



China's Role in Afghanistan's Peace Process

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Abstract

Peoples Republic of China due to economic and security factors had been willing to end up the war in Afghanistan through an inter-Afghan peace process and had been undertaken various steps to promote this initiative. The issues which will be discusses in this article are the followings: 1-The role of china in Afghanistan peace process as it is very crucial and important for Afghanistan, Questions, Assumptions and the main goals of the research are in the context of assessing the role of china as a major power and neighboring country in this case as well as numerous meetings of high level delegations of both countries. 2- The strategic interest of china in Afghanistan. 3- The leverage (political influence) of china on Pakistan.

China were involved in peace negotiations through bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral (QCG) channels and made supports and commitments for strengthening peace talks in Afghanistan, that can be finds by reviewing this read and finally conclude with a conclusion from the past, present and future china endeavors in this case.

Key words: *China's role, China's interests, China's influence, Afghanistan, Peace process, Taliban, Pakistan, bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral meetings.*

Introduction

This paper discussed about "China's role in Afghanistan's Peace Process". Peace is one major issue for each country, particularly in their internal policies; because without peace they cannot reach to development, welfare and the other important aspects of a country. Peace is an ambition for Afghans since they have seen decade's long war, aggression, intervention, and immigrations. Afghanistan lost its rich assets during the four decades war. As of 2017, the Taliban is still a dangerous network in Afghanistan and it is increasing step by step in building-up its power and territory and resources. They are all after Afghanistan's peace, democratic system and the people by waging an endless assassinations, explosions, suicide attacks and military operations. The government can't annihilate them since they have strong supporters and as a result to this, people are concerned and worried of the future of Afghanistan. Hence, the scenario has become more complicated and prospects of the peace very limited. Till date, Afghanistan has suffered a great number of casualties in achieving the means of peace. Also, it is not only the political and economic wellbeing of the country that's has been affected but the younger generation seems to be in a jeopardized situation. The government has always opened the door for the negotiations with Taliban through various channels and the other armed oppositions, but two sides have mostly failed to achieve any positive conclusion.

In the current international system, China has emerged as an important player in establishing peace and contributes to the development of its periphery. It is an important neighbor of Afghanistan and due to instable political sphere in the country; China has its own worries at Afghanistan and China border as the terrorists are also threat China. As per its initiatives in Afghanistan, potential and options for Afghans peace process dialogue seem to materialize. Therefore, I propose the present study topic from review aspects, opportunities, challenges and more role of China in Afghans peace process.

Role of China in Afghanistan's peace process

Since 2014, high-level government officials from China and Afghanistan have held increasingly frequent exchanges. Wang Yi visited Kabul in February 2014 and introduced China's policy goal for Afghanistan to become a "unified, stable, developing, and friendly" country. He pointed out that China is willing to play a constructive role in helping Afghanistan achieve comprehensive, inclusive political reconciliation. In July 2014, China named Sun Yuxi special envoy for Afghan affairs, and he went on to conduct high-profile mediation efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In October 2014, President Ghani visited China. China will provide 500 million Yuan (\$81.8 million) in grant assistance to the Afghan government for 2014 and a further 1.5 billion Yuan in the next three years. In return, Ghani declared support for China's fight against the Uighur separatist group East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which China blames for several deadly attacks throughout the country over the last decade. The two countries signed agreements on economic and technology cooperation. China will train 3,000 Afghan professionals in various fields over the next five years (Global Times 30 Oct 2014).

In November 2014, Chinese Minister of Public Security Guo Shengkun visited Afghanistan. He expressed that China is willing to work with Afghanistan to enhance law enforcement and security cooperation on issues such as fighting terrorism and transnational crime, taking concrete steps to resolutely fight the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, and creating a stable environment of peace and security in the region. Guo's visit indicates that Afghanistan has become a more important part of China's national security strategy (Geety; Luyang, Dec 2015). China also tries to act as mediator for talks over the peace process between the Taliban and the Afghan government, though it should be noted that China pursues an "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" peace process. China believes it is in a good position to undertake such mediation, because it has a relatively good political image in Afghanistan, as it consistently promotes Afghan-led and Afghan-owned policy, respects the country's independence and sovereignty, and actively promotes political reconciliation there. Furthermore, China did not participate in the Afghan war that began in 2001, has not aroused the dislike of any political faction, and is relatively easily accepted by all (Jin, Aug 2016).

