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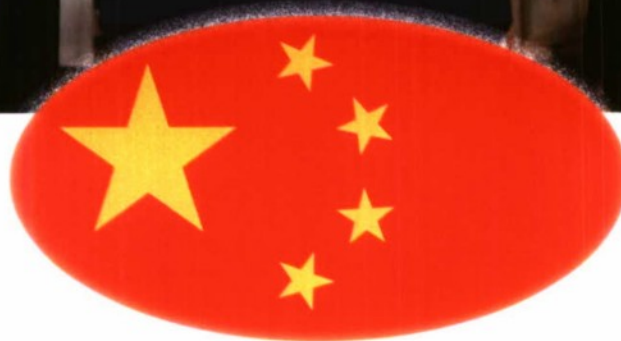
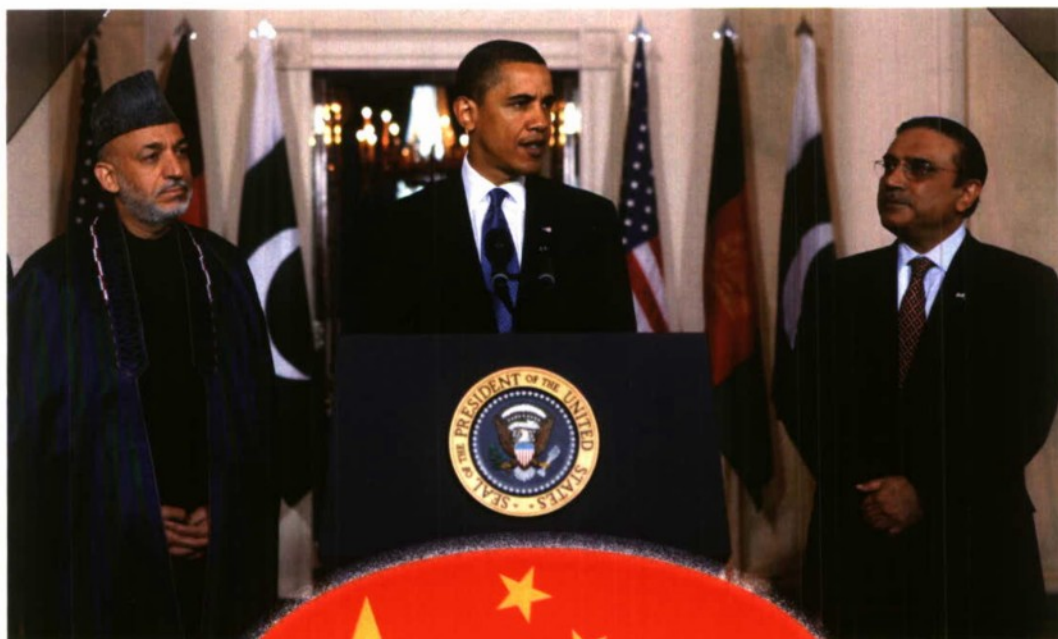
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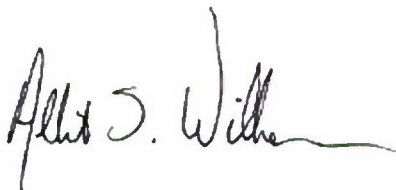
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U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan-Pakistan: Chinese Views and Interests

Executive Summary

On March 27, 2009, the United States unveiled a new strategy for Afghanistan based on three premises: that Afghanistan's situation was "inextricably linked" to that of Pakistan; that efforts must include not only military operations but economic and capacity-building assistance as well; and that the situation in Afghanistan/Pakistan was an international security challenge requiring a multinational response from principal stakeholders.

Since then, U.S. military and interagency officials have continued publicly to probe China to see what Beijing would be willing to do to support that strategy and the U.S./NATO effort. The issues U.S. and NATO officials have discussed with China include providing targeted aid and reconstruction; opening the Afghan-China border to U.S./NATO forces for supply lines; and potentially providing troops in non-combat (or even combat) positions.

For the most part, China's response has been to politely decline these opportunities or to take them under advisement with no apparent decision timetable in mind. Yet Beijing is thought to have both sufficient concern and sufficient capacity to be a more active contributor to the stability and development of these two countries, which lie along its southwestern border of Xinjiang Province. This report addresses what the Chinese have done to support the strategy, what they may be persuaded to do, and what they appear unlikely to do. A review and analysis of pertinent statements by key Chinese analysts and of actions by Chinese government officials since March 2009 reveal the key findings presented below.

Key Findings

1. Chinese analysts have mixed views about the U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy. Positive reactions include acknowledgements of the greater U.S. emphasis on diplomatic tools and international cooperation (as opposed to what Chinese sources previously had described as a purely military focus). Negative reactions include concerns about the timetable for withdrawal—specifically the consequences for regional stability if U.S./NATO forces leave before the situation is stabilized.

2. The U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy—in particular, the “troop surge” announced in December 2009—appears to have aggravated long-held suspicions among some Chinese observers about ultimate U.S. “hegemonic” motivations in the region. These include suspicions about how long the United States intends to stay in Afghanistan; that the troop surge and the Afghanistan-Pakistan link mean that the United States plans to expand its regional presence; and that the U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy's ultimate objective is to control Central Asian oil and gas resources and “contain” China. This suspicion of U.S. regional intent inherently contradicts the Chinese fears of a precipitous U.S. withdrawal mentioned above.

3. Although the new U.S. strategy explicitly links the situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the majority of Chinese sources reviewed for this report suggest that Beijing has not accepted this linkage as a factor relevant to its own security interests. China's close but opaque military, economic, and political relations with Pakistan, its "all-weather friend," remain paramount to Beijing. But Chinese analysts commenting on the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan usually minimize or ignore the linkage with Pakistan, suggesting that China is interesting in protecting its special bilateral relationship with Pakistan. One undercurrent in Chinese analytical writing, for instance, has been that China's economic interests in Afghanistan would be damaged if China were dragged into the current war effort.

4. The resistance to the Afghanistan-Pakistan linkage supports the premise that Beijing has calculated that its interests are best served first by keeping China's unique special relations with Pakistan separate from broader international coalition efforts, and second by doing nothing to jeopardize its economic interests and future economic position in Afghanistan.

5. Chinese views seem shaped by an overriding suspicion of U.S.-NATO regional dominance and a conviction that China's own regional efforts should be independent of the U.S.-NATO framework. Although China has participated in NATO-driven international conferences on Afghanistan, since March 2009 it has put money and effort behind multiple alternative initiatives and can be expected to continue this. These have included existing groups, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and new groupings, such as the Dianchi Cooperation for Opening Asia. These efforts may interact with, but seem largely parallel to, NATO efforts.

6. Chinese analysts continue to see the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan through the narrow lens of China's own immediate interests – in particular how developments there affect the situation in China's Xinjiang Province. China's major economic investments, such as its Aynak copper venture in Afghanistan, appear primarily to benefit China. Still, many Chinese analysts emphasize how those actions contribute to helping Afghanistan (specifically) and the region (more broadly). This Sino-centric focus extends to China's other multilateral efforts described above, in which Beijing's interests are characterized by a robust emphasis on regional economic development initiatives that include and benefit western China.

