NORTHEAST ASIA IN AFGHANISTAN

Whose Silk Road?

Co-Authors:
Jae H. Ku
Drew Thompson
Daniel Wertz

March 2011

A U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS and Center for the National Interest Joint Report

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Printed in the USA

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Acknowledgements

This report is based on research conducted by the U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS and the Center for the National Interest, which sought to examine Northeast Asia's growing interest and involvement in Afghanistan. The authors would like to express their sincerest gratitude to the Tokyo Foundation and the China Institute for International Studies (CIIS) for their generous support of this important study, and to Ambassador Akio Kawato, Senior Fellow with the Tokyo Foundation and Japan's former Ambassador to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, for his contribution to their scholarship.

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Introduction

The continuing security vacuum, political instability, and economic listlessness in Afghanistan, stand as a testament to the limits of American power and the need to enroll the help of friends and allies to ensure regional peace and stability. The current U.S. strategy for Afghanistan recognizes that while military success against the Taliban and allied militant groups is essential, long-term stability can only come by gaining the support of the Afghan people, which entails providing them greater security, confidence in their government, and economic opportunities. While several of America's European and Asian allies have contributed troops and financial assistance to Afghanistan, they also recognize the vital importance of Pakistan and the Central Asian states to the success of reconstructive efforts. In particular, the countries of Northeast Asia—China, South Korea, and Japan—have important roles to play in Afghanistan, and their influence is likely to increase as the United States begins to draw down its presence in the coming years. China, South Korea, and Japan are each in a unique position to contribute to Afghan reconstruction and regional security through bilateral programs and multilateral mechanisms that provide both economic opportunities and security.

With developed economies and alliances with the United States, South Korea and Japan have both assisted in the rebuilding of Afghanistan through economic and security contributions to the multinational effort. In the early stages of the conflict, Seoul sent development workers along with a small contingent of medical and engineering troops to Afghanistan; although its troops were withdrawn following a hostage crisis in 2007, a Korean military presence in Afghanistan has recently been reestablished. Japan, facing domestic political limitations on sending its armed forces in harm's way, has been Afghanistan's largest donor after the United States. Until last year, Japan's Self-Defense Forces also played a role refueling and resupplying International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) ships in the Indian Ocean. If greater security is established in Afghanistan, both South Korea and Japan could become major investors in its large deposits of mineral wealth—Afghanistan is estimated to hold reserves of oil, natural gas, iron ore, copper, and niobium valued at over $1 trillion.

China, on the other hand, has been skeptical of directly cooperating with the American-led NATO mission in Afghanistan, but China's security and economic interests are more directly tied to Afghanistan than those of South Korea or Japan. China shares a 76-kilometer border with Afghanistan and has concerns about a deteriorating security situation in Central Asia fed by developments within Afghanistan. Instability and religious extremism in Central Asia could spread to China's western frontier, while the trafficking of Afghan opiates poses a public health problem. Furthermore, China is a major investor in Afghanistan, having bid $3.5 billion for the rights to develop the Aynak copper mine, and Afghanistan's natural resources and role as a transportation corridor could stimulate economic growth, particularly in China's lagging western provinces. China's approach to Afghanistan is shaped by its long-standing foreign policy of non-interference, as well as its strategic rivalries with the United States, Russia, and India. However, China ultimately has a long-term interest in Afghanistan's security, which American policymakers could leverage to facilitate greater Chinese support in the region.

The integration of Afghanistan's economy and physical infrastructure with the rest of what has

been termed "greater Central Asia"—meaning the five former Soviet republics of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Xinjiang Province, and bordering regions in Iran, Pakistan, and India—will be crucial to making Afghanistan a stable, viable state.[1] A stable Afghanistan could be, as it was in past centuries, a hub of major trade routes throughout Eurasia, with pipelines, railways, and roads linking the isolated economies of Central Asia to South Asia and the Indian Ocean. If the Silk Road is to be rebuilt, then the countries at its eastern terminus will necessarily play a major role. China, South Korea, and Japan are all involved, to varying degrees, in investment and infrastructural development in Central Asia and Pakistan, and their actions in the region may indirectly affect Afghanistan's economic future. Additionally, the developed economies of Japan, South Korea, and China represent potentially important, close-proximity markets for Afghan products in the future.

This paper aims to review Northeast Asian interests in Afghanistan, assess their relevance to the United States' bilateral relations in the region, and explore potential opportunities for expanded cooperation in the region. It will review past contributions to Afghan reconstruction made by China, South Korea, and Japan, and analyze each country's strategic, economic, and security interests in Afghanistan. By exploring areas of common interest and potential cooperation, this report aims to suggest opportunities to expand a multilateral strategy for bringing security and development to Afghanistan in the years ahead.

The U.S.-China Relationship and Afghanistan

China has a long history of involvement in Central Asia and an important role to play in shaping Afghanistan's future. Today, Afghanistan represents a combination of opportunities and risks for China. Terrorism, radical Islam, and narcotics trafficking threaten China's domestic security, while Afghanistan's rich mineral resources and strategic location linking Central and South Asia make it a potentially important destination for Chinese investment. Although the rivalry between the United States and China for influence in the region has led to mutual suspicions, the two countries share a strategic interest in stabilizing governments, fighting terrorism, and promoting economic development in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

China did not participate in the U.S. and NATO operations that toppled the Taliban between October and December 2001. The Chinese government remains adamant that they will not make any commitments to ISAF or send combat troops to Afghanistan, despite China's vested interest in the country's long-term stability. However, senior PLA officers recently stated that the Chinese military would potentially support a peacekeeping operation in Afghanistan if it were conducted under a United Nations mandate. The flag-rank officers indicated that a Chinese peacekeeping deployment to Afghanistan would be consistent with China's historic contributions to UN missions, which have not included combat troops. Deployments of engineers, including demining experts, medical units, and civilian police were cited as the types of security assistance deployments that the Chinese military would support.[2]

China's History in the Region

Historic relations between China and Afghanistan have been peaceful, but relatively unengaged, defined mostly by ancient trade routes connecting the two. The People's Republic of China established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan in 1955, but in the following years, China's attentions were, for the most part, focused inward. Afghanistan was not an important consideration for Chinese foreign policy, which was consumed with the Soviet and American threats. Sino-Afghan relations were therefore stagnant at the height of the Cold War as tensions between the Soviet Union and China rose. China opposed the pro-Soviet government that seized power in Afghanistan in 1978, recalling its ambassador amidst Afghan denunciations of China's invasion of Vietnam in 1979. Likewise, China opposed the Soviet invasion later that year.