In Sep 2015, after the Taliban reclaimed Kunduz, a strategic city in northern Afghanistan, Beijing agreed to cooperate with Kabul. It pledged \$73 million to support Afghanistan fledgling security forces. Afghan border police also are being trained in China, and the Chinese government is providing military hardware, including bullet proof jackets, demining equipment and armored police vehicles (Snow, Mar 2016). In late September 2015, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized the importance of an "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned" reconciliation process.

Based on mutual agreement beside economic assistance, China will provide Afghanistan military aids, China Government has delivered its first military equipment aid to Afghanistan security forces which includes weapons and ammunition and some scanner machines which will neutralize the explosive materials, Afghanistan's National security adviser Hanif Atmar stated that China will soon provide some logistical helicopters for Afghan air forces to speed up the military operations (Ariana news: 03 July 2016).

Bilateral meeting between Afghanistan government and Taliban to hosted Pakistan and China, Pakistan hosted first round of peace talk between Kabul and Taliban insurgents on July 7. It was a step towards ending more than 13 years of war in Afghanistan, in which the Taliban have been fighting the government. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif described the first round of talks as a "breakthrough", adding: "This process has to succeed (Wayand, 24 July 2015)." The second round of talks is most probably going to be held in Urumqi in China on July 30," said Ismail Qasimyar, a senior member of Afghan High Peace Council. He said delegations from China and the United States would observe the talks, as they did in the ground breaking first official meeting earlier this month (Kumari, July 2015).

Beijing has set up a trilateral diplomatic forum with Islamabad and Kabul to encourage their cooperation and friendship. China has taken similar initiatives with Iran and India to involve the two countries in trilateral dialogues with Afghanistan. During the past year, Beijing has also reached out to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to secure their backing because they are seen as a key funding source for some Afghan insurgents. Chinese diplomats have held meetings with the Afghan Taliban emissaries in the Gulf and inside Pakistan. In January, even the Taliban acknowledged its delegation had visited Beijing late last year, but the insurgents stopped short of accepting a Chinese role. A Taliban statement said it "respects the efforts of all concerned parties in this regard, however, it has not yet decided on a new course of action"(Siddique , Jul, 2015).

Quadrilateral Coordination Group Meetings:

First meeting: The first meeting of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States on Afghan Peace and reconciliation process was held in Islamabad on 11 January 2016. All four countries underscored the importance of bringing an end to the conflict in Afghanistan that continues to inflict senseless violence on the Afghan people and also breeds insecurity throughout the region. The participants emphasized the immediate need for direct talks between representatives of the Government of Afghanistan and representatives from Taliban groups in a peace process that aims to preserve Afghanistan's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity (Press Releases: Jan 2016).

Second meeting: The second meeting of the (QCG) on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation process was held in Kabul on 18 January. Taking note of the joint statement of January 11, 2016 and building on the outcome of the first meeting of the QCG, the group discussed and made progress on a roadmap towards initiating peace talks with Taliban groups that reflects the shared commitments of the QCG member countries. The roadmap aims to set specific measures that are necessary for creating a conducive environment for the commencement of Afghan led, Afghan owned peace talks between Government of Afghanistan and Taliban groups aimed at reduction of violence and establishing lasting peace in Afghanistan and the region (Press Releases: Jan 2016).

Third meeting: The third meeting of the (QCG) of on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation process was held in Islamabad on 6 February. Building on the progress made in the last two meetings, the Group explored ways for holding early direct peace talks between the authorized representatives of the Afghan Government and Taliban groups. In this regard, the Group also adopted a roadmap stipulating the stages and steps in the process. The Group stressed that the outcome of the reconciliation process should be a political settlement that results in the cessation of violence, and durable peace in Afghanistan (Press Releases: Feb 2016).

Fourth meeting: The fourth meeting of the (QCG) o on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation process was held in Kabul on 23 Feb. The QCG also welcomed the decision by Afghanistan and Pakistan to constitute a bilateral joint working group to work with the honorable Ulema of Afghanistan and Pakistan for their support to the Afghan led and Afghan owned peace and reconciliation process, including through Fatwas against the ongoing senseless violence. "The Taliban reaction in their first response to the QCG and conditions include: the withdrawal of all foreign troops, official recognition of the Qatar office, the removal of the Taliban from the UN sanctions list, a halt to the "arrest and elimination" of Taliban fighters, the release of Taliban inmates from prisons, and a stop to what they call "anti-Taliban propaganda," including labeling them as "terrorists" (Ruttig, Feb 2016).

