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# China's Strategy Toward South and Central Asia

## An Empty Fortress

Andrew Scobell, Ely Ratner, Michael Beckley

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## An Empty Fortress

Andrew Scobell, Ely Ratner, Michael Beckley

RAND Project AIR FORCE

Prepared for the United States Air Force  
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## Preface

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Using a wide array of primary and secondary source materials, RAND Project AIR FORCE analyzed the drivers of China's policy toward Central Asia as well as Afghanistan and Pakistan, ascertained the full range and extent of Chinese activities in these areas, and then carefully assessed the implications of these findings for the United States.

This report was part of a larger project that explored the range of possible future demands on and requirements for the U.S. Air Force. The goal of the project was to analyze regional and global challenges, assess the implications of this analysis for U.S. national security, and make recommendations for U.S. Air Force posture. The research was commissioned by the Director of Operational Planning, Policy and Strategy, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations, Plans and Requirements, Headquarters United States Air Force (HQ USAF/A5X); and the Director of Strategic Planning, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Strategic Plans and Programs, Headquarters United States Air Force (HQ USAF/A8X).

The analysis was conducted within the Strategy and Doctrine Program of RAND Project AIR FORCE as part of a fiscal year 2011 study "What Is Driving China's Central Asia Policy and Should That Impact USAF Force Posture?"

## RAND Project AIR FORCE

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## Summary

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This study analyzes what is driving China's Central Asia and Afghanistan-Pakistan ("AfPak") policies, identifies China's overarching strategy, examines the extent of Chinese activities in the region, and then assesses their implications for the United States.

### Central Asia

Since 2001, China's diplomatic, military, and economic influence in Central Asia has grown dramatically. As of 2014, however, China's influence in the region remains quite modest except in the economic realm. Nonetheless, China's influence is likely to continue to grow in coming years, perhaps even to a point where Beijing dominates the area. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, China has embarked on a bold initiative to improve its relations with the post-Soviet states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan and to expand its influence in the area. This initiative has been remarkably successful; in 2014, China has good relations with virtually every country in and around Central Asia and is generally seen as a constructive and important partner—diplomatically, economically, and militarily.

China's Central Asia policy appears to be driven by four factors. First, despite growing military and economic power and the most stable and peaceful security environment in centuries, Beijing is consumed by insecurity and the goals of ensuring domestic stability and protecting national unity. China is especially preoccupied with suppressing internal unrest among ethnic minorities, such as the Uighurs of Xinjiang, who reside in sparsely populated, relatively remote, economically backward, and strategically important frontier areas. Beijing insists that it is waging a serious internal struggle against terrorism, separatism, and extremism—collectively labeled the "three evils."

Second, Beijing is driven to maintain peace, predictability, and secular governments in the countries of Central Asia. Beijing's greatest fear is linkups between internal challenges and external threats, notably the Uighur Diaspora that spills across national borders.

A third driver is to increase Chinese influence in Central Asia and thereby limit the influence of other powers. A key mechanism for China is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), an organization founded in 2001 to address nontraditional security threats, such as terrorism, that now includes China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. With the SCO, Beijing has sought to create a stable condominium-like arrangement that constrains Russian power and checks the influence of outside powers, such as the United States.

A fourth factor driving China is a desire to promote its economic interests in Central Asia and enhance energy security. China is an increasingly important trading partner with the countries of the region and, by 2010, appears to have surpassed Russia as Central Asia's top

trader. China has also enhanced its ability to extract energy resources from the region through the construction of an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan (completed in 2006) and a liquefied natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan (completed in 2009).

## Pakistan and Afghanistan

China's influence in Pakistan, meanwhile, is limited but significant, and in Afghanistan it is very modest. China has a high degree of concern about the levels of instability in both countries. While Beijing's level of alarm about problems in AfPak and the specter of spillover into adjacent countries—including western China—should remain high, the future of Chinese influence in AfPak is uncertain.

China has cordial relations with Afghanistan and friendly, longstanding relations with Pakistan. The former is considered the epicenter of this volatile landlocked region, while the latter is viewed as the linchpin of China's policies toward Southwest Asia and South Asia. Primary drivers of Beijing's Afghan policy are the threat of Islamic extremism, preventing Afghanistan from being used by other great powers to check China, and extracting raw materials. To these ends, China has been most active economically, establishing itself as the largest investor in the country; Chinese companies are engaged in dozens of infrastructure projects throughout Afghanistan. However, China has been less active in other areas: Diplomatically, Beijing has remained practically a bystander, while, militarily, China has been quite aloof.

Pakistan, probably China's closest and most enduring ally of the past half-century, has seen its strategic importance to Beijing recede since the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, China is increasingly concerned about trends in Pakistan, notably instability and the inability of Islamabad to control extremists. But abandonment does not seem to be an option because Beijing fears it would likely create even greater security problems for China.

## China's Strategy

While China has been very successful in expanding its influence in Afghanistan and the Central Asian states, and cultivating its ongoing friendship with Pakistan, all these countries are nevertheless perceived in threatening terms by China: as breeding grounds for Islamic radicals, sympathetic foreign bases of support for separatist forces in Xinjiang, and vulnerable to manipulation by other great powers.

China has watched the U.S. military presence in AfPak since 2001 very closely. The U.S. ability to project military power dominates China's threat perception of the United States and China's attendant defense planning. China will observe the deployment and presence of U.S. military forces in Central Asia as key indicators of U.S. intentions toward China itself, especially in the broader context of the Obama administration's stated policy of rebalancing to Asia.

China's response to the complex challenges on its western borders during the past two decades has been to adopt an "Empty Fortress" strategy. Legendary in the annals of Chinese



history, the Empty Fortress stratagem refers to a skillful ploy to feign strength to an adversary when one is in fact extremely weak. Chinese leaders recognize that the country's westernmost regions are poorly defended and vulnerable to internal dissent and external threats. China's defense posture is heavily skewed toward the east, where the wealthiest and most heavily populated areas are located. But Beijing refuses to abandon the west, grant its independence, or cede large tracts of territory to its neighbors. On the contrary, China has boldly projected an image of considerable strength in Central and South Asia to mask serious frailty. Beijing's strategy is exemplified by its promotion of the SCO, which, despite outward appearances of potency and activism, remains a loose collection of states incapable of resolute collective diplomatic, military, or economic action.

## Implications for the United States

While the "Great Game" may have been an apt characterization of contestations over Central Asia, Afghanistan, or Pakistan in an earlier age of empires, this is no longer an appropriate metaphor to use for the region today. In the early 21st century, there is no great power rivalry. Of course, the United States has significant interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which are focused on defeating al Qa'ida. However, the United States is not engaged in a zero-sum contest with other great powers. Rather, America's adversaries are nonstate actors. That said, the absence of a "great game" does not mean the United States concedes the region to a Chinese (or Russian) sphere of influence. Moreover, countries of the region have proven quite adept at managing the influence of powerful states on their periphery. While the states of the region are weak, especially compared with the major powers that seek influence in the region, none of them are powerless.

China, along with Russia and other great powers, will continue to play key roles in shaping the security environment in Central Asia. Chinese activities and aspirations also directly impact U.S. interests and initiatives in the region. And China, along with other great powers, will also affect the security situation and ongoing U.S. operations in Afghanistan and influence the state of play in Pakistan.

Currently, China is not a major threat to U.S. interests in Central Asia or AfPak and is unlikely to pose one in the near future. Therefore, at present, China is not a decisive factor in determining U.S. policy, military strategy, or posture in this region.



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## Abbreviations

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AfPak	Afghanistan-Pakistan
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
ETIM	East Turkistan Islamic Movement
FDI	foreign direct investment
FY	fiscal year
GA	Group Army
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MPS	Ministry of Public Security
MR	military region
MSS	Ministry of State Security
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PAF	RAND Project AIR FORCE
PAP	People's Armed Police
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UN	United Nations
XPCC	Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps



# 1. Introduction

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This study analyzes what is driving the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) Central Asia and South Asia policies, with particular attention to Afghanistan-Pakistan ("AfPak"). This study identifies China's overarching strategy, examines the extent of Chinese activities in the area, and assesses their implications for the United States post-2014.

## Background

Central Asia encompasses five states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—but this study also examines the key states of Afghanistan and Pakistan. These last two states are located on the geopolitical fault lines between Central Asia, South Asia, and Southwest Asia. Afghanistan and Pakistan will almost certainly have a significant impact on the future of Central Asia and are also of great strategic interest to the United States as it battles al Qaeda and its extremist allies.

Increasingly, China looms large as a player in Central Asia and South Asia. Moreover, China continues to emerge as a great power to be reckoned with economically, diplomatically, and militarily in the Asia-Pacific and beyond. Of all the regions on China's periphery, nowhere has Beijing been more proactive during the past two decades than in Central Asia. Beijing sees the region as fragile, with significant potential for instability, and Beijing fears that instability in Central Asia could destabilize China's west.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Beijing has embarked on a bold initiative to improve its relations with the five capitals of Central Asia and expand China's influence. To date, this initiative has been remarkably successful.<sup>1</sup> As of mid-2014, China has good relations with virtually every country in and around the region and is generally seen as a constructive and important partner—diplomatically, economically, and even militarily. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)—a key vehicle for Chinese influence in Central Asia—celebrated its 13th anniversary on June 15, 2014. Moreover, Beijing views AfPak as critically important to China. China has cordial relations with Afghanistan and friendly relations of long standing with Pakistan. The former is considered the epicenter of this volatile landlocked region, while the latter is viewed as the linchpin of China's policies toward Southwest Asia and South Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> One recent study asserts: "China's increasing sway in Central Asia is nothing short of remarkable." See Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia*, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 74.

China will continue to play a key role in shaping the security environment in Central Asia. Chinese activities and aspirations also directly impact U.S. interests and initiatives in the region, including the Partnership for Peace program.<sup>2</sup> China will also affect the security situation and ongoing U.S. operations in Afghanistan and influence the state of play in Pakistan. What is driving China's Central Asia policy and its relations with the South Asian states of Afghanistan and Pakistan? What are the implications for the United States?

This study contends that China's response to the complex challenges it has confronted on its western frontiers during the past two decades has been to adopt an "Empty Fortress" strategy. Chinese leaders recognize that the country's westernmost regions are poorly defended and vulnerable to internal dissent and external threats. China's defense posture is heavily skewed toward the east, where its wealthiest and most heavily populated areas are located. But Beijing refuses to relinquish control of its Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region or Tibetan Autonomous Region. On the contrary, China has boldly projected an image of great strength in Central and South Asia. Legendary in the annals of Chinese history, the Empty Fortress stratagem refers to a skillful ploy to feign strength to an adversary when one is in fact extremely weak.<sup>3</sup>

Beijing has implemented this Empty Fortress strategy since 1991 through shrewd and sustained diplomatic efforts in Central Asia. This foreign policy initiative has included bilateral and multilateral components in combination with very modest displays of military power. Small periodic bilateral and multilateral exercises with its neighbors have projected the image of a powerful, wealthy China that is willing to cooperate with its neighbors. All of this makes Beijing appear stronger and more influential than it is in actuality. China has discovered that the most potent arrows in its Empty Fortress quiver may be economic ones. Although China is happy to leverage its not-inconsiderable economic clout in Central Asia, from Beijing's perspective China is far more dependent on the region economically than the region is on China. Beijing covets the natural resources of Central Asia—especially its petroleum and natural gas reserves in order to fuel China's continued economic growth.

## Outline

Building on several earlier RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) studies, this project focuses on China's policies toward Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan since 2000.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Partnership for Peace program was established in 1994 by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to build trust and develop practical security cooperation relationships with non-NATO states in Europe and Asia.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the "Empty Fortress" stratagem, see Chapter Three.

<sup>4</sup> This date was selected to pick up where an earlier RAND study had left off (1999), and allow a focus on the period since September 11, 2001. The earlier study is Mark Burles, *Chinese Policy Toward Russian and the Central Asian Republics*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1045-AF, 1999. See also Olga Oliker and David A. Shlapak, *U.S. Interests in Central Asia: Policy Priorities and Military Roles*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND



Chapter Two analyzes the drivers of China's 21st century policy toward Central Asia, while Chapter Three outlines the strategy China has implemented in Central Asia. These include diplomatic, security, and economic dimensions and entail both bilateral and multilateral initiatives. Chapter Four examines China's interactions with and involvement in Afghanistan and China's enduring entente with Pakistan. Chapter Five summarizes the findings of this project and the implications for U.S. defense policy.

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Corporation, MG-338-AF, 2005; and Rollie Lal, *Central Asia and Its Asian Neighbors: Security and Commerce at the Crossroads*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-440-AF, 2006.



## 2. What Is Driving China's Central Asia Policy?

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Beijing's overall national security calculus is characterized by a paradox: Despite China's growing military and economic power and its location in a relatively stable and peaceful neighborhood, Chinese leaders are consumed by insecurity. And yet in the early 21st century, Beijing's security situation is better than it has been in more than 200 years: China is at peace and enjoys good or cordial relations with all countries around its periphery. Most Chinese people have never enjoyed such prosperity in the modern era. The country's economic clout and diplomatic influence continue to rise both in the Asia-Pacific and around the globe. Beijing's national defense capabilities have also been growing by leaps and bounds, with the result that China is better positioned to defend itself than it has been in centuries.<sup>1</sup>

Given China's growing strength, why are its leaders prone to feel increasingly vulnerable rather than more secure? There are two main reasons for this: China's leaders, first of all, conflate national security with regime security, and second, they are obsessed with national unity. The continued political rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is inseparable from the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the PRC. While for any government, national security is about domestic stability and internal security, Beijing is especially preoccupied with preventing internal unrest and quashing political dissent. China's communist rulers are most fearful of unrest in the heartland—the eastern seaboard and inland plains and river valleys where the overwhelming majority of the country's populace are concentrated. National unity is also uppermost in the minds of China's leaders, and they are also concerned about unrest and aspirations for greater autonomy or independence on the island of Taiwan and to the far west. The inhabitants of prosperous Taiwan are considered ethnic Han Chinese (Han constitute more than 90 percent of China's 1.3 billion population), but Beijing's concerns farther inland are focused on ethnic minorities who reside in sparsely populated, relatively remote, and economically backward westernmost China. Of particular concern are Tibetans, who are mainly concentrated in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and Qinghai Province, and the Uighurs, who are concentrated in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, which abuts Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

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<sup>1</sup> On China's economic growth, see Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, MIT Press, 2008; on China's expanding diplomatic clout, see Evan S. Medeiros, *China's International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-850-AF, 2009. For a comprehensive articulation of China's official national security calculus and defense policy, see Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in 2012*, Beijing, April 2013.

But the greatest fear of China's leaders is linkups between internal challenges—identified above—and external threats.<sup>2</sup> Thus, any hint of foreign support—rhetorical or material—for dissidents, demonstrators, and/or activists of any persuasion and ethnicity sets off alarm bells in Beijing. Both the Tibetan and Uighur Diasporas spill across national borders, and Beijing is most sensitive to desires by these two groups for greater autonomy or separate homelands.

## Central Asia and Western China

Central Asia may be thought of as China's untamed and unfenced—the Great Wall not withstanding—extended backyard.<sup>3</sup> By labeling Central Asia as Beijing's backyard, we do not mean to imply that China covets this region or considers it to be sovereign Chinese territory; rather, we wish to underscore the degree to which Beijing is very sensitive to trends and shocks in Central Asia and the adverse impact these can have on Chinese security. In the broad sweep of thousands of years of Chinese history, its northern and western frontiers have consistently posed the greatest geostrategic challenge for successive rulers. However, the most troublesome frontier for China's rulers historically has been its northern one—protecting this border and managing relations with the northern neighbors have proved extremely difficult for most dynasties. The nomadic peoples of the steppe constituted a perennial challenge as traders, raiders, and sometime invaders. Twice—in the 13th and 17th centuries—China was defeated and occupied by armies from the north.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, China's Central Asian frontiers, more geographically remote from the heartland—and separated not just by sheer distance but also by vast deserts and rugged mountain ranges—seemed much less threatening than the northern approaches. China's West, like its American counterpart, has been widely seen as a “wild” and exciting frontier. But, in addition, inner Asia was also the location of a key trade route—the Silk Road—to Europe and the Middle East.

In modern history, the geostrategic challenge to China in Eurasia has come from Russia. Up until the 1917 Revolution, the Russians proved to be manageable neighbors. However, the Soviet Union was a far more ambitious regime, with global designs that included attention to Asia. In 1949, the newly established PRC initially viewed the Soviet Union as an ally and an inspiration, but eventually Beijing came to see Moscow as threat and negative example. For much of the

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed the Great Wall is a historical myth: No single “Great Wall” stretching thousands of miles ever existed. While Chinese dynasties have been in the business of constructing significant fortifications for many centuries, what is now referred to as the “Great Wall” only dates back to the Ming dynasty. See Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> The Mongols established the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), and the Manchus founded the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).

Cold War, China's northern and Central Asian borders were tense and militarized. But a thaw in the late 1980s witnessed a Sino-Soviet rapprochement following the Red Army's withdrawal from Afghanistan, culminating in the first bilateral summit in 30 years when Mikhail Gorbachev traveled to Beijing in May 1989 to meet with Deng Xiaoping.

## The Foreign-Domestic Nexus

While the demise of the Soviet Union meant that China no longer confronted a single sprawling superpower along its northern and western borders, Beijing faced a host of new security challenges. Because of this transformation, the initial concentrated thrust of China's post-Cold War "good neighbor" foreign policy initiative was directed toward Central Asia. Soviet disintegration in 1991 produced three new neighbors—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (see Figure 2.1). Not only did the collapse of the world's oldest Leninist party-state shake China's communist leaders to the core, it also heightened the vulnerability China felt along its extended Central Asian land borders. The domestic threat was considered two-fold: within the heartland (ensuring a loyal military, maintaining elite unity, and suppressing dissent) and on the periphery (from ethnic minorities that spilled across borders). The territorial breakup of the USSR and the end of communist rule in Moscow prompted angst and alarm in the CCP.<sup>5</sup> The collapse of Soviet communism, combined with the popular protests that shook Beijing and other Chinese cities in 1989, heightened the insecurities of China's communist leaders.

After a brief period of retrenchment and uncertainty, Beijing rededicated itself to economic reform and opening to the outside world. During the 1990s and 2000s, China became stronger economically and more integrated into the global economy, and its national interests naturally also expanded. But instead of making Beijing more confident and secure, its sense of vulnerability also increased. Concerns about protecting trade routes and allowing access to energy resources and raw materials have arisen. China's political and economic heartland is located along its eastern seaboard, where the overwhelming majority of its population is concentrated. As a result, the focus of security has been to the east, with an increasing spotlight on the maritime realm. The lion's share of China's foreign trade is seaborne, and the most high-profile territorial disputes and contentious flashpoints can be found to the east in close proximity to the coast (Taiwan, South China and East China Seas, Korea, etc.).