China retained a nominal diplomatic presence in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion, but following the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Afghan client state, China's embassy was closed and no diplomatic relations were maintained with the Taliban. China was particularly frustrated with the Taliban's support for Uighur separatists, such as the East Turkestan Liberation Organization. The U.S. intervention, which toppled the Taliban in December 2001, opened the door for China to resume ties with Afghanistan. Newly-appointed Interim Prime Minister Hamid Karzai visited Beijing in January 2002, meeting President Jiang Zemin, before China had even reopened its Kabul embassy the following month. President Jiang pledged an immediate $1 million in grants and over $3 million in relief goods to Af-

ghanistan, with a total of $150 million in aid to be committed over time.[3]

Sino-Soviet tensions sealed off China's border with Soviet Central Asia for most of the Cold War, but with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Chinese interests in Central Asia expanded greatly. Motivated by political, economic, and security considerations, China moved quickly to recognize the new Central Asian states.[4] The leaders of these new states, seeking to avoid continued Russian dominance in the region, valued China as a counterweight to Russian influence and warmly received China's offers of development assistance, military aid, and the prospect of trade and investment. China's economic interests in the region were—and remain—largely resource-oriented, with Chinese industries eager for a share of Central Asia's abundant supplies of oil, natural gas, and important minerals, including uranium.

The overall scope of China's regional strategy for the former Soviet Republics has not changed significantly since they gained independence. However, with the increasing presence of the United States in the region after 9/11, China has intensified its engagement in order to maintain its influence. While American policymakers tend to regard their deepening role in Central Asia with some reluctance and have focused on security-related issues, China has expanded its economic investments and activities in the region, largely to satisfy its need for natural resources.[5] China's growing economy makes it increasingly reliant on foreign sources of energy, and the Central Asian states are geographically well-positioned to supply energy and other resources to China's underdeveloped western regions. The Turkmenistan-China Gas Pipeline (which transits Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) and the Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline are manifestations of China's deft diplomacy, deep pockets, and confidence that regional stability can be assured and demand for energy in western China will continue to grow along with China's booming economy.

The Economic Interest in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, and its government is heavily dependent on foreign aid, which makes up 90 percent of its budget.[6] In order to gain a semblance of self-sufficiency, the country will need considerable economic development. China has ample capital to invest in Afghanistan's infrastructure and natural resources sectors. China's domestic demand could provide a large market for Afghanistan's exports, and perhaps most importantly, China has experience and high tolerance for investing in unstable regions.[7] However, China has come under criticism for its neglect of human rights and environmental issues in its foreign investments, and its economic interests may not be an unalloyed blessing for Afghanistan. Extreme levels of corruption in Afghanistan increase the possibility that it will fall victim to the "resource curse" that has plagued other war-torn, resource-rich countries. China is not blind to these risks and has supported initiatives that aim to improve transparency and governance in countries with significant extractives industries, though it has also faced allegations of corruption in Afghanistan, including questions raised about its successful, high-profile bid to develop the Aynak copper mine.

While China considers investment in Afghanistan's resources to be a potentially lucrative opportunity, its economic interests also coincide with China's broader strategy for Central Asia. Afghanistan's geostrategic position as a link to Central Asia could enable the transportation of Chinese goods across the region, and improved infrastructure in Afghanistan could integrate its economy with those of China, Pakistan, and the Central Asian states. China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region conducts half of its foreign trade with Central Asia and Beijing therefore recognizes the link between the region's economic development and its own domestic development priorities.[8] Furthermore, China has made large investments in Pakistani infrastructure, including the Karakoram Highway connecting northern Pakistan with Xinjiang Province, and the port of Gwadar on the southwestern coast of Pakistan; Pakistani economic integration with Afghanistan would therefore suit China's economic interests as well.

Since the fall of the Taliban, China has stepped up its investments in Afghanistan, increasing its influence in the country. The most notable Chinese investment so far was signed in 2007, with the China Metallurgical Corporation (MCC) agreeing to a $3.5 billion deal to develop the Aynak copper field. This project is Afghanistan's largest foreign investment to date, and will potentially benefit both the Afghan government and its citizens. As part of the package to develop the mine, Chinese investors have pledged to build electrical plants, schools, and mosques as well as pay the Afghan government an $808 million premium and an unusually high royalty rate of 20 percent.[9] It is estimated that the mine will provide about 4,000 jobs for Afghans, and produce about 11 million tons of copper over the next 25 years.[10] The Aynak investment may also play a large role in the development of Afghanistan's transportation infrastructure: in September 2010, the MCC signed a further agreement with the Afghan government in fulfillment of its Aynak contract, agreeing to construct, "if feasible," a rail line running from northern Pakistan through Aynak and Kabul into southern Uzbekistan.[11]

Chinese firms have also been active investors in several smaller projects and will likely continue to be major contenders as the Afghan government solicits bids for further investments in the country's natural resources. Two large Chinese telecom companies, Huawei and ZTE, are active in Afghanistan, supplying 200,000 subscriber lines.[12] Chinese firms have implemented infrastructure projects, building hospitals in Kabul and Kandahar, constructing a railroad connecting western China with Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and assisting with the Parwan Irrigation Project. A Chinese firm is also in the process of competing for the Hajigak iron ore deposits in Bamiyan, although the MCC withdrew its bid in 2009 amid allegations that it secured the Aynak contract through bribery.[13]

Despite China's large financial interest in Afghanistan and its status as a significant contributor of foreign aid globally, it has provided Afghanistan with only minimal financial and developmental assistance. Since 2002, China has pledged close to $200 million in aid to Afghanistan, of which $75 million has been implemented to date.[14] Chinese officials in the Ministry of Commerce's department responsible for overseas development assistance estimate that China provides on average $15 million per year in development grants.[15] This represents only a small fraction of China's total overseas development assistance, which totaled $25 billion in 2007.[16] By 2009, China was only the twenty-third largest donor to Afghanistan, with its giving comparable to that of the much smaller economies of Finland and Turkey.[17] Critics of Chinese investments in Afghanistan have seized on its miserly assistance record to

argue that China is acting as a free (or at least cheap) rider in Afghanistan, content to let the United States and other ISAF partner nations do the "heavy lifting" of providing security and infrastructure in Afghanistan while China's state-run firms reap the economic benefits.[18]

China's Strategic Interests in Afghanistan

Some scholars believe that a new "Great Game" is emerging in Central Asia, as the region's dominant powers vie for influence. China is preoccupied with the balance of power in the region and regards Russia, India, and the United States as its main rivals in Central Asia. Chinese policymakers worry that a decline in influence in Central Asia would threaten China's economy, security, and stability. Enhancing its ties with Afghanistan is seen as an important step for China to maintain a necessary level of influence in the region.

