

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



October 16, 2018

Khalilzad: Tasked to Bring Peace to His Birth Place

Zalmai Khalilzad, the veteran US diplomat has been tasked with leading efforts to end the war in Afghanistan. He is a blunt negotiator with a history of hawkish foreign policy views. He has decades of experience in the region.

This mission has brought back Khalilzad to focus on the country of his birth and childhood, and the place where he has served as US ambassador from 2003-2005 under President George W. Bush in a period of the history of Afghanistan that he had to guide regime change in the messy aftermath of the fall of the Taliban. Indeed, he was instrumental in setting up the government structure in Afghanistan and helped Afghanistan through the first elections in 2005.

Challenges and Opportunities for Peace in Afghanistan

If we consider modern Afghanistan as a country characterized by low level of modernization and development, then there is sufficient historical evidence that the government in Kabul has been ineffective in terms of exercising power in Afghanistan. As a matter of bitter fact, politics and power in Afghanistan are strongly influenced by the country's ethnic complexities. Therefore, the deep ethno-linguistic divisions and the decentralized nature of the Afghan polity provide convenient fault lines ready for exploitation. After the fall of Taliban in 2001, a basic problem has been the failure of the Afghan government institutions to provide good governance and socio-political development to many parts of the country that could act as a means to close the ethnic gaps.

Correspondingly, there are different layers of geopolitical complications with far-reaching strategic implications in Afghanistan. The presence of the erstwhile Soviet Union, and the United States, in today's context has only served to legitimize the activities of the insurgents and jihadists across Afghan territory. And Russia's and Iran's contrasting positions have only exacerbated the complexities of the conflict. All parties are inclined to escalate military campaigns in the hope of persuading their rivals to negotiate on more suitable terms.

Some political scholars hold that Ghani's earnest appeal to the parties involved thinking of ending the war in Afghanistan, instead of winning it, does not seem to bring results under present circumstances of Afghanistan.

Another important factor is the annual production of some 9,000 tons of opium in Afghanistan which contributes to the creation of employment in many Afghan provinces. It is crystal cut that the opium trade generates profits for the Taliban, local warlords, and criminal networks; as a result, there are vested interests in prolonging the conflict in Afghanistan.

Thus, drug money is not the Taliban's sole funding source; they also mobilize finances from diversified sources including extortions, "protection tax" from Afghan telecom companies, donations from Gulf-based individuals, and covert support from states amenable to their strategy.

The Afghan security forces, after nearly two decades of extensive US military aid and training, continue to be plagued by serious operational problems that have enabled the Taliban to contest more than half of Afghan districts.

For many Afghans and international community members, the Afghan Taliban is merely Pakistan's proxies who are being exploited to weaken the Afghan state from within. They argue that Pakistan's asymmetrical warfare formula has created a Frankenstein that can no longer be expected to create a modern state structure.

Considering such context of conflict in Afghanistan bringing peace seems nearly impossible. However, there are other influential variables that can change the conflict equation in the country; involvement of new peace broker players like China, and South Asian countries can play a significant role in the peace process of Afghanistan. Further, Saudi Arabia which is believed to have a great influence on the Taliban is now more committed to help the US and Afghan governments to bring long conflict in Afghanistan to an end.



China, Afghanistan and Pakistan Tripartite Anti-Terrorism Cooperation Ushered a New era

By: Yunsong Zhou, Like Zhu & Bingfeng Fu

On the afternoon of October 12, local time in Dushanbe, Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah met with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang. Abdullah said: China has always been a good friend of the Afghan people. Afghanistan is willing to actively deepen cooperation with China in the field of anti-terrorism, actively promote trilateral cooperation between China and Pakistan, and promote regional peace and stability. The two sides have reached an important consensus on the issue of anti-terrorism cooperation. The day after the meeting, dozens of people were killed or injured in an explosion at an election rally in the northern province of Takhar. There have been similar attacks as the National Assembly elections approach. The Taliban issued a statement a few days ago, threatening to launch attacks against specific targets during the election period. The Afghan security services have recently had to strengthen security measures throughout the country in order to guarantee the successful conduct of the elections. According to the latest report released on the official website of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan on the 10th, from January to September this year, various armed conflicts and other violent incidents in Afghanistan have caused the deaths and injuries of 8050 civilians, including women and children. In the face of the grim domestic anti-terrorism situation, the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, while strengthening the domestic anti-terrorism forces to actively combat, should also strive to seek international cooperation in the field of anti-terrorism.