7. Chinese commentary suggests that some government analysts are debating whether China's traditional "non-interference" policy remains appropriate given expanding Chinese global interests. The debate focuses on the extent to which greater international involvement may be necessary in the future to protect China's interests. This includes whether China should broaden the circumstances (beyond a U.N. mandate) under which it would deploy peacekeeping forces or other personnel beyond Chinese borders.

Introduction

On March 27, 2009, President Obama unveiled a new strategy for U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. The new strategy was based on three conclusions: first, that Afghanistan's situation was "inextricably linked" to that of Pakistan; second, that military efforts needed to be supplemented with substantial economic and capacity-building assistance; and third, that the situation in Afghanistan-Pakistan was not just a U.S. problem but rather an international security challenge that required a multinational response from the principal stakeholders.

Those stakeholders, according to the President, included U.S. NATO allies, Central Asian states, the Gulf nations and Iran, Russia, India, and China.¹ China's close relations with Pakistan, which the two parties routinely refer to as an "all-weather friendship," made it a potentially critical player in the new U.S. strategy. To this end, since March 2009 U.S. officials have called on China to respond with more coordination and cooperation in this multilateral effort (see table 2).

What are the basics of the new U.S. strategy and U.S. expectations from China? What are China's perceptions of its own interests in Afghanistan-Pakistan, and what are its views of the new U.S. strategy? What steps is Beijing taking in the wake of the new U.S. strategy roll-out in pursuit of its own interests?

This report addresses these questions by reviewing and analyzing pertinent statements of key Chinese government officials since the Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy roll-out, articles and observations of experts from influential Chinese government think tanks, views from prominent scholars at key Chinese universities, and related actions of the Chinese government.

China and the U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy: An Overview

This report discusses the Chinese response to the new U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy. The report consists of three sections. The first section gives a brief overview of the new U.S. strategy as it was articulated by President Barack Obama in his March 27, 2009, announcement and his December 1, 2009, speech. This section includes a listing of primary U.S. policy documents involving the strategy and new U.S. bilateral and trilateral multilateral dialogues in support of the strategy.

¹ "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan," White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 27, 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/.

The second section looks at Chinese views and assessments of the strategy itself. The Chinese views reviewed for this report suggest several things.

- First, they suggest that a broad segment of Chinese analytical thinking sees the new U.S. emphasis on diplomatic and economic initiatives to be a fairly positive shift away from what was primarily viewed by China as a military effort in Afghanistan.
- Second, they reveal concern – in some cases pessimism – that the U.S. troop surge in Afghanistan will be sufficient to accomplish the intended mission of bringing stability to Afghanistan and preparing Afghan forces to take over primary responsibility for the country’s security.
- Third, Chinese views of the U.S. timetable for withdrawal are mixed: some analysts see the timetable as a positive sign that the United States is serious about withdrawing from the region; others are worried about the consequences of a too-early withdrawal; and still others see it as an unhelpful signal to Taliban and Pakistan insurgency forces that they can outwait the United States.
- Finally, Chinese views suggest that there remains a not-insignificant undercurrent of suspicion about U.S. and NATO intentions, with some Chinese analysts seeing the new strategy as another hegemonic step in a Western effort to control regional resources and to “contain” China and prevent its development.

The third section of this report looks at a series of Chinese pronouncements and actions in the wake of the new U.S. strategy announcement. These pronouncements and actions are not necessarily explicit reactions to the U.S. strategy per se, but relate more broadly to Chinese concerns about the ongoing U.S./NATO effort in Afghanistan-Pakistan and the implications of the Obama strategy for Chinese interests. The points addressed in this third section reveal several key issues:

- First, China’s pronouncements and decisions on economic and reconstruction aid for Afghanistan illustrate the extent to which Beijing continues to see the consequences of regional events within the confines of its own narrow interests. Even in a limited discussion of possibly sending Chinese peacekeeping forces to Afghanistan, some suggest that these forces be stationed mainly in areas of Afghanistan where China has investments.²
- Second, the Chinese continue to have a strong aversion to the NATO framework as the dominant political military structure for addressing regional concerns. Chinese analysts regularly promote the SCO, the U.N., and other organizations in

² A view espoused by Liu Xiao, identified only as a “Beijing scholar,” “China Can Make Arrangements for the Future by Sending Troops to Afghanistan,” in *Global Times*, (*Huanqiu Shibao* 环球时报), December 8, 2009, p. 14.

which China is a key player as vehicles for dealing with the Afghanistan challenge.

This section also addresses what is thought to be a larger pre-existing debate in the writings of Chinese government analysts and other Chinese sources that appear to be re-assessing China's appropriate global role. This evolving re-assessment likely is the result of multiple factors, only some of which have to do with the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the presence of the U.S./NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the region.

Current U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy

Upon assuming office, President Barack Obama ordered an immediate, extensive review of U.S. policy in Afghanistan and took a succession of early steps reflecting his administration's level of concern about the U.S. war effort there.³ The new U.S. policy was rolled out March 27, 2009, with a narrow but ambitious goal: "to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat" Al Qaeda forces in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent their return to either country. The United States would base its new policy on the premise that "the future of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the future of its neighbor, Pakistan"⁴ because terrorist elements in Afghanistan were crossing the Pakistan border to seek safe haven from U.S. war operations. Afghanistan and Pakistan, therefore, would be treated as a unified policy concern within the new U.S. strategy.

Key U.S. Dialogues after March 2009

- **U.S.-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Consultations**, first meeting, Washington, DC – May 6, 2009
- **U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue**, first meeting – March 24, 2010
- **U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Discussions** – May 11, 2010
- **U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue**, Washington, DC – June 1, 2010

In addition, the strategy placed a new emphasis on U.S. diplomacy, economic assistance, and capacity-building along with an expanded U.S. military effort, and called upon the Pakistani government to increase its efforts to combat insurgency groups seeking refuge in Pakistan. Finally, the new strategy called for international partners to offer more civilian assistance in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The policy was fleshed out in a White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, made available on the day of the President's speech.⁵ Complementary documents and supporting legislation followed. (See table 1.)

³ On January 22, 2009, his second day in office, the President announced the creation of the position of Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, naming Richard Holbrooke to the post. On February 17, the White House announced that 17,000 additional troops would be sent to Afghanistan.

⁴ "Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan."

⁵ *White Paper of the Interagency Group's Report on U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*, March 27, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/Afghanistan-Pakistan_White_Paper.pdf.

In the ensuing months, administration officials pursued initiatives to implement the new strategy. In addition to military deployments, these included extensive international and regional consultations (including with China), expanded assistance by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and a substantial legislative package of \$1.5 billion in additional annual U.S. assistance for Pakistan for the next five years.

