Assessing China's New Policy in Afghanistan

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Abstract

Prior to 2001, Beijing faithfully observed the principles of neutrality and non-interference regarding Afghanistan, yet it has become one of the key actors in appeasing the conflict, especially since 2014. Numerous scholars suggest that China's U-turn is related to the potential threat posed by the Uygur separatists in Afghanistan. This study suggests an alternate motive; namely, that Afghanistan's strategic location— the heart of Central and South Asia, the Middle East, and East Asia—drives China's increased interest.

Keywords

China – Afghanistan – OBOR – Taliban – Central Asia

As a neighbor of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the People's Republic of China (PRC) keeps intra-Afghan processes under continuous scrutiny as they might seriously threaten Chinese interests. Since the 1950s, Beijing's activity toward Afghanistan has been characterized either as intense or as expectant and static, depending on China's own interests. Xi Jinping's ascent to China's presidency in 2013 marked a major shift in Beijing's foreign policy agenda and initiated China's growing interest in Afghan issues and greater participation in their settlement. It also reflected changes in the traditional Chinese principles of non-interference in foreign conflicts. China's prioritized interest in Afghani- stan changed with the launch of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project in February 2014 and, many other important issues (e.g., Xinjiang, natural re-sources, and security of Chinese investments in bordering regions) have been downgraded below this grand development project. This article approaches the issue in three ways. First, it conducts a comparative analysis of China's

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foreign policy strategy in Afghanistan since 2001. Second, it illustrates the increasing importance of the Afghan conflict in the foreign policy agenda of Beijing since Xi Jinping's rise to power. Finally, it sheds light on the motives behind the new Chinese policy toward Afghanistan.

Afghanistan in China's Foreign Policy

Afghanistan has a noteworthy position among China's neighbors. Fourteen other states share a border with China, but the one with Afghanistan is the shortest (92 km).1 The two countries are connected through the Wakhan Corridor, located between the Pamir and Tian Shan mountain systems. China established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan in 1955, and in 1963 the two parties resolved the issue of common border demarcation.2 During the Cold War, the strained relationships between Moscow and Beijing had a tremendous impact on Chinese policies in Afghanistan. Beijing was trying to weaken the USSR's overwhelming influence over Kabul and to prevent the encirclement of China by pro-Soviet states. Moscow's actions explain the Chinese interest in improving relationships with Kabul—which peaked with PRC President Liu Shaoqi's historic visit in 1966.3

However, the turbulence in Afghanistan in the 1970s and the USSR's attempts to take control of the country through the introduction of troops in 1979 had a major impact on Beijing's attitude toward Afghanistan and on its foreign policy during that period as a whole. The events in Afghanistan served as a catalyst for the abrupt improvement and convergence of China–US relations. Together with a number of other countries, China and the United States collectively prevented complete Soviet domination in Afghanistan. Several scholars argue that China, with the help of Pakistan,4 armed the rebel groups

1 Zhao Huasheng, "Afghanistan and China's New Neighborhood Diplomacy," *International Affairs* 92 (2016): 891.

2 Artemy M. Kalinovsky, "Sino-Afghani Border Relations," in *Beijing's Power and China's Borders: Twenty Neighbors in Asia,* ed. Bruce Elleman, Stephen Kotkin, and Clive Schofield (New York: Routledge, 2014), 13–22.

3 Nadine Godehardt, *The Chinese Constitution of Central Asia: Regions and Intertwined Actors in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 185.

4 Chinese covert support for ISI's operations in Afghanistan is also affirmed by Kinsella Warren, *Unholy Alliances* (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1992); Yitzhak Shichor, "The Great Wall of Steel: Military and Strategy in Xinjiang," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland,* ed. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 157–158; Andrew Small, *The China–Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* (London: Hurst, 2015).

that fought against Soviet troops. They also document how China cooperated with Washington to open several centers for electronic intelligence in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in order to track the actions of Soviet forces in Afghanistan.5

The withdrawal of the USSR's troops from Afghanistan in 1989 significantly reduced Beijing's interest in Afghan affairs. However, the increased activity of Uygur separatist groups, which had the opportunity to settle and prepare terrorist acts in Afghanistan,6 renewed the attention of the Chinese leadership in the 1990s. Chinese officials began to negotiate with the Taliban movement, which controlled a substantial part of Afghanistan at that time, to secure guarantees that they would not support the activities of Uygur groups in the territories under their control. In December 2000, the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan, Lu Shu Lin, met with the head of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, to discussthe Uygur issue.7

The international military presence in Afghanistan under us command in late 2001 triggered a range of reactions in China. On the one hand, Beijing was interested in eliminating sources of terrorism in Afghanistan and supported the un Security Council's resolution on the introduction of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2001.8 After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Beijing allowed the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to open a Beijing office in October 2002 to enhance anti-terrorism cooperation with the United States.9 On the other hand, Beijing essentially avoided participating in any international military presence in Afghanistan and did not allow coalition forces to operate out of Chinese bases or airspace.10

After the international coalition began operations in Afghanistan in 2001, the Chinese government allocated us$4 million of humanitarian aid toward the

5 Andrew Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan–Pakistan," *Washington Quarterly* 33 (2010): 82–83.

6 Dewardric L. McNeal and Kerry Dumbaugh, "China's Relations with Central Asian States and Problems with Terrorism," *Congressional Research Service Report* RL31213, 2002, 12.

7 Andrew Small, "China, the United States, and the Question of Afghanistan," testimony before the us–China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing, "Looking West: China and Central Asia," March 18, 2015, 3.

8 UNSC Res. 1386 (2001), https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/708/55/PDF/N0170855.pdf?OpenElement.

9 I.C. Smith and Nigel West, *Historical Dictionary of Chinese Intelligence* (Lanham, md: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 92.

