

CHINA'S ENGAGEMENT IN PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN AND XINJIANG

Will China's Root Cause model provide regional stability and security?

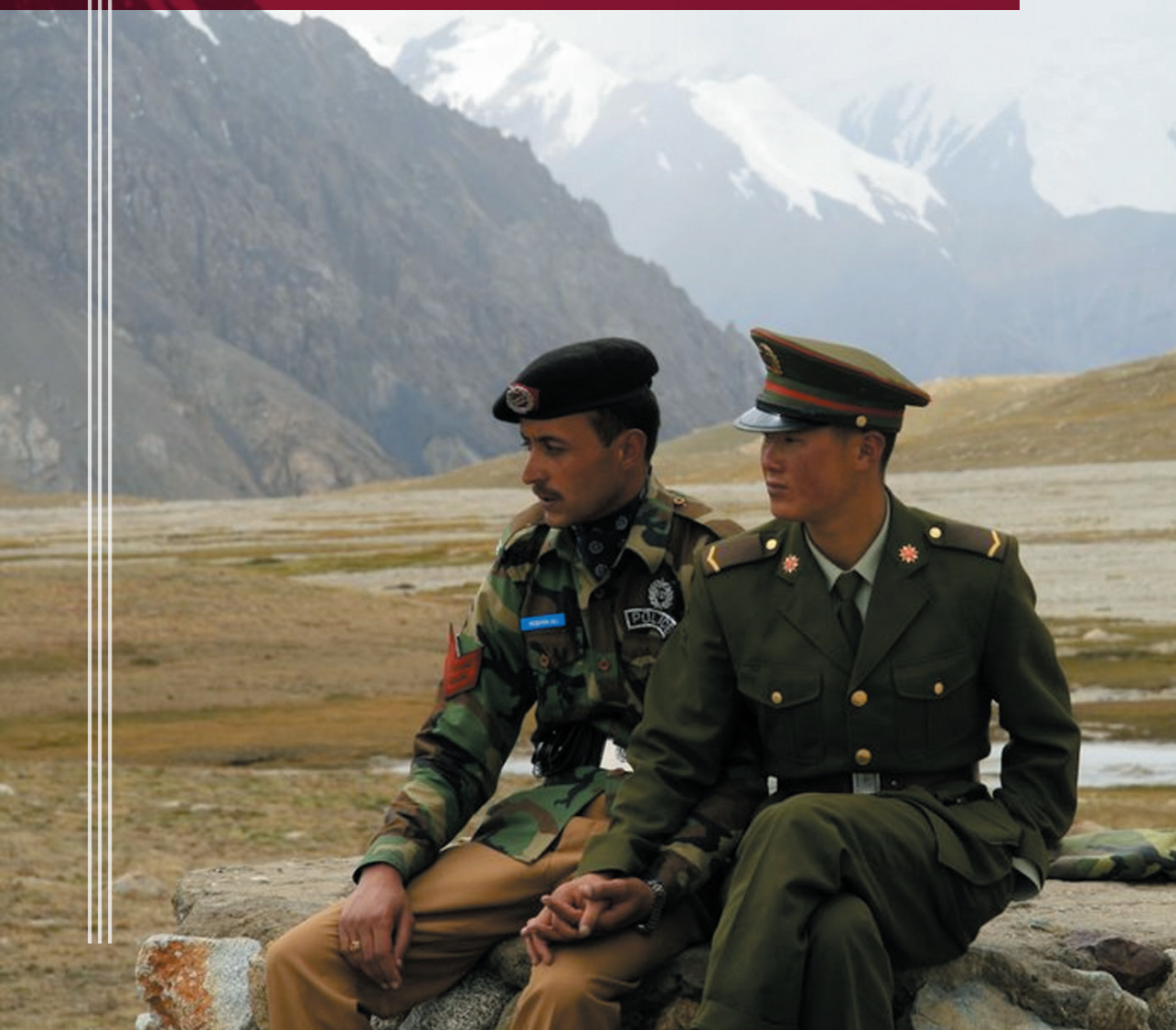


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This report is written by Senior Researcher Lars Erslev Andersen & Senior Researcher Yang Jiang and published by DIIS as part of the Defence and Security Studies.

DIIS · Danish Institute for International Studies
Østbanegade 117, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark
Tel: +45 32 69 87 87
E-mail: diis@diis.dk
www.diis.dk

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRP	Baluchistan Republican Party
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
CT	Counterterrorism
ETIM	East Turkistan Islamic Movement
GBAO	Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region
GDP	Gross domestic product
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IS	Islamic State
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JCCL	Jiangxi Copper Corporation
MCC	Metallurgical Corporation of China
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PCI	Pakistan-China Institute
PRC	People's Republic of China
QCCM	The Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism
QCG	Quadrilateral Coordination Group
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SOE	State-owned enterprise
TIP	Turkistan Islamic Party or East Turkestan Islamic Movement
TIP	Turkistan Islamic Party
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
XUAR	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

Map 1: Overview of South, Central, and West Asia



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores China's westward policy by analysing the opportunities and obstacles related to its flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as well as discussing the potential of China's approach to stabilizing the region through development. One aspect of the philosophy behind the CPEC is that lifting people out of poverty by providing them with better opportunities for jobs and incomes and hence improved living conditions will reduce the attractions of violent extremism and the inclination to indulge in it, thereby increasing stability. This so-called Root Cause model draws on China's experience of successfully lifting more than 600 million of its own citizens out of poverty due to the reform policy that has changed China rapidly over the past forty years, especially in the big cities in eastern China. However, the model has had mixed results in western China, especially in Xinjiang province. As this issue can shed light on the kinds of problems that China will face in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the report explores the situation in Xinjiang by investigating how it is conducting its policy there. The report outlines this development, which brings the Root Cause model into question to some extent, thus identifying some of the challenges that China will face in trying to stabilize conflict-torn parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan 'the Chinese way'. Following these observations, the report takes a closer look at China's economic diplomacy in Afghanistan. The last section discusses China's increasing role in mediating between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Taliban. Whether the Chinese approach to the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan proves to be a sustainable way of providing stability and achieving results is the question addressed in the report's conclusion.

FOREWORD

The research for this report has been conducted under the aegis of the Defense and Security Studies research pillar of the Danish Institute for International Studies. The report is based on written sources, including Chinese government papers, reports, statistics and scholarly work, together with interviews conducted during study trips to China in August 2018 and Islamabad in October 2018. We would like to thank all those who have willingly shared their views on the topic with us. The main points of the report have been presented as guest lectures at the Department for Defense and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, and at a conference co-organized by the Royal Danish Defense Academy at the National Defense University, Islamabad, both in October 2018. Earlier stages of the report have been discussed at a research workshop of the Asia group at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs in February 2018 and at a public seminar organized by the same institute in Stockholm in May 2018. Although we are exclusively responsible for the views and conclusions expressed in this report, we are grateful for the responses and input we received at these events in Islamabad and Stockholm, as well as the constructive comments of the report's reviewer.

The report explores China's engagement in Pakistan and Afghanistan as part of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and discusses the prospects of it contributing to regional stability through development. The BRI has become a big umbrella for Chinese trade and overseas investment activities, or what one might call a global China. The BRI is primarily an economic policy initiative aimed at helping Chinese companies to grow through overseas projects and markets and to obtain strategic assets, including natural resources and technology. As a foreign-policy initiative, Beijing hopes that creating closer economic ties through the BRI will strengthen diplomatic relations between China and the countries along these routes and thus

promote a multi-polar world order. As Denmark increasingly strengthens its diplomatic and economic ties with China, and as Danish companies increasingly regard the BRI as providing economic opportunities both for themselves and China and for third countries, the findings in the report are of interest to Denmark in analysing in detail the implementation of various aspects of the BRI in a concrete setting.

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The report also investigates how China seeks to provide stability and security along the routes mapped out by the BRI, as well as domestically in China's Xinjiang province. It points out that China has developed two different counterterrorism strategies: a domestic one framed around the discourse of the so-called 'global war on terror', despite its own inclination to justify its alleged infringements of human rights; and a foreign one that seeks to use development as a fundamental tool to provide stability, with multilateral regional cooperation and negotiation as the main diplomatic channels. As Denmark has been and still is an active partner in the USA's counterterrorism strategy and an international promoter of human rights, including in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other underdeveloped, conflict-afflicted regions, the findings of the report will be of interest to Danish foreign and security policy, as China is increasingly becoming an important actor in development, counterterrorism and stabilization projects in regions where Denmark operates.

INTRODUCTION

This report explores China's westward policy by analysing the opportunities and obstacles related to its flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as well as discussing the potential of China's approach to stabilizing the region through development. One aspect of the philosophy behind the CPEC and its vast investment in developing infrastructure projects is that lifting people out of poverty, giving them better opportunities for jobs and incomes and hence improving their living conditions will reduce the attractions of violent extremism and the inclination to indulge in it, thereby increasing stability. This so-called 'Root Cause model', which prioritizes development as the path to stability, draws on China's experience of successfully lifting more than 600 million of its own citizens out of poverty due to the reform policy that has rapidly changed China in the past forty years, especially in the big cities of eastern China. However, the model has had mixed results in western China, especially in Xinjiang province. As this issue can shed some light on the kinds of problems China will face in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the report explores the situation in Xinjiang by investigating how China is conducting its policy there. Acts of terrorism related to the tensions in Xinjiang have been met with an even tougher and more comprehensive counterterrorism strategy on the part of China, leading to the first national counterterrorism legislation in 2015. The report outlines this development, which brings the Root Cause model into question to some extent, thus identifying some of the challenges that China will face in trying to stabilize conflict-torn areas in Pakistan and Afghanistan 'the Chinese way'.

