



China's Post-2014 Role in Afghanistan

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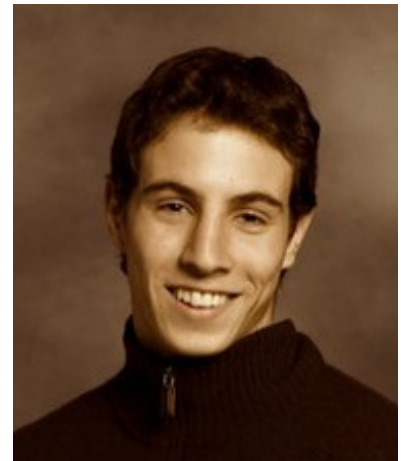
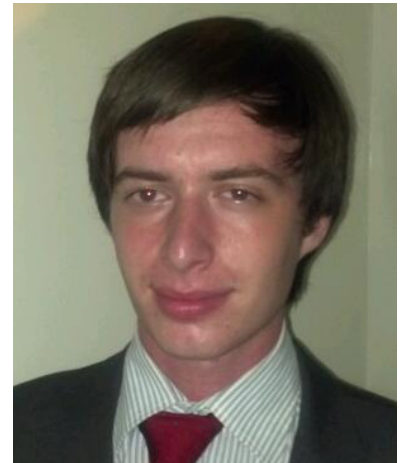
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Guide to Acronyms

ANSF: Afghan national security forces

CCP: Chinese Communist Party

CNPC: China National Petroleum Corporation

CMG: China Metallurgical Group

ETIM: East Turkestan Islamic Movement

FATA: Federally Administered Tribal Areas [Pakistan]

IMU: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

ISAF: International Security Assistance Force

ISI: Inter-Services Intelligence agency [Pakistan]

R2P: responsibility-to-protect doctrine

SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SOE: state-owned enterprise

TIP: Turkestan Islamic Party

TTP: Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan

UAVs: unmanned aerial vehicles

UNCAC: United Nations Convention Against Corruption

VNSA: violent non-state actor

Executive Summary

As the United States draws down from Afghanistan, regional actors are recalibrating their policies to protect their interests in the country. Aside from Pakistan, China may be the most important neighboring state in shaping Afghanistan's future. Two major objectives drive China's Afghanistan policy: exploiting its raw minerals and other natural resources, and preventing Uighur militants from establishing a safe haven. On this latter point, Beijing has an approach to violent non-state actors (VNSAs) in Afghanistan different from that of the United States and India, and these differences may produce tensions. Further, while the initial set of policies that China likely will adopt toward Afghanistan after the U.S. drawdown appears to be settled, Beijing will face more difficult questions if these policies don't achieve their objectives: That is, if Beijing's post-U.S. drawdown policies fail, it will have to adjust, and it's not clear what direction its adjustments would take.

For the past 13 years, China has benefited by letting someone else (the United States and the International Security Assistance Force) do the bulk of the work in attempting to secure Afghanistan. Moving forward, however, Beijing will face the question of whether its policies can succeed in the absence of a large American presence. The major Chinese policies include:

- Pressuring Pakistan, China's closest ally in the region, to crack down on Uighur militant groups in its tribal areas, as well as those who shelter these groups.
- Engaging and negotiating with VNSAs, including the Taliban, to both ensure the security of its commercial investments and

to prevent Uighur groups from gaining a foothold in Afghanistan.

- Cooperating with Russia and Central Asian countries within a multilateral framework to advance common security interests.

Beijing can derive some advantages from each of these policies, but each also has limitations. Though pragmatic considerations are driving China to increase its involvement in Afghanistan, clear constraints remain on what Beijing is willing to commit and what it is capable of accomplishing. **China won't try to fill the security vacuum left in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal, and is unlikely to dramatically increase its economic aid or development projects. Further, China's post-2014 policies aren't designed to prevent the Taliban's resurgence. If anything, Beijing has displayed a strong preference to engage the group.**

China faces significant uncertainty should its policies fail to attain their objectives. Adjustments that it makes might be instructive in establishing **the trajectory of China's foreign policy not just in Afghanistan, but also in other volatile countries where Beijing has enduring interests.** Should China become deeply involved in either ensuring the security of its economic projects in Afghanistan or trying to deprive Uighur groups of safe haven, this could spur China toward a more hands-on approach elsewhere. Conversely, China may become more risk-averse in many unstable **countries where it's currently engaged if it is forced to abandon its projects in Afghanistan.**

Introduction

As the United States draws down its combat troops from Afghanistan, regional actors are recalibrating their policies to protect their interests in the country. The drawdown of U.S. forces will place the burden of maintaining security on the shoulders of the Afghan national security forces (ANSF), which are plagued by a bevy of operational difficulties. Most observers have grim predictions for Afghanistan's future, as reflected in a recent National Intelligence Estimate, a report produced in late 2013 reflecting the view of America's 16 intelligence agencies. The estimate hasn't been publicly released, but *The Washington Post* reports that it "predicts that the Taliban and other power brokers will become increasingly influential as the United States winds down its longest war in history."¹

Other than Pakistan, whose meddling in its neighbor's affairs predates even the Afghan-Soviet war, China will likely be the most important neighboring state in shaping Afghanistan's future (though Iran and India are also contenders for that distinction). Two major objectives drive Beijing's Afghanistan policy: exploiting the country's vast and largely untapped supply of raw minerals and other natural resources, and preventing Uighur

militants from establishing a safe haven in eastern Afghanistan from which they might launch attacks into Chinese territory. While the United States has largely seen Beijing's Afghanistan policies over the past 13 years as beneficial albeit somewhat marginal to Afghan stability, Beijing's divergent approach to many of the violent non-state actors (VNSAs) in Afghanistan will likely engender tensions with the United States, India, and perhaps others. Further, while the initial set of policies China will likely employ in Afghanistan after the U.S. drawdown appears to be well settled, Beijing will face more difficult questions about how to adjust if these policies don't achieve their objectives.

It is clear why China perceives commercial and security interests in Afghanistan: The South Asian state has significant amounts of cobalt, copper, gold, iron, and lithium.² After scouring the world to secure the resources it needs to feed its industrial sector, Beijing has already invested billions of dollars in two major Afghanistan-based projects. Even so, China's security concerns in Afghanistan will likely take priority over even its economic interests. Beijing views separatism by the Uighur ethnic group as the greatest of several threats to its internal stability, a perception that has been heightened by several recent attacks by Uighur groups. China fears that instability in Afghanistan will allow the Uighur militant group known interchangeably as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) to establish itself in areas of eastern Afghanistan where the ANSF lacks a strong presence. (China refers to the group as ETIM, and this monograph does likewise.) A

¹ Ernesto Londoño, Karen DeYoung & Greg Miller, "Afghanistan Gains Will Be Lost Quickly After Drawdown, U.S. Intelligence Estimate Warns," *The Washington Post*, December 28, 2013. (http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/afghanistan-gains-will-be-lost-quickly-after-drawdown-us-intelligence-estimate-warns/2013/12/28/ac609f90-6f32-11e3-aecc-85cb037b7236_story.html) Recent developments seem to confirm these fears. See Rod Nordland and Taimoor Shah, "Afghans Say Taliban Are Nearing Control of Key District," *The New York Times*, September 6, 2014. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/07/world/asia/afghanistan.html>)

² James Risen, "U.S. Identifies Vast Mineral Riches in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, June 3, 2010. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/world/asia/14minerals.html?pagewanted=all>) China's mineral wealth is discussed in detail later in this report.

significant ETIM presence in Afghanistan would be particularly troublesome for China if Islamabad's pressure on these groups succeeds in pushing them from Pakistan's territory. If this happens, Afghanistan may become a central outpost for future Uighur militant operations.

Despite China's investments in Afghanistan and its security concerns, thus far Beijing has been only minimally involved in security efforts in Afghanistan (though, as will be discussed, this dynamic now appears to be changing). Beijing has, for the most part, preferred to let the United States and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) bear the bulk of the burden. China has provided only minimal training and assistance to the ANSF, and its economic assistance pledges to Afghanistan have been relatively small. These policies led one commentator to remark that, for more than a decade, China has "treated Afghanistan as a neighbor in name only."³

Despite China's relative lack of involvement, it has forged a set of rather nuanced policies for coping with Afghanistan's instability and advancing its interests after the U.S. drawdown. China's major South Asia policies as 2014 draws to a close include:

- Pressuring Pakistan, China's closest ally in the region, to crack down on Uighur militant groups in its tribal areas, as well as those who shelter these groups.
- Engaging and negotiating with VNSAs, including the Taliban, to ensure the security of its commercial investments and

to prevent Uighur militants from establishing a foothold in Afghanistan.

- Cooperating with Russia and Central Asian countries in a multilateral framework to advance common security interests.

China can derive some advantages from each of these policies, but each has its limitations. This is emblematic of the overall Chinese approach to Afghanistan: Though pragmatic considerations are driving Beijing to increase its involvement in that country (signaled, for example, by Chinese security chief Zhou Yongkang paying Afghanistan its first Politburo-level visit since 1966),⁴ constraints remain on what China is willing to commit and what it is capable of accomplishing. China won't try to fill the security vacuum left by the U.S. withdrawal, and though China's commercial projects will help Afghanistan's economy, Beijing is unlikely to increase its economic aid or development projects drastically. Of perhaps greatest importance to the United States and allies such as India, China's post-

⁴ Raffaello Pantucci & Alexandros Petersen, "Shifts in Beijing's Afghan Policy: A View from the Ground," *China Brief*, November 5, 2012.

(http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_tnews%5Btt_news%5D=40070&cHash=dddb4ec37d4ad772df2281d51020ac67#.VDqjyfldVps) Since 2012, there have been further high-level meetings between Chinese and Afghan officials. In May 2014, for example, Afghanistan's then-president, Hamid Karzai, met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Shanghai. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, press release, "Xi Jinping Meets with President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan," May 19, 2014. (http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1158098.shtml) Xi emphasized Afghanistan's duty to "take effective measures to protect the safety of Chinese institutions and personnel in Afghanistan." On October 3, a high-ranking Chinese delegation headed by its army chief of staff came to Kabul to meet senior Afghan officials. And new Afghan president Ashraf Ghani is scheduled to visit China on October 28, 2014.

