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Migration and Displacement Impacts of Afghan Transitions in 2014: Implications for Australia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. 2014 is expected to be a year of political, security, and economic transition in Afghanistan. Although the outcomes of these transitions are uncertain, current prognoses are generally downbeat. The unpredictability of the immediate future is already impacting migration decisions by Afghans, and instability and insecurity during and after 2014 are likely to exacerbate current migration and displacement trends, including with direct implications for Australia. Against this backdrop this paper reviews current research and analysis on prospects for Afghanistan during and after 2014, and considers their possible implications for migration and displacement inside the country, within the region, and further afield.
2. A number of variables are identified as influencing the security transition in Afghanistan after the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) withdrawal, notwithstanding the fact that a small part of the force may remain. One is the nature of the continuing engagement between ISAF and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). A second is the extent to which the ANSF will be able to fill the security gap, and most analysts think that it currently does not have adequate capacity. The third concerns levels of insurgency activity in Afghanistan, which have both intensified and spread geographically in recent years, with growing pressure on Kabul among the most significant manifestations of the past year.
3. A number of analysts suggest that the political transition in Afghanistan – and specifically the outcome of the April 2014 elections – may be more important than the security transition in determining peace and security in the foreseeable future. An unfair or contested election, or perceptions of such, may precipitate a cycle of conflict, deteriorating security, and capital flight. There is also the possibility, albeit slight, that the Taliban may become part of the political process. In addition, a fair election will be important to maintain confidence and commitment to Afghanistan among the international community. There are serious internal obstacles to fair elections, in part because regional powers could be expected to do what they can to influence outcomes in support of their respective strategic interests. However, these powers also have an interest in not further undermining regional stability.
4. Turning to the economic transition, most analysts predict a slowdown of the relatively strong growth (one which has been heavily contingent on the highly volatile annual wheat harvest) of the last few years as political and security uncertainties limit private-sector growth and undermine business confidence. The foreign troop withdrawal will also have a direct impact on annual growth and employment. Neither is it certain that Official Development Assistance (ODA) will continue at an adequate level to support continued development and growth.
5. The relationship between peace and security on the one hand, and displacement outcomes on the other, is not always 'linear' or direct. First, displacement trajectories will be affected by circumstances outside Afghanistan as much as by internal circumstances, in particular by political and popular attitudes towards refugees in Pakistan and Iran. Second, any new migration or displacement will take place against the backdrop of – and may be hard to distinguish from – a long tradition of labour migration to Pakistan and Iran. Third, it is important to recognize that people leaving Afghanistan over the next year or two are likely to be doing so for several reasons, and not necessarily exclusively because of insecurity or the direct threat of persecution. Finally, families may be reluctant to take the decision to opt for migration if life can be made tolerable without doing so.
6. Most studies and commentators expect that the most likely and most significant displacement outcome of the transitions in Afghanistan in 2014 will be more internal displacement in Afghanistan. One reason is a reluctance to move too far from their homes, especially for those who have already returned from exile. Second, for a variety of reasons that affect some groups more than others, the possibility and inclination to move to either Iran or Pakistan may

decrease over the coming years. Third, for a significant proportion of Afghans, internal displacement has become a fairly common survival strategy.

7. On balance, most published studies and commentators do not envisage massive new refugee flows to Iran or Pakistan, nor towards Central Asia, during or in the immediate aftermath of the 2014 transitions. In addition to changing policies and circumstances in Iran and Pakistan making these two traditional countries of destination less accessible, Pakistan and Iran have also become less attractive places to seek work, while security concerns in Pakistan may also put off potential refugees. In particular Afghan Hazaras have become victims of targeted violence in Baluchistan in recent months.
8. Three types of movement beyond Afghanistan's immediate hinterland are envisaged, and there is evidence that each of these has already begun to accelerate in anticipation of worsening conditions in Afghanistan over the next year. First, some ISAF troop contributing countries have developed immigration schemes for their former staff which may be left unemployed and unprotected from retaliation by anti-government elements. In December 2012, Australia put in place a policy on resettling locally engaged Afghan employees at risk of harm due to their employment in support of Australia's mission in Afghanistan. Second, there has been an increase in asylum applications by Afghans across the industrialized nations over the last year or two, with particular sharp increases in Turkey and Australia, as well as some European Union (EU) states.
9. Finally, in Australia there has been an increase of Afghan Hazaras in particular arriving as Irregular Maritime Arrivals (IMAs). To an extent these movements are supported by a small diaspora community formed by Hazara migration to Australia from the 1980s, including in the face of persecution by the Taliban. Today Hazaras find themselves at risk of persecution in Pakistan too; and uncertain about prospects in Afghanistan especially should the Taliban become part of the political settlement there or come to represent more of a threat to Hazaras in particular because of changing security conditions. Insecurity is also undermining a traditional cross-border livelihood strategy. This paper therefore concludes that for a combination of security, economic and political reasons, Afghan Hazaras are likely to remain a key IMA group in 2014 and beyond.

1. INTRODUCTION

The year 2014 will be a watershed for Afghanistan. President Karzai is due to step down in April 2014 and in the absence of an obvious candidate to replace him; his eventual successor may not be able to command sufficient allegiance to create a stable situation. Efforts are being made to involve the Taliban in the political process but the indications are that they will hope to gain a greater power base through a resort to arms, than they might secure through negotiations.

The planned withdrawal of a majority of the international forces present in Afghanistan by the end of 2014 is likely to compound insecurity and instability, and result in multiple power struggles across the country, with the emergence of fiefdoms of varying sizes. Confidence in the ability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to provide ambient security is mixed. Power can be expected to be continually contested.

Afghanistan's relatively strong recent economic growth is also expected to stall in 2014, as a direct result of the withdrawal of a large proportion of the international presence, but also indirectly as a result of business confidence being undermined by the unpredictable political and security situations.

These combined political, security and economic transitions are in turn likely to result in a humanitarian transition. There are concerns that progress made on respect for the human rights of women may stall or even reverse, particularly if the Taliban becomes part of the political process. Humanitarian access and safety is expected to reduce in certain areas in Afghanistan as a result of localized conflict. Far from there being a realistic prospect for durable solutions for Afghanistan's internally displaced persons (IDPs) and sustainable voluntary repatriation for millions of Afghan refugees, most international agencies are predicting more displacement within the country, the immediate region, and also further afield.

While it is important to maintain perspective, and to recognize that the impacts of the multiple transitions in Afghanistan will mainly be within the country and the region, there will also be implications for Australia and other industrialized states, ranging from the need to support the political process in Afghanistan, through maintaining engagement and development assistance beyond 2014, to a possible increase in irregular maritime arrivals (IMAs) and asylum applications from Afghanistan.