Following these observations, the report takes a closer look at China's economic diplomacy in Afghanistan. The last section of the report discusses China's increasing role in mediating processes between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Taliban. It is obvious that a negotiated political solution between the different actors, states as

well as non-states, is the only way forward in easing tensions and creating stability. However, it is also obvious that for more than a decade the USA has been trying to facilitate negotiations in the region without achieving any results, which the US blames on Pakistan, with its policy of double standards. Whether the Chinese approach to the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan is better able to navigate these troubled waters and achieve results is a question addressed by the report in the concluding section.

BACKGROUND: CHINA'S 'MANIFEST DESTINY'

During the last decade of the Cold War, China was preoccupied with developing the eastern part and shores of this vast country and expanding outwards towards Southeast Asia. In the west, especially in the troubled Xinjiang province, instead China prioritized securing its borders with the Soviet empire and Afghanistan, integrating the province into a unified Chinese republic, often with tough measures and mixed results, and developing good relations with Pakistan. With the break-up of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the so-called 'Stans', of which three – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, together with Afghanistan and Pakistan – border China, Beijing and Turkey both became aware of Central Asia as a promising region for economic expansion and expanding trade. For China, Central Asia was also important in securing its source of energy, increasingly vital if China's impressive economic growth were to be sustained in the future. Since then, China has increasingly developed the ambition to expand its sphere of economic interest into Central Asia. As China continues its development policy in the east as well as in Africa, going west has today become its 'manifest destiny', as it was for America in the nineteenth century.

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The route to Central Asia begins in Xinjiang and continues through Pakistan and to a certain extent Afghanistan. All three areas are underdeveloped and suffer from conflicts related to transnational jihadism and insurgencies. By launching its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China

seeks to expand its economic interests into Pakistan and Afghanistan, develop Xinjiang and promote stability in the region. Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan have been nicknamed 'The Graveyard of Empires', a reference to the fate of the British Empire in the 'Great Game' of the nineteenth century with Russia, the Soviet empire's own defeat in the Afghan civil war in the 1980s and the current so-called 'long war' that the USA has been fighting against transnational jihadists since 9/11 without achieving a conclusive result. After more than seventeen years of the USA's 'war on terror', Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan are still tormented by conflicts, insurgencies, terrorism and extremism. They also host various networks of jihadists, including the Taliban, the Haqqani network, al-Qaida and Islamic State, all of which have been able to attract foreign fighters, including Uyghurs from Xinjiang.¹ In particular, the links between the Uyghur militants in Xinjiang and the many jihadist networks in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other parts of Central Asia and the Middle East are of serious concern to China.

It is obvious that the Chinese approach to intervening in the conflicts in Pakistan and Afghanistan is very different from the US approach, but given the troubled history of the region, it is less obvious whether China will succeed with its initiative or whether, like so many empires before it, it will be dragged into endless conflicts.

By investing in large infrastructure projects and expanding military cooperation, including in counterterrorism in Pakistan, as well as conducting economic diplomacy in Afghanistan, China's aims are twofold: connecting the mainland of China with Central Asia to facilitate trade, thus shortening energy transport routes, and promoting stability in the entire region. It is obvious that the Chinese approach to intervening in the conflicts in Pakistan and Afghanistan is very different from the US approach, but given the troubled history of the region, it is less obvious whether China will succeed with its initiative or whether, like so many empires before it, it will be dragged into endless conflicts.

After Central Asia opened as a market following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it took more than two decades for China to initiate a strategy to connect its mainland to this new market. Two obstacles have put a brake on this process: the Uyghur problem in Xinjiang, and the war in Afghanistan.

OBSTACLES: TURKEY'S FLIRTATION WITH UYGHUR SEPARATISTS AND THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

It is fair to say that China's attraction to Central Asia has a long history. In the years after the Cold War, China succeeded in establishing good relations with all the states in Central Asia. The presence of Uyghur groups, which China wanted these states to control tightly, and the proxy war between the USA and USSR in Afghanistan, which China preferred not to become involved in, did put a brake on its westward advance. Also, as Turkey and China competed to secure good ties with Central Asia, in order to frustrate China's diplomacy in the region Turkey cultivated the Uyghurs to some extent by developing close relations with the Chinese Uyghurs in Xinjiang, whose language is a Turkish dialect, as well as with the often militant and separatist Uyghur diasporas in the new Stans. However, during the first decade of the new millennium tensions between Turkey and China were relaxed due to a more pragmatic policy on the part of Turkey, which also undertook to abstain from any interference in Xinjiang. China and Turkey have developed a strategic partnership that seems to be able to overcome the minor crises that erupt from time to time, such as the demonstrations in Istanbul demanding Turkey take steps against China after the 2009 Uyghur riots in Urumqi, the Xinjiang capital, in 2009, and again in 2015, when China placed restrictions on practicing Islam in Xinjiang. In both cases, Turkey and China quickly resumed their cooperation.

The war in Afghanistan initiated by the USA in October 2001 as a response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks opened two new clusters of problems for China's westward strategy: the presence of US troops right on the border with China, and new possibilities for militant Uyghur groups with affiliations to al-Qaida and Taliban to migrate between Xinjiang, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

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While US combat troops were engaged in fighting the jihadists – the common enemy of the US and China, this of course being to China's advantage – Beijing also feared that the Americans, having arrived in Afghanistan, would stay there forever. More specifically, China was worried that the USA would establish permanent military bases just beyond China's western border and thus in practice encircle China with its allies and troops. For this reason, China did not involve itself in the war in Afghanistan and in particular abstained from helping the US establish itself successfully there. Another reason for China to keep out of the conflict in Afghanistan was to avoid being seen as an active supporter of one of the sides in the conflict. In addition, China did not want to see the Taliban recapture control in Afghanistan, nor did it want the US to be militarily successful in its campaign and thus acquire a strong ally in Kabul.

The presence of transnational jihadists in Pakistan and the increasing risk of the 'Islamization' of Pakistan that involves the risk of serious internal conflicts and fragmentation, with the consequence of further destabilization in the region, also makes it extremely important for China to assist Pakistan in countering jihadism.

Thus, for years China kept out of direct involvement in the conflict in Afghanistan, limiting itself to maintaining the security of its borders to avoid spill-over effects from Afghanistan and Pakistan into Xinjiang. The negative aspect of this approach was that it made it almost impossible to develop Xinjiang as a gateway for China into Central Asia. When, in his West Point speech on the new Afghanistan strategy on 1 December 2009, President Barack Obama announced both a surge in American combat troops, which would raise their numbers to 100,000, and at the same time an *exit strategy for the US* starting in 2011, China changed its interpretation of the situation in Afghanistan.² Obama's point that the surge should make it possible for the US to exit the battlefield held out both fears and promises for China. On the one hand, China naturally welcomed the removal of US troops, but on the other hand it was genuinely worried that the US would exit before 'the job was done'. That would leave a war-torn Afghanistan as a nest of transnational jihadist networks to be handled by regional powers including China, thereby increasing the risks of a spill-over of militancy into Xinjiang. At that point, China started to reconsider its position and develop a strategy that would involve it much more in trying to *stabilize* Afghanistan and the troubled areas of Pakistan bordering Xinjiang. Increasing stability in South Asia would kill two birds with one stone: cementing development

and control in Xinjiang would also turn it into the gateway to Chinese economic and political expansion into Central Asia.

In developing transportation routes to Central Asia, expanding economic activities westward and stabilizing the troubled region comprising the tribal Pakistani areas, Xinjiang and Afghanistan, Pakistan is the obvious partner for China. For decades, Pakistan has been the chosen partner for China in countering India as a regional rival and ally of the USA. Even if China avoids taking sides in the complicated territorial disputes between India and Pakistan, for Beijing Pakistan is the key to building stability in the region and fighting jihadism and terrorism. The presence of transnational jihadists in Pakistan and the increasing risk of the 'Islamization' of Pakistan that involves the risk of serious internal conflicts and fragmentation, with the consequence of further destabilization in the region, also makes it extremely important for China to assist Pakistan in countering jihadism. Besides coordinating their counterterrorism strategies, investing in development in Pakistan is therefore crucial for China.³

PAKISTAN AND THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), otherwise known as the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road Initiative, is Chinese President Xi Jinping's signature foreign and foreign economic policy. Proposed by Xi in September 2015 in Kazakhstan, it was intended to revive the ancient Silk Road as a way of connecting China and Europe through trade and investment, but most importantly through infrastructure. It has been called the Chinese Marshall Plan,⁴ as it was mainly envisaged as developing the Eurasian continent, but the BRI's geography has since expanded to include Southeast Asia, North Africa and Latin America. In short, it has become a big umbrella to cover Chinese trade and overseas investment activities.

The BRI is first and foremost an economic policy initiative aimed at helping Chinese companies to grow through overseas projects and markets and obtain strategic assets, including natural resources and technology. As a foreign policy initiative, Beijing hopes that closer economic ties through BRI will strengthen diplomatic relations between China and the countries along these routes, as well as promoting a multi-polar world order.

