

China's Afghanistan Policy: Implications for Pakistan

Samran Ali

Introduction

China is growing from a regional to a global power. According to the power transition theory, the rise of China places it in a natural competition with the United States both economically and militarily. China's economic interests stretch from its immediate neighborhood to other continents. It is also working on reviving the Old Silk trade route, which covers its western regions, and Central and South Asia. It is also investing heavily in these regions. States' economic interests go alongside with their political interests. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013, and other economic ventures would, therefore, allow China to use soft power to shape the public opinion in several regions.

China's growing economic and political interests pose security challenges for it as well, which in turn demand a proactive foreign policy. The rivalry between the US and China is growing amid the US policy of Pivot to Asia and the alliance between Chinese regional rivals and the US. These factors are urging China to take measures for safeguarding its interests in the region and beyond. Although the US under President Trump has withdrawn from Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), its strategic objectives and policies in the region, crafted in the last few decades, have not changed i.e. 'Japan as keystone,' 'India as counterweight' and the regional alliance of democratic countries.

Violence in Afghanistan can have ripple effects on the Chinese internal security, particularly on the western region Xinjiang, which has a majority of ethnic Uyghur Muslim population. The Situation in Afghanistan has remained volatile from Afghan Jihad to never-ending War on Terror. Extremist ideologies were nurtured and

exported to neighboring Pakistan, Turkmenistan and the other Central Asian Republics (CARs) in the past. East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) has been involved in violent acts in the past. It is feared that if extremists come to power again in Afghanistan, their ideologies and terrorist activities may get a boost and the security situation in the region may become even more precarious.

Presence of US troops in Afghanistan has also generated a paradoxical situation. The troops' presence aims at bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan but the US boots on the ground are also a politically destabilizing factor. The Taliban, fighting against the US troops, consider them occupation forces which must be ousted from the Afghan soil.

Since Afghan soil became a playing field for competing interests of global and regional powers¹ in the 1980s and subsequent internecine fight for power in the 1990s, Afghanistan's security situation has been worsening except for the period when Taliban were in power there. The solution to the Afghan problem has become as complex as Afghan history of internal fights. A number of Afghanistan's neighbors and some major powers now have stakes in Afghanistan. This paper will analyze the Chinese rationale and approach towards Afghanistan situation and possible implications of Chinese policy for regional peace and stability, particularly how it would impact Pakistan.

Evolving Afghan Geo-Political Situation

The 19th Century's Great Game between the Russian and British Empire was about the distrust and deep suspicion of each other's intentions in the region. The Russians were fearful of the British making inroads in Central Asia and the British were concerned about the security of India. Today power contest is between the US and China and to lesser extents between the US and Russia. Pakistan, India, Iran, and others are playing subsidiary roles.²

President Trump's National Security Strategy regards Russia and China as 'key challenge' affecting the US global standing and terms them 'revisionist' states.³ The US interests in Central Asia are mostly strategic. It aims to isolate the Central Asian Republics (CARs) against Russian and Chinese influence. China and Russia see US' interests in CARs as standing challenge to their security interests.⁴ The influence and footprint of China are, however, growing in Central Asia with its increasing investments and trade in the region.⁵ Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is also working to enhance cooperation among its member states. In Afghanistan, divergent interests of several powers are becoming increasingly visible. The convergence of Russian, Chinese and Pakistani interests in Afghanistan have placed them on one side of the spectrum and the US and India on the other.

The US has not been successful in achieving its objective of wiping Taliban out of Afghanistan and establishing a central government which is capable of governing the whole country. The security situation in Afghanistan has further deteriorated after withdrawal of ISAF forces in 2014. According to Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), militants are expanding their control and influence into other territories while the influence of the government is decreasing.⁶ Political polarization has also increased in past few years. Now there are more groups fighting in Afghanistan than in 2001, when the US entered Afghanistan. ISIS fighters are also reportedly moving there after facing defeat in Syria and Iraq. According to UN Secretary-General's Report, the present situation remains volatile as Afghan Taliban and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP) showed a continued capacity to inflict mass casualties in Afghanistan.⁷