Fifth meeting: The fifth meeting of the (QCG) on the Afghan peace and reconciliation process was held in Islamabad on 18 May 2016. The QCG reiterated that violence serves no purpose and that peace negotiations remain the only option for a political settlement. The QCG strongly condemned the April 19 terrorist attack in Kabul and underscored that those who perpetrate such acts of terrorism should be ready to face consequences of their actions (Press Releases: May 2016).

Sixth meeting: The 6th meeting of the (QCG) held on 16 Oct 2017, in Oman, seemingly ended without finding any headway in the Afghan Peace Process as representatives from the member countries did not speak about the meeting. It was set up in Jan 2016 to find a political solution to the Afghan conflict. The process was halted after a US drone strike killed prominent Taliban's leader, Mullah Akhtar Mansoor. Roughly a week before the meeting, the Taliban's leadership council decided not to send a delegation to the QCG even if an invitation was extended. To date, Taliban have officially rejected engaging in direct talks and emphasized their conditions (Press Releases: Oct 2017).

The QCG has failed to achieve the purpose for which it was created. The major reason for the failure was that states' individual interests did not extend beyond the Taliban. The Taliban is an actor secondary to restoring stability in Afghanistan. It is the countries with stakes in a stable Afghanistan that have to play the primary role – be that through a political settlement or through other necessary measures. With this commitment in place at the state level, the Taliban would feel pressure to negotiate; in the absence of that commitment, the group will remain defiant and will only be persuaded to continue its fight against the Afghan government.

China's "special constructive role" is realized in two ways. On the one hand, China hoped to help settle the Afghanistan crisis through aid. China's support for Afghanistan has clearly grown. Between 2001 and 2013, China provided a total of nearly \$250 million in humanitarian aid and trained more than 1,000 professionals. However, in

2014 alone, China provided \$75 million of humanitarian aid, and promised to provide another \$330 million over the next three years — more than China had provided in the preceding 14 years combined. On the other hand, China views international organizations as important platforms to diminish international suspicions toward China. China encourages Afghanistan to join regional and international organizations led by China, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. China also provides economic investment to various states, including Afghanistan, under the framework of international organizations, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund. With China's help, Afghanistan has become an "observer" state in the SCO. Meanwhile, China has maintained close communication over Afghan issues with regional and global powers such as Pakistan, India, Iran, Russia, and the United States. Several trilateral mechanisms have been established (Jin, Aug 2016).

The Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs/International Relations in Beijing on 18-19 June 2017 at the initiative of China. We strongly condemn terrorist attacks resulting in death to innocent Afghan nationals. There is a need for immediate cessation of violence. We reaffirm our support to the people of Afghanistan in their efforts to achieve "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" peace and national reconciliation (Xinhua: 5 Sep 2017).

In June, Wang Yi during his meeting in Kabul, He paid a weekend trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan seeking to ease tensions between the neighbors and push them into joining efforts to create peace in the region. China, through its silent diplomacy, is already playing a role for peace in Afghanistan; however, this is the first time it has come forward so openly. Wang's visit shows China's enhanced interest to help resolve regional conflicts. And his mission has produced an immediate positive outcome (Malik, 27 June 2017).

Yao Jing, the Chinese Ambassador to Kabul, on 6 September; paid a visit to Badakhshan province and said insurgent activity in the north of Afghanistan is a threat to the region. "Yao said that Beijing is currently working with Kabul and other countries in the fight against insurgency to prevent their influence in China. We are concerned that the insurgents or the terrorist movements in this region are a threat not only to China but I believe to Afghanistan itself, to Tajikistan and to all neighbors (TOLO News: 07 Sep 2017).

Wang Yi said his country wants improved relations between Kabul and Islamabad. The two officials discussed security in the region and other bilateral issues between China and Pakistan. Yi said his country will support Pakistan in the war against terrorism, adding that peace in Afghanistan remains in the interest of both countries. He said China wants improved relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan (TOLO News: 08 Sep 2017).

A Chinese envoy on 25 Sep, called for political dialogue in Afghanistan as well as international efforts to boost the country's defense capacity, governance and its integration into regional development frameworks. "Political dialogue is the only viable solution to the question of Afghanistan," Wu Haitao. China's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations told an open meeting of the UN Security Council on Afghanistan. "Strengthening governance is an important guarantee of the peace and reconstruction process in Afghanistan," he said. At the end of the day, Afghan affairs should be handled by Afghans themselves (Xinhua: 26 Sep 2017).