As an important neighboring country of the two countries, China is also deeply endangered by terrorism. The cooperation between China, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the field of anti-terrorism has a profound historical and practical basis. China and Afghanistan have always maintained close cooperation in cracking down on the ETIM, border drug trafficking and training of anti-terrorism personnel, and China has always actively participated in various mechanisms related to the Afghan issue and actively supported the reconstruction of Afghanistan. China and Pakistan have set up a bilateral anti-terrorism consultation mechanism since the September 11 incident, and have held anti-terrorism drills many times to crack down on the "Three forces" and drug trafficking in the border areas through a series of coordinated actions. Afghanistan and

Pakistan, on the other hand, have major interests in common in cracking down on terrorist forces along the border with Pakistan. In recent years, the two countries have maintained close interaction at the high-level on the issue of anti-terrorism. The two sides have carried out many joint operations against terrorist forces in the border areas, especially the Taliban, and have achieved remarkable results. At the trilateral level, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan have established a mechanism for dialogue and cooperation on counter-terrorism issues, and Pakistan has become a full member of the SCO this year, and Afghanistan is also an observer state of the SCO. As an influential multilateral security cooperation platform in Central Asia and South Asia, the SCO will also play an increasingly important role in the trilateral fight against terrorism. It can be said that the cooperation between China, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the field of anti-terrorism has gradually entered a new stage of stability and institutionalization.

The anti-terrorism cooperation between China, Afghanistan and Pakistan is also of great positive significance to the maintenance of the domestic stability of the relevant parties and the regional security situation. On the Chinese side, there are close contacts and exchanges between the "East Turkistan" terrorist forces in China and the Taliban, Al-Qaida, and other terrorist organizations in Abba. Strengthening the anti-terrorism cooperation with Afghanistan and Pakistan have great practical significance to the prevention and control of terrorism in China. At the side of the Afghanistan and Pakistan, the terrorist forces in the two countries are intertwined; the economic development is relatively slow affected by the security situation. China, as an important neighbor of the two countries and a big country in the world, in the field of anti-terrorism, Afghanistan and Pakistan do not have the advantages of strength, strengthening cooperation with China can provide strong support for the fight against terrorism between the two countries. At the same time, as the main region of terrorism in South Asia, the anti-terrorism cooperation between China, Afghanistan and Pakistan also has a very positive significance for the maintenance of stability in South Asia and even the prevention and control of terrorism in other parts of the world.

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How Air Corridors in Afghanistan Connect it to the Region

By: Sameer Rasa

The first Air Corridor initiative between Afghanistan and India was officially inaugurated on the 18th of June by H.E. President Ghani at Hamid Karzai International Airport. The First cargo carried 60MTs of goods to India. According to President Ghani, the main objective behind the air corridor initiative was to transform Afghanistan from an import-oriented country to an export-oriented country. During the press conference which was held after the inauguration, he said "unless we become an exporter country, we will not be able to root out poverty and instability in Afghanistan". The establishment of air corridors and other new government export policies are realizing President Ghani's vision of turning Afghanistan to an exporting nation. In 2017 Afghanistan's export increased by \$44 million compared to year 2016 and based on International Monetary Fund (IMF), this figure will increase to \$748M in 2018 and \$842 in 2019 respectively.

Circumventing an old barrier

As a landlocked country, Afghanistan's transit routes largely rely on Pakistan, which is often vulnerable to political issues between the two countries. Today, however, air corridors have changed the deal and opened new doors for Afghan traders. Following the success of the first Air corridor between Kabul and New Delhi, the second air corridor between Kabul and Mumbai was officially inaugurated at Kabul International airport which was welcomed by Indian officials and traders in Indira Gandhi airport.

Long Term Friendship

Why did Afghanistan initiate the first Air Corridor with India? For decades Afghanistan and India have built a strong strategic relationship. India has played a significant role in the economic development and reconstruction of Afghanistan since 2001. The country has invested billions of dollars in various projects in Afghanistan such as construction of the Zaranj-Delaram highway in southwest, construction of Salma Dam in Herat province, investment of more than \$100M in the expansion of the Chabahar port and construc-

tion of a new parliament complex for the Afghan government. The volume of trade between Afghanistan and India was around \$900 Million this year compared to \$600 Million last year and it is expected to reach \$2 billion dollars by 2020. So far, 2,900 metric tons of goods have been exported from Kabul and Kandahar international airports to New Delhi and Mumbai. The success of the air corridor program is the result of the two exhibition in India. The first exhibition was held on 13th of July 2017 and the second was held on 24th of September 2018. In both exhibitions, hundreds of contracts were signed between Afghan traders and foreign traders.

More Export & Economic prosperity

Air corridors have helped Afghanistan boost its domestic economy by creating new transit routes and regional connectivity. Since the launch of first air corridor, more than 150 companies have signed up, of which around 135 [90%] are new companies with average number of 4 employees, have signed up for this new trading opportunity. This means 540 people were employed and export products have been transported to more than one hundred destinations, such as India, Europe, China, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and Russia. A total amount of 3,200 MTs of goods including fresh fruits, Dried fruit, Asafetida, Handicrafts, Carpets, and Karakul s were transported in 190 flights with a total value of \$65 Million dollars. Thousands of farmers are benefiting from the air corridor initiative as it has enabled them to find market for their agricultural products beyond Afghanistan borders, taking advantage of the new markets and better prices.

Being a land locked country, Air corridors have given Afghanistan the opportunity to access global markets. Air corridors have raised lots of hopes in opening up trading opportunities with regional countries including central Asia, South Asia and beyond. Afghan government economic policy is to become self-reliant and air corridors have helped it reaching this goal by increasing its volume of exports and reducing the in land transit routes risks.

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