

China numerous reports on how to change

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ChinaBuilds Military Base in

Afghanistan

Peter KORZUN The Afghan

Badakhshan province shares a commonborder with the China’s Xinjiang UygurAutonomous Region. Badakhshanwas part of the ancient Silk Roadlinking Asia with Europe.

The Silk Road is re-emerging. China’s wants theprovince to be stable and is providing aid to rebuild infrastructure. Chinais interested in stable supplies of raw materials, which Afghanistan has largedeposits of. Beijing is to invest\$55 billion to create an economic corridor going viaAfghanistan to the Arabian Sea. China is the Afghanistan’s largest trading partner able to make much desired investments. According toits “ OneBelt, One Road” (OBOR) project, a big infrastructure is to bebuilt in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

So, peace in Afghanistan meets theChina’s interests but there is little hope the United States can bring it. After all, it has failed to achieve anysubstantial gains since 2001. There have been surges and reductions, changes oftactics and strategy, numerous reports on how to change the tide but theTaliban is strong, economy is still in shambles with and drugs trafficking beingthe only business thriving. So far, the Trump administration has not presenteda long-awaited strategy defining its Afghanistan policy, despite the fact thatthere are 8400 American troops in the country. The presence will increase soon. The US relationships with key actors, such as Pakistan, are in shambles. Washington has recently suspended military aid to that country.

The instability in Afghanistan threatens the OBOR's flagship project -the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Beijing is working hard to improve the Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. It arranged a tripartite meeting at foreign ministers level in 2017. The talks working panels to promote cooperation in various areas. Another meeting is expected to take place this year in Kabul. The East Turkistan Islamic Movement, a Uighur nationalist and Islamic movement from China's Xinjiang region, is operating in Afghanistan. The militants gain combat experience fighting side by side with the Taliban and other militant groups. Russia and China step up military aid to Central Asian states.

They believe that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can substantially contribute into achieving peaceful settlement. Both are trying to bring together regional states. Moscow and Beijing are motivated by their national interests, which coincide. As major powers they are working together to promote security in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The Afghan government officials reported that China is to build a military base in Badakhshan. The weapons and equipment will be Chinese but the facility will be manned by Afghan military. No doubt, Chinese military instructors and other personnel will come to carry out for train and assist missions. The preparations for construction have already begun. Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission Xu Qilian said the construction is expected to be complete in 2018. In 2017, the Taliban delivered serious strikes temporarily capturing Ishkashim and Zebak districts of Badakhshan from the government troops. The Afghan government failed to provide the military

presence substantial enough to ensure security. Before the attacks, an agreement with local field commanders had been in place, giving them their share of lapis lazuli production in exchange for peace.

But internal bickering undermined the fragile peace between the local groups and the Taliban seized the opportunity to intervene. The Islamic State's presence in the province is a matter of special concern. It all makes border security an issue of paramount importance for Beijing. The question is how far is China ready to go? Until now, it has limited its military activities to special operations teams patrolling the Wakhan Corridor. A military base in Badakhshan is an important move to demonstrate Beijing is ready to expand its presence in the country.

Beijing has a trump card the US lacks – the cooperation of Russia and Pakistan. Beijing represents the SCO, a large international organization comprising such actors as Turkey, Iran, India, Pakistan and the countries of Central Asia. The SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group's activities were restarted last year upon the initiative of Russian president Vladimir Putin. They were suspended in 2009. Russia advocates launching direct talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban as soon as possible.

Beijing supports the idea. Moscow has said it is ready to host a conference on Afghanistan. The SCO's participation can make the crisis management process a real international endeavor. It will reduce the clout of the US but increase chances for peace.

Security cooperation and diplomatic activities can open new chapter in the Afghan history.