China's interests in Afghanistan

China's actions in Afghanistan are motivated by its national interests, and by a growing awareness of its responsibility, as a major power in the region, to promote security and economic development in Afghanistan and throughout South and Central Asia. Security is China's top interest in Afghanistan. The two countries are neighbors, and the border they share, although only about 90 kilometers long, strengthening of Taliban, linking between Taliban and Uyghur extremist group, poses significant security concerns for China. The Afghan side of the border is a hotbed of terrorism and extremism, while on the Chinese side sits Xinjiang, a region that is especially vulnerable to the effects of terrorism and extremism. The situation in Xinjiang has become more complicated, moving it to the forefront of China's national security strategy. Maintaining security and stability in Xinjiang requires a dual approach. China must combat and control domestic separatist, terrorist, and extremist groups in the region. But it also faces the danger that they might coordinate with terrorist groups in Afghanistan and beyond.

China also has significant financial investments in Afghanistan, chiefly the Mes Aynak copper mine is worth an estimated 3 billion dollars, southeast of Kabul, and the Amu Darya oil worth around 700 million dollars, field in northern Afghanistan. Beyond these ventures, Chinese officials see an opportunity to make further investments in the country. China's Silk Road Economic Belt strategy includes the construction of railways and highways to better connect Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Afghanistan is located at the geographical hub of these regions, and any unrest or civil war there would likely result in instability spilling over into nearby regions, making it difficult for the strategy to succeed (Huasheng, 08 Mar 2015). One reason for China's engagement is that a stable Afghanistan could become a critical transportation hub and market for Chinese goods, and, eventually, another investment opportunity for President Xi Jinping's grand economic plans for Central Asia.

“China needs a peaceful and stable neighborhood to advance its economic interests,” said Davood Moradian, an Afghan scholar. Afghanistan could play an important part in China’s plans, if it can overcome the deadly strife that makes doing business there a near impossibility. China’s economic incentives for helping with the peace process are secondary to trying to establish stability (Rubin, 24 Jan 2016).

China might be willing to invest more in Afghanistan if prospects in the country to enhance infrastructure network (roads, railways, etc.) are good enough. It could invest in Afghanistan’s infrastructure, for example via its Silk Road Fund or via the newly-established Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. In view to the insecurity and uncertainty however it appears unlikely for Afghanistan to become a key country in China’s OBOR plans in the near future, although Afghanistan could certainly benefit from the region’s improved infrastructure for trade and access to markets. In the short and medium term, Afghanistan might actually benefit more from China’s current approach to focus on smaller-scale projects rather than focusing on large-scale projects, as it became common for Chinese infrastructure investments. Afghanistan, rich in minerals and oil that China is keen to exploit, is a critical part of that network. Further untapped natural resources in Afghanistan are supposed to be worth \$1 trillion, according to a US report from 2010. China wants to exploit the mineral deposits of Afghanistan and is prepared to build a railway from Kabul to Xinjiang China could provide more funding to specific projects in Afghanistan, such as in the areas of health, education, and rural or urban development.

China’s influence on Pakistan

Peace in Afghanistan requires the help of Pakistan, the regime’s major benefactor. In this, China can be particularly helpful and could be a key player in future peace talks because of its close relationship with Pakistan, a country that Afghanistan accuses of harboring and even supporting Taliban leaders. “To many Afghans, the roots of their country’s problems stretch across the border to Taliban strongholds in the frontier areas, and even further, into the halls of Pakistan’s military and intelligence headquarters. The Taliban leadership is known as the Quetta Shura after the city in Pakistan’s Baluchistan Province where it’s been based since its ouster in 2001. When a US drone strike killed Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour in May, he was travelling by road in that province. The role of Pakistan’s intelligence and security agencies in the organization of the Taliban and their takeover of Afghanistan in the 1990s has been well documented by journalists and authors such as Ahmad Rashid” (Chiu and Ferrie, 4 July 2016). Yet if China is to play a productive role in peace talks with the Taliban, the officials and scholars say, it will have to convince its ally Pakistan that an Afghanistan at peace and engaged politically and economically with all regional powers, including India, is in Pakistan’s interests (Peterson, Mar 2015).