Table 1: Key U.S. policy documents on the new Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy

- “Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan,” White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 27, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/
- *White Paper of the Interagency Group’s Report on U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan and Pakistan*, March 27, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/Afghanistan-Pakistan_White_Paper.pdf
- *Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009* (“Kerry-Lugar-Berman”) – P.L. 111-73, October 15, 2009, http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ073.111.pdf
- “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” West Point, Office of the Press Secretary, December 1, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>
- *Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy* – January 21, 2010; updated February 2010, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/135728.pdf>

Despite these efforts, by late 2009 the White House judged that the situation in Afghanistan had deteriorated, with the Taliban in Afghanistan gaining momentum and retaining their safe havens along the Pakistan border. As a result, President Obama ordered another review of U.S. policy on Afghanistan “after the Afghan voting [in the presidential election] was completed.”⁶ Based on this second policy review, the President made adjustments to the new U.S. strategy. He announced the adjustments on December 1, 2009, in a national address given at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.⁷ The goal and the principal components were similar to those of the original March 2009 strategy. What differed was the announcement that an additional 30,000 troops would be deployed to “seize the initiative” in Afghanistan, and that within 18 months, the American effort in Afghanistan would begin to wind down in preparation for transferring security responsibility over to Afghan forces. The pace of international diplomatic activity and regional economic assistance also was to be enhanced, with Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP) Richard Holbrooke saying that 2010 would be “a year of heavy implementation” of the administration’s strategy.⁸

⁶ “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” Office of the Press Secretary, December 1, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ SRAP Holbrooke made the comments during an appearance on the MSNBC network on January 25, 2010.

Because the new U.S. strategy in Afghanistan has placed such an emphasis on the role of Pakistan in combating regional insurgency, China's close relations with Pakistan have made it a potentially critical player in the current U.S. strategy. SRAP Holbrooke and other U.S. officials met with their Chinese counterparts specifically to discuss the new strategy. (See table 2.) In addition to these dialogues, opportunities to discuss the U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan policy have been included in other cabinet-level visits to China; visits of Chinese officials to the United States; meetings of the U.S.-China Strategic & Economic Dialogue (S&ED), including working groups and sub-dialogues; and G-20 meetings.

China's Baseline

China shares key anti-terror and stability objectives with the U.S./NATO coalition in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, largely because of China's concerns about the implications for instability in its Muslim Xinjiang province, which borders both countries. But apart from these shared concerns, Beijing's history with Pakistan has differed markedly from its history with Afghanistan. For the most part, Beijing has pursued separate bilateral relationships with each country (as is its foreign policy preference), without linking the two into a more comprehensive regional context, as the United States has now done. Chinese interests in the two countries differ in fundamental ways from the interests on which the new U.S. strategy on Afghanistan-Pakistan is based, and they affect China's response to the new U.S. strategy accordingly.

China has long enjoyed a special economic, political, and military relationship with Pakistan.⁹ The two countries maintain robust official exchanges at all levels, conduct combined military and anti-terror exercises, and hold regular security and economic dialogues.¹⁰ Beijing's relations with Islamabad have an especially strong and deep security and military-to-military component, based to a great extent on shared mutual security concerns about India. Therefore, the new U.S. strategy on Afghanistan-Pakistan, which bolsters U.S.-Pakistan military relations and economic ties, and which links Pakistan's future "inextricably" with Afghanistan's, has significant implications for the framework of China-Pakistan military-to-military relations.

By contrast, China's interests in Afghanistan lack this military-to-military component. But Chinese interests there are developing a strong economic component, which emerged prominently in 2007 when Chinese state-owned companies began to win major contracts to develop Afghanistan's huge mineral resources.¹¹ One undercurrent in Chinese analytical writing in the wake of the U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan linkage has been that

⁹ See Kerry Dumbaugh, *Exploring the China-Pakistan Relationship: A Roundtable Report*, CNA China Studies Report D0022883, June 2010.

¹⁰ In July 2010, for instance, China and Pakistan held combined military exercises dubbed "Friendship 2010," the third such combined drill between the two countries.

¹¹ The Chinese bid of \$3.5 billion for the rights to develop Afghanistan's huge Aynak copper field included significant collateral development assistance, such as building transportation infrastructures, a coal-fired power plant, and the mining facilities to fuel it.

China has to weigh the economic “benefits and losses” to itself of becoming involved in the “ravages” of the war effort in Afghanistan.¹²

Finally, while the new U.S. strategy explicitly links developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Chinese sources reviewed for this report suggest that Beijing has not yet accepted this linkage as a factor affecting its own national interests in each country. Chinese analysts by and large continue to treat and discuss developments in each country separately and in fact to downplay the role of Pakistan in an Afghanistan solution. An example of this was seen at a live press conference in March 2010: a Hong Kong reporter linked the two countries when asking Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi what China’s policy would be toward “Afghanistan and Pakistan.” Yang separated the two countries in his answer, first giving a lengthy response applauding international support for the “uncertainties” in Afghanistan’s situation, then making a brief statement that Islamabad had “effectively” controlled the situation in Pakistan.¹³

China’s Broader Interests

The new U.S. strategy on Afghanistan-Pakistan is relevant to a number of long-standing Chinese regional interests. First and foremost among these is Beijing’s desire to ensure domestic stability, particularly in China’s heavily Muslim western province of Xinjiang, where Chinese officials have long been concerned about Muslim activists who advocate greater autonomy, and even independence. Chinese leaders refer to such activities as “extremism, separatism, and terrorism.” One of Beijing’s most important counter-terror goals is preventing extremist groups in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, which share borders with Xinjiang, from agitating China’s domestic Muslim populations. (See figure 1.) The effects of the current U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy therefore are directly pertinent to these overriding Chinese interests. (This Xinjiang dimension is discussed in more detail later in this report.)

A second Chinese interest involves developing mineral and carbon resources in the region and creating the infrastructure to exploit them. Even a cursory review of Chinese investments in both Afghanistan and Pakistan reveals a strong focus on exploiting energy and mineral resources. If Chinese plans to fully develop Afghanistan’s Aynak copper mine and to build oil and gas pipelines transiting Pakistan territory come to fruition, both Kabul and Islamabad will gain lease revenues and annual transport fees. Potential pipeline projects through South and Central Asia would help China diversify its energy supply routes away from dependence on sea-borne routes, making its energy sources less susceptible to interruption by piracy, terrorism, or the actions of other maritime powers. The Chinese-built Gwadar Port in Pakistan provides China’s landlocked Xinjiang Province with its only ocean access, a potentially key factor in Beijing’s plans to combat terrorism and extremism in Xinjiang by generating massive economic development in the province.

¹² Observations attributed to Yin Gang, a Middle East expert at CASS, “Afghanistan Has China in Mind,” in *Global Times online (Huanqiu Shibao 环球时报)*, June 24, 2010, *Open Source Center* CPP20100624722005.

¹³ Full text of PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi’s News Conference, CCTV-1, March 7, 2010, *Open Source Center* CCP20100307163008.

Figure 1. China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan



A third concern involves long-held Chinese suspicions that the United States and NATO are pursuing a deliberate strategy to (in Chinese terms) “contain” China by encircling it with a combination of formal alliances, special security arrangements, and close informal military relationships. This Chinese view of a U.S.-NATO “encirclement strategy” is a recurring theme in Chinese writings, and U.S.-NATO efforts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Pakistan – as specified in the new U.S. strategy – appear to have reinforced these concerns. Much of China’s response to the new U.S. strategy, including enhanced Chinese activities with the SCO and with other existing and new regional organizations, suggests that China may be seeking to counteract this perceived U.S.-NATO encirclement and to expand its own strategic space.

