

Is Trump Afghan Policy Aimed at Taliban or at China?

By [F. William Engdahl](#)

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In recent months the US President has reversed yet another campaign pledge to pull out of Afghanistan, America's longest war, and instead has begun to deploy an added 3,000 troops there. At the same time he has lashed out at the government of Pakistan accusing it of aiding the Afghan Taliban and pledging to cut all US military aid to that country as reprisal. A deeper view into the situation suggests that both moves are linked and have to do with not the Taliban and the Afghan terrorists. It has very much to do with ongoing developments of peaceful construction of the Chinese-led Belt, Road Initiative and desperate attempts of Washington to try to stop those developments using other pretexts.

In June 2017 After intense discussions with his military Trump authorized an added up to 4,000 US soldiers ostensibly to further train an Afghan military in dealing with an increasingly successful Taliban [force](#). By December the Pentagon was engaged in a massive air campaign it said was aimed at destroying the Taliban drug labs.

Arguing that the Pakistan ISI intelligence service was complicit in giving Taliban, the CIA-trained and al Qaeda-associated Haqqani and other terrorist groups sanctuary across the border, Trump then froze military aid to Pakistan. It is allegedly to force Pakistan's military and intelligence to cut support for the Taliban and other Islamist groups. In one of his infamous tweets, the US President wrote,

"The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools...They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. [No more!](#)"

The Pakistan aid cut could involve two billion worth of equipment and coalition support funding. Administration sources stated that, "all options are on the table," including stripping Pakistan of its status as a "major non-NATO ally" or calling in vital [IMF loans](#).

As a direct result of the US pressure, the Pakistani government did not automatically renew for a full year refugee status for some 1.4 million Afghan refugees, instead ordering them to return to Afghanistan by end of January. This, to a country where US bombings have escalated threefold, creating a de facto new destabilization across all [Afghanistan](#).

Another Hidden Agenda

In fact what Washington is doing in both Afghanistan and Pakistan has little if anything to do with restoring a functioning government in Kabul or stabilizing Pakistan, once a close US ally during the 1980's US-backed Al Qaeda war against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, the CIA Operation Cyclone, using Mujahideen mercenaries it trained and armed in a costly ten year war.

The true aim is geopolitical and is directly aimed at the growing influence of China, in cooperation in part with Russia, in stabilizing Afghanistan and drawing the country, along with Pakistan, into the game-changing Belt, Road Initiative, China's multi-nation multi-trillion dollar rail and deep water port infrastructure network. China is eager to draw Afghanistan into the China-Pakistan Corridor part of the BRI, for economic reasons as well as to control terrorist groups among China's Uighur Muslims from China's Xinjiang province being trained by the Taliban in [Afghanistan](#).

China Invites Afghanistan to Belt, Road Initiative

In fact Washington has never been serious about building genuine democracy in Afghanistan. Rather its priority was building NATO bases deep inside Eurasia to potentially target China and Russia. Another benefit was allowing Taliban and others to grow the world's largest opium crops, exporting the heroin via US military aircraft via Manas Airbase to create serious addiction problems inside Russia and Central Asia.

The renewed US interest in Afghanistan coincides with the growing efforts of especially China to stabilize Afghanistan following the 2014 US troop withdrawal and using economic development to reduce the breeding ground for radical Muslim terrorism near the border to China's Muslim Xinjiang province.

In late December Chinese **Foreign Minister Wang Yi** announced that both China and Pakistan are looking to include Afghanistan in their estimated \$57 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a key rail, highway, port and pipeline corridor of the vast Belt, Road Initiative. He declared,

“China and Pakistan are willing to look at with Afghanistan, on the basis of win-win, mutually beneficial principles, using an appropriate means to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to [Afghanistan](#).”

That would mark a major stabilization of the entire region where Pakistan and Afghanistan have often been at odds since the US invasion of Kabul in 2001. Such stability in the context of the Belt, Road Initiative would severely weaken US military influence across the entire region.

For its part, the current government in Kabul is very eager to discuss joining China's Economic Silk Road project. In October, 2017 Kabul hosted a forum of mayors of cities along the historic silk road and discussed the prospects of joining the China project. Among the projects in discussion between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan a Peshawar-Kabul motorway, the Landi Kotal-Jalalabad Railway, the Chaman-Speen Boldak Railway, a hydropower dam on Kunar River, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan electricity transmission line, and the trans-Afghan highway to Central Asia from Peshawar, Pakistan. These projects, along with the Logar-Torkham Railway line, would be a part of the China-Pakistan [Economic Corridor](#). Clearly this would create a far more stable dynamic than the

present US strategy of endless fighting.

At the same time that US President Trump was tweeting aid cuts to Pakistan for allegedly harboring Taliban from Afghanistan, the central bank of Pakistan announced that it would permit trade settlement with China, its largest trade partner, in Chinese yuan, another blow to the domination of the dollar. For its part, the Pakistani government has reacted to the pressure from Washington by suspending all military and intelligence cooperation with the US according to the Pakistani Defense Minister.

Washington these days has little positive to offer to the nations of Afghanistan or Pakistan. Threats, more troops, cuts in aid are not what is gaining the interest of those countries. Economic development is, and there is no development more attractive than that of building infrastructure corridors linking Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and potentially Turkey to China, Russia, select EU economies to create entire new markets and industries. To try to stop this is the real background to Washington's recent military reversal in Afghanistan and its pressure on Pakistan, not the Taliban.

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F. William Engdahl is strategic risk consultant and lecturer, he holds a degree in politics from Princeton University and is a best-selling author on oil and geopolitics, exclusively for the online magazine ["New Eastern Outlook."](#) where this article was originally published.

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