The US-Afghanistan Security Partnership Agreement, which entered into force on January 1, 2015, provides authorization for presence and actions of United States security forces in Afghanistan. Under the agreement, when deemed necessary, the US forces could also take part in security operations in Afghanistan. There is also no

exact timeline given for complete US forces withdrawal from Afghanistan, creating more ambiguity. President Trump, initially a critic of the war in Afghanistan, changed his stance after taking over the Presidential office. His Administration, in fact, took a tougher stance against the Taliban and came up with its New Afghan Strategy. This strategy allowed deployment of additional troops in Afghanistan, encouraged greater Indian role in Afghanistan and holds Pakistan responsible for not taking actions against Afghan Taliban as well as allegedly providing them safe havens.⁸ The new strategy does not lay emphasis on the political and governance problems in Afghanistan. This strategy also indicates that Trump Administration is trying to seek a military solution of the Afghan problem.

There are chances that Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will lose control of several peripheral areas if the US troops are withdrawn totally from Afghanistan.⁹ The withdrawal will create a power vacuum which may be filled by either Afghan Taliban gaining power and control of the whole of Afghanistan or would lead to total turmoil.¹⁰ The latter situation is likely to become similar to 1990s when political elites and warlords were engaged in fighting each other. This chaos may not be confined only to Afghanistan, it has the potential to undermine the peace and security of its neighbors in South and Central Asia including China and particularly Pakistan. The chaotic Afghanistan situation provided conducive conditions for Tahrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, militants from Uzbekistan and Uygurs from Western China, and more recently the presence of ISIS is likely to pose a whole new level of threat to the region.¹¹

Chinese Interests and Policies in Afghanistan

China had kept a low profile in Afghanistan in the past. It had, however, maintained secret contacts with some groups to restrain them from working against the Chinese interests. These included the flow of extremism into the Chinese Western region and security

of Chinese Companies operating in Afghanistan.¹² China's low-key position has also not challenged the US political leadership role in Afghanistan.¹³ But, as China is growing both economically and politically, it is taking more interest in regional and global affairs. Afghanistan as a neighbor of China holds more significance for the former today than in the past. It has become an area of interest for the Chinese foreign policy as it considers a peaceful Afghanistan a key to stability in the region. Chinese actions in Afghanistan are also partly motivated by the realization that China as a major power has a responsibility in maintaining regional peace and security.¹⁴ President Trump during his state visit to China in November 2017, also discussed Afghanistan's future and the threat of terrorism with President Xi, indicating the importance of Chinese role in Afghanistan. China's permanent representative to the United Nations, Ma Zhaoxu at the Security Council Debate on Afghanistan said, "Peace and stability in Afghanistan have a direct bearing on the well-being of the Afghan people, as well as on security, stability, and prosperity in the region."¹⁵ He also termed Afghanistan as an important country in the context of Belt and Road Initiative and that the international community must provide firm support to achieve peace and security in Afghanistan.¹⁶

Interests of Afghanistan are also converging with that of China. For Afghanistan, Beijing can help meet two of its major needs. Afghanistan needs resources for reconstruction and secondly, to play a role in influencing Pakistan¹⁷ to take steps against Afghan Taliban, allegedly operating from their bases in Pakistan.

Peace and Stability in Afghanistan

As mentioned earlier, Chinese main concerns are peace and stability in Afghanistan. There are two major reasons driving China's concerns. One is the internal insurgency in Afghanistan and the other presence of US troops in the war-torn country. The

stalemate between Taliban fighters and US troops deployed there have left the Chinese with fewer choices in Afghanistan.

