland and Baltic States⁵¹. (*Editors' note: please refer to map 2 in the annex.*)

The “North-South” railroad project will stimulate the development of the infrastructure of old and new Russian Baltic ports that serve as an alternative to the ports of Latvia.

The construction of a Russian military naval base in Ust-Luga started in the 1930s. The project was unfinished and all the facilities were blown up when the Soviet army retreated from the region in 1941. After the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union could use the ports of the Baltic States and it did not need new ports in the Russian part of the Baltic seacoast. In 1993 Russia started a new port project in Ust-Luga because it needed an alternative to the ports of the Baltic States. This is mostly a dry cargo port, although the second phase of Baltic pipeline system also goes through this port. Sea-borne freight turnover at the new port has been quickly growing; in 2009 it amounted to 10.36 million tons, in 2010 to 11.78 million tons, in 2011 to 22.69 million tons, and in 2012 to 46.79 million tons. It is expected to reach 180 million tons in 2020 and 191 million tons in 2025⁵².

The decision of the Russian government to construct the Primorsk port as a bulk-oil port, an alternative to bulk-oil port of Ventspils in Latvia, was made in 1993. Construction of port started in 2000. This is the final point of the Baltic pipeline system. Sea-borne freight turnover through this port reached 79.2 million tons in 2009, and since that time it has slowly declined.

The sea-borne freight turnover of the port of Saint-Petersburg will not grow quickly. It was 57.8 million tons in 2012.

⁵¹ С.Б.Переслегин, С.Е.Боровиков, Е.Д.Казанцев, К.К.Рахимов, А.Д.Собянин, Место коридора „Север-Юг” в системе транспортных коридоров Евразии, „РЖД-партнер”, 2002, №7, 22-25; №8, 21-24; №9, 30-34.

⁵² Заседание Совета ФАМРТ „Об итогах работы по разработке Стратегии развития морской портовой инфраструктуры России до 2030 года”, http://www.rosморпорт.ru/media/File/new2/FAMRT_Strategy_report.pdf

The last Russian Baltic Sea port, which will be developed in connection with new railroad projects, is Vysock. The main freight transferred through this port today is coal and oil. The sea-borne freight turnover of this port is 13.6 million tons.

The main constraints on the development of Russian seaport infrastructure are not technical, but are connected to the general problems regarding the development of the Russian economy. The majority of Russian economists predict slowing economic growth due to many different circumstances that include, among others, ineffective state institutions. For example, all Russian infrastructural projects are very expensive and many critics say that the cost of high corruption significantly contributes to this. There is also the problem of a quickly diminishing budget surplus (partially due to a negative demographic situation) and even the risk that Russia will in the near future already have a budget deficit. This will undoubtedly negatively influence all infrastructural programs. At the same time, it should be noted that while the price of oil and gas is high the Russian economy will grow and some money for new infrastructure will be available. But this growth will be, most probably, very slow, and infrastructural development should not be expected to be very quick.

Considered within this context, a commercial NDN might constitute an alternative route to the “North-South” corridor. Now Russia is not interested in a commercialized NDN both from a geopolitical and economic point of view. But this does not mean automatically that Russia would completely block the project if the USA and EU insist on it.

Russia has already demonstrated its flexibility in relation to both strategic and commercial communication lines. Russia has permitted the functioning of the NDN irrespective of Moscow’s original strategic concerns over the growth of US influence in Central Asia. Russia was also originally against all transportation lines from the West to the East that would go south of the Trans-Siberian railroad. However, now Russia cooperates with Kazakhstan in developing communications between

Europe and China. Russia was originally against all alternative pipelines to Central Asia. But China and Iran have constructed pipelines in this region. The Russian leadership is, in general, skeptical towards transportation projects through Afghanistan – especially within the context of American concepts of a Wider Central Asia and The New Silk Road. However, Russia agrees to cooperate on electricity transportation projects to and through Afghanistan, such as CASA-1000.

The commercialization of the NDN can finally happen if, for example, Moscow receives a really good commercial proposal from the EU or USA that would include substantial investments. In principle, the NDN can be incorporated into the Russian system of transnational routes. In this case, there would be an intersecting system of two transnational corridors running West-East (the Russian and Kazakh ones) and two intersecting transnational corridors running North-South (through Iran to India and through Afghanistan to Pakistan). The last two corridors can be connected not only to Pakistan and India but also to the transportation system linking old allies China and Pakistan. So this would improve not only Russian-Western relations, but will also further promote Russian-Chinese cooperation. Moreover, the Baltic Sea NDN, which should be based at the port of Riga, could be a good addition to the North-South corridor, which is based on Russian ports.

But all these positive developments can happen only if proponents of the commercialization of the NDN find a common language with the Kremlin. The development of different transportation routes through Central Eurasia, and especially the transformation of the NDN into a new commercial route, depends to a significant extent on Russia's position. Moscow can directly prohibit any transportation route going through Russian territory, and it can also pose significant security and geopolitical risks for any corridor in the “near abroad”, which Moscow perceives as its legitimate “sphere of influence”. The successful commercialization of the routes that have high security and geopolitical risks, especially taking into account competition from maritime routes, would be nigh-to-impossible.

Russian leadership standing on international transport corridors

The negative perception of Russian political elite on everything that is associated with NATO, including the NDN, has already been mentioned. It should be noted that this negative attitude towards NATO is not connected to Putin's presidency or to conservative groups within the government today: this policy was already formulated in the mid-1990s. So this attitude will probably not change for decades. However, the key issue from the point of view of the development and future existence of the NDN is not Russia-NATO relations, but rather Russia's interpretation of Eurasian integration. The Russian political elite is still uncertain whether it would like to promote globalization in Russia and surrounding areas through the realization of large-scale transportation projects or whether it would prefer the formation of an isolated sphere of influence in Central Eurasia (for example, in the form of the planned Eurasian Economic Union).

As the Soviet experience indicates, it is very hard to combine both these objectives. This can be exemplified by the fact that the Soviet Union used the Trans-Siberian railroad for international shipments and this was a profitable project – however, the nature of the Soviet system isolated as from the world prevented successful competition between the Trans-Siberian route and maritime routes around Eurasia.

Present day large scale projects enacted by the corporation “Russian Railroads”, such as the reconstruction of the Trans-Siberian railroad and the construction of new transport corridors like “North-South”, have, in essence, the same basic problem. In the absence of a business-friendly environment, in an atmosphere of high risks (including political and security risks), corruption, the absence of the rule of law in Russia and its neighborhood today, even geographically optimum routes will not be very attractive for investors and clients. If, as in the case of the NDN, this particular route has some specific geopolitical dimension associated with NATO and with US strategy in the region, the prospect for successful cooperation becomes even gloomier.

If the key to the successful realization of large-scale transportation projects through Central Eurasia is in Moscow's hands and if it now would probably use its power to block these projects, a natural question arises: can the position of Moscow change in the foreseeable future? To provide an answer to this question one should analyze the mechanisms for developing Russian policy on transport corridors that go through the territory of the former Soviet Union. Without understanding these mechanisms, it is impossible to understand the policy itself and its potential evolution.

Russia's priority (having both an economic and strategic dimension) in the sphere of transportation and developing international transport corridors is clearly stated in various official doctrines, documents and programs. This priority is for the economic reintegration of the former Soviet Union countries around Russia on a new basis, and in general there are no serious disagreements between different groups of the Russian political elite about this priority. Russia will always inevitably see all transport corridor projects affecting the former Soviet Union territory from the point of view of its interests on this territory. All other considerations will be of secondary importance.

This priority already appeared during Yeltsin's presidency, and it was supported at that time by a significant part of Russia's democratic forces. The ideology behind this combination of nationalism and liberalism was later coined by Anatoly Chubais, one of the leaders of the Union of Right Forces (CFC), in his slogan of a "liberal empire". This priority is now also fully supported by all kinds of nationalist forces, by left-wing parties (including the Communists) and by Putin's United Russia. So, in this case one can talk of the hardcore national interests of Russia and of a consensus among all political movements. However, the key difference between political forces is the interpretation of this reintegration: whether it should be on the basis of the economic cooperation of free nations like in the case of the EU, or it should include elements of a reconstruction of the Russian empire in the "near abroad". Nationalists

and communists are for a new empire closed to the outside world (“fortress Eurasia”), while liberals are for a “Eurasian EU” that is closely integrated with the EU and open for cooperation with the outside world, including the Far East and South Asia. I would call the first school of thought “conservative” and the second school of thought “liberal”.

The disagreement between Russian “conservatives” and “liberals” is not only about the concept of empire and a concept of a free union of nations, it is also about closeness to the outside world, or about openness to it. In the first case all transportation projects are perceived as a zero-sum game with the outside world and the key to the reconstruction of the Russian empire is to develop transportation corridors inside its zone of influence while interfering with the construction of all other transport corridors (especially those that act as an alternative to Russian ones). In the second case all transportation projects are perceived as a positive-sum game, where new transportation corridors inside Central Eurasia are a logical continuation of transport corridors outside of it. Within the logic of this school of thought, Russia will also benefit from construction of alternative transportation corridors in Central Eurasia because they will promote processes of globalization that will also positively affect Russian economy. Generally, the logic of experts of the first Russian school of thought corresponds, in some respects, to the American neo-realist IR school (Kenneth Waltz, etc.) with its security logic, while the logic of the second Russian school of thought vaguely corresponds to the logic of the American neo-liberal IR school (Robert Keohane, etc.) with its economic logic. That’s why the first Russian school of thought traditionally underlines the security and geopolitical aspects of transportation corridors, while the second Russian school of thought traditionally underlines economic aspects of transportation corridors.

This analysis was important because Putin’s so-called “centrist” position (reflected in the ideology of the ruling United Russia party) combines the elements of both schools of thought, conservative and liberal. Moreover, sometimes it is unclear whether the logic of concrete

official Russian documents or concrete political action of Moscow is conservative or liberal. The reason for this is that under the cover of “vertical of power” established by Putin there are many groups in the leadership that have different ideologies and different interests⁵³. For the purpose of simplification they are usually grouped into two poles: the conservative group includes people with a background in security services, especially from Putin’s home city of Saint Petersburg, while the liberal group includes civilian economists and lawyers, mostly from the same city. Liberal lawyers, but not liberal economists – as the conflict between Medvedev and former finance minister Alexey Kudrin has clearly demonstrated, they are mostly grouped around Medvedev. This conflict is an example of the constant regrouping and changing alliances even within what is ideologically the same wing of the leadership. This is also an illustration of the point that the popular idea that all Russian conservatives are grouped around Putin (the presidential administration today and the government during Medvedev’s presidency) and that all Russian liberals are grouped around Medvedev (the government today and the presidential administration during Medvedev’s presidency) is far from the reality.

It is very important that within the Russian system of “crony capitalism” and government by informal networking⁵⁴, conservative and liberal groups control different specific sectors of the Russian economy and therefore can define the policy of big corporations on transportation corridors. For example, liberal groups associated with Anatoly Chubais control the Russian electric generation and distribution system.

⁵³ See, for example: Евгений Минченко, Кирилл Петров, Большое правительство Владимира Путина и "Политбюро 2.0", 21.08.2012,

http://www.stratagema.org/exclusive/research/research_2391.html

⁵⁴ Victor Sergeev, *The Wild East: Crime and Lawlessness in Post-Communist Russia*, New York: Armonk, 1998; Alena Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works*, Cornell University Press, 2006; Alena Ledeneva, *Russia’s Economy of Favors*, Cambridge University Press, 1998; Federico Varese, *The Russian Mafia. Private Protection in a New Market Economy*. Oxford University Press, 2001; Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Therefore, Russia supports some alternative electricity transportation projects like CASA-1000 and would even like to sponsor such projects (at the very least, Putin and Medvedev publicly stated this intention). The leadership of Russian Railroads is closer to conservative circles, and this is one of the explanations for the extensive cooperation of this industry with Iran within the “North-South” corridor (I would highlight that within Russian expert circles, including Neo-Eurasianists, among the conservative part of establishment there was even the popular idea of a strategic “triangle” composed of Russia-Iran-Turkey). Energy sector is under the huge influence of conservative KGB generals like Igor Sechin. The fact that Gazprom is traditionally against all alternative gas transportation routes, especially those that would affect European market, of course, can be explained by the economic interest Gazprom has in saving its monopoly in the sphere of natural gas transportation. However, Gazprom could not do anything against a Chinese gas pipeline project in Central Asia that has effectively destroyed Russian control over gas transportation and made Turkmen gas too expensive for Russians⁵⁵. The reason for this was the strategic interests of Russia in Russian-Chinese cooperation. This cooperation, according to the opinion of the more conservative part of the Russian establishment, more corresponds to Russia’s interests than cooperation with the West, including the EU.

A constantly shifting balance between different groups of influence within Russian leadership and constantly changing patterns of alliances and conflicts within these groups create a cloud of ambivalence that constantly exists in Russian policy on transport corridors in Eurasia. At present, due to some specific domestic and international factors, conservative groups within the Kremlin seem to be in many respects stronger than liberal ones, but this does not mean that the liberal economic logic is completely eliminated from Russian policy. It also does

⁵⁵ See in more details in: Andrey A.Kazantsev, *The Crisis of Gazprom as the Crisis of Russia’s “Energy Super-State” Policy towards Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 4 (3), Summer 2010, 271-84.

not mean that the dominance of the conservative line on Eurasian integration and transportation corridors in Kremlin is forever within the horizon of Putin's leadership. Much depends on the concrete circumstances around each project and on the potential gains for Russia and its economic and political elite from specific projects.