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<sup>5</sup> For a good overview of CCP analysis of the situation, see David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008, chapter 4.

**Figure 2.1. Map of Post-Soviet Central Asia**



And yet there are increasing signs that Beijing believes that western China is of considerable importance to the country's future. The value of this region for China is not just that it provides strategic depth and a rich array of natural resources, according to General Liu Yazhou, political commissar at the People's Liberation Army's National Defense University in Beijing. In addition, the area has the potential to serve as a stimulus for extended national development and the gateway to Central Asia and beyond. In 2010, General Liu wrote:

Western China is a vast empty expanse [yi ge weida de kongjian]. Moreover, our strategic direction should be westward. . . . With an excellent geographic location (close to the center of the world), the western region can provide us with the driving force to build our strength. We should regard western China as our hinterland rather than as our frontier.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Liu Yazhou, "Xibu lun [Theory on the Western Region]," *Fenghuang Zhoukan [Phoenix Weekly]*, Hong Kong, August 5, 2010, p. 36.



Then, in 2012, Professor Wang Jisi, the dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University, wrote a widely read op-ed in a major newspaper titled “Xijin [Marching West].” A prominent and highly respected international relations expert, Wang argued that China should pay more attention to its far west. This did not mean that Beijing should ignore its eastern seaboard and the maritime realm; rather, Wang advocated a more balanced geostrategic approach that gave consideration both to its Central Asian hinterland and to the western Pacific.<sup>7</sup>

General Liu and Dean Wang do not necessarily represent official or even mainstream thinking in China, but they do exemplify an emerging school of thought in the country. Whatever the line of thinking, there is a clear consensus in Beijing that greater attention should be paid to western China as well as Central Asia and beyond. Four factors appear to drive China’s Central Asia policy in the early 21st century. The first of these is ensuring domestic stability and protecting national unity. The second is maintaining peace, predictability, and secular governments in the countries of the region. The third is increasing Chinese influence in the region and limiting the influence of other powers. The fourth factor is promoting China’s economic interests in Central Asia. Together, these factors underscore both China’s enduring defensive mindset and its rapidly expanding set of national interests.

### *Ensuring Domestic Stability and Protecting National Unity*

In Beijing’s view, Central Asia’s stability is closely linked to internal security in western China.<sup>8</sup> In the post–Cold War era, Central Asia had become for Beijing “an unpredictable zone from which Turkic nationalism and Islamic ideologies could radiate into Xinjiang.”<sup>9</sup>

The threat to China is most directly and concretely manifest in the Uighur ethnic group.<sup>10</sup> The Uighur Diaspora probably totals some 11 million, approximately 10 million of whom live in China—the vast majority of these in Xinjiang. Between 300,000 and 1 million more live in the five Central Asian states.<sup>11</sup> Since at least the 1990s acts of protest and violence by Uighur

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<sup>7</sup> See Wang Jisi, “‘Xijin’: Zhongguo diyuan zhanlue dezai pingheng [Marching West: China’s Geostrategic Rebalance],” *Huaqiu Shibao*, October 17, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Sheives, “China Turns West: Beijing’s Contemporary Strategy Towards Central Asia,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 2, Summer 2006, 207–214; and M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s Territorial Disputes*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 151.

<sup>9</sup> Lena Jonson, “Russia and Central Asia,” in Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, eds., *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, Brookings Institution and Royal Institute for International Affairs, 2001, p. 117. See also Sheives, “China Turns West,” p. 222.

<sup>10</sup> Zhao Huasheng, *Zhongguo de Zhong Ya waijiao [China’s Central Asian Diplomacy]*, Beijing: Shishi Chubanshe, 2008, p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> According to official Chinese statistics, as of 2007, 9.65 million Uighurs lived in Xinjiang. See Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 11. There are likely thousands more who are living elsewhere in China. For estimates of the number of Uighurs in Central Asia, see Sheives, “China Turns West,” p. 209; and Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse, “Cross-Border

militants have raised the most serious specter of ethnic dissent and terrorism for Beijing. This region is a sensitive one for China's leaders, not surprisingly since Xinjiang's more than 1.6 million square kilometers amounts to about one-sixth of the PRC's total land area. There are many indicators of this sensitivity, including regular condemnation of "terrorism, separatism, and extremism" in Xinjiang, periodic cutoffs of Internet service in Xinjiang, and restricted access by foreigners to the region. Moreover, a group of U.S. scholars found it difficult, if not impossible, to get visas to enter China apparently because of their involvement in a 2004 book on Xinjiang.<sup>12</sup>

Chinese efforts at improving the security situation in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region entail a three-pronged initiative: maintaining social order, efforts at economic development, and attention to national integration.

### Maintaining Social Order

This is a top priority. Discontented Uighurs are particularly worrisome for Beijing because of perceived linkages between the internal challenge and external threats. Beyond securing China's Central Asian borders and demilitarizing the region, Beijing is focused on maintaining stability in Xinjiang. Chinese leaders tend to conflate terrorism, separatism, and extremism: In their eyes, all three go together, and they are often dubbed the "three evils." As a senior public security official in Xinjiang noted in 2002, "ethnic separatism is their goal, religious extremism is their garb, and terrorist acts are their means."<sup>13</sup>

While there have been sporadic terrorist attacks in Xinjiang for the past two decades, there was a marked drop off in mass organized protests during the ten-year period from 1999 until 2009. Outside experts attributed the decade-long decline in episodes of anti-state collective action and violence in Xinjiang to brutally effective repression by the PRC coercive apparatus. However, the authorities have failed to address the core grievances of the Uighur community.<sup>14</sup> The violence in Urumqi in the summer of 2009 underscores the reality that Uighur grievances are deep rooted and extensive, and that harsh crackdowns do not deter Uighurs from defying the Chinese state.<sup>15</sup> "Because China's campaign has been so effective," Martin Wayne writes, "much

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Minorities as Cultural and Economic Mediators Between China and Central Asia," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 1, February 2009, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> Another indication of the importance of Xinjiang to Beijing is that China's State Council issued a white paper on the region in 2003. See Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, *History and Development of Xinjiang*, May 2003. See also Daniel de Vise, "U.S. Scholars Say Their Book on China Led to Travel Ban," *Washington Post*, August 20, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Andrew Scobell, "Terrorism and Chinese Foreign Policy," in Yong Deng and Fei-ling Wang, eds., *China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, p. 310.

<sup>14</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, pp. 133–134.

<sup>15</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, pp. 170–172.



of the debate today focuses on whether China genuinely confronts a terrorist threat.”<sup>16</sup> Research shows there were fewer “mass incidents” in Xinjiang than in several other provinces as a proportion of each region’s population between 1990 and 2009. Uighur unrest and terrorism continues to be a significant problem for the Chinese government, but it is not the most pressing internal issue facing China.<sup>17</sup>

Since 2009, there has been a spike in the frequency of ethnic unrest in Xinjiang. According to Chinese government reports, at least three dozen people were killed in three attacks in the cities of Hotan and Kashgar in 2011. And in 2009, major anti-Chinese rioting in Urumqi killed at least 197 people. The Chinese government responded to the most recent set of attacks by launching a “strike hard” crackdown that includes around-the-clock police patrols and random identity checks and physical searches. In August 2011, Beijing also dispatched its elite Snow Leopard antiterrorism unit of the People’s Armed Police (PAP), which had been deployed to provide security for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, to bolster the annual China-Eurasia Expo, which was held in Urumqi in the first week of September.<sup>18</sup> Deadly clashes continue to occur inside and outside of Xinjiang. One incident in December 2013 reportedly took place in a village near the city of Kashgar. According to official Chinese media reports, two policemen and 14 civilians were killed in the incident.<sup>19</sup> And two months earlier, in October 2013, senior CCP leaders were shocked when three Uighur radicals crashed a motor vehicle in Tiananmen Square in the heart of Beijing and set the automobile ablaze. The action resulted in the deaths of the vehicle’s three occupants and two bystanders, as well as injuries to dozens more pedestrians. This incident stunned the authorities because it occurred in what is almost certainly the most heavily policed and closely surveilled piece of real estate in China. Tiananmen Square is the symbolic center of the country and a few hundred yards from the senior leadership compound of Zhongnanhai.<sup>20</sup>

Combined with ethnic unrest and riots—particularly serious violent incidents occurred in February 1997 and July 2009—it is no surprise that the situation is viewed with particular alarm by Beijing. Ham-handed riot control and inept handling of Uighur grievances appear to be an unfortunate pattern. China was quick to seize the opportunity presented by the September 11, 2001, attacks to express sympathy and support for the United States and call for cooperation

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<sup>16</sup> On these trends, see Bovington, *The Uyghurs*, chapter 4 (pp. 105–134) and Martin I. Wayne, “Inside China’s War on Terrorism,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 18, No. 59, March 2009, p. 249. On this point, see, also, James Millward, “Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment,” East-West Center Paper, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Mass incidents are most common in the Han heartland in eastern China. However, looking solely at the number of mass incidents reported in proportion to the population, the Tibetan Autonomous Region has the most serious public security problem of any province-level jurisdiction in China (of course Islamic militants are not a problem in Tibet). Andrew Wedeman, “Enemies of the State: Mass Incidents and Subversion in China,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Cui Jian, “Unit Sent to Xinjiang to Smooth Way for Expo,” *China Daily*, August 13, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> BBC News, “Sixteen Dead in Clashes in China’s Xinjiang,” December 16, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Demick, “China Crash Occurred in Vicinity of Leaders,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 2013, p. 3.

between the two countries against a common threat. Beijing pressed Washington to have the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) labeled as a terrorist group. In late 2002 a presidential executive order designated ETIM as a terrorist organization.<sup>21</sup>

The task of maintaining social order inside China is the bailiwick of a host of security forces. The front line is manned by regular Chinese police, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), with the PAP, a paramilitary formation with significant riot control capabilities and greater firepower, serving as the primary backstop. The PAP is especially important in dealing with protests and riots, and paramilitary manpower in Xinjiang is estimated at 100,000.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the Ministry of State Security (MSS) functions as a KGB-like secret police. If the MPS and PAP are unable to cope with a situation, then the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is called in to quell the unrest—this is what happened in 1989 in Beijing.<sup>23</sup> In more recent episodes of social unrest, including in greater Tibet in March 2008 and in Xinjiang's administrative capital, Urumqi, in July 2009, the PLA played largely supporting roles in operations to disperse demonstrations or quell unrest.<sup>24</sup>

China's PLA is Janus-faced, with both core responsibilities for defense against external enemies and internal security. The PLA—as all branches of the regular military are called—focus primarily on external defense but also have significant domestic duties, including that of the last line of defense in the event of serious domestic disturbances.

The Lanzhou Military Region (MR) is both the largest of the seven and arguably the least well defended—certainly the Lanzhou MR has the lowest density of PLA personnel deployed in its area of responsibility, with approximately 220,000 troops in a military region of 3.4 million square kilometers.<sup>25</sup> This state of affairs is unsurprising given the lack of any perceived traditional military security threat from any of China's western neighbors bordering the Lanzhou MR, save India.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Lanzhou is the MR most removed from China's eastern political and economic heartland.

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<sup>21</sup> Scobell, "Terrorism and Chinese Foreign Policy," pp. 309–310, 317. Little reliable information is available on ETIM, but China blames the group for a significant amount of terrorist activity.

<sup>22</sup> Yitzak Shichor, "The Great Wall of Steel: Military and Strategy in Xinjiang," in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2004, pp. 122–123.

<sup>23</sup> On the PLA's role in the crackdown of May and June 1989, see Andrew Scobell, *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, chapter 7.

<sup>24</sup> For analyses of the 2009 security operations in Xinjiang and the 2008 security operations in Tibet, see, respectively, Harold M. Tanner, "The People's Liberation Army and China's Internal Security Challenges," in Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell, eds., *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China's Military*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2010, pp. 259–266; and Murray Scot Tanner, "How China Manages Internal Security Challenges and Its Impact on PLA Missions," in Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell, eds., *Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions Other Than Taiwan*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2009, pp. 64–85.

<sup>25</sup> Shichor, "The Great Wall of Steel," p. 123; *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment—China and Northeast Asia*, March 2011.

<sup>26</sup> The prime responsibility for dealing with the security situation with India falls to the Chengdu MR.

Moreover, the Lanzhou MR provides Beijing with significant strategic depth, and it constitutes about one-third of the total area of the PRC.<sup>27</sup> The MR is a sprawling, arid area that encompasses not only the entire Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region but also the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Gansu Province, Shaanxi Province, and Qinghai Province, as well as the westernmost portion of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (see Figure 2.2). The Lanzhou MR borders nine countries: Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Nepal.

**Figure 2.2**  
**China's Military Regions, with Lanzhou Military Region Highlighted**



The Lanzhou MR is vast and consists of rugged terrain, with only small pockets of widely dispersed security forces. Most of the regular military units are deployed near major cities and well away from the national frontiers. The preponderance of the components from the MR's two major ground formations—the 21st Group Army (GA) and the 47th GA—are deployed well

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<sup>27</sup> Shichor, "The Great Wall of Steel," p. 122.

back from Central Asia in Gansu Province and Shaanxi Province, respectively. The two GAs are located to command the “Gansu Corridor”—the main access route from the west into China’s heartland. The 21st GA only has two maneuver brigades but an extensive logistics tail, while the 47th GA has greater mobility. In terms of air power, the Lanzhou MR has two fighter divisions and one bomber division: the 6th Fighter Division based in Gansu (one regiment of J-6s and one of J-7s in Yinchuan, and one regiment of J-6s in Tianshui), the 37th Fighter Division in Xinjiang (two regiments of J-7s in Korla and one regiment of J-6s in Urumqi), and the 36th Bomber Division based in Wugong and Lintong, both in Shaanxi province. Each regiment has between 30 and 35 aircraft.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, the PLA’s strategic missile force, known as the Second Artillery, also operates key installations in the Lanzhou MR. Base 56 is headquartered in Xining in Qinghai Province and has subordinate missile brigades farther west, including one the near the city of Korla. The 823rd Brigade in Xinjiang is equipped with conventional medium-range ballistic missiles capable of hitting targets in Central Asia, such as U.S. bases in the region.<sup>29</sup>

### Economic Development

While some of the violent episodes and protests in China could be labeled as terrorist acts, most appear to be either the work of criminals or acts of protest. The 2009 unrest in Urumqi—the most serious episode since the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, resulting in approximately 200 fatalities with hundreds injured—was sparked by outrage among Uighurs over violence by Han Chinese committed against Uighur migrants in a factory dormitory in Guangdong Province. Nevertheless, Beijing tends to assume that the discontent is fundamentally the result of poverty and economic backwardness. The solution, therefore, is presumed to be economic development. In a major speech in mid-2001, commemorating the 80th anniversary of the founding of Chinese Communist Party, then-Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Lequan asserted:

To do good Xinjiang work . . . , to fight an outstanding and successful anti-separatism struggle, and to maintain long-standing social stability, . . . [it is] particularly key . . . to proceed with economic building. . . . [W]e need to always keep our economic development pace faster than that of surrounding countries and our living standards higher than those of surrounding countries. These are the only ways to keep the firm support of the people of all ethnic groups in the leadership of the CCP, to keep faith in the road of building socialism with

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<sup>28</sup> Dennis J. Blasko, *China Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation in the 21st Century*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2012, pp. 92–94; *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment—China and Northeast Asia*, August 3, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Mark Stokes, “The Second Artillery Force and the Future of Long-Range Precision Strike,” in Ashley J. Tellis and Travis Tanner, eds., *China’s Military Challenge 2012–13*, Seattle, Wash.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2012, pp. 127–160, esp. 135, 154.

Chinese characteristics, and to conscientiously resist and oppose all subversive acts of ethnic separatism.<sup>30</sup>

The goal of the “Go West” Campaign initiative launched in 2000 was to develop western China. By “west” (xibu), the Chinese government meant China’s vast interior—an area much larger than just Xinjiang or the Lanzhou MR. The area includes six provinces (Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, and Yunnan), five autonomous regions (Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, and Xinjiang), and one municipality (Chongqing). The entire area constitutes more than half of China’s total land area and approximately one-quarter of China’s population, and this portion of the population is disproportionately poor and minority.<sup>31</sup>

For more than a decade, Beijing has made a concentrated effort to upgrade the infrastructure of western China. As well-intentioned as this development initiative might be, the majority of the jobs and benefits appear to have accrued to Han Chinese rather than Uighurs and other ethnic minority peoples. The thrust of economic development has been substantial investment of state funds in massive engineering projects, including those to build infrastructure, such as roads, railways, and dams. Improving national integration has meant efforts on the one hand to instill the sense of an inclusive Chinese state to make ethnic minorities feel part of a multi-ethnic family, and on the other hand to encourage a major migration of Han Chinese to westernmost China to turn the demographic balance in Xinjiang in favor of China’s core ethnic grouping.

Xinjiang has enormous economic value to China and still greater economic potential.<sup>32</sup> The region is home to large deposits of petroleum, natural gas, and coal—all vital energy resources for China that have yet to be fully exploited. The region is estimated to have 30 percent of the country’s oil reserves; in 2009, Xinjiang ranked third in oil production. The region has an estimated 34 percent of the country’s natural gas reserves and ranked first in production of this energy resource. Exploitation of coal in Xinjiang is increasing rapidly, and the region is believed to contain 40 percent of the country’s total coal reserves. Moreover, Xinjiang can tap substantial amounts of wind and solar energy. In addition to plentiful energy resources, the region has significant reserves of nonferrous metals, such as copper and nickel.

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<sup>30</sup> Wang Lequan, “Speech at Xinjiang Autonomous Region Rally to Mark the Founding of the CPC,” *Xinjiang Ribao* (in Chinese), June 30, 2001, pp. A1, A4, accessed via World News Connection August 2, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> For some comprehensive overviews of the campaign, see the special section titled “China’s Campaign to ‘Open Up the West,’” *China Quarterly*, No. 178, June 2004, pp. 317–504; and Elizabeth Economy, *China’s Go West Campaign: Ecological Construction or Ecological Exploitation*, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, China Environment Series, No. 4, 2002, pp. 1–11.

<sup>32</sup> The economic data in this paragraph and the next one are drawn from Gu Baoguo, “Stride Ahead in Fast Lane of Economic, Social Development—Xinjiang Deeply Implements in an All-Round Way Spirit of Symposium on Xinjiang Work by Central Authorities,” *Qiushi Online* (in Chinese), Beijing, October 16, 2010, translated by BBC Monitoring International Reports, October 30, 2010; and Calla Wiemer, “The Economy of Xinjiang,” in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang*, Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2004, pp. 163–189.