China attaches more strategic meaning to certain parts of the BRI than to others. The BRI consists of six economic corridors that function as the main trunks of the Belt and Road and that branch out to connect various regions and sub-regions.⁵ Notably, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor are projected not only to provide China with alternative transportation routes and sources of energy, but also to contribute to regional development and stability. The latter is intended to connect China with the Middle

Map 2: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor



East via Central Asia, which would provide China with oil and gas from both regions via pipelines and road transportation. After the civil war in Afghanistan in 1996 and the 9/11 terrorist attack in 2001, China began to regard the Middle East as a 'strategic extension' relevant to the security of the Muslim regions of western China. Given its energy interests in the Middle East and North Africa, China defined the Middle East as belonging to its 'Greater Neighbouring Areas'.⁶

According to its official definition, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a 3,000-kilometer network of roads, railways and pipelines intended to transport oil and gas from southern Pakistan's port of Gwadar to the city of Kashgar in north-west China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. Under the CPEC agreements, China and Pakistan will also cooperate on gas, coal and solar energy projects to provide 16,400 megawatts of electricity, roughly doubling Pakistan's capacity.⁷ It was proposed by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in May 2015, before Xi introduced the Belt and Road Initiative in September that year. It was then incorporated into the BRI and named as one of its flagship projects. Under the CPEC, China pledged to invest \$46 billion in Pakistan (later increased to \$63 billion and still evolving). It serves two purposes: one is to promote the development and stability of China's All-weather Strategic Cooperative Partner, Pakistan; the other is for China to gain access to the Indian Ocean through a land route in Pakistan that ends at the port of Gwadar. Gwadar, which lies about 400 km from the Strait of Hormuz, would reduce China's routes to bring oil and gas from Africa and the Middle East by thousands of kilometres, 'making Gwadar a potentially vital link in China's supply chain'.⁸ The Gwadar port is therefore a crucial junction between the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

Both the Central-West Asia and CPEC corridors would reduce China's 'Malacca Dilemma', a term coined by former Chinese president Hu Jintao in 2003 to refer to the situation whereby China relies for its marine transportation on the Malacca Strait, which could be blocked by rival (Indian or American) navies in the event of a conflict.⁹ The planned corridors are therefore crucial to China's global trade and strategic interests, a necessary component of Xi Jinping's China Dream of rejuvenating the Chinese nation.

According to an ancient Chinese saying, people think of change when they are poor (*qiong ze si bian*).

China's basic logic behind the focus on infrastructure construction in unstable regions like Pakistan, Central Asia and Middle East is that infrastructure improves economic development, which in turn brings political stability and security. It is China's belief that the fundamental cause underlying the domestic and interstate conflicts in these regions is the low level of economic development. According to an ancient Chinese saying, people think of change when they are poor (*qiong ze si bian*).¹⁰ China's answer to combating terrorism and resolving regional conflicts therefore rests on economic development, an area in which China has a success story to tell. China believes this to be a more fundamental and longer term solution to conflicts than changing governments or external military interventions, just as Chinese medicine is a longer term treatment of the roots of illness than Western medicine, which deals with symptoms.¹¹ Since the Libya crisis in 2011, China has become active in pursuing economic diplomacy to protect its commercial interests in conflict zones and in using economic tools to support a peace process. The same logic is applied domestically: economic development has been the focus of the Chinese government's policy for its ethnic minority regions, including Tibet and Xinjiang, although the results in terms of resolving ethnic tensions have so far been mixed, as will be discussed later.

THE IMPACT OF CPEC, AND WESTERN WORRIES ABOUT A 'DEBT TRAP'

Because it is important for China to help Afghanistan and Pakistan with their socio-economic development through the BRI, to what extent has the CPEC contributed to local development? In March 2018, the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) of Pakistan and the Pakistan-China Institute (PCI) published a report, *The economic benefits of the modern silk road: the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)*. The report says that the CPEC has provided 60,000 jobs to Pakistanis since 2015 and that it would create over 800,000 new jobs in different sectors up to 2030. Moreover, the 21 energy projects planned under the CPEC will double Pakistan's current capacity of electricity production by producing 16,400 megawatts of electricity after their completion.¹² According to Pakistan's foreign minister, speaking at the launch of the report, the CPEC has reduced 13-14 hours a day of load shedding in 2013 to zero in 70% of the country. The CPEC is also said to be one reason behind Pakistan's 5.3% growth in GDP in 2017, the highest in the last ten years, according to a Pakistani senator and chairman of the Pakistan-China Institute.¹³

The report was published in the context of widespread criticism in the Western and Indian media, as well as in some Pakistani media, of China imposing a 'debt trap' on Pakistan through the CPEC.¹⁴ The concern is that Pakistan's trade deficit with China

has been rising, and Pakistan has no means to repay its \$63 billion debt to China. Even servicing the loans would be a heavy burden for Pakistan, on top of ten years of tax concessions for Chinese companies, a 43-year lease of the Gwadar port to Chinese companies until 2059 with 91% of its revenue going to China, and cheap Chinese imports.¹⁵ In November 2017, Pakistan cancelled a \$14 billion agreement to build the Diamer-Bhasha hydropower dam with China because it could not accept the strict conditions attached to Chinese funding, saying it was not doable and against Pakistan's interests.¹⁶ A Pakistani high official responsible for commerce, textiles, industry and investment, Abdul Razak Dawood, told the *Financial Times* that Pakistani companies had been put in a 'disadvantaged' position, and that 'the previous government did a bad job negotiating with China on CPEC – they didn't do their homework correctly and didn't negotiate correctly so they gave away a lot'.¹⁷ The debt trap concern for Pakistan arose at a time of similar concerns in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and other developing countries. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson and also Foreign Minister Wang Yi have recently rejected this view as a 'myth' and a plot to undermine China's relations with Pakistan.¹⁸

The crucial issue in Pakistan, however, is not whether Pakistan owes too much debt to China. If China decides to continue to bankroll its projects in Pakistan for strategic purposes, it will not let either its projects or Pakistan itself go bankrupt. It can be argued that the economic benefits of many projects will be realized in the long term and that the welfare benefits for local populations cannot be calculated using profit figures. Besides, China's political influence over Pakistan has already grown through aid, trade, investment and military assistance, with or without the debt.

From Beijing's perspective, the purpose of the CPEC is to promote economic development, which in turn enhances security in Pakistan and South Asia more generally. Such intentions have to some extent backfired, as the economic projects have encountered or created certain political and security problems.

From Beijing's perspective, the purpose of the CPEC is to promote economic development, which in turn enhances security in Pakistan and South Asia more generally. Such intentions have to some extent backfired, as the economic projects have encountered or created certain political and security problems. China is caught in the competition between two major politico-business factions in Pakistan.¹⁹ Moreover, the CPEC passes through Pakistan's northern areas, which India claims

are part of the disputed Jammu and Kashmir territory. The Diamer-Bhasha dam is on the Indus River in the region of Gilgit-Baltistan and borders the Pakistan-occupied part of the disputed territory of Kashmir. Apart from disputed territories, India is also concerned about China's expanding activities and presence in the Indian Ocean, as well as China's business and financing model in Pakistan. India's objections have also contributed to the difficulties Pakistan has experienced in raising money from international institutions for projects in that region. The US has joined India in opposing the CPEC on these grounds and has assigned India a greater role in Afghanistan in its South Asia Strategy paper published in 2017, thus further complicating the situation.²⁰

The most crucial issue, judging from China's diplomatic objectives, is that the CPEC has caused or exacerbated resentment among some regions and ethnic groups, which feel marginalized and exploited by the process of economic development because of the collaboration between the Chinese and Pakistani governments. In Baluchistan province, where the CPEC's most important project, the Gwadar port, is located, Baluch insurgents have been fighting for independence since Pakistan's inception in 1947. The province constitutes 44% of Pakistan's territory, is rich in natural resources like precious metals, mineral resources and natural gas, and has several deep coastal sites like Gwadar, Jiwani and Pasni. However, the continued conditions of poverty and deprivation in the province have been a main cause of these insurgencies. The Baluch rebels had hoped that the province and the Baluch people would be able to reap the economic benefits of the CPEC. In November 2015, Brahamdagh Bugti, leader of the Baluchistan Republican Party (BRP) – a separatist party – expressed a wish for reconciliation with the Pakistani state in a statement.²¹ The Chinese ambassador to Pakistan, Sun Weidong, also said that Baluchistan would be the 'major beneficiary' of the CPEC, which would 'bring an end to unemployment' in the province.²² However, the Baluch later felt that the distribution of the CPEC's benefits repeated a long-standing pattern whereby the people of Baluchistan were not allowed to benefit from the province's own assets.²³ They protested against the construction of the Gwadar port, which would bring thousands of Punjabi and Chinese workers into the province and would involve selling Baluch land to foreigners. This has forced China to hold talks directly with the separatists to protect its infrastructure projects.²⁴

AFGHANISTAN AND CHINA'S NEW APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

GETTING INVOLVED

Given China's widespread commercial activities around the world and its significant economic and military capabilities, it has become difficult for it to stick to its old diplomatic principle of keeping a low profile and not interfering in the political affairs of other countries. It can no longer do so, as the safety of its expanding overseas assets and citizens is increasingly threatened by local political disturbances, and Beijing is paying great attention to its international reputation in order to build an image of itself as a responsible great power. It was during the Darfur crisis in Sudan that China, under immense international pressure, made a clear policy shift from initial non-interference to one that pressed the incumbent government to end the humanitarian crisis and cooperate with the international community. As noted in an earlier study of China's foreign policy in the Gulf, the crises in Sudan and Libya made China realize the necessity of intervening in local conflicts to protect its citizens and businesses abroad. China has since played an active and pragmatic role in conflict regions through mediation, supporting UN sanctions, contributing to UN peace-keeping missions and using security arrangements to protect its own commercial interests.²⁵

BECOMING ACTIVE IN AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan, China used to leave the struggle over security to the US and its NATO allies while itself quietly exploring economic opportunities in the country, including its natural resources like copper, iron, gold, uranium and precious gems. That strategy has turned out to be unsustainable for three reasons.