This paper focuses on the migration and displacement implications of the 2014 Afghanistan transitions, with a particular interest in implications for Australia. The first section briefly reviews a fast-growing literature on Afghanistan's transitions during and after 2014, while also noting that relatively little attention has yet been paid to its humanitarian implications. The second section turns to potential migration and displacement patterns and processes, noting that the relationship between security and displacement is not necessarily linear, and also acknowledging that the most significant impact is likely to be internal displacement. The final section, before the paper concludes, considers how Australia may be directly impacted by emerging asylum and migration flows from Afghanistan and the region, using recent data provided by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) that highlight existing migration pathways to Australia, including as IMAs, and particularly by Afghan Hazaras.

Maps of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran are included in the appendix.

2. TRANSITIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

While much of the available analysis (especially emanating from the US) has focused on the security transition in Afghanistan, it is also suggested that the political transition resulting from the planned April 2014 election will be just as important for security and stability in Afghanistan in the short-term.¹ There are also concerns that an economic transition will reduce still further the livelihoods of many Afghans. While each of these transitions – security, political, and economic – are dealt with here in turn, clearly they are inter-related. For example, an illegitimate (or postponed) election is likely to result at least in localized conflict; just as the withdrawal of international forces is likely to reduce capacity certainly in the short-term to respond to growing insecurity. The withdrawal of international forces is expected to have a direct economic impact, for example, on the employment of hundreds of thousands of Afghans who work directly and indirectly for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Equally political instability and growing insecurity will undermine international business confidence in Afghanistan.

¹ Cordesman (2013)

2.1 The Security Transition

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has announced that it will effect a major reduction in the number of international forces present in Afghanistan during 2014.² The US Government has reached agreement with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, subject to certain conditions being met, to retain an ongoing military presence until 2024.³ Various projections have been made as to the likely size of the international military presence, to engage in counter-terrorism and train Afghan security forces, after 2014, and it has been reported that nine military bases will remain. However, the exact position remains unclear.⁴

The ANSF – comprising the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) – has expanded considerably in size in recent years, as part of a concerted programme to build up the capacity of the Afghan government to provide a secure environment in the wake of the reduction in the international military presence. Since March 2011, responsibility for local security has been progressively handed over to the ANSF, with the last tranche transferred in June 2013. Henceforth, ANSF will increasingly take the lead in combat operations, with full responsibility assumed at the end of 2014. The remaining international military forces are scheduled to play a training role and to also engage in counter-terrorism activities.

Confidence in the ability of the ANSF to provide ambient security is mixed.⁵ Serious challenges are reported to include attrition, insurgent infiltration, substance abuse, and illiteracy.⁶ The US Department of Defense and others also question the combat readiness of the ANSF, highlighting command and control, air and indirect fire support, logistics, and medical evacuation as key gaps.⁷ There is certainly a consensus that the Afghan army and police will require significant international funding and support to continue to function: according to Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessment for Afghanistan, the ANA currently lacks the resources and manpower to operate fully independently.⁸ There are also concerns that deals might be struck between ANSF at the local level and the Taliban. Further, the Taliban are actively seeking to undermine morale within the ANSF through terrorist attacks. The assumption cannot therefore be made that the ANSF will represent a significant defense against the operations of the Taliban, particularly in the southern provinces where the Taliban can be expected to retain the highest level of support.

At the same time the potential threat posed by the Taliban is uncertain. In a situation in which the Taliban follow a long line of religious movements, in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, which have led resistance to foreign military interventions,⁹ the movement could see its support base diminish with the reduction in the international military presence. On the other hand, it may be able to retain a degree of support on the basis of the continued existence of US military bases and of the presence of international forces in counter-terrorism and training roles.

Furthermore, the Taliban may be able to maintain a significant support base through their capacity to instil fear into the population. If the population anticipates that the Taliban may be successful in any

² NATO (2013)

³ The White House (2012); The New York Times (2012); Office of the President (2013)

⁴ Spiegel Online International (2013)

⁵ Cordesman (2013); RUSI (2012)

⁶ CRS (2012)

⁷ Katzman (2013)

⁸ Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments (2012)

⁹ Marsden (2009)

attempt to capture Kabul, for example, they may not want to be on the losing side if there are subsequent reprisals. Equally, there are already indications of local uprisings against the Taliban¹⁰ and also of initiatives by the Taliban to present a more moderate image in the hope of winning community support.¹¹ The ultimate power base of the Taliban may therefore rely on local power dynamics across the country, with local power holders ever prepared to shift their allegiance. The outcomes of such processes are very difficult to predict.

Overall, this uncertain security situation is providing the conditions for militia groups to strengthen their fighting capacity so that local power holders and the populations over which they hold sway can be in a better position to defend their patch against competing forces in the event of a breakdown in ambient security. This trend is especially evident in northern Afghanistan.¹² Such power struggles are likely to result in the emergence of fiefdoms, with the power bases of these fiefdoms continually contested and with the success of these challenges dependent on relative power bases and shifting alliances.

Neither can a struggle for control of Kabul be excluded, in the event that the Taliban assess that they have a reasonable chance of taking the city. In the event that the Taliban were to launch an offensive on Kabul, the effectiveness of the ANSF would be very much put to the test. The loyalties of soldiers would also be influenced by their ethnic origins in a situation in which the struggle would essentially be between a Taliban-led Pushtun south and a non-Pushtun north in which the Tajik-dominated Jamiat-e-Islami militia and the Uzbek-dominated Jumbesh militia would represent the primary defense. In such a situation, the Tajik dominance of the ANSF¹³ may result in it joining forces with the northern militias or in soldiers deserting to these militias.

2.2 The Political Transition

Presidential elections are due to be held in April 2014. President Karzai will already have served the two terms allowed for under the Afghan Constitution and will be required to step down. It is not clear at this stage who will be the principal contenders for presidential office. There is no obvious candidate able to command the allegiance of the broad mass of the population. Further, the previous presidential elections, as well as the parliamentary elections, were marred by significant irregularities. There is therefore little public confidence in the process. It is not possible to make the assumption that President Karzai's successor will be able to create a stable political and security situation. There are also concerns amongst some of the power holders in Afghanistan that President Karzai will seek to remain in office. This would likely create even greater instability.¹⁴

In anticipation of the presidential elections, there is much jockeying for position amongst the multiple power holders, some of whom are forming political parties in an attempt to build alliances and also claim legitimacy.¹⁵

The Taliban are seen as potential participants in the political process. However, negotiations with the Taliban through various mechanisms have so far failed to produce clear results,¹⁶ and there is a strong

¹⁰ The New York Times (2013)

¹¹ US Department of State (2012)

¹² Long War Journal (2012); Katzman (2013)

¹³ RUSI (2012)

¹⁴ Katzman (April 2013)

¹⁵ United Nations (2013)

¹⁶ The Guardian (2013)

possibility that the Taliban will fail to agree to any power-sharing agreement in advance of the withdrawal of the major part of ISAF.

