

Developing Practical Cooperation through Science

The NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme is open to scientists and experts from Afghanistan.

The NATO SPS Programme enables close collaboration on issues of common interest to enhance the security of NATO and partner nations by facilitating international efforts to meet emerging security challenges, supporting NATO-led operations and missions, and advancing early warning and forecast for the prevention of disasters and crises.

The current SPS Key Priorities include:

- Counter-Terrorism;
- Energy Security;
- Cyber Defence;
- Defence against CBRN Agents;
- Environmental Security;
- Security-related Advanced Technology;
- Border and Port Security;
- Human and Social Aspects of Security.

Additionally, the SPS Programme helps to promote *regional security* through scientific cooperation among partners. The programme also helps to *prepare* interested eligible nations for NATO membership. SPS activities often have a high *public diplomacy* value.

AFGHANISTAN

At the NATO Lisbon Summit in November 2010, NATO and Afghanistan reaffirmed their long-term ties with the signing of a Declaration on Enduring Partnership. The document, which marks NATO's continued commitment to Afghanistan, provides a political framework for future enhanced cooperation, particularly in the field of Afghan National Security Forces capacity-building and security sector reform. At the NATO Wales Summit in September 2014, NATO and ISAF contributing partners issued a Declaration on Afghanistan, reaffirming their partnership by presenting short, medium and long-term strands of cooperation with and support for Afghanistan. The SPS Programme supports these efforts through the provision of civil-science based cooperation.

Cooperative Activities

SILK-Afghanistan Programme: Named after the Great Silk Road trading route linking Asia and Europe, the SILK-Afghanistan project provides high-speed internet access via satellite and fibre optics to 34 Afghan universities as well as a few other academic and governmental institutions in Kabul. The network became operational at Kabul University in 2006 and has since been expanded to other provinces. SILK-Afghanistan is jointly funded by the NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme and the US Department of State with further financing provided by the European Commission. In addition to connectivity, it provides extra funding to build information technology (IT) infrastructure and to train IT staff at the universities. Today, the vast majority of university students and lecturers from more than 30 universities in Kabul and Afghan provinces are connected to the information highway through the SILK-Afghanistan project.



SILK-Afghanistan 2.0: In May 2013, the second phase of the SILK-Afghanistan Programme was launched. This new phase includes a contract between Afghan Telecom and NATO for a high-speed fibre-optic link to Europe as well as a contract with another Afghan company to provide internet access via microwave radio technology to universities not yet connected to the fibre-optics network. This new phase marks a shift from the use of satellites towards fibre-optic communications as this is a more sustainable solution for internet provision and will help prepare the way for the handover of the network to a European Commission (EC) funding mechanism, the TEIN4 network (Trans-Eurasia Information Network, phase 4) in summer 2016.



Assistant Secretary General Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) during an inauguration ceremony in Afghanistan in Oct. 2011.

Within the framework of SILK-Afghanistan, NATO has also been working with the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) since 2012 to set up an **“Afghanistan Research and Education Network”** (AfgREN). AfgREN allows Afghan students and researchers to hold video teleconferences (VTCs) with the MoHE and with other universities and countries; provides distance learning capabilities and the ability to broadcast and receive lectures; gives access to a digital library, virtual laboratories, and other research materials; provides VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) telephone services; and the opportunity for Afghanistan to join larger regional and international research networks. [ref. 984582; 984868]

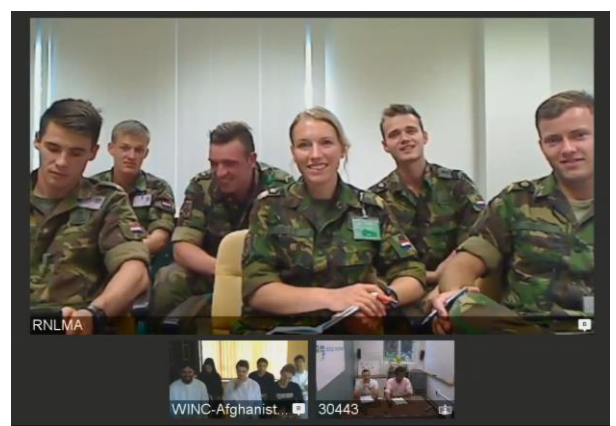


AfgREN workshop meeting in Brussels, May 2015

20 Networking Infrastructure Grants have also been awarded to Afghan universities and the MoHE as part of the SILK-Afghanistan Programme. These grants provide the financial means to cable buildings, to connect them to campus networks and to install PC pools for the use by lecturers, students and administrative staff. They help to improve teaching and learning facilities in Afghanistan, including cooperation with other universities worldwide.

In January and February 2015, a Training Course on **Network and Internet Security Assurance for Nationwide Community Connectivity** trained 35 Afghans in Bishkek/Kyrgyzstan. Trainees learned how to install, operate, and verify a basic network, including configuring switches and routers, identifying basic security threats and troubleshooting common network issues. Participants also obtained an overview of network services and operation systems, including through hands-on sessions. [ref. 984887]

Since 2014, Afghanistan is also participating in the Multi-Year Project **Cross-Cultural Training for Military Cadets**. Led by Afghanistan and the US, the project puts NATO-country military cadets directly in contact with Afghan university students via facilitated VTC sessions. These sessions help create mutual cultural awareness both among the officers to be deployed, and among the Afghan civilians who are often speaking to a soldier directly for the first time. [ref.G4746]



Dutch Military Cadets engage in a dialogue with Afghan civilians via VTC.