One of China's foremost security priorities for greater Central Asia is ensuring that terrorist activities and radicalism in the region do not spread to China. Particularly worrisome is the link between Uighur separatists in Xinjiang (the East Turkestan Islamic Movement) and terrorist groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. Muslims throughout Central Asia and Afghanistan share cultural similarities with the Uighurs and many sympathize with the Uighur separatist cause, calling for the reestablishment of a Muslim state of "East Turkestan." During Taliban rule, over 1,000 Uighur separatists traveled to Afghanistan, where many received military training before they returned to China. Since the end of the Taliban's reign, however, Uighur separatists can no longer find refuge in Afghanistan.[19]

The fight against terrorism in the region provides an important avenue for increased cooperation between the United States and China and creates an opportunity to improve bilateral relations. Coordination with the United States on Afghan issues would build mutual trust, and give China a means to legitimize its fight against domestic separatists. However, China is believed to be reluctant to actively challenge terrorism abroad, instead focusing its attention on terrorism at home.[20] Chinese strategists may fear that an active Chinese attack on al-Qaeda or the Taliban might result in those international networks focusing their attention on China. Chinese officials link their own Muslim population, about 23 million strong, to their foreign policy towards Islamic countries, indicating their concern about Chinese Muslim citizens becoming radicalized or otherwise influenced by external extremists. These considerations partially explain China's cautious approach to U.S. overtures on global cooperation against terrorism.

Afghanistan's drug trafficking also poses a threat to China, jeopardizing its stability and the health of its citizens. The narcotics industry comprises about a third of Afghanistan's economy, and is estimated to provide 40 percent of Taliban and al-Qaeda funding.[21] Opium produced in Afghanistan accounts for 90 percent of the world's supply, and while most of the drugs end up in Europe and Russia, China is a destination as well as a transit country. Drug traffickers travel to Xinjiang via Pakistan or Central Asia, and from there to the rest of China, including the affluent urban markets on China's East Coast. China's domestic consumption of illegal drugs has been on the rise, increasing 9 percent in 2008 alone.[22] The historical experience of widespread opiate addiction in nineteenth and early-twentieth cen-

tury China makes its leaders especially wary of drugs and their destabilizing effects. While combating the drug trade is an issue on which the United States and China could widely cooperate, fear of increased drug trafficking potentially deters China from some transportation infrastructure projects that could be vital to Afghanistan's future. If China were to build a road through the nearly impassable Wakhan Corridor, for example, it would risk opening a direct avenue for Afghan heroin to enter China.

The Role of Multinational Cooperation: China, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, NATO, and Afghanistan

China is a key player in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), one of Central Asia's main regional forums. The SCO was founded as the Shanghai Five in 1996, composed of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan; after the admission of Uzbekistan in 2001, the organization changed its name. Originally focused on demilitarizing the border between China and the former Soviet Union, the SCO's primary mission shifted to meeting the region's security challenges: drugs, terrorism, organized crime, and energy security. Increasingly, the SCO is promoting economic engagement and comprehensive political and cultural engagement between the member states, as well as the observer countries. While the SCO itself holds little promise as a mechanism to provide security for Afghanistan, it does encourage greater regional integration which would certainly benefit Afghanistan. However, the SCO's potential is hampered by mutual suspicions and disagreements among its member states. Furthermore, the organization's approach to American policy in Afghanistan has fluctuated significantly.[23]

In 2005, the SCO's member states called for the gradual withdrawal of Western troops from the region, attracting international attention and alarming Western strategists. Uzbekistan's demand that the United States vacate the Karshi-Khanabad airbase later that year raised further concerns about the viability of Central Asian partnerships for the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. However, in communiqués issued in subsequent years, the SCO has not repeated its call for a timeline for withdrawal from Afghanistan. The SCO created an "Afghanistan Contact Group" in 2006, but Russian skepticism may limit the extent of its influence. The SCO's member-focused, consensus-based format presents challenges to American policy makers seeking to engage or somehow harness the SCO. "It's hard to point to concrete achievements… except on the basis of bilateral or non-SCO agreements and understandings," notes former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Evan Feigenbaum.[24]

China has been unwilling to engage in substantive cooperation with NATO or ISAF forces in Afghanistan. Part of Beijing's reluctance stems from a lingering suspicion of NATO dating back to the 1999 bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade; another part of it has to do with Beijing's longstanding aversion to meddling in other states' "internal affairs" and its reluctance to deploy People's Liberation Army forces abroad, outside of United Nations peacekeeping mandates at least. China has made limited security contributions to Afghanistan, such as hosting Afghan army officers at the PLA University for Science and Technology in Nanjing for mine-clearing training.[25] China has also invited Afghan defense ministry officials to participate in PLA training courses and the Public Security ministry has provided

technical assistance in counter narcotics expertise. These undersized contributions, like China's frugal development assistance programs, have sustained international accusations of "cheap-riding" or "free-riding" on the international effort in Afghanistan. As a *New York Times* article put it, "…the conclusion is inescapable: American troops have helped make Afghanistan safe for Chinese investment."[26]

Afghanistan and China's Self-Perception

China sees itself as both a leader in Asia and the world's largest developing country, and wants to benefit from both claims. As a developing country, China's leaders claim, China should be free to focus on its internal development rather than making large contributions to the "international system." Beijing's strategy of securing raw materials and energy supplies abroad is considered necessary to continue domestic economic growth which ensures social stability. On the other hand, with growing influence in Asia and around the world, China seeks to maintain its dominant regional presence while enhancing its global clout. China's status as a big power, its non-interventionist foreign policies, ready capital and large market are among the reasons that Central Asian countries welcome Beijing's investments and aid. China's leaders believe that their country's proximity to Central Asia affords it a natural interest in activities on its periphery. This perspective leads Beijing to conclude that any outside actors in the region must have an ulterior motive to their presence.[27]

China's perspective is to some extent based on long experience. Historically, Britain, India and Russia have attempted to wield influence and exert hegemony in Afghanistan and Central Asia. While Britain's empire is no longer a potential challenge, China's strategists remain uneasy about India and Russia as large neighbors with potentially competing interests in China's periphery. China's rivalry with Russia and India is based on an ancient, fluid history of rising and falling power among the three giants. The relative balance of power between the three shapes Chinese perceptions of the present and future, evidenced by ongoing diplomatic and military rivalries that play out, not only on their shared land borders, but in the rest of the Asian mainland and maritime domain. Generations of Chinese grand strategists have contemplated the Middle Kingdom's relationship with its big neighbors, but only its most recent leaders have had to deliberate the significance of the United States' dominant role in the Pacific and for the last decade, Afghanistan.