Another variable in the political transition is the role of regional powers. Afghanistan's position within its geographical hinterland accords it enormous strategic importance.¹⁷ To the south and east lies Pakistan, the border with which has remained in dispute since Pakistan's formation in 1947, arising from its demarcation, as the Durand Line, by British India in 1893.¹⁸ The substantial Pushtun populations across southern Afghanistan and within the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province¹⁹ of Pakistan represent an ever-present threat to the territorial integrity of both countries. Further, the porous nature of the border²⁰ has created the conditions for Taliban-led insurgencies, focused on both the international military presence in Afghanistan and on the Pakistan Government, to be able to retreat across the border to regroup and secure supplies.²¹

Iran, which extends the full length of Afghanistan's western border, has historically wielded enormous influence in what are now the western provinces of Herat, Farah and Nimroz. Iran has invested heavily in Herat's transport and electricity infrastructure,²² and the strength of the Herat economy is closely linked with that of Iran. Iran's interest in maintaining significant influence in the West of Afghanistan is inevitably linked to its concern that the US and/or Israel may engage in military action against it. The presence of the US military base at Shindand, to the south of Herat, represents a very visible threat as do the regular surveillance flights over Iran.²³

Russia shares with its neighbours within the Central Asian Republics concern that radical Islam could become more of a political force within Central Asia, exemplified by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.²⁴ Russia is also concerned that the US government, in the wake of its agreement with the Afghan government to retain military bases in Afghanistan until 2024, may use these to strengthen its ability to promote and protect US interests in Central Asia.²⁵ China, while only bordering Afghanistan over a short distance in the far north-east of Afghanistan, is emerging as an important investor in the economy, particularly in relation to mineral deposits.²⁶ China has not sought to intervene in Afghanistan's internal political dynamics.

Finally, India has made active efforts to maintain its influence with the powerful former Mujahidin party, Jamiat-e-Islami. This reflects its concerns at long-standing ambitions held by some elements in Pakistan to create a radical Islamic bloc encompassing Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics as a counterweight to India's much greater military might. It has done this in the knowledge that Pakistan has looked particularly to the Pushtuns of southern Afghanistan as its route to influence within the country, with the emergence of the Taliban in 1994 the most recent manifestation.²⁷ The mutual paranoia which is felt by Pakistan and India, in relation to their respective involvement in Afghanistan, can be expected to be one of the factors influencing outcomes during the lead up to and following the international troop withdrawals in 2014.

¹⁷ Marsden (2009)

¹⁸ Dupree (1980)

¹⁹ The North-West Frontier of Pakistan was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in 2010.

²⁰ Lieven (2012)

²¹ NATO (2009) pg. 10

²² Marsden (2012)

²³ Katzman (2013)

²⁴ Stratfor (2012)

²⁵ Marsden (2009); Reuters (2013)

²⁶ Marsden (2012)

²⁷ Marsden (2002)

2.3 The Economic Transition

According to the World Bank, there has been robust economic growth in Afghanistan even since the transition process was announced in 2010. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in Afghanistan increased more than four percentage points from 7.3 per cent in 2010-11 to an estimated 11.8 per cent in 2011-12.²⁸ Admittedly this growth has been driven by an exceptional harvest supported by favourable weather conditions, bringing wheat production close to self-sufficiency level, and thus reducing dependency on food imports. The mining sector has also shown dynamic developments in 2012, as a result of the start of oil production in the Amu Darya oil fields, where production is expected to reach 4,000 barrels per day by the end of 2013. In addition work has started on reconstructing eight gas wells in Sheberghan. Very rapid developments in the services sector have also contributed to economic growth in 2012: the telecommunications sector has grown exponentially, and it is predicted for example that there will be 2.4 million internet users in Afghanistan by the end of 2013.²⁹

At the same time, the World Bank has predicted that this quite impressive rate of economic growth may not be sustained through 2014 and beyond; and its forecast is for uncertain growth in the medium-term. It is certainly not alone in predicting a significant contraction in the Afghan economy after 2014³⁰ and other analysts are far more pessimistic than the World Bank.³¹ The main factor cited by the World Bank is that in the next 12 to 24 months political and security uncertainties may limit private-sector growth; and in particular that business confidence will be lost by current and potential overseas investors. While increased public spending should help generate demand for services and construction in the short-term, in the longer-term raising financing for public service provision is identified by the World Bank as a risk.³²

It has also been suggested that the planned foreign troop withdrawal by the end of 2014 will directly lower annual growth by at least two or three percentage points, as a result of reduced local spending by these forces and by foreign civilian organizations with international and national staff. Unemployment is also expected to rise when local staff hired by foreign security and civilian organizations are laid off, military bases are closed and Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) projects come to an end. The fiscal impact of the transition will come mainly from increasing pressure on the Government to take over externally-financed operating expenditures (security and non-security); declining grants to the Government's development budget; and a reduction in donors' externally-financed development budgets.

This latter issue of the continuing commitment of the international community to providing official development assistance (ODA) to Afghanistan has been identified as critical by several sources. At the Tokyo donor conference in 2012, US\$ 16 billion was pledged to Afghanistan over the next four years. The European Union (EU) has pledged to keep its assistance spending to Afghanistan at 200 million Euros per year or more – amounting to about one billion Euros once member states' contributions are also factored in. At the same time, most analysts think it is likely that ODA will decline over time,³³ in part because of cuts to overseas development budgets in many major donor

²⁸ World Bank (2013) Note that growth figures relate to the Persian solar year 22 March to 21 March, so that 2010-11 is for the period 22 March 2010 to 21 March 2011.

²⁹ www.roshan.af

³⁰ Redman (2011)

³¹ CFC (2013)

³² World Bank (2013)

³³ NOREF (2012)

countries.³⁴ A reduction in ODA will in turn result in a decline in aid-related jobs, which according to some estimates number 6,500 currently.