³ Andrew Small, "China's Afghan Moment," *Foreign Policy*, October 3, 2012. (http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/10/03/chinas_afghan_moment)

2014 policies aren't designed to prevent the Taliban's resurgence, instead displaying a preference to engage the group. China has the most longstanding contacts with the Taliban's leadership of any country other than Pakistan, and it will likely offer incentives to try to keep the Taliban from allowing Uighur groups to exploit territory under Taliban control. This will place Beijing's approach at odds with that of Washington, which fears that a resurgent Taliban would again allow al-Qaeda to operate from its territory.

Significant questions will arise should China's post-2014 policies fail to attain their objectives. Indeed, Beijing's past efforts to get the Taliban to distance itself from Uighur militants were largely, though not entirely, unsuccessful. One obvious option if China's efforts fail is disengagement from Afghanistan, though Beijing's interests in Afghanistan—including serious skin in the game in the form of multibillion dollar development projects—may be strong enough to prevent it from completely disengaging. Other Chinese options range from limited military intervention to trying to bolster the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) into a more robust force capable of launching counterterrorism operations inside Afghanistan.

China's post-2014 Afghanistan strategy will have real implications for Afghanistan's security, but could also change the trajectory of Chinese foreign policy. Should Beijing become deeply involved in ensuring the security of its economic projects in Afghanistan, this could spur China toward a more hands-on approach to protecting its investments in other unstable countries. Conversely, China may become more risk-averse elsewhere if it is forced to abandon its projects in Afghanistan. Moreover, China's response to the threat posed by Uighur militant groups in Afghanistan may set new precedents for Chinese counterterrorism strategy.

Although Beijing has not carried out counterterrorism operations beyond its borders so far, it may pursue a more aggressive approach if Uighur militants establish a safe haven in Afghanistan and none of Beijing's local partners are able or willing to challenge the Uighurs.⁵

China's Foreign Policy Paradigms

Three core principles of Chinese foreign policy are relevant to its Afghanistan strategy. The first and most prominent principle is using foreign policy to sustain China's economic growth. Much of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) internal legitimacy rests on economic growth, and the party views continued growth as vital to quelling internal dissent and avoiding unrest. Chinese growth not only has domestic implications, but is also closely tied to the country's emergence as a global leader: China's rapid economic growth over the past two decades has enabled it to become a key actor on the international stage.

Sustained Chinese growth is contingent on the country's ability to secure access to sufficient natural resources. China faces increased demand for raw materials and energy, which it is unable to satisfy solely through exploitation of domestic reserves. Its insatiable hunger for natural resources has triggered a global search, prompting Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to carve out a

⁵ Although Chinese troops haven't been involved in counterterrorism operations outside China's borders, they have engaged in counterterrorism joint military exercises with a number of countries since 2002. See "Pak-China Joint Exercise: Troops to Root Out Terrorism, Army Chief," *Agence France Presse*, August 30, 2014 (<http://tribune.com.pk/story/755460/pak-china-joint-exercise-troops-to-root-out-terrorism-army-chief/>); "The 9 Joint Military Exercises Under SCO Framework," *PLA Daily*, June 12, 2012. (http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/2012-06/12/content_4892903.htm)

foothold in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, often cultivating relationships with regimes widely regarded as unsavory and agreeing to contracts that other states would consider suboptimal. Unlike Washington, which often pushes its commercial partners to undertake political reforms, Beijing has largely avoided involvement in its partners' internal affairs.

Chinese SOEs are also more willing than many Western companies to accept high levels of risk when investing abroad. As Tiffany Ng notes, partial state ownership affords Chinese firms "a degree of insulation from market risks" that "to some extent, alters the perception of risk."⁶ This enables Chinese companies to be among the first to extract natural resources in unstable countries such as Afghanistan or Sudan, where other firms might be reluctant to invest if they do not enjoy similar insulation from market risks.

In addition to greater willingness to undertake risky investments, Chinese firms enjoy another advantage over Western companies when competing for contracts in places like Afghanistan: the absence of a strict anti-bribery regime. Beijing's relatively permissive approach on matters of corruption makes its firms quite competitive in countries like Afghanistan, where corruption is endemic and bribes are often part of the bidding process. While Beijing passed a provision in 2011 criminalizing bribery of foreign officials, that law is rarely enforced, and anti-corruption specialists surmise that China may have passed the bill solely to meet the requirements of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).⁷ In

contrast, American companies must adhere to the regulations established under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, which prohibits them from providing payments or gifts to foreign officials to secure contracts.

The evidence suggests that Chinese SOEs took advantage of this relaxed anti-corruption regime when winning contracts in Afghanistan. The China Metallurgical Group (CMG) allegedly doled out \$30 million in bribes to the Afghan minister of mines to secure the contract it won to develop the Aynak copper mine. Although the minister denies the charges, both Afghan and American officials are concerned that the bribes undermined the bidding process.⁸ This is consistent with other allegations levelled against Chinese firms elsewhere in the world, as Chinese managers and investors are accused of providing "suitcases full of cash" to foreign officials to obtain contracts throughout Africa. The World Bank has even barred a number of Chinese companies from bidding on development projects that the Bank has financed.⁹

[currents/2011/03/02/china-criminalizes-foreign-bribery/](http://www.voanews.com/content/corruption-concerns-tain-burgeoning-china-africa-trade/2432469.html)) (describing China's passage of its anti-corruption laws); Jeffrey Young, "Corruption Concerns Taint Burgeoning China-Africa Trade," *Voice of America*, September 1, 2014 (<http://www.voanews.com/content/corruption-concerns-tain-burgeoning-china-africa-trade/2432469.html>) (examining lack of enforcement of these laws, including specialist Andrew Spalding's observation that "China has passed a foreign bribery prohibition to satisfy its requirements under the UNCAC, but UNCAC does not require enforcement").

⁸ Joshua Partlow, "Afghan Minister Accused of Taking Bribe," *The Washington Post*, November 18, 2009. (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/17/AR2009111704198.html>)

⁹ Jeffrey Young, "Corruption Concerns Taint Burgeoning China-Africa Trade," *Voice of America*, September 1, 2014 (<http://www.voanews.com/content/corruption-concerns-tain-burgeoning-china-africa-trade/2432469.html>) (noting that "China aggressively pursues and locks in economic

⁶ Tiffany P. Ng, *China's Role in Shaping the Future of Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), page 7.

⁷ See Joe Palazzolo, "China Criminalizes Foreign Bribery," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 2, 2011 (<http://blogs.wsj.com/corruption->

As it invests worldwide, China has found some success recently in diversifying its supplies of natural resources to ensure that it doesn't end up too dependent on any one supplier. One recent study notes that over the past decade and a half, China "significantly increased" the number of countries from which it imports oil, iron, and copper.¹⁰

The second relevant foreign policy principle concerns Beijing's embrace of the "Go West" program, which aims to increase economic development in China's long-neglected western regions. Chinese economic activity has historically been focused in the eastern coastal region, resulting in a widening economic disparity between the coastal region and the western inland region.¹¹ This economic disparity has increased resentment among residents in the inland regions, particularly in Xinjiang province, the Uighurs' ancestral home, which is already consumed with ethnic tension. The CCP developed the Go West program in response to this situation, hoping to address possible unrest through development. In the words of Nur Bakeri, the regional chairman of Xinjiang: "Development is our top priority and stability is

opportunities using ... suitcases full of cash when it is needed to close the deal"); The World Bank, press release, "World Bank Applies 2009 Debarment to China Communications Construction Company Limited for Fraud in Philippines Roads Project," July 29, 2011. (<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2011/07/29/world-bank-applies-2009-debarment-to-china-communications-construction-company-limited-for-fraud-in-philippines-roads-project>)

¹⁰ Juan Andrés Camus, Jane LePham, Roshan Shankar & Kenny White, *Strictly Business? An Examination of China's Natural Resource Acquisition Strategy in Latin America* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, 2013), page 2.

¹¹ Wu-Long Lin & Thomas P. Chen, "China's Widening Economic Disparities and Its 'Go West Program,'" *Journal of Contemporary China* 13:41 (2004), pages 663-86. (<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1067056042000281422>)

our greatest responsibility. Without development, there would be no stability and vice versa."¹²

A critical component of the Go West program is developing economic partnerships with, and expanding the economic capabilities of, countries that abut Xinjiang and other western provinces. As such, the Go West program is geographically specific, and thus distinct from China's broader agenda of exploiting natural resources across the globe. Related to the Go West program, President Xi Jinping has also proposed establishing an "economic belt along the Silk Road" that would improve transportation infrastructure in the region and allow for easier trade with regional partners.¹³

China's investment in Afghanistan can be seen as a product of the Go West and Silk Road programs. Though there are several challenges to establishing a lasting trade relationship between Beijing and Afghanistan, China tends to cast a broad net in its economic efforts.

A third relevant pillar of Chinese foreign policy is the principle of non-interference in other countries' sovereign affairs. Conceived as one of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence by Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai in 1953, non-interference is a pragmatic policy directly linked to China's concerns about respect for its own sovereignty. The CCP has long been concerned about the possibility of Western intervention in Chinese domestic politics, and the non-interference doctrine was designed to avoid setting a precedent that could be used against China. In a

¹² "China: Xinjiang's Regional Chief Says Economic Development Key to Stability," *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, March 2, 2011.

¹³ "President Xi Proposes to Build 'Silk Road Economic Belt,'" *CCTV English*, September 7, 2013. (<http://english.cntv.cn/program/china24/20130907/103428.shtml>)

2012 journal article titled “The Principle of Non-Interference Versus Neo-Interventionism,” a former Chinese ambassador to Egypt commented that to abandon non-intervention would “be inviting trouble and [would] undermine [China’s] own sovereignty and core interests.”¹⁴ The non-interference policy also serves as an instrument of Beijing’s soft power, reinforcing the difference between its approach and the often-unpopular tack of the United States, which harangues trading partners about their human-rights records and other domestic matters.