According to Director of Center for Shanghai Cooperation Organization Studies, Fudan University, Zhao Huasheng, Xinjiang's stability is the "starting point" for China's Afghanistan policy.¹⁸ There is a constant fear of the support to extremists in Western China from Afghanistan. The Xinjiang region of China is home to more than 8 million Muslims in which anti-Han sentiments have grown among the Uyghurs since the 1990s. They complain of discrimination and marginalization of their community in the overall development of China.¹⁹ Some experts see the Uyghur issue as an internal Chinese security problem, but for some it is seen in the context of global jihad as it has a religious dimension and Uyghurs have reported contacts with external militant groups.²⁰ Majority of the Uyghurs harboring anti-China sentiments are organized under the ETIM umbrella. The ETIM has ties with Al-Qaeda, Afghan Taliban and reportedly IS which is expanding its presence in Afghanistan.²¹ Presence of potent militant groups in China's neighborhood is worrisome for it. IS aspires to establish a global network of jihad,²² and poses a greater threat to China than militants adhering to any other ideology. In late February 2017, IS released a video featuring a man from Xinjiang vowing to carry out terrorist attacks in China.²³

The presence of US troops and intelligence agencies in Afghanistan is another factor that adds to China's security concerns. When US' forces entered Afghanistan in 2001, China viewed this development as a US military base right next to Chinese western border.²⁴ Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai has termed the US military presence not only to fight Taliban but also to keep an eye on its major adversaries in the region.²⁵ China also thinks the US will not exit Afghanistan completely, as it would be perceived as its defeat and a major embarrassment internationally. It also realizes that the US will maintain its military presence in Afghanistan as long as it remains unstable. China also fears that US withdrawal may result in

a civil war within Afghanistan, which is not in its interests. China, therefore, doesn't object to US' presence under current circumstances, but it doesn't want the extended US military presence in its neighborhood.²⁶

Paradoxically US presence in Afghanistan is also a major factor contributing to instability in Afghanistan. Taliban regard the US forces as occupation forces, which provides them with a legitimate reason to fight against them as well as garner support of the other Afghans. The absence of a withdrawal timeline and increase in US forces in Afghanistan has also cast doubts on US objectives in Afghanistan. The suspicions were also echoed by the Iranian Foreign Minister Dr. Javad Zarif, the other neighbor of Afghanistan, on his visit to Pakistan. He stated that the US was not interested in bringing peace in Afghanistan and security of the region. He stressed on cooperation among regional countries for peace.

In continuation of its troublesome policies, the US has also sought to increase Indian influence and role in Afghanistan.²⁷ Trump termed India as "a key security and economic partner of the United States" and said that developing a strategic partnership with India was a "critical part of the South Asia strategy for America". India, however, has declined to send its troops to Afghanistan and emphasized on the economic and infrastructure development in line with Chinese policy on Afghanistan. China, in larger geopolitical context, would not want Afghanistan with a support base for extremists, go under the Indian influence.

Other threats posed to China by insatiability in Afghanistan include the flow of drugs into China from Afghanistan. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), opium production in Afghanistan in 2016 increased by 43% to 4800 tons from 3300 tons in 2015.²⁸ Much of the drugs emanating from Afghanistan find their way into China through Central Asia. In order to control the drug trafficking, China has proposed an anti-drug task force working under SCO.

China Reconnecting with the World

At a time when policies of protectionism are being favored by the countries in the West, China is connecting with the world with trade and cooperation to further its economic objectives. The primary policy tools for China have been its trade and investment in different world regions. President Xi Jinping is working to revive the Old Silk Road under the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) to connect the vast territories in Europe and Asia with trade, infrastructure, and cultural links.²⁹

China wants to expand the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), that comes under BRI, to Afghanistan. The project involves the construction of two highways and railways connecting Afghanistan with Pakistan.³⁰ CPEC, China believes, will connect Afghanistan with Pakistan and China economically and help stabilize Afghan economy. The route will be further extended to Central Asia. The appointment of the new Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan was indicative of Afghan inclusion in CPEC. His experience as the director of Silk Road Fund established under BRI made him preferred choice for this. According to Liu Zongyi, a senior fellow at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, "The appointment of Liu [as new Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan] is a carefully considered one. He was raised in Xinjiang and has experience in South Asia." He also said, "China is spearheading economic cooperation and development for regional security, especially around its neighbors."³¹

