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# Afghanistan, Pakistan and Democratic Sustainability

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Examining the Afghanistan-Pakistan Region

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With a shift in the balance of political powers, Afghanistan is facing a crisis in which several foreign nations are questioning if Afghanistan can sustain its fledgling political economy. Afghanistan remains the least stable nation in the Middle East, in the midst of the crises with Iraq and Syria, which can be attributed to the accelerated withdrawal of primarily American military forces from the country. This withdrawal, however, is complicated by the ongoing conflict in the Ukraine. Currently, the only route NATO can use without having to face the destabilized Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, is the Northern Distribution Network.

With the Northern Distribution Network running through the Black Sea Coastal Region, Russia has an upper hand in determining how NATO can withdraw its hardware from Afghanistan. If the United States and NATO choose to retaliate against Putin for the Crimea conflict, Putin can halt any transport through the Russian controlled region of the Black Sea. Russia makes roughly \$1 billion a year for allowing the use of its routes to transport supplies.[1] If Russia chooses to close the Northern Distribution Network, the benefits of maintaining control over the Crimea Region may significantly outweigh the loss of revenue from closing the network. The cards are in Putin's hand, and NATO is going to be calling every bluff to secure their priorities. Afghanistan's fate ultimately may lie in the Kremlin's attitude towards the West.

With the impending exit of NATO forces on Afghanistan soil, the major concern is the counteraction that will ensue from Taliban militants. A real danger exists that the state of Taliban rule in Afghanistan that was present prior to US intervention will resume[2]. In recent months, since the planned removal of Western troops, Afghan forces have been faced with heavily casualties as a result of their battle with the Taliban[3]. If this is any indication of the Taliban's plans for an isolated Afghanistan in 2016, then we can anticipate significant losses in the near future. Conversely, U.S. Army Gen. John Campbell, who has been assessing the withdrawal of forces, believes that the Afghan National Security Forces are doing an effective job of denying the Taliban the ability to control areas including Helmand and Kunduz[4]. Campbell also explains that while reports last month indicated that the Taliban controlled a large part of Kunduz, the reality according to Campbell is that the Taliban is able to exaggerate the control they possess by use of the media[5]. Therefore, it is difficult to pin point what the exact reaction of the Taliban will be, due to conflicting perspectives. However Afghanistan needs to be prepared for the worst before NATO forces have completely exited the country at the end of 2016.