Although non-interference remains a relevant Chinese foreign policy paradigm, the principle has significantly eroded since it was first formulated. One sign of the erosion of non-interference is Beijing’s evolving thinking on the responsibility-to-protect doctrine (R2P). China embraced the moral framework of R2P at the 2005 World Summit in New York City, something it would have been loath to do in the early days of the non-interference doctrine. However, China reconciled its historical commitment to state sovereignty and non-intervention with its acceptance of R2P by emphasizing the necessity of state consent: Its acceptance of R2P does not entail acceptance of non-consensual state intervention.¹⁵ In turn, Beijing’s suspicion of non-consensual R2P has placed it at odds with other major international powers over such questions as NATO’s Libya intervention.

Another indication of China’s evolution on the question of non-interference is its growing role in peacekeeping missions. Until the early 2000s, other countries often criticized China for its lack of participation in peacekeeping, but since then Beijing has ramped up its involvement, becoming the 15th largest contributor of troops by March 2013.¹⁶ China may still be vulnerable to criticism on the grounds that its contributions are out of step with the size of its population and economy, but the commitments Beijing has made do indicate genuinely increasing involvement. Further, the specific role played by Chinese troops in peacekeeping missions has also evolved. Beijing historically refrained from committing combat troops, preferring to send medical and logistical forces.¹⁷ But China sent a small number of combat troops in 2012 to protect Chinese engineers and medical staff serving on the U.N. mission in South Sudan, and in June 2013 China announced that it intended to send combat troops to support the peacekeeping mission in Mali.¹⁸

Several factors explain this evolution. First, Beijing has become “more exposed to global risks and uncertainties.”¹⁹ As China grows more involved in

¹⁴ Quoted in Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Bräuner & Zhou Hang, *Protecting China’s Overseas Interests* (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2014), page 7.

¹⁵ Andrew Garwood Gowers, “China and the “Responsibility to Protect: The Implications of the Libyan Intervention,” *Asian Journal of International Law* 2:2, July 2012. (<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8660591&fileId=S204425131200015X>)

¹⁶ Ben Yunmo Wang, “The Dragon Brings Peace? Why China Became a Major Contributor to United Nations Peacekeeping,” The Stimson Center, July 12, 2013. (<http://www.stimson.org/spotlight/the-dragon-brings-peace-why-china-became-a-major-contributor-to-united-nations-peacekeeping-/>) China is also the sixth largest contributor to the U.N. peacekeeping budget.

¹⁷ Colleen Wong, “China Embraces Peacekeeping Missions,” *The Diplomat*, August 9, 2013. (<http://thediplomat.com/2013/08/china-embraces-peacekeeping-missions/>)

¹⁸ Kathrin Hille, “China Commits Combat Troops to Mali,” *Financial Times*, June 27, 2013. (<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/e46f3e42-defe-11e2-881f-00144feab7de.html#axzz3FlwF85H>)

¹⁹ Zhongying Pang, “China’s Non-Intervention Question,” in *Global Responsibility to Protect I* (Leiden, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2009), page 239.

global markets, its interests become more intertwined with those of other states, so it has become more invested in ensuring international stability. Second, China increasingly sees itself as a global geopolitical power, not just a state that has reason to fear outside intervention, and has accordingly grown more willing to assert its authority. Third, the CCP faces growing domestic pressure to protect the lives of Chinese citizens working abroad in unstable countries: Over 800,000 Chinese citizens now work overseas.

Yet the non-interference principle is by no means dead. Beijing remains wary of setting precedents that adversaries could exploit, and Chinese deviations from the non-interference principle outside of East Asia (where it is more aggressive) have been limited to multilateral operations, which set less of a negative precedent and are less likely to anger Beijing's local partners.

Chinese Commercial Interests in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's vast natural resource potential presents an enticing yet risky investment opportunity for Beijing. American geologists have estimated that Afghanistan possesses nearly \$1 trillion in untapped mineral deposits—including significant quantities of copper, iron, and lithium—and some estimates place the value even higher. Pentagon officials have said that Afghanistan could become the “Saudi Arabia of lithium.”²⁰ The U.S. Geological Survey has found that Afghanistan possesses 1.6 billion barrels of crude oil, 16 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and

500 million barrels of natural gas liquids.²¹ These petroleum resources are undoubtedly appealing to China, the world's largest petroleum importer.²²

Afghanistan also offers an untapped consumer market for Chinese goods that could ostensibly bolster the prospects of the Go West program. Though about 70 percent of the Afghan population lives in poverty, a surge in foreign aid that lasted more than a decade has contributed to the emergence of a small middle class.²³ China has thus tried to expand its access to Afghan markets. For example, it signed a bilateral agreement in 2006 that lifted customs duties on 278 commodities.²⁴ Though Afghanistan isn't the ideal Go West partner, it has the potential to provide a small but consistent market for Chinese goods, including those produced in the western regions.

China has also acquired concessions for two major projects in Afghanistan, the Aynak copper mine (acquired November 2007) and the Amu Darya oil field (acquired August 2011). The economic viability and physical security of these investments will be a determining factor in shaping China's Afghanistan strategy in the coming years.

²⁰ James Risen, “U.S. Identifies Vast Mineral Riches in Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, June 3, 2010. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/world/asia/14minerals.html?pagewanted=all>)

²¹ Afghanistan Ministry of Mines. “Afghanistan Oil and Gas Resources,” accessed October 15, 2014. ([http://mom.gov.af/Content/files/Oil_ & Gas_Brochure_2.pdf](http://mom.gov.af/Content/files/Oil_%20Gas_Brochure_2.pdf))

²² U.S. Energy Information Administration, “China Is Now the World's Largest Net Importer of Petroleum and Other Liquid Fuels,” March 24, 2014. (<http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=15531>)

²³ Graham Bowley, “Fears of the Future Haunt a Budding Generation of Afghan Strivers,” *The New York Times*, February 12, 2013. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/12/world/asia/middle-class-afghans-face-a-murky-future.html>)

²⁴ Stina Torjesen, *Fixing Afghanistan: What Role for China?* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Center, 2010), page 2.

The Aynak copper mine (Mes Aynak) is located in Logar province, directly south of Kabul. The mine is home to a massive, mostly untapped copper deposit. Some estimates place the total value of copper deposits and other raw materials in Mes Aynak at \$40 billion.²⁵ In 2007, several companies bid for rights to mine the site, including U.S. and Canadian firms and the China Metallurgical Group (CMG), an SOE. It was predictable that **China, the world's largest copper importer**, would make a concerted push to secure rights to the Aynak deposits, and CMG won the concession. It bid \$3.4 billion for the site, and signed a thirty-year lease to develop it.

The Aynak deal was always a risky business proposition for Afghanistan. Tiffany Ng notes:

Large-scale mining operations take an average of 7–10 years to become profitable under the best of circumstances, and can take as long as two decades, given the complex and expensive process of tunneling, blasting, processing, and transporting the minerals. To succeed, mining projects require ready access to plentiful water, reliable electricity, and an extensive logistics network including roads, railways, and maintenance facilities, none of which is in ready supply in Afghanistan. Add to this the remote location of the Afghan mineral deposits and the volatile security situation surrounding them, and mining becomes even more difficult.²⁶

²⁵ Dion Nussenbaum, "Delays Imperil Mining Riches Afghans Need After Pullout," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2012.
(<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304019404577418363707647028>)

²⁶ Tiffany P. Ng, *China's Role in Shaping the Future of Afghanistan*, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), page 6.

The Aynak project has been mired in controversy from the outset. Western observers claimed the bidding process was rife with corruption and accused CMG of bribing Afghan officials. A diplomatic cable that was later leaked revealed that an Afghan commercial attaché admitted to U.S. officials that the Afghan government viewed CMG as a "cow to milk" for bribes.²⁷ Corruption aside, CMG's generous long-term offer helped to give the company an advantage over its competitors. CMG promised to expedite development of the mine, and offered to build a railway network in Afghanistan as part of the contract, along with a 400-megawatt power plant, a coal mine, and even schools and mosques.²⁸ But CMG has reneged on its initial promise to build the railway network, and has demanded that Afghanistan drop the requirements for the power plant and coal mine.²⁹ Though negotiations are ongoing, researchers working for the U.S. military have estimated that the cost of building and running a railway network across Afghanistan would surpass \$54 billion.³⁰ Thus, Western officials are increasingly doubtful that the Chinese will commit to the network.

One reason China has backed away from its initial promises is that CMG has struggled to get the Aynak project off the ground. One setback has been controversy concerning the existence of an

²⁷ Dion Nussenbaum, "Delays Imperil Mining Riches Afghans Need After Pullout," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2012.
(<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304019404577418363707647028>)

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Jay Price, "Delay in Mine Project Shadows Hopes for Afghan Economy," *McClatchy*, May 21, 2013.
(<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2013/05/21/191854/delay-in-mine-project-shadows.html>)

³⁰ Dion Nussenbaum, "Doubt Cast on Afghan Mining," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 3, 2012.
(<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10000872396390444223104578034742974438144>)

ancient Buddhist archeological site in the Aynak mining area. After completion of the Aynak contract, the Chinese government contributed \$2 million to an emergency rescue dig coordinated by the French Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan to preserve artifacts in the site and thus avoid delays to the Aynak project.³¹ However, concerns about damaging the archeological site, coupled with technical and security concerns, pushed back the start date for mining and left the project significantly behind schedule, raising doubts about the project's future viability.³²

Further, as Reuters reported in September 2012, the Aynak site has been the target of multiple insurgent rocket attacks that aim “to wreck the government’s flagship project.”³³ Moreover, Logar province is one of Afghanistan’s most dangerous provinces—and is likely to grow even more perilous because the Taliban has dedicated considerable resources to militant efforts in the province. In August 2014, as many as 700 insurgents launched an offensive against ANSF units in Logar, and fighting in the province remains heavy.³⁴

China is also involved in developing Afghanistan’s oil and gas reserves, finding greater success in the oil sector than it has with the Aynak mine. China has a strong incentive to pursue new energy concessions to satisfy its growing demand, and its SOEs are well placed to make riskier long-term investments that would be more difficult for private corporations.