Chinese Diplomatic Efforts

The situation in Afghanistan is clear, if China takes sides in Afghanistan among the fighting factions, it will offend the other groups that are not supported. Preferred policy tool for China, therefore, is through the pursuit of a diplomatic and political solution for the Afghan problem. In its strategy for peace and

stability, Afghanistan aims to achieve five major goals. It includes an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process, capacity building of Afghanistan to take responsibility of its own affairs, facilitating the reconciliation process with Taliban, supporting Afghanistan development and reconstruction process and lastly supporting Afghanistan in developing external relations based on mutual respect.³²

A flurry of diplomatic activities, involving a number of states in Afghanistan's neighborhood was witnessed after the unveiling of new the US-Afghan Strategy-2017. Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) met in October 2017 in Oman. Russia hosted the SCO-Afghan Contact group meeting at the foreign ministerial level in the same month and China was host to Afghan and Pakistani foreign ministers for trilateral discussions. Kabul Process Conference also took place in February 2018. China is part of all these initiatives aimed at stabilizing Afghanistan. China also appointed veteran diplomat Sun Yuxi as a special envoy to Afghanistan.

Unlike other powers, China never entered Afghanistan militarily. Due to this China enjoys a non-controversial and a cleaner image among the Afghan people and militant groups. It also enjoys the trust of the central government in Afghanistan. With no historical baggage and a clean image, China is ideally suited to play the role of an honest broker for peace in Afghanistan. The Kabul Process is one such initiative. Kabul Peace Process works within the Chinese vision of Afghanistan peacebuilding as the process is Afghan-owned and Afghan-led aimed at taking forward a focused intra-Afghan dialogue on peace. Many regional and extra-regional powers participate in these talks. United Nations Organizations, European Union, and NATO also back this process. Two meetings of Kabul Process have been held so far. In the latest meeting, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offered talks to Taliban with no pre-conditions in a major policy shift.³³ The offer involved an office for Taliban in Kabul, Afghan passports for Taliban, resettlement for militants' families and assistance in removal of top Taliban leaders

names from international terrorist blacklists. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson welcomed this development and offered to play a role in the reconciliation process.³⁴ But the signals from the US don't augur well for the peace process. President Trump's new national security adviser, John Bolton, has stated that in face of growing Taliban, Islamic State and Al-Qaeda threats, the US can't walk away from the war in Afghanistan.³⁵

According to experts, China has developed contacts with Taliban over the years and has held meetings with them in both Pakistan and China. It is preparing to deal with whatever political forces emerge in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal.³⁶ China, after trilateral discussions on Afghanistan with Pakistan and Russia in December 2016, favored the removal of Taliban from UN sanctions list for strengthening peace dialogue between insurgents and the Afghan government.³⁷

Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Afghanistan

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can provide an important regional forum to seek a solution for Afghan conflict. SCO evolved side by side with the Afghan War on Terror after 9/11. Afghanistan was granted an observer status in the organization in 2012. SCO-Afghan Contact Group was established in 2005 to further the communication between Afghanistan and SCO members. SCO is opposed to the use of military means and external intervention in Afghan conflict and stresses on internal reconciliation by encouraging all political factions to engage in negotiations. It is opposed to the presence of external forces in Afghanistan saying it will jeopardize regional security.³⁸

SCO is still evolving and developing its framework.³⁹ Among other factors behind limited SCO role in the regional security sphere is the parallel Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) dominated by Russia. CSTO is clear in its sole objective of the provision of

security to member states, unlike the SCO which has multiple sets of aims and objectives ranging from security to culture and tourism. CSTO has a Collective Rapid Reaction Force whereas SCO does not have any.⁴⁰

Russian President's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, said in an interview that in face of the possible threat of terrorism from Afghanistan, Russia is taking steps with other member states of CSTO to increase the readiness of the post-Soviet security bloc and is also working with Afghanistan-SCO Contact Group in this regard.⁴¹ Both SCO and CSTO had signed an agreement to broaden mutual cooperation on security, crimes, and drug trafficking. Meanwhile, the presence of US and NATO is also a factor in limited SCO role in Afghanistan. China itself has mostly relied on US and NATO when it came to the provision of security to Chinese investments and interests. But China believes that to curb violence and extremism, the economic and social developments are more viable options.