Based on this historic perspective about the region, China is suspicious of the American presence in Afghanistan. China looks from northeast to southeast and sees itself surrounded by American military alliances. American soldiers based in Central Asia exacerbate Chinese fears of military encirclement or containment. American troops in Afghanistan and Central Asia evoke negative memories of U.S. actions in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and China's government similarly believed the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan to be based on a policy of "encirclement." Compounding the belief that the U.S. seeks a new containment strategy is the increasing alignment of India with the United States, as well as the longstanding American alliances with South Korea, Japan, and several Southeast Asian nations. China has been wary of American support for democratic reforms in Central Asia, and seeks to avoid a

shift in the region's balance of power, fearing that it might undermine China's security and commercial interests.[28]

Chinese policymakers face a dilemma: they would like to see United States and NATO troops removed from the region, but Beijing also values the security that they provide. China fears that chaos in Afghanistan and the expanding influence of Islamist militants would threaten the region's stability and possibly spread extremism to China. An Afghan foreign ministry official based in Beijing summed up both countries' mutual dilemma with the U.S. presence by stating, "We do not want American troops in Afghanistan, but we do not want you to leave either." China faces a similar problem: American failure in Afghanistan would beget regional instability while American success would augment the power and standing of the United States and allow American capital and resources to be redirected to a strategic rivalry with China.[29] Despite these misgivings, China recognizes the potential benefits of U.S. involvement in the region. The American fight against terrorism allows China to conduct its own fight against Muslim separatists unhindered. If China augments its contributions to stabilizing Afghanistan, this would have the added benefit of enhancing global perceptions of China as a responsible stakeholder, giving Beijing additional political capital with Washington. However, China's leaders will tread carefully to avoid being closely associated with Western powers in Afghanistan, as they have no desire to become targets of terrorist groups or incite extremists who might take action within China's borders.

A crucial aspect of Chinese policy for the region lies in its relationship with Pakistan, a historically close ally which plays a complicated yet pivotal role in the effort to stabilize Afghanistan. Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, its role as a safe haven for terrorist groups, and its transportation routes which bring 80 percent of ISAF supplies to Afghanistan, make Pakistan's stability a priority for the United States as well as China. The United States seeks greater assistance from Pakistan in controlling militants and the arms trade within its borders, and China's close relations with Pakistan give it the influence to help realize these goals. While it is possible that China could pressure Pakistan to move in this direction, Beijing is unlikely to abandon its non-interference policy and apply significant pressure on Islamabad so long as Pakistan-based militants do not directly threaten China's interests. Stepped up Chinese engagement with Pakistan on Afghanistan might give China sufficient leverage with the United States to extract an American assurance of a reduced presence in the region. At present, however, it is more likely that China wants to avoid conflating its hostility to Uighur separatists with hostility to Islamic extremists in general, and would prefer to deal with Pakistan on a bilateral basis rather than through the lens of Afghanistan.[30] Additionally, convincing Pakistan to fully aid U.S. efforts would deflect Pakistani resources and attention from India, which China similarly regards as a strategic rival.[31]

Implications and the Possibilities of Future U.S.-China Cooperation

Many in the United States would like China to increase its financial contributions to Afghanistan's reconstruction, particularly through transparent, coordinated, development assistance programs that conform to international norms. While an increase in Chinese aid may not be immediately forth-

coming, Chinese investment in Afghanistan can potentially play an important role in stabilizing the country and bordering areas while boosting its economy and nascent industries. Chinese businesses hope that their investments are less likely to be targeted by Islamic extremists than U.S. projects, although all such endeavors would nonetheless still be susceptible to banditry in the absence of a stable security environment. An argument can certainly be made for increasing Chinese investment and increasing a Chinese commercial presence on the ground in Afghanistan, particularly if it creates the impression of normalcy and profitability that would prompt greater investment by other countries. China's geographic position and leading role in Asia enable it to coordinate with Central Asian nations and its assistance in building transportation networks to connect Afghanistan to the rest of the region could play an important role in modernizing the Afghan economy.

As China's economic interests in Afghanistan increase, its security interests will grow proportionally. China and the United States will share common concerns about the governing capacity of Kabul in the provinces, including the ability of the Afghan government to provide security as U.S. and ISAF forces begin to hand over responsibility to Afghan units. As such, the United States should welcome China's openness to an expanded presence, including peacekeeping under a bolstered UN umbrella. For the sake of optics, Chinese authorities should resist the urge to focus security efforts in areas where Chinese investment is concentrated, instead taking a less self-interested pecuniary approach to Afghan security, and thereby demonstrating China's appreciation for regional interests, rather than simply its own. For instance, China could make a significant contribution to Afghan security by investing funds and expertise in building the Afghan national police force, enhancing China's influence without alarming neighbors about Chinese aspirations for hegemony.

The risks to China's present noncommittal strategy are growing as extremist groups have started to target Chinese civilians. Chinese workers have been kidnapped in Afghanistan, and there have been rocket attacks on the Aynak copper mines.[32] Beyond Afghanistan, as the Pakistani military loses its grip over the terrorist factions within its borders, Islamabad's ability to protect Chinese interests in the country diminishes. Militants have conducted activities aimed against the 10,000 Chinese who live in Pakistan, possibly in an effort to undermine Islamabad's relations with Beijing. Multiple suicide bombings and assassinations against Chinese workers in Pakistan have taken place in Balochistan and the Northwest Frontier Provinces.[33] Modifying its strategy for greater Central Asia will be complicated for Beijing, involving deliberation over the most fundamental nature of China's relations with the United States, Russia, and India, in addition to China's interests on its periphery. However, if the United States and China, perhaps under a UN rubric, can agree on a cooperative path forward, this would greatly benefit the long-term interests of both.