Overlaying the direct economic consequences of the reduction of international commitment to Afghanistan, are the ongoing challenges of systemic corruption. In 2012, Transparency International rated Afghanistan the second most corrupt country in the world.³⁵ There is also considered to be a risk that the drugs industry and organized crime will become an even more important part of the shadow economy and coping strategies, with increasing security risks also from general criminality.³⁶

3. POTENTIAL MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT IMPACTS

It is important to note from the outset that the relationship between peace and security on the one hand, and displacement outcomes on the other, is not always 'linear' or direct. In other words rising insecurity in Afghanistan may not necessarily result in more displacement, for example; while by the same token increased security may not promote significant returns either locally or internationally. There is a host of intervening variables.

First, displacement trajectories will be affected by circumstances outside Afghanistan as much as by internal circumstances. Both Pakistan and Iran have provided protection and financial underpinning for members of Afghan households since the Soviet military intervention of 1979. Their continued willingness to do so has come under increasing strain, and the conditions under which Afghans seek to survive within both countries have become increasingly challenging.³⁷

Second, any new migration or displacement will take place against the backdrop of – and may be hard to distinguish from – a long tradition of labour migration to Pakistan and Iran. In a situation in which much of the Afghan population is living at a highly marginal level, it is common for households to spread their risks by having, for example, some family members working on the land, others working in one or other urban centre within Afghanistan and still others migrating to work in Pakistan or Iran. It has been a common pattern for sons to work in Pakistan or Iran for a year or so to earn the necessary funds to pay for a marriage. Such a son would then remain in Afghanistan while the next son down repeats the process. Households continually assess potential income-earning opportunities within the rural, urban or labour migration sectors in deciding what weight to give to each.³⁸

Third, it is important to recognize that people leaving Afghanistan over the next year or two are likely to be doing so for several reasons, and not necessarily exclusively because of insecurity or the direct threat of persecution. Certainly security considerations would be an important factor for households in weighing up the many options before them. If a household has a legitimate fear that one of its members may be actively targeted, for example to avenge actions committed in the course of inter-factional fighting, it may decide that it is worth selling family assets to get him out of Afghanistan. A family may also decide that it would rather spend family assets to pay an agent than have one or more sons fight for the Taliban. The family may, in addition, find that it is paying an important part of its resources to one or other militia group operating road blocks on transit routes and that it needs to generate additional resources through the external migration of one of its members. A family may feel

³⁴ Dorronsoro (2012)

³⁵ Transparency International (2012)

³⁶ Felbab-Brown (2012)

³⁷ CFC (2013)

³⁸ Marsden (2012)

that a combination of adverse security conditions and economic hardship is such as to make it lose hope in a future for its children in Afghanistan. In such a situation, it may take the view that it is better for one or more children to look for long-term opportunities elsewhere. The better off families may increase their options by having family members spread across the globe, particularly given the high value being placed on education. With Afghanistan's education system so limited in its capacity, families tend to look to Pakistan and beyond to increase their options.

Finally, families may be reluctant to take the decision to opt for the migration of one of their number if life can be made tolerable without doing so. Family ties are very strong and family members will generally wish to stay in regular contact. Very often, therefore, a decision to opt for the departure of one or more of their number to another country, especially outside Afghanistan's immediate neighbourhood, may result from a particular trigger – a targeted security threat to an individual, an outbreak of major violence, a dramatic fall in the harvest, a natural disaster, or the destruction of a home.

3.1 Internal Displacement

Most studies and commentators expect that the most likely and most significant displacement outcome of the transitions in Afghanistan in 2014 will be more internal displacement in Afghanistan. A number of reasons have been suggested. One, as alluded to above, is a reluctance to move too far from their homes, especially for the millions of Afghans who have returned from displacement and invested in a new life. Second, it is suggested that for a variety of reasons that affect some groups more than others, the possibility and inclination to move to either Iran or Pakistan may decrease over the coming years. Third, for a significant proportion of Afghans, internal displacement has become a fairly common survival strategy, in particular in the form of short-term and short-distance moves to escape sporadic localized violence, or on a seasonal basis driven by climatic effects. The significant urbanisation process of the period since 2001 reflects this.

Internal displacement in Afghanistan is complex. Short-term and seasonal displacements, whether because of conflict or environmental effects, combine with a longstanding protracted IDP caseload, the growing challenge of urban IDPs especially in Kabul, significant displacement of the nomadic Kuchi population of Kandahar and Helmand, displacement resulting from the military tactics of ISAF, and the internal displacement of refugees who have returned from Pakistan but have been unable to return to their areas of origin.

Any new internal displacement would add to this complexity and exacerbate an already fairly serious internal displacement crisis in Afghanistan. As of 31 March 2013, a total of 534,006 people (86,632 families) were recorded by UNHCR as internally displaced by conflict in Afghanistan, with the largest numbers in Helmand, Badghis and Ghor Provinces, although these statistics combine conflict-induced and other displacements, as well as relatively new and protracted case loads.³⁹ Internal displacement has been rising over the past year already, and is projected to continue to increase over the next 12 months at least. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) over 100,000 people were displaced by conflict in Afghanistan in 2012 and a further 32,000 by natural disasters.⁴⁰ During the first three months of 2013 alone 23,295 people were displaced by conflict, particularly in the southern and western regions of the country.

³⁹ UNHCR (2013c)

⁴⁰ IDMC (2013)

Notwithstanding projections for significant increases in the number of IDPs in Afghanistan as a result of the transitions, conditions for many IDPs are already extremely serious. They are reported to face a wide range of physical threats and restrictions to their freedom of movement. They often lack access to sufficient food and water, adequate housing, security of tenure and employment. National and international responses to internal displacement in Afghanistan to date have been described as far from adequate, and clearly would be stretched by further internal displacement over the coming years.⁴¹

A final note under the heading of internal displacement is the scenario that the effects of conflict in eastern border areas of Afghanistan may spill-over into Pakistan, and in particular the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Deteriorating security and law order may in turn increase the IDP population within Pakistan, and possibly also prompt new flows of people in refugee-like situations from FATA to Afghanistan.

3.2 Migration between Afghanistan and its hinterland

Afghanistan has been the focus for the greatest – and most complex – refugee crisis in modern history. Starting in 1992, waves of displacement have coincided with significant waves of repatriation, especially over the last decade, although reducing in scale over the last few years.