The recent induction of Pakistan and India in SCO may also hinder its capacity for dealing with Afghan conflict as objectives of these states vis-à-vis Afghanistan are divergent. Pakistan and India became the full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in June 2017. After getting the permanent membership of the SCO, both the countries will get more engaged in the Central Asian affairs.

No Hard Power Option

Most of the experts agree on the point that Chinese will not get militarily involved in Afghanistan. They term Chinese military involvement in Afghanistan amounting to inviting trouble⁴² owing to its proximity to restive Xinjiang province. Chinese Defence Ministry recently denied reports of building a military post for Afghan National Forces and termed the news groundless. It said

China and Afghanistan had normal security cooperation and that China is supporting Afghanistan in improving defense and counter-terrorism efforts.⁴³ China focuses on the capacity building of the Afghan forces so that they can effectively deal with the militants and enforce government's writ. It provided Afghanistan with military aid for the first time in June 2016 which included logistic equipment and weapons. Details of the supplies, however, were kept secret.⁴⁴ General Fang Fenghui, the Chief of the General Staff of the PLA on his visit to Afghanistan said China would provide \$72 million worth of military aid to the host country. China is also strengthening its security on the border with Afghanistan. It is building a 75 km road up to 10 km of the border, a supply depot and mobile communication center for rapid movement of its military in the region.⁴⁵

Implications for Pakistan

Pakistan's interests complement the Chinese interests in Afghanistan, mainly stabilizing the internal situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan and China both face the threat of terrorism from Afghanistan. Afghan soil has been used by militants for subversive activities in Pakistan for decades and China fears the same for itself. Both want a central government, capable of effectively governing the whole of Afghan territory and bringing peace and stability in the country. Alignment of Pakistani interests with Russian Federation and China has helped Pakistan in the diplomatic arena. When the US blamed Pakistan for lies and deceit, China praised Pakistani counterterrorism efforts. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Geng Shuang said, "Pakistan has made great efforts and sacrifices for combating terrorism and made prominent contributions to the cause of international counterterrorism, and the international community should fully recognize this."⁴⁶

Pakistan experienced extremism and a strong wave of terrorism after 9/11 and start of the US War on Terror. According to Pakistan

government figures War on Terror has caused 123 billion US Dollars loss to Pakistani economy besides the loss of 50,000 civilians and 6,000 military personal's lives.⁴⁷ Pakistan today perceives genuine threats from inside Afghanistan.

In face of security challenges from Afghanistan, Pakistan has finally begun fencing of its border with Afghanistan, which it had been planning to do for a very long time. Once completed fencing will help improve security in the peripheral border areas. According to Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS) General Zubair Hayat, two hundred thousand Pakistani security forces are deployed on the western borders.⁴⁸ The stable situation on western borders will also lower the need for resources and number of security personnel there. These resources can be diverted to other defense and social needs.

Pakistan has also offered assistance and training to Afghan security forces but met with a cold response. Only six Afghan cadets arrived in Pakistan for training for the first time in 2015.⁴⁹ Afghanistan has yet to respond to Pakistani offer of a bilateral strategic cooperation agreement, made by then COAS Raheel Sharif in 2011, and offer to equip one of the brigades of Afghan National Army.

The increased Chinese involvement will help Pak-Afghan relations which are dominated by mutual mistrust. The Afghan government has been under US and Indian influence and adhere to mostly western narrative about Pakistan. Increased Chinese involvement in Afghanistan can help remove some mistrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan. China in this regard has tried to address the mistrust by holding trilateral talks with Pakistan and Afghanistan. The first round of Trilateral Strategic Dialogue of China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan was held in Kabul in February 2015. They discussed regional situation and trilateral practical cooperation.⁵⁰ China also hosted the 1st China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue in December 2017. The goals

of the dialogue included helping Pakistan and Afghanistan improve and develop their mutual relationship.⁵¹