10 Jonathan Z. Ludwig, "Sixty Years of Sino–Afghan Relations," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26 (2013): 402.

restoration of the Afghan state. In addition, at the Tokyo donor conference in 2002 it promised to provide an additional us$1 million for the same purposes.11 On December 22, 2002, China—together with the countries bordering Afghanistan (Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan)—signed the Declaration on Good-Neighborly Relations.12

In 2006, China and Afghanistan signed an Agreement on Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation, as well as a 2012 document crucial for interstate relations: the "Joint Declaration between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic State of Afghanistan on Establishing Strategic and Cooperative Partnership."13 The Chinese minister of public security, Zhou Yongkang—also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and the secretary of the Political and Legislative Affairs of the CPC Central Committee—came to the signing ceremony. At that time, Zhou was the most senior Chinese official to visit the Afghanistan since 1966.14 Remarkably, Beijing has been a committed participant in almost all international arrangements working toward the reconstruction of Afghanistan: London in 2006, Paris in 2008, and The Hague in 2009, along with meetings in London, Istanbul, and Kabul in 2010.15

Beyond that, China has paid considerable attention to the socioeconomic recovery of Afghanistan. First, in 2008, the Chinese iron and steel corporation Metallurgical Group and Jiangxi Copper pledged to invest approximately us$4 billion to acquire 100 percent of the rights in the Afghan field Aynak, the second-largest undeveloped copper deposit in the world. Within the framework of this project, China also committed to build a thermal power plant with a capacity of 400 megawatts, a railway from Afghanistan to Xinjiang, a hospital, and a mosque.16 In addition, in 2011 the China National Petroleum Corporation

11 Daniel Korski and John Fox, "Can China Save Afghanistan?," European Council on Foreign Relations, September 29, 2008, http://www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/can_china_save_afghanistan/.

12 "Kabul Declaration on Good-Neighborly Relations [Afghanistan]," S/2002/1416, UNSC, December 22, 2002, http://www.refworld.org/docid/42ef429e4.html.

13 Jane Perlez, "China Shows Interest in Afghan Security, Fearing Taliban Would Help Separatists," *New York Times,* June 9, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/09/world/asia/ china-signals-interest-in-afghanistan-after-nato-leaves.html.

14 Tom Phillips, "Senior Chinese Official Visits Afghanistan for First Time in 50 Years," *The Telegraph,* September 23, 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/9560995/Senior-Chinese-official-visits-Afghanistan-for-first-time-in-50-years.html.

15 Zhao Huasheng, "China and Afghanistan: China's Interests, Stances, and Perspectives," Washington, dc, Center for Strategic and International Studies (2012): 6.

16 Erica Downs, "China Buys into Afghanistan," *SAIS Review* 32 (2012): 65.

(CNPC) signed a 25-year contract for oil extraction in the northern provinces of Faryab and Sar-e Pol in the Amu Darya basin.17 The planned amount of Chinese investments in the Afghan economy is about us$10 billion.18 However, Chinese projects remain unfinished due to the challenging security situation countrywide, especially in some of the provinces where Chinese firms planned to help build infrastructure facilities.

Second, China has allocated a number of recovery grants for Afghanistan since 2001. In 2002, it announced an aid package worth about us$150 million,19 and in 2009, another us$75 million was infused into the Afghan economy.20 In 2010, the Chinese government wrote off us$19.5 million of Afghan debt.21 In 2011, it decided to grant another us$23.7 million of assistance.22 Third, Beijing supported the Afghan side in training 800 specialists in public administration and drug control. Furthermore, in 2010, China decided to release 95 percent of Afghan imports from taxes and fees.23 Fourth, the Chinese communication companies ZTE and Huawei—in partnership with the Ministry of Communications of Afghanistan—have created a digital telephone network with a capacity of 200,000 subscribers.24 China also took part in an irrigation project in Parwan and rebuilt hospitals in Kabul and Kandahar.25

17 Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar, "China's Evolving Stance on Afghanistan: Towards More Robust Diplomacy with 'Chinese Characteristics'," Polish Institute of International Affairs(2014): 3.

18 Zhao, "China and Afghanistan."

19 See "Official of the Foreign Ministry Briefs the Resident Journalists in Beijing about the Visit of Afghan Interim Government Chairman Karzai," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, January 30, 2002, http://www.fmPRC.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/wgjzx wzx/ipccfw/t18845.htm.

20 "Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei Attends International Conference on Afghanistan," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, April 1, 2009, http://www .fmPRC.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t555853.htm.

21 "China Provides Sincere and Selfless Assistance to Afghanistan Watering the Flower of Friendship between the Two Countries," *Xinhuanet,* August 22, 2010, http://news.xinhuanet .com/world/2010-08/22/c_12471641.htm.

22 Remarks by H.E. Yang Jiechi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China at the International Afghanistan Conference, Bonn, December 5, 2011, http://www.fmPRC .gov.cn/chn/pds/ziliao/zt/dnzt/yjcwzbfhwtdwzh/t884414.htm, http://www.fmPRC.gov.cn/ eng/wjdt/zyjh/t884443.htm.

23 Zhao, "China and Afghanistan," 6.

24 Gunjan Singh, "China's Afghanistan Policy," New Delhi, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, January 11, 2010, http://www.ipcs.org/article/china/chinas-afghanistan-policy -3040.html.

25 Singh, "China's Afghanistan Policy."

These initiatives might imply that Chinese policy in Afghanistan during 2001–2013 aimed at maintaining a moderate presence in the country. However, Beijing was fundamentally dismissive of greater involvement in intra-Afghan processes, demonstrating maximum impartiality in the settlement of the conflict. China had two perspectives regarding the presence of the US-led international coalition forces in Afghanistan. From one perspective, it was positive because of the coalition's mission to counter terrorist groups and deter any further escalation of the Afghan conflict. From another, the negative perceptions were rooted in (1) geopolitical and military-political challenges born by the close location of us and Western large-scale military infrastructure to Chinese borders and (2) the strengthening of Western influence and political and economic competition with China in bordering regions.

Indeed, since us troops entered Central Asia in 2001, Beijing has intensified its policy activity in the region. Many analysts consider China to be wary of the excessive growth of Western influence in Central Asia, and when international forces ejected the Taliban from the Afghan government, Beijing seized the opportunity to expand its own activity in the region. This resulted in large-scale investment and the expansion of Chinese companies into Central Asia.

China's New Policy in Afghanistan

The Chinese leadership uses "peripheral diplomacy" in its foreign policy for Afghanistan. According to President Xi Jinping, "China would strive for a sound neighboring environment for its own development and seek common development with neighboring countries."26 Specifically, Beijing is actively promoting vital components of its peripheral diplomacy, namely the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Road." These projects aim to increase the interconnectedness of infrastructure and economic and political cooperation between China and its neighbors. Beijing is highly concerned about the instability and further deterioration of the conflict in Afghanistan, and the future of security in the Central and South Asian regions, which is partly dependent on resolution of the Afghan conflict. The withdrawal of ISAF forces in late 2014 has, to some extent, created a security vacuum in the country, elevating Afghanistan to one of the most important vulnerable areas of

26 Mu Xuequan, "Xi Jinping: China to Further Friendly Relations with Neighboring Countries," *Xinhuanet*, October 26, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-10/26/c_125601680.htm.