First, western countries are planning to withdraw from Afghanistan and can no longer promise a secure environment in the country. Under Obama the US administration started withdrawing from Afghanistan in 2011. The following year, China's top security official, Zhou Yongkang, visited Kabul – the first high-level trip to Afghanistan by a senior Chinese leader in nearly half a century – and met with Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The agenda was security cooperation in fighting religious extremism and terrorism based on a strategic cooperation agreement that Karzai signed with Chinese President Hu Jintao in June 2012 on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting, where Afghanistan was granted observer status.²⁶

Secondly, China has been criticized for free-riding on the US security umbrella in its own commercial interests. In an influential op-ed in *New York Times* in 2009, Robert D. Kaplan took issue with the scenario in Afghanistan, claiming that, 'while America is sacrificing its blood and treasure, the Chinese will reap the benefits.' Apparently American troops were providing security for a Chinese state-owned company to exploit the Aynak copper reserves, which were worth tens of billions of dollars. At a strategic level, Kaplan compares the US to empires like that of ancient Rome and nineteenth-century Britain 'struggling in a far-off corner of the world to exact revenge, to put down the fires of rebellion, and to restore civilized order. Meanwhile, other rising and resurgent powers wait patiently in the wings, free-riding on the public good we offer.'²⁷ The picture of a declining empire stretching itself thin to provide public goods while an emerging empire indulges in free-riding to aggrandize itself is not appetizing to American or other western audiences. The west is still ambivalent about the enhanced Chinese military presence overseas: while China has been criticized for ignoring domestic human rights abuses in some of its partner countries, its increased overseas military activities unnerve western defence headquarters.

Thirdly, if left unattended, Afghanistan may turn into a safe haven for Xinjiang Uyghur militants and become a passage through which they can travel to the Middle East to join ISIS or al-Qaeda before possibly returning to China to conduct a jihadist war or seek independence. The border between Afghanistan and China is only 76 kilometres long, but the adjacent Afghan Wakhan corridor is surrounded by Tajikistan, Pakistan, China and India, making it a strategic chokepoint between these states, though also historically a caravan route from west to east. Ethnic groups in the region share ties with Xinjiang Uyghurs, and the geography of the highlands makes it very difficult for the various authorities to control. Especially in recent years, the hideouts of rebel militants seem to have moved from Pakistan to Afghanistan, when in the late 1990s Pakistan started to take action against militant groups carrying out anti-Chinese activities.²⁸ In 2014, in a trip to Kabul, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that

'the peace and stability of this country has an impact on the security of western China, and more importantly, it affects the tranquillity and development of the entire region'.²⁹ Nonetheless, since the 2009 ethnic riots in Xinjiang, there has been a steady exodus of Uyghurs to Turkey and Southeast Asia, and some of them have joined al-Qaeda and Taliban, which use Afghanistan-Pakistan tribal areas as a safe haven. As will be discussed later, the Uyghur militant organization, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (renamed the Turkistan Islamic Party, or TIP, in 2006), which is linked to al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Islamic State, has overrun several remote Afghan military outposts in mountainous areas and is believed to be based in northern tribal areas along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

For these reasons, China is increasingly having to provide security for its commercial and strategic interests in and surrounding Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular have become crucial but fragile pieces in China's grand BRI enterprise. Because of deepening economic relations through the BRI, China's political and security role in its immediate neighbourhood has become more important and complex. Judging from its enhanced efforts to mediate peace between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and between the Afghan government and Taliban rebels, Beijing has clearly realized the larger role it must play in the region. However, it is still choosing not to take sides and is reluctant to take over the security burden.



China is increasingly having to provide security for its commercial and strategic interests in and surrounding Afghanistan.

China's activities include providing economic assistance to Afghanistan, supporting and initiating regional institutions, and mediating between the Afghan government in Kabul and Taliban militants. Next the report will provide an overview of China's economic assistance to Afghanistan before going on to discuss the potential of China's Root Cause model to resolve regional and ethnic conflicts. We will return to China's other peace efforts later, which are partly a result of its deepening economic and security ties with the region.

PROVIDING ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN

Security conditions in Afghanistan and Pakistan are affecting the success of the BRI, though China still hopes that economic development will improve security in the region. The Chinese government believes that the key to ameliorating the ethnic

tensions in Xinjiang is economic development through both domestic investment and international trade. Likewise, China believes that the root problem of Afghanistan's instability lies in its low level of social economic development, and that only development can fundamentally lead to peace.³⁰

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In November 2015, during Chinese vice-president Li Yuanchao's visit to Kabul, one of the central topics of discussion was how to develop Afghanistan's role in the BRI. Li Yuanchao made it clear that China would not seek to fill the void left by the withdrawal of most foreign troops from Afghanistan at the end of 2014, but he pledged infrastructure and security support for Afghanistan.³¹ This was followed by Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou's visit to Kabul in 2016, when he welcomed Afghanistan into the BRI.³² Soon afterwards, a Chinese company, the Xinjiang Beixin Road and Bridge Group, won a contract from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to rehabilitate a part of the road from Kabul to Jalalabad, although it has encountered difficulties because of the worsening local security situation.³³

Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have invested in two major mining projects in Afghanistan: the Mes Aynak copper mine in Logar province, forty kilometres southeast of Kabul, run by the Metallurgical Corporation of China (MCC) and the Jiangxi Copper Corporation (JCCL); and the Amu Darya oil blocks in northwest Afghanistan, run by CNPC and an Afghan partner, Watan Oil & Gas.

The contract for the Mes Aynak copper mine was won by the MCC and JCCL in 2007 because of their cheap financing and inputs for production, as well as their promises to build infrastructure around the site. However, the project has since stalled, as the security situation around the mine has worsened over the years. Insurgents occasionally fire rockets on to the mining area from the vicinity of Oparon, a nearby village under Taliban control.³⁴ Given also the fall in copper prices on the global market, the Chinese consortium has been trying to renegotiate the contract, as well as backing away from providing some of the infrastructure promised earlier. The consortium apparently underestimated the security costs and overpromised infrastructure, and it has reportedly complained that it was pressured into undertaking the project by the Chinese government.³⁵ Moreover, the site is occupied by a 5000-year-old walled Buddhist city, and China's plan to extract copper from the area

has drawn sharp criticism from archaeologists, NGOs and local residents. The archaeological excavation has taken longer than the company expected, and corruption charges against the former general manager of the MCC in April 2017 further delayed the project.

The Amu Darya oil field project was Afghanistan's first big contract for oil exploration and development. It was awarded to CNPC in December 2011 with a 25-year contract.³⁶ CNPC's choice of partner, the Watan group, dismayed some local actors and power-brokers in the north and led to some project delays. The Watan group belongs to the powerful Popal family, linked to Afghanistan's founding fathers. The Popal family are also powerful in Pakistan, especially in the resource-rich Baluchistan province, a key part of the CPEC. Oil production began in 2012 but has stalled because of disagreements between CNPC and Uzbekistan over the exact conditions for the transportation of oil out of Afghanistan.

Although these two major projects have been stalled, China is currently Afghanistan's biggest foreign investor and third biggest trading partner. Over the past three years, China has provided \$70 million military aid to Afghanistan, as well as \$90 million development assistance with a focus on Badakhshan province.³⁷ China has helped build the Jumhoriate Hospital, the National Center for Science and Technology Education, and the Chinese Language Department Teaching Building and Guest House of Kabul University. When north-east Afghanistan was struck by earthquake in October 2015, China provided Afghanistan with emergency humanitarian relief supplies of ten million yuan (\$1.56 million) plus one million U.S. dollars in cash aid.³⁸

In December 2017, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi offered to extend the CPEC to Afghanistan during a meeting with his Pakistani and Afghan counterparts, which was officially agreed in September 2018. In international forums, China has linked the CPEC and BRI with Afghanistan's stability and security. In a clear sign of Chinese influence, UN Security Council resolutions have pointed out time and again that all parties should take advantage of the Belt and Road Initiative to promote stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and regional cooperation.

There have been reports that China is building a military base in the Wakhan corridor and helping Afghanistan to train a 'mountain brigade', as well as a report of the discreet presence of Chinese soldiers in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) of Tajikistan.³⁹ While China has denied the rumours about Chinese military personnel being sent into Afghan territory, it has officially confirmed that it is going to train Afghan soldiers in China in an effort to counter ISIS and al-Qaeda militants attempting to infiltrate Xinjiang.

THE ROOT CAUSE MODEL, SOCIAL ORDER AND TENSIONS IN XINJIANG

SOCIAL ORDER AND SOCIAL CONTROL

The analyses of the CPEC and China's economic diplomacy in Afghanistan demonstrate that development strategies with a focus on investments in large infrastructure projects are not in themselves enough to counter extremism, insurgency and violence in conflict zones. From a regional perspective, the close relationship with Pakistan forces China to balance its policy towards India and the US great power, which supports India's claims to disputed territory. To protect its interests and projects, China increasingly needs to expand its military aid and cooperation, including its counterterrorism (CT) operations with Afghanistan, and even more with Pakistan. As we have seen, negotiations with and between different insurgent groups, both locally and between themselves and the governments in Islamabad and Kabul, are necessary, which China both acknowledges and plays an active role in their being realized. Fighting the three evils in the eyes of China of terrorism, extremism and separatism thus obviously demands other tools and initiatives than investments in infrastructure. This indicates that something is missing in the Root Cause model as presented by the Chinese government, diplomats and researchers when they explain the Chinese strategy for countering the 'three evils'.

In order to examine the Root Cause model in detail, we will take a closer look at its implementation in the development of east China in the last forty years and how China has been introducing economic development in Xinjiang with the aim of integrating the Uyghur minority, and not just countering social unrest, separatism and terrorism. This will create a platform for a discussion of the chances and challenges of the Root Cause model achieving stability by way of how China is implementing it in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Root Cause model, which can be described as an 'all good things go together model', states that economic development will increase satisfaction among populations because it provides better opportunities for them to enhance their living conditions than the Western model of military intervention and democratization. The experience behind the model is the impressive development China has gone through in the last forty years, with more than 600 million of its own population having been lifted out of poverty and a large middle class created in Chinese society.⁴⁰ This emerging middle class enjoys a modern life-style, with education, jobs, consumerism and the resources to travel abroad, and the Chinese people have been provided with a well-developed infrastructure that both comprises the world's largest high-speed train network and access to advanced IT technology and social media. Apart from terrorism conducted by persons from Xinjiang, terrorism and political violence seem to be a relatively small problem outside that province. Life is good for the large Chinese middle classes and the elites, provided they refrain from criticizing the regime and its ultimate leader Xi Jinping, follow the laws and regulations of the state, and behave decently according to the morality laid down by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Then they become part of Chinese society as the state has envisioned it, namely as a harmonious social totality. For hundreds of millions of Chinese people, especially Han Chinese, this is the reality. All things being equal, it is an astonishing and impressive achievement on the part of China to have changed conditions for so many citizens from living in poverty in an underdeveloped environment to becoming part of a global consumer community enjoying the fruits of globalization. In the overflowing fancy cafés in the big cities, young people sip their macchiatos while chatting on WeChat, buying things or checking the news on their smart phones. At least on the surface Chinese society appears to be a well-functioning unity.