The majority of refugees have fled to Pakistan and Iran. Those in Pakistan have been predominantly, although not exclusively, Pushtun, while those in Iran are, for the most part, from northern and central Afghanistan, where a majority speaks Dari, a dialect akin to Iran's Farsi. Hazaras are among the Dari speakers, although they also have their own dialect of Farsi, Hazaragi.⁴² The refugees in Pakistan were until recently accommodated in refugee camps the length of the border, with a greater concentration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province than in Baluchistan. The camps were administered by the Pakistan Government, with additional support provided by UNHCR, the World Food Programme and NGOs. Iran, in contrast, sought to avoid the international presence created by UN agencies and NGOs and instead, apart from establishing a small number of refugee camps which it administered along with the Iranian Red Crescent Society, required Afghan refugees to fend for themselves within the Iranian economy and housing market. This is consistent with the view that Iran has not provided rights and benefits normally accorded to refugees under the UN Refugees Convention.⁴³ Afghans in Iran suffered particularly from a long-established prejudice against them which resulted in frequent insults and abuse.⁴⁴ UNHCR has operated in Iran throughout the refugee crisis and has worked with the government to provide a limited range of services for registered Afghans and to facilitate returns and resettlement to third countries.

It is important to recognise, however, that both Pakistan and Iran have hosted very significant Afghan refugee populations for many years. UNHCR estimated that in 2012, Pakistan hosted 1.64 million refugees and Iran hosted 868,000 refugees;⁴⁵ both refugee populations predominantly comprised Afghans. In Iran at least, assistance and support of Afghan refugees has been incrementally reduced since the 1990s, noting that in 1994, expenditure on two million Afghans was estimated by the Iranian

⁴¹ IDMC (2013)

⁴² Marsden (2002)

⁴³ Abbasi-Shavazi et al (2005)

⁴⁴ Marsden (2002)

⁴⁵ UNHCR (2013b)

government to be as high as US\$10 million per day for subsidised education, health services, transport, fuel and basic goods.⁴⁶

The US-led military intervention of October 2001 was seen by Pakistan and Iran to justify an accelerated push on refugees to return. Pakistan, which had already overseen a reduction in the services provided to refugees, began to plan a process of camp closures. This largely took effect after 2005, when Pakistan conducted a census of Afghan refugees and registered those covered.⁴⁷ The registration process accorded no rights to Afghan refugees in Pakistan other than the right to remain where they were until their camp was demolished. However, it enabled Pakistan to be much tougher with the continuing arrival of economic migrants from Afghanistan. Those without documentation therefore found themselves under frequent scrutiny by the police and would suffer harassment and, on occasion, deportation. Iran had already begun to place increasing pressure on Afghans to return from 1993 onwards. This manifested itself in periodic police operations when Afghans would be picked up on the streets, without having the opportunity to alert any relatives, and deported in very large numbers. Some spent a period of time, prior to deportation, in one of a number of detention facilities where conditions were particularly severe. The police would often pay no regard to the existence of one of a number of temporary documents issued to Afghans by the Iranian government to accord a limited right to stay. This pattern has continued into the post-2001 period.⁴⁸

This brief review of the refugee experience for Afghans in Iran and Pakistan is instructive in projecting future trends for at least three reasons. First, it indicates that seeking asylum in these two neighbouring countries has become a survival strategy that a significant proportion of the Afghan population has either direct or indirect experience of. Second, and a related point, is that many Afghans have family members or other relatives in Iran and Pakistan, on whom they may be able to rely should they decide to leave Afghanistan. Indeed, relying on informal support will become increasingly significant as the government in both Iran and Pakistan reduce their welcome for Afghan refugees, and this declining hospitality is another factor that may influence the decision whether or not to leave Afghanistan.

On balance, most published studies and commentators do not envisage massive new refugee flows to Iran or Pakistan, nor towards Central Asia, during or in the immediate aftermath of the 2014 transitions.⁴⁹ In addition to changing policies and circumstances in Iran and Pakistan making these two traditional countries of destination less accessible, two other reasons have been suggested. One is that Pakistan and Iran have become less attractive places to seek work, in very recent years, as the opportunities available within the urban economy of Afghanistan have provided alternatives to the harsh treatment which Afghans suffer in Iran and Pakistan.⁵⁰ However, in a situation in which it is the norm for families to diversify their income sources, the balance between these options is likely to remain very fluid. With the planned drawdown in the international military and civilian presence, the urban economy may not provide the same opportunities that it has in recent years and there may be a greater willingness to tolerate the difficulties which exist in Iran and Pakistan. The recent election of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani may also have an indirect impact if the President follows through with his desire to improve engagement with the West, and there is an improvement in the economic

⁴⁶ Abbasi-Shavazi et al (2005)

⁴⁷ UNHCR (2005)

⁴⁸ IRIN (2009)

⁴⁹ CFC (2013)

⁵⁰ PRDU (2012)

situation in Iran. This in turn could attract Afghans to Iran in pursuit of greater employment opportunities.

In the case of Pakistan, it has also been suggested that security concerns may put off potential refugees. It has been noted that Pakistan's own Pashtuns are currently moving away from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) because of insecurity, and these are the places traditionally that have absorbed largely Pashtun Afghan refugee populations. Specific mention has also been made of the situation of Hazaras and Shia religion Afghans who have become victims of targeted violence by Pakistan-based radical Sunni groups such as Lashkar-e-Janghvi.⁵¹ Significant numbers of Afghan Hazara refugees have been killed and injured in such attacks in Baluchistan, which may deter Hazaras from seeking asylum in Pakistan as opposed to Iran. On the other hand, UNHCR Pakistan's growing resettlement programme, which has received media publicity in the context of sectarian violence against Hazaras, may attract some Hazara refugees who would regard Pakistan as a transit country, including to Australia.

The following specific forecasts have been made regarding the scale, character, and geography of new refugee flows in light of the transitions in Afghanistan.

It is suggested in a recent STATT analysis that at least three conditions would need to be met in order to prompt large-scale movements across the borders.⁵² First, the current intermittent clashes would have to turn into longer term fighting with the use of higher capacity weapons over a larger swathe of land and civilians would have to be 'caught in the cross-fire' with large scale human rights violations. Second, if the fighting blocked vital roads towards the centre of the country or affected urban areas this might push populations outwards towards border areas. Third, the governments of neighbouring countries would have to be willing to accept new refugee flows. While potential new refugees may have family members among the large numbers of refugee and non-registered Afghans anchored in these countries, the policies of the asylum countries (including a likely unwillingness to establish new camps) may limit the opportunities for many of the new refugees to join their family members.

It has also been forecast that new refugee flows would be significantly different from those experienced between the 1970s and 1990s, and in particular that ethnic considerations would be more of a factor this time: Pashtuns from the south and east would want to move to Pakistan, as might some Hazaras seeking resettlement opportunities. Tajiks would want to move internally to Kabul and northwards, with some potential movement to Tajikistan and perhaps onwards to Kyrgyzstan. Hazaras would orient themselves towards Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Iran. At a smaller scale Uzbeks would be oriented towards Uzbekistan and possibly onwards to Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmen to Turkmenistan.

