

China flexing muscles in Afghanistan

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Napoleon once said that, “When China awakes the world will tremble. China is one of the strategically most important neighbors of Afghanistan. The rapid expansion of its economy has made china a point of reference and topic in political and economic discussions throughout the world. Many of the political and trade union leaders have been praising the Chinese “miracle” as the only way out of the crisis, especially in this part of the world. The advanced capitalist world is, on the one hand jubilant at the capitalist restoration in China whereas at the same time they are disheartened by the Chinese bureaucracy. The US and EU conflicts today with china are not of an ideological nature but based on market competition, capital investment and trade antagonism. Yet it was the Chinese elite that provided cheap and skilled labour for the profitable manufacturing ventures to the global corporation that gave a little breathing space of stability and avoided deep recession before 2008. The policy clash if any exist that is just upon Keynesian and monetarist methods.

On the global and regional stage China exerting prominent role. In Afghanistan too China could play significant role. Afghan authorities must prepare for the emerging greater political role of China in the region. Since 2001 China has made a minimal security contribution to Afghanistan. But its aid commitment for Afghanistan’s reconstruction has been a very modest US\$250 million. Diplomatically too, china took a low-key approach to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2012.

China has long been concerned about the spread of the Islamic extremist agenda and activism from Afghanistan through Central Asia and across its own borders. Particularly into its western most under-developed territory, Xinjiang. This major security concern for China is one of the defining factors to flexed muscles in the Afghan affairs.

The recent visit of the, Li Yuanchao vice president of the People’s Republic of China to Kabul is the proof that China cannot remain aloof from Afghanistan. Both Kabul and Beijing signed three cooperation agreements in the presence of President Ghani and Vice President Li Yuanchao. China will also provide scanning devices for detection of explosive at the four entry gates of Kabul. Technical cooperation in the form of Vocational institute for education and residential apartments worth 500 million Chinese Yuan are the content of these agreements. The vice President of China further vowed that they will provide 50 more educational scholarship for Afghan students. Li also said: “this is the year of friendly cooperation between china and Afghanistan and I have come to Kabul to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of political relations of Afghanistan and china.” He further added that china wants to fulfill the commitments that the leaders of the two countries had agreed upon.

While debating the risk of Afghanistan many Chinese policy-makers broadly agree that stability in Afghanistan is an important Chinese interest, but they have differences on the level of the risk. Certainly the threat posed from the Islamic fundamentalism is very similar to both the nations. Although the 92 kilometers-long border is inaccessible and the spill-over of the threat is very limited. However, even then we cannot turn a blind eye on this vicious threat because Central Asia could also provide alternative route for these Islamic extremists to make inroad into Chinese Xingjiang. Which ultimately do help and radicalise

their brethren of Sunni militant Uyghur group which always claimed responsibility of attacks in China. China must come with more active positive role in Afghanistan because the war in Afghanistan is not the internal war but it is international. Now it must be very clear that safe and secure Xinjiang is only possible through stable Afghanistan. To counter the risk more effectively Afghanistan and China need enhanced diplomatic and economic engagement.

Training and equipping the Afghan forces is another possible area where Chinese cooperation could help a lot. Mine clearance or counter-narcotics training is also the area where Chinese expert can provide help to the Afghans. One of the more innovative training suggestions comes from Hu Shisheng. Along with co-authors Raffaello Pantucci of the Royal United Services Institution in London and Ravi Sawhney of New Delhi's Vivekananda International Foundation, Hu proposed that China and India could jointly train a "mineral-assets protection force" in Afghanistan.

Since 2011, China's diplomatic engagement on the Afghan issue has strengthened significantly. In June 2012, Afghanistan and China signed a "strategic and cooperative partnership". China has strategic partnership with dozens of other countries as well. But the nature of the relation differs. In the case of Afghanistan it could be seen as the symbol of increased Chinese interest. In July 2014, China announced the appointment of a special envoy to Afghanistan, Sun Yuxi, a former ambassador to both Afghanistan and India.

In the current dormant peace process within and around Afghanistan China once again appearing for the purpose of resuming talks with Taliban. The daily Express Tribune on its 7 November 2015 editorial also highlighted the significant role of China in the peace process of Afghan government with Taliban. The editorial added "There is much at stake, and not only for China. Peace, if it ever comes in Afghanistan, will be game a changer and a possible key, if not to prosperity in the short term then to improved lives for many millions across the region generally".

In a fresh move the special Chinese Envoy on Afghanistan, Deng Xijun also visited Islamabad and met with Pakistani officials in order to discuss the issue of Afghan peace talks. Pakistan has been considered one of the primary key player in the whole peace process. Afghan government and its international allies many times asked Pakistan to bring Taliban on the table with sincere efforts. But Pakistan has always and is still supporting the religious proxies in Afghanistan. The Haqqanis and the Quetta Shura are the two well-known Pakistani state sponsored militias, through which Pakistan wants to exert influence on Kabul. It is a historical truth that Islamabad never supported the secular and democratic forces in Afghanistan. Even then Pakistan is not ready to give more rights and civil liberties to the most deprived Baloch and Pashtuns. It is also very important for China to understand the grievances of the Baloch and Pashtun Question. The success of 45\$ US billion dollars China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project is very dependent on the Baloch and Pashtun political status in Pakistan. Chinese officials must understand all these risky fault lines existing in the way of CPEC. Because in long run there is a possibility of the disruption of the potential spill over of any of these fault lines.

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