In order to examine the Root Cause model in detail, we will take a closer look at its implementation in the development of East China in the last forty years and how China has been introducing economic development in Xinjiang with the aim of integrating the Uyghur minority, and not just countering social unrest, separatism and terrorism.

This apparently harmonious social reality has not been created without paying what liberal westerners would see as a heavy price, namely censorship and surveillance. Massive social control and experimentation with what we could define as social engineering using a reward and punishment system (the Social Credit System)

makes it possible for both local authorities and the state to regulate social behaviour and counter activities that are interpreted as disturbing the social order.⁴¹

Controlling the stream of foreign information especially has been achieved by creating what has been nicknamed the 'Great Firewall of China'.

There is no doubt that China's innovative success in developing advanced IT technology, including features like face-screening in smartphones, is impressive, but the story behind this endeavour is also one of placing a high priority in being able to control information on the internet and regulating social behaviour through advanced surveillance of activities on social media. The background to this comprehensive social control is not counterterrorism but preventing and punishing fraud in business. When China turned into a market economy, it not only meant opening up new business opportunities but also attracting criminals to earn big money quickly through cheating and fraud, resulting in several scandals, including baby-food poisoning. The government's good performance in increasing living conditions for its population by providing jobs and welfare goods, sustaining economic growth rates, avoiding business scandals, and fighting crime and corruption seems to be the ultimate justification for the Communist Party and its leader. According to an interesting article by Dingxin Zhao, Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, a good performance on the part of the government and its leader both traditionally and currently – with Mao's regime as an exception – is the way to be granted legitimacy by the people, while a bad performance runs the risk of social unrest.⁴² Maintaining social order by means of a good performance and fighting crime, but also controlling the stream of information to avoid criticism of the government and to educate the people to behave according to the moral norms laid down for it, has been an important driver behind the innovation of IT technology, which has proved efficient in both detecting fraud and promoting good behaviour.⁴³ Controlling the stream of foreign information especially has been achieved by creating what has been nicknamed the 'Great Firewall of China'. This involves the banning of foreign search engines and social media apps and developing Chinese replacements that are at least as smart as Google, Facebook etc. but are controlled and monitored by the authorities – some even talk about China transforming the internet into a vast Chinese intranet.⁴⁴ Paired with the so-called Social Credit System, where people's activities are monitored through advanced and heavily controlled IT technology, good behaviour can be rewarded, while bad but not necessarily criminal

acts can be punished by awarding or deducting points. Surplus points lead to privileges, while low points become a form of punishment that denies individuals access to a whole range of social goods, like party membership, being able to obtain loans, access to specific schools etc.⁴⁵

Education in social behaviour is a very important tool of Chinese social engineering, creating a social order that is based on and regulates social behaviour in accordance with the moral rules laid down by the Chinese Communist Party.

Of course, this development of advanced social control and social engineering has sparked criticism both within China and from western states that accuse China of violating political and human rights. However, this is an issue we will not pursue here, confining ourselves instead to mentioning the development of advanced IT technology and social control in order to test the Root Cause model. First, the analysis clearly demonstrates that the creation of a large middle class and a highly controlled social order in which the three evils of terrorism, extremism and separatism have been almost entirely eliminated is not only the result of economic development and enormous investment in infrastructure, but also of a sophisticated system of social control. Secondly, education in social behaviour is a very important tool of Chinese social engineering, creating a social order that is based on and regulates social behaviour in accordance with the moral rules laid down by the Chinese Communist Party.

SOUTH ASIA IS NOT EAST CHINA FORTY YEARS AGO

Furthermore, it is very important to bear in mind that the 'departure point' for China's economic reforms and infrastructure investments is very different from the situation in Afghanistan, the tribal areas of Pakistan or for that matter in Xinjiang province itself. In the underdeveloped and poverty-stricken eastern China of forty years ago, it is fair to characterize its demographic structure as rather homogeneous and plagued neither by foreign military invasions competing over control of territory, nor internal conflicts and civil wars between different ethnic and religious groups. However, this is exactly the situation in Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan: all the way back to the internal conflicts in Afghanistan in the 1970s that led to the Soviet invasion and occupation of 1979, followed by the comprehensive interventions of

the USA, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and the Pakistani border areas have constantly been in war situations. In addition, this region is characterized by an extremely heterogeneous demography in respect of ethnicity, tribal relations and the presence of some of the world's most dangerous transnational jihad networks, including al-Qaida, Islamic State and the Taliban. It has therefore been the scene of foreign powers like the USA, India, Iran and Saudi Arabia intervening through proxies or the USA's direct military operations since 9/11, supported by allied states like Denmark, which, after an American request in the fall of 2017, again deployed combat troops in Afghanistan. In combatting al-Qaida and other groups, the US routinely conducts operations using armed drones as well as special forces operations in Pakistan's tribal areas. The borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan are a nest for cultivating all kinds of armed conflicts, including terrorism, as well as attracting foreign fighters from Central Asia and Xinjiang.

It is estimated that the Afghan government forces control only 60% of Afghanistan's territory, the other 40% being either contested or controlled by the insurgents.

As a response to the large-scale terrorism attacks in New York City and Washington DC on September 11, 2001, the US started the war in Afghanistan in October of the same year. After sixteen years of Americans fighting in Afghanistan, there is still no end to the war in sight. As the *Guardian* newspaper phrased it in a headline in May 2018, 'The US and Afghanistan: can't win the war, can't stop it, and can't leave'.⁴⁶ Despite the Americans deploying enormous human and military resources and implementing various counter-insurgency strategies, the situation in the country is not improving at all. In 2018 we witnessed some of the worst terror attacks in Kabul conducted by the Taliban, including one in January where the group used an ambulance packed with explosives to kill nearly a hundred people when it blew up in the capital. The same month another attack targeted a voter registration centre in Kabul killing sixty people signing up for the elections in October. It is estimated that the Afghan government forces control only 60% of Afghanistan's territory, the other 40% being either contested or controlled by the insurgents. Negotiations between President Ashraf Ghani, who in August offered a ceasefire that lasted three days, and the Taliban have so far led nowhere, and both fighting and terrorism continue.⁴⁷ Clearly, the regional situation is very different from the situation in eastern China forty years ago, and it will obviously pose serious challenges to China's policy in Pakistan and Afghanistan in implementing the Root Cause model.

Xinjiang is both a crossroads connecting China with Central Asia and a location where Uyghur groups are linking up with transnational jihadists, making stabilizing the situation here of the highest priority for China.

For decades, China has tried to stabilize the situation in Xinjiang, with its large population of Muslim Uyghurs. Here China has used both economic development and counterterrorism strategies. Xinjiang is both a crossroads connecting China with Central Asia and a location where Uyghur groups are linking up with transnational jihadists, making stabilizing the situation here of the highest priority for China. Examining the situation in Xinjiang and how China has dealt with it can therefore tell us something about kinds of problems and challenges China is likely to face in implementing its Root Cause model in areas that are much more demographically heterogeneous than was the case in eastern China. Therefore, we will now explore in greater detail how China's politics and strategy have developed and how they have affected the population of Xinjiang province.

XINJIANG AND THE UYGHURS

If the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), its official name since 1955, were a sovereign state, it would be the eighth biggest state in the world. Its territory is in the size of Iran, around 23 million people live there, and it is home to 46 different ethnic groups, the two largest being the Uyghur with 46% of the population and the Han Chinese with 40%. The rest consists of Hui (also Muslims), Tajiks, Kyrgyz, Mongols and others. The region has a long history and has been of interest to different empires since ancient times up to its annexation by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The PRC would object to the phrase 'annexation', as it claims that Xinjiang has been part of China since ancient times, or at least since the Qin dynasty (1644-1912), which officially made Xinjiang a Chinese province. Literally Xinjiang means 'new borderland', but it was more precisely understood by the Emperor of Qin as 'old land newly returned'. This clearly indicates the disputed status of the region, which is known by other names like 'Chinese Turkestan' or 'East Turkestan'. The latter term is a reference to the large group of almost eleven million Uyghurs whose language is a Turkish dialect. The Uyghurs have been known from ancient times as a conglomerate of Central Asian and Mongolian tribes that early fell under Chinese influence. Already by the tenth century, however, many Uyghurs had turned to Islam and become Muslims.

Since 1949 Uyghur nationalists having been working for and demanding independence from China and campaigning for the establishment of a sovereign East Turkestan State or a 'Uyghuristan'. In support of this they refer among other things to the fact that such a state has already existed twice: in 1933 a self-proclaimed state had a brief existence, and in 1944 the USSR backed the establishment of the so-called Second East Turkestan State. However, the Kuomintang defeated its army and took power over the region until the PRC took control of China in 1949 and incorporated Xinjiang into the Chinese People's Republic. From the 1950s until 2001, when the USA initiated the so-called 'global war on terror', political and nationalist Uyghur groups in Xinjiang and among the diaspora, especially in Turkey and the Central Asian states, have worked for the province's separation from China, sometimes violently. As in Tibet, China deals with such separatist activity through heavy-handed military and police operations. Because the Uyghur separatists operate in the Chinese borderlands with Afghanistan and Central Asia, China has been confronted with what it interprets as two major security problems, namely separatism and vulnerable border security, with the risk of separatists crossing back and forth over the border and with interference from foreign states and groups. These problems increased significantly during the civil war in Afghanistan and the USSR occupation of the 1980s, which, with the support of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the USA, boosted the growth of transnational jihadist networks and groups.⁴⁸ Following these events, political Islam and jihadism also became issues in Xinjiang because of the links between jihadists both within and outside the Chinese province. Even though jihadist groups in Xinjiang are small and probably quite marginalized, they have maintained a presence up to the rise of the Islamic State, which on several occasions has threatened China by claiming that Chinese Uyghurs were going to return home 'and shed blood like rivers'. In the lead up to the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008, Uyghur jihadists issued threats against the event, and in 2013, 2014 and 2015 they carried out terrorist acts in China.

