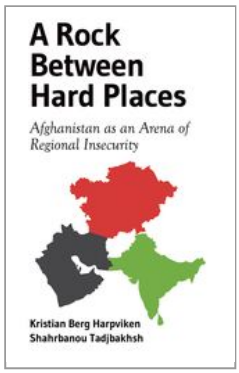

A Rock Between Hard Places: Afghanistan as an Arena of Regional Insecurity
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Introduction

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter lays out the historical and political background for Afghanistan's fraught relationships to states in its neighborhood. It introduces the analytical framework developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in their book *Regions and Powers* (2003), and contrasts that to mainstream analysis, which sees Afghanistan as the center of a wider region. The authors argue that the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and neighboring states is a projection of dynamics elsewhere – within South Asia, Central Asia and the Persian Gulf – and therefore peripheral to more important regional security relations. The failure, in the aftermath of the 2001 intervention in Afghanistan, to foster a regional security cooperation that would contribute to peace and stability in that country reflects the shortcomings of the mainstream analysis. The chapter provides the foundation for an alternative approach, in which a more constructive engagement in Afghanistan by states of its neighborhood relies less on each neighbor's relationship with Afghanistan than it does on cooperation within each of the three regions that surround it.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Central Asia, Persian Gulf, South Asia, Regional Security, Regional Cooperation

What drives the involvement of neighboring states in the Afghan conflict? Is the conflict there a mere reflection of tensions inherent in the larger neighborhood, or should it rather be understood that domestic Afghan divisions draw in surrounding states? What are the roles of Global Powers in the intricate interplay of forces within Afghanistan and its wider neighborhood? A short

decade after US-led intervention toppled the Taliban, the international policy focus shifted from virtual neglect towards renewed interest in the regional dimensions of the Afghan war, intensifying as the long announced 2014 withdrawal of international forces grew nearer. In the global policy debate, the dominant analysis placed Afghanistan at the center—the so-called 'heart'—of a larger pan-Asian region whose fate depends on Afghan stability. This book, by contrast, situates Afghanistan at the margin of three regional security complexes—South Asia, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf—each characterized by deep security contentions. These region-specific dynamics, in turn, inform the engagement of the states of the neighborhood in Afghanistan. Pakistan's and India's sustained Afghan engagement can be understood only in the context of their own enduring rivalry. Within Central Asia, security cooperation is hampered by competition for regional supremacy, with each country seeking support from Global Powers, a dynamic reflected in their half-hearted roles in Afghanistan. In the Persian Gulf, both Iran and Saudi Arabia fight for economic and political influence, mirrored in their Afghan engagements.

The dominant analytical perspective is of Afghanistan as the 'core' of a larger conflict formation tied together by various transnational networks with **(p.2)** the potential to mobilize across borders (Rubin 1998, 2006b; Rubin and Armstrong 2002). Edmund Herzig (2000) discerns a 'negative sub-regional dynamic,' whereby the 'region' of which Afghanistan is part has acquired a permanent identity as a Regional Conflict Formation tied together by transnational militant, criminal, and economic networks. Evidence is found in the wars in Afghanistan and Tajikistan (1992–7), Islamist rebellion in Uzbekistan, and the dominant role of non-state actors in these conflicts (Rubin 2006b). Interaction in the neighborhood, and relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors, depend therefore on the extent to which states' decisions to cooperate are shaped by threats from non-state actors, especially trans-boundary ones. In this framework trans-border social networks are the most potent actors—deciding the outcome of the escalation of conflicts—and are subject to harnessing for peace and stability. The weaker the states, the greater the potential for transnational actors to destabilize the region as a whole. It would therefore be natural that states with religious, ethnic, and tribal ties would cooperate to combat what they would define as crime and militancy.

Afghanistan is both a source of conflict with potentially contagious effects and a possible focus for neighborly cooperation. Given that stabilization of this unstable 'core' is a shared concern, patterns that govern the region would naturally lead more towards amity and cooperation than enmity between states. Cooperation would not only curb the destructive behavior of non-state actors, but could also lead to positive externalities, such as economic dividends to neighboring countries. An influential report published in early 2001, with Barnett Rubin as the lead author, including President Ashraf Ghani as a contributor (alongside William Maley, Ahmed Rashid, and Olivier Roy), codifies

the Heart of Asia perspective. The 'transnational links are too deep to be untangled and will have to be transformed,' argue the authors. Hence, 'it would be a mistake to analyze it solely or even primarily in terms of the political differences between the current protagonists,' and a 'more desirable policy goal would be reconstructing the country as part of the interstate and economic structure of an entire region' (Rubin et al. 2001). According to this line, Afghanistan would be transformed into a land bridge, a hub for trade and transit in the region—what the US administration envisioned as a 'New Silk Road,' a term that the Chinese later adopted as their own.

