



### CHINA'S AFGHAN POLICY POST US WITHDRAWAL

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June 21, 2021

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



According to a statement by the Chinese embassy in Kabul, China plays an active role for resolving the Afghanistan issue via political means and fully supports the Intra-Afghan peace process.<sup>1</sup> The statement suggested that political settlement and dialogue is the only way to achieve success in Afghanistan, and disputes and old grievances among Afghans can be resolved through consultations between all stakeholders for genuine reconciliation. The concept of an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process should be followed and no country should seek geo-political contest in Afghanistan.

The statement also stressed on the need for an extensive and inclusive framework goal where all stakeholders in Afghanistan should pursue a political structure that involves all segments of the Afghan society and which ensures equal participation and power sharing besides being united to combat terrorism and follows a peaceful and friendly foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

The statement further goes on to say that the root causes of the Afghan conundrum needs to be addressed along with its symptoms. Problems like poverty, drugs and refugees also needs serious attention by all stakeholders by investing their collective wisdom and resources, as livelihoods and

<sup>1</sup> "China Plays an Active and Constructive Role in Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process", Ministry of Foreign Affairs the People's Republic of China, January 30, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

security of millions of Afghans is at stake. This requires a collective effort by all parties for the achievement of durable peace and stability in the country.<sup>3</sup>

The statement also highlighted the need for the international community and regional countries to be fair and responsible in executing their responsibilities in order to uphold justice in Afghanistan. A prerequisite for this is unwavering and genuine support for peace negotiations and orderly withdrawal of foreign troops in order to prevent terrorist outfits and spoilers from creating unrest and chaos in the country and ensure smooth transition.<sup>4</sup>

Following the statement by Chinese embassy many Chinese experts have also been expressing their views regarding China's involvement in Afghanistan. According to one of the Chinese security analyst, Sun Qi, China may send peacekeeping force to Afghanistan after US forces leave Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

### **China's Afghan Policy**

China has always maintained a low profile with regards to Afghanistan, but after US withdrawal, Beijing's priority would be to create political stability in Afghanistan because of its security and economic stakes in that country. Being a neighbouring country, China is apprehensive of potential instability in Afghanistan that could seriously impinge upon its security, particularly with regard to the unrest in its north-western region of Xinjiang. It is of utmost importance for China to aid an amicable (political) resolution of the Afghan conundrum as peace in Afghanistan is a prerequisite for peace and stability in the entire region. China has provided several billions of Yuan economic aid to Afghanistan for internal growth, reconstruction and development in social sector.<sup>6</sup> In the 2nd Pakistan-China-Afghanistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers dialogue held in December 2018, three countries had also signed a memorandum of understanding to advance connectivity and deepen cooperation under China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). In order to deepen regional connectivity and economic integration, "China has welcomed Afghanistan to bring into full play its geographical and resource advantages, to promote the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> <https://americanmilitarynews.com/2021/04/report-china-may-send-peacekeeping-force-to-afghanistan-after-us-troops-leave/>

<sup>6</sup> Syed Waqas Haider, "The Role of China in economic stabilisation and reconciliation of Afghanistan", *Margalla Papers*, National Defense University, Islamabad, 2012.

joint construction of the BRI.”<sup>7</sup> During the Covid-19 pandemic, China has also donated multiple batches of medical supplies, vaccines and emergency food assistance to Afghanistan.

China, being a neighbouring country, can be expected to play a major role in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan after the US and NATO withdrawal. Afghanistan can greatly benefit from China's experience in development and aid in reconstruction. There can be no denying the fact that Afghanistan can benefit greatly from the extension of China's BRI related projects which will not only help in the development of infrastructure and communication networks (railways, roads, transit and trade corridors), but will also help in generating employment opportunities for the Afghan people. This in turn will also help in reducing radicalization among the local people as they will have better options to opt for rather than falling prey to ideas of extremism.

Furthermore, China is one of the major powers in the region which has good relations with all the regional stakeholders and enjoys confidence among the Afghan people as well. This puts China in a good position to convince all the relevant stakeholders to achieve consensus regarding a peaceful political solution to the situation in Afghanistan and facilitate the Intra-Afghan negotiations as well (something it has already been doing in the form of the Quadrilateral Group meetings<sup>8</sup> and the Moscow Format).<sup>9</sup>

By facilitating peace and development in Afghanistan, China can also expedite the implementation of other important development, energy and connectivity projects such as CASA 1000 and TAPI, that will prove to be highly beneficial not only for Afghanistan but for the entire region.

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<sup>7</sup> Federica Lai, "China's economic influence in Afghanistan in a Belt & Road context", *Asia Power Watch*, December 1, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> "What to know about the Afghan Peace Negotiations", Center for Preventive Action and Contingency Planning for Future Crises, *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/article/what-know-about-afghan-peace-negotiations>, last updated on September 11, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Zahid Hussain, "The 'Moscow Format'", *DAWN*, Published on November 14, 2018. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1445504>