Thus, there is no doubt that China faces a security problem in Xinjiang. However, there is a great deal of doubt whether it is dealing with this problem correctly and efficiently or whether its increasingly harsh measures are not in fact part of the problem rather than its solution.

Thus, there is no doubt that China faces a security problem in Xinjiang. However, there is a great deal of doubt whether it is dealing with this problem correctly and efficiently or whether its increasingly harsh measures are not in fact part of the

problem rather than its solution. Furthermore, China has recently received harsh criticism of its handling of the conflict with the Uighur minority. Thus, in August 2018 a UN Human Rights Panel published a very critical report accusing China of holding as many as a million ethnic Uyghurs in indoctrination or re-education camps, where they can be kept indefinitely, without due process. This critical UN report has attracted quite large and varied support from researchers, the media and groups like Human Rights Watch, though China has totally denied the accusations and rejected them as 'completely untrue'.⁴⁹ However, on 9 October 2018 the website of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress in Xinjiang published new regulations that 'allow local governments to set up institutions to provide people affected by extremist thoughts with vocational skills, training and psychological counselling', and it acknowledged the existence of an 'education transformation system' in the province.⁵⁰

When the *bingtuan* was established in 1955, approximately 10% of the population were Han: now they account for 40%.

Valid reports, including from Chinese public sources, document the fact that the situation in Xinjiang is very tense and that both the regional and state governments are increasing their security to an extremely high degree, involving extensive policing, surveillance and detentions. In addition, the authorities have introduced severe restrictions on the practice of Islam as reflected in dress, wearing beards, fasting during Ramadan, travelling, attending prayers in mosques, publishing on religious issues and limiting both the content and length of sermons. Many commentators and researchers worry that China's counterterrorism strategy in Xinjiang is not only targeting potential jihadists and terrorists but in fact the entire Uyghur population and that this situation has been increasing in recent years.

However, in order to integrate Xinjiang into the PRC, for decades China has been implementing the Root Cause model that it claims has worked in eastern China. As Shan Wei and Chen Gang summarize this process in a balanced study in *East Asian Policy* of the riots that erupted in Urumqi, Xinjiang's capital, in July 2009: 'While the government has spent billions of dollars in Xinjiang on infrastructure and welfare projects, and a huge amount of fiscal subsidies from Beijing have gone to the minority areas to support those projects, the Uyghurs tend not to perceive them as beneficial. They believe that those projects only bring about the influx of more Han people who will take up new job opportunities and become rich, while the wealth should belong to them (the Uyghurs) and not the incomers'.⁵¹

To secure the border and develop the region economically, China has set up a Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan). 'This state-run organization, usually referred to as the *bingtuan* (Chinese for military corps), controls an area twice the size of Taiwan, broken into numerous parts scattered around the province (...). Of their total population of more than 2.6 million people, 86% are ethnically Han Chinese'.⁵² The *bingtuan* was set up to develop economic zones in the region and build up industry, a large proportion of which involves the production of agricultural products, oil exploration, organizing the many village-like spots around the region and building housing complexes for incoming workers from eastern China. When the *bingtuan* was established in 1955, approximately 10% of the population were Han: now they account for 40%. Apart from members of the *bingtuan*, many other Han have migrated to Xinjiang, often to escape bad living conditions in eastern China, though others have been in prison or been forced by the government to migrate, all hoping that settling in Xinjiang will change their circumstances and improve their living conditions. Today, there are distinct inequalities between local Uyghurs and Han in Xinjiang, the latter on average being wealthier, more highly educated and having better jobs than the Uyghurs, who also complain that the traditional Uyghur handicrafts and trade have suffered severely from the state-run economic development and infrastructure projects. Instead of being more integrated into the majority Han society in China because of economic growth – and even though Xinjiang has experienced higher economic growth rates than the rest of China, even when the latter reached 10% – the Uyghurs complain of being marginalized and left out of the general increase in welfare in China. These complaints of increased inequalities between Han and Uyghurs in Xinjiang is confirmed by data provided by Shan Wei and Chen Gang, and in greater detail in a study published by two professors from the University of Regina, Canada, Yuchao Zhu and Dongyan Blachford, in *Asian Survey* in 2012. The latter conclude that the government of China 'needs to remedy social exclusion problems by implementing more specifically targeted redistributive policies and intervening more actively in the management of marketization through locally oriented employment policies in Xinjiang in Tibet'.⁵³ Hence, while improvements in welfare in Xinjiang are the experience of the Hans, the Uyghur see themselves as poorer, excluded and marginalized. What should have resulted in integration into the PRC has led to the opposite: the experience of becoming second-rate citizens and being refused access to China's tremendous welfare boom.

DIFFICULT INTEGRATION

As in eastern China, economic development is not the only tool to have been used in the attempt to construct a harmonious social order in Xinjiang: China has also invested in education projects and privileges granted to the Uyghurs in order to integrate them into the majority Han society. In education, minorities in China, including the Uyghurs, receive preferences in college admissions; in family planning, against the one-child policy applied to the Han, they could have more than one child, and in legal affairs too minority suspects receive lenient treatment.⁵⁴ The privileges are a kind of affirmative action designed for the level of socio-economic development of ethnic minorities and their religious-cultural backgrounds. However, in Xinjiang this affirmative strategy seems to have backfired. As Wei and Gang state, 'These preferential policies have failed to produce their intended results. Minorities are generally not happy with their treatment, and the Han complain about "reverse discrimination"'. Instead of creating harmonious coexistence between Uyghurs and Han, the preferential policy has raised tensions and animosity between the two groups.

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Moreover, the integration policies can be perceived as attempts to assimilate Uyghurs into the Han majority, as the pace of modernization and of the mingling of ethnic groups are prioritized over measures to protect ethnic identities. Religious freedom is written into China's constitution, and Uyghurs can maintain Islam as their religion, pray, learn the Uyghur language, go to mosques, eat halal food and assemble in a peaceful manner. However, in recent years, and especially since Chen Quanguo became Party Secretary of the XUAR in 2016, the suppression of religious freedom and use of extraordinary methods to counter extremism have greatly increased. Visible signs of ethnic identity such as dress and appearance, assembly and religious rituals are restricted, as is communication between Xinjiang and the outside world.

COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGIES IN CHINA: DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN DIFFERENCES

ADOPTING THE FRAMING OF THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

As pointed out by Sean R. Roberts, an expert in the history and sociology of the Uyghurs and Director of International Development Studies at George Washington University, these measures seem to have increased further because of China's adoption of the discourse of the 'global war on terror'. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, much of the global discourse on national resistance groups, insurgencies and separatists from around the globe changed from perceiving them as liberation movements to their simply being terrorists. This eased things for China, which immediately appropriated the rhetoric of the global war on terror, which from the Chinese perspective had two advantages. First, it relaxed the very tense relationship that had grown up between China and the George W. Bush administration, which had grown highly confrontational in the first six months of Bush's presidency, succeeding to China becoming a partner in the US War on Terror after 9/11. Secondly, it made it much easier for China to interpret the conflicts in Xinjiang on the international stage as problems related to terrorism. As pointed out by the Australian political scientist and researcher on Uyghur relations, Michael Clarke, the discourse of the global war on terror thus led to a change in the rhetoric and ideology of most of the resistance groups as they changed their policies of nationalist liberation and separatism and replaced them with a liberal rhetoric of a world order involving the recognition of human rights. Their clear aim was to be recognized as partners in the neo-liberal promotion of democracy, which in the West formed the ideological framing of the legitimization of the war on terror. Hence, the epicentre of the politically organized Uyghurs moved from Central Asia to Europe (Munich) and the USA (Washington, DC), where they portrayed themselves as a democratic opposition to

the Communist Republic of China.⁵⁵ However, as the West engaged itself more in the war on terror than in promoting the human rights of various minority groups in remote areas, China changed its narrative of the Uyghur problem to present it as one of terrorism embedded in the global war on terror.

As the West engaged itself more in the war on terror than in promoting the human rights of various minority groups in remote areas, China changed its narrative of the Uyghur problem to present it as one of terrorism embedded in the global war on terror.

In a well-documented article in *Critical Asian Studies* from 2008, Roberts argues that the Chinese labelling of the Uyghur population as a terrorist threat shortly after 9/11 in a statement by China's Permanent Mission at the UN has increased the general suspicion of the Uyghurs in majoritarian China.⁵⁶ Roberts stresses that this increasing general suspicion and the ever-increasing security measures imposed on the Uyghurs is an outcome of the Uyghurs being identified as a (potential) terrorist threat, even though this was not the state's aim.