The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), another SOE, won the rights to develop in Amu Darya at Afghanistan’s first oilfield auction in August 2011. There are several reasons that China was interested in Amu Darya. First, China expects that northern Afghanistan, where Amu Darya is located, will remain stable enough to ensure the viability of the investment. However, recent developments call China’s expectations into question, as security in Faryab province has steadily deteriorated since CNPC secured a contract to drill oil there. Since the withdrawal of the Norwegian Provincial Reconstruction Team and the removal of most, if not all, U.S. Special Forces in 2012, the province witnessed a dramatic uptick in Taliban attacks.³⁵ Three of its districts have been labeled high-threat areas.³⁶ Although the majority of CNPC’s oil operations are located in Sar-e Pol province, located immediately east of Faryab province, the growing instability in Faryab jeopardizes the security of oil operations in both provinces.

A second reason for Chinese interest in Amu Darya is that China sees the investment as “a foot in the door for access to major natural gas deposits

³¹ William Dalrymple, “Mes Aynak: Afghanistan’s Buddhist Buried Treasure Faces Destruction,” *The Guardian* (U.K.), May 31, 2011.

(<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/may/31/mes-aynak-afghanistan-buddhist-treasure>)

³² Jay Price, “Delay in Mine Project Shadows Hopes for Afghan Economy,” *McClatchy*, May 21, 2013. (<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2013/05/21/191854/delay-in-mine-project-shadows.html>)

³³ Jessica Donati & Mirwais Harooni, “Chinese Halt at Flagship Mine Imperils Afghan Future,” *Reuters*, September 27, 2012. (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/09/27/uk-afghanistan-aynak-idUKBRE88Q0XL20120927>)

³⁴ Sneha Shankar, “Logar in Afghanistan Attacked by More Than 700 Taliban Fighters,” *International Business Times*, August 19, 2014.

³⁵ Obaid Ali, “Moving East in the North: Transitioned Faryab and the Taleban,” *Afghan Analysts Network*, May 17, 2013, at <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/moving-east-in-the-north-transitioned-faryab-and-the-taleban/>.

³⁶ Azam Ahmed & Haris Kakar, “Suicide Bomber Kills at Least 16 in Northern Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 2014.

in northern and northwestern Afghanistan.”³⁷ China seeks to establish good will with the Afghan government to give it an advantage in future negotiations over natural resources. Similarly, China has put itself in a stronger position to secure drilling rights along the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan border.³⁸

China's investment in Amu Darya has faced some significant security challenges. In June 2012, militias affiliated with General Abdul Rashid Dostum disrupted surveyors and engineers, with reports indicating that Dostum sought to intimidate CNPC into giving him a personal share of proceeds from the project.³⁹ The issue with Dostum was reportedly resolved when China struck a deal with him to ensure his men didn't interfere with the project.

Chinese Security Interests in Afghanistan

Though China has significant economic interests in Afghanistan, its biggest concern about the country may be the threat posed by Uighur militant groups if they are able to again operate from its territory.

First, we will provide some background on Uighur separatism and ETIM. The Qing Empire originally annexed the Xinjiang Uighur

Autonomous Region in 1760. Its population makes Xinjiang distinct from the rest of China: The Uighurs, Xinjiang's largest ethnic group, are of the Muslim faith and Turkic ethnicity. However, Xinjiang's annexation proved easier than its administration. By 1949 Uighur leaders had on multiple occasions established “short-lived independent states.”⁴⁰ These included the “East Turkestan Islamic Republic” (founded November 1933 in the city of Kashi and lasted less than three months) and the “East Turkistan Republic” (founded November 1944 in the city of Yining and lasted less than two years).

Communist China cracked down vigorously on Uighur separatism. Joshua Kurlantzick notes that “thousands of mosques were shuttered, imams were jailed, Uighurs who wore headscarves or other Muslim clothing were arrested, and during the Cultural Revolution, the CCP purposely defiled mosques with pigs.”⁴¹ At the same time, the CCP tried to change Xinjiang's demographics by forcing population control measures on the Uighurs while encouraging the migration of Han Chinese into the region. Though repressive policies toward Xinjiang declined thereafter, Uighur separatism found new life in the 1990s, and first intersected with Islamic militancy in Afghanistan during that period as Uighur militants migrated to that country. During this period, separatist activity came in distinct waves of incidents that appear to be driven more by opportunity than anything else. The renewed separatist movements could be seen as early as 1990, with an uprising in Baren, which was followed by a

³⁷ Raffaello Pantucci & Alexandros Petersen, “Shifts in Beijing's Afghan Policy: A View from the Ground,” *China Brief*, November 5, 2012. (http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40070&cHash=dddb4ec37d4ad772df2281d51020ac67#.VD1gxvl4pgk)

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hamid Shalizi, “Afghans Say Former Warlord Meddling in China Oil Deal,” *Reuters*, June 11, 2012. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/11/us-afghanistan-dostum-idUSBRE85A15W20120611>)

⁴⁰ Joshua Kurlantzick, “The Unsettled West: China's Long War on Xinjiang,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2004; see also Zhao Huasheng, “China's View of and Expectations From the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *Asian Survey*, May/June 2013.

⁴¹ Joshua Kurlantzick, “The Unsettled West: China's Long War on Xinjiang,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2004.

series of terrorist incidents in 1992-93.⁴² A third cluster of Uighur militant activities came in 1996-97, including “a wave of protests, explosions, and assassinations of ethnic Uighur officials.”⁴³

Around that time, China began to focus on the influence of Afghanistan's Taliban movement on Uighur separatists. Chinese estimates of the Uighur presence in Afghanistan convey the perception of the threat that the Taliban posed by bolstering Uighur capabilities. S. Frederick Starr writes:

As early as 1999, a Chinese academic specialist on Xinjiang...had estimated that as many as 10,000 Uighurs had traveled to Pakistan for religious schooling and “military training.” In May 2002, the Chinese government claimed that over 1,000 Uighurs had been trained in Taliban camps and that many of them had returned to Xinjiang to participate in the separatist struggle. Beijing also claimed that approximately 20 Uighurs were killed by U.S. forces in Afghanistan and that some 300 Uighurs had been captured.... In June 2002, the Chinese military attaché in Washington reported that his government had identified some 400 Uighurs as fighters in Afghanistan.⁴⁴

Beijing had an obvious incentive to play up Uighur links to international Islamic militancy—

portraying the Uighurs as the same problem set as al-Qaeda would help give China a blank check for dealing with this issue—and many Western counterterrorism experts consequently viewed its claims as pure hyperbole. However, it is a fact that the Taliban provided ETIM with safe haven in Afghanistan. A review of ETIM's propaganda reveals that it has fought against ISAF in Afghanistan, sent fighters to Syria, and had its media releases distributed by al-Qaeda's al-Fajr Media Center. Further, its public messages are indistinguishable from that of other global jihadist groups in terms of rhetoric and anti-Western focus.⁴⁵

It is worth noting, though, that it is difficult to identify the specific affiliations of Uighur militants in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Not all of them are part of ETIM: Some reports indicate that Uighurs have joined Central Asian militant groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), with whom they share linguistic and cultural

⁴² See, e.g., Nicholas D. Kristof, “A Muslim Region Is Tugging at the Ties That Bind China,” *The New York Times*, August 14, 1993.

⁴³ Millward, *Violent Separatism in Xinjiang*, page viii.

⁴⁴ S. Frederick Starr, *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), page 342. For more on Chinese perceptions of Uighur militancy, see Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the U.N., “‘East Turkestan’ Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity,” January 21, 2002. (<http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/Jan/25582.htm>)

⁴⁵ See the following Open Source Center translations: “Al-Fajr Releases Turkistan Islamic Party Magazine, Issue 13: Table of Contents,” August 18, 2013; “TIP Video: ‘Advice of Shaykh Khalid Bin-Abd-al-Rahman al-Husaynan to Muslims of East Turkistan,’” April 1, 2013; “Turkistan Islamic Party Releases ‘Lovers of Paradise 7’ Eulogizing Dead Members,” March 9, 2013; “Turkistan Islamic Party Releases Magazine, Issue 12: Table of Contents,” February 18, 2013; “Turkistan Islamic Party: ‘Ruling on East Turkistan Jihad and Chinese Invaders,’” February 15, 2013; “TIP Video: ‘Journey of Believers 6,’” October 15, 2012; “Islamic Turkistan Magazine Eulogizes 3 Uyghurs Killed in Afghanistan; 2001-2010,” October 13, 2012; “Turkistan Islamic Party Video: ‘Journey of Believers 5,’” June 15, 2012. Jihadist groups have also carried out retaliatory attacks after ETIM members were killed. See “Killing of FC Men Diminishes Chances of Govt-TTP Talks,” *The News* (Islamabad), September 3, 2013. (<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-25202-Killing-of-FC-men-diminishes-chances-of-govt-TTP-talks>)

commonalities.⁴⁶ This helps to explain China's eagerness to pressure Pakistan to ban the IMU and Islamic Jihad Union (though the anti-Chinese rhetoric of IMU mufti Abu Zar al-Burmi is surely relevant, too).⁴⁷ Uighur militants have also played prominent roles within al-Qaeda's core leadership. For example, former ETIM emir Abdul Shakoov Turkistani was reportedly appointed the commander of al-Qaeda's military forces in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) following military commander Saif al-Adel's departure from the region, holding the position until a U.S. drone strike killed him in August 2012.⁴⁸

China has two overarching security concerns related to Uighur militancy. The first is the possibility of unrest in its Uighur population in Xinjiang province. Second, China is worried about the possibility of terrorist attacks carried out by ETIM. These concerns have been heightened in recent years by an escalation in terrorist attacks carried out by Uighur militant groups throughout China.

On October 28, 2013, three Uighur militants drove a car through a crowd on the edge of

Beijing's Tiananmen Square, killing two bystanders before the car burst into flames. The security forces blamed ETIM, claiming the attack had been premeditated.⁴⁹ Some experts questioned this conclusion, but ETIM posted a speech from leader Abdullah Mansour describing the attack as a "jihadi operation," and labeling the perpetrators as mujahedin.⁵⁰ Mansour warned that "such operations were just the beginning" and threatened to strike at other high value targets, including the Great Hall of the People, where China's parliament meets.