The concept behind the 'Heart of Asia' approach is characterized by two major flaws. First, it underestimates the potential among states—even when they share a concern for dangers emanating from non-state actors—for eschewing cooperation. It overlooks factors that shape relations between states: some durable **(p.3)** and tangible, such as geography and history; others intangible and changing, such as national interest, ambitions for power, and economic rivalry. Terrorism, extremism, and criminal trafficking of narcotics and arms certainly present threats for all countries of the wider neighborhood surrounding Afghanistan. Secondly, by assuming that there is a larger region with a common interest in cooperative security, the 'Heart of Asia' and 'New Silk Road' visions overlook the security dynamics within the constituent regions of the area. Yet it is within sub-regions that states are locked into durable patterns of enmity or amity. Interactions between states within regional complexes, rather than the actions of non-state actors, should be the basis when analyzing what dictates conflict and cooperation dynamics in the neighborhood.

An alternative conceptual approach analyzes regional cooperation mainly by focusing on the agency of states, recognizing that states—even when cooperation would benefit them all—may find themselves locked into a logic of noncooperation, wherein patterns of amity and enmity have taken on an imminent or existential character. This approach draws on the notion of the Regional Security Complex developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, which takes as its point of departure the argument that geographical proximity defines patterns of security interdependence, since most states fear their neighbors more than they do distant powers (Buzan and Wæver 2003). The original definition of a Security Complex is 'a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another' (Buzan 1983). A revised definition, in Buzan and Wæver's book *Regions and Powers*, lays out security complexes as 'a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another' (Buzan and Wæver 2003). It follows that states are prime actors driving cooperation or conflict; that security concerns override other issues and often take on an existential character; and that the inherent dynamics, and composition, of regions are

remarkably robust over time. In this context Afghanistan lies at the intersection of three regional security complexes, drawing in actors from countries in each of these, with an overlay of fluctuating Global Power interest.

This latter perspective engenders counter-intuitive insights for policy engagement. A key conclusion is that engagement in Afghanistan by each of its neighbors is not first and foremost a reflection of its bilateral relations with Afghanistan, but rather of concerns within its respective region. The implication for policy is that neighbors' interference in the Afghan conflict can only be **(p.4)** addressed by resolving tensions within each region. Most international efforts of the early twenty-first century have run contrary to this implication, rather accepting the premise that Afghanistan is at the center—with the potential to be the very heart—of a large interconnected South-Central Asian region.

Our basic conclusions are linked to several observations: that security thinking in this part of the world is traditional, privileging hard national security concerns; that most states hold security concerns of an existential nature (and that involvement of Global Powers often exacerbates tensions within the regional complexes in question). The result contradicts the dominant analysis in the scholarly literature and current policy processes, which takes Kabul as the prime referent when examining the impact of its neighbors, assuming a priori that Afghanistan is a central issue for its neighbors. There is a strong tendency, among Afghan and international observers alike, to see the country as a victim of forces beyond its control, surrounded by neighbors shrewdly manipulating Afghan politics. Our analysis provides an alternative, where Afghanistan is peripheral to the regional security dynamics in which its neighbors find themselves embroiled, yet they pursue their objectives in interaction with Afghanistan's domestic political forces.

The basis for investigation will be established in this brief introduction, where we lay out Afghanistan's recent political history, placing the country in a neighborhood of shifting political entities. We then turn to the analytical framework, before concluding with an overview of the book's structure.

Afghanistan in its Region

Geographically, Afghanistan is at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East.[1] External bureaucracies, in pursuit of clear geographic divisions, may place Afghanistan in one of the three regions, while area experts may argue that it has strong affinities with all of them. The borders of present-day Afghanistan reflect the need, from the mid-1800s, for what is commonly referred to as a 'buffer state' between the British and Russian empires (Partem 1983). From the south, the British sought to expand the territory under their control towards a defensible border, the so-called 'forward policy' (Jenkins 1986). To the north, the Russians sought to solidify and expand their control over Central Asia. Tensions between the two empires intensified throughout the

latter part of the nineteenth century. The buffer state started to materialize in the late 1870s with the Gandamak Treaty, which concluded the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878–9). In 1895, the establishment of the Wakhan corridor, **(p.5)** a narrow arm through rather hostile mountain territory, which extended Afghanistan to the Chinese border, brought the buffer logic to completion (Rowe 2010).

Afghanistan maintained its status as a buffer state for much of the twentieth century. The deals of the late 1800s inherently made Afghan rulers dependent on the two neighboring empires, on Britain in particular (Ghani 1990). In 1919 the Afghan king, receiving military support from the new Russian government (soon to become the Soviet Union), launched a war against the British. The main outcome of the third Anglo-Afghan war (1919) was Afghanistan's regaining the right to formulate its own foreign policy. But the pattern—since the turn of the century—persisted, whereby the northern neighbor, Russia, sought to counterbalance British influence in Afghanistan. The Afghan response was a careful strategy of balancing (*bi-tarafi* in Dari), a form of non-alignment that characterized the country's foreign policy well into the 1970s (Adamec 1991). Interestingly, in the period between the two world wars, Afghanistan sought independence from the two major blocs by bringing in a third party, the Germans. During the Second World War, Afghanistan settled for neutrality. By 1947 the regional context had changed dramatically, as the British withdrew from India, and Pakistan emerged as Afghanistan's neighbor to the immediate south. The US stepped into the vacuum, cultivating an alliance with Pakistan. The Afghans insisted on *bitarafi* (Dupree 1980; Newell 1972). Acceptance of Soviet and US assistance was carefully balanced.