Roberts' point is a general one related to the rhetoric surrounding the global war on terror, namely that by identifying a particular religious or ethnic identity, be it Kurdish, Muslim or Palestinian, as the main reason for people turning to terrorism, all those who belong to the group are treated as potential terrorists, thus alienating the whole group from other groups in the society, especially the majority population. Furthermore, this not only legitimizes the situation but also urge states to impose still stricter measures against the whole group, as we have witnessed in the cases of Turkey against the Kurds, Israel against the Palestinians, President Trump's immigration laws against Muslims, and now China's measures against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Hence, adopting the rhetoric of the global war on terror contains the risk of ending up in a cynical trap in which measures against an ethnic or religious group that has been labelled a terrorist threat could actually promote radicalization among marginalized individuals, thus inspiring them to commit acts of terrorism which, in the eyes of the majority and the state, simply confirms the terrorist label and triggers even harsher measures, in an ongoing spiral.⁵⁷ This trap or dilemma has characterized the global war on terror ever since the American President George W. Bush initiated it in 2001, resulting in a significant increase in terrorism globally, not the reverse. We will not pursue the many complexities of the global war on terror here but restrict

ourselves to concluding that so far it has led to greater levels of terrorism, violence and casualties and more conflicts and destabilization in regions like South Asia, the Middle East and Africa than managed to eradicate extremism and terrorism.⁵⁸

Adopting the rhetoric of the global war on terror contains the risk of ending up in a cynical trap.

While in conflict zones such as Pakistan and Afghanistan China has chosen a different approach than the US in its attempt to implement the BRI, promote stability and counter extremism, in Xinjiang the PRC has fallen in entirely with the rhetoric of the global war on terror in its counterterrorism strategy. As already mentioned, from the start China supported this US initiative and tried a few months after the 9/11 terror attacks to have Uyghur separatist groups placed on US lists of terror organizations. Referring to Roberts, China continued its campaign against separatism, but now presented it as a campaign against terrorism. China accused more than forty Uyghur organizations, some located in Xinjiang but most abroad, of having ties to al-Qaida and its now notorious leader, Osama Bin Laden. In its campaign against terrorism, China paid special attention to the Uyghur group known under the name of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). In fact, this is the name China coined for the group, which itself used other names, banning the use of ETIM in 2006 and declaring its name to be the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP). China, on the other hand, officially continued to use ETIM and never referred to TIP. By 2002 China had already succeeded in having ETIM designated a terror organization in the US and UN, 'subsequently subjecting it to international sanctions and essentially making it a legitimate enemy in GWOT'. Together with other jihadist groups in Xinjiang, TIP has for years cultivated ties with transnational jihadist networks, including al-Qaida and the Taliban, although it is not clear whether the Islamic State has also succeeded in establishing links to groups in Xinjiang.

Before the Olympic Games in Beijing, which took place in August 2008, China increased its security and declared that the greatest threat to safety in the capital was terrorism organized by Uyghur groups based in Xinjiang. The authorities claimed to have foiled several attacks, including an attempt by Uyghurs to hijack a plane in March 2008. In the months prior to the Games, Uyghurs were detained or expelled from Beijing, and it was almost impossible for them to rent hotel rooms during the Summer Games. This meant that most Uyghurs were prevented from taking part in the most spectacular event in the history of the PRC, designed to show the world and Chinese citizens alike how successful the government had been in increasing

the state's economic performance and levels of welfare. Public announcements of the foiled attacks, as well as statements that the Uyghurs posed a serious terrorist threat, naturally raised the fears and suspicions of the Han Chinese towards the Uyghurs. These fears and suspicions increased further when in July 2008 TIP published a frightening video and announced bomb threats against the Olympic Games as revenge for the PRC's treatment of the Uyghurs.

The year after, in July 2009, social unrest turned into large-scale riots in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang. Demonstrations related to some minor clashes between Han Chinese and Uyghurs in Guangdong province erupted into riots, and clashes with police left 184 dead. According to the Chinese government, most of these victims were Han Chinese. Although these events were probably linked to social problems boosted by the generally increased tensions between the Han and Uyghurs, as Shan Wei and Chen Gang pointed out, some media outlets in China portrayed them as 'China's 9/11', a clear reference to the terrorist threat that Xinjiang's Uyghurs allegedly posed to China. The reaction of the authorities was to increase security further, as XUAR officials stated a year later in 2010: '40,000 high-definition surveillance cameras with riot-proof protective shells had been installed throughout the region'.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the increased security measures, which target all civilian Uyghurs in Xinjiang, have not stopped social unrest, violence and terrorism but have probably led to a vicious circle where suppression sparks radicalization, which leads to yet tighter security, repression and surveillance. The terror attacks that tormented China in the years that followed clearly indicate this. In 2013 in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, five people were killed by a fiery car blaze; in 2014 in Urumqi an attack with cars and explosives killed 43; and in 2015 in Aksu, Xinjiang, fifty were killed by attackers with knives. Minor attacks often using knives or cars have taken place, as well as clashes between the security forces and alleged terrorist suspects.

The Chinese response to the jihadist threat so far has been new counterterrorism legislation passed in December 2015 – the first Counterterrorism Act in China – and the State Security Law passed in July 2017 (not only focused on terrorism), supplemented by various national and local-level regulations, security measures etc.⁶⁰ The advanced IT technology China has developed to enforce social order is being exploited by counterterrorism strategies, coupled with a whole range of electronic surveillance equipment, including technics placed in smartphones to track faces. In Xinjiang all this is supplemented by agents reporting on activities among the Uyghurs, including their private lives, in mosques and elsewhere, where many checkpoints have been set up. Responsibility for implementing this compact surveillance network is Xinjiang's Communist Party secretary, who since August 2016 has been Chen Quanguo. Before arriving in Xinjiang, he was responsible for

security in Tibet. According to Chen, the XUAR implements a 'grid-style management system' which enables security officials to watch activities in a defined area in urban communities segmented into geometric zones, of which there are 949 in Urumqi alone.⁶¹ Many commentators, researchers and human rights organizations claim that Xinjiang today is a security state,⁶² and Roberts even describes the surveillance network as a panopticon, referring to an idea of the French philosopher Michel Foucault.⁶³

COUNTERTERRORISM AT HOME AND ABROAD

Whether these counterterrorism strategies will eliminate terrorism or will rather prepare the ground for more radicalization and terrorism is an open question. While the Chinese government can argue that no Uyghur terrorist actions have occurred since the implementation of its counterterrorism legislation, and while the many counterterrorism strategies indicate that China's approach is working, many commentators and researchers worry that the policy will backfire. For example, Wei and Gang argue that ultimately surveillance and repression are not sustainable. Instead, they argue that what they call the Singapore model, in which ethnic and religious groups are integrated with respect for and tolerance of their specific identities, is a more sustainable approach than the current Chinese strategy.

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These arguments are, of course, important, but for the purposes of the present discussion of China's policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan and the so-called Root Cause model, it is clear that *'all good things do not go together'*. In eastern China, an expanded and advanced surveillance system coupled with the Social Credit System has supplemented economic growth in order to maintain the social order through control and social engineering. In Xinjiang economic growth rates have in fact been higher than in the rest of China, but as we have seen China has found it necessary to implement comprehensive and advanced counterterrorism strategies targeting the whole Uyghur population in order to counter violence and uphold the social order in Xinjiang. Hence, it should be obvious that economic investments in large infrastructure projects under the umbrella of the BRI will not in itself stabilize conflicts in war-torn regions and that a number of other strategies

need to be implemented if the aim is substantially to counter extremism and terrorism. In addition, for economic and political reasons China will not be able to make use of its own experiences in controlling the social order in either eastern China or with counterterrorism in Xinjiang in conflict zones in Afghanistan and Pakistan. To implement the social order the Chinese way beyond China's own borders or to enforce counterterrorism strategies like those used in Xinjiang would be so demanding of resources as to go beyond what China can afford. In addition, in implementing these strategies China would need to occupy the whole region, an option that is certainly *not* on the table.

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Thus, China is forced to adopt a different approach to counterterrorism, stabilization initiatives and conflict resolution outside its borders than those it is able to implement domestically. Certainly China's approach to the conflicts in Pakistan and Afghanistan is very different from the US approach, which has primarily consisted in military interventions, special forces operations, counter-insurgency strategies, regime change and, in a much more limited way, nation-building – the basic tools of the US-designed approach to the global war on terror. It is hard to know what China is doing on the ground in its cooperation on counterterrorism with Pakistan, but there are a few indicators, none of them reliable, that China has inserted combat troops into military operations on the ground in Afghanistan and Pakistan apart from training and exercises. Thus, what is interesting is that in its domestic counterterrorism strategies, China has closely embraced the rhetoric, discourse and methods of the global war on terror while following a very different path beyond its borders.

THE REGIONAL APPROACH TO COUNTERTERRORISM

Counterterrorism in China is in fact a rather new phenomenon. Before joining sides with the US in the global war on terror, China's approach was one of regional cooperation, the declared aim being to secure China's western borders with the Stans and Russia. In 1996 China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia formed a group known as the Shanghai Five. In 2001 Uzbekistan joined the group, which then changed its name to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Pakistan and India became full members in 2017, while Afghanistan is affiliated as an observer.

The charter of the SCO, published in 2002, talks about cooperation in a wide range of fields, including education, the economy and security. China has used the SCO as a forum to negotiate agreements to improve its border security and is still an active member using the SCO to deal with regional security in a multilateral setting. The fact that both India and Pakistan have become full members indicates that China prioritizes a regional, negotiated approach to security issues on its western border. A brief look at how China has dealt with security issues in Afghanistan and Pakistan indicates that China prefers a negotiated and mediated approach here too.

SUPPORTING AND INITIATING REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

China is involved in multiple regional and international institutions and forums for dealing with issues related to Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was during China's presidency of the SCO in 2012 that the Afghan contact group was created, leading to the country being granted observer status and to it becoming a full member in June 2017. According to an Indian diplomat, China and Russia were keen to bring India and Pakistan together in the SCO.⁶⁴

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When China hosted the 'Heart of Asia' or 'Istanbul Process' in 2014, it prepared for peace negotiations between President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan and the Taliban. Ashraf Ghani had just been elected president, and he made Beijing his first destination for an official visit.

China has also helped establish the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), made up of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the US and China, to focus on Afghanistan's security. The QCG process has stalled, however, as the US has not made any serious efforts to coordinate with the regional states.⁶⁵ There has only been a single meeting, in October 2017, which failed to produce a joint statement.