Xinjiang is also an important agricultural region, serving as China's largest producer of high-quality commercial-grade cotton. With sizable flocks of sheep, the region produces significant amounts of wool. Other crops include fruits and nuts. Much of the farming is large-scale, mechanized, and commercial. Infrastructure projects have improved transportation and communication links within Xinjiang, with the rest of China, and with Xinjiang's Central Asian neighbors.

### National Integration

Chinese propaganda seeks to emphasize the harmonious, multi-ethnic character of the PRC. The borders of the PRC correspond quite closely to the boundaries of the Qing dynasty, and in some ways 21st century China continues to resemble a sprawling empire.<sup>33</sup> China's population is overwhelmingly Han Chinese, but approximately 9 percent of PRC citizens are from 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities, including Mongols, Tibetans, and Uighurs. Most of these minorities are concentrated in strategic border areas. Each of the aforementioned groups has a provincial-level autonomous region, which is supposed to provide significant autonomy for these minorities. In practice, however, there is only a token amount of autonomy, and politically these jurisdictions are firmly under the control of Beijing. While the regional chief executive tends to be a member of the respective ethnic group, the Communist Party Secretary is invariably a Han Chinese who wields the real power. Wang Lequan, the Party Secretary in Xinjiang for 16 years (1994–2010), was recently replaced by another Han, Zhang Chunxian. Meanwhile, since 2007 the Chairman of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region has been a Uighur: Nur Bekri. Officially there is legal protection of language, religion, and culture, but Beijing's emphasis is more on strict control of these dimensions and careful monitoring of the Uighur community because of fears that this could be a focal point for resistance or run counter to efforts at assimilation.<sup>34</sup>

Efforts aimed at assimilating minorities have met quite limited results, especially where Uighurs and Tibetans are concerned. By contrast, efforts to send Han Chinese settlers into the west have been far more successful, if only to judge by the growing numbers of Han living and working in Xinjiang and Tibet, especially in urban areas. The influx of ethnic Chinese has fueled tensions because the indigenous peoples tend to feel that they are being invaded and the benefits of economic development are disproportionately accruing to Han.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Not surprisingly, most Chinese bristle at such a label. Nevertheless, the depiction seems apt when examining China's border regions. See Gideon Rachman, "China Is Now an Empire in Denial," *The Financial Times*, July 13, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> For a recent account of life in the Uighur community, see Andrew Jacobs, "Resentment Simmers in Western Chinese Region," *New York Times* (Washington edition), September 5, 2010, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> See Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, pp. 49–65, and Elliott Sperling, "The Tibet Question and the Security of Asia," in Ganguly, Scobell, and Liow, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Asian Security Studies*, Routledge, 2010, pp. 68–69.

The pioneers of 20th century Han settlement were members of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). The XPCC evolved out of PLA and Kuomintang (KMT—Nationalist Party) forces and their families stationed in westernmost China. The XPCC also absorbed hundreds of thousands of Han migrants in several waves of settlers in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.<sup>36</sup> This unique formation not only has contributed to national integration of Xinjiang, but also to the maintenance of security and the region's economic development. The XPCC is composed of 2.5 million mostly ethnic Han Chinese personnel, including more than 900,000 workers who labor in a large network of farms, factories, and mines in Xinjiang. They are reportedly arranged along military lines into 14 divisions, with as many as 170 regimental farms and thousands of industrial, construction, and commercial enterprises. Perhaps 100,000 of these are organized into militia units. The XPCC's mission is defined as "cultivating and guarding the frontier areas entrusted to it by the state."<sup>37</sup>

In fact, the investments of the central government seem to have accelerated an influx of Han Chinese into Xinjiang. As of 2011, more than 8 million Han Chinese reside in the Autonomous Region. The official figure probably undercounts the ethnic Han population, because it almost certainly does not include either migrant laborers working in Xinjiang who come from other provinces or hundreds of thousands of military or paramilitary personnel stationed in Xinjiang (PLA and PAP). Moreover, it is unlikely that the approximately 2.5 million members of the XPCC are included in this figure.<sup>38</sup> The outcome has been resentment among the Uighur population and no appreciable improvement in the employment prospects or living standards of many Uighurs. There is considerable evidence that economic development during the past three decades has actually exacerbated ethnic tensions and increased the level of paranoia among the authorities.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> James Millward and Nabijian Tursun, "Political History and Strategic Control, 1884–1978," in Starre, 2004, pp. 89–90.

<sup>37</sup> For more information on the XPCC, see Information Office of the State Council, *History and Development of Xinjiang*, Section IX; Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, pp. 59–61; Yitzhak Shichor, "The Great Wall of Steel," p. 122; Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, pp. 93, 113–114. The quote appears in Blasko, p. 113.

<sup>38</sup> The official figure of Han Chinese residing in Xinjiang is cited by Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, p. 12. In addition to the 2.5 million members of the XPCC, there are an estimated 220,000 PLA personnel and 100,000 PAP personnel. See Shichor, "The Great Wall of Steel," pp. 122–23.

<sup>39</sup> See Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, chapter 4 ("Collective Action and Violence") and the appendix "Organized Protests and Violent Events, 1949–2005"). See also Yuhui Li, "Notes on the Chinese Government's Handling of the Urumqi Riot in Xinjiang," *Central and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2009, pp. 11–15. Beijing also appears to be deeply suspicious of Uighur activists, even those who try to work within the system. The case of prominent and successful businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer is perhaps the best example of China's counterproductive actions. She was imprisoned in 1999 and then expelled in 2005. Kadeer now lives in exile in the United States. See Rebiya Kadeer with Alexandra Cavelius, *Dragon Fighter: One Woman's Epic Struggle for Peace with China*, Carlsbad, Calif.: Kales Press, 2009.

### *Maintaining Peace, Predictability, and Secularism in Central Asia*

Although Beijing is most focused on internal security, as noted, its worst nightmare is the linkage of domestic enemies with foreign troublemakers. Thus, China must be vigilant on its borders and do its utmost to develop and maintain a buffer of stability all the way around China. In short, peace on China's periphery is considered essential to domestic harmony. This presumes significant Chinese influence in these regions and limited influence by outside powers (see below).

In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse of 1991, China sought to adjust to the new realities just beyond its borders. Internally, strengthening the CCP's grip on power was considered key, while externally, affirming the precise boundaries of its expansive land borders to the north and west was the highest priority.<sup>40</sup> Beijing worked hard to establish relations with these new states as well as the post-communist governments in Russia and Mongolia. By the mid-1990s, these efforts began to bear fruit, with the resolution of territorial disputes and confidence-building measures resulting in demilitarized borders. Also, Beijing worked to manage the threat posed by ethnic minorities inside China who spilled across borders through a combination of repression, economic development, and cooperation with its Central Asian neighbors. The five former Soviet republics in Central Asia all have weak, corrupt, authoritarian and secular regimes. Each seeks to stay in power by suppressing religious extremism and ruling populations that are ethnically mixed and spill across borders. Major ethnic groups in the region include Afghans and Tajiks (who are related to Iranians/Persians), Kazakhs, Turkmens, and Uzbeks (Turkic peoples), and sizable Russian populations.

Beijing quickly recognized all the post-Soviet states (setting aside its discomfort with these new entities), and on the basis of its usual principles of non-interference, established good relations with whomever was in charge. There has been active diplomacy, including frequent high-level Chinese visits to these capitals (see Chapter Three). As noted above, China settled all its border disputes with the post-Soviet states, but this took considerable time and great efforts to accomplish. Simply finalizing border matters between China and its three Central Asian neighbors was involved and time-consuming. China and Kazakhstan reached general agreement in 1994, with supplemental accords in 1997 and 1998, and demarcation was eventually concluded in 2002. The border with Kyrgyzstan was addressed by two accords in 1996 and 1999, demarcation work began in 2001, and a boundary protocol was penned in 2004. The border with Tajikistan was settled in 2002, although the actual process of demarcation did not begin until

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<sup>40</sup> Zhao Huasheng, *Zhongguo de Zhong Ya waijiao*, p. 38. Two European Central Asia specialists highlight the same point. See Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse, "Druzhiba Ponevole," *Rossia v Global'noi Politike*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2010, pp. 102–115.



2006, and the process was not officially concluded until the Tajik parliament ratified the protocol in January 2011.<sup>41</sup>

### *Increasing Chinese Influence and Limiting That of Other Powers*

China wants to stabilize and institutionalize the current satisfactory status quo in Central Asia by extending its influence, constraining other great powers, checking terrorism, and expanding economic ties.

The region of Central Asia is geographically surrounded by three major powers: Russia to the north and west, China to the east, and Iran to the southwest. Other major powers are more distant but still have influence and interests in the region; these include Turkey, India, and the United States. Other lesser powers have interests and influence in Central Asia, notably Afghanistan and Pakistan. All of these outsiders—especially Russia and the United States—compete for influence to varying degrees diplomatically, economically, and, of course, militarily. Beijing seeks to increase its influence in Central Asia and at the same time limit that of other powers.<sup>42</sup>

#### Russia

Historically, the dominant great power in the region has been Russia—all Central Asian states were former Soviet republics. Central Asia continues to be a key Russian sphere of influence and an important part of Moscow's "Near Abroad." One Chinese Central Asian specialist describes the region as "deeply Russified."<sup>43</sup> This status has been underscored by the presence of Russian troops and ethnic Russian inhabitants, as well as strong economic ties and established transportation links to Russia. In addition to military and economic influence, the impact of Russia in Central Asia also includes ethnic and linguistic dimensions. Approximately 10 million ethnic Russians call the five former Soviet Central Asian republics home, and the lingua franca of the region continues to be Russian. The majority of these Russians reside in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Russia, unlike China, has a number of military installations in the

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<sup>41</sup> For Kazakhstan, see Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, pp. 161–167; for Kyrgyzstan, see Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, p. 164; for Tajikistan, see Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, p. 166. In September 2006, Xinhua quoted Premier Wen Jiabao as saying that the border issue with Tajikistan had been "completely resolved." See also Bhavna Singh, "Sino-Tajik Border: Settlement or Entrapment?" New Delhi, India: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, January 28, 2011.

Understandably, resolution has been a sensitive domestic political issue in countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In Kyrgyzstan, many feel that too many concessions were made to China and the border issue was a focus of the protests that toppled Askar Akaev from the post of president of Kyrgyzstan in 2005. See Laruelle and Peyrouse.

<sup>42</sup> For a recent comprehensive treatment of great power competition in Central Asia, See Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*.

<sup>43</sup> Zhao Huasheng, *Zhongguo de Zhong Ya waijiao*, pp. 141, 142.

<sup>44</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Factbook*, "Kazakhstan," "Kyrgyzstan," "Tajikistan," "Turkmenistan," and "Uzbekistan," online, accessed September 14, 2011.

region—in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—staffed by an estimated several thousand military personnel.<sup>45</sup>

Russia continues to have a significant geostrategic interest in Central Asia. Since 2002, Moscow has led the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which binds Russia to Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>46</sup> The CSTO, like its Chinese counterpart, the SCO, promotes military cooperation, including joint exercises against terrorism and drug trafficking. Russia, of course, is also a member of the SCO. (The SCO consists of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.) While China is not a member of CSTO, Beijing has maintained good relations with Moscow during both post-Soviet eras.<sup>47</sup> There have been regular summits between Russian and Chinese leaders and cooperation in diplomatic, security and economic spheres, including under SCO auspices (see Chapter Three).

Although Beijing views Moscow as a competitor in Central Asia, Chinese leaders find it useful to avoid confrontation and work cooperatively as much as possible. China does not perceive Russia as a significant threat to Chinese interests in the region. Indeed, many Chinese analysts view Russia as a weak great power that is likely to weaken even further in the future.<sup>48</sup> Moscow in many ways serves as a useful partner for Beijing. For example, both Russia and China have a shared interest in countering U.S. influence in Central Asia and elsewhere.<sup>49</sup>

## The United States

The United States has considerable diplomatic, military, and economic levers as well as soft power. Soft power is often considered to be a real threat by regimes in Beijing, Moscow, and Central Asian capitals because Washington champions democracy and human rights, invariably making aid and expansion of relations contingent on regime adherence to respect for human rights. The autocrats are at best resistant to these pressures and at worst feel threatened by them. A prime example was the decision by Uzbekistan's leader to close the U.S. base at Karshi-Khanabad following American condemnation of the bloody suppression of domestic dissent in

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<sup>45</sup> Margarete Klein, *Russia's Military Capabilities: "Great Power" Ambitions and Reality*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, October 2009, p. 2; Vladimir Popov, "Uzbekistan Against New Russian Military Base in Kyrgyzstan," RIA Novosti/Reuters, March 8, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> The CSTO was formally founded in 2002 but its charter was not officially ratified until 2003 by founding members Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan joined in 2005.

<sup>47</sup> See Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*, pp. 56–59.

<sup>48</sup> The serious challenges facing Russia, including demographic decline and uncertainties about the post-Putin era, seem daunting to many Chinese observers. See, for example, Liu Yazhou, "Xibu Lun," p. 39 and the analysis of David Shambaugh in *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 36.

<sup>49</sup> See Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008.

May 2005.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Central Asian states have proved adept at leveraging their value in the U.S.-led global war on terrorism for financial gain and geostrategic balancing.<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, China's main worry concerns the U.S. military presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in late 2001. Looking out from Beijing, Chinese leaders get the impression that the United States is seeking to encircle China. According to one Chinese analyst writing in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs journal in 2005,

The United States has taken . . . steps to build . . . a strategic ring of encirclement in China's neighboring regions . . . significantly strengthening its network of military bases in the Asia-Pacific region and its alliance relationships with China neighboring countries; further strengthened the U.S. Pacific Fleet and established forward military bases in Central Asia which is contiguous to China's western region, in the name of counterterrorism.<sup>52</sup>

Most Chinese believe that the United States has every intention of maintaining permanent bases in Central Asia and Afghanistan. China appears to be skeptical of American claims that U.S. military forces will withdraw from the region following the conclusion of operations in Afghanistan. Many Chinese analysts believe that there are important geostrategic reasons for the United States to retain a significant military presence following the end of OEF. This is deemed extremely logical, given that Washington is thought to consider Central Asia a strategically important area, considering the amount of blood and treasure the United States has been willing to sacrifice since 2001. With a military presence in Central Asia, according to some Chinese analysts, the United States raises the specter of a western front in any future conflict with China.<sup>53</sup>

Especially worrisome for China is U.S. air power, and analysts pay particular attention to U.S. air facilities at places such as Manas in Kyrgyzstan and Bagram in Afghanistan (see below). Beijing will note with satisfaction that the United States is scheduled to depart Manas in 2014.<sup>54</sup> Historically, perhaps the U.S. military capability most feared by China has been air power. Chinese forces have experienced firsthand the punishment that the U.S. Air Force can deliver.

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<sup>50</sup> On the episode and its fallout, see Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*, pp. 38–40.

<sup>51</sup> See Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*.

<sup>52</sup> Qian Wenrong, "What Has Influenced Bush?" *Shijie Zhishe* (in Chinese), September 1, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> For articles that make all these points, see, for example, Fei Hongyuan, "The True and False of US Military Base Building in Central Asia," *Jiefangjun Bao Online* (in Chinese) April 11, 2010, p. 4, accessed via World News Connection July 18, 2012; Fu Xiaoqiang, "Why U.S. forces bent on expanding military bases in Afghanistan?" (in English), *People's Daily Online*, September 20, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Kyrgyzstan's parliament passed legislation in June 2013 preventing the extension of the U.S. lease on Manas beyond July 11, 2014, when the current lease expires. Approximately 1,500 U.S. military personnel and contractors work at the facility along with some 700 local employees. See Matt Millham, "Extension of US Manas Lease Ruled Out," *Stars and Stripes*, June 21, 2013, p. 3.

During the Korean War, Chinese troops suffered greatly from bombing. The PLA has a healthy respect for—and in some ways even an awe of—the U.S. Air Force.<sup>55</sup> The experience of Korea has been reinforced by the performance of U.S. air power in more recent campaigns, notably Operation Desert Storm (1991), Operation Allied Force (1999), Operation Enduring Freedom (since 2001), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003). The impact on China was particularly powerful during the former two campaigns. In 1991, it was the remarkable success of precision-guided munitions against Iraqi forces that jolted the PLA into reassessing its own understandings of the nature of modern warfare. In 1999, China was a victim of a tragic U.S. mistake when five Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs) accidentally struck the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, resulting in the death of three Chinese citizens and injuries to 20 others. While the incident was the result of a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) targeting error, most Chinese continue to believe that the strike was intentional. This conviction in part reflects the perception of hostile U.S. intentions toward China and in part an incredulity that the world's most technologically advanced and capable military could make such a fundamental mistake.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, the PLA is predisposed to think first and foremost of defensive air campaigns because it has routinely confronted more powerful and technologically superior adversaries in a series of military conflicts over the entire course of its existence. Thus, the PLA Air Force continues to put considerable attention into preparing for air defense campaigns.<sup>57</sup>

In the 21st century, China remains particularly alarmed about U.S. air superiority. While this concern is largely directed toward the protection of the country's political and economic heartland in China's northeast, concern has been raised about China's vulnerability in other more weakly defended regions. In the mid-1990s, for example, analysts expressed concern over the possibility that another power might impose a "no fly zone" over Tibet to hinder Chinese operations against Tibetan "separatists."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See, for example, John J. Tkacik, Jr., "From Surprise to Stalemate: What the People's Liberation Army Learned from the Korean War—a Half-Century Later," in Laurie Burkitt, Andrew Scobell, and Larry M. Wortzel, eds., *The Lessons of History: The Chinese People's Liberation Army at 75*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2003, pp. 296–297, 301–305, 308–309 and Dean Cheng, "Chinese Lessons from the Gulf Wars," in Andrew Scobell, David Lai, and Roy Kamphausen, eds., *Chinese Lessons from Other Peoples' Wars*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2011, pp. 153–200.

<sup>56</sup> Author discussions with numerous Chinese civilian and military analysts, 2000–2012.

<sup>57</sup> Roger Cliff, John Fei, Jeff Hagen, Elizabeth Hague, Eric Heginbotham, and John Stillion, *Shaking the Heavens and Splitting the Earth: Chinese Air Force Employment Concepts in the 21st Century*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-915-AF, 2011, pp. 117, 141. The analysis in this report is based on extensive analysis of Chinese sources.

<sup>58</sup> Zhang Wenmu, "21 shiji Zhongguo guoji zhengzhi jiao dian" [Central Issues of International Politics for China in the 21st Century] in Shi Boke, ed., *Zhongguo daqushi* [Megatrends China], Beijing: Hualing Chubanshe, 1996, p. 32.