The position of the two groups within Russian leadership corresponds to a hidden polarization of positions of the members of the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space. President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko is ideologically close to the conservative wing of Russian leadership. He always underlines that Eurasian integration is a way to oppose the USA, NATO and the EU. In connection with the current crisis in Russian-Belorussian relations surrounding the "Uralkaliy" corporation, the Russian press today is writing a lot about Lukashenko's special relations with some prominent security conservatives, such as Igor Sechin, and his bad relations with the liberal economic wing of the government⁵⁶. Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, is undoubtedly not liberal in his domestic policy, but his policy is, in many respects, liberal in the economic sphere. Nazarbayev is the author of the idea of Eurasian integration. However, for him this integration should go hand in hand with globalization and, therefore, is a positive-sum game with the outside world. Nazarbayev also positively views the improvement of relations between Eurasian structures, on the one hand, and NATO and the EU, on the other hand. See, for example, Nazarbayev's recent speech during the G-20 summit in Russia, where he puts Eurasian integration into the same context as WTO membership⁵⁷. Opinions can be heard from representatives

⁵⁶ See, for example: Эксперт: „В России есть немало пробелорусских лоббистских групп, в одну из них входит Сечин“, 13.09.2013, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1707027.html>; Либеральный клан объявил Белоруссии настоящую войну, 04.09.2013, <http://www.km.ru/v-rossii/2013/09/04/delo-uralkaliya/719826-liberalnyi-klan-obyavil-belorussii-nastoyashchuyu-voinu>, etc.

⁵⁷ Н.Назарбаев выступил на сессии Саммита G20 в Санкт-Петербурге, 05.09.2013, <http://www.bnews.kz/ru/news/post/157325>

of Kazakh government that for them, from an economic point of view, membership in a future Eurasian economic union is a way to become closer to European markets, since for Kazakhstan the Russian territory is the best available transportation route to the EU. In reality, the ideology of Eurasian integration that Russian leadership supports combines two logics that I have analyzed above in my description of the arguments of the conservative and liberal schools of thought. Geopolitical and security logic sees the territory of future Eurasian Union as a zone of Russian military and economic control (i.e., “empire”) that guarantees Russia’s security and high status in the world. Economic logic sees partnership within the Eurasian Union as fully independent and understands the whole project as a positive-sum game both within the territory of the Eurasian Union and with the outside world (especially with the EU).

To my understanding, the objective, economic, and not geopolitical reasons for Eurasian integration are very strong for Russia. Russian conservatives sometimes quite artificially attach geopolitical aspects to economic integration. Economic connections with the former Soviet Union countries are still important for the Russian economy; moreover, these countries are among the very few markets in the world that can consume Russian industrial products. Other important trade partners buy raw materials from Russia (oil, natural gas, diamonds, timber, gold), goods with a low level of processing (metals, chemical fertilizers), and armaments. Eurasian integration is one of the ways to overcome this unprofitable specialization in the world economy.

A simple recommendation follows from this analysis. The Latvian government in its potential talks with Russia should avoid all aspects of NDN issues that connect it to security, geopolitics, or to a NATO and US grand strategy in a Wider Central Asia. This will help to put NDN issues to the basket of economic issues, and respective economic and technical agencies controlled by the more liberal wing of the Russian government would take responsibility for it. Taking into account Russia’s negative view of NATO and framing this issue as an EU issue would be very

important. Winning over the full support of Kazakhstan, which has a liberal view on Eurasian integration, could also be beneficial for the NDN.

Russia's policy towards transportation corridors in Eurasia: dreams of a Wider Europe vs. the reality of conflicts

After analyzing the mechanisms of its formulation, let's turn to the concrete elements of Russian policy on transportation corridors that would affect the NDN. Here, also, everything depends on the Russian interpretation of Eurasian integration.

There are two key documents that formulate the tasks and principles of Russian policy in the "near abroad" during the third term of Putin's presidency: Putin's conceptual electoral article "New integration project for Eurasia – a future, which is born today" and the new Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation

Putin's electoral article⁵⁸ underlines that the renewal of the Soviet empire is not the task of Kremlin. Russia aspires to re-integrate former Soviet republics on the basis of new values, and on a new political and economic foundation. Putin proposes a new international structure that can play the role of an effective "link" between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region (this is important from the point of view of Russia's policy on transportation routes). Putin says that the Eurasian Union should be a part of a Wider Europe that is unified by common values and norms, and he proposes a free trade agreement and "even more advanced forms of integration" with the EU. Putin also declares that the Customs Union and future Eurasian Union should help its members integrate into a Wider Europe.

It should be noted that irrespective of the general liberal ideas of the Putin's article, there are also some conservative elements even in the interpretation of a correlation between global economic processes and economic processes in Central Eurasia. These elements can be understood

⁵⁸ Владимир В. Путин, Новый интеграционный проект для Евразии...

when one compares Putin's article with the ideas of conservative economist Mikhail Khazin, who is close, in some respects, to neoconservative, neo-Eurasianist ideologists grouped around popular political writer Mikhail Leontyev. The latter is a well-known proponent of the New Great Game in Central Asia. Khazin, who is popular both in Russia and Kazakhstan, declares that globalization has been stopped and the current economic crisis will cause a fragmentation of the world into "regional currency" zones (a dollar zone, the eurozone, a renminbi zone, etc.)⁵⁹. This is the best way to overcome chaos in the world economy. Eurasian integration for him is a chance to form a rouble zone between the euro and renminbi zones. There is nothing original in his ideas. Khazin groups together two ideas taken from different historical periods. The first is the idea of Fernand Braudel's isolated "world economies", which preceded the global economy that has formed since the period of exploration⁶⁰. World economies could be decentralized, like the European one, but in case of Russia a Braudelian "world economy" coincided with a "world empire". Another element of Khazin's thinking is a simple observation that is well-known to economic historians: during the Great Depression, the world market disintegrated into national markets (see, for example, the respective scenario of disintegration into national markets in the projection made by the National Intelligence Council of the USA⁶¹). Khazin's ideas are attractive for Russian conservatives because he provides economic justification for the formation of an isolated regional "world", consisting of a Russian "world economy" and a "world empire" in Central Eurasia under the disguise of Eurasian economic integration.

Some of the elements in Putin's article correspond to this type of thinking (although, generally, it is a liberal article). For example, Putin

⁵⁹ Михаил Хазин: „Распад мира становится рентабельным”, 22.07.2013, http://forbes.kz/process/expertise/mihail_hazin_raspad_mira_stanovitsya_rentabelnyim

⁶⁰ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization & Capitalism 15th-18th Century*, Volume 3: *The Perspective of the World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1979.

⁶¹ National Intelligence Council of USA, *Global trends 2030: Alternative worlds*, December 2012, www.dni.gov/nic/globaltrends

sees a Eurasian Economic Union as a “mighty supernational unit that can become one of the poles of the modern world”. A part of Russian foreign policy thinking since the times of foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov, the idea of a “pole of the world” has been used as a synonym for a 19th century-style great power with an imperial sphere of influence. Putin’s article also proposed developing a global economic order and a global economic system on the basis of regional international structures, and a Eurasian Economic Union would be among these structures. So here is the same idea that the global economy is disintegrating and falling into chaos, and that regional structures can bring order into this chaos.

Russia’s official documents are formulated in accordance with the liberal points of Putin’s article. Point 44 of the new Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, approved by President Putin on February 12, 2013, clearly indicates that a Eurasian Economic Union is based on the principles of “mutually beneficial economic ties” and that it should “serve as an effective link between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region”. “Russia sees as a priority the task of establishing the Eurasian Economic Union, aiming not only to make the best use of mutually beneficial economic ties in the CIS space but also to become a model of association open to other states, a model that would determine the future of the Commonwealth states. The new union that is being formed on the basis of universal integration principles is designed to serve as an effective link between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.” So the Concept formulates a liberal approach to the future Eurasian Economic Union: it is seen as a positive-sum, mutually beneficial game within the Post-Soviet space, and it is also open to all other regions of the world in terms of developing transportation routes.

Some of the liberal principles formulated in Putin’s electoral article and in the official concept have been realized, especially in foreign economic policy. Russia launched the project of the Customs Union and became a member of the WTO almost simultaneously. Putin in this respect has many times declared that he sees both projects as mutually

complementary; i.e., Eurasian integration is a part of the process of Russia's integration into the global economy. Russia also supports Kazakhstan's ambitions to become a member of WTO soon. Moscow continues its talks with Brussels on establishing a visa free regime and other mechanisms of promoting "common spaces" (I have already noted that according to official Russian doctrinal documents, Eurasian integration should go hand in hand with the development of a Wider Europe). It should be underlined in this respect that effectively functioning transport corridors and strict visa and customs controls, in many respects, contradict each other. Hence, a future rapprochement between Russia and the EU and the construction of effectively functioning transport corridors through Russia to Europe should inevitably include more liberal visa and customs regimes.

Some of the recent proposals of the Eurasian Economic Commission could work in this direction. For example, on September 20, 2013, Russian information agency "ITAR-TASS" reported on a proposal of the Eurasian Economic Commission to establish "a common transit space" with the EU with the purpose of eliminating problems with crossing the borders. The minister of customs cooperation of the Eurasian Economic Commission Vladimir Goshin explained that he proposes that the EU create a system according to which goods should move through the borders on the basis of a single transit document⁶². This development could be very important for future dialogue on the NDN.

An improvement of Russian-Georgian relations, especially in economic and humanitarian spheres, was also one of the developments that took a more liberal direction after Putin's return to Kremlin. However, this happened not due to a change of Moscow's strategy, but because of a change of power in Tbilisi. Unfortunately, any improvement of Russian-Georgian relations is limited due to basic disagreements on the status of

⁶² Россия, Белоруссия и Казахстан предложат Евросоюзу создать единое транзитное пространство, 20.09.2013, <http://www.itar-tass.com/c16/883925.html>

Abkhazia and South Ossetia (they are constituent parts of Georgia according to Georgia, which is, in general, supported by other UN members, and are independent nations according to Russia). As the conflict around South Cyprus indicates, such conflicts can go on for decades, even if many of the original reasons for the conflict have disappeared.

The Russian-Georgian conflict has an important transport dimension. Since Armenia is cut off from the outside world by the hostile territories of Azerbaijan and Turkey, its only railroad connections with the world could go through Georgia or Iran. The old railroad from Armenia to Russia through Georgia passes Abkhazia, so it has been closed since the beginning of the conflict on this territory in 1992–1993. The official Georgian position has been for many years that opening this railroad depends on Russia's recognition of Georgian sovereignty over Abkhazia. All attempts to open this railroad within the context of the recent improvement of Russian-Georgian relations have failed. That's why Armenia is developing railroad transportation projects with Iran. In 2009, a directorate for building North-South railroads was established in Armenia. An agreement about the construction of this railroad was signed on January 29, 2013. This project exists within the framework of "North-South" transport corridor. Within the framework of the processes of Eurasian integration, the corporation "Russian Railroad", which is responsible for this project, will invest 15 billion roubles into the reconstruction of Armenian railroads in general. It is not known which part of this sum will be invested into an Armenian-Iranian railroad. Iran, and some companies from Dubai and China⁶³ are among the other investors. It is important to underline that these developments will be not conducive to the improvement of Russian-American relations since all

⁶³ Армения строит новую железную дорогу, 29.01.2013, <http://cfts.org.ua/news/51072>

the projects surrounding a “North-South” transport corridor undermine American attempts to isolate Iran.

If NATO, the EU or the USA as potential intermediaries in a Russian-Georgian-Armenian dialogue on the railroad through Abkhazia can help Armenia open this railroad, this would diminish the dependency of Yerevan on Iran and, accordingly, there will be one less active proponent of a North-South corridor, which is an alternative to the NDN.

Irrespective of some liberal elements, especially in the economic sphere, Russia’s general policy in the “near abroad” today is, in general, different from the officially declared liberal principles. It follows more closely the logic of a conservative, geopolitical approach and the resulting collisions with EU would pose a direct risk to any large-scale cooperative transportation projects like a commercialized NDN.

This is indicated by the following facts.

First, there is intensive pressure from Moscow on Ukraine and Moldova to convince them not to sign free trade and association agreements with the EU and to instead become members of the future Eurasian Economic Union. In the case of Ukraine this includes restrictions on various Ukrainian goods, sometimes on the basis of a violation of sanitary regulations, and a deterioration of the conditions according to which Ukrainian goods can pass Russian customs officials. Recently, Sergey Glazyev, who is Putin’s adviser on Eurasian integration, said that Ukraine will be unilaterally excluded from the CIS free trade agreement after signing a free trade agreement with the EU⁶⁴. In the case of Moldova, Russia has recently introduced a ban on importing Moldovan wine (a key export item of this small country), officially on the basis of a violation of sanitary regulations. In general, Russia has demonstrated through this policy towards Ukraine and Moldova that it sees the project of Eurasian integration as completely different from and even hostile to the projects

⁶⁴ Глазьев: „Евроэмиссары получают неплохие гонорары за втягивание Украины”, <http://vesti.ua/politika/16990-rossija-ne-sobiraetsja-delat-ukraine-poblazhki>

initiated by the EU and that the former republics of the Soviet Union should choose between cooperation with the EU and Eurasian integration. This policy is not conducive to the development of effective international transportation routes like a commercialized NDN that would include Russia, other Post-Soviet countries and EU members-states.