Strategically, for Pakistan, China can act as the balancing factor vis-à-vis US and India in Afghanistan. Both China and Pakistan want a limited Indian role and influence in Afghanistan. India is using Afghan territory to support the TTP and Baloch insurgents against Pakistan. The major part of Indian funded development projects in Afghanistan is undertaken in its eastern provinces bordering Pakistan. Pakistan believes that the Indian agents in the disguise of officials working on these projects are involved in planning, organizing and supporting militancy in Pakistan's Balochistan Province. Taking the training of Afghan security forces as an example of Indian influence, India had trained up to two thousand Afghan soldiers in its military academies in 2013,⁵² and one thousand more were in training in 2014.

Pakistan wants to reach out to Central Asian Republics (CARs) for enhancement of mutual economic and trade relations. CARs have huge potential for trade growth with Pakistan. They have combined population of 66 million and gross domestic product of 206 billion US Dollars. However, Pakistan trade volume with CARs is much less than its potential. Pakistan traded US \$89 million worth goods in 2014 with Tajikistan and US \$24 million with Uzbekistan. Afghanistan is the most feasible land route for reaching out to Central Asia.⁵³ CASA-1000 energy project is currently under construction, but its viability also depends on the security situation in Afghanistan as it passes through several Afghan provinces including Kunduz and Nangarhar with substantial militant presence. Chinese aim to extend CPEC into Afghanistan and Central Asia. If it is realized, CPEC will connect CARs to Pakistani ports, making Afghanistan a land bridge and greatly benefit CARs, Afghanistan and Pakistan economically.

The prosperity brought economic cooperation and CPEC can make conducive conditions in Afghanistan for those Afghan refugees

living in Pakistan to return to their home country. Pakistan is currently host to 1.3 million registered and about 0.6 million unregistered Afghan refugees.⁵⁴ Pakistan wants repatriation of these refugees to Afghanistan with dignity. But Afghanistan and the US call internal Afghan situation not yet suited for the return of these refugees.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The study of China's policy towards Afghanistan shows that the Chinese role is increasing in Afghanistan due to security and economic reasons. The security situation in Afghanistan has a direct impact on the Chinese internal security, and its economic plans in Afghanistan and in its neighborhood. The IS growing footprints in Afghanistan and US plans staying for the long term in Afghanistan are also adding to Chinese concerns. Amid these concerns, China and other stakeholders in the region are working hard strive for peace and stability in Afghanistan. China and other Afghan neighbors like Pakistan and Russia want a political and diplomatic solution to the Afghan problem. If Taliban show their willingness to become a part of the peace process, it would give a major boost to achieving peace in Afghanistan. The US on its part can facilitate the peace process in best interests of the region by negotiating its exit from Afghanistan.

Indications, so far, however, are that the US wants a military solution of the Afghan problem. The United States is keeping its forces in Afghanistan at least "until the end of 2024 and beyond" under the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA). It is increasing its air campaigns and troops deployment under Trump's new strategy. However, the United States military have not had a major success against Taliban. Taliban have maintained their fighting capacity and demonstrated it by capturing provincial capital Kunduz in 2015 and recently bombings in the heart of Kabul. They have also made US withdrawal from Afghanistan a pre-condition for peace

negotiations to take place. A political settlement of Afghan remains the most viable option.

With regards to implications of China's Afghan policy for Pakistan if the Chinese influence and diplomatic clout over Afghanistan are exploited well by Pakistan it can further Pakistani interests in Afghanistan. China is making diplomatic efforts for eradicating mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan. China wants friendly Pak-Afghan relations to decrease the challenges posed to CPEC from militants based in Afghanistan. The overall involvement of China into Afghanistan can have a positive outcome for Afghanistan and the region.

*Samran Ali is a
Research Assistant at CISS*

Endnotes

¹ Riaz Muhammad Khan, *Afghanistan, and Pakistan: Conflict, Extremism, and Resistance to Modernity*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 162.