Finally, no discussion of Chinese regional interests would be complete without mention of the Sino-centric way in which China calculates those interests in interacting with the international system. China seems to define its interests in Afghanistan very narrowly, even when seeking to couch its actions as more broadly beneficial to the U.S. effort in Afghanistan and to Afghans themselves. This is the case with the Chinese copper mining venture in Afghanistan, for instance, which is often described as one of China’s major contributions to Afghanistan’s economic reconstruction even though that investment seems to primarily benefit China. Similar instances include discussions about deploying potential peacekeeping operations where Chinese investments are located,¹⁴ descriptions of Afghanistan’s economic needs in terms of the opportunities they offer for Chinese business investments, and viewing Afghanistan’s geographic location as making it

¹⁴ A view espoused by Liu Xiao, identified only as a “Beijing scholar,” “China Can Make Arrangements for the Future by Sending Troops to Afghanistan,” in *Global Times*, (*Huanqiu Shibao* 环球时报), December 8, 2009, p. 14.

especially important for China's massive program to develop Xinjiang and thereby limit "extremism" in western China.¹⁵

China's Views of the U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy

Chinese analytical commentary on the U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy has remained mixed, including straight-forward descriptions, analyses of whether the shift is positive or negative, and discussions of the strategy's likelihood of success. Official pronouncements on the strategy by Chinese leaders have been decidedly non-committal, as indicated by the comparison of U.S. and Chinese comments in table 2.

Some Chinese analytical observations have been fairly positive. In general, these more positive comments have been saved for U.S. actions that directly support China's own interests and efforts to expand its influence. The new U.S. strategy has been given high marks, for instance, for its shift to a more pragmatic approach, its energized use of diplomacy, and its emphasis on international cooperation.¹⁶

Along the same lines, several analysts welcomed in particular the U.S. designation of Abdul Haq, leader of the East Turkistan Islamic Party, as "a terrorist organization ... for its support to Al Qaida." The U.S. announcement condemned the group specifically for seeking to "sow violence and fracture international unity at the 2008 Olympic Games in China."¹⁷ Chinese analysts also drew links between the new U.S. strategy and China's own efforts on behalf of Afghanistan in the SCO, with the United States credited under the new strategy as having accepted a more active role for the SCO as a partner on Afghan issues.¹⁸

¹⁵ "PRC Daily Article Suggests Things China Should Do in Afghanistan," *Guoji Xianqu Daobao* (国际先驱导报), article by Wang Shida, researcher at CICIR, December 10, 2010, Open Source Center CPP20100304671001.

¹⁶ At least one military source picked up on the U.S. term of "smart power" (*qiao shi li*; 巧实力) to describe this more comprehensive mix of policy tools. Yuan Yuan, "United States Uses 'Smart Power' on New Strategy for Afghanistan," *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报) in Chinese, April 5, 2009, Open Source Center CPP20090414088003.

¹⁷ "Treasury Targets Leader of Group Tied to Al Qaeda," U.S. Treasury Department press release TG-92, April 20, 2009. <http://www.treas.gov/press/releases/tg92.htm>. Li Wei, an anti-terror analyst from the China Institute of Contemporary and International Relations (CICIR) (*Zhongguo xiandai guoji guanxi yanjiuyuan*; 中国现代国际关系研究院) stated that the sanction showed the U.S. not only was pursuing a more comprehensive anti-terror approach, but also was placing a higher value on China's cooperation in anti-terrorism. "Sanction Against East Turkistan Shows Change in U.S. Anti-Terror Policy," *Beijing Qingnian Bao* online in Chinese, April 22, 2009, Open Source Center CPP20090422710002.

¹⁸ Such observations were made, for instance, by Sun Zhuangzi, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) (*Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan*; 中国社会科学院), *Shanghai's Jiefang Ribao*, March 30, 2009, and by Li Li, a researcher at CICIR, "Sanction Against East Turkistan Shows Change in U.S. Anti-Terror Policy," *Beijing Qingnian Bao* () online in Chinese, Open Source Center CPP20090422710002, April 22, 2009. The SCO is a mutual security organization founded in 2001 by China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Pakistan is an observer in the SCO. Afghanistan, while not an SCO observer, is part of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, with Afghan President Karzai regularly attending SCO meetings.

Table 2: Comparison of U.S. and Chinese statements on Afghanistan-Pakistan

Date	U.S. Statement	Chinese statement
February 2009	Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who discussed the issue with Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi during her visit to China, in her remarks said: <i>“...we agreed to work together on the best way forward to combat extremism and promote stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan.”</i> ¹⁹	Foreign Minister Yang did not mention Afghanistan or Pakistan in his remarks, stating only that the United States and China would: <i>“continue to conduct counter-terrorism and non-proliferation consultations, and military-to-military exchanges.”</i>
April 2009	SRAP Richard Holbrooke, Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, visited China. No public statement noted.	No public statement noted.
November 2009	President Barack Obama, who discussed the subject with President Hu Jintao during his state visit to China, in his remarks, said: <i>“...[we] discussed our mutual interest in security and stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan. And neither country can or should be used as a base for terrorism, and we agreed to cooperate more on meeting this goal, including bringing about more stable, peaceful relations in all of South Asia.”</i> ²⁰	President Hu did not mention Afghanistan or Pakistan in his remarks, but said that both the United States and China would be: <i>“willing to act on the basis of mutual benefit and reciprocity to deepen our cooperation on counterterrorism...”</i>
December 3 & 4, 2009	Statement of Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Philip Crowley, who said in response to a question: <i>“We are looking at how to create alternative supply lines [to Afghanistan]. This is something we will be talking to China and neighboring countries about.”</i> ²¹	Answering a reporter’s specific question about whether China would respond to U.S. requests to open the Sino-Afghanistan border, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said: <i>“We would like to see an Afghanistan that enjoys peace, stability, development, and progress. We hope efforts by the international community will help achieve this goal and promote lasting peace and stability in the region.”</i> ²²
May 2010	Assistant Secretary of State for South/Central Asia Robert Blake in China was quoted in a Chinese newspaper as telling Foreign Ministry officials that the United States wanted China to “coordinate more” on Afghanistan-Pakistan: <i>“China has an important stake in the success of these (international) efforts. And we welcome the opportunity to discuss ways China can contribute more both through investments and through assistance of various kinds.”</i> ²³	In response to a direct question about the topic of Assistant Secretary Blake’s meetings with Chinese officials, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said: <i>“US Assistant Secretary of State Blake for South Asian Affairs held consultation over South Asian affairs with his Chinese counterparts in Beijing today.”</i> ²⁴

¹⁹ “Toward a Deeper and Broader Relationship with China,” Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton’s Remarks with Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, Beijing, China, February 21, 2009,

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/02/119432.htm>

²⁰ Joint Press Statement by President Obama and President Hu of China, in Beijing, November 17, 2009,

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/joint-press-statement-president-obama-and-president-hu-china>

²¹ Greg Torode and NgTse-wei, quoting Assistant Secretary Crowley in “U.S. Sees Bigger Role for China in Afghanistan Reconstruction...,” *South China Morning Post*, December 4, 2009, p. 1.

²² Transcript of PRC Foreign Ministry Spokesman Qin Gang’s News Conference on December 3, 2009, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, December 3, 2009, Open Source Center CPP20091203364001.