The U.S.-Republic of Korea Alliance and Afghanistan

The Republic of Korea's participation in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan continues the ROK's tradition of providing military assistance to American-led overseas conflicts. Outside of its alliance with the United States, South Korea's immediate geopolitical interests in Afghanistan are limited. However, South Korea's participation in the conflict comes as it expands the reach of its overseas investments, political influence, and development assistance programs beyond Northeast Asia. While instability in Afghanistan does not pose a direct threat to South Korea, Seoul stands to benefit from actively participating in security and reconstruction efforts. Successful programs in Afghanistan help highlight South Korea's effectiveness in peacekeeping and providing development assistance, garnering it increased influence globally.

South Korea's contributions to Afghanistan's security are high profile, particularly since its troops have been redeployed there after an initial 2007 withdrawal. With South Korea's reputation for good governance, their programs have focused heavily on development assistance and training programs for the Afghan government. These efforts reflect South Korea's maturation into what academics often refer to as the country's position as a "middle power." South Korea's experiences rebuilding after the war—moving from being an aid recipient to a donor nation in one generation—make its efforts all the more salient. Seoul's strategy for Afghanistan and the region should therefore be viewed not only through the lens of its alliance with the United States, but also in terms of its perception of itself and its expanding profile on the world stage, often referred to as "Global Korea."

Korea's History in the Region

Korea and Afghanistan have historically shared little except for the unfortunate phenomenon of being located in strategic regions near larger and more powerful states. Korean contacts with Afghanistan, or with the greater Central Asian region more broadly, have been historically minimal due largely to geographic limitations. Medieval Islamic geographical works made references to Korea, and contemporary merchants from both Central Asia and Korea likely did business in Chinese trade entrepôts; in general, though, little if any sustained contact between the two societies is likely to have occurred prior to modern times.[34]

South Korea established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan in December 1973, shortly after Mohammed Daoud Khan seized power in a military coup and abolished Afghanistan's monarchy. By 1978, Daoud was himself deposed as the Moscow-aligned People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan assumed power, which led to South Korea cutting its political ties with Afghanistan and condemning the Soviet invasion the following year. Diplomatic ties were reestablished in January 2002, after the expulsion of the Taliban and subsequent installment of the Afghan Interim Authority.

South Korean Military Commitments

South Korea has a long history of supporting the United States militarily. In 1965, South Korea sent its first batch of combat troops to Vietnam to fight alongside its U.S. ally. When the Vietnam War ended, South Korea had sent over 350,000 combat troops; 5,000 soldiers lost their lives. South Korea did not participate in another U.S.-led war until the Second Gulf War, when it provided 3,600 soldiers, a mixture of combat troops and engineers, to Iraq. From 2004 to 2008, over 20,000 South Korean troops were rotated in and out of Iraq, making South Korea the third largest contributor of troops.

South Korea committed non-combat troops to Afghanistan beginning in 2002, sending a detachment of 210 medical and engineering troops to assist in the country's reconstruction. In July 2007, as the Taliban and its allies began posing a renewed threat to the Afghan government and ISAF troops, Taliban fighters took 23 Korean Christian missionaries hostage in the Ghazni Province. Two hostages were killed, and the remainder returned to Korea in exchange for a promise of the withdrawal of Korean troops from Afghanistan and a ransom alleged by the Taliban to be as high as $20 million. South Korean troops, in what their government stated was a previously scheduled plan, were withdrawn by the end of the year.[35]

As Lee Myung-bak assumed the Presidency of South Korea in early 2008, Washington and the Afghan foreign ministry pressed Seoul for a renewed commitment to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.[36] The Afghan Ambassador to South Korea similarly pressed Seoul to play a larger role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan in 2008, citing South Korea's experience with rapidly developing its own economy.[37] Initially, President Lee was reluctant to make a military commitment. However, his administration gradually agreed to increasing levels of assistance to Afghanistan, pledging increased development assistance, police training forces, and financial support, and partnering with Japan in joint development projects.[38] By late 2009, the Lee administration decided to renew the military commitment to Afghanistan, sending 350 troops to support and protect a Korean provincial reconstruction team (PRT) of about 300 aid workers and police officers in Parwan province.[39]

The decision to participate in another U.S.-led war was not an easy one. The South Korean government was extremely concerned with the potential for another flare up of anti-American sentiments. Thus, the political leaders shied away from any notion that the dispatch was tied to U.S.-ROK alliance commitments. Instead, the political debate was couched in terms of South Korea being a global, responsible nation that had a moral obligation as a member of the international civil society.

The Korean base housing these troops and development workers in Charikar, the capital of Parwan province, was completed in January 2011. The risks of operating in Afghanistan were apparent however, as the base came under rocket attack shortly before its official opening, though no one was hurt. Although Korean troops in Parwan have been assigned to a nominally non-combat mission, they have begun training exercises with American troops in the wake of this attack.[40] One Korea analyst, Scott Snyder, has argued that South Korean troops will likely play more of a combat role than their government has publicly indicated, estimating that the stated mission of protecting the PRT is part of an ef-

fort to assuage public opinion.[41] Given the political sensitivity of the dispatch, any kind of casualty is intensely scrutinized and could serve as a call for an immediate withdrawal.

South Korean development projects in Afghanistan are the bedrock of its approach to the country. These projects have aimed to provide Afghanistan with basic infrastructure and enhanced policing and governance capabilities. Korea's development projects in Afghanistan are concentrated in Kabul and Parwan, a relatively stable, majority Tajik province. Projects planned, completed, or underway include the development of IT infrastructure, schools, and hospitals;[42] police training programs;[43] and sustainable agricultural development.[44] The Korean International Cooperation Agency has also hosted Afghan officials for several programs on various aspects of development.[45] However, Seoul remains a relatively minor donor in Afghanistan: as of November 2009, Korea has pledged $85 million for Afghan development programs, which makes up only a fraction of one percent of total development spending in the country.

The Economic Interest in Afghanistan

South Korea has only a small role as a trading partner or investor in Afghanistan. In 2008, it exported only about $74 million worth of goods to Afghanistan, including cigarettes, kitchen appliances, medical supplies, and textiles. Several South Korean construction companies, including Modern Technology International and Krima, are also currently active in Afghanistan. Afghan exports to South Korea are paltry, although the development of Afghanistan's natural resources could attract South Korean extractives companies over the long term if security improves.