U.S. air facilities in Central Asia and Afghanistan have elevated Chinese concerns over the threat U.S. air power poses to western China. According to an article published in a newspaper read by senior Chinese officials,

The U.S. and Russian newly built bases in Kyrgyzstan are at most several hundred kilometers away from the border with China, and fighters need only about ten minutes to zero in on China's border. The United States counter-terrorist deployments have seriously threatened the security of China's westernmost region and China cannot but take defensive actions.<sup>59</sup>

More recently, Beijing's sense of vulnerability to U.S. forces located on this periphery was heightened by the helicopter-borne raid by Navy SEALs inside Pakistan in May 2011. China was most impressed by the successful U.S. operation launched against Osama bin Laden, and the terrorist leader's death was certainly good news from China's perspective.<sup>60</sup> However, the fact that the United States did this without informing or gaining approval from Pakistan ahead of time, from Beijing's perspective, highlights both U.S. power projection capabilities and a willingness to violate the sovereignty of another state.

#### Other Powers

Other powers with influence in Central Asia include Iran, India, and Turkey. Beijing has been amenable to including Tehran and New Delhi as interested parties in the region but seems more reticent about including Ankara. China has good relations with Iran and does not view it as a rival. Meanwhile, China is on fairly good terms with India, although lingering issues bedevil their bilateral relationship. India has an air base in Tajikistan at Ayni, close to the border with Afghanistan and 10 km northeast of Dushanbe. The basing arrangement involves trilateral coordination between India, Russia, and Tajikistan. Despite this, Beijing does not appear to view New Delhi as a threat or challenge in Central Asia. Both Iran and India have been included in SCO summits.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Shadati, "Mei, E Zhong Ya jidi aizhe Zhongguojian" [U.S., Russian bases constructed close to China] in *Guoji Xianqu Daobao* (Beijing) March 26, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, "China Says Bin Laden's Death 'Milestone' for International Anti-Terrorism Efforts," in English, Beijing, *Xinhua*, May 2, 2011, posted by *People's Daily Online*, May 3, 2011; and Wang Hui, "Repercussions of bin Laden's Death," op-ed (in English), *China Daily*, online, updated May 5, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> On China-Iran relations, see John W. Garver, *China and Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World*, Seattle: University of Washington, 2006; and Michael D. Swaine, "Beijing's Tightrope Walk on Iran," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 33, Summer 2010a, pp. 1–19. On China-India relations, see John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*, Seattle: University of Washington, 2001a; and Zhao Jun, "Security Problems in Central Asia and Possibilities of Increased Cooperation Between China, Russia, and India," *Far Eastern Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2011, pp. 44–48. On India's air base in Tajikistan, see Jagannath P. Panda, "India's Approach to Central Asia: Strategic Intent and Geo-political Calculus," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2009, pp. 108–109.

Turkey, however, is viewed with more concern by China than either Iran or India. According to General Liu Yazhou, “When speaking of Central Asia, rivals such as Russia and the United States tend to grab our attention; but, if we step back, our fearsome and formidable rival is not the United States or Russia, rather, it is Turkey.” General Liu explains: “. . . Turkey is the best example of secularization and democratization in the Islamic and Turkic worlds. Culturally, Turkey claims to be the ancestral home of all ethnic Turkic peoples [including the Uighurs].”<sup>62</sup> In the 21st century, Turkey is home to “some 40,000” ethnic Uighurs and a key base for Uighur dissidents in exile.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the unrest in Xinjiang has created tensions with Turkey and other Muslim states.<sup>64</sup>

### *Promoting China’s Economic Interests*

Sustaining economic growth and prosperity inside China means promoting trade and investment with neighboring countries and securing new sources of energy. Energy cooperation and economic interests are also important drivers.<sup>65</sup> China has moved to exploit economic complementarities between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. With all of these countries, China has pursued a state-led development model of economic relations, trying to promote trade, investment, and transportation links. The economic goals for China are linked both to securing political ties and to facilitating the economic development of Xinjiang. Hence, Beijing has focused on the development of rail, highway, and air routes that open borders to trade.<sup>66</sup> China’s trade with Central Asian republics has grown rapidly and, although a small portion of total Chinese trade, makes China a high-ranking trade partner of most of the Central Asian republics, especially Kazakhstan (see Chapter Three).

Chinese leaders are increasingly concerned with energy security. Although the bulk of China’s energy needs are met by coal, petroleum is an ever-expanding sector of energy consumption. Since 1993, China has been a net importer of oil. Natural gas is also of growing importance to China. Increasingly Beijing looks abroad to meet its energy needs, even for coal. There are two main modes of transportation available to get these resources back to China: pipelines and shipping routes.<sup>67</sup> For the past two decades, China has been dependent on sea lanes, and efforts to construct pipelines to Russia and Central Asia have proved tortuous and

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<sup>62</sup> Liu Yazhou, “Xibu Lun,” p. 40.

<sup>63</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, p. 140.

<sup>64</sup> Chris Zambelis, “Xinjiang Crackdown and Changing Perceptions of China in the Islamic World,” *China Brief*, Vol. 9, No. 16, August 5, 2009.

<sup>65</sup> Zhao Huasheng, *Zhongguo de Zhong Ya waijiao*, pp. 71–80.

<sup>66</sup> See Jonathan Holslag, “China’s Roads to Influence,” *Asian Survey* vol. 50, no. 4 (July/August 2010), pp. 646–47, 648, 659, 660, 661.

<sup>67</sup> For analysis of China’s energy security concerns, see Andrew J. Nathan and Andrew Scobell, *China’s Search for Security*, Columbia University Press, 2012, pp. 167, 171–178.



extremely slow to bear fruit (see Chapter Three for details). Nevertheless, Beijing is keen to diversify its energy sources and supply routes. China feels very vulnerable where its sea lines of communication are concerned. As a result, there is great interest in building pipelines to Central Asia, to Russia, and to ports in places such as Pakistan (see Chapter Four). One influential analyst at China's Central Party School has labeled such routes "strategic passageways" [zhanlue tongdao] that are especially important for energy security. Men Honghua noted that "China can tap the energy resources of Central Asia and Russia that will enable China to have access with oil supply lines via transportation routes beyond the control of the U.S. Navy, thus lessening China's vulnerability to the disruption of oil from the Middle East."<sup>68</sup>

China also possesses substantial energy resources within its borders, but development has proved time-consuming and expensive. China's largest oil and natural gas reserves appear to be located in Xinjiang, notably in the Tarim Basin, where they are a long way from the centers of demand in eastern China.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Chinese analysts believe domestic energy resources will be inadequate and the country will face shortages unless foreign sources can be secured.<sup>70</sup>

Having explored the drivers of China's Central Asia policy, we now turn to examine Chinese strategy toward the region.

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<sup>68</sup> Men Honghua, "Xin anquan guan; lihai gongtongti; zhanlue tongdao [New Security Concept; Interests Communities; Strategic Passageways]," *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu*, No. 8, 2004, p. 71. See also Liu Yazhou, "Xinbu Lun," pp. 37–39.

<sup>69</sup> Liu Chenglin, Zhu Jie, Chen Changbo, and Liu Guangdi, "Potential Recoverable Natural Gas Resources in China," *Petroleum Science*, Vol. 5, Issue 1, 2008, pp. 83–86; "Strengthen Oil/Gas Exploration and Development in Xinjiang," *China Chemical Reporter* (April 26, 2007), p. 5; Winnie Lee, "China's Tarim Crude Oil Output Off 14.1% in 2009, Gas Up," *Platts Oilgram News* (January 11, 2010), p. 2; "Xinjiang Becomes China's Second Largest Crude Oil Producer," Xinhua News, Beijing, January 2, 2009.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Men Honghua, "Xin anquan guan; lihai gongtongti; zhanlue tongdao [New Security Concept; Interests Communities; Strategic Passageways]."





### 3. China's Central Asia Strategy

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China has been increasingly active in Central Asia since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Of particular note is Beijing's remarkable drive to establish a Chinese-sponsored multilateral security architecture for Central Asia: the SCO. This initiative marks an unprecedented step forward in China's efforts to take a leadership role in Asia. Behind this activism are the drivers identified in the previous chapter, which are borne of an underlying sense of vulnerability and weakness. China's response to the complex challenges it confronts to the west during the past two decades has been to adopt an "Empty Fortress" strategy. China's leaders recognize the country's westernmost regions are poorly defended and vulnerable to internal dissent and external threats. China's defense posture is heavily skewed toward the east, where the most prosperous and densely populated areas are located. But Beijing refuses to accept its weaknesses. China will not abandon western areas, grant independence to the non-Han inhabitants, or cede tracts of territory to its neighbors. On the contrary, China has boldly projected an image of proactive strength in Central Asia. The Empty Fortress strategy is an ancient strategic ruse to trick an adversary into believing one is powerful when in fact one is weak.<sup>1</sup>

Beijing has executed its Empty Fortress strategy since 1991 through sustained diplomatic efforts in Central Asia. These efforts have been combined with limited security cooperation (see below). These include high-profile displays of modest military power—small-scale exercises conducted with security forces from other SCO member states (see below and Table 3.2). These initiatives, which have been undertaken under the umbrella of the SCO, have enabled China to project the image of a mighty and influential power. While the strongest card that China has to play in Central Asia is economic, Beijing views this less as a strength and more as a weakness. Of course, Beijing realizes that Central Asian states for the most part welcome Chinese trade and investment, and it recognizes that this gives China greater clout in the region. Nevertheless, Beijing considers the overall economic dimension an Achilles' heel because China is dependent on overseas inputs to sustain its economic juggernaut. Central Asia possesses rich energy resources that Beijing covets, notably petroleum and natural gas.

This chapter reviews China's diplomatic, security, and economic activities during the past two decades.

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<sup>1</sup> The original Empty Fortress stratagem is credited to the legendary Chinese general Zhuge Liang, who successfully repulsed enemy hordes from the defenseless city of Xicheng without a fight. The story is recounted in chapter 95 of the epic Chinese novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by Luo Guanzhong and summarized in Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, p. xxi.

## Chinese Diplomacy in Central Asia: Much Style, Limited Substance

In recent years, China's leaders have been extremely active around the world, traveling far and wide for summits and state visits.<sup>2</sup> But their most frequent stopovers are in Asia. Central Asia and the surrounding countries are important destinations. In June 2011, for example, President Hu Jintao undertook a nine-day trip and “conducted intensive diplomatic activities, visited three countries [Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine] and five cities [Astana, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Yalta], attended two international conferences [the annual SCO heads of state summit and 15th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum], and participated in more than 50 bilateral and multilateral activities.”<sup>3</sup>

More recently, in September 2013, Hu's successor, President Xi Jinping, undertook an extended excursion in Central Asia. In doing so, he became the third consecutive PRC head of state to pay such concerted attention to the region. Xi began his tour with a two-day visit to Turkmenistan, where the focus was on expanded energy cooperation. The Chinese president ceremonially opened a new gas field at Galkynysh and committed to the construction of a new multi-billion dollar liquid natural gas pipeline. Known as “Route D,” this pipeline will become the second route and reaffirm China's status as the number one customer for Turkmenistan's gas. From there, Xi flew to Russia, where he attended the G-20 Summit meeting in St. Petersburg. Following this high-profile meeting, President Xi visited Kazakhstan. There he gave a major speech focusing on PRC policy toward Central Asia at Nazarbayev University. Xi promoted the idea of a “Silk Road economic belt” and announced a number of new Chinese initiatives, including a ten-year program to fund scholarships for 30,000 students from SCO countries and another to pay for 10,000 teachers and students from SCO member state Confucius Institutes to visit China. Xi's next stop was Uzbekistan, where the Chinese leader signed deals on oil, gas, and gold reportedly worth US\$15 billion. The PRC president's final stop was in Kyrgyzstan, where he participated in his first annual SCO heads of state summit in Bishkek and signed deals with his Kyrgyz counterpart worth US\$3 billion, including funding for a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China and an oil refinery.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Medeiros, *China's International Behavior*, pp. 72–78.

<sup>3</sup> “China, Ukraine Set Up Strategic Partnership,” Xinhua, June 20, 2011; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, “Building and Enhancing the Strategic Partnership and Writing a New Chapter of Friendly Cooperation—Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi Talks About the Outcome of President Hu Jintao's Visits,” June 21, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph draws on the following sources: Wu Jiao and Zhang Yunbi, “Xi Proposes a ‘New Silk Road’ with Central Asia,” *China Daily* (US Edition), September 8, 2013; Martha Brill Olcott, “China's Unmatched Influence in Central Asia,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 18, 2013; “China in Central Asia: Rising China, Sinking Russia,” *The Economist*, September 14, 2013; “China to Allocate \$3Bln to Kyrgyzstan—Reports” RIA Novosti (Moscow), September 11, 2013; Simon Denyer, “China Bypasses American ‘New Silk Road’ with Two of Its Own,” *Washington Post*, October 14, 2013.

Multilaterally, Chinese policy has concentrated on creating a stable condominium-like arrangement that is attentive to Chinese interests and constrains the future growth of Russian power. Meanwhile, Russia has found the SCO to be not just a worthwhile venue for basic Sino-Russian cooperation but also a way for Moscow to mitigate Beijing's influence in the region.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, China uses the organization to limit the influence of outside powers such as the United States and India. In short, the SCO is a key management mechanism that Beijing uses to demonstrate growing influence in Central Asia.

### *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*

Despite a more activist Chinese foreign policy in the region, including the formation of the SCO, Beijing's diplomatic clout remains modest—long on rhetoric and symbolism and short on action and substance. Beijing has nevertheless adeptly hyped its activities—summitry, declarations, and dialogues—to project the image of a dynamic and powerful China. In short, Beijing has gone about deftly implementing its Empty Fortress strategy.

#### History

Formally established on June 15, 2001, the SCO evolved out of annual summits among five states that started in 1996—Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In its early years, China focused the organization on improving the security situation in Xinjiang and China's Central Asian neighborhood. SCO's precursor, the "Shanghai Five" (formed in 1996), focused initially on confidence-building measures, and this morphed into enhancing border security and internal security as well as multilateral military and counterterrorism cooperation. The Shanghai Five was formally established two years after the launching of the NATO enlargement initiative and the creation of the Partnership for Peace program. Noteworthy early achievements were confidence-building measures, including the pullback of most military forces 100 kilometers from borders and advanced notification of military exercises and troop movements.<sup>6</sup> Another state, Uzbekistan, was added in 2001, and together these six states became the founding members of SCO. China was the driving force behind the creation of the entity and remains the SCO's most important member.

In the late 1990s China found the Shanghai Five extremely useful as a management mechanism for Central Asia. As a result, Beijing worked hard to formalize the entity. Member states agreed to establish a secretariat in Beijing at the May 2003 SCO summit in Moscow and selected a Chinese diplomat to serve as the secretary general. The SCO has provided China with

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<sup>5</sup> Mohan Malik, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization," in Sumit Ganguly, Joseph Liow, and Andrew Scobell, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Asian Security Studies*, New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 74, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Bates Gill, *Rising Star*, pp. 37–38.

“an institutionalized means for . . . engagement in Central Asian affairs, as well as a platform for overall cooperation between China and Central Asian states.”<sup>7</sup>

In fact, the organization also benefits Russia and the states of Central Asia. The SCO enhances regime security in each country by helping to legitimize rulers. Since virtually none of the political leaders were selected through free and fair elections, the SCO functions as an autocrats’ club, providing rulers with a tangible means to demonstrate their status and offer real economic benefits to their citizens through international trade and investment. Moreover, the SCO is a forum for all the member states to cooperate in keeping one another in power: As secular authoritarian regimes, they all share a common interest in blocking Islamic fundamentalism and democratization.<sup>8</sup>

Gradually, over the course of the 2000s, the SCO has become an important vehicle for actual Chinese geostrategic influence as well as status enhancement. Not only can China use the SCO to exert influence in the region and constrain the influence of other outside powers, but Beijing can also promote its reputation as a constructive and peaceful great power. China seeks to counter longstanding Russian influence and more recent U.S. influence. Moreover, the SCO has raised China to a position of unprecedented prominence, “giving it a major voice in Central Asian affairs without antagonizing Russia and alarming regional leaders while keeping the United States at bay.”<sup>9</sup>

The United States has found itself excluded from the organization, but not necessarily by Chinese design. The responses to feelers by Washington on the possibility of establishing some formal affiliation with SCO have been cool. Since the organization operates on the basis of consensus, an invitation to the United States would require the unanimous consent of the member states—something that is very difficult to obtain. While Beijing is wary of Washington’s involvement in Central Asia since the launching in late 2001 of the Global War on Terrorism, China seeks to exploit this opportunity to justify suppressing Uighur unrest in the name of contributing to a worldwide counterterrorism struggle. Nevertheless, China works to mitigate U.S. influence in the region, treading cautiously so as not to unnecessarily antagonize

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<sup>7</sup> Zhao Huasheng, “China’s Central Asia Policy,” in Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love, eds., *The New Great Game: Chinese Views on Central Asia*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2006, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Malik, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” pp. 76–77.

<sup>9</sup> Eugene B. Rumer, “China, Russia, and the Balance of Power in Central Asia,” *Strategic Forum*, No. 223, November 2006, p. 5, cited in Selbi Hanova, “Perspectives on the SCO: Imagined Discourses,” *China Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2009, p. 76.

the United States.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as one Western analyst noted, “the SCO has pursued a policy of accommodation with the United States on Central Asia policy.”<sup>11</sup>

While the SCO is a potential instrument for checking U.S. influence in the region, China and other SCO members are not adamantly opposed to a temporary U.S. presence. However, Beijing does not desire a permanent U.S. military footprint in Central Asia and is wary of perceived U.S. efforts to constrain China. Yet no single country totally dominates the SCO. While some have interpreted Beijing’s stance on U.S. involvement in the region as hostile, it can also be viewed as a low-key effort by China to guard against a permanent U.S. military presence in the region. At the conclusion of the July 2005 SCO heads of state summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, the six countries issued a statement urging the U.S.-led coalition forces to “determine a deadline” for withdrawal of its forces from SCO member countries. In July 2005, the United States was forced to close down its airfield at Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan. But the pressure had come from individual countries and not the SCO itself. Indeed, the 2005 statement appears to have been prompted by states other than China, notably Uzbekistan.<sup>12</sup> In short, China has not spearheaded SCO efforts to expel U.S. military forces from Central Asia.