Chinese foreign policy. In addition, increasing activity by other powerful countries, such as Russia and India, in Central Asia and Afghanistan has also influenced the intensification of Chinese foreign policy in this region. In a nutshell, Beijing sees Afghanistan as a potentially strong threat to the OBOR project.

In February 2015, Foreign Minister Wang Yi outlined four aspects of China's foreign policy toward Afghanistan:

- China reaffirms its commitment to internal reconciliation in Afghanistan driven by the Afghans themselves, and participation of Beijing in the process shall be based on the request of the government of Afghanistan.
- Beijing supports a peaceful settlement of the conflict between the official government and the Taliban.
- China will strive to participate actively in the socioeconomic healing of Afghanistan.
- China is interested in integrating Afghanistan into regional dynamics by means of its participation in the Silk Road Economic Belt.27

Beijing's political activity in Afghanistan has intensified since 2014. First, in July of that year, Beijing appointed the very first special envoy for Afghanistan, Sun Yuxi, a former PRC ambassador to Kabul. Sun was succeeded in November 2015 by another experienced Chinese diplomat, Deng Xijun.28 Second, in October 2014, Ashraf Ghani, the newly elected president of Afghanistan, made Beijing his first foreign trip,29 immediately after reaching a compromise with runner-up Abdullah Abdullah on the division of powers. In another historically significant event, PRC Vice President Li Yuanchao visited Kabul in November 2015 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.30 Third, China initiated the Fourth Heart of Asia–Istanbul Ministerial Process and organized a meeting of that group in

27 Wang Yi, "Addressing the Issue of Afghanistan Requires Reinforced Support in Four Aspects," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, February 12, 2015, http://www.fmPRC.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2676_663356/2678_663360/t1238074.shtml.

28 Huaxia, "China Names New Special Envoy for Afghanistan Affairs."

29 Michael Martina, "China Says Afghan President Vows to Help China Fight Militants," Reuters, October 29, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-afghanistan-idUSKBN0IH1D420141029.

30 Li Yuanchao, "Promote China–Afghanistan Cooperation and Bring New Life to the Silk Road," speech by the Vice President of the People's Republic of China, November 5, 2015, http://af.china-embassy.org/eng/sgxw/t1312041.htm.

Beijing in October 2014.31 Simultaneously, it has reinforced its dialogue with a number of countries that also have interests in Afghanistan, such as Pakistan, the United States, Russia, Iran, India, and the Central Asian countries in order to discuss the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict.

Fourth, Beijing has been an active participant in the ongoing negotiations between the government in Kabul and the Taliban. Chinese officials held talks with representatives of the Taliban in November 2014 in Pakistan;32 then, with Pakistan's support, they met with the Taliban in Urumqi in May 2015.33 Also, Beijing has become one of the catalyzers and active proponents of creating the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) comprised of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, and the United States on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation process through peace talks between the parties.34

Fifth, after Xi became president in 2013, the government planned to increase the volume of China's aid to Afghanistan. At the Fourth Heart of Asia–Istanbul Ministerial Process gathering, China announced its intentions to increase the annual amount of aid from us$32 million in 2013 to us$300 million through 2017. These funds mainly target projects in public health, education, and agriculture.35 China also declared its readiness to train 3,000 Afghan specialists in various fields and to allocate an additional 500 scholarships for Afghan students to pursue degrees in the PRC.36

Sixth, China has gradually strengthened cooperation with Afghan military structures and security forces, which directly contradicts its policies of the

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31 S.M. Hali, "China Pumps Adrenalin into the 'Heart of Asia'," *Daily Times* (Pakistan), November 4, 2014, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/04-Nov-2014/china-pumps-adrenalin-into-the-heart-of-asia.

32 Edward Wong, "Exploring a New Role: Peacemaker in Afghanistan," *New York Times,* January 14, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/14/world/asia/exploring-a-new-role-peacemaker-in-afghanistan.html?_r=0.

33 Edward Wong and Mujib Mashal, "Taliban and Afghan Peace Officials Have Secret Talks in China," *New York Times*, May 25, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/26/world/asia/taliban-and-afghan-peace-officials-have-secret-talks-in-china.html?_r=0.

34 "Special Envoy on Afghan Affairs of the Foreign Ministry Deng Xijun Attends the First Meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, January 12, 2016, http://www.fmPRC.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1331561.shtml.

35 Shisheng Hu et al., "Communication, Co-operation and Challenges: A Roadmap for Sino–Indian Engagement in Afghanistan," Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (2016): 18.

36 Angela Stanzel, "China Moves into Afghanistan," European Council on Foreign Relations, November 26, 2014, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_china_moves_into_afghanistan634.

early 2000s. Since the beginning of the Ghani–Abdullah tandem governance, Afghanistan and China have signed four memoranda of understanding regarding security and defense. The number of bilateral visits of heads of defense agencies and special services has reached an unprecedented level. From 2014 to June 2016, several Afghan officials—including the Afghan president's national security advisor and ministers of national defense, interior affairs, and foreign affairs—visited Beijing. In return, ministers of public security, foreign affairs, and the chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army have paid visits to Afghanistan.37

During his visit to Afghanistan, the PRC's vice president announced a grant of about us$79 million to build 10,000 apartments for the families of fallen soldiers and policemen.38 Similarly, the chief of the General Staff of the PLA, Fang Fenghui, announced another us$72 million in aid to the armed forces of Afghanistan during his visit in March 2016.39 He also noted that China is willing to increase counter-terrorism intelligence, joint drills, personnel training, and other areas of practical cooperation.40 This position differs from the Chinese strategy in Afghanistan under President Hamid Karzai (2004–2014), when Beijing refrained from any military cooperation with Kabul and declined to train any Afghan security forces except for a small number of counter-narcotics experts. On July 3, 2016, China delivered the first batch of military aid to Kabul, consisting of vehicles, spare parts, and ammunition.41

These actions demonstrate China's growing activity in Afghanistan, the importance of the country, and the inclusion of the Afghan conflict in the new Chinese foreign policy strategy. Beijing appears determined to achieve positive changes in Afghanistan through the vigorous implementation of socioeconomic projects, investment in natural resources extraction, networking with major Afghan political forces, and helping equip and train the country's security forces.