Should displacement outside Afghanistan occur, the expectation is that most refugees would cross into Pakistan using the official border crossings of Torkham in the east and Spin Boldak/Chaman in the South. In the west, potential refugees would need to continue to rely on illegal migration channels to access Iran. It is unlikely that the Iranian Government would make any provision to support such refugees. In the north, it has been suggested that significant refugee flows into Central Asia would only occur if populations 'trapped' by conflict near border areas perceived no other alternatives but to cross borders, as was the case in 2001-2. At the same time an increase in flows to Tajikistan in particular cannot be excluded, in particular of Tajik speakers if access to Iran proves to be too problematic.

⁵¹ BBC News Asia (2013)

⁵² STATT (2013)

3.3 Migration beyond the hinterland

Beyond Afghanistan's immediate neighbours (principally Pakistan and Iran but also countries in Central Asia), Afghans have migrated to many locations around the world in a range of capacities over several generations.

Beyond its hinterland, Afghan migration in the modern era has featured two key elements: migrant workers to Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and other parts of the Middle East; and irregular migrants and asylum seekers to industrialised countries in Europe and North America. More recently, countries such as Turkey and Australia have become destinations for Afghan asylum seekers. This is discussed below.

There is also 'regular' migration to industrialised countries in the form of, for example, skilled, family, student as well as humanitarian resettlement migration programmes. These forms of migration are managed by receiving countries, and generally have some regulatory limit placed on them. While acknowledging the place of managed migration programmes in the broader migration context, for the purposes of this paper, which is focussed on the implications of the 2014 transition in Afghanistan, discussion of these forms of migration is limited to specific transitional issues.

3.3.1 Afghan migration via migration programmes

There is a general consensus that an elite exodus from Afghanistan is already taking place in anticipation of the transition, and it is predicted to increase over the coming months. One indicator is said to be the decline in high-end real estate prices in Kabul.⁵³ It is reported that many Afghan ministers have already settled their families in other countries to prepare for an exit after the troop withdrawal.⁵⁴

It is generally felt that individuals associated with, or perceived as supportive of, the Government and international community, including ISAF, are at risk of being targeted by anti-Government groups, especially in areas where these groups are active.⁵⁵ This risk has been reiterated in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) mid-year report in 2012⁵⁶ and in a fact-finding mission by the Danish Immigration Service.⁵⁷ And these risks do not just concern the elite - they extend to truck drivers, security guards, and interpreters for example. According to the Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), the category of government employees most at risk are those in the security forces - including the police, intelligence services, and the military, followed by teachers and employees at health clinics.⁵⁸

While neighbouring asylum countries are receiving modest numbers of such applications from Afghan former employees of ISAF, embassies, UN agencies and INGOs, it is believed that many others are making their own way to the West as asylum seekers. Among these groups, those with the resources and wherewithal are expected to leave Afghanistan in increasing numbers over the next year, using

⁵³ Dorrnsoro (2012)

⁵⁴ IAGCI (2013)

⁵⁵ UNHCR (2010)

⁵⁶ UNAMA (2012)

⁵⁷ Danish Immigration Service (2012)

⁵⁸ UKBA (2013)

the neighbouring countries (including Iran and Pakistan), as a transit to Turkey and countries in Europe.⁵⁹ Many of them have already started to map out their routes.⁶⁰

Some ISAF troop contributing countries have immigration schemes for their former staff which may be left unemployed and unprotected from retaliation by anti-government elements. In December 2012, Australia put in place a policy on resettling locally engaged Afghan employees at risk of harm due to their employment in support of Australia's mission in Afghanistan. Under the policy, locally engaged Afghan employees, from a range of occupations including drivers and interpreters, are assessed against specific threat criteria, including the level of direct support the employee provided to Australia's mission as well as their public profile, location and the period of employment. Eligible employees are able to apply for a visa under Australia's Humanitarian Program, which involves meeting the standard visa criteria including health, character and security requirements. Successful applicants are then resettled under Australia's Humanitarian Program.⁶¹

3.3.2 Afghan asylum seekers and refugees

Notwithstanding the discussion in section 3.1 above regarding the predominance of internal displacement, it is useful to reflect on asylum flows of Afghans beyond the hinterland over time.

Braakman⁶² depicts Afghan asylum migration to Germany, for example, as having distinct characteristics over three periods or 'waves' in recent history:

- The first wave of refugees was those who left during the period of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan Government of 1978-92. They comprised the elite, many of whom '...had been educated in one of the schools and universities linked to Western countries, and where the language of instruction had been English, French or German'.
- The second wave were those who left during the period of the Mujahidin government of 1992-96, and may have feared conflict as well as '...the risk of being accused of having supported the communist and 'atheist' enemy prompted those affiliated with the Khalq or Parcham regime or employed as civil servants'.
- The third wave came during the period of the Taliban government of 1996-2001, and involved middle class, urban educated Afghans fleeing to the West because repressive Taliban measures that posed security concerns, as well as the lack of livelihood and education opportunities.⁶³

More recently, Afghan asylum seeker numbers dropped in the mid-2000s following the defeat of the Taliban and a renewed optimism took hold. Since 2007, however, Afghan asylum seeker applications in industrialised countries have increased substantially and continue to trend upwards. Afghans are again one of the world's largest sources of asylum seekers and refugees, corresponding to an overall decline in conditions in Afghanistan.

⁵⁹ STATT (2013)

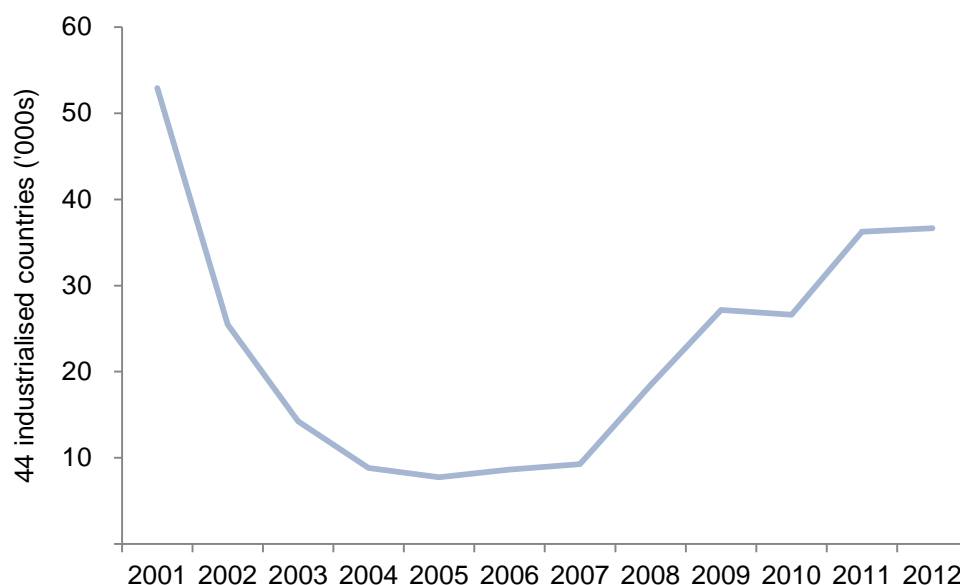
⁶⁰ LA Times (2013)