In recent years, South Korea has sought to significantly expand its outbound global investments. South Korean companies have recently landed a number of high-profile projects overseas, most notably a $20 billion dollar deal to develop nuclear energy in the United Arab Emirates. However, this investment drive has so far avoided Afghanistan. Although the scope of Afghanistan's resources makes it a potential target for South Korean investment in the future, improved security and infrastructure will likely be prerequisites for any significant investment to occur.

South Korea's Interests in Central Asia and Pakistan

South Korea has made significant investments in Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The ethnic Korean population in the region, dating from the Soviet ethnic transfer policies of the 1930s, has also led to a cultural link between Korea and Central Asia. Seoul conducts an annual forum with all the Foreign Ministers of Central Asian governments aimed at improving bilateral ties with each of them. South Korea's exchanges with the participating countries range over a wide field, including culture and education, and involving both the public and private sectors. Since gaining their independence from the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states have generally been cautious of letting neighboring powers or the United States gain preponderant influence, which has made South Korea in-

creasingly attractive as an international partner and investor.

South Korean investments in Central Asia, for the most part, focus on energy and infrastructure. A consortium of South Korean companies has signed an agreement with the Uzbek government to explore the Surgil Gas Field near the Aral Sea, which has been estimated to contain up to 4.7 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.[46] The state-run South Korean National Oil Corporation (KNOC) has also acquired exploration rights for oil and natural gas fields in the Namangan-Tergachi and Chust-Pop regions in eastern Uzbekistan.[47] Korean firms have also invested in Uzbekistan's air and ground transport infrastructure.[48] In Kazakhstan, a South Korean consortium won a $2.5 billion bid to build a thermal power plant in Balkhash and KNOC has agreed to the joint exploration of the Zambil Mine oil field in the Caspian Sea with Kazakhstan's state-run energy company.[49]

Given the heavy energy investments South Korea has made in Central Asia, Afghanistan's potential as a pipeline route is a matter of economic interest. Additionally, if Korea remains invested in Central Asia's transportation infrastructure, Afghanistan's role as a regional hub and gateway to South Asia will become increasingly important. Korea's influence and benign image in Central Asia may enable it to play a greater role in supplying ISAF troops in Afghanistan through the region.

South Korea also has a role to play as an investor, trading partner, and donor in Pakistan. In April 2009, Seoul pledged a $200 million development package for Pakistan, significantly larger than the aid it has committed to Afghanistan.[50] Additionally, South Korea has invested in Pakistan's infrastructure, energy, and mining sectors, and has pledged greater investment in the future.[51] As with its investments in Central Asia, South Korean infrastructure and energy projects in Pakistan may provide the potential to better integrate Afghanistan's economy into the broader region.

An Expanding Global Reach

South Korea's renewed involvement in Afghanistan comes in the context of an effort by President Lee Myung-bak to expand the country's international presence beyond Northeast Asia, referred to by the catch phrase, "Global Korea." South Koreans are justifiably proud of their accomplishments and growing role on the world stage, manifested by Seoul's hosting of the 2010 G-20 Summit. Korea's entry into the OECD's Development Assistance Committee in 2009 marked a major turning point for its role as a donor nation, and the country's rapid transition from war-ravaged aid recipient to major donor (as well as its evolution from military dictatorship to thriving democracy) has given it a unique role to play as a model for international development. South Korean development aid has increased significantly in the past decade, with projects outside of Asia taking an increasing percentage of the total development budget. South Korea's work in Afghanistan is therefore, in many ways, a test of its international credibility. As an editorial in the *Chosun Ilbo* put it, "If Korea were to turn its back on the war in Afghanistan, which is one of the most urgent issues in the world, it would find it impossible to gain genuine international recognition and establish global leadership."[52]

Korea's international military presence is also quietly growing and its presence in Afghanistan may reflect this. Seoul has recently sent a contingent of 130 troops to the United Arab Emirates to train UAE Special Forces troops, cementing its relationship with its second largest oil supplier and partner in a $20 billion nuclear deal. South Korea deployed large numbers of troops to Iraq, peaking at 3,600 troops in 2005, before a final withdrawal in 2008. South Korean forces have also been deployed as part of a multilateral mission to fight piracy off the coast of Somalia and have engaged in peacekeeping operations across the globe.[53] The credibility and public support of this increasing global military presence, like that of South Korea's increasing donor presence, would likely be shaped by the success of its efforts in Afghanistan.

The U.S.-Japan Alliance and Afghanistan

Like Korea, Japan does not have a long history of involvement in Central Asia, and has little direct stake in the outcome of Afghanistan outside of how it will affect its international reputation and its relations with the United States. While Japan has no troops and few aid workers in Afghanistan, Japan ranks second only to the United States as an aid donor to Afghanistan. Beyond development assistance, Japan has the potential to take a greater economic role in the Central Asian states, where it is not perceived to act with the same geopolitical motives as China, Russia, or the United States. However, Japanese financial assistance to Afghanistan is not likely to translate into commercial investment or a close economic relationship until Afghanistan's security improves.

Japan's future role in the region will likely be defined by broad geopolitical factors that are tangential to Central Asia, as well as the dynamic resulting from a stagnant domestic political situation. First, Japan's ruling Democratic Party has tried to redefine the nature of its alliance with the United States, evident in tensions over the American base on Okinawa and an end to the Japanese mission of refueling ISAF vessels in the Indian Ocean. However, harsh rhetoric and near-clashes with China over the Senkaku Islands has dramatically closed the gap between Japan and the United States. Japan's future in Afghanistan will most likely be predicated on how its leaders choose to shape their relationship with the United States, rather than a changing assessment of the threat posed by Afghanistan. Second, Japan's tensions with Russia and China over the Northern Territories and Senkaku Islands provide impetus to seek diplomatic leverage against both countries, which increased Japanese influence in Central Asia might provide.