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37 Ahmad Bilal Khalil, "The Rise of China–Afghanistan Security Relations," *The Diplomat*, June 23, 2016, http://thediplomat.com/2016/06/the-rise-of-china-afghanistan-security-relations/.

38 Ankit Panda, "Chinese Vice President Visits Afghanistan," *The Diplomat*, November 4, 2015, http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/chinese-vice-president-visits-afghanistan/.

39 "China Pledges over us$70 Million to Support the Afghan Military," *Khaama Press*, March 1, 2016, http://www.khaama.com/china-pledges-over-70-million-to-support-the-afghan-military-0216.

40 "China Eyes Deeper Military Ties with Afghanistan," *Reuters*, April 21, 2016, http://www.dawn.com/news/1253481.

41 Gabriel Dominguez, "Afghanistan Receives First Batch of Chinese Military Aid," *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, July 5, 2016, http://www.janes.com/article/61987/afghanistan-receives-first-batch-of-chinese-military-aid.

However, there are still many concerns about whether Beijing will fulfill all these promises to facilitate the resolution of the Afghan conflict and to accelerate the economic development of Afghanistan. In providing financial support to a range of projects, Beijing may still be very cautious and hesitant. However, the best strategy to secure its current and future projects in Afghanistan may be for Beijing to make arrangements with local military leaders who will be responsible for the security of Chinese projects on Afghan soil.

The New Foreign Policy Concept of Xi Jinping

With Xi Jinping's rise to power, China's altered its approach to Central Asia and Afghanistan. The marked policy changes regarding Afghanistan are traceable particularly from 2014, and these shifts are, in turn, part of the systemic changes to Beijing's policies in the international arena. Previously, China sought to avoid significant involvement in conflict-resolution efforts in both neighboring countries and other parts of the world, choosing instead to concentrate mainly on domestic economic development. Currently, however, Beijing appears determined to conduct an ambitious, active, and long-term foreign policy with the aim of anticipating any plausible threats to its interests, ensuring security at its borders, and driving the country's economic development.

The leadership of Xi Jinping opened a new page in the history of Chinese foreign policy. Soon after his inauguration, Xi declared, "In foreign affairs, the imperative task is the supply and successful employment of important strategic opportunities for China."[42] During his speech in Paris in March 2014, the Chinese president recalled Napoleon's view of China: "Napoleon said that China … is a sleeping lion, and when he wakes up, will shake the world." Xi has asserted that the Chinese lion is already awake, but as "a peaceful, friendly, and civilized lion."[43] Over the past three years, China's leader has shown himself to be reform-minded, aiming to transform the entirety of domestic and foreign relations of the country. Xi Jinping intends to expand China's global power by conducting a more active and assertive foreign policy. This policy is focused on

42 "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs was Held in Beijing," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the PRC, November 29, 2014, http://www.fmPRC.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml.

43 "Speech by H.E. Mr. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at the Meeting Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of China-France Diplomatic Relations," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China March 27, 2014, http://www.fmPRC.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1147894.shtml.

the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Road initiatives, increasing the scale of international trade and investment, creating new regional and international institutions, and improving the country's military armament.

China may have perceived the withdrawal of the international coalition forces and the subsequent significant reduction of the us and NATO military presence in Afghanistan as one of these strategic opportunities. The emerging situation in Afghanistan brings opportunities for China to expand its influence, but also to push for substantial changes. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, China was clearly under-involved in the international arena. It failed to respond adequately to the crises in Libya and Syria, and it refrained from comment until the political upheavals passed in Myanmar and North Korea—its closest partners. To some observers, it appeared that China did not have a comprehensive foreign policy strategy. President Xi Jinping seeks to change this impression; instead of following the mantra of former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping "to hide one's abilities, stay invisible," Xi has offered a much more expansionist and muscular foreign policy.44

Importantly, in the past few years the Chinese leadership has often used the phrases "peaceful development" and "mutually beneficial cooperation."45 The notion of being a responsible global power has also entered into the public discourse of Chinese officials.46 Obviously, China is gradually upgrading from a regional power into a global power.47 It is making necessary adjustments to its policy of non-interference to allow for a more active foreign policy stance when China's key economic and strategic interests are endangered. China wants to be more involved in international affairs, gradually reform the global system of political and economic governance, promote its own set of values, firmly defend its vital interests, and begin to set global rules—not merely carry out rules set by another power.

One of the indicators of China's new policy is the country's change in attitude toward peacekeeping operations under the United Nations. By 2014, China had sent around 3,000 soldiers (placing it ninth among the countries

44 Elizabeth C. Economy, "China's Imperial President," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2014), http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142201/elizabeth-c-economy/chinas-imperial-president.

45 "Peace and Development Dominant Themes of Xi's Diplomacy," *China Daily*, January 5, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-01/05/content_22943326.htm.

46 "China's Mediation in South Sudan Problem not for Own Interests: FM," *Xinhuanet*, January 12, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-01/12/c_133913969.htm.

47 Zhu Liqun, "China's Foreign Policy Debates, European Institute for Security Studies," Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Papers (2010): 37–38.

with peacekeepers in un ranks) to participate in un peacekeeping operations. In a speech at the un General Assembly in September 2015, Xi Jinping promised to increase the number of Chinese peacekeepers by 8,000 and to allocate us$1 billion for this purpose.48 Previously, China had avoided sending military units to un peacekeeping operations, preferring instead to provide medical and logistical military specialists under its own flag.49 However, the government has recently decided to send military forces to South Sudan and Mali.50 Furthermore, in 2014 Beijing sent an additional 700 people to join un peace- keeping forces stationed in southern Sudan, thereby increasing its presence in the new country to 1,050 soldiers.51 China's intervention as a mediator in the Sudanese conflict was a first in PRC history, and it serves as an important indicator of a new direction for Chinese foreign policy.52

Why Did China Change Its Strategy in Afghanistan?

Many experts have linked China's foreign practices in Central Asia and Afghanistan to the internal problems of Xinjiang. They suggest that China hopes to use its strategic position to increase its authority in the restive Uygur region. Specifically, China has attempted to integrate Xinjiang with Central Asia and China proper via a "double opening" strategy. These efforts, which began in 1991, have shaped China's political strategy in Central Asia and in the "New Great Game."53 Chinese expert Zhao Huasheng argues, for instance, that China's security concerns about the Muslim-dominated Xinjiang region trump any of Beijing's interests in Afghanistan.54 Similarly, Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar, from the Polish Institute of International Affairs, contends that China is also concerned

48 "China's Xi Says to Commit 8,000 Troops for un Peacekeeping Force," *Reuters,* September 28, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-china-idUSKCN0RS1Z120150929.