²³ Zhang Haizhou, “U.S. seeks bigger role for China in Afghanistan,” *China Daily*, May 5, 2010.

²⁴ English Transcript of PRC Foreign Ministry Spokesman Jiang Yu’s News Conference on May 4, 2010, Open Source Center CPP20100505467006.

Other observations, along with corresponding Chinese actions, suggest that some Chinese analysts are more concerned that the new strategy (in particular, the troop surge announced in December 2009) is another piece of evidence that the situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating, raising the risks to neighboring countries, specifically Pakistan. These concerns again tended to focus on the consequences of such a possibility for specific Chinese interests. A number of observations, for instance, commented on the implications that further deterioration in the region could have for stability and economic development plans in Xinjiang. One government analyst worried that if the new U.S. strategy put too much pressure on Pakistan to fight terrorism, it could result in a downfall of the Pakistani government.²⁵

Discussions with Chinese military officers and analysts suggest that Beijing may be concerned about the announcement of a timetable for a U.S. withdrawal. Some expressed concern, for instance, about the consequences of a rapid U.S. departure before the situation is effectively stabilized.²⁶ At least one military analyst doubted whether the 30,000 additional troops that President Obama authorized in December 2009 would be enough to accomplish the mission according to the announced timetable.²⁷ Other Chinese military analysts have privately expressed concern that an early U.S. departure could force leaders in both Afghanistan and Pakistan to reach accommodation with a newly energized Taliban – something they judged not to be in China’s interests.²⁸

China’s rejection of an Afghanistan-Pakistan linkage to support its own national interests supports the premise that Beijing has calculated that its interests are best served first by keeping China’s unique special relations with Pakistan separate from broader international coalition efforts, and second by doing nothing to jeopardize its economic interests and future economic position in Afghanistan. As table 2 notes, key U.S. officials associated with U.S. policy in Afghanistan-Pakistan have made statements suggesting they are interested in having China do more, and have held dialogues with Chinese officials to discuss the issue.²⁹ Official Chinese responses to these dialogues, at least in public, have been tepid, as noted in table 2.

Other, Broader Chinese Concerns Related to U.S. Strategy

As discussed earlier in this report, China has a number of long-standing regional concerns, among them fears that regional instability may contribute to domestic instability in western China, and concern that the United States is working to limit China’s global role

²⁵ Observations attributed to Hu Shisheng, CICIR, Director of the Office of South Asian Studies, in *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, July 21, 2010.

²⁶ Interviews in October 2009.

²⁷ Interviews in December 2009.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke visited China in April 2009, although no public statement was noted; Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Robert Blake visited China in May 2010, where he said that the United States wanted to discuss ways China could contribute more.

and influence. The U.S. strategy on Afghanistan and Pakistan not only has fed into some of these concerns, but has become part of a larger internal debate in China about China's "identity" in the world and its proper global role.³⁰

Uncertainty about Longer-Term U.S. Intentions

Chinese sources illustrate a complicated mix of views on U.S. intentions with its new Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy. Some see the troop surge not as a new expansion but as the prelude to an ultimate "contraction" of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan.³¹ But there also has been a smattering of other commentary that suggests continuing distrust of U.S. motives. Such observations usually come from analysts who question overall U.S. strategic intent in the region. Some suggest that the United States is pursuing three goals with its Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy: not just anti-terrorism, but also control of Central Asian oil and gas resources, and the undermining of Russia and containment of China.³²

Comments from these less trustful observers of U.S. intent in its new strategy became more pointed after President Obama's second pronouncement, on December 1, 2009, that the United States would send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. Some military commentary at the time held that the new strategy actually was part of the U.S. "China containment" policy. According to this view, the Bush administration had focused exclusively on anti-terrorism; thus, U.S. "containment" of China had been relaxed under President Bush and China had had space to develop. Now, under the new administration's policy, anti-terrorism was just one of a variety of foreign policy considerations, and U.S. "containment" efforts against China would grow again.³³

One university scholar found ominous the route that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton followed during her July 2010 trip to Asia: Pakistan-Afghanistan in South Asia; South Korea in Northeast Asia; and Vietnam in Southeast Asia. Echoing the "containment" strategy fear, the scholar suggested that the locations visited on this trip indicated ultimate U.S. intentions and posed a serious challenge for China to consider.³⁴

³⁰ According to informed Chinese specialists, many Chinese analysts are wrestling to find a balance between what they see as China's four different "identities": developing country, rising country, world power, and quasi-superpower.

³¹ Sun Ru, researcher at the Institute of American Studies, CICIR, in an article published in *Jiefangjun Bao*, May 3, 2009.

³² An article by Wu Shuhu in *Dangdai Shijie* (当代世界), a monthly journal published under the management of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee (May 4, 2009), placed U.S. anti-terror objectives third on the list of U.S. priorities in Afghanistan. See also comments by Chen Xiangyang, Director, Strategic Studies Center, CICIR, in "After the Eastward Shift of Focus of the U.S. War on Terror," *Liaowang* (瞭望) May 18, 2009. Open Source Center CPP20090522710112.

³³ Observation attributed to People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force Colonel Dai Xu, in "New U.S. War on Terror Chancy for China," *Huanqiu Shibao* (in English only online), January 10, 2010. Open Source Center, CPP20100114722001.

³⁴ Renmin University Professor Shi Yinhong, quoted by *Xinhua* in English, July 22, 2010.

The Xinjiang Dimension

The connection between events in Afghanistan, events in Pakistan, and Chinese interests in the stability of Xinjiang Province permeate Chinese commentary, illustrating the extent to which China's chief priority tends to view events in the region through the narrow lens of its own economic and political self-interests. Chinese authorities have long been concerned about activism and unrest in Xinjiang Province among the Muslim population, who are largely Uighur.

Beijing in particular blames Uighur forces of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM – designated a terrorist organization by the United States), a group that believes Xinjiang should be part of a new, independent state of East Turkistan. As one noted Chinese expert points out, ETIM members seek refuge across the Chinese border in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and it is this connection that Chinese authorities focus on most in their counter-terror efforts with Pakistani authorities. According to this expert, the main ETIM support base is in Xinjiang, but ETIM's reach is now extending to Henan, Guangdong, and Yunan Provinces, illustrating Chinese concerns that terrorist challenges could broaden beyond western China.³⁵

The Afghanistan-Pakistan-Xinjiang connection is pertinent to U.S. policy and to Chinese views of U.S. actions in the region. Chinese commentary consistently draws links between the ETIM, China's counter-terror problems in Xinjiang, and developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Less consistent, however – even contradictory – is commentary on the implications that the U.S. role in Afghanistan has for China's ETIM concerns.

Sometimes U.S. actions in Afghanistan are described as highly beneficial to Chinese counter-terror interests. The real blow to ETIM, according to one noted expert, came in October 2001 when U.S. air strikes in Afghanistan destroyed all the ETIM bases in that country.³⁶ This was followed by the U.S. declaration in 2002 that ETIM was a terrorist organization and, in early 2009, the U.S. declaration of sanctions against Abdul Haq, the leader of the East Turkistan Islamic Party.