By the early 1970s, the balancing between superpowers had started to falter. In 1973 Daud Khan—who had been Afghanistan's prime minister for a decade, forced to step down in 1963 as a result of his belligerent attitude to Pakistan—took power in a bloodless coup that relied on support within the bureaucracy and the army. Importantly, the 1973 coup had the support also of the Parcham faction within the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which was more moderate than the rival Khalq faction and had close ties to the Soviet leadership (Ziring 1987). Parcham support was instrumental in Daud's ability to stabilize the situation after the coup, hand in hand with an increasing reliance on the Soviets for development support, military expertise, and hardware. Even if Daud did try to keep the US aboard, the Afghan balance was tilted seriously in the Soviets' favor (Westad 2005).

Growing Islamist movements also concerned Daud. Soon after the coup, a group of Islamist leaders fled to Pakistan, where they were welcomed by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who despite the ideological distance between them saw **(p.6)** the Afghan Islamists as an instrument for undermining Daud's regime. The core of the Islamist movement unsuccessfully staged cross-border attacks. They would

most likely have remained a footnote to history had it not been for the fact that after the 1979 Soviet intervention their ties to the Pakistani leadership and military intelligence became a key resource; Pakistan selected the leaders of the exile-based resistance groups from among them. Daud had become increasingly worried about the Soviet tilt. He tried to limit the influence of the Parchamis in his own regime, and by 1977 had resorted to outright purges of communists of all brands (including the Khalq faction of the PDPA and the China-oriented *Shula-e Jawed*) (Dupree 1980; Hyman 1992). Members of the PDPA felt increasing pressure, and quietly started planning a coup, against the strong advice of Soviet interlocutors. Confrontation between Daud and the PDPA escalated, and in April 1978 the PDPA—relying on supporters within the army—instigated a successful coup. Reluctantly, the Soviets backed the new regime financially and with advisers. Reluctance escalated into deep concern as the Khalqi power-holders proved not only politically impatient but also willing to use force to get reforms underway, which resulted in a number of spontaneous uprisings in various parts of the country (Shahrani 1984).

The year 1979 witnessed dramatic events. In February, the Shah in Iran lost power to an alliance led by the revolutionary Islamist Khomeini, and the US lost its major platform in that part of the world. In Moscow there was increasing concern that the communist revolution in neighboring Afghanistan was going astray. By the end of the year, the Soviets intervened militarily in order to replace the Khalqi leadership there with Babrak Karmal, their favorite from the Parcham branch. The Soviets had mistakenly thought that their intervention would cause only modest international reaction (Bradsher 1999). The rest of the world, and the US in particular, interpreted the invasion as an offensive maneuver, and possibly as a step towards securing access to the Arabian Sea. There were different factors weighing on the Soviet decision to intervene, but the motivation was overwhelmingly defensive. First and foremost was the perceived need to install a more moderate leadership that could foster broader public support for reform, in place of the violent repression under the Khalq, thereby saving the first communist revolution in a neighboring country from self-destruction (Kornienko 1994; Westad 1994).

Overnight, Afghanistan had become a major battleground of the Cold War, and it figured at the very center of regional politics. From the north, the Soviets were directly involved militarily. Looking south, Pakistan, which had **(p.7)** received the largest share of refugees, filled the vacuum resulting from Iran’s turning its back on the US, and became the main bridgehead for support to the Afghan resistance. To the west, an unconsolidated Iranian regime was virtually overwhelmed by its war with Iraq (1980–88), and despite its sympathy with Afghan resistance, it limited its active support to radical Shia groups, lest it lose Soviet sympathy in its struggle with Iraq. China, also bordering Afghanistan and a key actor in the larger neighborhood, declined to engage, despite approaches by Afghan Maoists, by no means a negligible force in Afghan politics in the late

1970s (Emadi 1993). For Afghanistan, the 1980s were a decade characterized by the confrontation between two superpowers, whose engagement transformed the Afghan political landscape and introduced new forms of organization and warfare. But as borne out both by Iran's reluctance to engage and by Pakistan's role as the broker for assistance to the resistance, neighboring states—albeit informed by their own security concerns—played important roles.

As Afghanistan entered the 1990s, the superpower overlay was vanishing. The Soviet Union withdrew its forces in February 1989, after several years of preparation. Soon after, the US started to wind down its engagement. By autumn 1991 the Soviet Union was falling apart; by the following spring the Afghan communists under Dr. Najib were forced to step down. In the absence of credible external support the regime fragmented, as various factions formed alliances with favorite groups within the resistance. The pivotal event was when the regime's main militia commander, Abdul Rashid Dostum, struck a deal with groups within the resistance (Rubin 2002). By then Afghan groups had largely identified themselves in ethnic terms, and with a fairly clear pattern of support from various neighboring powers: Uzbekistan supporting Dostum's forces (the so-called Uzbek militia); Russia maintaining contact with various groups of northern origin, particularly *Jamiat-e Islami* (dominantly Tajik); Iran throwing its weight between the new umbrella of Shia and Hazara groups, the *Hezb-e Wahdat* (Unity Party); and Pakistan keeping up its ties with the Pashtun-dominated groups that had been set up in exile, notably the Islamist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (Roy 1995). The vision of a liberated Afghanistan that would serve as a land bridge between landlocked Central Asian states and South Asia was soon overtaken by brutal ethnic warfare. Undoubtedly, in the absence of the superpower confrontation, the Afghan power dynamic was strong enough to reproduce itself in new formats, yet neighboring states significantly contributed to its exacerbation.