⁶¹ Minister for Defence and Minister for Immigration and Citizenship(2012)

⁶² Braakman (2005)

⁶³ Ibid, pp. 14-16

Figure 1: Afghan asylum seekers in industrialised countries: 2001-2012



Source: UNHCR *Asylum Trends 2012: Levels and Trends in Industrialised Countries*

UNHCR asylum figures indicate that there has been a trend increase since 2007, albeit in a staggered fashion. Disaggregation reveals that the overall trend increase has not been uniform. The 32,972 Afghans who lodged applications in the 38 European countries in 2012 represented a three per cent decrease from 33,837 in 2011. In terms of the 27 countries of the European Union (now 28), there was a seven per cent decrease from the 26,679 Afghans who sought asylum in 2011 to the 24,681 figure for 2012. Within this, however, there were increases in Austria, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland and decreases in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany and the UK.

In contrast to the overall picture for Europe, Australia experienced a 79 per cent increase from 1,719 Afghan asylum applications in 2011 to 3,079 applications in 2012. It is also interesting to note that Turkey saw a 77 per cent increase in Afghan asylum applications over the same period, from 2,486 in 2011 to 4,401 in 2012. This may reflect its immediate proximity to Iran, and the possible perception that it is an easy source of refuge for Afghans fearing deportation from Iran. The increase may also reflect increasing difficulties accessing Europe as well as changes in Europe, including in relation to economic and political circumstances. Greece, as the gateway to Europe, for example, saw the number of Afghan asylum applications fall from 1,510 in 2009 to 524 in 2010 (the year the Greek debt crisis emerged). Afghan asylum applications have since remained fairly steady in Greece, with 584 submitted in 2012.

There was an overall reduction in Afghan asylum claims within Europe between 2011 and 2012. Prevailing economic conditions – including as they relate to people smuggling networks and markets – are likely to have been one of a range of complex factors at play in relation to the movement of Afghan (and other) asylum seekers. The reasons for Afghans choosing certain destinations rather than others, is likely to also relate to community and social networks, and the existence of established migration routes.

Monsutti has argued that in relation to Hazaras, no hard and fast distinction can be made between refugees and economic migrants and that a 'migration continuum' exists that has developed as part of a broader strategy of survival.⁶⁴ Further, he states that 'Afghans give different and usually plural reasons for their decision to migrate: perhaps an outbreak of fighting, a threat from a personal enemy, the danger of bombing or compulsory conscription; perhaps the search for work or opportunities to trade, the need for medical treatment, or the undertaking of a pilgrimage'.⁶⁵

Particularly in light of the multitude of reasons underpinning Afghan migration, the anticipated decrease in security in Afghanistan from 2014 is not expected to neatly translate into a correlated increase in international migration. That said, the combination of anticipated hardship stemming from economic, political and security transitions will weigh heavily in the minds of individuals and families as they continue to assess and re-assess their options to enacting survival strategies that may involve migration beyond Afghanistan's hinterland.

3.3.3 Afghan asylum seekers to Australia

There was some movement of Afghans to Australia during the years following the 1978 PDPA coup, alongside the much greater number who sought refuge in Europe and North America.

A more significant flow occurred during the period of the Taliban Government of 1996-2001. An important element within this flow was Hazaras. While some Hazaras headed for the USA, many others sought to enter Australia on small fishing boats from Indonesia as irregular maritime arrivals (IMAs).⁶⁶

Almost no Afghan IMAs came to Australia between 2002 and 2007. This corresponded to a global decrease in Afghan asylum claims, and a time when large numbers of Afghans voluntarily returned to Afghanistan, particularly after the fall of the Taliban (see Figure 2 below). Afghan IMAs to Australia began to increase from 2008, corresponding to deteriorating situations in Afghanistan, and increases in Afghans seeking asylum globally. It is also likely that domestic policy changes in Australia were a contributing factor.

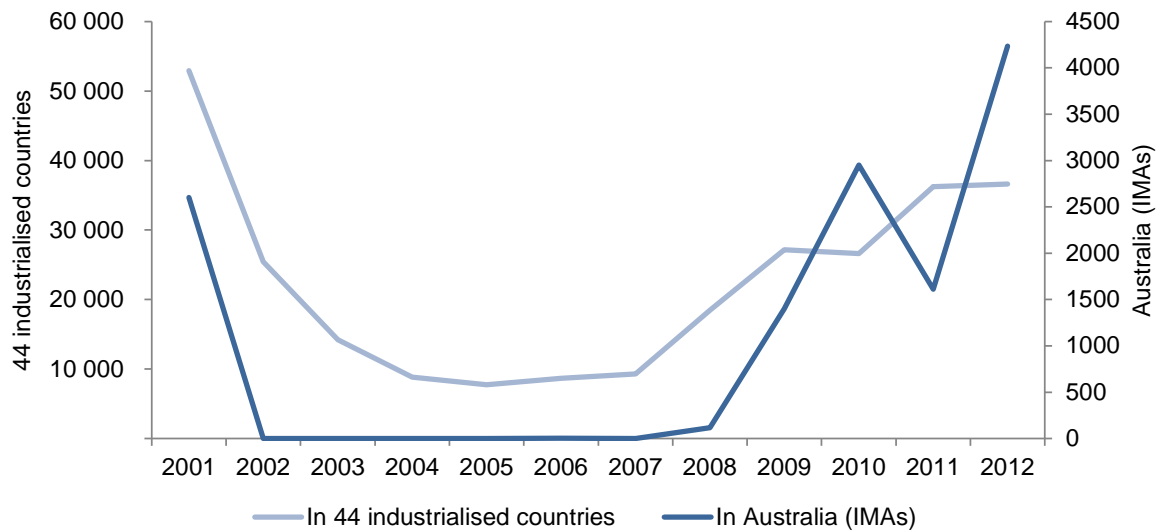
This pattern has again been apparent in recent years so that, along with those Afghans who have been able to enter Australia via regular migration channels, others have sought to enter irregularly by sea, through the use of people smuggling networks. These IMAs have shown a predominantly upward trend and have numbered up to several thousand per year recently.