Second, Putin has recently convinced Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan to become a future member of Eurasian Union. In this case the geopolitical dependency of Armenia on Russia was used as an argument. Armenia is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, where Russia is a key player. The presence of a Russian military base in Armenia is important for this state because it helps to balance the military might of both Azerbaijan (there is an old conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region) and Turkey (which is traditionally friendly to Azerbaijan). Without Russian assistance, Armenia cannot compete with oil-rich Azerbaijan in an arms race. However, Russia also has friendly relations with Azerbaijan. Putin paid his first visit after re-election not to Russia's official ally Armenia, but to Azerbaijan. Moreover, Russia has recently made a 1 billion US dollars armament deal with Azerbaijan. Many experts in Russia also supported the idea of Russia's re-orientation towards more friendly relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey at the cost of disbanding its old alliance with Armenia. All these facts could be interpreted as a warning to Yerevan, and Sargsyan reacted to this warning by re-orienting from his association with the EU to membership in the Eurasian Economic Union. It is worth noting that the EU has also demonstrated a harsh and rigid position towards Armenia. The Armenian president proposed that the EU sign only a political agreement on association, since an economic agreement creating a free trade zone became impossible due to Armenia's new policy on Eurasian integration. However, Stefan Fule, EU Commissioner for the Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy, said that a political agreement about association and an economic agreement on a free trade zone are interconnected and,

therefore, it would be impossible to sign one document without the other during the forthcoming Vilnius summit⁶⁵.

Senior research fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Thomas de Waal has mentioned in this respect that Brussels has not given Yerevan any opportunity to maneuver⁶⁶. I would add to this that Brussels, in some respects, has adhered to the logic of the conservative part of the Russian political establishment, which sees Eurasian integration and Europeanization as projects that completely exclude each other. However, Brussels later demonstrated more flexibility. Stefan Fule has declared that there is an opportunity for cooperation: the Customs Union is trying to adopt some European norms, while the EU is trying to make both structures compatible with the purpose of developing integration between them⁶⁷.

In general, Russia has demonstrated with its policy in the Southern Caucasus the same geopolitical intentions as its policy towards Ukraine and Moldova. The only specificity is that the EU has also demonstrated by its refusal to sign only a political agreement with Armenia that it sees deep cooperation with Europe and the development of Eurasian integration as two completely different and even mutually exclusive projects, at least in the short term. Both positions are not positive from the point of view of developing international transportation routes like a commercialized NDN.

Moscow can achieve its officially declared (by Putin) purpose of combining Eurasian integration with the formation of a Wider Europe and making effective transportation corridors between Europe and Asia through Central Eurasia only if it stops underlining the geopolitical aspects of Eurasian integration and concentrates on its economic aspects

⁶⁵ Стефан Фюле: „Мы не можем расчлнить Соглашение об ассоциации”, 12.09.2013, <http://www.mediamax.am/ru/news/interviews/7973/#sthash.OoAsPtTS.dpuf>

⁶⁶ Томас де Ваал: Президент Армении не мог отказаться от предложения Путина, 05.09.2013, <http://armenia-online.ru/armnews/91682.html>

⁶⁷ ЕС и Таможенный союз работают над совместимостью структур, 12.09.2013, <http://mir24.tv/news/politics/7938303>

within a common with EU normative framework (which is, after all, an official doctrine formulated in some documents). Europe and the USA should also make steps towards Moscow by developing complementarities and interaction between Moscow's project for Eurasian integration, the European Eastern Partnership project, and the New Silk Road project that the USA supports for Central and South Asia. Only under these conditions of mutual understanding and cooperation can existing transportation routes through Central Eurasia linking Europe, South and East Asia through Central Eurasia become a real alternative to maritime routes. Otherwise, various geopolitical conflicts and the associated security risks would make large scale transportation projects inefficient. The collision of geopolitical projects from Russia, on the one hand, and the West, including the EU and USA, on the other, is among the main obstacles for the commercialization of the NDN.

Russian-American relations and NDN

The previous analysis of Russia's policy in the European part of the former Soviet Union and in the South Caucasus mostly touched upon Russian-European relations, since this is the territory of the EU's Eastern Partnership program. However, Russia's policy in Central Asia is more important from the point of view of Russian-American relations because of the American military presence in Afghanistan. Here one can also find significant elements of ambivalence in Russia's position towards the NDN and negative tendencies regarding the commercialization of this route based on political and geopolitical reasons. This is especially important if we take into account the current crisis surrounding Obama's "reset" policy in relations with Russia and the general crisis in Russian-American relations.

The existence of the NDN and a partnership in the war on terror in Afghanistan have not changed much in Russia-NATO relations. Putin's statements about the American military presence in Afghanistan, of which the NDN is today a logical part, are ambivalent. He was very skeptical

about the American military presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia in his electoral article about world politics today⁶⁸. Russia's pressure on Kyrgyzstan to close the Manas transit airbase has also demonstrated Moscow's negative attitude to America's military presence in Central Asia. At the same time, Putin's statements on the NDN Ulyanovsk transit base were positive. Speaking before the deputies of parliament in April, he said that Russia should help the USA and NATO solve problems of stabilization in Afghanistan because otherwise Russia would have to do it itself. He also recognized that "sometimes NATO plays stabilizing role in world affairs"⁶⁹. Putin repeated the same ideas in August 2012 during his meeting with Russian paratroopers in Ulyanovsk⁷⁰.

This ambivalent position can be easily explained. Russian leadership wants to cooperate with the USA on Afghan issues, but it also has some reservations. First, Moscow believes that the USA has not rewarded Russia enough for its assistance in the war on terror in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Particularly, Putin dislikes what he perceives as a negative US attitude towards all aspects of Russian influence on the Post-Soviet space, including purely economic ones. The more conservative part of the Russian elite simply wants direct American recognition of Russia's sphere of influence in the style of the 19th century. Second, Russia is afraid that the US military presence in Central Asia will change the balance of power and will further promote the existing trend of declining Russian influence in the region⁷¹. Third, Moscow wants tighter cooperation on drug issues from the USA. Drugs from Afghanistan are now considered one of the key new security threats in Moscow. The American military presence in

⁶⁸ Владимир В.Путин, Россия и меняющийся мир, <http://www.putin2012.ru>

⁶⁹ В Ульяновске речь идет не о базе НАТО, а о „площадке подскока” для воздушного транзита – Путин, 11.04.2012, <http://www.itar-tass.com/c340/389646.html>

⁷⁰ NATO should finish job in Afghanistan – Putin, 01.08.2012, <http://rt.com/politics/putin-nato-afghanistan-ulyanovsk-618/>

⁷¹ See in more details in: Andrey Kazantsev, Russian Policy in Central Asia in 1991-2010: A Disappearing Power?, European University Institute Working Paper, Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, 2010/59, Florence, 2010.

Afghanistan has coincided with a significant growth of drug production and trafficking. This is important from an NDN perspective because to some degree it coincides with the so-called Northern Route of transportation of Afghan drugs to Russia and onward to the EU (especially to the Nordic and Baltic countries). The only difference between the Northern Route of drug transportation and the NDN is that the first goes mostly through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, while the second goes mostly through Uzbekistan. Taking into account the growth of influence of the Federal Drug Control Service of Russia (FSKN) over Moscow's Central Asian policy, this consideration should be seriously taken into account. The FSKN is even skeptical about Eurasian cooperation – for example, this agency recently demanded the return of drug trafficking control within the Customs Union Russian-Kazakh border. The FSKN is afraid that infrastructural development along the NDN would facilitate drug trafficking.

It is important to mention a fact which is not known even to many Western experts on Russia's policy: anti-Western propaganda from Russian conservatives includes accusations against the US and NATO regarding drug transportation through the NDN. For example, leader of the Russian Communists Gennady Zyuganov's speech in Ulyanovsk contained the direct statement that the US transit base in Ulyanovsk is used for drug transportation (he said that this was "one of the most important drug transportation bases")⁷². This propaganda does not represent an official point of view, but it still creates a negative PR environment for the NDN in Russia.

Moscow's position towards the geopolitical aspects of American projects for Central and Southern Asia such as Wider Central Asia and the

⁷² Зюганов вступился за талибов, 10.04.2012, <http://www.mk.ru/politics/article/2012/04/09/690972-zyuganov-vstupilsya-za-talibov.html>; see also discussions of this issue on the Communists' sites: База НАТО в Ульяновске: перевалка грузов или перевалка наркотиков?, <http://www.politforums.ru/internal/1331982496.html>

New Silk Road has traditionally been skeptical. Russian critics have always pointed out that in every project that wants to develop cooperation somebody is “in” while somebody else is “out”. Moscow is afraid that within both mentioned projects the Russians are “out”. The development of connections and synergies between Central Asia and South Asia can diminish the significance of still existing connections and synergies between Central Asia and Russia. The commercialization of the NDN can be perceived within Russia according to this pattern and much should be done to reassure the critics.

Russia also traditionally has had a negative position towards alternative routes of transportation to and from Central Asia (they are usually described as “Silk road” projects). This is justified by general geopolitical and geo-economic considerations. Due to Russia’s economic weakness, its influence in Central Asia was based mostly on control over transportation routes. The development of new Chinese and Iranian pipelines and new Chinese railroad and highway systems has already significantly undermined Russian positions. New alternative routes can make other directions of integration for Central Asian countries more attractive than the forms of integration that Russia proposes. A commercialized NDN could be interpreted by Russia as one more alternative “Silk road” that undermines Russia’s position.

All these factors can have a very important negative influence on NDN commercialization. But they are not fatal. Russia's leadership has demonstrated a pragmatic approach to many issues. After all, from the point of view of Russia’s influence in Central Asia nearly the same negative geopolitical arguments as those used against NDN can be put forward against Russian-Chinese cooperation on infrastructural programs.

Conclusions and practical recommendations

The existence of the NDN has not changed much in Russia-NATO relations. Moscow still sees everything that is associated with NATO and the USA negatively. Moreover, these tendencies are now on the rise. Under

the most negative scenario, Russia could easily block key elements of the NDN not only on its own territory, but also on the territories of some Post-Soviet states allied to Moscow. Much will depend on the results of the fight between security-oriented conservatives and economic-oriented liberals inside the Russian leadership. This fight will also define the direction of Eurasian integration and perspectives of the formation of a Larger Europe. If Eurasian integration goes in the direction of voluntary economic integration and openness to the outside world, this would be the perfect environment for the further development of the NDN as a commercial project. The NDN could be, finally, incorporated into the Russian system of commercial transnational routes. In this case there would be an intersecting system of two transnational West-East corridors (Russian and Kazakh) and two intersecting transnational North-South corridors (through Iran to India and through Afghanistan to Pakistan). The Baltic Sea side of the NDN, which is based at the port of Riga, could be a good addition to the North-South corridor, which would be based on Russian ports.

Some of the measures to save the NDN in the current situation are characterized by high political risks, and promoting the commercialization of the NDN can already be undertaken today.

First, the government of Latvia should directly address the Russian government (through the Ministry of transportation) and the corporation "Russian Railroads" with commercial and logistical proposals concerning the development of transportation lines from the Baltic States to Central Asia through Russian territory. The Council on Railroad Transport of the CIS, as well as the Eurasian Commission, can also be used for the discussion of these issues. Full Kazakh support for the commercialization of the NDN could also help in talks with Russia and the Eurasian Commission.

Second, the government of Latvia should initiate the establishment of a politically independent information and business center that would assist various business projects associated with the commercialization of the

NDN and would improve (through conferences, databases, publications, etc.) contacts between businesses in EU member-states and in Post-Soviet countries, including Russia.

Third, the Russian establishment negatively perceives NATO, while the EU is perceived much more positively (and even the idea of the formation of a “Wider Europe” is officially supported). Therefore, it would be much better to frame all talks with Russia on the commercialization of the NDN as EU issues, not as NATO issues. Talks about the commercialization of the NDN can be included in the context of Russian-European negotiations about establishing a common economic space. The recent proposal of the Eurasian Economic Commission to establish “a common transit space” with the EU can be also used for this purpose.

Fourth, one of the key modern tendencies is the development of integrated international transport corridors, including the transportation of freight and passengers through railroads, highways, by river and maritime shipments, the transportation of resources through pipelines, the transfer of electricity through electric grids, the transfer of data traffic through optic lines, etc. Complex systems of transportation are more competitive in the 21st century than more simple systems. The NDN has the potential to develop into a more complex system of transportation than simply a combination of maritime and railroad transport. Only in this way can it commercially compete with the North-South corridor, which is now a more complex system. Alongside the NDN there is a project for electricity transportation from Central Asia to Afghanistan and onward to South Asia, which Russia and some key international financial organizations support. A new system of highways and bridges connecting Central Asia and Afghanistan is also emerging. Finally, there is a project for Turkmen gas transportation through Afghanistan. Hence, the government of Latvia or the EU could start consultations with some of the investors and proponents of respective projects in order to locate synergies between these projects.

Fifth, the EU could initiate talks with Russia and other members of the “North-South” project about merging some elements of the NDN and the “North-South” corridor. The EU can only cooperate with some elements of the “North-South” project on the territories of Russia and the Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries in order to avoid American objections of cooperation with Iran and to avoid violating respective UN sanctions. Within the framework of this cooperation the EU could propose more extensive use of the ports of the Baltic States for the purpose of the development of merged elements of the NDN and the “North-South” project. Some elements of EU technical and economic assistance to the Eastern Partnership and Central Asian countries can be diverted for this purpose.