It was against this background that the Taliban movement emerged in the autumn of 1994. It did not take long for Pakistan to throw itself behind this new **(p.8)** actor—contributing money, arms, military advice—thereby playing an instrumental role in the Taliban's sweeping success which culminated in its takeover of the capital, Kabul, as early as autumn 1996 (Harpviken 1997). The international community isolated the Taliban regime, which was recognized only by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, and this served further to encourage the Taliban–al-Qaeda alliance (van Linschoten and Kuehn 2012). This did not deter Pakistan from continuing its support, hopeful that the Taliban would eventually gain control and constitute the 'friendly government' in Kabul that was seen as pivotal in relation to the threat from India. Other neighboring states, for varying reasons, were suspicious of the Taliban, whose alliance with al-Qaeda involved also hosting various ill-assorted resistance movements from the larger region. Yet while continuing to support their respective allies on the Afghan battleground, the neighbors (except Pakistan) can at best be described

as lukewarm, testifying to the extent to which other security concerns figured more prominently on their agendas.

The terror attacks on 11 September 2001 led to the US war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. By this time, the various anti-Taliban forces in the country had joined the so-called Northern Alliance, most prominently composed of the Tajik-dominated *Jamiat-e Islami*, the Uzbek-dominated *Jombush-e Milli*, and the Hazara-dominated *Hezb-e Wahdat*. The alliance was one of necessity; mutual trust was in short supply since the enormities of the 1990s, when all these groups at one time or another had fought each other and had committed grave atrocities against civilians on ethnic or religious grounds. Externally, the three main groups had the support of Russia, Uzbekistan, Iran (in that order), and increasingly of India. All neighboring states declared their support of the US-led effort, although in hindsight it seems clear that Pakistan pursued a double track, maintaining Taliban capacity while at the same time sharing intelligence with the interventionists. At the very least, the gradually expanding international military presence from 2001 onwards served as a lid on the direct engagement of neighboring states against militant groups, although it is clear that old relationships were cultivated, in the expectation of the day when international forces would leave.

At Bonn in late November and early December 2001, when the initial settlement talks were held, all the neighbors were present, although not at the table (Dobbins 2008). India, Iran, and Russia, the trio backing the Northern Alliance, played an important role in securing the parties' acquiescence to a compromise deal placing Hamid Karzai at the helm of the transitional administration. The level of commitment from other countries, **(p.9)** notably Pakistan, was less evident. Nonetheless, within weeks, Afghanistan's six neighbors gathered in its capital to draft the Kabul Declaration on Good-Neighborly Relations. This document, signed on 22 December 2001 and endorsed by the Security Council on Christmas Day, signified a strong will to cultivate more constructive interaction in the neighborhood. The fundamental principle was inviolability of Afghanistan's sovereignty. The signatories pledged 'constructive and supportive bilateral relationships based on the principles of territorial integrity, mutual respect, friendly relations, cooperation and non-interference in each other's internal affairs' (Kabul Declaration on Good-Neighborly Relations 2002). Over the next few years, however, with a resurgent Taliban and numerous other obstacles facing Afghanistan's fragile government and its international godfathers, neighborly relations got limited attention. The US, as the dominant external force, pursued a line in which coordinated multilateral initiatives lost out to bilateralism (Beeson 2006). Afghanistan's neighborhood was no exception. For the neighbors, however, it was a major limitation that Afghanistan's government was in no position to guarantee that its territory, hosting the world's

strongest military power, could not be used as a launching pad for military attacks in the neighborhood.

By 2008, approaching the end of the Bush administration, it was commonly acknowledged that a 'regional approach' was a necessary step to achieving stability in Afghanistan. The first iteration was the so-called AfPak strategy, launched as part of the new Obama administration's review in March 2009, which effectively argued that the two countries had to be approached as a singular threat ('one theater'), owing to both the influence that Pakistan had on internal dynamics within Afghanistan, and the presence of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in both countries. By November 2011, the US had concluded that limiting the regional approach to Pakistan was not enough. Other countries—India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Central Asian republics; even Russia, China, and Turkey—had stakes in the stability of Afghanistan. The net had to be cast wider; a new concept was needed. In this iteration, Afghanistan was seen as the Heart of Asia, a metaphor adopted from the poem of the philosopher–poet Muhammad Iqbal Lahori (1877–1938), leader of the All-India Muslim League and fundamental to the conception of modern Pakistan. Opening the 'Istanbul Conference for Afghanistan' in November 2011, President Karzai recited: 'Asia is a body of water and soil, where the Afghan nation is the heart; its prosperity brings prosperity to Asia, and its decay brings decay to Asia' (quoted by Karzai 2011; see also Ruttig 2011).

