

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدین بوم وېر زنده یک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/25/world/asia/china-considers-larger-role-in-afghanistan-peace-process.html?_r=0

China Considers Larger Role in Afghanistan Peace Process

By EDWARD WONG and DAVID JOLLY

January 24, 2016

As a bloody offensive by the Taliban spreads in Afghanistan and with American combat operations there officially ended, anxious Chinese leaders find themselves under pressure to take a more active role in the long-stalled peace process, according to scholars and current and former diplomats.

For observers of Chinese diplomacy, that kind of commitment is surprising since China often tries to take a hands-off approach in regions and nations at war.

“The big backdrop is that the United States will have withdrawn most of its troops from Afghanistan with the antiterrorism mission unfinished, which is leaving the country a mess,” said Du Youkang, who worked in Islamabad, Pakistan, as a diplomat and is now the director of the South Asia Studies Center at Fudan University in Shanghai. “Bombings have never stopped, even in the capital. Afghanistan shares a border with China, so in this case China must get involved to promote the talks and to secure the stability in the region.”



Deng Xijun, China's special representative for Afghanistan, listening last week during a meeting at the presidential palace in Kabul, Afghanistan, aimed at reviving peace negotiations with the Taliban.

Yet if China is to play a productive role in peace talks with the Taliban, the officials and scholars say, it will have to convince its ally Pakistan that an Afghanistan at peace and engaged politically and economically with all regional powers, including India, is in Pakistan's interests.

The Afghan foreign minister, Salahuddin Rabbani, begins an official four-day visit in Beijing on Monday, and the topic of bringing Afghanistan's warring factions to the negotiating table is expected to be the priority in his meetings with Chinese leaders.

Mr. Rabbani's trip signals that China has a stake in the resumption of peace talks, which are still at an early stage and stalled months ago.

One reason for China's engagement is that a stable Afghanistan could become a critical transportation hub and market for Chinese goods, and, eventually, another investment opportunity for President Xi Jinping's grand economic plans for Central Asia.

Yet security concerns loom alongside the economic motive. China has become increasingly worried about the insurgent violence in its western frontier region of Xinjiang, and officials say that the Uighurs, a Turkic-speaking, mostly Sunni Muslim ethnic group, might be falling under the influence of radical elements from outside China, motivating some of them to carry out attacks in Xinjiang.

Since 2001, Uighurs have fought in Afghanistan, and Afghan officials say they have told Beijing about the dozens of Uighurs that have been captured there recently, even if some foreign analysts say China's expressed fears of organized terrorist violence in Xinjiang are overblown.

Uighur militants in Afghanistan have not been neutralized yet, Mr. Du said, because "the government has not been able to assert control over all of its sovereign area."

China had long been reluctant to get involved in the Afghan war, not wanting to be seen as taking sides. But Afghan officials, beginning under the administration of President Hamid Karzai, have been insistent, pressing Chinese leaders at every opportunity to use their influence on Islamabad to curb the Taliban, which Pakistan had helped to create in the 1990s.

Barnett R. Rubin, an American scholar of Afghanistan at New York University and a former special adviser to the United States and the United Nations, said the formation of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, which is scheduled to hold its third meeting in Islamabad in early February, was significant because it was the “only institutionalization so far of U.S.-China political cooperation in Afghanistan.”

“This means that the two countries are coordinating their policies much better,” he added. “There’s the U.S. with some influence in Kabul, and China with some influence in Pakistan.”

“One important role for China in the process is to provide reassurances to Pakistan,” he said. “If China were to support common positions of the U.S. and Afghan governments, it would be much more difficult for Pakistan to resist that.”

While the talks at this stage are still aimed only at establishing a road map for future negotiations, there has been one significant accomplishment: winning China’s agreement that it would put its weight behind promoting face-to-face talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

A previous round of talks collapsed last year with the revelation that Mullah Muhammed Omar, a Taliban founder, had been dead for two years, causing a split in the ranks of the insurgency and uncertainty among participating nations. One expectation among negotiators is that eventually Pakistan will have to bring pressure on the Taliban, including militarily.

But Pakistan has long treated Afghanistan as a strategic territory that must at all costs be kept from falling under the influence of its archrival, India. The question of whether Beijing can bring it around looms heavily in the minds of Afghans.

“China needs a peaceful and stable neighborhood to advance its economic interests,” said Davood Moradian, head of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies and an adviser to Mr. Karzai. He cited the new Silk Road initiative, Beijing’s quest to expand its economic influence westward toward Europe by increasing trade and development in Central Asia. Afghanistan could play an important part in China’s plans, if it can overcome the deadly strife that makes doing business there a near impossibility.

China’s economic ambitions conflict with important aspects of its strategic vision, Mr. Moradian said, since Beijing sees its alliance with Pakistan as essential to building a regional bulwark against India and the United States, even as Pakistan uses destabilizing groups like the Taliban as “tools of foreign policy.”

China could make a major difference if it pressed Pakistan to acknowledge its support for the Taliban, but so far both Beijing and Washington “have relied on a policy of appeasing Islamabad,” Mr. Moradian said.

“I don’t think Pakistan is susceptible to that approach, and the Afghan government really has nothing to offer Pakistan in terms of incentives or pressure,” he added.

“There is a certain degree of naïveté among Chinese diplomats,” Mr. Moradian said. “Only in the last few years have they started to understand the conflict. In the next few years they might have to distance themselves from the Pakistani narrative.”

China’s economic incentives for helping with the peace process are secondary to trying to establish stability, Mr. Du said. The copper mine at Mes Aynak, operated by a Chinese state-owned enterprise outside Kabul, has languished mainly because of the unstable security situation and the precarious state of Afghanistan’s transportation network. “How are you going to invest in, excavate and ship out all that copper if the war has never stopped?” he said.

Masood Khan, who previously served as Pakistan’s ambassador to Beijing and to the United Nations, said that China would play a “supportive and constructive” role in the talks, and that all of the participants saw its presence as “a confidence-building measure.”

Li Shaoxian, a Chinese scholar and vice-president of the Chinese Association of Middle East Studies, said he believed it was important for China to establish direct contact with Taliban representatives.

“I went to the country in 2000, and I have to say that the Taliban simply will not be wiped out, because they are deeply rooted in the rank-and-file of society and are a representative of the Pashtuns,” Mr. Li said, referring to the majority ethnic group in Afghanistan. “So now Beijing, Washington and Kabul have all accepted the fact that, well, we need to include them in the peace and reconciliation process.”

Mr. Li said Taliban members had told him “China was trustworthy because it was historically the only country that has not bullied the Afghans.”