⁶⁴ Monsutti, A. (2005), pp. 168-9

⁶⁵ Ibid, pg. 146

⁶⁶ Monsutti, A. (2010)

Figure 2: Afghan asylum seekers globally and Afghan IMAs to Australia: 2001 to 2012



Sources: UNHCR Asylum Trends 2012: Levels and Trends in Industrialised Countries; DIBP data (unpublished).

Note: Two axes have been used to compare trend lines; comparisons of volumes are not advisable.

There has been a particular concentration of Afghan Hazaras among IMAs in Australia since the late 1990s. In beginning to understand why, and to consider future trajectories, it should first be noted that Hazaras are a minority group within Afghanistan. They are distinct from the rest of the Afghan population in being Shi'a, as opposed to the majority Sunni, in their adherence to Islam, and also in being physically very different. This has, historically, led to them being marginalized within Afghan society and relegated to largely menial roles within the economy. It has also resulted in their suffering high levels of persecution at various points over the last century or so, notably at the end of the 19th century and during the period of the Taliban government of 1996-2001. During the latter period several thousand Hazaras were massacred in Mazar-e-Sharif in August 1998, in response to their resistance to an earlier abortive attempt on the city the year before. There were also subsequent episodes when Hazaras in central Afghanistan were victims of targeted violence.

Some Hazaras during this period also sought asylum in Australia. In seeking to escape from the Taliban, it is reasonable to suppose that Hazaras would have actively chosen not to seek asylum in a country in which non-Hazara Afghans were already established, given their historical marginalization by these other groups, and the fact that some Pushtuns in Europe and North America were supporters of the Taliban. They may, therefore, have sought to avoid some of the more traditional destinations and seek out alternatives. The recent influx of Hazaras will therefore have built on those who entered Australia during the 1980s to create a small diaspora community.

The post-1978 conflicts have created the space for Hazaras to challenge their previous subservient status, with some degree of success. Hazaras are now represented within the professional class and some have become civil society activists. The Hazarajat has been relatively stable under the government of President Karzai, although Hazaras living in areas such as Ghazni, where the Taliban have a strong presence, have come under pressure. Further, there has not been a pattern of Shi'a becoming victims of targeted violence. There was, therefore, surprise that an attack took place on a Shi'a shrine in Kabul on 6 December 2011, in which at least 54 people were killed, and over a simultaneous attack on a shrine in Mazar-e-Sharif in which four people died. The Taliban denied

responsibility for both incidents but, according to some reports, Lashkar-e-Jangvi, based in Pakistan, did claim responsibility. There have been no further attacks of this nature.

It may be, therefore, that the decision by Hazaras to migrate towards Australia more recently relates more to the serious persecution which they are currently facing in Quetta. An additional consideration is that Hazaras have traditionally moved backwards and forwards between Quetta and Afghanistan as part of the annual economic cycle, and the adverse security situation in Quetta risks undermining livelihood options too. It may be the case that, in addition to protection-related reasons, Hazaras have increasingly sought to enter Australia for economic reasons because their capacity to secure an adequate livelihood by moving between the Hazarajat and Quetta has been adversely affected by the security threats that they face in Pakistan. There is likely to be a combination of security, economic and other factors underpinning movement. The economic pressures that households face may increase if, as is likely, relatives in Quetta take refuge in Afghanistan from the violence in Pakistan.

Hazaras may also look to Pakistan, Iran, Australia or elsewhere if economic conditions in Afghanistan become particularly severe. The planned drawdown in the international military presence may impact disproportionately on the Hazaras, as among the most marginal, economically, among the population. However, the need to generate sufficient resources to engage agents may act as a significant constraint on those for whom economic hardship is the primary factor in seeking to migrate.

In response to an increase in IMAs, including Afghan Hazaras, the previous Australian Government has introduced a range of policy responses to reduce IMA flows.⁶⁷ Of specific relevance to Afghans has been the additional resettlement quotas and support to UNHCR, including for acceptance of Afghan Hazara refugees from Pakistan, in order to provide a safe and legal avenue for entry to Australia. Arrival numbers of Afghan IMAs, along with other key citizenship groups, have however continued to increase in 2013. As at the end of June 2013, around 1,800 Afghan IMAs had arrived in 2013. While it is difficult to speculate with any accuracy, the expected deterioration in Afghanistan, along with the prevailing geopolitical and global economic conditions as well as the role of migrant smugglers,⁶⁸ makes it difficult to predict a decline in Afghan IMAs for the foreseeable future. On the contrary, and given that Afghan Hazaras have featured in IMA flows on and off since the late 1990s, it is likely that Afghan Hazaras will remain a key IMA group in 2014 and beyond. Recent policy announcements on offshore processing and (where relevant) resettlement of all IMAs to Australia in Papua New Guinea⁶⁹ will be another aspect Hazara families will weigh up as they assess and re-assess their migration options in the context of widely anticipated deteriorating conditions. Indications are that the newly elected Australia government intends making additional policy changes, including in relation to temporary protection visas, border management measures in transit countries and possible changes to refugee status determination processing.

⁶⁷ See, for example, the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers, which has been agreed and largely implemented by government.

⁶⁸ WSC (2010)

⁶⁹ See Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Address to the Nation of 19 July 2013 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klapYIBRZIs>

4. CONCLUSIONS

Recognizing the challenges of making predictions in as uncertain a context as Afghanistan, this paper has reviewed recent research and analysis on projections for security, political stability, and economic growth in Afghanistan during and after 2014. Most prognoses are fairly pessimistic. A combination of rising tensions and conflict, a contested political scene, and rising unemployment, is expected to result in further migration and displacement within and outside the country. An increase in internal displacement is widely predicted, with a very real possibility of new cross-border flows especially into Pakistan and Iran, but also possibly to Central Asia as well as further afield. While maintaining perspective, the paper has suggested that Australia may also be directly impacted, through its commitment to resettle some Afghan employees who have supported its mission in Afghanistan, by the prospect of a growing number of Afghan asylum applications, and as a result of the historical and current significance of Afghan Hazaras among IMA flows.

Map of provinces of Afghanistan



Source: United States Government, Central Intelligence Agency, www.cia.gov/library/publications/cia-maps-publications/afghanistan.html, accessed 30 August 2013.

Map of provinces and territories of Pakistan



Source: United States Government, Central Intelligence Agency, www.cia.gov/library/publications/cia-maps-publications/Pakistan.html, accessed 30 August 2013.

Map of provinces of Iran



Source: Wikipedia labelled image map templates, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Provinces_of_Iran_Labelled_Map, accessed 30 August 2013.

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