(p.10) Reinvigorated commitment manifested itself in an approach based on two premises. Firstly, as discussed above, it saw the mobilization of transnational networks and shared identities as key to fostering common security, countering the threat of cross-boundary crime and militancy (Rubin 1998; Rubin and Armstrong 2002). Furthermore, the widened regional approach assumed that there was a large region—a Heart of Asia—whose states and peoples had compatible security interests. Not only would cooperation limit the destructive behavior of non-state actors; it could also have positive externalities. Most concretely, with the New Silk Road, the US envisaged Afghanistan as the big connector of the region. By late fall 2014, with international military forces departing Afghanistan, neither the New Silk Road nor the related Heart of Asia template seemed to depict relations in the larger neighborhood particularly well. In this book, we argue that the ambitious ideas were poorly rooted in the realities of the neighborhood, where states are locked into the logic of their respective regions and state leaders remain preoccupied with regime survival and conventional conceptions of national security. A war-torn Afghanistan is a distant cry from possessing the power needed to set in motion a new pattern of cooperation throughout the wider neighborhood.

Afghanistan's leadership, struggling to keep the Taliban in check and worried that a fragile government coalition might collapse, remains preoccupied with its neighbors, and not surprisingly, given the role these have all had in supporting

various armed groups over the years. The standard narrative, however, easily exaggerates the external causes of Afghanistan's troubles at the cost of appreciating their internal roots, as in the rather common assertion that the Afghan Taliban is nothing but a Pakistani marionette. Furthermore, the idea that Afghanistan can constitute the heart of a larger regional concert not only wildly exaggerates Afghanistan's influence and capacity, but it also misreads its relations with its neighbors, for all of whom Afghanistan is, at best, of secondary importance. But, even if secondary, neighbors do have concerns. While none of them regard Afghanistan itself as a major threat, most have had concerns with the massive presence of a US military force in the country, which quite realistically could engage throughout the region, as it did in Pakistan. Ultimately, however, the main worry in relation to Afghanistan is probably that of a full implosion, partly because it could become a free harbor for criminals and militants, but primarily because of the challenge it poses to state sovereignty and regime survival. The ultimate irony is that while most of Afghanistan's neighbors stand to lose massively from the worst-case scenario, they also want to hedge their bets should it materialize; and they thereby risk making it a self-fulfilling prophecy.

(p.11) Conceptual Framework

The Regional Security Complexes (RSC) approach has its roots in work by Barry Buzan dating back to the early 1980s (see Buzan 1983), and was later refined in joint works by Buzan and Ole Wæver (Buzan and Wæver 1998, 2003). To qualify as a Regional Security Complex, a group of states need to have a certain level of security interdependence, both sufficient in form to establish them as a linked set, and to differentiate them from surrounding security regions. A basic assumption is that geographic proximity matters for security, in the sense that states (or other referent actors) adjacent to each other do not have the option of disengagement, whereas distant actors do. In its 2003 definition, a Regional Security Complex is 'a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another' (Buzan and Weaver 2003).

From this perspective, geographic adjacency matters. The definition emphasizes interdependence; mutual security interdependence of a RSC is distinctly more significant than that between any of these units and those outside it. Regions are defined as mutually exclusive; one cannot be a member of multiple regional security complexes. Accordingly, superpowers—and great powers—may play important roles in RSCs other than their own, but this does not make them constituent members; they can always withdraw. Rather, the theory favors multilevel analysis, placing the regional level both in relation to a subordinate level of 'units,' and a superordinate level of interregional and global dynamics. Buzan and Wæver's (2003) insistence that RSC membership is mutually exclusive sets their definition apart from others, most notably that of a Regional

Security Complex provided by Lake and Morgan (1997), which allows for multiple memberships, hence also overlaps between regions. Buzan and Wæver see this as a confusion of levels, and as contrary to their ambition of formulating a theory of regional security that can be applied not only to one region at a time, but to the analysis of the entire global security structure (and, by implication, to comparison between regions). In the Buzan and Wæver scheme, membership hinges on the following key criteria: geographic proximity, relative durability of relations, and shared security concerns. Superpowers rarely meet these key criteria of inclusion, and when they do, it is only in the region in which they are geographically embedded (where they are also likely to be dominant).

The first part of the definition entails an important modification of earlier definitions, emphasizing 'securitization,' the constructivist assumption that what **(p.12)** drives security dynamics is not threats in any objective sense, but perceptions of and dominant narratives about threats (i.e. Buzan 1983). In the 2003 book by Buzan and Wæver, analysis of securitization plays a marginal role (although they themselves see it as essential to the theory). In the following, we will similarly presume that threats are, at least in part, socially constructed, without attempting to address, within each constituent state, processes of securitization.