49 Collen Wong, "China Embraces Peacekeeping Missions," *The Diplomat*, August 9, 2013, http://thediplomat.com/2013/08/china-embracespeacekeeping-missions/.

50 Frans Paul van der Putten, "China's Evolving Role in Peacekeeping and African Security," Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael (2015): 8.

51 Shannon Tiezzi, "China Triples Peacekeeping Presence in South Sudan," *The Diplomat*, September 26, 2014, http://thediplomat.com/2014/09/china-triples-peacekeeping-presence-in-south-sudan/.

52 Zhao Shengnan, "Beijing's Mediation Praised in Sudan, S. Sudan Issues," *China Daily*, May 29, 2012, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2012-05/29/content_15416648.htm.

53 Michael Clarke, "China's Post-9/11 Strategy in Central Asia," *Griffith University Regional Outlook Paper* No. 5, Brisbane, 2005, 5.

54 Zhao, "China and Afghanistan," 6.

about the Turkistan Islamic Party (tip) in Afghanistan, the East Turkestan Independence Movement, and similar terrorist organizations in China. Beijing believes Uygur separatists are recruited and trained in Afghanistan to fight in- side Xinjiang region.55

Meanwhile, Jeff Reeves stresses how the PRC believes that the security situation in Afghanistan has a direct impact on security in the XUAR.56 Elizabeth Wishnick adds that a meticulous examination of Chinese scholarly opinion confirms that China's interest in Afghanistan is rooted in its view that Xinjiang lies at the heart of security concerns along with regional security.57 Michael Clarke believes that "as the withdrawal of US and NATO forces has come ever closer, China's anxieties about the threat of Uygur terrorism in Xinjiang and its links to Af–Pak have remained at the forefront of Beijing's attention."58

The One Belt, One Road Project

In September 2013, Xi Jinping visited four (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) Central Asian countries, unequivocally demonstrating the growing importance of the region to Beijing and signaling strategic changes in China's foreign policy. In response to the actions of other influential actors in the world arena—and in Central Asia, in particular—Beijing announced a strategic reorientation described as a "turn toward Eurasia." When the Shanghai Five (the future Shanghai Cooperation Organization) was established in 1996, China had outlined a new policy of gradually building up long-term cooperation with the Central Asian countries at the same time it announced plans to create a Silk Road Economic Belt. Thus, Chinese interest in Central Asia, originally defined by the establishment of Shanghai-5, proceeded step- by-step and reached its apogee with the ambitious OBOR project. Beijing intends to implement large infrastructure projects in Central and Southeast Asia, Russia, parts of Europe, and potentially in most of Africa (65 countries) within the framework of OBOR. Chinese companies and banks, including the newly created Asian Bank for Infrastructure Investments, have commit- ted to invest us$1 trillion to construct railway lines, oil and gas pipelines,

55 Szczudlik-Tatar, "China's Evolving Stance on Afghanistan," 2.

56 Jeff Reeves, "Does China's Afghan Foreign Policy Constitute a Grand Strategy?," *Defense Concepts* 5 (2011): 25.

57 Elizabeth Wishnick, "Post-2014 Afghanistan Policy and the Limitations of China's Global Role," *Central Asian Affairs* 1 (2014): 152.

58 Michael Clarke, "'One Belt, One Road' and China's Emerging Afghanistan Dilemma," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 70 (2016): 10.

highways, airports, and large ports to improve the ties between China and these countries.59

In a strategic shift that us foreign policy officials billed as the a "pivot to Asia," the Obama administration shifted its priority interests to the Asia-Pacific region. This new displacement, coupled with the gradual withdrawal of us forces from Afghanistan, presents a convenient moment for Beijing to deepen its own presence in Central Asia. Meanwhile, China is warily observing us actions on military, political, and economic issues, along with trade capacity- building efforts and the overall us presence in the Asia-Pacific region. Beijing, however, warily regards us efforts to expand relations with Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, and a number of Southeast Asian countries, particularly India, as a policy of strategic encirclement. China fears that these steps could lead to a significant decline in its trade turnover with these countries and com- plicate access to vital marine transport routes.

Seen from China, the Eurasian continent provides a comfortable place for economic expansion in the coming years.60 By promoting One Belt, One Road, the new generation of Chinese leaders is thus conceivably striving to implement some sort of a new Marshall Plan in Eurasia and to create a project similar to the Euro-Atlantic system on the Asian continent—but under Beijing's leadership. This may somewhat compensate China for losses in the Asia-Pacific region connected with the expanding us military presence there and Washington's strong economic relations with all countries in the region but China. PricewaterhouseCooper has predicted that the Chinese government intends to send us$1 trillion in loans and grants to implement the OBOR project in the next 10 years alone.61 To finance this strategy, the PRC helped establish two major organizations, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund. In addition, it plans to commit its own currency reserves and the capabilities of a number of state-owned banks to capitalize several ongoing projects within OBOR.

Yet Afghanistan appears to be excluded from the OBOR project. No special infrastructure is planned on Afghan territory. Beijing worries about the possible ruinous influence of instability in Afghanistan, which is the linchpin of many

59 Joshua Yau, "PriceWaterhouseCoopers' Report for the un: Chinese Outbound Funding," UN Office of Financing for Development (2015): 2–3, http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/10/PPP-Overseas-Fiscal_vSend-for-UN-Portion.pdf.

60 Lanxin Xiang, "China's Eurasian Experiment," *Survival* 46 (2004): 118.

61 "China's New Silk Route: The Long and Winding Road," PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2016):4, http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/high-growth-markets/publications/china-new-silk-route.html.

grandiose OBOR-related projects. The destabilization of Afghanistan, as well as the spread of chaos and violence from its territory to neighboring countries and regions, could jeopardize OBOR and China's existing investments. For example, construction of the China–Pakistan economic corridor will cost China us$46 billion in the next 10–15 years.62 During Xi Jinping's visit to Central Asia in 2013, the parties signed a package of agreements worth us$50 billion.63 During his trip to Iran, Xi Jinping agreed to increase bilateral trade to us$600 billion within 10 years.64 Afghanistan, as a neighbor of all these countries, poses a non-insignificant risk to Beijing's plans. In this context, the PRC has no other choice but to increase its foreign policy involvement in Afghanistan, while at the same time it cannot guarantee the stability of the country or prevent Kabul's likely negative influence on the OBOR project.