Sixth, the EU should strengthen its attempts to find elements of compatibility between Europeanization and Eurasian integration in the Post-Soviet space according to the principle of the formation of a Wider Europe based on the same principles and norms. This would open new opportunities for Russian-European cooperation and would prevent new crises around Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia. I can repeat the same point about Eurasian integration and the American project of the New Silk Road. The EU or NATO could also assist (as an intermediary on talks with Georgia) Russia and Armenia in resuming the functioning of the railroad through Abkhazia as a part of the current process of improving Russian-Georgian relations. This would save Armenia from the blockade established long ago by Azerbaijan and Turkey, diminish Armenian dependency on the Iranian railroad projects and make Armenia a partner for the NDN.

Seventh, the EU can propose a new format for trilateral or quattrolateral dialogue between the EU, Russia, India and the USA on the development of new transportation corridors between Europe and South Asia through Central Eurasia. China and Pakistan, as well as the Central Asian states and Afghanistan, can also become parties in this dialogue. Different existing formats, including the G-20, can be also used for this.

Lastly, the issue of drug transportation along the NDN, which is Russia's major security concern in the realm of new security threats, should be more intensively addressed on a bilateral level as well as on a multilateral level (through the UN, the OSCE, the EU, NATO, etc.).

The Northern Distribution Network and Central Asia

Guli I.Yuldasheva

Introduction

One of the most significant trends of the increasingly globalized world is the formation of transport-transit networks connecting diverse regions to world markets. This trend is logically connected with the process of creating a new international geo-economic structure and regional economic unions, without which none of the regions in the 21st century can preserve their integrity and stability.

It's natural within this context that Central Asian countries, which are geographically isolated from the main trade routes, try to find their proper niche in the world economic system. This is closely connected with problems surrounding their survival within the circumstances of great power strategies, an unstable environment (Middle Eastern and Afghanistan issues), and the perseverance of social-economic security problems in the region. The development of their transport-transit potential therefore becomes the main priority in the policy of CA states, from the territorial-geographic, historical-cultural, political and economical points of view. In this sense, the formation of a regional transport network is both a goal and a means of achieving integration and security in the CA region, and is potentially able to provide a real breakthrough in the development of the whole region.

However, in reality the process of constructing transport-transit networks in Central Asia, including the NDN, runs into various risks and challenges. Two main drivers can be stressed in this context: geopolitical tension and the transitional state of a transforming Central Asia, the

outcomes of which are the present situation in and around Central Asia, including Afghanistan (terrorism, religious extremism, ethnic conflict, failed states, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and drug-trafficking).

It is clear that geopolitical tension between the key actors (Russia-US, US-Iran, China, etc.) lead to an absence of trust between them and a low level of cooperation/coordination, control over the transport corridors, and various sanctions, thus creating favorable ground for the development of other negative factors. This is exacerbated by the continuation of transitional difficulties of the Post-Soviet states and Afghanistan, such as the weakness of the institutions and infrastructure (including in the vitally important transport sphere), as well as weakness at a social-economic and educational level, and, hence, weakness of the local political culture, which is quite important for achieving the necessary compromises and closer cooperation among regional states.

In the political sphere these drivers (geopolitical and transitional) in fact create favorable grounds for the growth of extremism (the taliban, IMU, Al-Qaeda, etc.) as different forces push forward their own agenda and promise to improve the situation, while blaming the key actors for the majority of their misfortunes. This preserves instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as fragility in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The absence of trust and necessary support in circumstances of geopolitical tension and a low level of cooperation/coordination between the agencies and actors also provide a background for CA conflicts and intra-regional competition. This is expressed, for instance, in the different choice of partners by CA states – on water issues, choosing Russian or Western-led international organizations; on security issues, the OSCE or NATO – which in turn stimulates interstate competition and rivalry in search of better results and benefits.

In the economic sphere, both these drivers lead to sanctions (Iran); the perseverance of corruption as a result of the prolongation of economic instability and low salaries; the financial mismanagement of funds from

international donors, who in circumstances of instability are inclined to restrict investments into local projects, but instead make huge expenditures on a variety of sometimes unproductive organizational measures (trips, meetings, seminars, etc.); rigid competition between CA states for resources and the right to be the main transport hub and geo-economic center in the region; underdeveloped infrastructure or a shortage thereof; weak legislation; and a low level of professional preparedness in CA for transcontinental economic projects.

In these circumstances an important role is attached today to the NATO-sponsored Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a system of transport routes built on the basis of existing Eurasian corridors. It is not only planned to become a means and vehicle for the forthcoming withdrawal of peacekeeping troops from Afghanistan, but it is also acquiring more political significance as a tool for the reconciliation of all interested parties on the Eurasian continent through their probable integration into a mutually advantageous transport-transit project in Central Asia. Not accidentally, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Robert Blake stressed that “We should not overlook the economic potential of the NDN. The existing infrastructure and transit routes used to transport military cargo can and should be used by the private sector to continue trade across the region, where there is ample opportunity for growth”⁷³. In this way the NDN project can in fact promote the realization of the US-sponsored “New Silk Road” strategy.

According to local assessments⁷⁴, any transit corridor via CA states could provide the most favorable conditions for the freight delivery through:

⁷³ Joshua Kucera. NDN and the New Silk Road, Together Again, 25.10.2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66113>

⁷⁴ Transport Communications of Central Asia: Variants for their Maximum Usage, 24.04.2009, <http://cps.uz/ru/analitika-i-publikatsii/transportnye-kommunikatsii-tsa-varianty-maksimalnogo-ispolzovaniya-ikh-poten>

- the solution of bureaucratic procedures at cross-border checkpoints on the basis of the agreements on the joint usage of railways;
- the formation of unified transport provisions for the CA states;
- guaranteeing communication between industrial centers, markets and regional ports;
- the establishment of a special investment fund for the realization of regional infrastructural projects.

Within this context, this paper examines the way the NDN project reflects the transport interests and plans of CA states, particularly Uzbekistan, the level of NATO-CA cooperation, as well as the risks and challenges to the realization of this grand project. In conclusion, some probable recommendations are given for most efficient strategy in this regard.

The prospects for the development of transport routes in Central Asia: plans and realities

Eurasian corridors

The ongoing geopolitical struggle in the region, as well as the increasingly unstable world climate, demands from each CA state a diversification of transport routes within and from Central Asia. At the moment, therefore, the main acting Eurasian corridors run to 1) the northern ports of the Baltic States, 2) Europe, 3) Iran and the Persian Gulf, 4) China, and 5) Afghanistan, the route which is planned for completion after the country's stabilization (*editors' note: see map 3 in the annex*).

The Northern continental corridor provides access to Western and Northern Europe, and is now mostly associated with the Northern Distribution Network. Other routes to Europe are bound to a great degree to TRACECA, the main purpose⁷⁵ of which is to protect the regional states from some states' domination over communication and transport flows and to provide the guaranteed regular exit of Caspian resources to world

⁷⁵ See Transport Communications of Central Asia: Variants for their Maximum Usage...

markets. At the same time, another alternative access to European markets is provided by the Russian-initiated intergovernmental agreement on Trans-Asian railroads, which is signed by 25 participant states, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

The Iranian route is linked, first of all, with the railroad “Tedjen-Serahs-Meshhed”, which provides CA states direct access to the Iranian transportation system and, thus, to the ports of the Persian Gulf, Europe and Turkey. According to specialists⁷⁶, cargo delivery through the ports of Karachi and Bender-Abbas is nearly half the cost of Black sea ports. At the same time, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are incorporated into the Iranian railroad system via the eastern branch of the “North-South” transport corridor, attracting cargo from India, Iran and other Persian Gulf states to Russian territory and then to North and West Europe. The eastern branch of the “North-South” corridor allows a reduction in distance (it is 600 km shorter than through Serahs) and, correspondingly, the terms of freight delivery to the markets of Central Asia, Iran and Turkey. The projected construction of the Bafk-Zahedan railroad can provide a direct railroad connection between Iran and Pakistan that allows CA states to get access to South Asian countries. According to Iranian assessments⁷⁷, in only 10 months (20.03.2012-19.01.2013) 9,354,069 tons of transit goods were transferred through the territory of Iran, which is 13.9% more than the previous year. The majority of traffic was forwarded from the Iranian sea ports to Afghanistan.

It is worth mentioning here that the probability of mutually advantageous cooperation between Central Asian states and Iran has already lead Tehran and Kabul to signing a strategic partnership. Moreover,

⁷⁶ See Transport Communications of Central Asia: Variants for their Maximum Usage... .

⁷⁷ The Volume of Transit Freight Delivery Through Iran has Increased Almost 15%, Iran News, 01.02.2013.

Kabul has officially started⁷⁸ to export goods from the Iranian port of Chabahar. These positive tendencies are reinforced by recently established contacts between the US President Barack Obama and his Iranian counterpart Hasan Rokhani, which could lead to a solution of the Iranian nuclear issue and further radical changes around Central Asia.

The Chinese routes (Western Europe-Western China, the Eurasian motor transport initiative “NELTI”, etc.) provide CA states with a more secure and shorter transport link to Europe, South-Eastern Asia and Russia and look more viable for CA states in comparison to other routes. It is especially important that since the 90s China has revealed an interest in the “China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan” railroad link. Moreover, during the recent Bishkek summit Chinese President Xi Jinping suggested opening the transport corridor from Central Asia to the Persian Gulf⁷⁹. Simultaneously, China has concluded multi-billion investment contracts with Kazakhstan (\$30 billion for a share in Kashagan), Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (\$7 billion for the construction of a gas pipeline to China and \$3 billion for various projects, including the construction of the North-South corridor)⁸⁰.

The Transafghan route is the shortest way to the southern ports (Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan, Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Iran). The pacification of Afghanistan could open new possibilities to elaborate southern alternative transport corridors to the Iranian ports of Bender-Abbas and Chabahar, Pakistani Karachi, Kasim and Gvadar. The attractiveness of this route can be increased by the termination of the transport projects “Iran-Pakistan-India” and “Afghanistan-Pakistan-India”. The project of constructing further the railroad from Gvadar port to

⁷⁸ See: Afghanistan has Officially Started Export of Goods by Chabahar Port, 28.07.2013, <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/62773.html>

⁷⁹ See: Mikhail Kalishevsky, SCO Summit. “Benefit Performances” and “Debuts”, 16.09.2013, <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1379321400>

⁸⁰ The Outcome of the 2013 Summit of the SCO, <http://www.ufa2015.ru/media/news/330/>

Qwetta is strategically important for Central Asia due to its future potential to connect with Afghanistan, Iran and China.

Taking into account the above-mentioned, each CA state tries to use to the utmost their geographic and other advantages to turn their country into the biggest international-transport-logistical hub, with all the positive financial and geopolitical dividends for itself.

Thus, Uzbekistan is planning to invest about \$8.5 billion in foreign and domestic capital into the transit-transport sphere by 2015⁸¹. At present, the country has the possibility of delivering local goods to world markets in nearly 10 directions. About 18% of regional railroads pass through the territory of Uzbekistan, the share of all freights shipment being about 11%⁸². The dynamics of transport sphere development in Uzbekistan are illustrated by a slow, but still steady increase of volumes of freight shipped by local transport and a growth in the production of transport vehicles in Uzbekistan (see Table 1 and 2 – *editors' note: appendix at the end of the chapter*). It's noteworthy to mention here the increase in the production of cargo transport and motor cars, which is very important for the growth of regional trade. At the same time, Uzbekistan is the only country through which cargo traffic, railroads, motor-cars, river and air transport can run from Afghanistan. Hence, Tashkent works very actively on the Transafghan corridor Termez-Mazari-Sharif-Gerat-Bender-Abbas and Chabakhar. These endeavors are supported⁸³ by India, which is interested in supporting the construction of a railroad from Herat to Meshhed and financially supports the railroad to Chabakhar. The Uzbek company "Uzbekiston Temir Yollari" is currently working out the feasibility of the project, which is planned for 2013-2015. The road will connect the Tajik-Afghan border area on the Pyanj river with the Mazari-

⁸¹ Uzbekistan Invests \$8.5 bln into Development of the Transport Infrastructure till 2015, 19.10.2012, <http://www.uzvt.uz/index.php/ru/newsmenu/58-20121112-2>

⁸² The Survey of the Transport Logistics State in Uzbekistan, <http://logistika.uz/info/articles/4752>

⁸³ See: Uzbekistan Intends to Expand the Railroad Khairaton-Mazari-Sharif, 15.09.2013, <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/64213.html>

Sharif branch. At the same time, Tashkent supports the realization of the transport corridor Navoi-Turkmenbashi, which will be joined to the Baku-Tbilisi-Karsh route and consequently will lead to Europe. The relative stability in the relations of Iran with CA states allows the construction of the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Oman-Katar transport corridor and the opening in a short time of the newly-built Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railroad.

The significance of Kazakhstan is preconditioned by the location of the country between Russia, China and CA states. These transport directions are the most well-developed. In Astana, great importance is currently attached to the Aktau sea port, which is the main special economic zone in the country and has been functioning since January 1, 2003. Being part of the TRASECA and the “North-South” international corridors, Aktau is considered to be the “Western gate” of the country, which provides access to the Caspian, Black, Mediterranean and Baltic Seas, to the Persian Gulf and to South-East Asia. The creation of a single transport operator, including the Aktau port, will supposedly allow for an increase of twofold in transit freight traffic and will annually bring no less than 2.8 billion dollars into the state budget⁸⁴. It is interesting, however, that Astana supports the New Silk Road plans on the basis of the Custom Union, as well. The “New Silk Road” will supposedly connect Europe with China, Asia and the Persian Gulf states. The realization of such a project could promote the formation of the Eurasian Union, which is why Russian experts support the Kazakh initiative⁸⁵.