² Munir Akram, "The new Great Game," *Dawn*, June 12, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1264242>

³ "President Donald J. Trump Announces a National Security Strategy to Advance America's Interests," *White House*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-announces-national-security-strategy-advance-americas-interests/>

⁴ Stephen J. Blank, "US Interests in Central Asia and Challenges to Them," March 2007.

⁵ Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky and Paul Stronksi, "U.S. Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, January 25, 2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/01/25/u.s.-policy-toward-central-asia-3.0-pub-62556>

⁶ United States Congress, *Quarterly Report, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)*, (30 January 2018)

⁷ United Nations, General Assembly, *The Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security: Report of Secretary-General*, A/72/651 (15 December 2017)

⁸ "Full Transcript: Donald Trump Announces His Afghanistan Policy", *The Atlantic*, Aug 21, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/full-transcript-donald-trump-announces-his-afghanistan-policy/537552/>

⁹ Sean Mann and Stephen Watts, "Afghanistan after the Drawdown," *Brookings*, July 6, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2015/07/06/afghanistan-after-the-drawdown/>

¹⁰ Sandra Destradi, Nadine Godehardt and Alexander Frank, "The ISAF Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Perceptions and Reactions of Regional Powers." *GIGA Focus Global* 2012, 10,

¹¹ Harleen Gambhir, "ISIS in Afghanistan." Backgrounder, *Institute for the Study of War* (2015): 6.

¹² Jingdong Yuan, "China and Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities," in *New South Asian Security*, ed. Chris Ogden, (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2016), p. 79.

¹³ Zhao Huasheng, *China, and Afghanistan: China's Interests, Stances, and Perspectives*, A Report of

the Center for Strategic and International Studies Russia and Eurasia Program, March 2012

¹⁴ Zhao Huasheng, "What is behind China's Growing Attention to Afghanistan," *Carnegie*, March 08, 2015, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/03/08/what-is-behind-china-s-growing-attention-to-afghanistan>.

¹⁵ "Statement by Ambassador MA Zhaoxu at the Security Council Debate on Afghanistan," *China's Permanent Mission to United Nation*, March 08, 2018, <http://www.china-un.org/eng/hyyfy/t1542996.htm>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Jingdong Yuan, "China and Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities," p.77.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Xinjiang Territory Profile," *BBC*, November 2016 17, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-16860974>

²⁰ Shamil Shams, "Why China's Uighurs are joining jihadists in Afghanistan," *DW*, July 24, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/why-chinas-uighurs-are-joining-jihadists-in-afghanistan/a-18605630>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Harleen Gambhir, "ISIS in Afghanistan."

²³ "ISIL video threatens China with 'rivers of bloodshed'," *Aljazeera*, March 1, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/isil-video-threatens-china-rivers-bloodshed-170301103927503.html>

²⁴ Wang Jin, The US Withdrawal, and One Belt One Road: Chinese Concerns and Challenges in Afghanistan," *Strategic Assessment* 19, No. 3 (October 2016)

²⁵ Pamela Constable, "Hamid Karzai's dark theories are gaining traction in Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, February 14, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/hamid-karzais-dark-theories-are-gaining-traction-in-afghanistan/2018/02/13/31df39e0-0e19-11e8-998c-96deb18cca19_story.html?utm_term=.7d39e041e87f

²⁶ Richard Ghiasy, "Why Afghanistan's Stability is so Important to China?" *South China Morning Post*, May 22, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2095156/opinion-why-afghanistans-stability-so-important-china>

²⁷ "President Unveils New Afghanistan, South Asia Strategy," *US Department of Defence*, August 21, 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1284964/president-unveils-new-afghanistan-south-asia-strategy/>

²⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016 – Executive Summary*, (United Nations 2016)

²⁹ China Power Team, "How will the Belt and Road Initiative advance China's interests?" *China Power*, <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-belt-and-road-initiative/>

³⁰ Saibal Dasgupta, "China Trying to Extend Belt Plan to Afghanistan to Expand Influence," *Voice of America*, May 08, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-trying-to-extend-belt-plan-to-afghanistan/3842278.html>

³¹ Teddy Ng and Laura Zhou, "Beijing sends in new envoy in a sign it wants a bigger role for Afghanistan in 'New Silk Road'," *South China Morning Post*, February 02, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2131819/beijing-sends-new-envoy-sign-it-wants-bigger-role>

³² Zhao Huasheng, "China and Afghanistan."