It is noticeable that in early versions of the definition, the 'state' was the referent object for security, whereas in later versions it has been replaced by 'units,' which may encompass various types of non-state actors as well as multilateral entities. But the 2003 book, which presents a global map of security complexes, is overly state-centered. The authors acknowledge this as a possible weakness of their analysis—although not of the theory—but at the same time argue that states 'remain de facto at the center of much of the structure of global security' (Buzan and Wæver 2003). A critique of the RSC approach would therefore be that it fails to include the specific character of transnational terrorism. To this, Buzan and Wæver respond that even though transnational terrorism may rely on global networks and propagate a global agenda, its actors are firmly embedded in specific regional security agendas—hence the main effects of 9/11, for example, are seen in the dynamics of the South Asian and Middle Eastern complexes, as well as in the US engagement in those regions and with the great powers (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Territoriality is resilient, and even new security threats—associated with globalizing processes—are best understood within an RSC framework.

Regional security complexes are of different types. Mainly, they are distinguished along two dimensions. Firstly, there is the polarity question: are they unipolar (containing a great power); bipolar (dominated by rivalry between two units); or multipolar. Polarity has major implications for regional security dynamics. Secondly, and relatedly, there are variations in the crucial amity–enmity variable. Buzan and Wæver suggest a continuum in the maturing of a

Regional Security Complex, from conflict formation to security regime to security community (Buzan and Wæver 2003). In regional conflict formation, enmity dominates, there is no mutual trust, and no institutions can effectively constrain the use of force (e.g. the Middle East, South Asia). In a regional security regime, mutual suspicion and fear of violence dominate politics, but are kept in check by working institutions (e.g. Southeast Asia). In a regional security community, there is a mutual understanding of security interdependence and actors do not perceive the use of force as an option (e.g. the EU, North America). Not all regions fit neatly into one category; the Commonwealth of Independent **(p.13)** States (CIS), for example, combines elements of formation and regime, with the imprint of Russian struggle to establish hegemony.

According to Buzan and Wæver, geographical proximity defines the patterns and intensity of security interdependence, and most states fear their neighbors more than distant powers (Buzan and Wæver 2003). In the Buzan and Wæver view, relationships follow a pattern of enmity and amity, whereas in the alternative conceptualization of Allison and Jonson (2001a), patterns of suspicion and friendship inform dynamics of conflict or cooperation. Both sets of authors argue that dynamics in a given security complex tend to be so strong that external powers intervening in the region fall in line with the existing pattern of power relations and dividing lines. Insisting on exclusive membership in Regional Security Complexes, as well as geographic adjacency, Buzan and Wæver see Global Powers as external to any region (with the exception of that power's home region). But an even more important premise for this line is that Buzan and Wæver see engagement of Global Powers in regions outside their immediate neighborhood fluctuating greatly over time, although even the full withdrawal of a Global Power from a particular region does not fundamentally alter its composition and dynamic.

Buzan and Wæver argue that 'where there is rivalry among the Global Powers, a regional security complex in conflict formation mode draws in outside interventions along the lines of its own internal split' (Buzan and Wæver 2003). This explains the pattern of alliance between the countries of the regional complex with Global Powers as a reflection of the power relations within. If Buzan and Wæver see the global and the regional levels as two separate entities in analytical terms, Lake and Morgan provide an alternative view by conflating the two levels into one. In their position, great powers can be counted as members of a remote region where they project force (Lake and Morgan 1997; Morgan 1997). To Lake and Morgan, Global Powers should be understood as part of a regional complex if their involvement is central to the great powers' foreign policy and to their conception of security, as well as to the dynamics of the regional complex. Geographic proximity is no longer a criterion for membership, as external powers may be present through influence and power, despite their ability to withdraw.

Adding to the complexity, though, it is not only Global Powers that impose themselves on regions: regional dynamics also draw them in. The interaction is two-way, argues Raimo Väyrynen in a 1984 article, because major powers 'are also affected by peripheral regional conflicts in which they have become entangled in a competitive fashion' (Väyrynen 1984). This type of mutually **(p. 14)** utilitarian interaction, between regional actors and Global Powers, entails opportunities and threats of its own. If a dominant power in the region, propped up by a great power, provides assurances against destabilizing changes, a stable regional order could emerge. Just as likely, the 'sub-imperialist relationship' may be opposed by another great power (or powers) who will try to balance this through its own channels for alignment and influence (Väyrynen 1984). The latter is very much a pattern familiar from the Cold War, which, in many parts of the world, was a 'hot war,' as the US and the Soviet Union fought through allied states and proxy groups (Westad 2005). But Global Power competition did not come to an end with the conclusion of the Cold War, and as the unipolar order of the immediate post-Cold War period gradually evolves into some form of multipolar reality, we see new potential for Global Power contests to determine the fates of regions distant from the main centers of power.

The participation—especially if hegemonic—of a great power in any regional complex has a number of effects. Perhaps most importantly, it undercuts the possibility of collaboration and integration, as it provides incentives for balancing behavior and alignments among regional states. The durability of Global Power engagement also varies, depending on the basic drivers of that engagement. For the US, for example, to leave the Levant entirely to itself, given their strong identification with Israel, is virtually unthinkable. More generally, with Global Powers depending on energy resources, we see that a region rich in such resources inevitably draws in different Global Powers. Again, to reiterate Väyrynen's point, a situation wherein a Global Power depends on critical resource supplies from a minor country in a region far away—think of the US and Saudi Arabia—is also one with ample room for the latter to pull the former into the regional puzzle.