Often, however, the United States is described as ignoring or subverting Chinese counter-terror interests in Xinjiang. One Chinese analyst argues that while the United States opposes ETIM, it supports “East Turkistan” forces that use non-terrorist means to fight for independence.³⁷ As a result, according to this analyst, the U.S. and Chinese positions on “East Turkistan” are “seriously antagonistic.” The U.S. refusal to repatriate Chinese Uighurs captured in Afghanistan and held in Guantanamo Bay is one cited example. Another is the U.S. decision to give permanent resident status to noted Uighur activist

³⁵ Observations by Li Wei, Director of the Institute of Security and Strategic Studies, CICIR, cited in “Terrorist Arrests Just Tip of the Iceberg,” by Wu Meng, *Global Times online* in English, June 30, 2010.

³⁶ Observation of Pan Guang, Director, Shanghai International Studies Center, in “‘East Turkmenistan Movement’ Organization Gradually Marginalized,” by Dong Xiaobin and Jin Wei, *Guoji Xianqu Daobao* (国际先驱导报) online in Chinese, May 4, 2009. *Open Source Center* CPP20090512671010.

³⁷ Observation of Niu Xinchun, expert on U.S. studies, CICIR, in *Huanqiu Shibao* (环球时报) online in Chinese, March 3, 2010, *Open Source Center* CPP20100304710003.

Rebiya Kadeer. Some Chinese analysts cite this as a U.S. “double standard” on terrorism when it comes to Xinjiang.³⁸ This inherent contradiction in U.S. and Chinese views is a fundamental impediment to close U.S.-China counter-terror cooperation.

Chinese analysts also offer inconsistent views concerning the extent to which ETIM and its presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan is really a Xinjiang problem rather than a larger global terrorism concern. Many Chinese analysts describe the collusion between East Turkistan forces and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan largely in terms of the threat it poses to western China. Some Western observers have commented on this tendency, suggesting that Chinese leaders appear to want to “de-couple” the ETIM from the broader universe of global terrorism, treating it as a uniquely Chinese concern and responsibility that China can handle on its own.³⁹

But while this is often the case, Chinese analysts at times also criticize the West for seeing separatists in Xinjiang as “only” a Chinese problem. In these cases, Chinese analysts appear to be arguing that their Xinjiang troubles *are* part of a larger global terrorism problem, citing the arrests of ETIM members in Norway and Germany in July 2010 as supporting evidence.⁴⁰ Given China’s known preference for keeping other powers out of its own affairs, one possible reason for these competing views may be that China prefers to handle its own ETIM-related Xinjiang problems alone, but wants to leave to others the job of stamping out ETIM tentacles elsewhere.

Apart from the ETIM issue, some Chinese analysts link Xinjiang in other ways to the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Some have criticized U.S. policies that might result in a return of the Taliban in Afghanistan, saying that the policies are potentially detrimental to Xinjiang’s security.⁴¹ China should become more involved in Afghanistan, according to one analyst, because terrorists in Afghanistan will seek to attack Chinese interests there and even across the Chinese border [in Xinjiang].⁴² Another scholar directly links any potential Chinese actions against the Taliban with the danger of an increase in pressure for “Xinjiang independence.” As a result, this scholar recommends, China’s policy in Afghanistan should be treated specifically as an important weapon for fighting “Xinjiang independence.”⁴³

Likewise, Chinese commentators often appear to factor Xinjiang into their calculations regarding what China’s own level of involvement in Afghanistan should be. Some analysts appear to be arguing for more involvement because Afghanistan’s geographic

³⁸ Commentary by Li Wei, Director, Institute of Security and Strategic Studies, CICIR, in “Western Support for Xinjiang Terrorist Groups Courts Disaster,” *Global Times online* in English, July 27, 2010, Open Source Center CPP20100728722005.

³⁹ These and other related observations can be found in Dumbaugh, *Exploring the China-Pakistan Relationship*.

⁴⁰ Li Wei, in “Western Support for Xinjiang Terrorist Groups Courts Disaster.”

⁴¹ By Wu Shuhu, in *Dangdai Shijie* 担待世界, under the International Department of the CCP Central Committee, May 5, 2009.

⁴² Liu Xiao, identified only as a “Beijing scholar,” “China Can Make Arrangements for the Future by Sending Troops to Afghanistan,” p. 14.

⁴³ Li Xiguang, “China Should Have its Own Agenda for Afghanistan.”

location makes it a key component of China's western economic development strategy. According to this view, transportation linkages through Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular will strengthen Urumqi as a trade and financial center in Central Asia. Thus, according to this view, China should formulate its own Afghanistan policy to safeguard its national interests in Xinjiang, combat ETIM, and improve the economic development prospects for Chinese enterprises in Afghanistan.⁴⁴

The recuperative power of economic development is a consistent theme that runs through much of the Chinese commentary during this period and characterizes many of the actions of the Chinese government. Economic development, for instance, has been emphasized for Xinjiang Province, where Beijing is vulnerable to charges by extremists in Pakistan and Afghanistan that its policies are overly harsh and its treatment of Muslims unfair. This vulnerability increased after China's firm suppression of violent clashes between ethnic Chinese and ethnic Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang in July 2009.⁴⁵

In late 2009, the Chinese government announced that it would initiate a massive economic aid and development program for Xinjiang, based in part on a series of investments in Xinjiang by partnership support programs involving financial allocations by other Chinese provinces.⁴⁶ Some Chinese analysts link Xinjiang's economic fortunes directly with the economic futures of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some, for instance, have advised that China's economic development program in Xinjiang should include the development of an economic cooperation zone between China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, so that the three countries may jointly exploit the resources in West Asia.⁴⁷

Debate Over China's Proper Role

Some observers have continued to advise China to remain uninvolved in "America's war."⁴⁸ But Chinese commentary suggests that at least some analysts are debating whether China's traditional "non-interference" principle is still appropriate given regional instability and China's expanding global interests. Data reviewed for this report reveals that a number of Chinese specialists since at least March 2009 have been making the case for a greater Chinese initiative on Afghanistan and Pakistan.

For the most part, these arguments are made on the grounds that greater involvement is necessary to acquire the influence and power commensurate with – and needed for the protection of – China's growing economic interests. China's long-term economic and security interests could suffer if China remains passive in the region while "hiding behind

⁴⁴ Wang Shida, "PRC Daily Article Suggests Things China Should Do in Afghanistan."

⁴⁵ Beijing also replaced the long-serving, hard-line Party Secretary for Xinjiang, Wang Lequan, with Zhang Chunxian.

⁴⁶ "Massive Aid Program for Xinjiang," in *China Daily online*, May 5, 2010.

⁴⁷ Observation of Xu Fengxian, researcher at the Institute of Economic Studies, CASS, in *Liaowang Dongfang Zhoukan* (瞭望东方周刊), March 4, 2010.