In a significant step, in 2016 China created another mechanism without the US, namely the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism (QCCM) for counter-terrorism bringing together China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. It

reflects China's desire to play a more active and more independent role in regional security in South Asia, especially a more independent role from that of the western forces in the region. The involvement of Tajikistan also signals China's wish to strengthen collaboration with Central Asian states on border security issues and to restrict the movement of Uyghur militants, especially along the Wakhan corridor. The QCCM was inaugurated in Xinjiang's provincial capital, Urumqi, in August 2016, although relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan deteriorated in 2015 because Afghanistan refused to sign an intelligence-sharing agreement with Pakistan.⁶⁶ At the QCCM's second meeting in Dushanbe, the Tajik capital, in August 2017, the four countries signed an 'Agreement on the Coordination Mechanism in Counter Terrorism by Afghanistan-China-Pakistan-Tajikistan Armed Forces' and a 'Protocol on a Counter-Terrorism Information Coordination Center by the Afghanistan-China-Pakistan-Tajikistan Armed Forces', based on their joint statement from the inaugural meeting in Urumqi. Compared with the QCG, the QCCM is making steady progress in security collaboration in the region.

It reflects China's desire to play a more active and more independent role in regional security in South Asia, especially a more independent role from that of the western forces in the region.

In December 2017, China hosted the first China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue. At the meeting, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi underlined two important developments: Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to improve relations, and the three countries agreed to cooperate on the CPEC with the aim of linking it to the Central-West Asia Corridor. Subsequently China continued to engage actively with both Afghanistan and Pakistan in security dialogues aimed at achieving a political settlement of the Afghanistan issue, strengthening regional cooperation and advancing counter-terrorism work. In May 2018 China hosted a strategic dialogue between China, Afghanistan and Pakistan, a counter-terrorism security consultation between the three countries, and a meeting of the 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization – Afghanistan Contact Group' in Beijing, all at deputy foreign minister level. Afghanistan's President Ghani attended the 18th meeting of the Council of the Heads of SCO Member States in Qingdao, China, in June 2018 as the head of an observer nation. At the trilateral talks, China and Pakistan also pushed the Afghan government to hold peace talks with the Taliban.

ENGAGING WITH BOTH KABUL AND THE TALIBAN

China used only to help mediate in US or Afghan-led peace talks in Afghanistan, but now it has become quite active in talking directly to both Kabul and the Taliban in order to facilitate the negotiations because of its security concerns over Xinjiang and because mines and other important CPEC projects in which China has invested are located in Taliban-controlled areas. China avoids the appearance of picking sides between Kabul and Taliban, instead engaging with all parties to try to achieve the best possible security for Chinese interests in the country.

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In 2014 China appointed Sun Yuxi, a former ambassador to Kabul, as its first Special Envoy for Afghanistan, and since then it has also played a more active role in brokering peace talks between Kabul and the Taliban. In October 2014, ahead of the newly elected president Mohammad Ashraf Ghani's visit to Beijing, Ghani agreed to meet the Taliban for peace talks. During his visit to Kabul in November 2015, Chinese Vice-president Li Yuanchao called on President Ghani, Chief Executive Officer Abdullah and former President Karzai to take the peace process forward. When Xi Jinping met with Ghani on the sidelines of the SCO meeting in Kazakhstan in June 2017, Xi offered China's constructive role in advancing Afghanistan's peaceful reconstruction and reconciliation process.

China's efforts seem to have achieved some progress in the dialogues between Kabul and the Taliban. China has reportedly made deeper inroads than its American counterparts, with discussions covering the presence of Xinjiang Uyghurs in Afghanistan.⁶⁷ In 2015, senior Taliban figures met representatives from the Afghan High Peace Council in Urumqi in Xinjiang. Chinese officials also met the Taliban several times in 2017 in a concerted effort to end the conflict in Afghanistan. In June 2018, when both the Taliban and the Afghan government announced ceasefires, Pakistani officials reportedly said that Pakistan and China had 'played a key role in brokering the ceasefire deal'.⁶⁸ Despite these efforts, the ceasefires only lasted for three days, but they showed China's keenness in prioritizing regional and negotiated solutions to the conflicts in the region.

DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGIES: TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS

Economic expansion is an important aim of China's westward policy in Pakistan and Afghanistan, as it is for the BRI in general. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, at least as important, maybe more, is security, which in this context is designed to counter the three evils of extremism, separatism and terrorism. First, it means destroying the Uyghur jihadist and separatist networks and groups that organize insurgency and terrorism from their hideouts in Xinjiang. Secondly, it means securing the western border to stop Uyghur jihadists travelling abroad to conflict zones and returning with combat experience and skills in the use of weapons and explosives. Finally, it means preventing transnational jihadists from intervening in Xinjiang or establishing links to local Uyghur jihadist or separatist groups.

To achieve the first aim, China has implemented a hard approach based on the global war on terror that might work, but with a high price in taking a whole ethnic population, the Uyghurs, hostage in a conflict that some researchers and commentators worry could backfire in the long term. To achieve the second aim, China needs to work closely with regional actors in implementing counterterrorism strategies, in particular with Pakistan. As the USA has experienced for years, ever since it started the global war on terror, close cooperation with Pakistan in security matters is a risky game: both the Bush and Obama administrations fought many battles with the Pakistanis over how to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaida, both of which operated into Afghanistan from territories in Pakistan. These disputes between the USA and Pakistan culminated in President Donald Trump suspending military aid worth 1.3 billion dollars in January 2018 because of Pakistan's failure to agree with America's understanding of how to fight the global war on terror. The problem here is that on the one hand Pakistan has been an ally with the US in that war and hence has conducted comprehensive military operations against jihadist networks, while on the other hand having for years been involved with and manipulated some of these jihadist organizations in fulfilment of its own security interests, especially in relation to India, but also against Iran and the Afghan government in Kabul. Hence, there is no clear dividing line between the politics and strategies of the jihadist networks and their constituencies among the local population, and the policies pursued by the Pakistani state.

For China, Pakistan is the crucial partner in its counterterrorism strategy, and America's punishment of Pakistan could even push Islamabad closer to Beijing. On the other hand, the more China involves itself in conflict resolution and counter-

terrorism strategies with Pakistan, the more it will be dragged into these complicated regional conflicts and become trapped in Pakistan's sophisticated and not always clear double-standard security policy.

The more China involves itself in conflict resolution and counterterrorism strategies with Pakistan, the more it will be dragged into complicated regional conflicts and become trapped in Pakistan's sophisticated and not always clear double-standard security policy.

Even if China prioritizes economic diplomacy and large investments in infrastructure projects, coupled with multilateral negotiations and agreements through the SCO and bilaterally with Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as promoting peace negotiations with actors like the Taliban, as a new Great Power in the region it will face severe challenges in being dragged into regional and local conflicts. How China will cope with these challenges is yet to be seen.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

SEVERE CHALLENGES FOR CHINA IN STABILIZING AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN BY USING THE ROOT CAUSE MODEL

To understand China's foreign policy, one should first realize that the legitimacy of the Chinese party-state now comes not only from economic growth, but also from the domestic image of the Communist Party as a party for the people and an international image of China as a responsible Great Power that is respected and looked up to. Assessing China's international status, Chinese policy-makers have made the judgement that their country's hard power, consisting of its economic and military capabilities, has promoted it to the status of a Great Power. In October 2017, the Chinese Communist Party's 19th Congress Report remarked on the 'further rise of China's international influence, ability to inspire, and power to shape.' This is reflected in the more active and assertive role it plays in regional affairs and in conflict regions in which it has key strategic and economic interests, including in Afghanistan and Pakistan. On matters concerning its core interests, including its own territorial integrity, China takes an assertive stance to the effect that 'no one should expect us to swallow anything that undermines our interests.' Because of their close links to the XUAR and their strategic location for China's Belt and Road Initiative, Afghanistan and Pakistan have become the chief targets of China's 'charm offensive', which is underpinned by investments, aid and military assistance. They have met with some obstacles because of regional, factional and ethnic tensions in the host countries, as well as economic problems with these projects, but it remains to be seen whether they have mostly a positive or negative impact on South Asia in the long term. For now, it seems important to China that progress be made in establishing dialogues between conflicting parties and in binding China and the two countries closer together through economic ties. For Xi Jinping, the BRI will not be

allowed to fail, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as the CPEC, being important pieces of the BRI initiative. For Afghanistan and Pakistan, China offers an alternative to the western powers in terms of economic resources and even emerging security assistance, but China's reluctance to become involved in Afghanistan's and Pakistan's conflicts mean that it will not play the same role as the US in the region.

As this report argues from analyses of China's experiences so far in Xinjiang, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Root Cause model faces challenges in realizing the goal of 'development for stability'.

As this report argues from analyses of China's experiences so far in Xinjiang, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Root Cause model faces challenges in realizing the goal of 'development for stability'. Not only is China becoming increasingly entangled in local factional, regional and ethnic conflicts because of its own economic activities, the ramifications of modernization are not always happy for everyone. Ethnic minority groups may end up feeling marginalized or even exploited by the process of economic development, as exacerbating inequalities is often a risk with modernization projects. Those projects that concern natural resources, land and living environments are especially sensitive for ethnic minority groups and local populations, a topic that China is still learning to grapple with both domestically and internationally. The lessons of its involvement in these regions also demonstrates that peaceful ethnic and regional relations come not only from economic development, but also from wise religious, social, cultural and ethnic policies that 'advance with time', as Deng Xiaoping stated in his guidance notes for China's diplomatic activities.

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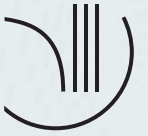
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CHINA'S ENGAGEMENT IN PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN AND XINJIANG

Will China's Root Cause model provide regional
stability and security?