Japan's Silk Road Diplomacy

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Japan began building economic ties and relationships with the newly-independent Central Asian states. Analysts have disagreed on the nature of Japan's strategy for Central Asia: some have argued that Japan wanted to use any influence it garnered in the new Central Asian states as leverage against Russia for the contested Kuril Islands (called the "Northern Territories" by the Japanese).[54] In contrast, the noted Japanese diplomat, Akio Kawato, argued that Japan's initial objective in the region was to enlarge its presence and gain influence in an area previously dominated by the Soviet Union. Under this policy, Japan built political relations and established embassies in the five Central Asian states, but due to a lack of an overarching regional strategy or any vital interests in the region, Japanese policy towards Central Asia became, as Ambassador Kawato notes, "on and off."[55]

As Central Asia took on increased geo-political importance following 9/11, Japanese policymakers decided to play on the calculations of the Central Asian states, which tended to view Japan as a balancer against growing Chinese, Russian, and American influence. In 2004, the Japanese Institute of International Affairs reported, "Central Asia is a frontier for Japanese foreign policy where we can amplify the same principles of diplomacy towards Asian countries, or where Japan can enlarge its presence."[56] The same year, Japan and the Central Asian states (minus perennially neutral Turkmenistan) established the Central Asia Plus Japan Initiative (CAPJ), creating a framework that may compare well to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In multilateral dialogues, Japan pledged to assist with regional development and help combat terrorism and drug trafficking; it also promised assistance for building infrastructure to link Central Asia to Afghanistan and thence to outlets to the Indian Ocean.[57] Promising that a southern route and its attendant energy pipelines would "be for Central Asia a corridor of peace and stability," Japan's infrastructure projects in the region have

What can Japan Propose for Afghanistan and Central Asia?

By Akio Kawato

The Japanese government was very active at the onset of the anti-terror operation in Afghanistan. On September 21, 2001, Japan conferred $40 million of urgent assistance to Pakistan and provided debt relief in the amount of $4.5 billion. The next month, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces' airplanes and ships delivered tents and other materials to Pakistan. In November of the same year, Japanese Self-Defense Forces vessels in the Indian Ocean started fueling the military vessels of the United States, Pakistan, and other states. To ensure stability in the surrounding countries, the Japanese government gave about $12 million in grants to both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

Mainly driven by domestic political pressures, Japan was unable to send its troops to Afghanistan, although the International Peace Cooperation Law adopted in 1992 allowed for it to do so. Instead, Japan limited itself to humanitarian and economic assistance.

Japan has been one of the most generous donors for Afghanistan and Central Asia, concentrating on state building and infrastructure construction—a task which Japan is both well experienced in and well equipped for.

It is worth noting that the Japanese government is paying about one half of the entire salary of the Afghan National Police; it has built and repaired 660 kilometers of highways as well as more than 650 schools, simultaneously training about 10,000 school teachers. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is now poised to augment its technical and financial assistance for agricultural development, which is vitally important for the eradication of opium production.

Japan has already spent $2.5 billion in helping Afghanistan. With the additional pledge in 2009 to donate up to $5 billion in five years, this sum will grow substantially. These funds will be disbursed through international organizations and unilaterally by the Japanese government on a fifty-fifty basis. This will play a very important role in the withdrawal process of the American and ISAF forces from Afghanistan.

Japan looks beyond the withdrawal of the allied troops, because Afghanistan and Central Asia possess very geopolitically important positions. This region borders China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran (and is very close to Kashmir, the focal point of the India-Pakistan conflict). If the region maintains its independence and stability, then good relations with its countries will greatly enhance Japan's position vis-à-vis big powers like China and Russia.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Japan became one of the largest donor countries to this area. The Japanese government has spent more than $2 billion (mostly through soft loans) for state building and construction of infrastructure. In order to foment a sense of unity among the Central Asian countries and to promote their independence, Japan established the foreign ministerial forum "Central Asia plus Japan."

The United States and the European Union may well join this endeavor. This region is not a place for a serious contention for power, but is a place for international cooperation, and decent diplomatic efforts and economic assistance will bring commensurate fruits.

Realistically, however, neither the United States nor the European Union will attach a high priority to this region; the same goes for Japan. Nevertheless, the following measures would substantially enhance our position in the region, and at the same time, strengthen the ability of region's countries to formulate foreign policy with greater independence.

As the American and ISAF forces withdraw, they should leave bulky and heavy arms with the Afghan and Central Asian armies. It will not only level up their defense capabilities, but will also ensure long-term ties.

On the political side, Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries should be given an assurance of their independence and stability by the interested countries. For example, holding regular meetings, let's say of the "OSCE Caucus on Central Asia and Afghanistan" with the participation of Japan, the United States, China, India, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkey, would be very useful for that purpose. Japan and Turkey may be a suitable tandem for promoting this.

Moreover, Japan does not oppose China playing a greater role in the region. China should be actively involved in multilateral concerted actions for the stability and prosperity of the region. However, this would not mean that China should be given a monopolistic mandate to deal with the region's problems, as has been suggested in the case of North Korea and Myanmar. Such a move would overestimate China's capacity, and ignore the fact that China would not want to perform such a role, either.

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dovetailed nicely with its efforts to improve the transportation system of Afghanistan.[58]

Economic Interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia

An abundance of natural resources in Central Asia accord it a level of economic importance to Japan. However, Japan's regional economic interests remain limited: total trade in 2007 amounted to only $620 million and Japanese investments in the region are sparse. Japan has also provided the Central Asian states with economic assistance in the form of grants, technical assistance, and long-term, low-interest loans for infrastructure development.[59] In Afghanistan, political instability, corruption and the lack of security create great disincentives to Japanese investment. Japan's greatest economic interest in Greater Central Asia is its potential as a major regional energy hub. The Japanese economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas from the Middle East, and Central Asia's development as a major energy exporter would allow Japan to diversify its supply sources. Furthermore, Central Asia is a source for key minerals, including uranium, needed to fuel Japan's nuclear power plants; Kazakhstan has the second largest deposits of uranium in the world.

Japanese economic interests in Afghanistan largely stem from a concern for stability and its reputation as an international donor. Japan's status as one of the world's largest economies allows it to provide substantial overseas development assistance, and since 9/11, Japan has made a concerted effort to promote economic development in Afghanistan, becoming the country's largest donor besides the United States. Japan has pledged about $7.5 billion in aid, of which $2.5 billion has been implemented.[60] Japan's largest commitment was made in November 2009, when it announced a $5 billion aid package which would invest in agriculture, underwrite Afghanistan's police force, and further develop Afghan infrastructure.[61] This investment in infrastructure forms a central aspect of Japan's strategic approach to the region. Most notably, Japan contributed to the construction of the "Ring Road" linking Afghanistan's major cities, and has provided assistance building the Tajikistan-Afghanistan Bridge that was completed in 2007.[62] Japan has provided loans to Uzbekistan for a railroad connecting it with Afghanistan.[63] Japan has also pledged $1 billion in aid over two years to Pakistan, linking its future with that of Afghanistan.[64]