From its own side, Ashgabad plans to turn its international sea port in Turkmenbashi into the “sea gate” to Central Asia, providing the shipment of cargo from Afghanistan and the Far East to Azerbaijan and onward to

⁸⁴ The Logics of Multi-Logistics: the Aktau Sea Port will be Transferred to the Administration of KTJ (КТЖ) During the First Quarter of 2013, 13.02.2013, <http://www.lokomotiv.kz/news/5066/>

⁸⁵ See: The Customs Union Will Build New “Silk Road”, <http://www.mcps-khorgos.kz/smi-review/tamozhennyi-soyuz-postroit-novyi-shelkovyi-put>

the Black Sea and Europe⁸⁶. At the same time, the construction of a 126 km Atamurad-Imamnazar-Akina-Andhoi railroad is foreseen between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Others plans⁸⁷ include joining the railroads of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan on the territory of Afghanistan and finishing the Uzen-Gorgan project, which was started in 2007 and aimed to join the country with European and Asian transport networks.

The situations in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are very similar and tied to the realization of big projects in neighboring countries.

Thus, Dushanbe seeks to become a transport route connecting CA states with the South-East, the Asian-Pacific region and South Asia. However, transportation between the regions in Tajikistan is carried out by transit through the territories of other countries, which is uncomfortable for Dushanbe. In trying to solve this problem, Tajikistan promotes a project on the reconstruction of the Dushanbe-Hujand highway over Uzbek borders, which in fact is a part of the corridor, then crossing Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran to gain access to the sea ports there. Besides this, there are plans to finish the construction of a 50 km railroad by Tajikistan, running from Kolkhozobod to Low Pyanj, by 2015. As to the “Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan” project, Tajik experts are cautious as “situation in the north of Afghanistan is complicated and unpredictable”⁸⁸.

The mountainous landscape of Kyrgyzstan forces the absence of direct railroad lines between northern and southern regions of the country.

⁸⁶ See: The Chronicle of Might and Happiness – the Year of 2012, <http://www.parahat.info/news/2013-01-03-letopis-epohi-moguschestva-i-schastya-god-2012-transport-i-svyaz>; Transit-Transport Corridors – a Silk Road of the XXI century, 10.07.2012, <http://tdh.gov.tm/index.php?id=5232>

⁸⁷ See: Ashgabad Supports Dushanbe’s Initiative on Joining Railroads of Two Countries on the Territory of Afghanistan, <http://www.12news.uz/news/2013/03/13/>; Infrastructural Projects of Turkmenistan Transform the Logistical Map of the Continent, 25.06.2013, http://turkmenistanembassy.am/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2480&full=1

⁸⁸ Страны Центральной Азии начали активную стройку железных дорог: какой маршрут выгоднее?, 07.06.2013, <http://www.transport-centre.ru/article.php?id=15152>

Much hope in this sense is set on the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad. Hence, alongside the common interests among CA states to perform complementary activities on the formation of multiple regional networks of alternative routes, one cannot exclude the differences in available resources and the rigid competition for the right to become the main international-transport-logistical hub in the region. Some analysts⁸⁹ also add that there are differences within the internal and external policies of CA states, tax and custom collections, and too much stress on the development of infrastructure to the detriment of liquidating these obstacles on the way to constructing a regional transport network in Central Asia. However, it is quite obvious that interests of stability and the potential economic benefits from regional cooperation outweigh all other negative factors and can at last promote regional integration, which depends greatly on the continuation of concerted efforts in this direction by all interested sides.

The Northern Distribution Network

The Northern Distribution Network consists of three main land routes:

1. The north route: the port in Latvia/Baltics – Russia – Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan;
2. The south route: the Georgian port Poti on the Black sea – Baku in Azerbaijan, across the Caspian sea – Central Asia (bypasses Russia);
3. The KKT route: Latvia/Baltics – Kazakhstan – Russia – Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan (bypasses Uzbekistan).

It is quite clear from the above-mentioned routes that the role and significance of Uzbekistan in all Eurasian transport corridors, including the NDN project, is quite important as it shares borders with all CA states; nearly all Eurasian prospective and operating transport corridors that are connected with Central Asia run through the territory of Uzbekistan.

⁸⁹ See: Helen Kulipanova, *International Traffic in Central Asia: Understanding Tendencies of (No)Cooperation*, University of Central Asia, The Supreme School of Development, Institute of State Management and Politics, Paper №2, 2013, www.ucentralasia.org

Moreover, in the current circumstances of an unstable Pakistan, corridors through Uzbekistan become the only viable routes connecting the southern (through Afghanistan) and northern (through the Baltic states) seas. Besides this, the country's strategic location at the very heart of the CA region and close to the turbulent Afghanistan, its economic and military potential, stability and its necessary infrastructure are all quite indispensable for the realization of the NDN project.

Tashkent allowed the launch of the NDN project in 2009. In late 2011 the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported that almost three fourths of all non-lethal surface shipments to Afghanistan had been transported via the NDN (this amount increased to virtually all surface transport following Pakistan's halt of shipments from late November 2011 to early July 2012). Navoi airport in Uzbekistan also supplements existing land routes. In August 2011 shipments began along a 50-mile rail line that runs from the town of Hairaton to the city of Mazari-Sharif⁹⁰.

In the North the same important role – due to stability, predictability, economic resources and infrastructure, and a similar post-soviet political culture – is played by Latvia. Moreover, Lithuania is ideally situated to become a regional transportation hub, connecting Scandinavia and Central Europe with Central Asian states, and Klaipeda seaport is one of the few non-freezing ports in the eastern portion of the Baltic Sea coast. As a result of this, in June officials from the US and Baltic countries celebrated in Riga the 100,000th container to pass through the Baltics en route to military forces in Afghanistan⁹¹.

In comparison to other routes providing CA states alternative economically beneficial outlets to world markets, the successful realization of the NDN project has today acquired more significance for the involved states due to its connection with formation of the new world

⁹⁰ Jim Nichol, Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for the U.S., Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, 09.01.2013, 61.

⁹¹ Joshua Kucera, Baltics Hope NDN Is Route for Closer Ties with Central Asia, 13.06.2013, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67114>

geo-economic order. In an ideal situation, with the solution of the Iranian problem, the final termination of the present-day Indian-Pakistani friction, and the stabilization of the Middle East and Central Asia, the NDN project could lead to the formation of several regional free economic zones, the prosperity of the vast region of Central and South Asia and a stable multi-polar world order.

In the meantime, in the political sphere the realization of this means achieving an optimal balance of forces and interests; the development of regionalism in Central Asia, which is a constructive vehicle for US-EU engagement; a reduction of international conflicts and misunderstandings (regarding CA, US-Russia, US-Iran, US-China and India-Pakistan). In the economic sphere it is one of a number of possible ways of diversifying the economy through the construction of alternative transport routes to Europe and Asia, the development of the regional transport network, achieving access to energy and global consumption markets; the attraction of investments; revenues from custom duties; the creation of modern transport infrastructure and jobs; and the solution of many social-economic problems.

NATO's relations with Central Asian states

Much surrounding the promotion of regional stability and the realization of the above-mentioned economic plans is dependent on the state of cooperation between NATO and CA states, which can conditionally be divided in two periods: before 2010 and after it.

During the first period, NATO's relations with CA states were not very active due to the peripheral significance of the region to the security interests of NATO member states. NATO's activities in the last decade of the 20th century were oriented mostly toward protecting the Euro-Atlantic community interests in this part of the world, and as such were mainly aimed at the problem of securing access to and control over energy resources and the construction of the Euro-Asian transport and pipeline system, as well as struggling against the proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction, combating drug trafficking, and the promotion of democratic reforms and structural market transformations in Central Asia.

It's noteworthy that President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov not once over these years brought attention⁹² of various international institutions, including the UN, NATO and the OSCE, to the necessity of consolidating cooperation in the struggle against international terrorism. However, the majority of Central Asian problems were considered in the West to be of internal character, not representing too much danger for the rest of the world. It's quite natural then that NATO-CA relations in the 90s were restricted only to participation in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (since 1992) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program (since 1994).

Since the tragic terroristic events of September 11, 2001, NATO states have started having close involvement in regional affairs. Fears are growing now of the probability of "resource wars" and related global security issues⁹³, including a geopolitical clash of interests and the role of the United States⁹⁴ in the future world order. The issues of the previous period have been compounded by the goal of fighting against international terrorism, which is largely connected with Central Asia and Middle East. It is proclaimed that "It is part of NATO's policy to reach out to strategically important regions, whose security and stability are closely linked to wider Euro-Atlantic security... Each of the five countries has the potential to positively impact on the future development of Afghanistan,

⁹² See: Uzbekistan and the Issues of International Security,

http://mfa.uz/rus/mej_sotr/uzbekistan_i_voprosi_mejdunarodnoy_bezopasnosti/

⁹³ See, for instance, E.G. Kochetov, *Geoconomy. Tutorial for Higher Education Institutes*, M.: BEK,1999; Richard A. Matthew, *Book Review: Resource Wars. Oil and War do Mix the New Landscape of Global Conflict* by Michael T. Klare (New York: Metropolitan Books. Henry Holt and Co., 2001), *Issues in Science & Technology* 18, Iss. 2, Winter 2001/2002, 84.

⁹⁴ See: Charles William Maynes, *Contending Schools, National Interest* 63, Spring 2001, 49; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Choice: Domination or Leadership?*, U.S.: Perseus Books Group, 2004.

where the Alliance is deeply engaged”⁹⁵. Correspondingly, in 2001 Central Asian partners join fellow members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in condemning the terrorist attacks and pledging to combat terrorism. In 2003, NATO took over the lead of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and all Central Asian partners supported the mission – moreover, in 2004 NATO’s Istanbul Summit placed a special focus on Central Asia and the Caucasus.

To provide a more active NATO-CA relationship, NATO leadership has tried to invigorate the previous relationship and add new institutional arrangements within NATO’s Partnership for Peace program. The main activities within this program have been to embrace measures aimed at training military staff, language training, the fight against terrorism, stymieing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other threats, and cooperation on science and civil emergency planning. These include such programs as:

1. The “Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program”, which was elaborated for each CA republic at the beginning of the 90s. Uzbekistan has participated in the program since 1996.
2. The “Planning and Review Process”(PARP), in which all countries, except Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, participate. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have participated since 2002, Kyrgyzstan decided to join the process only in 2007.
3. “The Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC)”, joined only by Kazakhstan.
4. “Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAPs)”. This new partnership mechanism was launched after the Prague Summit in 2002, but has been elaborated only since 2006 with Kazakhstan.
5. “Civil Emergency Planning” (training on disaster-preparedness), supported by all CA states.

⁹⁵ Partners in Central Asia, NATO Backgrounder, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120116_partners_central_asia_2011-e.pdf

As is seen from the level of participants' activity, NATO-CA relations bear a symbolic and declarative nature. It's noteworthy to add that Tajikistan only joined the PfP program in 2002, and Turkmenistan's cooperation with NATO is limited by the principles of "neutrality" in its foreign policy. Cooperation with Uzbekistan developed substantially in the early years of their partnership, but has been restricted significantly since the events in Andijan in May 2005.

The reasons for the low participation of CA countries in NATO activities are of a complex inner and external character, proceeding from the two mentioned drivers – geopolitical tension and the transitional state of a transforming Central Asia. However, some factors can be mentioned here:

- Central Asia has not been a priority area for the interests of NATO member states;
- the CA states need to balance security cooperation with NATO with that of Russia (SCTO) and Russia-China (SCO);
- European-American discrepancies in regional approaches⁹⁶ (including differences in the availability of resources);
- the absence of adequate Central Asian professional experience at such a level of cooperation.

The turning point in NATO's relations with its CA partners begins with NATO's new Strategic Concept, adopted at the Lisbon Summit in 2010 as "a focused effort to reform NATO's partnerships policy was launched... to make dialogue and cooperation more inclusive, flexible and strategically oriented"⁹⁷. By that time the democratic processes in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as in the Middle East and South Asia, fully demonstrated the complexity of transferring western standards of democracy to the territory of Asian countries.

⁹⁶ See, for instance: NATO and Central Asia. The Two Elephants that Never Meet, EUCAM Watch EU-Central Asia Monitoring 11, February 2012.

⁹⁷ Partners in Central Asia...

To prevent new threats and challenges in political and economical spheres in Central Asia, especially ahead of the withdrawal of peacekeeping troops from Afghanistan, NATO's focus in relations with CA states lies in dialogue with local leadership and the search for balance between the demands of hard security interests and Central Asia's democracy and human rights record. These steps are accompanied by new principles in cooperation: long-term bilateral cooperation, public diplomacy, coordination with all the international players, and staged evolutionary reforms.

In line with this new strategy, NATO officially recognized a PfP Training Center in Almaty in December 2010, which provides language training and cultural education on Central Asia. However, this and other similar steps, especially in the security sphere, cannot in fact significantly involve other CA states, which are too cautious about their sovereignty. At present, therefore, NATO's approach transforms from a "one region" approach addressing the sovereignty problems more to

1. Bilateral relations with each CA state. Meetings and bilateral discussions between NATO representatives and leaders of CA states, including Turkmenistan, are held regularly, especially recent years. Consequently, in 2012 Uzbekistan ratified an agreement on the transit of non-lethal ISAF cargo by rail. According to US Ministry of Defense data⁹⁸, 98% of cargo goes through the territory of Uzbekistan via the NDN. On March 23, 2013, Special Representative of the NATO General Secretary James Appaturai visited Uzbekistan.
2. Looking for effective cooperation between three main subjects of the process – the US, NATO and Russia, which in fact reflect the state of US-Russian relations. Despite the complex character of these relations, both states cooperate rather efficiently on issues regarding Afghanistan and the NDN. Moreover, the United States and Russia reached an agreement

⁹⁸ НАТО и Афганистан, Информационно-аналитический портал НАТО.рф, <http://www.nato.bz/ru/afghanistan.html>

this September on the Syrian chemical weapons issue. And most impressive is the fact that CSTO head Nikolai Bordyuzha said on September 16 that he has no issue with the presence of US or NATO forces in Central Asia, as it improves regional security and NATO-Russian cooperation could be constructive⁹⁹.