The year 2014 saw two of the highest-profile terrorist attacks in modern Chinese history. In March, a group armed with knives attacked passengers at the Kunming train station in Yunnan province, killing 29 civilians and wounding 140.⁵¹ Chinese authorities blamed Uighur separatists, stating that they found East Turkestan flags at the site of the attack.⁵² In May, militants drove two cars loaded with explosives into a crowded market in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, running down shoppers and throwing explosives out the car windows before detonating the charges inside the

⁴⁶ Raffaello Pantucci & Edward Schwarck, *Transition in Afghanistan: Filling the Security Vacuum—The Expansion of Uighur Extremism?* (Barcelona: Barcelona Center for International Affairs, 2014), pages 9-10.

⁴⁷ "Pakistan Bans Three Extremist Outfits, on Orders from China," *Express Tribune* (Pakistan), October 23, 2013. (<http://tribune.com.pk/story/621400/pakistan-bans-three-extremist-outfits-on-orders-from-china/>) On al-Burmi's anti-China rhetoric, see Jacob Zenn, "Beijing, Kunming, Urumqi and Guangzhou: The Changing Landscape of Anti-Chinese Jihadists," *Jamestown Foundation*, May 23, 2014. (http://www.jamestown.org/regions/southasia/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42416&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=680&cHash=9c51c229a0f454ed88e6df81fcf00510#.VD1kRfl4pgk)

⁴⁸ Bill Roggio, "Turkistan Islamic Party Leader Thought Killed in U.S. Drone Strike," *The Long War Journal*, August 25, 2012. (http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/turkistan_islamic_pa_1.php)

⁴⁹ Megha Rajagopalan, "China Security Chief Blames Uighur Islamists for Tiananmen Attack," *Reuters*, November 1, 2013. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/01/us-china-tiananmen-idUSBRE9A003L20131101>)

⁵⁰ Jethro Mullen, "Report: Militant Group Says Tiananmen Attack in China was 'Jihadi Operation,'" *CNN*, November 25, 2013. (<http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/25/world/asia/china-tiananmen-attack-report/>)

⁵¹ James Pach, "Horrific Knife Attack in China Leaves 33 Dead," *The Diplomat*, March 2, 2014. (<http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/horrific-knife-attack-in-china-leaves-33-dead/>)

⁵² Jeremy Page, "Separatist Flags Found at Site of Chinese Attack," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 3, 2014. (<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304585004579416581471577064>)

cars.⁵³ This attack killed 43 and wounded 90, eclipsing even the Kunming attack.

This recent escalation has made the Chinese government view Uighur separatism as an even more urgent problem, particularly given the geographic areas that these groups managed to attack. The attack in Beijing brought the threat directly to China's economic and cultural heartland. Since then, the CCP has vigorously cracked down on suspected Uighur separatist activities, arresting hundreds of Xinjiang-based Uighurs on charges of spreading extremist propaganda and possessing banned weapons, and even carrying out 13 executions in June 2014.⁵⁴

In addition, China has focused on depriving Uighur militant groups of external safe havens—something it had been trying to accomplish even before the most recent escalation in attacks. Though China historically refrained from publicly discussing the presence of Uighur militants in Pakistan to avoid embarrassing the Pakistani government and straining the bilateral relationship, Chinese officials have become increasingly outspoken about the issue over the past few years.⁵⁵

⁵³ Andrew Jacobs, "In China's Far West, a City Struggles to Move On," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2014. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/24/world/asia/residents-try-to-move-on-after-terrorist-attack-in-china.html>)

⁵⁴ Charlie Campbell, "China Cracks Down on 'Terrorist Videos,' Arrests More Than 200," *Time*, May 12, 2014; (<http://time.com/95736/china-xinjiang-terrorism-uighur-video/>) & Ben Blanchard & Megha Rajagopalan, "China Executes 13 People for 'Terrorist' Attacks in Xinjiang," *Reuters*, June 16, 2014. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/16/us-china-attacks-idUSKBN0ER19220140616>)

⁵⁵ See, e.g., "China Urges Pakistan to Expel Uighur Islamic Militants," *BBC*, May 31, 2012 (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-18276864>); Brian Spegele, "China Points Finger at Pakistan Again," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 2012 (<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB1000142405297020>

The China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Relationship

China's increasing pressure on Pakistan highlights a strained relationship that is critical to Afghanistan's future. China's rivalry with India has largely driven its relationship with Pakistan. The China-India rivalry has shaped the Chinese policy of *hexiao gongda*, wherein China allies with small South Asian states such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Burma to balance against India.⁵⁶ Delhi sees China's support for Pakistan as noxious even though both countries have made progress on reducing border and territorial tensions. China and Pakistan have also supported each other in territorial disputes with India, and many in Pakistan view China as a more reliable ally than the United States.

China recognizes Pakistan's ability to influence events in Afghanistan in particular, and thus views Pakistan as a potentially valuable partner. But Pakistan's activities in Afghanistan are increasingly at odds with Chinese interests. Pakistan's policy toward Afghanistan focuses on making Islamist VNSAs, such as the Taliban, its proxies. Pakistan initially adopted this policy course in the 1970s in response to Afghan efforts to stir up Pashtun separatism in its territory, but over time the importance of establishing strategic depth as a

([4781804577266952254783484](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/02/world/asia/02china.html)); Michael Wines, "China Blames Foreign-Trained Separatists for Attacks in Xinjiang," *The New York Times*, August 1, 2011. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/02/world/asia/02china.html>)

⁵⁶ Mohan Malik, "China and India Today: Diplomats Jostle, Militaries Prepare," *World Affairs*, July/August 2012, page 75. (<http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/china-and-india-today-diplomats-jostle-militaries-prepare>)

counterweight to India has eclipsed its fears of Pashtun separatism.⁵⁷

Though Pakistan's support of Islamist proxies has given it some advantages in its rivalry with India, including the ability to strike into Kashmir, Pakistan's policies have had a destabilizing effect on Afghanistan. In fact, they have had a boomerang effect on Pakistan itself, as some of its support for Islamist militancy has—predictably—ended up being channeled into anti-Pakistan efforts. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) epitomizes this problem. Established in 2007, TTP is “an umbrella organization for Pakistani militant groups” in the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.⁵⁸ Since TTP's formation, it has had an adversarial relationship with the Pakistani state, one that has grown only worse. TTP's rise to prominence was followed by a massive escalation in violence, as various networked militant groups grew into a full-blown insurgency against the Pakistani government. In early 2014, TTP sparked concerns about worsening violence in several areas of the country. In Karachi, for example, where TTP “was largely responsible for a 90 percent spike in terrorist attacks” in 2013, insurgents began to take control of neighborhoods, giving rise to “concerns that one of the world's most populous cities is teetering on the brink of lawlessness.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ For a detailed examination of the long history of Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan, see Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Tara Vassefi, “The Forgotten History of Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations,” *Yale Journal of International Affairs* (2012), pages 38-45.

⁵⁸ Anne Stenersen, “The Relationship Between al-Qaeda and the Taliban,” in Peter Bergen & Katherine Tiedemann eds., *Talibanistan: Negotiating the Borders Between Terror, Politics, and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), page 78.

⁵⁹ Tim Craig, “Karachi Residents Live in Fear as Pakistan Taliban Gains Strength,” *The Washington Post*, February 3, 2014. (http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/karachi-in-fear-as-pakistan-taliban-gains-strength/2014/02/03/010aafef-8991-11e3-833c-33098f9e5267_story.html)

China increasingly recognizes the manner in which Pakistan's patronage of Islamic militants undermines China's two overarching goals in Afghanistan. Pakistan's proxy strategy has helped foster a proliferating number of jihadist actors in Afghanistan and Pakistan that have embraced Uighur separatists with open arms. This has driven China to reconsider how its relationship with Pakistan connects to its Afghanistan strategy. As Harsh V. Pant, a reader in international relations in King's College London's defense studies department, notes:

While China realizes that Pakistan is very important, it seems to be moving toward the perspective that Pakistan is in a very difficult state. For a long time they put all their eggs in Pakistan's basket as far as Afghanistan was concerned, and there was the expectation that Pakistan would do whatever it was asked to do because of the special relationship that Beijing shares with Islamabad. Some of these assumptions are now being reconsidered because there is a realization that even if Pakistan wants to, it does not have the ability to manipulate some of the forces that have been unleashed in the region.⁶⁰

This growing dissatisfaction with Pakistan has in turn prompted Beijing to seek out India as an interlocutor on the Afghanistan issue for the first time. Despite their rivalry, there is a convergence of Chinese and Indian interests in South and Central Asia. Both countries would benefit from a stable Afghanistan, where both have been among the leading commercial investors. Both countries are also concerned about the threat posed by

fear-as-pakistan-taliban-gains/2014/02/03/010aafef-8991-11e3-833c-33098f9e5267_story.html)

⁶⁰ Harsh V. Pant, telephone interview with authors, August 2013.

jihadi groups, both as threats to their commercial investments and within their own borders. Yet while China's outreach to India is a positive, their interests are not perfectly aligned. China is likely to adopt an approach to VNSAs different enough from India's that it will stoke tensions: China's first line of approach to the Taliban is engaging the militant group, while India has had very limited interactions with the Taliban, but there is no indication that its view of the Taliban is softening.