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has expressed his appreciation for Japan's role as a donor. Perhaps seeking to counterbalance China's economic role in Afghanistan, he has implied that Japanese firms would be given priority in investing in Afghan mineral resources.[65] However, according to Japanese officials, not a single Japanese company has yet invested in Afghanistan (other than contractors implementing Japanese aid contracts), though up to 50 operate in Pakistan. Additionally, as Japan seeks to increase its donor footprint without putting boots on the ground in Afghanistan, it will likely face significant challenges in ensuring that its aid money does not go to waste. Afghan corruption poses a major challenge to the effectiveness of many development projects, and some Western diplomats and scholars have noted that Japan relies too heavily on pouring its Afghan development funds into UN agencies as a way of meeting its donor targets.[66]

Afghan Security and Japanese Interests

Japan's foremost interest in Afghanistan stems from significance of the U.S.-Japan alliance to leaders in Japan, and the subsequent importance the United States allots to the region. Terrorism and drug trafficking stemming from Afghanistan, while a concern, do not directly threaten Japan in a significant way. Japan has been willing to make substantial financial contributions to help stabilize Afghanistan, but it has only a small civilian presence in the country. According to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, about 120 Japanese civilians reside in Afghanistan, comprising embassy personnel, JICA workers, and NGO employees. The Japanese public is very wary even of this minimal presence; one Japanese aid worker was abducted and killed in 2008, and a Korea-style hostage crisis in Afghanistan could cause a large backlash from the Japanese public.

Given constitutional restrictions on its military, public skepticism, and lingering fears in East Asia of renewed Japanese militarism, an enlarged military role for Japan in Afghanistan is implausible. Japan deployed its Self-Defense Forces to the Indian Ocean shortly after 9/11, with a mission to refuel and repair ISAF ships and supply the Operation Enduring Freedom Maritime Interdiction Operation, which aims to stop the flow of weapons and drugs to and from Afghanistan. Japan withdrew its Self-Defense Forces in early 2010 despite American pressure to continue the mission. Japan's largest ongoing contributions to providing security for Afghanistan have been its lead role in Afghanistan's New Beginnings Program to disarm and reintegrate militias and child soldiers into Afghan society, and its role in subsidizing the Afghan national police and training the Afghan National Security Forces. The government of Japan pays the salaries for Afghanistan's police force, totaling about $200 million a year, though Japanese aid officials hope that the Afghan government can begin to assume more of the burden of financing their own security forces. Currently, the Afghan government has committed to funding less than 10 percent of the police's payroll costs.

Afghanistan and the Future of the U.S.-Japanese Relationship

Japanese policymakers have demonstrated a strong preference for providing financial assistance to Afghanistan rather than substantially contributing to its security. While this arrangement satisfies public opinion and will do little to arouse neighboring states which fear a remilitarized Japan, it faces several long-term challenges. Japan's stagnant economy may make this arrangement increasingly difficult and unpopular, while its lack of a military presence in the region gives it little credibility as a provider of security or conventional power. However, U.S.-Japan relations have a strong tendency to self-correct with Tokyo balancing the need for a strong U.S.-Japan alliance with party politics and fickle public opinion. Recent tensions between Japan and China have dramatically underlined the centrality of U.S.-Japan security arrangements across the Japanese political spectrum.

The U.S.-Japan alliance and American interests will undoubtedly remain the main factor for Japan's Afghanistan policy. Despite its economic woes, Japan remains the third-largest economy in the world and a major trading nation which could play a larger role in the economic integration and develop-

ment of greater Central Asia. The Central Asian attraction to Japan as a geopolitically disinterested partner could help counter Chinese and Russian influence in the region and perhaps lay the groundwork for a more robust regional forum or cooperative body that includes the United States. It is unsurprising that Japan's approach to Afghanistan is linked to its relationship with the United States. The American alliance with Japan has been a cornerstone of regional security for decades, and its continuing importance for both countries should not be dismissed. While Japan may aim to develop a more independent foreign policy, its most vital national interests will continue to overlap with those of the United States.

Conclusion

China, South Korea, and Japan each have distinct interests in Afghanistan and each have a unique relationship with the United States. For China, one noted Chinese military official stated, "America's failure is not China's gain." China does not seek an unstable Afghanistan that would keep the United States bogged down. China, too, would prefer a successful stabilization of Afghanistan. For South Korea, a stable Afghanistan in which Seoul played a role will help bolster those in Korea who seek more participation in international peacekeeping and the broadening of its international commitments. A stable Afghanistan will positively help the image of Global Korea. For Japan, Afghanistan has taken up a significant portion of its overseas development assistance. Afghanistan's failure may have domestic repercussions, given the fact that so much money is being provided for Afghan reconstruction. The recent devastation left by an earthquake and tsunami may put new pressure for more domestic spending as opposed to overseas assistance. Therefore, a gross failure in Afghanistan will likely add pressure to wind down Japan's economic contributions to Afghanistan. Changing national conditions and domestic opinions in Japan and South Korea will certainly influence each country's level of commitment, arguing for greater coordination between the United States and its two key Asian allies during the Afghan drawdown process.

The planned U.S. drawdown and handover of security responsibilities to Afghan forces should prompt shared concern among the three Northeast Asian countries. For South Korea and Japan, the drawdown is interpreted as a signal to also begin winding down their involvements. With public opinion in both countries strongly against citizen casualties, neither wants to be left behind as the United States dramatically reduces its combat presence.

The impact of the U.S. declaration to withdraw by 2014 is particularly acute in Seoul. The U.S. announcement will most likely precipitate a ROK withdrawal before then. Discussions in Seoul by the authors suggest that Seoul may begin to withdraw as early as fall of this year. For China, concerns coalesce around the return of the Taliban and fears that Afghanistan might export terrorism to China. Because China shares the U.S. interest in stabilizing Afghanistan, Chinese contributions to multinational security efforts become increasingly plausible in light of a U.S. drawdown. China may find such an opportunity under a UN-led peacekeeping regime, rather than a U.S.-led NATO mission.

The nature and character of the U.S. strategy is not well understood by China, South Korea, or Japan, each arguing for a greater U.S. effort to more clearly explain what a drawdown and transfer of responsibility might look like. One American observer sought to allay concerns in the region, saying, "The American drawdown in Afghanistan will be gradual. It will not look like helicopters departing from rooftops. It will not be an evacuation." Therefore, the most critical component of a U.S. withdrawal is to describe to friends in the region in tangible terms what the U.S. military and diplomatic presence might look like in 2014 and beyond.

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