⁴⁸ "Afghanistan is not China's Battlefield," by Yin Jiwu, professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University, *Huanqiu Shibao* (环球时报) in Chinese, December 18, 2009, p. 14, Open Source Center CPP20100106710001.

other powers,” one noted expert argued.⁴⁹ Other noted experts maintained that “helping the United States in Afghanistan” would be in China’s economic and security interests,⁵⁰ and that China could not continue to “excessively rely” on the strategic space acquired by US policy changes.⁵¹

The “No Troops” Issue

A number of Chinese analysts have been discussing the issue, prompted in part by some Western suggestions, of whether China should send military forces of some kind to Afghanistan. Most Chinese commentary has been firmly supportive of the official position that China should send no troops abroad. One Beijing scholar held that China should send combat troops abroad only if China’s core national interests have been seriously challenged.⁵² The “no troops” arguments are defended partly on pragmatic reasoning involving China’s self-interests: that sending troops would invite terrorist retaliation and result in closer synergy between the Taliban in Afghanistan-Pakistan and independence advocates in China’s Xinjiang Province; and that sending troops abroad would aggravate regional and global fears about a “China threat.”⁵³ Comments by noted Chinese specialist Wang Jisi, of Beijing University, suggested that the question of troop involvement was being weighed more broadly in conjunction with China’s “non-interference” principle.⁵⁴

But there also have been indications that this issue may be the subject of a limited internal debate. One expert has stated as much, saying that suggestions that China send troops to Afghanistan and open the Wakhan Corridor to supply routes by foreign forces had sparked a “heated debate in China.”⁵⁵ Many of the observations on troops are limited to references to “peacekeeping” forces. Occasionally such observations are straightforward – that China opposes use of the military but could consider sending peacekeeping forces to Afghanistan under a U.N. mandate.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ “How PRC Should Get Involved in Afghanistan Without Sending Troops,” *Huanqiu Shibao* (环球报) article by Sun Zhuangzhi, Director CASS Center for SCO Studies, January 7, 2010, Open Source Center CPP20100115710004.

⁵⁰ Wang Shida, “PRC Daily Article Suggests Things China Should Do in Afghanistan.”

⁵¹ Observations by Sun Zhe, Director of the Research Center for Sino-U.S. Relations at Tsinghua University, *Global Times* (*Huanqiu Shibao*) online in English only, January 10, 2010.

⁵² Yin Jiwu, “Afghanistan Is Not China’s Battlefield.”

⁵³ Such views were espoused by analysts and scholars in several *Huanqiu Shibao* articles in 2009, including: “China Should Not Send Combat Troops to Afghanistan,” by National Defense University Professor Li Daguang, December 08; “Afghanistan is Not China’s Battlefield,” by Beijing Foreign Studies University Professor of International Relations Yin Jiwu, December 18; and “China Should Have its Own Agenda for Afghanistan,” by Tsinghua University’s Director of the Center for International Communications Studies, Li Xiguang, December 24.

⁵⁴ “Trends on the Development of U.S.-China Relations and Deep-Seated Reasons,” lecture at the CASS Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, Wang Jisi, Dean of the School of International Relations, Beijing University, in *Dangdai Yatai* (当代亚太), June 20, 2009, pp. 4-20, Open Source Center CPP20090804671003.

⁵⁵ “The Times Call for a Chinese-Version Afghanistan Strategy,” *Shijie Zhishi* (世界知识), article by Wang Shida, February 10, 2010, pp. 34-35, 38, Open Source Center CPP20100316671009.

⁵⁶ Observations by Da Wei, Vice Director of the Institute for American Research, CICIR, in *Huanqiu Shibao* online in English only, January 10, 2010.

One article by a professor at China's National Defense University (NDU), for instance, eschews the possibility of sending troops, on the basis of China's "basic national strategy" (the non-interference principle). This observer emphasizes that all of China's overseas deployments to date have been limited to peacekeeping forces sent through U.N. auspices and tasked with medical and construction missions. The article goes on to suggest that, therefore, if the U.N. requires peacekeeping forces to be stationed in Afghanistan, China will send only "units for peacekeeping." This article appears as one of a pair in the same newspaper edition in what may have been a staged "debate" on the subject⁵⁷

The companion piece takes the view that it is essential for China to send troops to Afghanistan, and that China in fact has already adjusted its "non-interference" principle by sending PLA naval ships on escort duty off the Somali coast. The article goes on, however, to set forth an extremely restrictive framework under which sending troops to Afghanistan would be permissible: they would be sent under UN auspices with Afghan authorization; they would be independent from NATO forces; they would include forces from the SCO; they would consist largely of non-combat forces "with a small number of protective combat forces"; and they would be stationed mainly in areas of Afghanistan where China has investments.⁵⁸

Despite these hints of ongoing discussion, none of the sources reviewed suggested that the question of using Chinese forces on the ground in Afghanistan, in any form, has yet risen to the level of official policy. Asked a direct question during a news conference about the possibility of China sending peacekeeping forces to Afghanistan, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi demurred, saying only that military means were not the answer to Afghanistan's problems and that China has already been helping in Afghanistan's economic reconstruction.⁵⁹

Independence from the U.S./NATO Framework

The broader evolving debate over the level of Chinese involvement in the new U.S. Afghanistan/Pakistan strategy seems to be shaped by a growing conviction that China should strive to be part of a multilateral effort as long as it is not associated with NATO. The "not NATO" conviction is not necessarily an indictment of NATO actions – China has participated in international conferences on Afghanistan prompted by the U.S.-NATO Afghanistan effort – but appears to pertain specifically to Beijing's view of the importance of having a separate, regionally based, lead player to counteract NATO influence.

⁵⁷ "Sending Troops to Afghanistan Will Cause Trouble for China," an article by National Defense University Professor Li Daguang, in *Global Times*, (*Huanqiu Shibao* 环球时报), December 8, 2009, p. 14.

⁵⁸ Liu Xiao, identified only as a "Beijing scholar," "China Can Make Arrangements for the Future by Sending Troops to Afghanistan," p. 14.

⁵⁹ Full text of PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi's News Conference, CCTV-1, March 7, 2010, Open Source Center CCP20100307163008.

One well-connected scholar suggested that Chinese officials and scholars were “leaning toward” the United States and NATO maintaining control in Afghanistan, but could not offer public expressions of support for the U.S./NATO effort because the matter was highly sensitive.⁶⁰ In any event, such a statement does not appear to suggest a revision of overall Chinese thinking on alternatives to U.S./NATO leadership in the region. Consistent public Chinese statements and observations are that the United Nations should take the lead in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Evidence that China desires involvement independent of the U.S./NATO framework goes beyond the commentary of informed observers.⁶¹ From early 2009 on, it has been backed up by an increasing tempo in Beijing’s diplomatic and economic-related activity involving Afghanistan specifically and the region more broadly. In addition to focusing SCO activities more intensely on events in Afghanistan, China has participated in a series of non-NATO-sponsored international meetings and organizations on Central and South Asian development, putting money and effort behind multiple initiatives. These efforts have appeared to be aimed at a broader but still regionally based network of support for Afghanistan only, and have not included Pakistan. In the words of a formal statement issued at one of these conferences:

Forming the very heart of Asia, Afghanistan is a country whose present and future is inseparably bound with those of its neighborhood. The vital element of regional peace and stability is a safe, secure, peaceful, and prosperous Afghanistan which in turn can be ensured within a regional framework that reflects friendship and cooperation.⁶²

As illustrated in table 3, China’s activities have included participating not only in broad international NATO-led meetings, but also in existing and new regional mechanisms at which the Afghanistan problem was discussed. These appear to represent efforts to push the boundaries of regional involvement beyond the NATO framework.