3. The issues of the security and stability risks the region itself generates, as well as the negative spill-over effects from Afghanistan. It is especially important ahead of the forthcoming withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and the change of leadership in nearly all CA states, which could be accompanied both by a sharpening of internal political clashes between the opposition forces and legal power, and an involvement of radical forces¹⁰⁰ from Afghanistan and Pakistan.
4. The consolidation of the military-political and economic components of its programs through the formation of transit-transport routes in CA, and assistance in promoting the New Silk Road (NSR) strategy of the United States, which is reflected in the recent activities and achievements of NATO troops in Afghanistan and support for the NDN project.
5. Weakening the pressure on humanitarian and democracy issues, as these are long-term in character. While issues of democracy in Central Asia still remain in force, a consolidation of radical movements in the Middle East, South and Central Asia make the issue of preserving security in Central Asia paramount for the Alliance and shifts the direction of their activities to security issues first.

The move toward bilateral cooperation by no means revokes the important multilateral dimension the Euro-Atlantic Partnership framework has. This is embodied in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), in the diplomatic representation of CA states to NATO

⁹⁹ See: Russia: U.S., NATO Central Asian Presence Okay – CSTO, STRATFOR, 16.09.2010.

¹⁰⁰ See, for inst.: Nikita Mendkovich, Postsoviet Partners of Talibans, 16.09.2013, <http://www.afghanistan.ru/doc/64205.html>

Headquarters, and in the Partnership Coordination Cell at Allied Command Operations.

To further improve these ongoing transformations in NATO-CA relations, NATO's regional representation was opened in Tashkent on June 3, 2013. It is entrusted by the task of fostering dialogue and practical cooperation between the Alliance and its regional partners – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Hence, an up to date and more or less successful NATO-CA partnership was developed between NATO and Kazakhstan, and NATO and Uzbekistan. The majority of military staff in both countries receive military training, tailored advice, and support for defense and security-sector reforms. The most important areas of cooperation have been the Afghanistan reconciliation process, disaster-preparedness, and scientific and environmental collaboration. Kazakhstan is among the first in CA to agree to three consecutive IPAPs with NATO; it pledged a contingent of staff officers as an initial troop contribution to the ISAF mission and provided an assistance package for Afghanistan totaling US \$3 million. Specialists from Uzbekistan have assisted with a number of infrastructure projects in Afghanistan, including the rebuilding of 11 bridges connecting the northern part of the country with Kabul. Within the NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Program framework, as of October 2010 the project on neutralizing highly toxic melange was completed in Uzbekistan,¹⁰¹ the “Virtual Silk Road” project, and a project promoting the efficient use of Aral sea resources are actively ongoing in the country.

In sum, after a long period of partial disregard for Central Asian security issues, the search for the most effective methods of cooperation in the NATO-CA partnership is in fact undergoing an initial stage of development, the outcome of which is difficult to predict due to the multiplicity of the involved factors.

¹⁰¹ See: Partners in Central Asia...

Conclusion

The multiplicity of involved interests in the NDN project in Central Asia involves some contradictory tendencies in Central Asia, which could negatively influence and reduce the tempo of the NATO-CA partnership and, hence, should be taken into account.

First, the steady growth of integrative tendencies in the CA transport-transit sphere is simultaneously accompanied by interstate competition in Central Asia, which could be both a positive sign of healthy competition and the stimulation of regional progress, and a negative development when used by foreign powers in their own geopolitical interests.

Secondly, the Afghan route is only a part of the forming Eurasian transport system, although it does not diminish the interests of key actors to receive access to Afghan economic resources. This means that this direction within the CA transport-transit system may not prevail over other corridors in the future due to the ongoing geopolitical clash of interests (between internal and external actors) which might cause the country to remain unstable for a long time.

Thirdly, the growth of Chinese influence in the Central Asian economy, including Afghanistan, is often regarded as a precursor of its future domination in the region – this by no means reduces its interest in the stability of the region, and hence, in international cooperation. This can reflect a more positive trend for the implementation of far-reaching NDN goals, but cannot diminish Chinese interest in monopolizing the regional economy (supported by available resources), which will remain a destabilizing factor in international relations.

And at last, the preservation of the anti-Iranian strategy taken by the western community versus the interests of Iran in improving relations with the world community and its involvement in the Afghanistan processes could destabilize the situation surrounding the NDN project if the Iranian problem is not solved.

In these circumstances, the NDN itself can (due to the high probability of poor management) become a source of drug-trafficking, illegal

migration, crime and corruption. The problem is that the re-education and training of adequate personnel for such projects throughout the whole territory of Central Asia and the CIS states, as well as the solution of existing internal political-economic problems in Afghanistan, a change in the local political culture and fostering the mentality necessary for the proper functioning of the regional transport-transit network, will take an indefinite period of time.

Policy opportunities and the possibility to avoid existing risks and challenges:

In the international sphere it would be expedient:

1. to accelerate the solution of the Iranian nuclear problem and the positive involvement of Iran in regional affairs;
2. to achieve a balance of interests between key players (the US, Russia, China, etc.);
3. to improve the financial activity of international donors in the area (a redistribution of investment flows for the benefit of concrete development projects), including transparency in their financial operations;
4. to form on the territory of Post-Soviet Central Asia a separate common center (in addition to that functioning in Afghanistan) for professional-technical training and retraining the staff at cross-border and control posts, as well as within the structure of new logistical networks.

In the local sphere:

6. to continue negotiations with the taliban;
7. to improve local legislation and increase salaries to overcome corruption;
8. to form more strict mechanisms of control between the donor and the client state and agencies;
9. to create a network of analytical information centers all over the region of Central and South Asia, bringing to Kabul the knowledge produced by governmental, civil and international organizations working in the

sphere of monitoring, control and political analysis under the aegis of the UNDP.

It would be useful to continue additional research on issues of

- the potential cooperation abilities between key actors (NATO-OSCE, US-Russia, US-Iran, Afghanistan-Pakistan);
- the existing legislation, to improve and adapt it to the new environment.

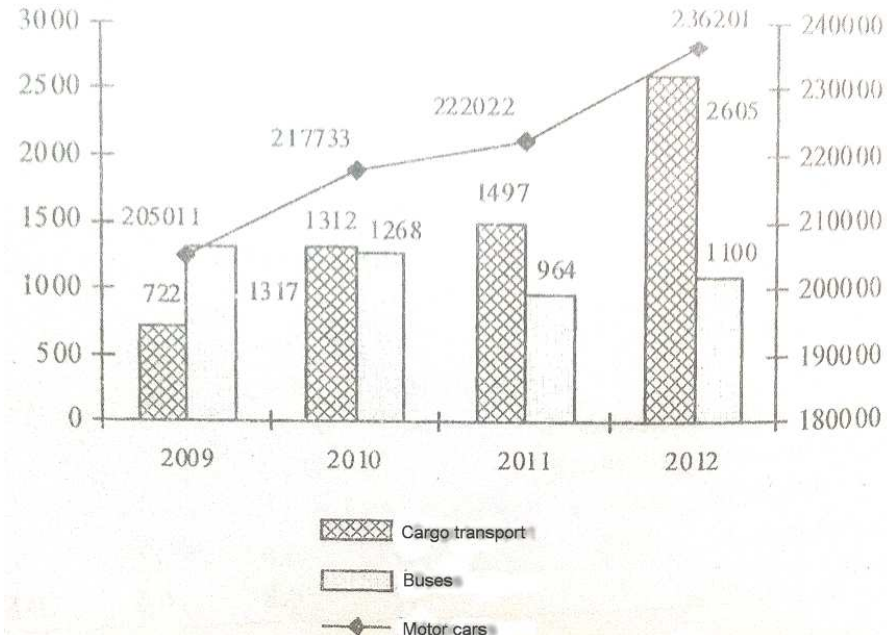
Appendix

Table 1. Freight shipped by transport in Uzbekistan (million tons)

By	2009	2010	2011	2012
Railroad	65.6	56.9	59.2	61.6
Motor transport	959.3	1066.1	1156.4	1203.3
Air	15.9	29.5	30.7	24.0

Source: Transport and Communication in Uzbekistan, Tashkent, State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, 2013, 19.

Table 2. The production of transport facilities



Source: Transport and Communication in Uzbekistan, Tashkent, State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, 2013, 18.

NATO-Uzbekistan-NDN: Mercenary Deal or Strategic Cooperation?

Farkhod Tolipov

The geopolitical environment: between Euro-Asia and Euro-Atlantic

When one talks about NATO's strategy and policy with respect to Central Asia, the overall analysis is mostly concentrated in the Alliance's interests and goals in this region and how NATO pursues them. Less has been elaborated on the interests and goals of Central Asian countries themselves with respect to NATO. From this perspective, it seems both sides, though partners in name, have been engaging with each other based on different principles and strategies. NATO's strategy stems from an international security perspective, while the Central Asian countries' strategy stems from national security rationale. Construing and constructing security in Central Asia represents by itself quite a sophisticated and, so to speak, pro-regime phenomenon. For political regimes in all five states of the region, national security is directly and closely correlated with security and the interests of the regime. This circumstance has brought about a very specific security environment in Central Asia in which the international cooperation of Central Asian states in the sphere of regional and national security take simultaneously the forms of mercenary deals and strategic partnerships.

The security and strategic environment in Central Asia is in flux, and the region is faced by a number of strategic uncertainties which make security policies here less consistent and more prone to fluctuation. The main peculiarity of the region in the context of security is that the region is not self-sufficient in this sphere and therefore a proliferation of

'security providers' takes place in this part of the world. This process, just like the overall geopolitical transformation of the region that began with the collapse of the USSR, became more visible and contradictory after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. All the Central Asian countries have been proceeding through the post-independence period with a heavy geopolitical burden. Their foreign policy actions and orientations have constantly had geopolitical implications. The Great geopolitical Game of great powers, juxtaposed with a smaller game between and among Central Asian states themselves, has created a very complex regional environment.

The complexity of the geopolitical environment can be well illustrated in the quite unique situation of the 'base race' that emerged in this region, where the proliferation of different types of military installations by foreign powers became a matter of fact. Russia and the US are the major base deployers in the region, yet small contingents of some NATO countries are also deployed. There are seven major Russian military installations in Kazakhstan, five in Kyrgyzstan, and two in Tajikistan, including its 201st division, which is still the Russia's biggest military deployment ever outside its territory. The US has the "Manas" Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan and from 2001 through 2005 had "Karshi-Khanabad" base in the Uzbek city of Karshi. Germany uses the Termez airport in the south of Uzbekistan. Furthermore, there have been allegations about motions from both sides – Russia and the US – to establish new installations in the region: Russia announced plans to set up a second Russian base in the south of Kyrgyzstan, where the US allegedly intends to set up a training center. Interestingly, in 2006 Tajikistan offered air basing rights to the US, but Washington opted for the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan. In spite of the geopolitical difficulties alluded to in 2006, as recently as 2010 Tajikistan officials were again saying that "they would be happy for the US establish an air base in Tajikistan"¹⁰².

¹⁰² Joshua Kucera, Tajikistan Wanted U.S. Air Base At Kulyab; Rumsfeld Gave Them Bridge Instead, 15.03.2013, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66698>

Nowadays, the security environment in Central Asia and the security policies of states in the region are mostly associated with the anticipated implications of the international troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, which should be accomplished as scheduled by the end of 2014. The Northern Distribution Network (NDN), which was set up in 2009 as a comprehensive system of routes for the transportation of technical equipment, weapons and man power for the NATO ISAF, as well as goods and foodstuffs to and from Afghanistan, is currently widely popularized by the international media and expert communities as a NATO's essential breakthrough in its relations with Central Asian states. This is, indeed, the most considerable achievement of the Alliance outside its zone of immediate responsibility – that is, the Euro-Atlantic area. At the same time, overall activities related to the functioning of the NDN are not simply, so to speak, a technical undertaking or, in other words, just a transportation issue which would be of a “withdraw from Afghanistan and leave the region” pattern. This process obviously will have serious geopolitical, economic and security implications for both sides – NATO/Europe and Central Asia.

After gaining its political independence in 1991, the region of Central Asia found itself at the focus of international attention for at least two reasons: 1) natural resources, especially oil and gas reserves in this region; 2) its geostrategic importance as a land bridge that can connect China and Asia-Pacific with Europe. This period coincided with the beginning of NATO's and Europe's global outreach policy – NATO due to successful completion of its mission as a guarantor of European security; the European Union due to the successful completion of regional integration and becoming a global actor. In such circumstances the newly independent states of Central Asia surprisingly found themselves wedged between two mega spaces – Euro-Asia and Euro-Atlantic. Deeply land-locked countries of the region (Uzbekistan being double-land-locked) realized from the challenge of independence that they have to construct a very large transport communications network with the world at large.