In addition to the six full members of the SCO, other states have been granted formal affiliation. The first to attain such status was Mongolia in 2004—Ulan Bator became an “observer” and President Natsagiin Bagabandi attended the 2004 SCO heads of state summit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (Table 3.1). Iran and Pakistan are keen on membership in the SCO and have been observers since 2005. Tehran formally applied for full membership in 2009, but is unlikely to be admitted in the near future because the SCO statutes require members not to be the target of United Nations sanctions. While Mongolia and India have observer status in the SCO, neither seems to be interested in full membership in the organization.<sup>13</sup> In addition, SCO has two “dialogue partners”—Sri Lanka and Belarus—and three “guests”—Afghanistan, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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<sup>10</sup> Scheives, “China Turns West,” pp. 219–222; Hasan H. Karrar, *The New Silk Road Diplomacy: China’s Central Asian Foreign Policy Since the Cold War*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009, pp. 58–66.

<sup>11</sup> Marc Lanteigne, “In Medias Res: The Development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Security Community,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 4, Winter 2006–2007, p. 613.

<sup>12</sup> It appears Uzbekistan was a driving force behind the statement. See, for example, Scheives, “China Turns West,” p. 221; and Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> On these affiliated nonmember countries and their interests, see Malik, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” pp. 77–78.

**Table 3.1**  
**SCO Heads of State Summits, 2001–2013**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Member States Represented</b>	<b>Nonmember States Represented</b>
June 14, 2001	Shanghai, China	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	N/A
June 7, 2002	St. Petersburg, Russia	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	N/A
May 29, 2003	Moscow, Russia	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	N/A
June 17, 2004	Tashkent, Uzbekistan	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mongolia (observer)</li> </ul>
July 5, 2005	Astana, Kazakhstan	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran (observers)</li> <li>• Afghanistan (SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group)</li> </ul>
June 15, 2006	Shanghai, China	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran (observers)</li> <li>• Afghanistan (SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group)</li> </ul>
August 16, 2007	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran (observers)</li> <li>• Afghanistan (SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group)</li> </ul>
August 28, 2008	Dushanbe, Tajikistan	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran (observers)</li> <li>• Afghanistan (SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group)</li> </ul>
June 16–18, 2009	Yekaterinburg, Russia	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran (observers)</li> <li>• Afghanistan (SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group)</li> <li>• Belarus, Sri Lanka (dialogue partners)</li> </ul>
June 10–11, 2010	Tashkent, Uzbekistan	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran (observers)</li> <li>• Afghanistan (SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group)</li> <li>• Belarus, Sri Lanka (dialogue partners)</li> </ul>

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Member States Represented</b>	<b>Nonmember States Represented</b>
June 15, 2011	Astana, Kazakhstan	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran (observers)</li> <li>• Afghanistan (SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group)</li> <li>• Belarus, Sri Lanka (dialogue partners)</li> </ul>
June 6–7, 2012	Beijing, China	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran (observers)</li> <li>• Afghanistan, Turkmenistan (guests of host state)</li> <li>• Belarus, Sri Lanka (dialogue partners)</li> </ul>
September 13, 2013	Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Afghanistan, Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran (observers)</li> <li>• Belarus, Sri Lanka, Turkey (dialogue partners)</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Compiled from RAND data.

In the early years of its existence, the SCO was primarily concerned with establishing relations with organizations such as ASEAN and CIS. In recent years, the SCO has put a great deal of effort into increasing the number of affiliated states. Annual summits since 2005 have seen not only a growing number of observer countries and dialogue partners, but also an increasingly active role for these nonmember countries. In 2009, for example, the leaders of observer states were able for the first time to participate in a restricted meeting of the Council of the Heads of Member States. Additionally, special working groups spent two to three years developing formal qualifications for admission of new member states to the SCO, which were issued in 2010.<sup>14</sup>

### Chinese Interests

From the Chinese perspective, the SCO advances three objectives: improving the regional security situation, providing a mechanism for Beijing to manage its Central Asia policy, and projecting China's geopolitical influence by expanding China's hard power and enhancing its soft power.

Official Chinese rhetoric proclaims the establishment of “strategic partnerships” in Central Asia and elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> However, China's actual priority is preventing instability in the Central

<sup>14</sup> Nicola P. Contessi, “China, Russia, and the Leadership of the SCO: A Tacit Deal Scenario,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 2010, p. 109.

<sup>15</sup> Medeiros, *China's International Behavior*, pp. 82–89.



Asian region.<sup>16</sup> The five Central Asian states have been fairly stable in the 21st century, although it would be a stretch for the SCO to claim credit for relative stability in and around the region. Nevertheless, there have been problems: the continuing conflict in Afghanistan, and upheavals in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The SCO's record of dealing with regional crises is disappointing. In the Uzbek (Andijan) and Kyrgyz crises (2005), the organization was irrelevant. The SCO also played no role in the Kyrgyz upheaval of 2010.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the SCO has been a bystander to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Beyond issuing statements of concern and establishing an Afghan contact group, the organization has played no role (see below).

Concern over turmoil in the region has heightened since early 2005, when protests following a disputed election led to the ouster of Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev in what would come to be known as the "Tulip Revolution." In May of that year, China supported the Uzbek government when it violently cracked down on protesters in Andijan, an event that spurred a falling out between the Uzbek government and that of the United States.<sup>18</sup> From China's perspective, Tashkent's actions in Andijan were crucial in preventing further unrest and violence, and foreign calls for an investigation were viewed as clear interference in sovereign affairs.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, China also remains concerned about continuing ethnic violence and political unrest in Kyrgyzstan (where another wave of protests in April 2010 killed dozens and toppled yet another president, while ethnic violence months later killed thousands and displaced hundreds of thousands). China would prefer a resolution of the water disputes that plague relations between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as their energy-rich and water-poor neighbors.<sup>20</sup> China also views the SCO as a management mechanism to avert conflict among members, and it is noteworthy that no member state has yet to fight a war with another member state.

Not to be overlooked is the fact that SCO enhances China's stature as a great power. It is the first multilateral organization to be established by China and be headquartered in China. With a Chinese city named in the title, Beijing is proud of its central role. Moreover, rhetorically at least, SCO member states support Chinese stands on a variety of issues. Most obviously, this

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Sergei M. Trush, "Dinamika Otnoshenii KNR-SShA. Motivatsii Rossii," *SShA-Kanada, Ekonomika, Politika, Kul'tura*, No. 4, April 2011.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on these episodes, see Eric McGlinchey, "Exploring Regime Instability and Ethnic Violence in Kyrgyzstan," *Asia Policy*, No. 12, July 2011, pp. 79–98; and Eric McGlinchey, *Chaos, Violence, Dynasty: Politics and Islam in Central Asia*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*, pp. 38–40; and A. Baranov, "Treugol'nik SSHA-RF-KNR i SHOS," *Aziia i Afrika Segodnia*, No. 9, September 2009, pp. 57–59.

<sup>19</sup> Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*, pp. 81–83.

<sup>20</sup> Mochul'skii, 2010.



verbal support comes on the matter of the “three evils” (terrorism, separatism, and extremism) but also on other matters of importance to Beijing.

China has played the leading role in the SCO. The SCO eased China’s way into regional influence, providing a way to get involved without overtly challenging Russia.<sup>21</sup> However, some analysts believe China’s growing role in that organization challenges Russia and diminishes Russian influence.<sup>22</sup> Central Asian foreign policy analysts express concern about Chinese involvement in their region. China and Russia are seen as competing in Central Asia and through the SCO.<sup>23</sup> But for Central Asian states, Russia’s participation in the SCO helps dilute Chinese influence.

In the meantime, however, Russia continues to see certain benefits in its SCO involvement, even if China’s role is growing. In the absence of other comparable strong organizations, including the limited role of the CSTO, the SCO is a means for Russia to engage Central Asian states and China.<sup>24</sup> According to some, there is a division of labor in the SCO, with Russia focusing on security issues and China on economic issues.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, many argue that the Sino-Russian bilateral relationship is more important to both countries than the SCO itself.<sup>26</sup>

## Key Areas of SCO Interest

In the decade since its formation, the SCO attention has focused on three key areas. These areas are evident in official statements and reports of annual meetings of the Council of the Heads of Member States and other SCO gatherings. First, the organization has consistently focused on nontraditional threats to the region, particularly the “three evils.” Counterterrorism has been the “cooperation focus of . . . member states” according to the SCO foreign ministers’ statement of January 7, 2002.<sup>27</sup> Virtually every joint statement declared common opposition to the “three evils.”<sup>28</sup> But Beijing’s greatest fear is the threat of separatism or “splittism.” The issue of “East Turkistan splittist forces” gets top priority from the Chinese government and Chinese analysts.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse, “Druzhba Ponevole,” *Rossia v Global’noi Politike*, No. 2, Vol. 8, 2010, pp. 102–115.

<sup>22</sup> See Vladimir Skosyrev, “Vliianie Rossii v Tsentral’noi Azii Padaet,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, April 27, 2011. See also Blank, *Towards a New Chinese Order in Asia: Russia’s Failure*.

<sup>23</sup> Laruelle and Peyrouse, “Druzhba Ponevole.”

<sup>24</sup> Of course Moscow would prefer a higher profile for the CSTO but is willing to utilize the SCO to exert Russian influence. Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*, pp. 70–71.

<sup>25</sup> Contessi, “China, Russia and the Leadership of the SCO,” pp. 101–123.

<sup>26</sup> Skosyrev, “Vliianie Rossii v Tsentral’noi Azii Padaet.”

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Sheives, “China Turns West,” p. 213.

<sup>28</sup> See the joint statements available on the SCO website: [www.sectsco.org](http://www.sectsco.org).

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Zhao Huasheng, *Zhongguo de Zhong Ya waijiao*, pp. 59–71.

Some of the earliest substantive measures taken by the SCO were directly focused on the “three evils.” Reports from the annual meetings of the Council of the Heads of Member States are filled with strong language on the issue of terrorism, and senior leaders of SCO nations regularly express satisfaction with joint counterterrorism exercises as well as the desire to continue security cooperation programs (see next section). Other nontraditional security issues that have held the SCO’s attention since its inception are narcotics, international crime, illegal migration, and information security. Issues that have appeared less consistently include health care and environmental protection.<sup>30</sup>

SCO communiqués also frequently emphasize economic cooperation. One relatively recent trend is the increased desire of the member states to involve the SCO Business Council and SCO Interbank Consortium in multilateral projects rather than simply bilateral ones. Of note is the fact that economic issues often come up in meeting agendas in conjunction with broader security concerns. In 2009, for example, a communiqué from the Council of the Heads of Member States mentioned the global financial crisis only in the context of being prepared to ensure security and maintain stability in the SCO region.<sup>31</sup>

A third theme that has been increasingly emphasized in recent years is the need for the SCO to play a greater role in stabilizing Afghanistan. In 2005, the organization established an Afghanistan contact group (see last section in this chapter).

China’s foreign policy toward Central Asia has been impressive on the surface, but results have been quite modest. Nevertheless, this diplomatic initiative can be considered a very successful part of the overall Empty Fortress strategy. The remainder of this chapter examines each of these three themes—security cooperation, economic interactions, and SCO initiatives on Afghanistan—in turn. While the SCO is not the conduit through which all these activities flow, the organization does provide an umbrella under which they can occur.

### ***Security Cooperation: Big Show, Modest Results***

China has made noteworthy strides in security cooperation with Central Asian states.<sup>32</sup> In the 1990s, there was an impressive series of confidence-building measures; in the 2000s, the accomplishments were more modest—an ongoing program of military-to-military relations and law enforcement collaboration. The most visible manifestation of the former was a series of mostly small-scale field exercises held on a near-annual basis (see Table 3.2 for full details and sources); the most tangible development of the latter was the establishment of a counterterrorism

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<sup>30</sup> See reports available on the SCO’s website: [www.sectsco.org](http://www.sectsco.org).

<sup>31</sup> See the communiqué available on the website: [www.sectsco.org](http://www.sectsco.org).

<sup>32</sup> Beijing has also expanded security cooperation and military diplomacy with countries in other areas of Asia and the world. See, for example, Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, pp. 206–209.

center. Both of these were quite humble undertakings, but they fulfilled their purpose under the Empty Fortress strategy—suggesting a dynamic, powerful, and cooperative China.

The Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure located in Tashkent, one of two permanent SCO bodies (the other being the Secretariat in Beijing), is intended as a clearinghouse for information on terrorists and terrorist groups. The extent of actual cooperation is unclear, but it helps ensure that Xinjiang Uighur separatists receive little aid or comfort from Central Asian states and provides a mechanism for intelligence sharing on cross-border fundamentalist activities. While there are formal undertakings by the Central Asian states to suppress the Uighur separatists, there is still some sympathy and tolerance by national governments for political activities by the Uighur diaspora beyond China's borders.<sup>33</sup>

One of the most visible results of SCO cooperation has been regular military exercises among member states. The Central Asian states welcome these Chinese military initiatives as a way to balance against Russian and U.S. military influence. And these states are happy that Chinese troops come, provide useful training and photographic opportunities, and then depart after the exercises. China has no military bases in Central Asia, and no government in the region appears interested in such a possibility. The possibility of a Chinese military presence in Central Asia to shore up border protection—an idea allegedly floated by a Chinese official in 2009—was reportedly greeted with little enthusiasm in the region.<sup>34</sup> During the course of an SCO military exercise, the then PLA Chief of General Staff, General Chen Bingde, apparently opined that, upon the invitation of a foreign government, China might be receptive to dispatching troops abroad to strike against violent extremists.<sup>35</sup> While interesting, these comments should not be interpreted as an indicator of any enthusiasm by China to send forces out into Central Asia. Any such initiative is likely to be viewed with considerable skepticism within China and will find it difficult to gain traction in Beijing.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Chien-peng Chung, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: China's Changing Influence in Central Asia," *The China Quarterly* 180 (December 2004), pp. 999–1000; and Laruelle and Peyrouse, "Druzhba Ponevole."

<sup>34</sup> Laruelle and Peyrouse, "Druzhba Ponevole."

<sup>35</sup> Pan Guang, "China's Policy on the Conflict in Afghanistan," *Central and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2010, p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> A key element of Beijing's propaganda for foreign consumption is that China is qualitatively different from other great powers. China insists that it is not interested in establishing military bases abroad. While this stance is of course subject to change, as a key tenet of Chinese security policy and a sincerely held position it would take something momentous to alter it.

**Table 3.2. China's Participation in Multilateral Military Exercises Under the Framework of the SCO, 2001–2013**

Codename	Dates	Participants	Location	Troop Strength
Exercise 01	October 10–11, 2002	China, Kyrgyzstan	Near the Irkeshtam crossing on both sides of the Kyrgyz-Chinese border	400 troops from each side's border defense units were involved in preparations for and in the holding of the exercises. Approximately 175 troops from China and 75 from Kyrgyzstan directly participated in the exercises. <sup>a</sup>
Cooperation 2003	August 6–12, 2003	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan	Kazakhstan's border city of Ucharal; and Yili in China's northwest Xinjiang province	More than 1,200 troops participated in the exercise. In Kazakhstan, the 500 participating troops included a Kazakh mobile infantry unit, a Russian motorized infantry company, and a Kyrgyz paratroop assault platoon. <sup>b</sup> In China, 700 Chinese troops participated, including mobile riflemen, armored infantry, artillery infantry, helicopter elements, elements of a special unit of armed police, and special support forces belonging to the Xinjiang Military District. They were joined by a 33-man Kyrgyz special warfare platoon. <sup>c</sup>
Peace Mission 2005	August 18–25, 2005	China, Russia	Vladivostok in Russia's Far East, and east China's Shandong Peninsula	8,000 Chinese and 1,800 Russian troops.
East (Vostok) Anti-Terror 2006	March 2–5, 2006	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia; Tajikistan, Uzbekistan <sup>d</sup>	Tashkent region, Uzbekistan	Undisclosed number of security and law enforcement forces.
Tianshan-1 2006	August 24–26, 2006	China, Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan's eastern Almaty region; and Yining in China's northwest Xinjiang province	Over 700 Chinese frontier troops participated, including anti-terror reconnaissance troops, horseback police, and technical reconnaissance troops. <sup>e</sup> Kazakh forces were drawn from their border patrol, the Interior Ministry, and the Emergency Situations Ministry.
Collaboration (Xiezu) 2006	September 22–23, 2006	China, Tajikistan	Kulyab, Tajikistan	150 Chinese and 300 Tajik troops. <sup>f</sup>
Issyk Kul Anti-Terror 2007	May 29–31, 2007	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan <sup>g</sup>	Northeastern Kyrgyzstan	Up to 1,000 Kyrgyz servicemen together with officers of special forces from other SCO countries. <sup>h</sup>
Peace Mission 2007	August 9–17, 2007	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	Chelyabinsk in Russia's Ural mountains; and Urumqi, the capital of China's Xinjiang province	Over 4,000 total troops participated. <sup>i</sup> 2,000 from Russia, 1,600 from China, and the rest from other military units of the SCO member states. <sup>j</sup>

Codename	Dates	Participants	Location	Troop Strength
Norak Anti-Terror 2009	April 17–19, 2009	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan <sup>k</sup>	Fakhrobod training ground in Khatlon province, some 50 kilometers to the south of Dushanbe, Tajikistan	A total of about 1,000 servicemen took part in the exercises. The forces included subdivisions of Tajikistan's State Committee on National Security, the Defense Ministry and the Interior Ministry; task-force subdivisions of the Russian 201st Military Base deployed in Tajikistan; and rapid-reaction groups from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and China. <sup>l</sup>
Peace Mission 2009	July 22–26, 2009	China, Russia	Shenyang Military Area Command in China's northeast Jilin Province	2,600 army personnel (1,300 from each side) including special forces from both sides. <sup>m</sup>
Peace Mission 2010	September 9–25, 2010	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan;	Matybulak training range in southern Kazakhstan	Over 5,000 personnel reportedly participated, including 1,000 troops each from China, Kazakhstan, and Russia, and 150 each from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. <sup>n</sup>
Peace Mission 2012	June 8–14, 2012	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan	Khuzhand, Tajikistan	2,000 total troops, including 369 Chinese personnel. China sent army aviation troops as well as ground forces. <sup>o</sup>
Peace Mission 2013	July 27–August 15, 2013	China, Russia	Chebarkul, Russia	1,500 total, including 600 Chinese and 900 Russians. <sup>p</sup>

SOURCE: Compiled from RAND data.

<sup>a</sup> "Kyrgyz Deputy Minister Praises Kyrgyz-Chinese Military Exercises," BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, text of report by Kyrgyz news agency Kabar, October 18, 2002.

<sup>b</sup> "PLA Daily Gives On-The-Spot Coverage of Stage Two of 'Coalition-2003' Exercises," Beijing, *Jiefangjun Bao* (internet version, in Chinese) August 18, 2003, p. 11, accessed via World News Connection August 2, 2012.

<sup>c</sup> PLA Daily Gives On-The-Spot Coverage of Stage Two of 'Coalition-2003' Exercises," p. 11.