Leveraging the SCO

Beijing’s preferred multilateral vehicle in the region for addressing terrorism and stability issues is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which Chinese leaders appear to want to make more visible and influential. Pakistan is one of four official “observer” states, and President Hamid Karzai has been a regular “guest” attendee since 2005, when the

⁶⁰ Wang Jisi, “Trends on the Development of U.S.-China Relations and Deep-Seated Reasons.”

⁶¹ Several Chinese observers see NATO as a hegemonic tool of the United States. According to one security analyst, the anti-terror campaign serves as an excuse for the “boundless” expansion of NATO. Zhao Mingwen, Director for the China Regional Security Center at the China Institute for International Studies (CIIS), in “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s Sustained and Stable Development,” *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* (国际问题研究) in Chinese, July 13, 2009, Open Source Center, CPP20090813671002. Another government scholar said that China has common anti-terror interests with NATO but also its own independent policies. Tao Wenzhao, CASS, Institute of American Studies, in “NATO Seeks Chinese Rebuilding Help for Kabul,” *China Daily* online in English, March 25, 2010, Open Source Center CPP20100325968059.

⁶² “Istanbul Statement on Friendship and Cooperation in the ‘Heart of Asia,’” issued by the Istanbul Summit on Friendship and Cooperation in the “Heart of Asia,” January 26, 2010.

Table 3: Selected International Conferences and Meetings on Afghanistan, 2009-2010*

- Moscow International Conference on Afghanistan, under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) – March 26, 2009 – first meeting
- The Hague International Conference on Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context – March 31, 2009
- SCO 9th Summit, Yekaterinburg – June 15, 2009 (expressed “grave concern” over Afghanistan situation)
- Istanbul Summit on Friendship and Cooperation in the “Heart of Asia” (Afghanistan), Istanbul, Turkey – January 26, 2010 (US and NATO as observers)
- London International Conference on Afghanistan – January 28, 2010
- South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), in Bhutan – April 28, 2010 (China and the US as observers)
- SCO 10th Summit, Tashkent – June 11, 2010
- Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Istanbul – June 28, 2010
- Kabul International Conference on Afghanistan – July 20, 2010
- Dianchi Cooperation for Opening Asia (DCOA), in Kunming – July 2010, first meeting

* Half of these meetings were specifically devoted to Afghanistan issues; the rest had Afghanistan as one of multiple topics. Entries in blue indicate international NATO-based international conferences; entries in red indicate separate non-NATO events in which China participated.

SCO turned its attention to the situation in Afghanistan. Chinese scholars and analysts in 2009 and 2010 appeared to view the new U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy as an opportunity for the SCO both to have greater interaction with the West and to serve as a counterweight to U.S. and NATO regional influence.⁶³

In the weeks leading up to and following the SCO’s 9th summit meeting in June 2009, several Chinese articles, interviews, and news reports discussed the organization’s potential role in Afghanistan. One Chinese expert on international security speculated that because of the U.S. shift in focus from Iraq to Afghanistan-Pakistan, the 2009 SCO summit agenda would include anti-terrorism discussions.⁶⁴

Another Chinese analyst judged that the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and the new U.S. strategy launched in 2009 provided the SCO with its best opportunity since the 9/11 terrorist attacks to adjust its relationship with the United States and the West. According to this analyst, the SCO had not made full use of its resources with respect to Afghanistan, and needed to develop its own program there.⁶⁵ Another analyst reported

⁶³ This range of views is presented in several scholarly articles that appeared the month after the SCO’s June 2009 meeting. See “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s Sustained and Stable Development,” by Zhao Mingwen, Director, China Regional Security Center, CIIS, Open Source Center CPP20090813671002; and “The SCO and the Afghanistan Issue,” by Zhao Huasheng, Director, Center for Russian and Central Asian Studies, Fudan University, Research Project for the State Innovative Institute for American Studies. Both articles are published in Chinese in *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* (国际问题研究), a journal of the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS), with links to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 13, 2009, pp. 36-41, Open Source Center CPP20090813671001.

⁶⁴ Observation by Renmin University expert Jin Canrong, *China Daily* online in English, June 16, 2009.

⁶⁵ Zhao Huasheng, in *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* (国际问题研究), July 13, 2009, pp. 36-41, Open Source Center CPP20090813671001.

that while the global financial crisis continued to occupy SCO members' discussions, terrorism had become a long-term concern for the SCO, and the organization would greatly increase its cooperation on anti-terror issues.⁶⁶

In a different view on developing the SCO's potential, the organization was described as a buffer for China (and also Russia) to counter the "strategic pressure" (*ji ya*) of the United States and its allies. The United States and NATO were described as trying to "dismantle" the SCO and cripple its effectiveness through such initiatives as the NATO "Partnership Plan" and the U.S. "Greater Central Asia Plan." According to this government analyst, the SCO is the region's only hope for countering U.S. "containment" strategy.⁶⁷

Concluding Observations

Chinese views of the U.S. Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy suggest several key implications, not only for the U.S. war effort but for broader U.S. regional interests as well.

First, in their discussions, writings, and commentary, Chinese government analysts consistently display an aversion to accepting the U.S.-NATO framework as a dominant and permanent regional force. Beijing has put money and effort behind regional efforts that parallel or offer alternatives to the NATO framework. China sees NATO as, at best, indirectly supporting Chinese interests in eradicating terrorism on its periphery – and, at worst, a competitor to China in the region or even a deliberate impediment to Chinese growth and influence.

Second, in their discussions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, Chinese analysts appear to be at least entertaining the idea that China may need to begin to act more assertively in international affairs as its economic interests and activities grow. These evaluations of China's potential global role focus on measures that would protect its own direct economic interests and help to further those interests. They do not focus on shaping, re-making, or assuming greater responsibility for the broader regional environment.

In this sense, China in Afghanistan and Pakistan continues to have a high tolerance for economic risk and a low tolerance for political risk. This suggests that Beijing is more likely, then, to invest in reconstruction and aid projects that directly support Chinese economic interests and that are conducted through the United Nations, the SCO, or another non-NATO political group. As the U.S./NATO effort in Afghanistan draws down, Chinese actions may offer insights into how Beijing plans to address the non-interference issue in future policy.

Third, in addition to furthering China's economic interests, Chinese regional concerns continue to focus on ensuring stability and combating terrorism. Again, these concerns

⁶⁶ Observations of Jiang Yi, a researcher on Russia and Central Asia Studies at CASS, *China Daily* online in English, June 16, 2009.

⁶⁷ Zhao Mingwen, CIIS, China Regional Security Center Director, *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* (国际问题研究), July 13, 2009.

are tilted almost exclusively toward measures that directly affect Chinese interests. Taken together, this suggests that although China is unlikely to participate in NATO endeavors in Afghanistan, Beijing may be amenable to coordinating parallel, mutually-reinforcing initiatives that support both Chinese and U.S.-NATO objectives.



Cover photo: REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque
U.S. President Obama talks to reporters as he stands with Afghanistan's President Karzai and Pakistan's President Zardari at White House in Washington. (06/05/2009)