The United States and European Union countries, in turn, also realized the immense geopolitical, economic and strategic opportunities in establishing direct access to five Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and three South Caucasian states: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

NATO's engagement in and with Central Asia has a two-stage background: the PfP and operational support for the ISAF, mainly through the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). All Central Asian countries have been PfP members since its inception in 1994 (Tajikistan joined in 2002) and up to now accrued considerable experience in their interactions with the Alliance¹⁰³. Currently, NDN-related activities provide new and useful experience and demonstrate that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are strategically important for NATO; correspondingly, new geopolitics and new interests emerge. In these conditions, and following NATO's departure from Afghanistan, Central Asian states will not be able to maintain their low profile in regional affairs, as was the case so far¹⁰⁴. "NATO's withdrawal is thus not only a serious challenge, but also an opportunity for Central Asian countries to deepen their cooperation with the Alliance"¹⁰⁵ *and, through it, with each other.*

The first and second 'transportization' of Central Asia

This new opportunity is related, as many expect, to the prospect of turning the NDN into a trans-regional and trans-continental web of transport and communication corridors connecting Central Asia with the world at large (mostly the Western world). Actually, the elements and infrastructure of what is called today the NDN existed long before the

¹⁰³ Very detailed information on Kazakhstan-NATO, Kyrgyzstan-NATO, Tajikistan-NATO, Turkmenistan-NATO and Uzbekistan-NATO partnerships can be found on the NATO homepage.

¹⁰⁴ Heidi Reisinger, How to Get Out of Afghanistan: NATO's Withdrawal Through Central Asia, NATO Defense College Research Paper No. 79, June 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem.

operation in Afghanistan, even since the Russian colonization of the former Turkestan. Since the opening of this geographical space in the era of imperial expansion – from the 19th-20th centuries – the coverage of this territory with railways stretching primarily northward and connecting it to the colonizing metropolises became a strategic task. One of the founders of geopolitics, Sir Halford Mackinder, at dawn of the 20th century even called this region the ‘Heartland of Eurasia’ and pointed to the fundamental strategic benefits of covering this geographical zone with railways networks. The Soviet Union – the single and the last great power on the whole Heartland – turned that Mackinder’s idea of mastering it into reality.

Today, each Central Asian country possesses its own railway, highway and airway transport system – the legacy that the former Soviet Union left behind. Moreover, we could call the Soviet-made transport infrastructure ‘the first *transportization* of the region’, which served the strategic task of ‘overlay’, to use the term of Barry Buzan. “Under this arrangement, overlay takes the form of unequal alliance. Local security concerns are subordinated to the security orientation of the dominating power, and this orientation is reinforced by the stationing of that power’s military forces directly within the local complex”¹⁰⁶. So the first period of overlaying the Central Asian region with the network of northward oriented railroads served the strategic task of supplying the “dominating power” – that is, Russia – with natural resources and other products and at the same time creating a buffer zone between Russia and southern powers by cutting off Central Asia from the external world. That’s why, during the Soviet rule, the entirety of transport arteries in the region were disrupted in all directions but north.

In the new era, the newly independent states launched their own efforts at self-connecting to the external world with a new system of

¹⁰⁶ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991, 220.

transport and communication arteries. The first tokens of what is discussed and advanced as a Modern Silk Road (MSR) project at dawn of the 21st century – the mega-idea of creating the system of railroads, highways and pipe-lines stretching from this region to the north, south, east and west – arose at the beginning of independence for countries of the region. One of the first and most promising proposals was the EU's „Transport Corridor Europe-Central Asia” (TRACECA) project.

In September 1998, at a historic summit in Baku, Azerbaijan, 12 TRACECA countries signed the „Basic Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for the Development Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia” (MLA) in order to take full advantage of its geopolitical and economic opportunities. The MLA became a logical continuation of the inter-regional program of the European Union's TRACECA and at the same time the only legal basis for its effective implementation. After the signing of this agreement and the establishment of the Intergovernmental Commission (IGC), the TRACECA Permanent Secretariat have a new legal framework for the development and implementation of international transit traffic at a better level.

The transport corridor TRACECA was the renaissance of the Great Silk Road, one of the ancient trade routes in the world. The corridor starts in Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine) and crosses Turkey. There are routes passing the Black Sea to the ports of Poti in Georgia, then using the transport network of the Southern Caucasus, and a land connection to this region from Turkey. From Azerbaijan by means of the Caspian ferries (Baku – Turkmenbashi, Baku – Aktau), the TRACECA route reaches the railway networks of the Central Asian states of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The transport networks of these states are connected to destinations in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and reach the borders of China and Afghanistan¹⁰⁷. The development of a new transport corridor

¹⁰⁷ The Silk Road of the 21st Century, TRACECA,
<http://www.traceca-org.org/en/home/the-silk-road-of-the-21st-century/>

provided for efficient transportation possibilities to accommodate rising freight flows from the Asia-Pacific region to destinations in the Central Asia, the Caucasus and Europe. This also allows the opening and enlargement of markets in TRACECA countries and the possibility to connect them to trans-European networks.

It has to be pointed out that in 1997 the European Union launched a more comprehensive and developmental initiative on providing economic and technical assistance to Central Asia called the "Special Program Europe-Central Asia" (SPECA), which was formally sponsored by the two UN commissions – the EEC and ESCAP. In March 1998, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as executive secretaries of the EEC and ESCAP, signed the Tashkent Declaration on the creation of the SPECA, which Turkmenistan joined in September that year. The SPECA was worked out for fulfillment of concrete projects in the socio-economic sphere. In 1998 in Tashkent, five priority projects were approved in the sphere of transport, energy, the environment and the promotion of small and medium sized entrepreneurship.

It was decided that each country in Central Asia would coordinate one of proposed projects. For instance, the transport infrastructure and improvement of border crossing procedures project was coordinated by Kazakhstan; the project on the rational and effective utilization of the energy and water resources of Central Asia was coordinated by Kyrgyzstan; the organization of the international economic conference in Tajikistan and the project on a common strategy of regional development and attracting foreign investments was coordinated by Tajikistan; the regional cooperation for working out multiple transport corridors for the supply of hydrocarbon resources to world markets by pipe-lines was coordinated by Turkmenistan; and the project on reforming the industrial

potential of the region with the aim of creating international competitive industrial companies was coordinated by Uzbekistan¹⁰⁸.

Thus, long before the NDN, the European Union in cooperation with UN structures had made major attempts directed at supporting newly independent and fragile land-locked states and pulling them toward world markets. The romantic expression “Great Silk Road” entered the international political and geopolitical lexicon concerning the Central Asian region. In 1999 the United States adopted the so-called Great Silk Road Act.

In the wake of the ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan and the functioning of the NDN, the US initiated the “New Great Silk Road Strategy”. This mega-project was designed to promote trade across the region. “[T]he passage of large numbers of civilian transport vehicles will also advance security, since many people in the affected areas will take advantage of the new opportunities for getting goods to market, as well as for providing services to the transport industry itself. As such commerce increases, people along the main corridors will come to view open transport as a key to their own economic advancement.

“It is no criticism to say these prospects were not in the minds of those who planned the NDN. They had a more limited job to do, and they seem to have done it very well. But by so doing, they have laid the essential groundwork for what could become a sustained and lucrative flow of continental transport across Afghanistan and its neighboring states. Again, this will not happen automatically. But if the United States can recognize this prospect and take the lead in achieving it, it will have set in motion a positive and transformative force in the economic and social life of Afghanistan and the entire region of Greater Central Asia”¹⁰⁹. The key

¹⁰⁸ Арсен Вартанян, Программа СПЕКА – новая региональная инициатива ЕС в Центральной Азии, Новые Рынки № 5, 2001, <http://www.newmarkets.ru/nm-ru/issues/nm520012.htm>

¹⁰⁹ The Northern Distribution Network and the Modern Silk Road. Planning for Afghanistan’s Future, Washington, DC: A Report of the CSIS, December 2009.

point is both to increase the capacity of throughput and to create more competitive market conditions that promote greater cost efficiency for the client and produce positive spillover in the surrounding region¹¹⁰.

Meanwhile, the question arises on a strategic level of the prospects of converting such good will into effective political and technical motion. One very important aspect of the issue of the NDN as such is how this issue is perceived by the countries in the region and how it is regarded from a regional perspective. In other words, regional affairs in Central Asia and the future of the NDN are obviously interlinked. Indeed, the New Silk Road, should it come to pass, will have long-term substantive implications in terms of a triple diversification – economic, geopolitical, and security. This trend we can call ‘the second *transportization* of the region’. The overall campaign in Afghanistan from 2001-2014 has provided the US and the West a unique experience and access to the region, which was closed and locked to the world during the Soviet era. The functioning of the Northern Distribution Network symbolized the opening of the region, to which the US/NATO got direct access for the first time in the history. The MSR is not simply about transport diversification, but through this network it is possible to establish a geopolitical presence and security assistance. Through the New Silk Road a somewhat eclectic strategic environment can be established in Central Asia.

Just like the first stage of the “*transportization*” of Central Asia, the second stage also has a clear-cut security dimension. The fact of the matter is that any transport arteries can serve not only as corridors for the movement of tracks, goods and merchants but also for troops, tanks and weapons. The securitization of the transport issue in Central Asia is reminiscent of the geopolitization and securitization of any sea lanes or railways which traverse relatively significant and strategically important geographic zones.

¹¹⁰ The Northern Distribution Network and the Modern Silk Road..., 12.

Having said that, we should admit that the proposed New Silk Road will certainly be beneficial for the US's global rival, China. As R. Munro pointed out, "A new Silk Road of modern railroads and highways that would effectively give China a land route far to the west, ultimately to Europe and to an Iranian opening on the Persian Gulf, would have enormous strategic consequences, possibly comparable to the impact that the advent of Suez and Panama Canals once had"¹¹¹. Indeed, even prior to the new US Initiative, China already had engaged Central Asians in its own version of the New Silk Road. On the one hand, China is deeply interested and largely involved in various transport projects in Central Asia. The Andijan-Osh-Irkeshtam railway, which connects Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Chinese cities respectively, is one of several concrete Chinese endeavours to breakthrough into this region. China invests in and is directly involved in the construction of a huge web of highways in Tajikistan.

Moreover, the commissioning in 1996 of the Serakhs-Tedjen-Mashhad railroad segment completely connected the railroads networks of Turkmenistan and Iran, which many observers evaluated as an important stage of the revitalization of the Silk Road. In fact, due to this segment, Chinese ports on the Pacific and Europe were linked through Central Asia, Iran and Turkey.

Another US rival, Russia, will be one of the indispensable actors on the MSR as well. On the one hand, Russia is interested in taking advantage of any mega-projects in Central Asia as long as they involve Russian businesses and expand Russian influence. On the other hand, Moscow is concerned that the "second transportization" of the region would lead it away from Russian influence and re-orient it towards the West or East. So the NDN and its future re-formatting into the "New Silk Road" will be nothing but a geopolitical challenge which Russia seeks to meet adequately, since this mega-project will inevitably further expose the

¹¹¹ Ross H. Munro, „India, and Central Asia”, in *After Empire: The Emerging Geopolitics of Central Asia*, ed. Jed C. Snyder, University Press of the Pacific, 2002, 130.

countries lying on the NDN/MSR to external influences and thereby fundamentally transform the century-old geopolitical order of the Heartland of Eurasia.

Meanwhile, the transit center in the Russian town Ulyanovsk was offered to NATO by Russia in 2012 for cargo transit from Afghanistan. However, NATO countries haven't signed any contract with Russian carriers because, as NATO representatives say, the Russian side demands higher prices for their services. They point out that the Russian carriers demand 50,000 Euros per container, whereas the Uzbeks demand 30,000 Euro. The Russian side insists that although transit through Ulyanovsk is more expensive it is nevertheless faster and more secure. Moreover, NATO wants to avoid any political dependence on Moscow. Interestingly, Russian experts argue that the transit base in Ulyanovsk will sooner or later be used by the UN or others, if not NATO¹¹².

By and large, for the time being, the mercenary interests of Russians seem to juxtapose with their geopolitical concerns when it comes to the would-be implications of the NDN. Meanwhile, despite such a geopolitically sensitive issue, Moscow doesn't dramatize the situation because "Trans-container" – a Russian company – already transports cargo for the French, British and German contingents of the ISAF on the railways from Khayraton station in Afghanistan through the Galaba border passage in Uzbekistan to Riga, from which cargo is further delivered by sea to its destinations¹¹³.

By the way, Riga is considered by Uzbekistan as a strategically important transit center and cooperation in the transportation sphere between Uzbekistan and Latvia has remained at the center of bilateral cooperation since the 1990s. On October 16-17, 2013, the president of Uzbekistan made an official visit to Latvia and the two sides, among other

¹¹² Транзит грузов НАТО через Ульяновск оказался невостребованным, 15.08.2013, <http://lenta.ru/news/2013/08/15/nato/>

¹¹³ А груз и ныне там, Коммерсант.ру, 15.08.2013, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2255453>

things, once again stated their interest in developing such cooperation for reaching out to major regional and international markets.

Uzbekistan between self-isolationism and engagement

Potentially, the idea of the MSR is in the interests of Uzbekistan. The government is, obviously, supportive of this mega-project. However, its success will depend to a great extent on the relative weight of and correlation of geopolitical and commercial laws and trends. The popularity of the New Silk Road project for Uzbekistan is contingent on its own rhetoric in favour of a restoration of the ancient Silk Road. It seems that all projects and ideas that lead to a breakthrough of Uzbekistan's land-locked isolation from world markets and symbolizes "geopolitical freedom of choice and manoeuvring" will find political support in Tashkent.