³³ Hamid Shalizi and James Mackenzie, "Afghanistan's Ghani offers talks with Taliban 'without preconditions'," *Reuters*, February 28, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-taliban/afghanistans-ghani-offers-talks-with-taliban-without-preconditions-idUSKCN1GC0J0>

³⁴ Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference, March 1, 2018, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1538767.shtml

³⁵ "Americans frustrated as military still in Afghanistan: US NSA John Bolton," *Tribune*, March 24, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1668234/9-americans-frustrated-us-military-still-afghanistan-us-nsa-john-bolton/>

³⁶ Andrew Small, "Why Is China Talking to the Taliban?" *Foreign Policy*, June 21, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/06/21/why-is-china-talking-to-the-taliban/>

³⁷ "Russia, China favor taking Taliban off UN sanctions list," *Tribune*, December 28, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1277084/russia-china-favour-taking-taliban-off-un-sanctions-list/>

³⁸ Zhao Huasheng, "China and Afghanistan."

³⁹ Sartaj Aziz, "Concluding Address," in *proceedings of SCO Role in Regional Stability Prospects of its Expansion*, Islamabad 2013, *IPRI*

⁴⁰ Raj Kumar Sharma, "SCO's Role in Afghanistan: Prospects and Challenges," *Mainstream*, VOL LIII No 24, June 6, 2015, <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article5721.html>

⁴¹ "Russia puts Post-Soviet security bloc on alert over likely terror threat from Afghanistan," *TASS*, February 9, <http://tass.com/politics/989170>

⁴² Dirk van der Kley, "China's Foreign Policy in Afghanistan," *Analysis*, October 2014.

⁴³ "China denies plan to build a military base in Afghanistan," *Reuters*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-afghanistan/china-denies-plan-to-build-military-base-in-afghanistan-idUSKBN1FE196>

⁴⁴ Franz J. Marty, "The curious case of Chinese troops on Afghan soil," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, February 03, 2017, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13424-the-curious-case-of-chinese-troops-on-afghan-soil.html>

⁴⁵ Jingdong Yuan, "China and Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities," p. 82.

- ⁴⁶ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang's Regular Press Conference on January 2, 2018,” http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1523228.shtml
- ⁴⁷ “Pakistan lost over 50,000 civilians in the war on terror,” *Tribune*, January 3, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1599831/1-pakistan-lost-50000-civilians-war-terror/>
- ⁴⁸ “General Hayat says no outside or military solution to Afghan problems,” *Geo*, September 09, 2017, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/157281-pakistan-fought-worlds-biggest-battle-against-terrorism-cjcs-mahmood>
- ⁴⁹ “Pakistan trains Afghan army cadets,” *BBC*, accessed on February 6, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-31164119>
- ⁵⁰ First Round of China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue Held in Kabul,” *MFA*, February 10, 2015, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1236606.shtml
- ⁵¹ “The 1st China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue Convenes,” *MFA*, December 26, 2017, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1522541.shtml
- ⁵² “Afghanistan sends India a weapons wish-list ahead of NATO withdrawal,” *Daily Mail*, November 20, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2510786/Afghanistan-sends-India-weapons-wish-list-ahead-NATO-withdrawal.html#ixzz59cIN5pUI>
- ⁵³ Riaz Muhammad Khan, “*Afghanistan and Pakistan*.”
- ⁵⁴ “Extension in Afghan refugees’ stay beyond June 2018 unlikely,” *Tribune*, January 9, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1603798/1-extension-afghan-refugees-stay-beyond-june-2018-unlikely/>
- ⁵⁵ “Afghan refugees: US averse to Pakistan’s repatriation plan,” *Tribune*, February 2, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1624340/1-afghan-refugeesus-averse-pakistans-repatriation-plan/>