“Terrorism is a big problem and a huge issue for us in the region. Terrorist groups such as Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Tahrir-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or Taliban movement of Pakistan, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Islamic State (IS) are a big threat to the security of both Afghanistan and China”. The Chinese colleagues have played an essential and important role in Afghanistan peace and security talks, because China has a close relation with Pakistan; therefore, we encourage China to continue serious discussions with Pakistan on Afghan peace talks,” Deputy Afghanistan Foreign Ministry Hekmat Khalil Karzai said on March 2015 (Ariana News: Frotan, 16 Mar 2015).

On 25 June 2017, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan are all committed to maintaining regional peace and stability, enhancing regional connectivity and economic cooperation and promoting shared security and development. The three parties also agreed to establish the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' dialogue mechanism to cooperate on issues of mutual interest and the Quadrilateral Coordination Group should be revived (Xinhua: 26 June 2017).

China's top diplomat Yang Jiechi on Aug 2017 said the United States must value Pakistan's role in Afghanistan and respect its sovereignty and security concerns, in a telephonic call to US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. China's Foreign Ministry defended its ally Pakistan earlier this week after President Donald Trump said the United States could no longer be silent about militants using safe havens on Pakistani soil (Reuters: 24 Aug 2017). “We have identified three priority areas which are strategic communication, security dialogue and practical cooperation. On that basis, we will work to advance on trilateral basis starting from easier matters with goal of establishing a new platform for regional cooperation. “I am confident that with the consorted efforts from Pakistan and Afghanistan and with the active support from China and relations between the two countries and cooperation among the three countries will embrace a brighter future,” Wang Yi said (Hindustan Times: 08 Sep 2017).

China, Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed on 10 Nov 2017, to step up cooperation on fighting terrorism and to jointly uphold the security and stability of the three countries and the region, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry has said. According Pakistan's Samaa news portal, the decision was taken during a trilateral vice-

ministerial consultation in Beijing on counter-terrorism and security between the three nations (TOLO News: 11 Nov 2017).

Conclusion

With the conduction of library research reaches to this conclusion: China like other countries trying to obtain its strategic interests in Afghanistan. The relationship between china and Afghanistan goes back to six decades. The china representatives contacted with Taliban regime during their ruling in Afghanistan and had meetings discussing on wide range of issues including cutting Taliban ties with the terrorist groups like Islamic movement of Xinxiang. Despite the lobbying china was not successful to prevent the destruction of Buda sculptures by Taliban. During the post-Taliban order, china invested over 3.7 Billion dollars in tow major projects, Aynak copper mine in Logar province and excavation of Amu river oil reserves, but the role of china in promoting peace talks had been increased after the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan, intensification of large terrorist attack and the threats facing by Uyghur region. This was the reason why visits and meetings of high level delegations of two countries increased and signed many agreements ranging from security to economic and cultural fields and President Ghani state visit to Beijing in 2014 lay down the concrete foundation for the bolstering of the level of co operations.

China offered to be the mediator in Afghanistan Peace and reconciliation process, given to the effectiveness and leverage on Pakistan welcomed by Afghan government, indeed china needs a secure Afghanistan to be long term partner as Afghanistan very much interested to a good neighborly and large scale co operations with china and in return china enjoying the economic interest through One Belt One Road and CPEC, excavation of cooper and oil reserves of Amu river. Pertaining to the peace process of Afghanistan, china holds bilateral talks between Taliban and Afghanistan envoys in Beijing, Mari and Urumqi (to be checked for make sure its correction) and trilateral meetings participating Pakistan, China and Afghanistan that had concrete results on furthering security co operations. In the main time china support quadrilateral coordination group (QCG) focusing on Afghanistan peace process held in Islamabad and Kabul and recently the QCG meeting convened in Muscat to resume peace talks and accelerate this process. The QCG efforts to create a regional consensus on Afghanistan peace talks and bring Taliban to negotiating tables failed due to lack of sincere commitment of Pakistan as an important player of war and peace of Afghanistan and setting un law full preconditions such as withdrawal of all foreign troops, releasing Taliban prisons and amendments of the constitution of Afghanistan by Taliban. In November 2017 and also in December china, Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to combat against terrorism and jointly maintain security and stability in the region as such a commitment had been made in the past didn't put in place.

Given the leverage of china to Pakistan and high level economic ties between two countries, Afghanistan was hopeful to have tangible results but unfortunately Pakistan was not sincere on their side commitments. Now it is an imperative for china to secure Afghanistan as OBOR and CPEC passes from Afghanistan territory based on signed MOU between china and Afghanistan and put political pressure and undertakes other practical steps to dismantle terrorist safe havens.

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