At the same time, China's dissatisfaction with Pakistan's policies has not caused it to abandon this troublesome alliance. Instead, its outreach to India can be better understood as hedging its bets. China has also pressured Pakistan to ban Uighur militant groups and others with an anti-China orientation, while Pakistan has its own similar strategic interests in going after armed groups in its territory. One result of Pakistan's military operations, such as the recent Zarb-e-Azb offensive that began on June 15, 2014, may be increasing the importance of Afghanistan to Chinese security. Although the Pakistani military has repeatedly asserted that its objective is to eliminate all militant networks in North Waziristan, many analysts believe that the result will in fact be to push these groups across the border into Afghanistan. Some believe that this result is the product of design. Georgetown University scholar C. Christine Fair asserts that "this operation likely is more about driving Pakistani militants into Afghanistan rather than eliminating them or seeking their disarmament and demobilization."⁶¹

⁶¹ Christine Fair, "The Pakistan Army's Foray into North Waziristan: Get Used to Disappointment," *War on the Rocks*, July 7, 2014. (<http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/the-pakistan-armys-foray-into-north-waziristan-get-used-to-disappointment/>) For similar criticisms, see Shuja Nawaz, "Pakistan's Taliban Offensive Will Fall Short," *Foreign Policy*, June 24, 2014

China's Policies Toward Afghanistan

The first noteworthy aspect of China's Afghanistan policy is its limited aid and security assistance. Though China's investments at Aynak and Amu Darya are two of the largest foreign projects in Afghanistan, China has maintained a rather small level of foreign aid. A report issued by Afghan's finance ministry found that China's total foreign aid pledged from 2002 to 2013, \$252 million, ranked 16th among all countries—behind Italy, Iran, Spain, and others whose economies are far smaller than China's.⁶² China's support for Afghanistan's security sector has also been minimal. China rejected the possibility of sending Chinese troops to serve in ISAF,⁶³ and has also done very little training of its security forces. As part of a 2012 security agreement with the Afghan government, China agreed to train 300 security officers over four years.⁶⁴ While this program may hold symbolic importance, it will have a negligible impact on ANSF's capabilities.

(http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/06/24/pakistan_taliban_offensive_will_fall_short) (noting that "both the army and the government have been telegraphing their intentions," which means that Taliban leaders likely "have already fled to Afghanistan or elsewhere in Pakistan").

⁶² "Aid and Conflict in Afghanistan," International Crisis Group, August 4, 2011, page 30.

(<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/210-aid-and-conflict-in-afghanistan.aspx>)

⁶³ Zhao Huasheng, *China and Afghanistan: China's Interests, Stances, and Perspectives*, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012), page 7. (http://csis.org/files/publication/120322_Zhao_ChinaAfghanistan_web.pdf)

⁶⁴ "China and Afghanistan Sign Economic and Security Deals," *BBC*, September 23, 2012.

(<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-19693005>)

This connects directly to a second important aspect of China's policies toward Afghanistan: Rather than committing to broader security efforts, China has been willing to strike deals with VNSAs to further its interests, even if doing so would harm the government in Kabul. This has included even the Taliban. Though China was deeply suspicious of the Taliban's rise to power in the 1990s, it entered into ultimately unsuccessful negotiations with Taliban leader Mullah Omar to try to make him promise that Uighur groups wouldn't use the territory he controlled to prepare operations against China. Even after the 9/11 attacks, China "quietly maintained a relationship with the Quetta Shura, the Taliban's leadership council based across the border in Pakistan."⁶⁵ Contacts between China and the Taliban have reportedly grown as the U.S. drawdown approaches. China hopes that direct negotiations can prevent Uighur groups from finding an Afghan safe haven, while being less costly than going to war with the Taliban.

China is also willing to engage with other VNSAs, such as warlords and local militias, to safeguard its commercial interests. China's aforementioned encounter with General Dostum's militia at the Amu Darya oil fields provides a valuable example. A third aspect of China's Afghanistan strategy is that it Beijing would like to work within a multilateral framework to advance its security interests. This is consistent with its non-interference doctrine: China has grown more willing to take actions, even militarily, than it once would have seen as unreasonably interfering with another state's sovereign affairs, but prefers to do so through a multilateral framework. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is the

multilateral institution most relevant to China's posture toward Afghanistan.

In April 1996, China, along with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, formed the Shanghai Five coalition, an organization that initially focused on border security but broadened its focus to look at more general issues of regional security in 1998. The coalition was renamed the SCO in 2001, and the Afghanistan war soon became a critical focus for the organization. Since 2001, the SCO has added more countries as both member and observer states, and in Afghanistan it has attempted to encourage reconciliation and economic development.⁶⁶ Nontraditional security threats like terrorism and separatist actors are also central to SCO's focus.⁶⁷ SCO's statements have consistently cited terrorism as a top concern, and its April 2011 conference singled out Afghan instability as one of the top security challenges. This prompted one commentator to claim in late 2012 that "it is clear that the SCO will continue to be a crucial component in China's security-related strategy in Afghanistan as it assumes a more comprehensive role in the coming years."⁶⁸

The SCO may grow in importance as NATO's assistance to the ANSF continues to shrink, and soon there may not be sufficient funds to cover such core matters as ANSF salaries. The estimated cost of maintaining the ANSF over the next three

⁶⁵ Andrew Small, "Why Is China Talking to the Taliban?," *Foreign Policy*, June 21, 2013. (http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/20/why_is_china_talking_to_the_taliban)

⁶⁶ Zhao Huasheng, "China and Afghanistan: China's Interests, Stances and Perspectives," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2012, page 10. (http://csis.org/files/publication/120322_Zhao_ChinaAfghan_web.pdf)

⁶⁷ David L. Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order," *International Security*, Winter 2004/5, page 74. (<http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/shambaugh.pdf>)

⁶⁸ Serafettin Yilmaz, "Afghanistan: China's New Frontier?" *e-International Relations*, December 19, 2012. (<http://www.e-ir.info/2012/12/19/afghanistan-chinas-new-frontier/>)

years ranges from \$4.1 billion to \$6 billion per year, depending upon the size of the forces.⁶⁹ While the Afghan government will be incapable of funding the ANSF alone, questions remain about whether the U.S. Congress and other international actors will be willing to foot the rest of the bill, especially as the U.S.'s military presence draws down.⁷⁰

However, it isn't clear that the SCO is actually capable of being a crucial component of addressing Afghanistan's security challenges. Raffaello Pantucci, a senior research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, describes SCO as "hugely ineffective as an organization."⁷¹ He notes that although some of SCO's mechanisms could play a positive role in Afghanistan, "I don't see them being used, mostly because I don't think there's internal concurrence within SCO about what the organization should be, and what it should be doing with Afghanistan. You've got the Chinese interests of turning it into more of an economic vehicle, and the Russians' clear interest for it not going in that direction."⁷² SCO isn't a common defense pact like NATO, and its members are unlikely to mobilize forces should security in Afghanistan deteriorate. So, while China may *want* SCO to feature prominently in its Afghanistan strategy, it is unlikely to do so.

This brings us to a fourth and final aspect of Chinese foreign policy. SCO should be seen as a

way for China to hedge if its direct engagement with VNSAs is unsuccessful—but what if SCO is also unsuccessful? Though power-projection capabilities could be scaled up if China views it as a national priority, right now China's military isn't geared toward expeditionary actions. Martin Andrew notes that it isn't clear how the People's Liberation Army "would respond if it were called upon to perform COIN [counterinsurgency]-like roles in an overseas context."⁷³

What if China's Strategy for Protecting Its Economic Interests Fails?

China's strategy isn't designed to attain perfect security for its commercial projects. It easily could tolerate episodic but limited attacks, and in its other investment policies China has shown a relatively high tolerance for risk. However, China's risk tolerance isn't unlimited, and several outcomes could force China to recalculate its policies in Afghanistan.

One such outcome is sustained or devastating attacks against Chinese economic projects, or against Chinese civilians working on these projects. Local militant groups have repeatedly attacked Chinese citizens abroad. For example, in April 2007 the separatist Ogaden National Liberation Front stormed an oilfield run by China in Ethiopia, killing 74 workers (nine of whom were Chinese) and capturing seven.⁷⁴ That attack wasn't designed

⁶⁹ Jon Harper, "Study: Current Plans for Afghan Security Forces Risk Failure," *Stars and Stripes*, February 21, 2014. (<http://www.stripes.com/study-current-plans-for-afghan-security-forces-risk-failure-1.268976>)

⁷⁰ See William Byrd, "Who Will Pay for the Afghan Security Forces," *Foreign Policy*, June 12, 2014. (http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/06/12/will_t_he_afghan_national_security_forces_fold_0)

⁷¹ Raffaello Pantucci, telephone interview with authors, August 2013.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Martin Andrew, "The Influence of U.S. Counterinsurgency Operations in Afghanistan on the People's Liberation Army," in Andrew Scobell, David Lai and Roy Kamphausen eds., *Chinese Lessons from Other Peoples' Wars* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), page 237.

⁷⁴ "74 Dead in Ethiopian Oil Field Attack," *Associated Press*, April 24, 2007.

to target Chinese interests, but rather to deter investment in Ogaden. Still, Chinese citizens working abroad have also been the target of Sinophobic attacks in Africa and South Asia.⁷⁵ Consequently, the Chinese government faces increasing pressure to protect Chinese expatriates, and it couldn't ignore a devastating attack against its civilians in Afghanistan.

Thus far, Chinese policies aimed at preventing such a security situation have been relatively successful at Amu Darya. China has negotiated with local militias to stop them from attacking the work site.⁷⁶ Moving forward, it is noteworthy that the project is located in northern Afghanistan, outside the Taliban's likely sphere of influence, and thus a major Taliban offensive won't directly affect security at Amu Darya.

But China has been less successful at protecting the Aynak project, which continues to be a target of insurgent rocket attacks. There appear to be at least four distinct armed groups operating in the Aynak region, including the Haqqani network,⁷⁷

and the presence of these disparate factions makes it more difficult for China to broker a deal. Moreover, Logar is of strategic importance to the Taliban and Haqqani Network, and thus—as previously explained—its security may further decline.

So how will China adapt in the case of sustained attacks against its economic projects or against Chinese civilians? There are several possibilities.

Possibility 1: Increase on-site security personnel at Aynak and Amu Darya. This is the most likely path for the Chinese government to pursue if faced with a barrage of attacks. In doing so, China could demand that Afghanistan increase the number of security forces protecting the sites, or it could provide its own security personnel. Thus far, China has largely relied on security provided by the Afghan government, which has reportedly dedicated 2,000 security personnel to Aynak while setting up more checkpoints and establishing a wider perimeter.⁷⁸ But China may decide that employing its own security forces—perhaps even drawing from China's relatively young private security industry—is a better alternative. The cost of hiring a Chinese security firm is comparable to that of private Afghan security, but cheaper than Western providers would be.⁷⁹

Yet it remains unclear to what extent increasing the number of on-site security personnel might have a lasting effect on security at the commercial sites. Even a very large number of private security personnel could be overwhelmed by a massed attack in an insecure area, and a larger security

(http://www.nbcnews.com/id/18287943/ns/world_news-africa/t/dead-ethiopian-oil-field-attack/#.VD1X5vldVps)

⁷⁵ Jonathan Holslag, "Khaki and Commerce: The Relevance of Military Power to China's Economic Go-Global Policy," Brussels Institute of Contemporary China Studies Asia Paper 3:8, September 2009.