<sup>d</sup> Marcel de Haas, "The 'Peace Mission 2007' Exercises: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization Advances," Advanced Research Assessment Group, Central Asian Series, Defense Academy of the United Kingdom, September 2007, p. 8.

<sup>e</sup> Bai Yu, "The China-Kazakhstan Anti-Terror Drill Displays the Most Advanced Means of Cracking Three Evil Forces," *Zhongguo Tongxun She* (in Chinese), August 28, 2006, accessed via World News Connection August 2, 2012.

<sup>f</sup> "Sino-Tajik Joint Anti-Terror Drills Start in Tajikistan," *Asia-Plus*, September 21, 2006.

<sup>g</sup> Marcel de Haas, "The 'Peace Mission 2007' Exercises: . . . , p. 8.

<sup>h</sup> Yu Bin, "China-Russia Relations: Partying and Posturing for Power, Petro, and Prestige," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 9, No. 2, July 2007, p. 164.

<sup>i</sup> "All Chinese exercise troops return home from Russia," Xinhua General News Service, August 26, 2007.

<sup>j</sup> Yu Bin, "China-Russia Relations . . . , p. 164.

<sup>k</sup> "SCO Anti-terror Exercises to Be Held in South Tajikistan in Mid-April," ITAR-TASS, April 2, 2009, accessed via World News Connection August 2, 2012.

<sup>l</sup> "Shanghai Bloc's Antiterror Drills End in Tajikistan," BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, April 18, 2009, text of report by corporate-owned Russian news agency Interfax.

<sup>m</sup> "'Peace Mission-2009' Improves Anti-Terror Response: Chinese Military Officer," Xinhua General News Service, July 24, 2009.

<sup>n</sup> Julie Boland, "Learning from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's 'Peace Mission-2010' Exercise," Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, October 29, 2010.

<sup>o</sup> "Chinese Troops Participating in 'Peace Mission 2012' Exercise Arrive in Tajikistan," *People's Daily Online*, June 7, 2012;

<sup>p</sup> "Chinese Military Hardware Hits Russia for Joint Anti-Terror Drills," RT, August 5, 2013.

The first exercises under SCO auspices occurred in October 2002 (see Table 3.2). The PRC for the first time conducted a military exercise with another country. The event was held in Kyrgyzstan four months after the first secretary at the Chinese embassy in Bishkek was shot dead in his automobile. Several hundred Chinese and Kyrgyz soldiers conducted a bilateral counterterrorism exercise while observers from other SCO member states looked on. Then, the following year, China conducted its first multinational military exercise on Chinese territory. More than 1,000 Chinese and Kyrgyz troops participated in the second phase of a counterterrorism exercise held in Xinjiang in August 2003 (the first was held in Kazakhstan), watched by China's Minister of National Defense Cao Gangchuan as well as Russian, Kazakh, and Tajik observers.<sup>37</sup> Bilateral Sino-Russian and multilateral SCO military exercises also occurred in 2005 and 2007, supposedly directed against terrorists. The actual benefit was to build trust, communication, and provide a hard power dimension to the soft amorphous nature of SCO.

Between October 2002 and August 2013, a total of 13 separate field exercises were held in a variety of locations in each member country on what appears to be a rotating basis. The exercises lasted for as few as two days and as many as 14 days. The events included security personnel from as few as two participating countries to as many as six. The numbers of personnel involved ranged from 800 to about 10,000 (see Table 3.2). Equipment used included tanks, armored cars, artillery, helicopters, and jet fighters. The Peace Mission 2010 drill in Kazakhstan broke new ground when, for the first time, a handful of PLA Air Force H-6 bombers dropped payloads, at least one of which was a nighttime bombing mission.<sup>38</sup>

China's military activities are limited but noteworthy. As noted earlier, there are no Chinese military bases in the region. Chinese security forces (PLA and PAP), however, participate on a roughly annual basis in field exercises with their counterparts under the auspices of the SCO. These exercises are relatively unsophisticated operationally. Moreover, in terms of the degree of actual interoperability attained and level of partnership building capacity acquired, the results appear quite modest.

China provides modest amounts of light weaponry and security equipment to at least several of the five Central Asian states, although not formally under the auspices of the SCO. Moreover, these deals are all bilateral agreements. China reportedly provided some US\$4.5 million worth of military assistance to Kazakhstan between 1997 and 2003. The aid consisted of communication equipment and vehicles, including Jeeps. Between 1993 and 2008 China provided US\$15 million worth of military aid to Tajikistan, and in 2009 Beijing promised US\$1.5 million more aid to Dushanbe. In 2000, China shipped sniper rifles to Uzbekistan and nine years later agreed to provide Tashkent with mobile scanning equipment to monitor border crossings. In 2007, China

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<sup>37</sup> Scobell, "Terrorism and Chinese Foreign Policy," pp. 312–313.

<sup>38</sup> Li Xiaokun, "Pilots Break New Ground in Anti-Terror Exercise: China Completes First Cross-Border Air Strike during Military Drill," *China Daily* (in English) September 25, 2010, p. 3.



also provided a US\$3 million loan to allow Turkmenistan to purchase unspecified “military hardware” and uniforms for soldiers. Under the terms of an agreement signed in 2002, China promised to provide Turkmenistan with US\$1.2 million in “technical military assistance.” In 2008, China’s Ministry of Public Security reportedly provided computers and motor vehicles to the Kyrgyz agency in charge of border security.<sup>39</sup> These military packages are miniscule compared with the size and volume of weapons system transferred to Pakistan (see Chapter Four).

China is also active in military-to-military exchanges with the Central Asian states, but language is a significant hurdle. Of course, high-level visits by defense officials routinely utilize skilled interpreters. However, training courses in China for officers from Central Asia present more of a challenge. All courses for Central Asian officers at Chinese institutions of professional military education are conducted in Russian. Central Asian soldiers generally do not speak Chinese, and their Chinese counterparts generally cannot speak the various indigenous languages of the region. The numbers of Central Asia officers sent to study in China are modest but seem to be increasing. For example, while the first wave of Kazakh officers sent to China (starting in the 1990s) comprised just over a dozen, the second wave (since the mid-2000s) numbered more than 60. Smaller batches of officers from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were sent to China in the 2000s.<sup>40</sup>

But all these efforts pale in comparison to Russia’s much greater military footprint and extensive program of military engagement with the armed forces of the region. In addition to the military bases mentioned above, under the auspices of the CSTO, Russia conducts regular military exercises with a higher level of interoperability than is evident in SCO exercises. Moreover, Russia provides a significant amount of the weaponry and equipment used by the armed forces of the Central Asian states. The CSTO functions much more like a traditional military alliance than the SCO, with Russia very much in the center.<sup>41</sup>

While China’s diplomacy and security initiatives in Central Asia have been noteworthy and are ongoing, it is in the economic sphere that China has been most impressive. However, Beijing does not view its growing economic involvement in the region as a manifestation of Chinese strength, rather it is considered a sign of vulnerability that highlights China’s dependence on

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<sup>39</sup> On Chinese military transfer to Central Asia generally, see Sébastien Peyrouse, “Military Cooperation Between China and Central Asia: Breakthrough, Limits, Prospects,” *China Brief*, Vol. 10, Issue 5, March 5, 2010, pp. 11–12. On Turkmenistan, see Viktoriya Panfilova, “China Will Dress Turkmenistani Army—Pekin Generously Credits Central Asian Countries,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, November 29, 2007b, Moscow (in Russian), translated by World News Connection, CEP20071129380002. On Kyrgyzstan, see Viktoriya Panfilova, “Kyrgyzstan to Get 0.5 m Dollars of Chinese Military Aid,” *Kabar News Agency*, November 12, 2007a, Bishkek (in Russian), translated by World News Connection, CEP20071112950147.

<sup>40</sup> Peyrouse, “Military Cooperation Between China and Central Asia,” p. 12; Centralasia.ru, July 12, 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander Frost, “The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia’s Strategic Goals in Central Asia,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2008, pp. 83–102.

natural resources and raw materials from beyond its national borders.<sup>42</sup> China's efforts to gain access to oil and gas have proved time-consuming, and the results have been slow in coming.

### *China's Growing Economic Role*

China's economic footprint in Central Asia has grown significantly in the 21st century, both in terms of trade and investments. China is particularly dominant as a trade partner with the countries of the region, and by 2012 appeared to have surpassed Russia as Central Asia's top trader (see Table 3.3). In terms of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the region, while China's share has been growing, it has never exceeded 10 percent of the region's total. FDI in Central Asia tends to be dominated by the United States and Europe, and the lion's share of this investment is focused on Kazakhstan (80–90 percent of all FDI flowing into the entire region in each year from 1999–2008 has reportedly gone to Kazakhstan).<sup>43</sup> According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in 2009, the United States and the Netherlands together accounted for just over 50 percent of the total foreign investment in Kazakhstan.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, China and Russia are more significant foreign investors in Kyrgyzstan, although the amount of total FDI in Kyrgyzstan is a fraction of the FDI in Kazakhstan.<sup>45</sup>

China's economic presence is largely seen in favorable terms by the individual countries, but there are some worries about the implications. The expanding trade and increasing investments are welcomed. However, there are concerns about whether these trends will be beneficial to the economic development of Central Asia. It is easy for specific countries to view China as engaged in economic imperialism. Virtually all of China's imports from Central Asia are raw materials, and its exports to the region are cheap manufactured goods. China's main imports from Kazakhstan, for example, are metals such as steel, copper, and aluminum, as well as crude oil; meanwhile China's main exports are clothing, electronics, and household appliances.<sup>46</sup> Chinese analysts recognize that this has prompted Central Asians to conclude that China is dumping its goods in the region while looting their raw materials.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, pp. 172–181.

<sup>43</sup> According to United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) data analyzed by RAND.

<sup>44</sup> Reliable data are hard to find. The IMF data conflicts with data provided by Kazakh National Bank. According to the Bank, the United States and the Netherlands do not make up 50 percent of total FDI. See National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "Gross Domestic Investment from Abroad: Inflows by Country," online.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Dept. of State, "2010 Investment Climate Statement – Kyrgyz Republic," March 2010, online.

<sup>46</sup> On trade, see Calla Wiemer, "The Economy of Xinjiang," p. 185; and Edward Wong, "China Quietly Extends Its Footprints Deep into Central Asia," *New York Times* (Washington edition), January 3, 2011, pp. A4, A10.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Liu Yazhou, "Xibu lun," p. 40.



**Table 3.3. Chinese and Russian Trade with Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) as a Percentage of Total Central Asian Global Trade, 2002–2012**

Country	2002	2007	2012
China	5.7%	10.2%	20.0%
Russia	18.2%	19.3%	15.7%

SOURCE: UN Comtrade and the CIA *World Factbook*.

Expanding economic cooperation has given China an opportunity to leverage its “biggest advantage in Central Asia . . . its economy.”<sup>48</sup> Despite the slow expansion of economic ties, China has become a significant business partner with some of the Central Asian states, notably Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Beijing seems keen on making the SCO more than a security organization by expanding the economic dimension. While the economic cooperation was explicitly mentioned in the organization’s founding declaration, virtually all of China’s efforts are bilateral and only loosely linked to SCO.

China’s trade with the Central Asian states has continued to grow rapidly, by 2008 reaching an official trade balance of over \$25 billion, thus approaching Russia’s own trade with Central Asia in size.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, China’s trade with the region has since surpassed that of Russia and shuttle trade with border states only raises China’s trade figures.<sup>51</sup> This growth in trade is heavily dependent on ties with Kazakhstan (80 percent of Chinese trade with Central Asian states is actually trade with Kazakhstan). Turkmenistan is also important because of a gas pipeline linking the two countries that officially opened in December 2009 and was set to reach full capacity of 40 billion cubic meters per year by 2013.<sup>52</sup> Chinese ties, including trade with Uzbekistan, have grown in recent years as well, and Tajikistan has some trade with the PRC as well as receiving some financial assistance. Finally, while Kyrgyzstan is not crucial to China’s trade balance, China is essential to Kyrgyzstan, making up almost 90 percent of Kyrgyz foreign trade—which consists mainly of Kyrgyz imports from China.<sup>53</sup>

Within Central Asia, the biggest proponents of close ties with China are business leaders, who see financial gain in the relationship. Others, however, are more nervous about ties, as is

<sup>48</sup> Zhao Huasheng, “China’s Central Asia Policy,” in Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love, eds., *The New Great Game*, p. 22.

<sup>49</sup> Chien-peng Chung, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and China’s Roles and Influence in Central Asia,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 180, December 2004, pp. 1000–1002.

<sup>50</sup> Lukin, 2007.

<sup>51</sup> Laruelle and Peyrouse.

<sup>52</sup> “Chinese President Opens Turkmenistan Gas Pipeline,” BBC News, December 14, 2009.

<sup>53</sup> S. Luzianin, “Kitai i “Blizhnee Okruzhenie”: Regional’nye i Dvustoronnie Aspekty Otnoshenii,” *Problemy Dal’nego Vostoka*, No. 3, 2010.

evident from public debate on the topic in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Dissatisfaction may also increase over time in Tajikistan, and perhaps even in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (although the discontent could be less public in the latter two states because of repressive governments). Several issues are sensitive enough to cause serious turbulence. Kazakh uneasiness with Chinese involvement in Kazakh energy markets has been consistent, and Chinese businesses have poor reputations in the region. Although these firms are now obligated to hire locally, past practices by Chinese companies have left many distrustful. In Kyrgyzstan, concern about Chinese traders echoes attitudes in Russia and, while fueled perhaps by xenophobia, can have a substantial impact. Finally, there is the perception that Chinese workers are migrating to Central Asia and taking local jobs. While the jobs that these workers, whether specialists or laborers, generally take on are not those for which local workers would otherwise compete, this issue feeds overall distrust.<sup>54</sup> This, of course echoes the situation vis-à-vis Chinese presence in the Russian Far East.

There is suspicion in Russia and some Central Asian states that China seeks to dominate the area economically. Premier Wen Jiabao suggested the establishment of a free trade agreement at the 2003 SCO head of governments meeting in Beijing, but this suggestion was met with reluctance by some Central Asian states. For wealthy states, such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, this is a factor in their opposition to an SCO free trade zone, for example.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which already depend on imports from China, do not oppose the free trade zone.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, one Tajik analyst sees his country's future grounded in economic ties with countries to its south—that is, away from Russia and toward China, Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan.<sup>57</sup>

Chinese demand for energy to fuel its economic growth appears insatiable, and energy imports continue to rise. Since 1993, China has been a net importer of petroleum. It is also a net importer of both natural gas and coal: In 2011, China imported 192,499 thousand short tons of coal while exporting 18,165 thousand. The same year, it imported 1,108 billion cubic feet of natural gas while exporting 113 billion. In 2011, China consumed 3,826,869 thousand short tons (76.118 quadrillion btu) of coal, which made up 69.4 percent of its total energy consumption that year, and 4,624 billion cubic feet (4.850 quadrillion btu) of natural gas, which constituted 4.4 percent of total consumption.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse, "Druzhba Ponevole," *Rossiia v Global'noi Politike*, No. 2, Vol. 8, 2010, pp. 102–115.

<sup>55</sup> Laruelle and Peyrouse, "Druzhba Ponevole."

<sup>56</sup> Laruelle and Peyrouse, "Druzhba Ponevole."

<sup>57</sup> Ochil Zakhidov, "O Geopoliticheskikh Prioritetakh Sovremennogo Tadzhikistana," *Neprikosnovennyi Zapas*, No. 4, 2009, pp. 145–152.

<sup>58</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, "International Energy Statistics," accessed at [www.eia.gov](http://www.eia.gov).

As a consequence China has worked hard to access energy resources in countries and regions in the Asia-Pacific and the world. Chinese companies are often in competition with U.S. corporations for oilfield development rights, pipelines, and oil supplies. Progress has been slow, owing partly to poor transportation links and underdeveloped infrastructure. These have included efforts in Russia and Central Asia. Particularly problematic have been attempts to work with Russia—a logical Chinese partner given the proximity of the oil and gas fields in Siberia and the Russian Far East. Russian suspicions and Chinese refusal to pay the same price that Europeans do for Russian energy has inhibited agreements and prevented pipeline deals from coming to fruition. For Moscow, Europe continues to be a larger, more secure, and more lucrative market for energy exports than China.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the only success to date has been the completion of an oil pipeline from Russia to China's Daqing oilfield in Heilongjiang Province in 2010.<sup>60</sup>

While results in Russia have proved disappointing, in Central Asia Chinese success has come slowly but surely. Although China was interested in tapping the hydroelectric power potential of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it is Beijing's efforts at tapping petroleum in Kazakhstan and natural gas in Turkmenistan that have borne fruit. The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) bought a majority stake in the Aktyubinski and Petrokazakhstan oilfields. In June 1997, CNPC and the governments of China and Kazakhstan agreed to build an oil pipeline. But construction did not begin until September 2004, and the Chinese-financed pipeline did not begin delivering crude oil from central Kazakhstan to western China along its 650-mile length until May 2006. Then, in December 2009, a pipeline began pumping liquefied natural gas from Turkmenistan to Xinjiang through more than 1,000 miles of rugged terrain across Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan into China. The official opening ceremony was attended by then PRC President Hu Jintao and his Turkmen, Uzbek, and Kazakh counterpart heads of state.<sup>61</sup> In September 2013, recently elected PRC President Xi Jinping and his Turkmen counterpart signed agreements to expand energy cooperation between their two countries, including a contract to construct a new gas pipeline, informally known as "Route D," scheduled to be completed by 2016. When finished, the pipeline will stretch some 850 kilometers through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>62</sup>

Beyond these very visible manifestations of China's growing hard power, less noticeable soft power aspects have also expanded in the region. The Chinese model of economic development

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<sup>59</sup> Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics*, Chatham House and the Brookings Institution Press, 2008, pp. 148–150.

<sup>60</sup> "Russia-China Oil Pipeline Opens," BBC News, January 1, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> On Chinese energy interests, see Sheives, "China Turns West," pp. 215–217; on the oil pipeline completion, see Medeiros, *China's International Behavior*, p. 138; and "Xinjiang pipeline oils wheels," *The Standard*, December 14, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Tavus Rejepova, "Turkmenistan, China Reach New Energy Deals," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, October 16, 2013.

and its education system have increasing appeal. For example, as of 2010, more Central Asian students study in China than in Russia.<sup>63</sup>

### *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Afghanistan: Rhetoric Without Action*

But on a third issue of real concern to SCO member countries, the organization has demonstrated impotence. Whether as an organization or individual member states, the SCO has been unwilling or unable to offer much material support to help stabilize Afghanistan. The organization did establish an SCO-Afghanistan “contact group” in 2005, charged with “elaborating proposals and recommendations on realisation of cooperation between the SCO and Afghanistan on issues of mutual interest.”<sup>64</sup> Coordination for the contact group is handled by a SCO Secretariat officer and a senior Afghan diplomat at the Afghan Embassy to the PRC. In March 2009, the group held a conference on Afghanistan in Moscow with the goal, according to an SCO statement, of “boosting joint efforts by the international community to counteract terrorism, the illegal drug trade and trans-border organized crime from Afghan territory.”<sup>65</sup> The issue of Afghan drug trafficking was again on the SCO agenda at the heads of state summit in Tashkent in June 2010. Despite this diplomatic activity, analysts have noted that the SCO “engages in little concrete activity regarding Afghanistan besides issuing declarations.”<sup>66</sup> There have been no counternarcotic operations or joint training for Afghan security personnel.