The Security of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Undoubtedly, China's foreign policy in Afghanistan is premised on the possible negative impact of the Afghan conflict on the stability and development of Xinjiang. China fears the inflow of drugs and terrorist groups, particularly of Uygur origin, across their common border, as well as through Pakistan and the Central Asian countries. Pakistan and Southeast Asia are major transit countries in the flow of Afghan drugs to China. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in 2009 about 40 tons of heroin reached China from Afghanistan. That same year, the PRC seized another 5.8 tons of heroin.
The Chinese heroin market is worth us$7.3 billion per year. Moreover, the PRC accounts for more than one-third of heroin consumption in Asia.65

The start of the military campaign in Afghanistan in 2001 contributed to the international recognition of Uygur separatist groups as terrorist organizations. Prior to that, the United States had accused Beijing of suppressing opposition groups in Xinjiang by treating them as terrorist organizations. However, in August 2002, us Assistant Secretary Richard Armitage added the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) to the official us list of terrorist groups. A month later,

62 Daniel S. Markey, "Behind China's Gambit in Pakistan," Council on Foreign Relations, May 12, 2016, http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/behind-chinas-gambit-pakistan/p37855.

63 Ben Chu, "China's us$50bn Spending Spree on New Silk Road," *Independent*, October 3, 2013, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/chinas-50bn-spending-spree-on-new-silk-road-8854793.html.

64 Bozorgmehr Sharafedin, "Iran's Leader Says Never Trusted the West, Seeks Closer Ties with China," *Reuters*, January 23, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-china-idUSKCN0V109V.

65 "The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2011): 13–70.

the United States and China requested that the un add ETIM to its list of terrorist organizations and require all member states to freeze the financial assets of the group and deny its supporters entry into their territories.66 According to Chinese experts, in the late 1990s approximately 10,000 Uygurs from the PRC went through religious and military training in Pakistan. In 2002, Beijing announced that more than 1,000 Chinese Uygurs had been trained at Taliban and Al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan, and many of them had reportedly returned to the XUAR to conduct clandestine warfare. At that time, around 20 Uygurs were killed and about 300 were captured during us military operations on Afghan territory.67

The Chinese government has accused ETIM and other Uygur separatist organizations of committing numerous terrorist acts within China. The most resonant attacks were committed before the Olympics in Beijing in 2008 and during large-scale riots in Urumqi in July 2009. In recent years, there has also been a marked increase in terrorist acts, not only in Xinjiang, but also outside it, often before important political events: the explosion in Tiananmen Square on the eve of the Third Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (October 2013); knife-wielding terrorists attacking passengers at the railway station in Kumming during the annual session of the National People's Political Committee Consultative Conference (March 2014); a knife attack at a railway station in Guangzhou (May 2014); and two suicide blasts at a railway station in Urumqi on the last day of Xi Jinping's visit to the XUAR (April 2014).68 There were also a number of explosions in Xinjiang in July69 and September 2014,70 attacks at a coalmine in Aksu, and 10 parcel bombs detonated in Liucheng in September 2015.71 There is no direct evidence of a connection between these incidents and Afghanistan, but the growing number of Uygur terrorists on the Afghan territory may cause the situation inXinjiang to degrade even further.

66 McNeal and Dumbaugh, "China's Relations with Central Asian States," 9.

67 S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe,2004), 342.

68 Szczudlik-Tatar, "China's Evolving Stance on Afghanistan," 2.

69 "Nearly 100 Dead – Mostly 'Terrorists'– in Attack, China Says," *CNN,* August 4, 2014, http://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/03/world/asia/china-terror-attack/.

70 "Reports: 50 were Killed in China Clash," *USA Today*, September 26, 2014, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2014/09/26/china-xinjiang-terrorism-50-dead/16249969/.

71 "China's Liucheng Bombings Rekindle Fears of Militancy," *Stratfor*, September 30, 2015, https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/chinas-liucheng-bombings-rekindle-fears-militancy.

Uygur terrorist organizations are supposedly working closely with the Islamic Movement of Turkestan,72 Al-Qaeda,73 and the Taliban.74 Uygur militants have settled in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan (FATA), as well as in the eastern and southern provinces of Afghanistan.75 Some ETIM leaders were killed by us drone strikes or by the efforts of Pakistani security forces in North Waziristan: H. Masum in 2003, A. Hak Turkistan in May 2010, and A. Shakur al-Turkistan in August 2012.76 China is determined to eradicate terrorism and separatism in Xinjiang, but it faces difficulties, given historical Uygur demands for special treatment, including cultural autonomy and social justice. Security, stability, and the development of XUAR are some of the main issues on the political agenda of China, and settling these issues seems to be one of the top priorities of the new generation of Chinese leaders. A stable and dynamic Xinjiang is thus pivotal for the success of the OBOR, since virtually all major land infrastructure facilities are supposed to be built there.

Natural Resources from Afghanistan

Another factor driving China's growing involvement in Afghanistan is national energy security needs and resource adequacy. The rapidly growing Chinese economy requires a considerable amount of energy resources. However, growing tensions in the Middle East and increasing risks in delivering mineral products through marine routes has meant that the Chinese leadership needed to seek new markets for importing raw materials. Beijing views Central Asia and Afghanistan as one such market. In this context, it considers Afghanistan as both a new source of resources that the Chinese economy lacks and a serious threat to the stability of neighboring countries that supply significant volumes of natural raw materials to the PRC.

Energy demand in China continues to grow steadily despite the slowdown in GDP growth, and the country is subsequently becoming more dependent on external energy supplies. The PRC's Ministry of Land and Resources has

72 Jacob Zenn, "Turkistan Islamic Party Increases Its Media Profile," *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, February 9, 2014, http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12909-turkistanislamic-party-increases-its-media-profile.html.

73 Thomas Joscelyn, "Zawahiri Praises Uighur Jihadists in Ninth Episode of 'Islamic Spring' Series," *Long War Journal*, July 7, 2016, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/07/zawahiri-praises-uighur-jihadists-in-ninth-episode-of-islamic-spring-series.php.

74 Zhao, "China and Afghanistan," 1.

75 Andrew Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan–Pakistan," *Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2010): 82.