From the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, Buzan and Wæver define Afghanistan as an insulator between distinct RSCs: South Asia, the Middle East, and the CIS. For them, the buffer concept is reserved for a state (or a 'mini-complex,' a set of states) within an RSC that keeps rival powers apart. An insulator is located at the boundary between complexes, keeping them apart—it is 'a zone of indifference' (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Other insulators in the present-day global system are Burma, Turkey, and the Sahel states. As an insulator, Afghanistan constitutes an entity of its own in a world divided into regions. Afghanistan 'draws in neighboring states, but its internal dynamics are strong enough to keep the larger dynamics separate' (Buzan and Wæver 2003). This proposition is rather bold: not only does it imply that **(p.15)** domestic dynamics were driving the war of the 1980s, when Afghanistan became one of

the major battlegrounds of the so-called Cold War; it also suggests that virtual insulation is robust and likely to endure.

The Afghan state itself is a fragile construction. Historically, central power has relied on a balance of tribal groups, with limited state penetration outside the major cities. The country's conflicts in the 1970s, instigated by a small group of impatient educated reformers with strong ideological convictions, brought state power to large parts of the country, but mainly in the form of armed contestation. With war came new forms of organization, new technology (much of it military), and international exposure, which—in the absence of institutions—meant a fragmented and conflicted polity. Any claim to central power, in this situation, went hand in hand with external sources of revenue, from the USSR in the 1980s, from the US and its allies after 2001. By implication, what we have is a state where power at the center is weak, but where contenders are comparatively strong, with ample room for external agents to seek influence by teaming up with actors that challenge the center in one way or another.

The Buzan and Wæver proposition, discussed above, runs contrary to the widespread optimism of the immediate post-Cold War years—reinvigorated almost two decades later with the New Silk Road initiative—when it was hoped that the newly independent Central Asian states would be linked to South Asia via an Afghan land bridge, and escape from their dependence on Russia. A peaceful Afghanistan would allow development of new transportation infrastructure, including a gas pipeline linking Central Asia to the subcontinent (Rashid 2000). Writing now, two and a half decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and a very long decade after intervention in Afghanistan, we can safely conclude that Afghanistan has not developed in the hoped-for way. Following the logic of Buzan and Wæver's regional security complex approach, we should not find this too surprising: the surrounding regions have strong internal dynamics, and Afghanistan is virtually doomed to serve as a shock absorber where the tensions inherent in the surrounding regional complexes interact with existing domestic tensions to deepen the conflict.

Main Argument and Organization

The remainder of this book contains four chapters. The next three chapters examine each of the three security complexes—South Asia, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf—in greater detail. These chapters adopt a common structure, **(p. 16)** focusing first on the dynamics within the regional complexes and then the role of external actors (Global Powers in particular), before laying out implications for engagement with Afghanistan. The fifth and final chapter re-examines the proposition of Afghanistan as a connector for the countries of the wider neighborhood, goes on to review post-2001 policy initiatives, and—taking Kabul as the point of reference in examining prospective change within each of

the surrounding regions—identifies the main factors of change and discusses what are the most likely trajectories ahead.

Chapter 2 examines dynamics within the South Asian regional complex, how the two regional rivals, India and Pakistan, draw in Global Powers, and how their relationship is projected onto Afghanistan. The durability of the conflict between India and Pakistan, which is at the core of the South Asia Security Complex, is attributed to historical legacies over territory, as well as to irreconcilable differences over national identity ever since Pakistan, the homeland for Muslims on the subcontinent, was separated from a secular, multicultural, multi-religious India, based on a two-nation theory effecting the 1947 Partition. New factors, such as dispute over the sharing of water from the Indus River, exacerbate tensions. Economic cooperation, despite new opportunities, proves hard to bring about. The relative asymmetry between the two countries increases rapidly, with India outweighing Pakistan by far in terms of all measures of strength (territory, population, economy, armed forces), while Pakistan is weakening owing to multiple internal challenges: rising militancy, social fragmentation, and economic woes.

We argue that while increasing asymmetry could have transformed the Indian–Pakistani relationship, the rivalry persists as a result of interdependence, economically and in terms of security. Despite its relative ascendancy, India's claim to regional hegemony remains contested, and its pursuit of global recognition is constrained by Pakistan's challenge. The chapter then examines how the security dynamics within the South Asian region have been influenced by the rivalries of Global Powers, before examining how India's and Pakistan's engagements in Afghanistan primarily reflect their own security aspirations. For each country, the main rationale is to check the influence of the other, furthering their regional proxy war on the soil of Afghanistan, albeit indirectly and with unconventional tactics. In Pakistan, influence over Afghanistan is seen as essential to security, first and foremost for maintaining strategic depth against India, but also to maintain the current border (the disputed Durand Line), to quash aspirations for a united Pashtunistan, and to foster economic and military cooperation with the US. For India, engagement **(p.17)** in Afghanistan, which has been stepped up massively since 2001, is first and foremost about constraining Pakistan's influence, turning public opinion against its main rival, while insulating itself from the dangers of drugs and fundamentalist Islam and gaining international recognition as a donor.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the Central Asia security complex, and on the lack of integration in a region with strong and weak states locked into rivalry, each seeking to use Global Powers for its own benefit. The chapter argues that rivalry between Central Asian states, fear of loss of sovereignty, and the need to balance the interests of Global Powers undermine regional integration. By implication, these factors also preclude a unified regional position towards Afghanistan. The

five Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—share concern about threats to their regime stability and national security, such as terrorism, extremism, and criminality, driven by both internal and external factors. Despite these common security concerns, and owing to several factors, they prefer bilateral over multilateral approaches to cooperation. Those factors include 1) the skewed distribution of power and economic resources among the Central Asian countries; 2) the nature of their own state-building processes, and their forms of political leadership; and 3) the fear of loss of sovereignty, which Central Asian countries have guarded jealously since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Central Asia chapter then examines how the engagement of external actors —Russia, the US, and China—creates incentives that reify bilateralism and foster centrifugal tendencies. The Central Asian countries are active players, which in essence use external rivalries to their own advantage, playing on contradictions for their own benefits. This strategy translates into a multi-vector foreign policy where each seeks to remain on good terms with all the major powers, whose rivalries they play on to gain strategic goods for themselves and against each other. The asymmetric rivalry of the five Central Asian countries, with their need to balance the interests of external actors, has resulted in a strategy of insulation towards Afghanistan. Afghanistan represents both a threat and an opportunity. While the potential spill-over of instability in terms of trans-border terrorism, extremism, and trafficking is a concern for Central Asian states, this is peripheral to, and not at the core of, the dynamic of the Central Asian Regional Security Complex.

The Persian Gulf, seen in the Buzan and Wæver scheme as a sub-region of the larger Middle Eastern region, is the focus of Chapter 4. The security dynamic within this complex has traditionally been tri-polar—involving Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia—with the 2003 US intervention effectively converting **(p.18)** Iraq from a major actor into a playing field for competition between the two remaining powers. Since then, the region has been characterized by the antagonistic relations between Iran, a rising power with hegemonic regional ambitions which is using the conflict over nuclear capability to its advantage, and a more insecure Saudi Arabia, which is forced to rely on the security guarantees of external powers against both regional and domestic threats. The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is analyzed along several dimensions, the interplay of which has a major impact on each country’s approach to the other: 1) domestic security threats, including insurgencies; 2) competing ideological orientations, rooted in national and religious identities and claims to the leadership of the Islamic community; and 3) economic competition, particularly over the production and pricing of oil and gas.

The chapter then analyzes how the involvement of great powers in the Persian Gulf Complex weakens possibilities for integration; how the US, China, and Russia use the strife between the main countries of the region; and how the Global Powers, in turn, are used by Iran and Saudi Arabia for the purposes of pursuing their own rivalry. Afghanistan becomes a terrain over which Iran and Saudi Arabia project their ideological ambitions and seek security safeguards. Each competes to shape Afghan domestic politics and future governance, in large part by attempting to curb the influence of the other. They use their connections with various ethnic and religious groups, propagating their distinct religious doctrines, increasing economic ties and attempting to influence insurgent groups. At the same time, both seek legitimacy and relevance by maneuvering to become part of the solution to the Afghan security problem. The chapter offers some thoughts on factors that could potentially change the dynamics of the Persian Gulf Complex.

The fifth and concluding chapter offers a summary, drawing heavily on comparisons across the three regions as examined within the framework put forward in Chapter 1. The chapter lays out the main findings, with an emphasis on those factors that could fundamentally alter the dynamic, or even the membership, of the respective regions. The chapter takes a critical look at the basic proposition that Afghanistan serves as a connector for the countries of the wider neighborhood, examining this proposition from an identity perspective, an economic perspective, as well as a security perspective. Next, the chapter reviews post-2001 policy initiatives, contrasting the dominant initiatives that see Afghanistan as the connector within the Heart of Asia with alternative approaches that build on Afghanistan’s traditional balancing between multiple centers of power, and keeping distance in the form of nonalignment **(p.19)** or neutrality. Finally, the chapter revisits the unfolding processes of change within each of the three regions surrounding Afghanistan, taking the vantage point of Kabul in asking what possible changes this could bring about in the relationship with each neighboring country and the regions of which they form a part, as well as whether we may see a full transformation of the very regional architecture of the neighborhood. The book concludes with a few reflections on how Afghanistan, given its relative powerlessness in a region fraught with tension and open conflicts, can act—across multiple levels from the domestic to the global, and within diverse thematic domains from the cultural via the economic to hardcore security—to bring about a gradual but sustained peace for the country and its citizens. **(p.20)**

Notes:

(1.) This section draws on K. B. Harpviken 2010b, ‘Caught in the middle? Regional perspectives on Afghanistan,’ *Comparative Social Research*, 27, 277–305.