SCO initiatives on Afghanistan remain in the realm of rhetoric and gestures, while concrete action is the purview of individual member countries. The mixed feelings of SCO member states about International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operations and U.S. presence in Afghanistan (which borders three SCO member states) have been there from the start. For example, in 2005 the SCO issued a statement that, on the one hand, affirmed general support for ISAF operations in Afghanistan, but on the other indicated that it would like to see the coalition define an end date for its activities there.<sup>67</sup> The SCO member states are all concerned about stability in Afghanistan. States such as Russia and Uzbekistan were crucial supporters of the Northern Alliance prior to the September 11, 2001, attacks that soon led to U.S. military action in Afghanistan. Russia and the Central Asian states, especially, have been and continue to see themselves as the front line for any fallout from continued turmoil in Afghanistan. One Central Asian analyst argues that a large number of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) fighters are

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<sup>63</sup> Evgeinii Verlin and Vladislav Inozemtsev, “Rossiia-Kitai: Vremia Korrektirovat’ Kurs,” *Svobodnaia Mysl*, No. 8, August 2010, pp. 43–58.

<sup>64</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organization, “Protocol on Establishment of SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group Between SCO and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” official website of the SCO, April 21, 2006.

<sup>65</sup> Kaveh Afrasiabi, “Unlikely bedfellows in Afghanistan,” *Asia Times*, March 19, 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Weitz, “The SCO’s Failure in Afghanistan,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, February 16, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Baranov, 2009.

currently in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, and, once U.S. forces leave, they will make their way to Uzbekistan and other parts of Central Asia. Another analyst argues that al Qa'ida, with its support of radical and jihadist groups, is a substantial threat to Central Asia and Russia, and some elements of the Taliban pose a significant danger to the neighborhood.<sup>68</sup> Aside from extremism, Russia fears it will remain the primary market for Afghanistan's continuing opium trade. Russian analysts and officials cite this as a key issue that forces their continued involvement and interest in the stabilization of Afghanistan, although there are differing views as to what Russia can and should do.<sup>69</sup>

But cooperation between regional states and ISAF, including some small independent and joint initiatives, has not occurred under the auspices of the SCO. Individual Central Asian states have offered basing and access for ISAF forces, and Russia has supported increases in shipment of ISAF materiel and other supplies across its own territory. The SCO members have spoken of a "security belt" of strict border controls around Afghanistan. The border with Tajikistan would be particularly crucial in this regard, as so much of the drug flow from Afghanistan takes that route. Central Asian states and Russia have also carried out training of Afghan security personnel, including work with counternarcotics police.<sup>70</sup> Russia has indicated that it would like to see more SCO involvement in Afghanistan. The CSTO, like the SCO, has created an entity to address Afghan issues—a foreign minister-level working group on Afghanistan. There are also Quad talks between Russia, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This group has met at least twice at the summit level and also held a December 2010 meeting of counternarcotics chiefs.<sup>71</sup> Finally, Russia is pursuing bilateral ties with Afghanistan, and there are plans to create a Russian-Afghan Commission on Economic Cooperation. According to one analyst, Russia would likely also contribute to infrastructure development if financing could be agreed upon. Russia is also interested in the potential for a gas pipeline through Afghanistan.<sup>72</sup>

However, Russia and Central Asian states are reluctant to play larger roles in Afghanistan security- or economic-wise because of the continued instability and deep suspicions of U.S. intentions. Officials and analysts in these countries have never been fully convinced that U.S. interests in Afghanistan are truly aligned with their own. Some Russian analysts view

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<sup>68</sup> See the portions by G. I. Mirskii, and I. I. Khokhlov in I. Labinskaia, "Tsentral'naia Aziia v Kontekste Afganskoi Situatsii," *Mirovaia Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia*, No. 5, May 2011, pp. 3–16. D. B. Malysheva dissents, arguing that no matter how bad things get in Afghanistan there will be no threat to Central Asia.

<sup>69</sup> Russian policy toward the Afghan drug trade is discussed by many participants in the roundtable documented by I. Labinskaia, "Tsentral'naia Aziia v Kontekste Afganskoi Situatsii," *Mirovaia Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia*, No. 5, May 2011, pp. 3–16; Aleksandr Lukin, "Tsentral'naia Aziia i Afghanistan v Strategii Rossii," *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn'*, No. 7, July 2011.

<sup>70</sup> Andrei Korbut, "Nerealizovannyi Potentsial SHOS," *Voenna-Promyshlennyi Kur'er*, No. 18, May 13, 2009. While he states that other SCO countries are also providing training, his examples are all Russian.

<sup>71</sup> See the portion by D. B. Malysheva in Labinskaia, 2011, pp. 3–16.

<sup>72</sup> Malysheva, in Labinskaia, 2011, pp. 3–16.

Afghanistan as an energy transit corridor, and a few suggest that energy interests are the underlying motive for U.S. involvement in that country (the hypothesis is that the Taliban was unwilling to support the gas pipeline sought by the U.S. firm Unocal).<sup>73</sup> One analyst argues that the U.S. and NATO presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia now serves the interests of Western energy companies.<sup>74</sup> Another Russian analyst argues that the United States and NATO do not want to work with Russia in Afghanistan and that, over time, the U.S. presence is a danger for Russia, threatening its strategic interests there.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

China's influence in Central Asia has grown significantly in the past decade in diplomatic, economic, and even military spheres, albeit starting from a very low level in each case. The Central Asian states will likely continue to work to maintain good relations with China, in part out of a desire to avoid antagonizing Beijing and in part out of an interest in balancing against Moscow. Just as important are the economic opportunities that China provides. Nevertheless, Central Asian countries continue to look to Russia to balance against the prospect of Chinese domination in the realms of the economy, diplomacy, and defense.<sup>76</sup> Central Asian capitals appear to see Moscow as a more reliable partner and less of a threat to their sovereignty than Beijing.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, China's management of its relations with neighbors to the west in the 21st century has been quite impressive. Beijing's response to the daunting problems it confronts in Central Asia and western China has been to skillfully project an image of great strength and outward confidence to mask extreme weakness and inner insecurity: an Empty Fortress strategy. Through deft use of high-profile diplomacy and modest military exercises, combined with growing economic clout, Beijing has promoted the image of a powerful and benevolent China. This is in spite of a defense posture in the west that is Spartan and stretched: The Lanzhou MR is vast, and major military units are deployed well away from its borders with Central Asia (see Chapter Two).

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<sup>73</sup> Malysheva, in Labinskaia, 2011, pp. 3–16.

<sup>74</sup> Trush, 2011, pp. 19–42.

<sup>75</sup> Malysheva, in Labinskaia, 2011, pp. 3–16. Other analysts don't see a threat to Russia from a continued U.S. presence and still others see benefits for Russia. For the former view, see Trush, 2011, pp. 19–42; and Aleksandr Lukin "Tsentral'naia Aziia i Afghanistan v Strategii Rossii," *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn'*, No. 7, July 2011. For the latter view, see the portion by A. G. Volodin in Labinskaia, 2011, pp. 3–16. See also the portion by G. I. Mirskii and A. G. Arbatov in Labinskaia, 2011, pp. 3–16.

<sup>76</sup> Trush, 2011. His point is made in the context of energy development.

<sup>77</sup> Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse, "Druzhba Ponevole," *Rossia v Global'noi Politike*, No. 2, Vol. 8, 2010, pp. 102–115.

Moreover, SCO multilateralism and China's bilateral military engagement activities allow Beijing to project the image of a military great power in a manner that is nonthreatening to China's partners and neighbors. By planning cooperative small-scale activities with the security forces of other SCO member states and targeting nontraditional security threats, Beijing's military power does not loom too large in Moscow, Astana, Bishkek, Dushanbe, Tashkent, or other capitals.

In the next chapter, we examine China's strategy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan.





## 4. China in Afghanistan and Pakistan

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China views Afghanistan and Pakistan as critical countries of considerable geostrategic importance. Beijing perceives Afghanistan as the epicenter of Central Asia, in the sense that any instability, lawlessness, or extremism there will inevitably radiate northward beyond its borders and into the five Central Asian republics. China considers Pakistan a pivotal state that will decisively influence the course of events in surrounding countries, including Afghanistan. Moreover, Beijing also thinks of Islamabad as a longtime but deeply troubled ally on a geostrategic fault line between South and Central Asia—in a region where China has had few friends. Nevertheless, Pakistan has gradually declined in overall significance as Beijing's diplomatic relations and economic ties with other capitals in Southwest and South Asia have expanded. In particular, India looms ever larger as a major economic partner for China.<sup>1</sup>

Although Chinese involvement has grown in Afghanistan and remains significant in Pakistan, Beijing's influence in Kabul and Islamabad is relatively modest. Moreover, China perceives its impact in Afghanistan and Pakistan to be extremely limited. In fact, Beijing feels weak and near powerless to affect the course of events in these two countries. Indeed, while the Chinese government seeks to project the image of an influential great power, it considers itself weak and ill-equipped to deal with this volatile region. The Empty Fortress strategy is also operative in Beijing's policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially since China's calculus must include not just these countries but also India—the sprawling giant of South Asia. Western China, which includes not just Xinjiang but also Tibet, is a vast and lightly defended area that is highly vulnerable to external meddling, and Beijing views New Delhi with considerable suspicion.

This chapter examines how Afghanistan and Pakistan fit into Beijing's strategic calculus. What drives Chinese policy toward each country, and what are the range and extent of China's activities in these two states? The first part of this chapter examines Afghanistan, and the second part examines Pakistan.

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<sup>1</sup> For a concise treatment of China and South Asia, see Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, pp. 159–164. For other more detailed analyses of and background on China's relations with South Asia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, see John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest*, University of Washington Press, 2001; Jing-dong Yuan, *Dragon and the Elephant*; Devin T. Hagerty, "China and Pakistan: Strains in the Relationship," *Current History*, Vol. 101, No. 656, September 2002, pp. 284–290; Andrew Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3, July 2010, pp. 81; Michael D. Swaine, "China and the 'AfPak' Issue," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 31, Winter 2010b.

## Afghanistan

The first three decades of relations between the PRC and Afghanistan (1950s, 1960s, 1970s) were quiet and relatively uneventful. Beijing and Kabul established diplomatic ties in 1955 and eight years later (in 1963) signed a treaty resolving a border dispute.<sup>2</sup> China and Afghanistan share a short but inhospitable 92 kilometer mountainous border. There are no roads leading to the border on either side, and there is heavy snow cover for most of the year. On the Afghan side of the border, a narrow strip of rugged terrain, known as the Wakhan Corridor, at a high altitude well above the tree-line, connects with the rest of the country. On the Chinese side, the terrain is just as rugged.<sup>3</sup>

The second three decades of Beijing-Kabul relations (1980s, 1990s, 2000s), however, proved much more eventful than the prior three decades. While the two countries' short, remote common border makes up a very small fraction of China's expansive total land borders (more than 22,000 kilometers), Afghanistan has loomed disproportionately large on China's security agenda. The Soviet Union's 1980 invasion propelled Afghanistan into one of the "three obstacles" Beijing identified to improving relations with Moscow.<sup>4</sup> The Soviet withdrawal in early 1989 paved the way for the normalization of relations between China and the Soviet Union in May of 1989. China chose not to recognize the Taliban government that ruled Afghanistan during the late 1990s, although there was at least sporadic contact between the two sides. In December 2000, for example, the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan met with Taliban leader Mullah Omar, reportedly in an unsuccessful attempt at a quid pro quo whereby the Taliban would undertake not to support Uighur militants in Xinjiang in exchange for Chinese support for Afghanistan in the United Nations.<sup>5</sup>

Since the ouster of the Taliban regime in Kabul, China has developed closer ties with Afghanistan, particularly following the Karzai administration's decision to open up energy, mineral, and raw materials to foreign investors around 2007.<sup>6</sup> In the 2010s, China appears to monitor closely the situation in Afghanistan and remains concerned about the continued upheavals inside that country. Beijing's defense white paper issued in March 2011 states: "The

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<sup>2</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> See Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, p. 324, and Michael Finkel, "Stranded on the Roof of the World," *National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. 223, No. 2, February 2013, pp. 84–111.

<sup>4</sup> The other two obstacles were Soviet troops massed along the Chinese border (including in Mongolia) and Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Scobell, "Terrorism and Chinese Foreign Policy," in Yong Deng and Fei-ling Wang, eds., *China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, p. 312.

<sup>6</sup> Nicklas Norling, "The Emerging China-Afghanistan Relationship," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, May 14, 2008.

security situation in Afghanistan remains serious.”<sup>7</sup> According to one Chinese academic expert on the region: “A stable Afghanistan is of vital importance to [China].” Speaking in January 2013, Wang Lian of Peking University claimed that his country could not “afford to stand aside following the U.S. troop withdrawal [in 2014]. . . .”<sup>8</sup>

### *What Is Driving China’s Afghan Policy?*

Two primary factors are driving Beijing’s Afghan policy: to protect China from the threat of Islamic extremism, and to prevent Afghanistan from being used by other great powers to check China. Since the early 1990s, China has viewed Afghanistan as the regional epicenter of Islamic radicalism, which Beijing fears, if unchecked, can spread throughout Central Asia and spill over into Xinjiang.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. intervention of late 2001 and ongoing military presence in Afghanistan continues to make China uneasy. While Beijing was not happy about having U.S. forces stationed and engaged in combat operations on China’s periphery, it hoped that the United States would be successful in defeating the terrorist groups in Afghanistan. However, at least one prominent Chinese analyst of Central Asia, Pan Guang, observed:

Afghanistan is still a crucial focus for anti-terrorist campaigns, primarily for the following three reasons: Firstly, Afghanistan was the first main battlefield for the war on terrorism after 9/11. If the anti-terror war in Afghanistan cannot achieve a thorough victory, terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Central Asia may stage a comeback at any time. . . . Secondly, now that the leading core of al-Qaeda is still very active between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and almost all the key figures of Central Asian terrorist groups have grown up from the Jihad in Afghanistan, Afghanistan remains the spiritual pillar of terrorism. Thirdly, the production and transaction of narcotics in Afghanistan have provided the terrorist groups in Central Asia with significant funds. . . .<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in Pan’s view, the problem of Afghanistan was unlikely to be resolved quickly or easily. And without success in Afghanistan, Beijing worries, Islamic militants are unlikely to be vanquished from Central Asia or Xinjiang. Fortunately for Beijing, the impermeability of China’s borders in southern Central Asia inhibits infiltration by potential terrorists from

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<sup>7</sup> *China’s National Defense in 2010*.

<sup>8</sup> Denis D. Gray, “China Could Prove Ultimate Winner in Afghanistan,” Associated Press, January 26, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> But according to a leading Chinese analyst, “[Beijing’s] . . . domestic concerns about the security and stability of . . . Xinjiang overwhelm [all other interests].” See Zhao Huasheng, *China and Afghanistan: China’s Interests, Stances, and Perspectives*, Washington, D.C.: CSIS, March 2012, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> On the significance of Afghanistan, see Pan Guang, “The Role of a Multilateral Anti-terror Mechanism in Central Asia,” in Charles Hawkins and Robert R. Love, eds., *The New Great Game: Chinese Views on Central Asia*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2006, p. 113.

Afghanistan and Pakistan into Xinjiang.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, some extremists do successfully make the journey from Pakistan. China has complained that Uighur extremists have received weapons, explosives, and training in Pakistan.<sup>12</sup>

Beijing also views Afghanistan as a convenient outpost for rival great powers to constrain or even contain China. As a result, China is ambivalent about U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Beijing recognizes that U.S. forces are focused on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, and at least some Chinese elites hope the United States will be successful.<sup>13</sup> However, if a sizable U.S. presence became a long-term reality, China would be greatly concerned.

Beijing, for its part, has also pursued a hedging strategy, calling for a nonmilitary solution to the Afghan insurgency and supporting efforts to find a political compromise with the Taliban.<sup>14</sup> In addition to a general sense among Chinese strategists that there is no purely military solution to the Afghan insurgency, Beijing does not want to be seen as siding with the United States against the Taliban for fear of unnecessarily drawing the ire of violent extremists.

Two second-tier drivers of Beijing's Afghan policy are stemming the flow of illegal narcotics (mostly opium and heroin) in China and tapping Afghanistan's wealth of natural resources, including iron ore, copper, lithium, petroleum, and natural gas. Beijing's economic interests are discussed in the following section.

The scourge of narcotics has emerged as a significant problem in 21st century China after the CCP had virtually eliminated drug addiction and drug trafficking in the early years of the PRC. The poppy-growing region centered on Afghanistan has been dubbed by PRC law enforcement organs as the "Golden Crescent." While this crescent includes Pakistan and Iran, Afghanistan is the source of the vast majority of opium and heroin flowing into China from the region. PRC authorities first became concerned about the flow of narcotics from the Golden Crescent in the mid-2000s, but by 2010 the Ministry of Public Security concluded that almost one-third of the heroin seized in China came from the region. Thus, the Golden Crescent has become a law enforcement challenge at least as serious as the one posed by the so-called "Golden Triangle" along China's southern border with the Southeast Asia states of Burma and Laos.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Swaine, "China and the 'AfPak' Issue," pp. 6–7. The Chinese have built some infrastructure for troops stationed near the border. See Russell Hsiao and Glen E. Howard, "China Builds Closer Ties to Afghanistan through Wakhan Corridor," *China Brief*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, January 7, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Brian Spegele, "China Points Finger at Pakistan Again," *Wall Street Journal*, March 8, 2012, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Swaine, "China and the 'AfPak' Issue," p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3, July 2010, p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Murray Scot Tanner, *China Confronts Afghan Drugs: Law Enforcement Views of the "Golden Crescent"*, Alexandria, Va.: Center for Naval Analyses, March 2011, pp. 14, 7.

## *China's Activities in Afghanistan*

Whatever China's goals, thus far its involvement in Afghanistan is limited. Bilateral diplomatic ties are modest. Aid pledges are small relative to China's capacity and Afghanistan's need, and military relations are virtually nonexistent. This section examines China's diplomatic, economic, and military initiatives in Afghanistan.