([http://www.vub.ac.be/biccs/documents/Holslag,%20Jonathan%20\(2008\),%20Khaki%20and%20Commerce.pdf](http://www.vub.ac.be/biccs/documents/Holslag,%20Jonathan%20(2008),%20Khaki%20and%20Commerce.pdf))

⁷⁶ There were previous security incidents at the work site, but open source reporting conflicts on whether General Dostum's forces actually attacked the Chinese workers, or only sought to intimidate them.

⁷⁷ Jessica Donati & Mirwais Harooni, "Chinese Halt at Flagship Mine Imperils Afghan Future," *Reuters*, September 27, 2012 (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/09/27/uk-afghanistan-aynak-idUKBRE88Q0XL20120927>); Andrew Small, "Why Is China Talking to the Taliban?" *Foreign Policy*, June 21, 2013.

(http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/20/why_is_china_talking_to_the_taliban)

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Andrew Erickson & Gabe Collins, "Enter China's Security Firms," *The Diplomat*, February 21, 2012. (<http://thediplomat.com/2012/02/enter-chinas-security-firms/>)

presence wouldn't prevent rocket attacks, either. China may thus be forced to explore other options.

Possibility 2: Delay work at the sites and dramatically reduce the number of Chinese employees. Chinese companies may instead opt to put commercial progress on hold until security improves in the region or a deal can be struck with the armed groups. Repatriating the Chinese employees reduces the risk of Chinese citizens being harmed. Evacuations of this kind have already occurred in such conflict-stricken places as Chad, Libya, and Sudan. Indeed, when instability rocked Libya near the end of Muammar Qaddafi's rule, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that China "dispatched the guided missile frigate Xuzhou to symbolically oversee the sea-borne component of the evacuation of all 35,000 of its expats," while the People's Liberation Army air force "also sent four IL-76 long-range transport aircraft to evacuate Chinese nationals from central Libya."⁸⁰

China has already evacuated employees from the Aynak site. Specifically, following a string of attacks at Aynak in August and September 2012, the Chinese mining consortium halted work and many employees fled Afghanistan, leaving only a "skeleton crew" to monitor equipment.⁸¹ This suggests that such a course could also be followed for other China-owned commercial sites in Afghanistan in the future. Such a move would delay progress on economic projects in Afghanistan, but rather than ending the projects

entirely, it would allow China to retain its foothold in Afghanistan's natural resource market.

Possibility 3: China increases its security presence in Afghanistan and/or commits to significantly expand its training of Afghan security forces. This option assumes that to protect its economic interests, China comes to believe it has to fill the security vacuum left by the U.S. withdrawal. The two most straightforward methods of doing so, which could be done separately or in combination, are sending Chinese troops—either to serve as combat advisers for the ANSF or else undertake their own independent missions—and undertaking a robust training program for ANSF.

Though China is the only regional actor capable of assuming these responsibilities, this scenario is highly unlikely given China's reluctance to become militarily involved in conflicts outside East Asia. Moreover, the United States failed to stabilize Afghanistan after channeling an enormous amount of troops and money into similar efforts, which means China faces a discouraging precedent. As Andrew Nathan, a scholar of Chinese foreign policy at Columbia University, bluntly put it, "the first reason why [China] wouldn't go in militarily in an American-style way is because they are too smart to do that. They would understand that it is a stupid thing to do, and that it isn't worth it, and that they will lose, and there's no realistic military scenario."⁸²

China's investments in Afghanistan, though considerable, aren't valuable enough to justify a large-scale military intervention. These investments pale in comparison with the country's investments in Africa and Latin America. Nor does China face a level of dependence on energy

⁸⁰ Andrew Erickson & Gabe Collins, "China's New Challenge: Protecting Its Citizens Abroad," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 10, 2012.

(<http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2012/02/10/chinas-new-challenge-protecting-its-citizens-abroad/>)

⁸¹ Jessica Donati & Mirwais Harooni, "Chinese Halt at Flagship Mine Imperils Afghan Future," *Reuters*, September 27, 2012. (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/09/27/uk-afghanistan-aynak-idUKBRE88Q0XL20120927>)

⁸² Andrew Nathan, telephone interview with authors, July 14, 2014.

supplies from Afghanistan that would require it to give greater priority to Amu Darya than its economic value justifies.

China has consistently signaled its aversion to this kind of intervention. The recently appointed Chinese special representative to Afghanistan, Sun Yuxi, said in a meeting with Afghan officials that “the conflicts between different religious groups and races are too complicated” for China to intervene in Afghanistan’s domestic affairs.⁸³ Days later, Sun added that China wouldn’t fill the security void left by the U.S. withdrawal, noting that the responsibility for security should lie primarily with the ANSF.⁸⁴

Possibility 4: Chinese companies abandon their investments in Afghanistan entirely. If China reaches an impasse where it appears that the only way to continue its commercial projects is robust military intervention, it may instead choose to abandon its investments in Afghanistan.

Complete economic disengagement from Afghanistan would mean that the companies involved receive no return on their investment. It would leave China at a disadvantage if it decided it wanted to return to investing in Afghanistan in the future. China would also lose the foothold it is attempting to establish in Central Asian oil fields through its Amu Darya project.

China’s credibility as an investor may also be damaged, as thus far Chinese companies investing

abroad have generally stayed the course on economic projects even when faced with violence or instability. For instance, although China evacuated almost all of its employees from Libya and halted work on its projects there amid the growing violence of early 2011, China quickly reengaged following the fall of Qaddafi’s regime.⁸⁵ Similarly, China has played an active role in mediating the conflict between the South Sudanese government and rebel forces to protect its investments there, even though Chinese employees working on oil projects in South Sudan have been kidnapped and killed by rebel groups.⁸⁶

What if China’s Strategy for Protecting Its Security Interests Fails?

The CCP faces considerable domestic pressure to reassure Chinese citizens of their security in the face of the Uighur separatist threat. Should Chinese policies—namely engaging the Taliban—fail to prevent Uighur militant groups from establishing a safe haven in Afghanistan, the CCP will face pressure to act. To be sure, a resurgent Taliban may provide a permissive environment for Uighur militancy despite China’s engagement efforts.

⁸³ Teddy Ng, “Sun Yuxi Appointed Special Envoy to Afghanistan,” *South China Morning Post*, July 19, 2014. (<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1556206/sun-yuxi-appointed-special-envoy-afghanistan>)

⁸⁴ Michael Martina, “China Will Not Fill U.S. Void in Afghanistan: Official,” *Reuters*, July 21, 2014. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/21/us-china-afghanistan-idUSKBN0FQ12I20140721>)

⁸⁵ Compare “CNPC, CNOOC and Sinopec Withdraw All Staff from Libya,” *Reuters*, March 28, 2011 (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/02/28/china-libya-idUKTOE71R06Y20110228>) with Michael Martina & Chris Buckley, “China Urges Libya to Protect Investments,” *Reuters*, August 23, 2011. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/23/us-china-libya-oil-idUSTRE77M0PD20110823>)

⁸⁶ Yuwen Wu, “China’s Oil Fears Over South Sudan Fighting,” *BBC*, January 8, 2014. (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25654155>)

First, ideological and cultural considerations may prompt the Taliban to continue to provide a supportive environment for Uighur militancy. The Taliban and groups like ETIM possess common ideological visions rooted in a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. Though there are many dimensions to Uighur militancy, including nationalist drivers, ETIM's public messaging falls in line with that of other jihadist groups, and it has significant operational ties to transnational jihadism. On these grounds, the Taliban may be unwilling to betray its China-based coreligionists. Further, the Taliban's adherence to the ancient Pashtunwali code magnifies the odds that the Taliban will continue to support Uighur militants. Pashtunwali places a high value on the protection of guests.

Second, the Taliban has developed intense personal connections with Uighur groups since the 1990s, when they found a safe haven in Afghanistan prior to the 9/11 attacks.⁸⁷ Following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Uighur militant groups fled to the tribal regions of Pakistan along with other Islamist militants to evade the American onslaught. Press reporting indicates that ETIM has become highly influential with jihadist groups close to the Taliban.⁸⁸ Further, ETIM has dispatched fighters to Afghanistan to fight ISAF and Afghan forces, which may further cement its relationship with the Taliban.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Raffaello Pantucci & Edward Schwarck, *Transition in Afghanistan: Filling the Security Vacuum—The Expansion of Uighur Extremism?* (Barcelona: Barcelona Center for International Affairs, 2014), pages 6-8.

⁸⁸ Michael Wines & Declan Walsh, "China Says Wanted Militants Use Nearby Countries to Stage Attacks," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2012.
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/07/world/asia/china-says-wanted-militants-use-nearby-countries-to-stage-attacks.html>)

⁸⁹ There is some ambiguity about which groups are fighting alongside ETIM. ETIM militants are undoubtedly operating

Third, the Taliban may doubt the credibility of Chinese threats related to harboring Uighur militants. For one thing, even if the Taliban's policies toward the presence of Uighur militants are permissive, China still has an incentive to stay on the Taliban's good side. China's main strategy for protecting its commercial projects in Afghanistan is striking deals with VNSAs. While it tries to discourage the Taliban from giving shelter to Uighur militants, China will simultaneously be looking to the Taliban to help keep Chinese commercial investments viable.

Moreover, the Taliban doesn't have a good reason to fear Chinese military action. China has been reticent to engage in security cooperation and training in Afghanistan since the 9/11 attacks. And even if China did decide to militarily engage Uighur militants in Afghanistan, it would be more likely to target them specifically—through, for example, a campaign of targeted killings rather than one broad attack.

