

Pakistan's Position on the US-Afghanistan Settlement: Impact on China's Belt and Road

By [Dr. Ejaz Akram](#)

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***Zhao Lijian**, the spokesman of the ministry of foreign affairs in China quite knowledgeably alleged that the US was behind the spread of Corona virus through its military personnel in Wuhan during Wuhan military games late last autumn, 2019. If that be true, then China has just begun the war of challenging the false US narratives on global affairs.*

It seems that 2020 will be a year of two phenomena; uncovering conspiracies, less theory and more facts. If so, then it is understandable that Italy may be punished because of defying American orders against joining Belt & Road (BRI). Iran is ever guilty of wrong doing, hence more Corona density, so on and so forth. The purpose of this argument is not to discover the origins of Corona virus but to argue that the US is dead set on subverting the BRI, no matter what means need to be adopted to blackmail and bludgeon China into submission for the sake of its own world domination. With Zhao Lijian's statement, it seems obvious that China is not likely to capitulate on BRI, rather China is likely to confront the US in conventional and non-conventional ways and to follow through ever more assertively its BRI plans.

Now we turn to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is key to world peace. If the US is beaten out of Afghanistan successfully, it will leave India, Daesh/ISIS, Afghan National Army (ANA) which the Taliban with regional help can easily eliminate. Main regional actors that are likely to do that are Pakistan, China and Russia. But even Iran and Turkey are interested in doing the same.

Pakistanis know very well that after the signing of the so-called peace deal between the US and the Taliban, Afghanistan is entering a very dangerous period of war in which its neighbors must not sit quietly. Islamabad knows too well that the Taliban are about to form a government in Kabul as the Americans leave, **Ashraf Ghani** and **Abdullah Abdullah** fight over power and India seeks Daesh/ISIS support to keep Pakistan away from helping the Kashmiri people. Hence, Islamabad only has ONE choice: Support the Taliban's return to power once again.

Pakistani PM should not have congratulated Ashraf Ghani government under the American pressure because it would mean ill will towards the Taliban. The Taliban on the other hand seek the recognition of their government not Ghani's puppet government. In all likelihood, the Pakistanis did what they have done before. Most likely, they placated the Americans on the surface but alerted the Taliban that this is only surface level diplomacy. Taliban have given a clear message to Americans. The US was supposed to release 5,000 prisoners. India forbade Ghani government to release prisoners to which Mike Pompeo asserted that Ghani must release prisoners otherwise the Taliban will begin to shoot the retreating American

forces. Just in the last two days, the Taliban staged over a hundred attacks on the ANA in ten different provinces. Their deal is only with the US for safe withdrawal of American troops, but the Taliban will show no clemency to Ghani-Abdullah government(s).

The old remnants of so-called al-Qaeda's salafi groups have done a baiyah (oath of allegiance) at the hands of Mullah Haibatullah, the head of the Taliban's main group, the Mullah Omar group. The salafi group has also promised that they will fight against US and India supported Daesh/ISIS fighters by submitting to the Taliban. The Taliban have declared that their next step is conquest of Kabul. Pakistanis are in full support of that underneath the surface because they still fear America. But at the sub-diplomatic level, Pakistan is in full support for the Afghan Taliban, because without securing the Western borders, it cannot give adequate response to Indian aggression in Kashmir and butchery of Muslims inside India. If America doesn't keep its promise and fights the Taliban then they will begin a strong offensive against the Americans. While the latter is not likely to happen, but American support for unleashing Daesh/ISIS has happened before and will certainly happen again.

China should consider doing the following to ensure its best interest in the long run:

1. Recognize the Taliban government at its earliest so that the post-Civil war dealings with the Post Ghani-Abdullah Afghan government take place between China and the Taliban government in a medium of support and trust.
2. Consider giving the US a bloody nose for its misdeed in Wuhan and avenge the life of its citizens by supporting anti-American forces in Afghanistan.
3. Consider giving Taliban heavier weapons for their last offensive against Kabul
4. China and Russia should help Taliban weed out the Indians and Daesh/ISIS from the region entirely. This cannot be done without Pakistan.
5. After Taliban's consolidation of power in Kabul, provide the SCO platform to achieve Intra-Afghan understanding, rebuilt trust so that civil war doesn't erupt again and propose "one country-multiple system" notion of development for Afghanistan to prevent future polarity within the country while keeping the Afghanistan sovereignty intact.
6. China must continue to cultivate and deepen relations with all its immediate Western neighborhood, i.e., countries of the Muslim world.

Pakistan is still dedicated to BRI and it is committed to continue to do so in the decades to come. However, BRI requires a secure environment for Chinese workers, which requires stampeding the forces that are against BRI (i.e., India, US and its lackeys). Afghan situation is not complex and very easy to understand if one's narrative is based on truth. The battle is between builders (China) and destroyers (the US), those who promote connectivity (China) and those who disconnect people, families, countries and regions (the US). If Zhao Lijian is right (which all of the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan believe to be so), then the Corona virus deadly mischief by America has really disconnected the world from each other. No connectivity even within families, friends, workers, factories, sports, universities, and more. This move by the US has really isolated, disconnected and atomized the world. Not only that the economic loss to China and all economies of the world has been tremendous, it has led

to a mutually divorced humanity instilled with fear of future rather than hope.

For Pakistan, peace in Afghanistan is existential. For China success of CPEC in Pakistan existential. In sum, for both China and Pakistan there are no other viable options of peace except for helping the Taliban into power through any means possible. India is the spoiler of peace in Afghanistan and igniter of violence inside its own borders. If China increases its involvement in Afghanistan, the Indians may be misguided to monkey around with China along its border areas. If Indians do make such a mistake, China should be prepared to take an assertive stand against India.

What seems clear in the days to come is that there will be lesser room for diplomacy and an increase in kinetic and non-kinetic warfare. The world is becoming black and white with less grey area, which means that the domain of diplomacy may gradually be shrinking.

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