

New Silk Road could revitalize war-torn Afghanistan

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Global Research, June 07, 2011

[Global Times and Stop NATO](#) 7 June 2011

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

For thousands of years, the Pamir passes have served as the crossroads of goods, ideas, cultures and religions between China, the Arab world and Europe. If there were no wars in the region, tens of thousands of trucks and buses would transport cargo and people every day among the three countries....As a responsible world power and the biggest neighbor of Afghanistan, China should also help its neighbor turn a new page, by using its influence to tell the NATO countries that the three-decade wars in Afghanistan must end now.

A recent Wall Street Journal report claims that Pakistan has urged Afghan President Hamid Karzai to turn to China as a reliable ally to lead Afghanistan and Pakistan out of their messy situations.

Despite the denials by both the Pakistani and Afghan governments, the message reflects the truth that the decade-long Afghan war is now shifting to Pakistan, transforming the Afghan war more like a regional war in which China has a stake.

The Pamir Mountains include the Tianshan, Karakoram and Hindu Kush mountain ranges. In the Pamir region, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan not only have common landscape, they also share a history and culture.

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After the death of Osama bin Laden, China needs to redefine the issue of Afghanistan. China should lose no time to initiate regional cooperation among China, Pakistan and Afghanistan to realize the tremendous potential of the legendary medieval Silk Road. Any prospect of reviving regional trade has been disrupted since the 1970s by first the Soviet and then the NATO invasions of Afghanistan.

As a responsible world power and the biggest neighbor of Afghanistan, China should also help its neighbor turn a new page, by using its influence to tell the NATO countries that the three-decade wars in Afghanistan must end now.

Despite the war in Afghanistan, recent years have seen Chinese companies taking an active part in the country's economic reconstruction by undertaking road construction, communications and other infrastructure projects. For example, China's biggest investment in a single foreign project is the Aynak Copper Mine project. ZTE, Huawei and Sinohydro are among the Chinese giant companies involved in the country. The Jomhuri Hospital, the

largest China-assisted project in Afghanistan, was handed over to the Afghan government. The two countries jointly cracked a number of major drug-trafficking cases. There is now a Confucius Institute in Kabul University with 35 students.

But in the long run, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan need to form a Pamir group, a strategic trilateral partnership to support sustainable peace and prosperity in the region.

The Pamir countries could revive the Silk Road with China's intensifying its investment in building a network of roads, energy pipelines, electric grids and other infrastructure connecting Afghanistan, and Pakistan with China.

The wars and killings in Afghanistan not only harm the national interests of the country, but also endanger regional development and cooperation. Within the Pamir group and serving as a mediator to bring peace between the warring factions of the region, China can work collectively with Afghanistan and Pakistan to stop violence among the local people, helping an Afghan government that makes all fighting peoples and factions sit at the table for political settlement and national reconciliation.

Northeastern Afghanistan once contained the Wakhan Corridor to China, where Hungarian explorer Aurel Stein reported in 1906 that at least 100 pony loads of goods crossed to China annually.

Today, a few hours of drive away from Wakhan lies Kashgar, a newly-developed special economic zone in the far western end of Xinjiang, where visitors can see plots of land for the Central and South Asia Industrial Park, factories making goods for export to Pakistan and warehouses storing cargo headed for Central and South Asia.

With tens of billions of dollars pumped into Kashgar, China hopes the city will be restored to the position it had in the legendary Silk Road, serving as a launch pad into Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asian countries.

Although the war has devastated Afghanistan, history shows that Afghanistan is a resilient nation. Despite the chill of the Afghan war and the Pamir's freezing climate, with the forming of a Pamir group for regional cooperation, the people of the region will see a warm future of peace and prosperity.

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