Prior to 9/11, the Taliban attempted to straddle the line, providing a permissive environment to Uighur militants while attempting not to incur the wrath of China. Raffaello Pantucci and Edward Schwarck note that:

Abdul Salam Zaef, a founding member of the Taliban who also served as Ambassador to Islamabad, alleges that a delegation of ETIM leaders met with Mullah Omar in Kandahar to request support for their activities in China. The ETIM delegation was rebuffed, and told not to aggravate Beijing (although the

within the Islamic Jihad Union, and it's likely that some ETIM militants are collaborating with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, given the key roles that ETIM's Abdul Haq Turkistani and Abdul Shakoor Turkistani played within al-Qaeda. There is also evidence that ETIM militants have been training in TTP camps.

Taliban continued to provide them with sanctuary). These events are corroborated by Abu Musab al-Suri, the al-Qaeda strategist.⁹⁰

Andrew Small similarly noted that sources close to China's foreign ministry say that the Taliban has promised that it won't allow Afghanistan to be used as a base to launch attacks against China.⁹¹ However, China won't be happy even with this middle-ground approach: Even if the Taliban ensured that ETIM didn't use territory it controlled to plan attacks against China, if ETIM were to find safe haven in Afghanistan, it would make the militant group more resilient against Chinese attacks and also strengthen its hand for ultimately carrying out attacks in China. Further, Small notes that his sources say that China doubts "the Taliban's capacity and willingness to deliver on its promises" on the matter of safe haven for Uighur militants.⁹²

However, China is not without leverage. The Taliban has some utilitarian reasons to stay on China's good side, including ensuring that China does not become too deeply involved in Afghanistan's internal affairs. The Taliban may also derive some economic benefit from acceding to Chinese demands. In 2000, for example, Mullah Omar asked China's ambassador to Pakistan for political recognition and protection from U.N. sanctions in return for concessions on the Uighur

issue, and its recent talks with China suggest that the Taliban would like economic relations.⁹³

All of this suggests that China's Uighur policy may fail. If it does, China will likely consider four options for dealing with the issue.

Possibility 1: Exert pressure on the Afghan government to target Uighur safe havens. As previously discussed, China has been pressuring Pakistan's government to crack down on Uighur militancy in its tribal areas, and China similarly may try to get Afghanistan to serve its interests on the Uighur issue. This strategy would allow China to maintain pressure on Uighur militants without directly intervening. The two major obstacles to implementing this policy are possible limitations in China's leverage over the Afghan government and the Afghan security forces' operational shortcomings.

Getting the Afghan government to acquiesce to target Uighur safe havens would be the first step in pursuing this policy course. China's significant economic and strategic partnerships with Pakistan have enabled the Chinese government to exert its influence in Pakistan, but its influence in Afghanistan is more limited, especially since China's commercial projects have moved in fits and starts. Afghanistan may not be willing to dedicate scarce resources to tackling Uighur militant groups, as they pose no immediate threat to the Afghan state, especially in comparison to other VNSAs.

If Beijing can persuade Afghanistan's government to target Uighur militant groups, the ANSF's capabilities pose another barrier. The ANSF has faced particular logistics and intelligence

⁹⁰ Raffaello Pantucci & Edward Schwarck, *Transition in Afghanistan: Filling the Security Vacuum—The Expansion of Uighur Extremism?* (Barcelona: Barcelona Center for International Affairs, 2014), page 6.

⁹¹ Andrew Small, "Why Is China Talking to the Taliban?" *Foreign Policy*, June 21, 2013. (http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/20/why_is_china_talking_to_the_taliban)

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

challenges, which are two of the key components of going after groups like ETIM.⁹⁴

Possibility 2: Rely on Pakistan to counter Uighur VNSAs. If China's efforts to pressure the Afghan government to crack down on Uighur groups fail, China may utilize its connections with Pakistan to limit the Uighur presence. Pakistani intelligence maintains close ties with a range of non-state actors operating in Afghanistan that rely on Pakistan for funding and other support. China could push Pakistan to pressure its proxies in Afghanistan—such as the Haqqani Network, Afghan Taliban, and Jaish-e-Mohammed—to refuse safe haven to Uighur militants or even attack Uighurs.

There are two problems with this policy. First, the ISI may be reluctant to use political capital with its Afghan proxies on the Uighur issue, which is peripheral to Pakistan's interests. Second, the Uighurs could seek safe haven with insurgent groups that are not under the ISI's sway.

⁹⁴ NATO made logistics training for the ANSF a low priority in the early stages of its Afghanistan training mission. As a result, the ANSF's tooth-to-tail ratio is inadequate, and the Afghan national army has an insufficient number of combat enablers and logisticians. Jonathan Schroden et al., *Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces* (Washington, DC: CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2014). (<http://www.cna.org/sites/default/files/research/CNA%20Independent%20Assessment%20of%20the%20ANSF.pdf>) Further, Afghanistan's disparate logistics networks do not currently operate as a cohesive, national system. Gary Owen, "Beans and Bullets: Pentagon Report Puts ANSF Logistical and Combat Capabilities in Doubt," *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, February 26, 2013. (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/beans-and-bullets-pentagon-report-puts-ansf-logistical-and-combat-capabilities-in-doubt/>) The ANSF faces particular challenges in sustaining multiday operations in remote areas, and also faces basic administrative challenges, such as paying bills and maintaining adequate supply levels.

Possibility 3: Empower local VNSAs that can counter Uighur groups. In keeping with China's longstanding policy of engaging VNSAs, China might sponsor local actors (including Northern Alliance militias, or possibly Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin) who can combat ETIM or other Uighur militants if the Afghan government is either unwilling or unable to act. This would allow China to advance its interests while mitigating its exposure to risk. One advantage of pursuing this course is that China is increasingly active in areas where the Westphalian system has broken down, and working with VNSAs as proxies in Afghanistan can help it to prepare to advance its interests elsewhere through means that aren't state-centric. Additionally, China could maintain a degree of plausible deniability if it sponsored VNSAs to undertake anti-Uighur operations for it. This policy would entail less risk for China than overt military involvement, but more risk than working through the Afghan government.

Possibility 4: Carry out targeted strikes and special forces operations against Uighur VNSAs. If these other policy options failed or are declined, China might be forced to carry out kinetic strikes against Uighur VNSAs in Afghanistan. Such unilateral military intervention would mark a break—though one can question how significant—from the current position of China's non-interference doctrine. Arguing that the break from Chinese foreign policy would be minimum, Andrew Nathan has said that China is "very supportive of a logic of going after terrorists with all means necessary."⁹⁵

The non-interference doctrine has long served and protected China's interests. But Nathan thinks the precedent that would be set by Chinese targeted killings in Afghanistan designed to remove Uighur

⁹⁵ Andrew Nathan, telephone interview with authors, July 14, 2014.

militant leaders isn't troublesome for China. "They wouldn't call it intervention," he said. China doesn't fear that precedent because terrorists threatening other countries don't currently find safe haven in China, and thus targeted killings in Afghanistan would be unlikely to come back to haunt China.⁹⁶

Analysts estimate that China possesses several thousand unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that can be used for both surveillance and kinetic strikes, including the Yi Long, which carries a maximum payload of 440 pounds and has a range of almost 2,500 miles.⁹⁷ China may be increasingly willing to use its UAVs in strikes: In 2012, Chinese counternarcotics officials considered carrying out a drone strike against a drug lord in Myanmar responsible for the murders of 13 Chinese soldiers, though they ultimately decided against it (they arrested him instead).⁹⁸ But questions remain about how well China's drone operating platforms will function in a tough environment like Afghanistan. In addition, China would need to establish or gain access to human intelligence networks on the ground in Afghanistan to make targeted killings a potent tool.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ "The Role of Autonomy in DoD Systems," Defense Science Board, July 2012, page 70 (<http://fas.org/irp/agency/dod/dsb/autonomy.pdf>); Wendell Minnick, "China's Interest in Mideast Countries Rattles Europe, U.S.," *Defense News*, November 18, 2013. (<http://www.defensenews.com/article/20131118/DEFREG04/311180013/China-s-Interest-Mideast-Countries-Rattles-Europe-US>)

⁹⁸ Jane Perlez, "Chinese Plan to Kill Drug Lord With Drone Highlights Military Advances," *The New York Times*, February 20, 2013. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/21/world/asia/chinese-plan-to-use-drone-highlights-military-advances.html>)

Conclusion

China has adopted a nuanced set of policies to deal with the challenges it will face as U.S. and ISAF forces draw down from Afghanistan. To advance its twin objectives of keeping its commercial projects running and avoiding reemergence of a safe haven for Uighur militant groups like ETIM, China has adopted a set of policies that involves pressuring Pakistan to deprive Uighur militants of safe haven in its tribal areas and engaging and negotiating with VNSAs in Afghanistan. There are limitations to what this set of policies will accomplish: Though China is likely to play a positive role in Afghanistan, it neither will fill the general security vacuum that the U.S. drawdown will leave nor increase its economic aid or development projects enough to keep Afghanistan's economy afloat more broadly. Further, its policy of engagement with VNSAs, possibly including the Taliban, will likely create some tensions with the United States and some of that nation's close allies, including India.

The initial set of policies China will attempt toward Afghanistan after the U.S. drawdown is essentially settled, but China will face more difficult questions about how to adjust if these policies don't achieve their objectives. In the past, China's efforts to convince the Taliban to distance itself from ETIM resulted in an unsatisfactory middle-ground policy where the Taliban continued to allow ETIM safe haven in areas it controlled but asked the group not to plan attacks against China from those areas. China has several options if its initial policies toward Afghanistan don't succeed; which path it takes could have an impact not only on Afghanistan but also, in some ways, on the course of Chinese foreign policy. Afghanistan could set precedents for China more

aggressively asserting its international interests in the context of sub-state security threats.

These same dynamics will also factor into the future trajectory of the triangular relationship involving China, Pakistan, and India. With Pakistan serving as a force for instability, and India anxious about VNSAs that Pakistan sponsors, China's Afghanistan policy may address not only bilateral concerns, but also tensions with broader implications for South Asian geopolitics. Regardless of how indirect its approach, China is highly unlikely to escape some form of participation in Afghanistan's tumultuous future.

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