The creation of new transport corridors inside the country as well as the construction of international highway, railroad and airway corridors and logistical centers are the corner stone of the Uzbek foreign economic strategy and geopolitics. The creation in 2008 of the intermodal transport hub and logistical center in the provincial city of Navoi is illustrative in this sense. This investment project was realized in cooperation with the Air Company "Korean Air" and envisaged the creation of an international entrepot which would combine aviation, automobile and railroad services on the export, import and transfer of cargo and passengers.

Currently, about 12 flights a week are made by "Korean Air" with a "Boing 747" aircraft on itineraries such as Incheon (Korea)-Navoi (Uzbekistan)-Milan (Italy), Incheon-Navoi-Brussels, and Shanghai-Navoi-Milan. "Uzbek Airways" itself makes 11 flights a week with an A300 aircraft on itineraries such as Navoi-Delhi, Navoi-Mumbai, Navoi-Bangkok, and Navoi-Frankfurt, as well as charter flights between Navoi-Dakka and

Navoi-Frankfurt. New itineraries are also projected to Istanbul, Almaty, Dubai, Moscow and Tel-Aviv¹¹⁴.

The cargo terminal of the Navoi international logistical center has the capacity to process 300 tons of goods per day. In general, Navoi has a very beneficial geographical location at the cross-roads of international air freights between Europe and Asia and in the proximity of international highways and a trans-continental railway. Uzbekistan has the most developed and most capable transport network in the region and can make the greatest contribution to the New Silk Road project.

In October 2010, President Islam Karimov initiated the creation of the new Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran-Oman-Qatar international transport corridor. On October 25, 2011, the participating countries signed an agreement on the transport-communication corridor, which would link the countries of Central Asia with ports of the Persian Gulf¹¹⁵.

Uzbekistan is definitely interested in getting access to southern ports on the Indian ocean through Afghanistan. The 75 km long railway connecting the southern Uzbek city Termez through the northern Afghan town Khayraton with Mazari-Sharif was constructed by Uzbekistan in 2011. Currently 80% of the ISAF's cargo withdrawing from Afghanistan passes through the territory of Uzbekistan, which again reflects the key role of Uzbekistan in the overall Afghanistan reconstruction effort and the NDN-MSR project.

Whether the NDN will or can turn into a trans-continental web of transport corridors will also depend on the outcomes and implications of the completion of the ISAF and, certainly, on the economic, trade and business environment in the region after 2014. Tashkent ignored the Istanbul Process "On Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan" that took place on November 2, 2011 in Istanbul. The

¹¹⁴ Министерство иностранных дел Республики Узбекистан, <http://www.mfa.uz/>

¹¹⁵ Сотрудничество Республики Узбекистан со странами Среднего, Ближнего Востока и Африки, Министерство иностранных дел Республики Узбекистан, http://mfa.uz/rus/mej_sotr/uzbekistan_i_strani_mira/uzbekistan_strani_azii_i_afriki/

conference adopted a document that reflected perhaps the most ambitious plans since the beginning of the ISAF withdrawal, an attempt by the international community at strengthening the regional dimension of the Afghan process. Article 10 of the Istanbul Document says: “We mark our full support to the ongoing process of transition of responsibility for providing security in Afghanistan from ISAF/NATO to ANSF in the framework of the ‘Kabul Process’. We remain convinced that progress to be made between now and 2014, when transition will be completed, will make a decisive impact on the future course of efforts underway in Afghanistan. However, this transition should assist Afghanistan and the development of its relevant structures with sustained support in the form of long term commitments to be made by regional and international partners. We welcome ongoing efforts by the Government of Afghanistan and its regional partners to foster trust and cooperation with each other as well as relevant cooperation initiatives developed by the countries concerned and regional organizations. The promotion of a sound regional cooperation in the ‘Heart of Asia’ will be an important contribution to these efforts. In this context, enhanced trade connectivity along historical trade routes will also constitute an added value and will require a conducive regional environment”¹¹⁶. This and all other clauses of the Istanbul Document are obviously in the interests of Uzbekistan because they were worked out with good-will and in a cooperative spirit. However, Uzbekistan refrained from taking part in it.

That was a telling manifestation of Tashkent’s self-isolationism in regional affairs. This tendency in Tashkent’s foreign policy reached its peaks in September 2012, when Uzbekistan adopted a new Foreign Policy Doctrine and switched to bilateralism as the main principle of its international relations, and then in December 2012, when Uzbekistan abandoned the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The

¹¹⁶ Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for A Secure and Stable Afghanistan, 02.11.2011, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/istanbul-process-on-regional-security-and-cooperation-for-a-secure-and-stable-afghanistan.en.mfa>

strategic and geopolitical situation in Central Asia became even more uncertain than has so far been the case. Uzbekistan's bilateralism cannot be a panacea in the face of security challenges, while the CSTO's multilateralism, in turn, cannot be efficient in the region without Uzbekistan¹¹⁷. Such isolationist posturing by Tashkent sharply contrasts its ambitious plans to reach out to world markets by laying down railroads and highways and opening new air corridors. The above-mentioned observation of Tashkent's reluctance for multilateral cooperation was not to say that this is a long-term strategy; it is rather a short-term maneuvering directed at the accumulation of strategic and geopolitical capital. In other words, Tashkent is attempting to capitalize on Uzbekistan's key geographical position in Central Asia. However, for the time being, this capitalization "project" is being materialized in the form of lucrative deals.

For instance, the NDN has caused quite illustrative allegations about the mercenary attitude of Tashkent on the issue of counter-terrorism (if we agree that both the deployment of troops and their withdrawal are parts of the same operation). According to observations, with planning for the Western military withdrawal from Afghanistan in full swing, officials in Uzbekistan want to make a deal: we will provide the roads out if you leave some of those extra vehicles and supplies behind for us. On the wish list are armored vehicles, mine detectors, helicopters, navigation equipment and night-vision goggles — used and dusty would be fine. It is a proposal that has won the attention of Western capitals and is said to have annoyed the Kremlin enough that it is pushing through an arms deal with Uzbekistan's neighbor, Kyrgyzstan¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁷ Farkhod Tolipov, Uzbekistan without the CSTO, CACI Analyst, 02.20.2013, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5929>

¹¹⁸ Andrew E.Kramer, As NATO Prepares for Afghan Withdrawal, Uzbekistan Seeks War's Leftovers, 31.01.2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/01/world/asia/uzbekistan-wants-natos-leftovers-from-afghanistan.html?ref=asia&r=1&>

As mentioned above, Tashkent is trying to capitalize on its key location at the very outset of the NDN. It is not by accident that visits by military delegations from European countries and the United States to Uzbekistan have become a regular event. These delegations discuss with Uzbek authorities the situation in Afghanistan and the overall process of pulling out troops and technical equipment from Afghanistan via the NDN. Inevitably, such NDN-related activism from all sides – Uzbekistan and its Western partners – cannot but elevate Tashkent’s profile not only in Afghan affairs but also on the international scene. However, this activism serves only the ultimate goal of withdrawing forces and vehicles from Afghanistan and, so far, almost nothing more.

Recently there appeared some new tokens of regional development: in June this year Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan signed a treaty “On Strategic Partnership”. A strategic partnership will inevitably require that Astana and Tashkent reconsider their foreign policy principles and doctrinal provisions, since states aspiring to be strategic partners essentially need common international positions¹¹⁹. The same rapprochement is needed in the overall relationships of *all* Central Asian states. The regional cooperation leading to regional integration – the goal that was proclaimed at the very outset of independence in 1991 – will be one of the key preconditions for any geographically larger projects.

Such a perspective leads us beyond the vision of the NATO-led NDN being merely a mercenary or geopolitical adventure. The success of the transformation of the NDN into the MSR will depend on the representation of what can be called ‘developmental security’ policy. The concept of ‘developmental security’ stems from comprehension of the obvious flaws of the securitization of the NDN, in which mercenary and geopolitical aspects currently prevail over economic and normative ones.

¹¹⁹ Farkhod Tolipov, *Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: Competitors, Strategic Partners or Eternal Friends?*, CACI Analyst, 08.07.2013, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12786-uzbekistan-and-kazakhstan-competitors-strategic-partners-or-eternal-friends?.html>

Development security requires securitization of economic, infrastructural, transport as well as social projects.

From this perspective, post-2014 Afghanistan could be peaceful and the MSR project realistic if the international community and regional countries regard security not only as a military operation and/or geopolitical arrangement, albeit these dimensions are important per se, but also as a developmental condition. Therefore, a somewhat systematic approach should be realized with regard to the NDN-MSR mega-project in which all dimensions of security are combined in a single strategy.

Professor Frederick Starr suggests a number of urgent transport projects that should be realized in Afghanistan to turn the country into a hub of continental transport and trade. The construction of railroads linking Central Asia to Pakistan and India across Afghanistan, and also to the ports Gwadar, Karachi and Chabahar, “will establish Afghanistan as a true entrepot for north-south and east-west transport and trade”¹²⁰. This is a very wise and attractive plan. At the same time, it could be doomed to failure unless trade, economic and transport projects are inculcated in a comprehensive, developmental security strategy. Some people argue that economic projects and major investments cannot come to Afghanistan unless peace, security and stability are firmly established. Others argue that investments and economic development will help ensure peace, security and stability. The central point of the article is that security and the economy should go hand-in-hand. This means that the military operation, albeit in new forms that are more limited in scale, should go on, and economic reconstruction and transport projects should be realized against the background of obvious military success.

¹²⁰ S. Frederick Starr with Adib Farhadi, *Finish the Job: Jump-Start Afghanistan's Economy*, Washington: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2012, 52, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1211Afghan.pdf>

Conclusions and recommendations

Due to the functioning of the NDN, NATO is currently gaining a unique “geographical experience” of the complex utilization of land, rail, sea and airways in the vast Euro-Asian space, of which it had remained unfamiliar before its ISAF operation in Afghanistan. This led NATO, as the NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow noted, to “set up a whole network of redundant routes so that if one failed, others would be able to easily fill in”. After all, NATO’s longer-term objective should be “to bring regional stakeholders to the understanding that security can be more than a zero sum game”¹²¹. However, it is easier to state such good will than to make it a reality. More often than not the persistence of geopolitical interests make good will statements from all sides nothing but a wishful thinking. Meanwhile, it became a symbolical sign of the time that the world’s first intercontinental rail tunnel opened in last days of October 2013, linking Europe and Asia via the Bosphorus Strait in Istanbul. “The 8.3 mile Marmaray Tunnel is the linchpin in what has been dubbed an ‘Iron Silk Road’ linking Europe and Central Asia. Turkish leaders say that it will eventually form part of a route from London to Beijing, an alternative to the Trans-Siberian railway”¹²².

The existential question arises in the end of this analysis as to the role of NATO in long-term MSR-related activities. Related to this are the following essential questions:

When we elaborate on prospects of the Modern Silk Road emerging out of the NATO-led Northern Distribution Network, we are faced with the regional countries’ long-lasting efforts at what was called above a “second transportization” of the region. So, is the concept of the NDN correlated

¹²¹ Sten Rynning, *After Combat, the Perils of Partnership: NATO and Afghanistan beyond 2014*, NATO Defense College Research Paper No. 80, July 2012, 7, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/series.php?icode=1>

¹²² Alexander Christie-Miller, *Tunnel Brings Iron Silk Road into View*, 28.10.2013, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/asia/article3906142.ece>

somehow with the region's own efforts at developing regional and trans-regional transport networks?

When we elaborate on prospects of the MSR materialized in intensified trade, the movement of people and region-wide economic cooperation, we confront regional countries' broken unity and frozen integration. So, can the NDN stimulate regional cooperation and integration, including in the sphere of regional security?

When we elaborate on prospects of the MSR from the point of view of prioritizing big investments in transport and economic projects, we often overlook the importance and necessity of the continuation of a military operation until complete victory over terrorism has been achieved. So, will the NDN lead to the end of a military campaign in Afghanistan post-2014, or continue to serve it alongside its commercial and communicational functions?

As one can see, there are a number of positive trends and a number of controversies regarding the feasibility of the NDN-MSR mega-project. These controversies can be revealed as a triple manifestation: mercenary-geopolitical-developmental. From this point of view, it would be desirable that the NATO-Central Asia, and especially a NATO-Uzbekistan, partnership on the new stage is elevated to the level of "strategic cooperation", which would diminish lucrative and geopolitical schemes and focus on long-term developmental security. After all, the NDN was NATO's explicit logistical, transport and political acquisition; the post-NDN would-be Modern Silk Road should remain the same.

Having said that, the following recommendations can be made:

The PfP for Central Asia should be prolonged and strengthened, with more focus on non-military dimension such as regional confidence-building; good governance and democratization; science, education and the environment; transport; disaster-preparedness; border management, and so on. In this regard, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly could play the exceptional role of facilitator, promoter and tribune of the future partnership based on the new concept of "Developmental security", which

means an arrangement focused on strengthening security through the promotion of economic and democratic development.

In June 2013, the NATO Liaison Office (NLO) was opened in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. It would be expedient to turn it into a strong analytical, informational, technical and public-diplomacy body. NATO has proclaimed an 'assist-train-advise' policy for post-2014 Afghanistan. It would be expedient to ascribe somewhat similar mission to the NLO.

CA countries' missions to the NATO HQ in Brussels symbolize individualism rather than collectivism in their overall undertaking to shape new partnerships with the Alliance. So NATO might engage these missions collectively in joint projects and promote Central Asian regional dialogue *right from Brussels*. In parallel, the recently appointed NATO Liaison Officer (NLO) for Central Asia with an office in Tashkent can do the same job *right from the region*.