



# The Great Game is not a zero-sum deal

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## **India and China can work together, bilaterally and in multilateral groupings, to build a secure Afghanistan**

- There is an air of uncertainty about the U.S.'s intentions in Afghanistan.
- The likelihood of an American pullout raises the spectre of instability in Afghanistan, South and Central Asia.
- If this happens, security could hinge on efforts made by regional powers to stabilise Afghanistan.
- India, China never had any intention of contributing troops to NATO's anti-Taliban campaign.
- But as Asia's strongest power and challenger to the U.S., China will shed no tears if the U.S. reduces its military strength or calls it a day after 18 years of a protracted and indecisive war in Afghanistan.

### **Vital to development**

- Sharing part of a border with Afghanistan, China has a great interest in its stability. China would be adversely affected by war and chaos, which could spill over into north-western China, Pakistan, and Central Asia. As all these areas are vital in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), peace in Afghanistan is critical.
- Over the last decade, China has gained considerable economic and diplomatic influence in Afghanistan.
- It has joined the U.S. and Russia in several peace talks with the Taliban and is part of the four-nation Quadrilateral Coordination Group (with Afghanistan, Pakistan and the U.S.).
- Despite the prevailing instability in Afghanistan, China has used diplomacy and finance to appear influential and generous.
- China's diplomacy has highlighted its contacts with all parties to the conflict and enhanced its status as a power broker.
- In 2012, it brought Afghanistan into the regional diplomatic processes by giving it observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

- The SCO's programme for 2019-21 also calls for combating terrorism, and generally enhancing security cooperation.

## **Dealing with Pakistan**

- If the U.S. withdrawal exacerbates conflict, southern Russia will also face the threat of an extremist spillover.
- Therefore, Russia and its Central Asian 'near abroad' would be willing to expand their cooperation with China to curb insecurity.
- Pakistan has become a crucial link in the BRI.
- And China has reportedly invested billions in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which cuts across disputed territory in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.
- Since 2011, China has continually blamed Pakistan for exporting extremists to Uighur in Xinjiang, and for extremist attacks on Chinese workers in the CPEC area. But these incidents have not affected their friendship.
- India supports China's role in international negotiations on Afghanistan, the activation of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group and other mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation for restoration of peace and development in Afghanistan.

## **Indian Role**

- For its part, India has certainly contributed much 'soft power' ranging from telecommunications to education, Bollywood movies and pop music.
- The building for the National Assembly was built with Indian assistance to support Afghanistan's democracy.
- Indian reconstruction largesse, amounting to some \$3 billion, has earned it goodwill and popularity.

## **Sitting across the table**

- India, which has been against holding talks with the Taliban for a long time, finally sent two retired diplomats, at the 'non-official level', to join them at the Moscow peace parleys in November last year.
- But India's lengthy absence from regional diplomacy has resulted in its limited contribution to the negotiations that are necessary to stabilise Afghanistan.
- The Afghan government would like to see India-China economic cooperation in Afghanistan that could boost progress and enhance

human security.

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