76 Zia Ur Rehman, "ETIM's Presence in Pakistan and China's Growing Pressure," Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (2014): 2.

calculated that China imported 57 percent of its oil needs in 2013, and this figure is predicted to rise to 66 percent by 2020 and 72 percent in 2040.77 At the same time, China is aiming to gradually substitute natural gas for coal in order to reduce the negative environmental impact. The International Energy Agency estimates that China will be consuming about 250 billion cubic meters of natural gas by 2020.78

Afghanistan is rich in a wide range of energy resources as well as ferrous, non-ferrous, precious, and rare metals. When experts from the Geological Committee and the us Department of Defense studied materials from Soviet geologists in Afghanistan and surveyed approximately 70 percent of the country using special aircraft equipment, they concluded that there are huge de- posits of various raw materials worth roughly US$1 trillion.79 According to us Geological Survey estimates from 2007, the value of iron stores in Afghanistan is estimated at US$421 billion, copper at US$274 billion, niobium at US$81.2 billion, cobalt at US$50.8 billion, gold at US$25 billion, molybdenum at US$24 billion, other rare earth metals at US$7 billion, asbestos at US$6 billion, and silver at US$5 billion, among others.80

China has already invested in developing copper and oil in Afghanistan. However, continuous local clashes, the deteriorating situation in various Afghan provinces, and the weak, corrupt national government and security force prevent the full realization of the Chinese production capacity potential for natural resources. From 2007 to 2012, there were 19 attacks on Chinese specialists working in the Aynak copper deposit. As a result, 40 Chinese engineers had to leave Afghanistan earlier than planned.81 Two Chinese engineers were kidnapped in the Faryab province in 2010.82 The security situation in Afghani- stan also poses a significant threat to neighboring countries and Chinese border provinces that Beijing considers reliable suppliers of resources today and in the future. The large reserves of natural resources in the XUAR—nearly

77 "China," us Energy Information Administration, February 4, 2014, http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=CH.

78 Nobuyuki Higashi, "Natural Gas in China: Market Evolution and Strategy," International Energy Agency Working Paper Series (2009), http://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/nat_gas_china.pdf.

79 James Risen, "us Identifies Vast Mineral Riches in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, June 13, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/world/asia/14minerals.html?_r=0.

80 Arif Ayub, "Minerals in Afghanistan," *The Nation,* August 11, 2010, http://nation.com.pk/columns/11-Aug-2010/Minerals-in-Afghanistan.

81 Erica Downs, "China Buys into Afghanistan," *SAIS Review* 32 (2012): 69.

82 "Taliban Kidnap Two Chinese Engineers, Four Afghans," *Associated Press*, January 17, 2010, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jGr744c2ihCH1UuPJqvBmH7RmmoQ.

30 percent of Chinese oil reserves, 34 percent of gas deposits, 40 percent of coal, and substantial reserves of nonferrous metals—are located in the region.83

China is seriously concerned about the increased activity of Taliban and other radical organizations in the north of Afghanistan and their possible negative impact on Beijing's strategic interests in the Central Asian region. Furthermore, increased activities among the various armed groups along the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan border and the worsening security situation in this area directly threaten Chinese interests.

Concerns about Pakistan

China's increased interest in the Afghan conflict is also driven by the state of affairs in Pakistan. The Chinese leadership fears the further deterioration of the internal situation in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as Islamabad's direct involvement in Afghanistan stymies the resolution of Pakistan's own severe political and socioeconomic problems. These issues might seriously weaken Pakistan, which would not align with the strategic interests of China.

China was also seriously concerned about the situation in Pakistan after the 1973 coup that brought Mokhammed Daoud Khan to power in Afghanistan. Daoud, who had previously served as a prime minister, was the principal advocate of Pashtun nationalism and the unification of Pashtuns on both sides of the Afghan–Pakistani border. Beijing presumed that the new head of the country would once again bring claims to Islamabad about the Pashtun issue, as Pakistan was severely weakened after the third Indo-Pakistan war in 1971 and had already lost the territory of Bangladesh.84

Precarious stability still makes Pakistan vulnerable in the twenty-first century. There has been a sharp increase in terrorist activity in the country. As a comparison, the annual average of 153 terrorist victims recorded from 1998 to 2006 reached a catastrophic 1,592 persons per year in 2007–2014. Pakistan— along with Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Nigeria—comprise the top five worst countries in terms of terrorism. In 2014 alone, 1,821 terrorist attacks with 1,760 victims were recorded. In late 2014, the number of terrorist organizations based in Pakistan reached 35.85

The economic performance of the country is also subject to the ruinous consequences of this worsening security. The state budget revenues in 2015 were us$14 billion less than expenditures, and the budget deficit was

83 Andrew Scobell, Ely Ratner, and Michael Beckley, *China's Strategy Toward South and Central Asia: An Empty Fortress* (Santa Monica, ca: rand, 2014): 15.

84 Ludwig, "Sixty Years of Sino–Afghan Relations," 397.

85 "Global Terrorism Index 2015," Institute for Economics and Peace (2015): 1–23.

5.8 percent of GDP. The volume of imports to Pakistan more than doubled the cumulative imports of us$45.83 and exports us$23.67 billion.86 In 2015, the FDI volume was only half of the us$979 million recorded the previous year.87 Undeveloped logistics infrastructure and severe energy shortages also preclude any developments in the Pakistani economy. Furthermore, the internal political struggle has recently been exacerbated among civilians, military authorities, and representatives of various parties, clans, and regional elites.

The openness of the Afghan-Pakistani border—which allows radical groups to move easily between the two countries—and weak control over the FATA— the main base for terrorist training and accommodation—complicate the Pakistani security forces' efforts to eradicate terrorist elements. Beyond this issue, Pakistan is also concerned about India's growing influence in Afghanistan, where it has become an important economic, military, and political assistance partner since the terror attacks of 9/11. This concern involves both the question of settling the Afghan conflict, as well as the unwillingness of the Afghan government to officially recognize the existing border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. These circumstances have led Islamabad to furtively support the Taliban and the Haqqani Network88 on Afghan territory.

China is taking vigorous measures to stabilize the situation in Pakistan and catalyze its further development. Beijing considers Pakistan to be a major ally in South Asia. It describes their relationship as an "all-weather strategic partnership and cooperation," which in Chinese political culture marks the highest level of cooperation and trust in bilateral relations with a foreign state,

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86 "Pakistan," *The CIA World Factbook* (Washington, DC: CIA, 2016), https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pk.html.

87 "Foreign Direct Investment, Net Inflows (BoP, current us$): Pakistan," World Bank, 2016, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.KLT.DINV.CD.WD?end=2015&locations=PK&start=2008&view=chart.

88 According to the United Nations Security Council: The Haqqani Network has its roots in the Afghan conflict of the late 1970s. In the mid-1980s, Jalaluddin Haqqani, the founder of the Haqqani Network, forged a relationship with the leader of al-Qaeda, Usama bin Laden. Jalaluddin joined the Taliban movement in 1995, but maintained his own power base along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Jalaluddin's son, Sirajuddin Haqqani, took control of the network and has since then led the group into the forefront of insurgent activities in Afghanistan. The Haqqani Network has been responsible for many of the highest-profile attacks in Afghanistan. The Haqqani Network has also been involved in a number of kidnappings, and has cooperated with the Taliban and other militant organizations in Afghanistan, https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1988/materials/summaries/entity/haqqani-network.

exclusively used to describe the relationship with Islamabad.89 This is illustrated in plans to build the China–Pakistan economic corridor, valued at US$46 billion. Notably, although the transportation component—roads and railways across the Karakoram mountain range, 120 tunnels, bridges, Gwadar Port,90 among others—is the main basis, the major share of the project's costs are associated with the development of its economic zone and creation of an energy complex. Thus, up to us$37 billion will be invested in electricity production: construction of thermal coal power plants, hydropower plants, solar energy conversion, and the creation of a developed energy network.91 By mid-2016, China had already realized more than 200 projects in Pakistan involving 14,000 Chinese engineers and technicians.92

In response to China's positive gestures, Pakistan aims to take China's interests into account (to a certain extent) when formulating its own Afghanistan policy. Islamabad created the conditions and provided security for a meeting to discuss the Uygur issue between the Chinese leadership and Taliban representatives in 2000. With the direct participation of the Pakistani side, another set of talks between Chinese officials and the Taliban were held in 2014–2015. It seems that Beijing prompted Islamabad to engage in a quadripartite format on the settlement of the Afghan conflict together with Washington and Kabul. However, the PRC's impact on Pakistan is often exaggerated, asserting that, under China's pressure, Pakistan may be submissive about its Afghan policy. Pakistan–China relations are very complex, multi-faceted, and multi-factor. They are interdependent and cannot simply dictate to each other a particular course of action with respect to sensitive issues. Taking into account the historical and emotional aspects of Pakistani policy in Afghanistan, it is difficult to foresee that Islamabad would allow any serious pressure on matters that do not align with its interests. At the same time, such a course of action is not in line with the foreign policy strategy of Beijing, which prefers soft power to excessively harsh actions in achieving its goals.

89 "China, Pakistan Elevate Relations, Commit to Long-lasting Friendship," *Xinhua*, April 21, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/21/c_134167525.htm.

90 Phase one of Gwadar Port was completed in late 2016.

91 Katharine Houreld, "China and Pakistan Launch Economic Corridor Plan Worth US$46 Billion," *Reuters*, April 20, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-china-idUSKBN0NA12T20150420.

92 Wang Xu, "Special Troops to Help Keep China–Pakistan Corridor Safe," *China Daily,* February 4, 2016, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-02/04/content_23385711.htm.

Conclusion

The recent foreign policy of China in Afghanistan is marked by versatility and a goal-oriented strategy, but also by some ambiguous methods to achieve these goals. China has made some efforts to resolve the Afghan problem, but the diplomatic measures taken to establish a dialogue between the parties to the conflict and the financial aid given to Kabul have not yet produced any tangible results. The situation in the country remains tenuous and at risk of deterioration. Meanwhile, Taliban forces, despite internal opposition, are successfully opposing the Afghan security forces and have taken control of large areas of the country.

China's policy toward Afghanistan is often treated as a part of its strategy in Central Asia. However, there are some fundamental differences. Chinese policy in Central Asia is economy-oriented, and Beijing explicitly avoids interfering in the internal and inter-state issues. In contrast, Beijing's main concerns in Afghanistan are security-oriented. Additionally, China's readiness to co-mediate with the United States in efforts to resolve the Afghan conflict is another notable aspect that is not visible in Central Asia.

China's interests in Afghanistan have noticeably evolved since 2001. Previously, Beijing prioritized the regulation of Uygur terrorists and the Afghan–Pakistani border along with natural resources extraction. However, lately these problems have been relegated to a secondary role behind the country's strategic mission to ensure the safety, viability, and effectiveness of OBOR and Chinese investment into the region.

Before taking an active position in Afghanistan, Beijing faced two dilemmas. First, it needed to demonstrate its international presence and desire to become a "responsible global power" that participates in the resolution of international conflicts. But, second, it had to exercise caution, hot undertaking too serious a commitment that, if it failed, might adversely affect China's image. Beijing is, for instance, acting with a certain degree of restraint and caution in the negotiation process on Afghanistan, yielding to Pakistan and the United States. China seems to be willing to collaborate with any government in Kabul that does not pose a threat to its own security and interests. Beijing needs a stable and predictable Afghanistan that will pose no threat to Chinese interests in Afghanistan and in bordering regions. It aspires to maintain smooth, professional working relationships with all members of the Afghan political establishment. The experience of Chinese companies abroad demonstrates that they are ready for close and mutually beneficial cooperation with all field commanders and local leaders to promote their projects on the principle of "security in exchange for a financial investment." At the same time, China has

established a dialogue with separate opposition political forces in Afghanistan through the mediation of Pakistan. The prospects for direct contact between Chinese officials and the Taliban remain slim, specifically when considering Islamabad's strong resistance to allowing any third party into its special relationship.

But several factors question the efficiency of China's policy in Afghanistan: the suspension of the quadripartite format on the settlement of the Afghan conflict, the change in leadership of the Taliban movement, the failure of Afghan security forces despite military support to provide peace and stability, and, finally, the high risk born by major economic and infrastructure projects. China is aware of the current state of its Afghan policy, but it does not know how to improve it. This might be rooted in the lack of cooperation experience between China and Afghanistan and the lack of a wide range of Afghan experts among the Chinese academic and policy community.

It is difficult to believe that China's current policy in Afghanistan will be very effective. The Afghan problem is so complicated and deep that it demands the participation of a long list of influential actors. The negotiation process initiated by China is too limited by the small number of its members. Any external actor in Afghanistan that was not invited to participate in these talks could spoil this format. At the same time, Chinese financial resources for different socioeconomic and military projects on the Afghan territory should be coordinated with other donors in Afghanistan in order to be more effective and targeted.