Since the fall of the Taliban, Afghan officials have engaged in a series of high-level diplomatic meetings with China's leadership. Hamid Karzai made his first official visit to Beijing in January 2002 as chairman of the Afghan Interim Government. In the ensuing years, Karzai reportedly met with President Hu Jintao on the sidelines of a number of SCO summits, including in 2004 (Tashkent), 2006 (Shanghai), 2008 (Dushanbe), 2009 (Yekaterinburg, Russia), 2010 (Tashkent, Uzbekistan), 2011 (Astana, Kazakhstan), 2012 (Beijing), and 2013 (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan).<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Vice President Mohammed Karim Khalili traveled to Beijing for the SCO prime ministers meeting in October 2007, where he met with then Premier Wen Jiabao. High-level parliamentary meetings have also occurred between the countries, and Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta has visited China to meet with his counterpart Yang Jiechi, as well as then Vice President and heir apparent Xi Jinping.<sup>17</sup> Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rasoul made a four-day official visit to Beijing in May 2011.

Karzai's fourth and most notable trip to Beijing as Afghan president occurred in March 2010, when he traveled to the capital to meet with President Hu, Premier Wen, and Politburo Standing Committee member Wu Bangguo. While there, Karzai penned a number of agreements on economic cooperation, technical training, and preferential tariffs for Afghan exports.<sup>18</sup> The Afghan president was not alone. He brought with him a large delegation, including cabinet ministers for foreign affairs, defense, mines, and investment, as well as a number of top Afghan business executives.<sup>19</sup> Karzai's foreign policy approach shares important characteristics with other Central Asian states. As part of seeking to exert independence from the United States, Karzai has sought to "strike a balance among foreign powers" and ensure that he has multiple sources of diplomatic and economic support.<sup>20</sup>

Karzai visited Beijing again in September 2013. In China, the Afghan head of state met with his PRC counterpart Xi Jinping. Xi reportedly told Karzai that 2014 was "a critical [year] for Afghanistan." The Afghan president witnessed the signing of agreements on economic and

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<sup>16</sup> Zhao Huasheng, *China and Afghanistan*, pp. 2, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "China and Afghanistan," August 25, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> "Karzai and Hu Jintao Discuss Energy and Islamic Extremism," *Asia News*, March 25, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Weitz, "Karzai's State Visit Highlights Beijing's Afghan Priorities," *China Brief*, Vol. 10, No. 8, April 16, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Bodeen, "China Steps Up Investment in Afghanistan," *Huffington Post*, March 24, 2010.

technical cooperation and an extradition treaty.<sup>21</sup> Karzai also held separate meetings with Premier Li Keqiang and Vice Premier Wang Yang. The two countries issued a joint statement on September 27, 2013 in which Beijing pledged to “. . . as always provide assistance to Afghanistan within the realm of its capabilities.” China agreed to provide more grant aid, as well as scholarships for Afghan students to study in China, and both countries pledged to expand cooperation in combatting criminal trafficking in narcotics, arms, and humans.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to a burgeoning political relationship, economic ties between China and Afghanistan have grown rapidly in recent years. President Karzai has been quoted as saying that he wants Afghanistan to emulate “America’s democracy and China’s economic success.”<sup>23</sup> Although still small in relative terms, from 2006 to 2010 two-way trade between the countries grew from roughly seven-fold from an estimated US\$101 million to 716 million.<sup>24</sup> Such trade consists primarily of Afghans purchasing Chinese consumer goods in exchange for raw materials.<sup>25</sup> Beyond bilateral trade, China has established itself as the largest investor in Afghanistan. Chinese companies are engaged in dozens of infrastructure projects throughout the country, including projects by major Chinese corporations such as Huawei, ZTE, and Sinohydro.<sup>26</sup> In 2008, the PRC Commerce Ministry estimated that Chinese firms in Afghanistan had 33 infrastructure projects valued at \$480 million (as of 2008), not including the Aynak mining project discussed below.<sup>27</sup>

Beijing also reportedly plans to build rail lines to Aynak and Kabul, as well as potentially other routes through Pakistan and Central Asia. In addition, China is involved in a number of infrastructure projects in Afghanistan, primarily focused on telecommunications and road construction.<sup>28</sup>

Without question, China’s highest-profile endeavor has been its multi-billion dollar investment to develop the Aynak copper mine, which stands as the single largest foreign investment in Afghanistan’s history.<sup>29</sup> Aynak is located in Logar province, 25 miles south of

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<sup>21</sup> “Xi Jinping Holds Talks with President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan Stressing to Deepen Bilateral Strategic Cooperative Partnership and to Support Peace and Reconstruction Process in Afghanistan,” September 27, 2103.

<sup>22</sup> “Chinese President Holds Talks with Afghan Counterpart,” Xinhua News Agency, September 28, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Norling, “The Emerging China-Afghanistan Relationship.”

<sup>24</sup> Zhao Huasheng, *China and Afghanistan*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>25</sup> Weitz, “Karzai’s State Visit . . .” and Zhao Huasheng, *China and Afghanistan*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “China and Afghanistan,” August 25, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Phillips and Shai Oster, “U.S. and China Work Together to Rebuild Afghanistan,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 20, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Raghav Sharma, “China’s Afghanistan Policy: Slow Recalibration,” *China Report*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2010, pp. 201–215.

<sup>29</sup> At the time of this writing, Afghanistan’s Ministry of Mines had yet to conclude the bidding process on the Hajigak iron ore deposit, which will reportedly yield even more revenue than Aynak. Of 22 bidders, United Mining



Kabul. The massive \$4.4 billion project is 75 percent owned by China Metallurgical Group (also called the Metallurgical Construction Corporation, or MCC) and 25 percent by Jiangxi Copper.<sup>30</sup> Aynak is considered the world's second-largest unexploited copper deposit.<sup>31</sup> The companies won the bidding process in part by offering to provide a full slate of services and infrastructure to complement the mine, including a 400-megawatt generating plant (which would also service Kabul), a new coal mine to fuel the plant, a smelter to refine copper ore, and a railway line running from Afghanistan's northern border with Tajikistan south to Pakistan.<sup>32</sup> MCC further promised to build roads, hospitals, schools, water sources, and mosques for the local Afghan population.<sup>33</sup> Of course, it remains to be seen how much progress China will be able to make on these reconstruction pledges.

Should the project come to fruition, it will be a boon for Afghanistan's economy. The Afghan government has estimated that the mine and its related projects will directly generate between 8,000 to 10,000 jobs, and perhaps as many as 30,000 more indirectly.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile the mine could generate as much as \$350 million to \$400 million royalties for the Afghan government, which currently represents more than half of its current annual budget.<sup>35</sup> These deals have been welcomed by Afghan officials. In May 2011, the Afghan foreign minister told an audience in Beijing that "We would very much like Chinese companies to increase their direct investments in the development of Afghanistan's natural resources sector for the benefit of both sides."<sup>36</sup>

It may be several years, however, until these earnings materialize. After winning the 30-year lease in 2007, security concerns, including landmine clearing, initially delayed the project. More recently, ancient Buddhist relics were discovered at the site, including a temple and soaring statues, some more than 15 centuries old.<sup>37</sup> With production slated to begin in 2014, safeguarding the relics could add years to the start date. The project has also been dogged by accusations that the Chinese won the bid by offering more than \$20 million in bribes to the

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and Minerals Co. was the only Chinese company still in the bidding process. See "Afghanistan Invites Bids for Hajigak Iron Deposit," Reuters, January 19, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> "Factbox: Relations Between China and Afghanistan," Reuters, March 22, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Emmanuel Huntzinger, *The Aynak Copper Mine: Assessment of Threats and Opportunities for Development*, Integrity Watch Afghanistan, January 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Wines, "China Willing to Spend Big on Afghan Commerce," *New York Times*, December 30, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Embassy of Afghanistan, "Aynak Copper Mine Predicted to Create 8,000 Direct Jobs Once Landmines Are Cleared," Washington, D.C., August 27, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Embassy of Afghanistan, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Norling, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> "Speech of H.E. Dr. Zalmay Rasoul Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," Beijing, People's Republic of China, May 11, 2011.

<sup>37</sup> "Aynak Copper Mine Delayed: Afghan Mining Minister," Reuters, December 5, 2010.

mining minister, Muhammed Ibrahim Adel.<sup>38</sup> While such corruption is certainly possible, if not probable, it is also the case that China's offer to provide an abundance of additional infrastructure made its bid highly attractive to their Afghan interlocutors. Nonetheless, some outside experts remain concerned that the project will yield few tangible rewards for the Afghan people and could instead result in significant environmental and social disruption.<sup>39</sup> Then, in 2011, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), along with an Afghan partner, won the rights to look for oil in the northwest provinces of Sari-i-Pul and Faryab. CNPC anticipates oil exploration will entail an initial investment of at least several hundred million U.S. dollars.<sup>40</sup>

In a May 2011 speech at the China Institute of International Studies in Beijing, the Afghan foreign minister estimated that China had contributed roughly \$200 million in assistance and reconstruction money. While not insignificant, this figure pales in comparison to donations by the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, and India, all of whom have each offered more than \$1 billion in aid.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the Chinese have contributed to the reopening of schools and hospitals, including Beijing's largest assistance project, the Jimhuri Hospital. In addition, China has offered food aid and rehabilitated irrigation systems, and, for those wishing to speak directly to their Chinese counterparts, a Chinese-language Confucius Institute has opened at Kabul University. In the area of human capital development, China has provided Afghan officials and experts vocational training programs in the fields of communication, agriculture, medicine, and health.<sup>42</sup> The programs were part of the cooperation agreements signed during President Karzai's visit to China in March 2010.<sup>43</sup>

Beyond trade, investment, and economic assistance, Beijing has contributed relatively little to stabilization operations in Afghanistan. After meeting with his Afghan counterpart Abdul Rahim Wardak in March 2010, PRC Minister of National Defense Liang Guanglie announced that, the "Chinese military will continue assistance to the Afghan National Army to improve their capacity of safeguarding national sovereignty, territorial integrity and domestic stability."<sup>44</sup> Exactly how they have made good on these promises is less clear. Their most substantial

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<sup>38</sup> Adel was reportedly dismissed in part because of the corruption allegations (Wines, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Huntzinger, 2008; Wines, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Erica Downs, "China Buys into Afghanistan," *SAIS Review* Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer–Fall 2012, pp. 65, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Christian Le Mièr, "Kabul's New Patron? The Growing Afghan-Chinese Relationship," *Foreign Affairs*, April 13, 2010. On India's substantial assistance to Afghanistan see Michael D. Swaine, "China and the 'AfPak' Issue," p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> "Afghans Eager to Learn from China in Agriculture," *Xinhua News*, May 11, 2011.

<sup>43</sup> "Afghan Telecommunication Officials to Tour China for Training Program," *Xinhua News*, April 2, 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Tim Sullivan, "Who's Going to Win in Afghanistan? China," Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, Center for Defense Studies, undated.



contribution to date has been a mine-clearing training course for at most dozens of Afghan (and Iraqi) officers run by the PLA.<sup>45</sup>

At no point, however, have the Chinese offered to provide troops on the ground. In November 2008, Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang spoke to this issue unequivocally: “China’s position on the issue of Afghanistan has not changed a bit. Except for the UN peacekeeping missions approved by the UN Security Council, China never sends a single troop abroad. It’s out of the question to send Chinese troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.”<sup>46</sup> Qin called media reports of China sending troops to Afghanistan “groundless.”<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, Chinese analysts have engaged in lively speculation on this possibility with the most likely scenario being under UN auspices.<sup>48</sup>

Joint statements between the United States and China have recognized that both countries “support the efforts of Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight terrorism, maintain domestic stability and achieve sustainable economic and social development.”<sup>49</sup> That being said, U.S. and other Western officials have prodded Beijing to contribute more generously to international stabilization efforts.<sup>50</sup> Referring to Afghanistan on a trip to Beijing in May 2010, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake reiterated that “China has an important stake in the success of these efforts. And we welcome the opportunity to discuss ways China can contribute more both through investments and through assistance of various kinds.”<sup>51</sup> U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke visited Beijing in April 2009 and attended the July 2009 Strategic and Economic Dialogue to discuss possible Chinese contributions to counterterrorism operations in the region, but without tangible results (see below).<sup>52</sup>

### *China’s Limited Role in Afghanistan*

Given China’s national interests and overall foreign policy strategy, its limited contributions to U.S. efforts in Afghanistan should come as no surprise. Beijing has little incentive to reverse its

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<sup>45</sup> This has become a niche specialty for the PLA. The Chinese claim to have trained 300 mine clearers from 15 countries and offered humanitarian mine clearing assistance to 20 countries. “China Launches Mine-Clearing Training Course for Afghanistan, Iraq,” Xinhua, September 15, 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Chinese Government’s Official Web Portal, “FM Press Conference on Nov. 18,” November 18, 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Melinda Liu, “How China Could Quietly Play a Key Role in Afghanistan,” *Newsweek*, November 22, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Swaine, “China and the ‘AfPak’ Issue,” pp. 9–10.

<sup>49</sup> The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “U.S.-China Joint Statement,” Beijing, China, November 17, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> For comments by the German Foreign Minister, see “Germany Wants Bigger China Role in Afghanistan,” Reuters, November 2, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Zhang Haizhou, “US Seeks Bigger Role for China in Afghanistan,” *China Daily*, May 5, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Geoff Dyer, “Obama to Press China on Afghanistan,” *Financial Times*, November 12, 2009.

long-standing policy of sending troops abroad only under the auspices of the United Nations. To do otherwise would represent a sea change in Chinese foreign policy. In addition, Beijing has been clearly reluctant to be over-associated with the NATO military operation in Afghanistan. In 2009, the U.S. State Department proposed to the PRC Foreign Ministry the idea of Beijing's cooperation in opening up a logistics route into Afghanistan through western China. The proposal, which was intended to explore another route to supplement the Southern Distribution Network passageway by road from Pakistan, came to naught. This would have entailed allowing transit of nonlethal military supplies and linked China into the Northern Distribution Network. The proposal was never approved by Beijing.<sup>53</sup>

Beijing's overall efforts in Afghanistan remain, as one analyst put it, "on a scale considerably below Beijing's capacity to act as a contributor and stabilizing force, and are rarely coordinated with other international actors."<sup>54</sup> China does not want to be seen as colluding with the United States in a foreign occupation of Afghanistan in the eyes of the Afghans and other regional actors. Moreover, Beijing takes an extremely pragmatic approach that has included a low-keyed and ongoing dialogue with the Taliban.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps most importantly, Beijing remains committed to its partnership with Pakistan and is reluctant to take any actions that will irritate or destabilize its historical partner.<sup>56</sup>

China's economic engagement with Afghanistan is a positive development because Beijing's efforts provide additional jobs and infrastructure to the impoverished state. Critics are right, however, to point out that Beijing is pursuing a narrow and self-interested investment strategy that is mostly focused on extracting natural resources (similar to China's approach in Central Asia). Furthermore, they are able to do so by free riding on the extraordinary security commitment of the United States and its NATO allies.<sup>57</sup> While all this is true, Chinese investments work to support U.S. goals in Afghanistan. In addition, although some in Beijing believe China benefits from seeing the United States tied down in Afghanistan, a failed Afghan state or a precipitous U.S. withdrawal would work directly counter to China's principal goal of stability in the region. PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi directly addressed this in remarks he made to a think tank audience in Washington, D.C., in September 2013: "Afghanistan is now in a phase of crucial transition. . . . We [the United States and China] both hope Afghanistan will continue to maintain stability after next year. . . . [A]nd we both don't want to see a resurgence

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<sup>53</sup> Craig Whitlock, "China Rejected U.S. Request to Open Supply Route, Cables Show," *Washington Post*, July 3, 2011a, p. A8.

<sup>54</sup> Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan," p. 84.

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Small, "Why Is China Talking to the Taliban?" *Foreign Policy*, June 21, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Michael D. Swaine, "China and the 'AfPak' Issue."

<sup>57</sup> U.S. forces do not directly protect Chinese development projects, but do provide general stability in areas where Chinese companies are operating. See Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL30588, January 26, 2011.

of terrorism.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, while the United States should continue prodding Beijing to do more, U.S. policymakers should also be realistic about the likelihood of China’s security contributions, and should continue to welcome greater economic interaction between the neighbors.

## Pakistan

Pakistan is probably China’s closest and most enduring ally. No other capital has maintained such a good, sustained relationship with Beijing as Islamabad. The relationship has spanned decades and weathered many ups and downs. Of course, there are a few other countries that have managed to retain friendly ties with China for prolonged periods. Other countries that come to mind include Albania, North Korea, and Iran. In the post-Mao era, this select group shrinks to only North Korea and Iran, hardly an impressive list, with the possible exception of Tehran. While China officially maintains one alliance relationship—with North Korea by a treaty signed in 1961—links between Beijing and Pyongyang have been marked by turmoil and tension during the early 21st century over the latter’s nuclear and missile programs and continuing provocations.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, China’s relations with Pakistan have been more stable and tension-free, at least until very recently. China’s relations with Iran have also been good since the 1970s, weathering the overthrow of the Shah, and, like Beijing’s ties with Islamabad, there has been cooperation on missile and nuclear programs. Despite good ties between post-Shah Iran and China, relations still do not compare to the closeness of China’s relations with Pakistan.

During the early Cold War, China found itself surrounded by enemies. To the north and west were the Soviet Union and its client state Mongolia. To the south was India, which leaned toward the Soviet Union and was deemed hostile to China following the 1962 Sino-Indian border war. Border disputes with many of its neighbors, ethnic unrest, and fear of external invasion made China desperate for allies. In these circumstances, Pakistan became a fast friend, and the relationship proved mutually beneficial. Pakistan found an “all-weather friend” in a forbidding neighborhood, while China discovered a client to help check India, hence helping to ameliorate the security situation on its southern border and an intermediary to build bridges to the Islamic world and the United States. Pakistan, for example, played a key role in facilitating U.S.-China rapprochement. In 1971, Islamabad provided the launching pad for Henry Kissinger’s secret visit to Beijing. This trip set the stage for President Richard M. Nixon’s historic 1972 visit to China.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Chen Weihua, “Can China and the U.S. Cooperate on Fixing Afghanistan?” *China Daily* (U.S. edition) September 25, 2013, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> For some overviews of China’s relations with North Korea, see Andrew Scobell, *China and North Korea: From Comrades-in-Arms to Allies at Arm’s Length*, U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2004, and Nathan and Scobell, *China’s Search for Security*, pp. 126–137.

<sup>60</sup> Nathan and Scobell, *China’s Search for Security*, p. 161.

Nevertheless, in the 21st century China's interests and expectations vis-à-vis Pakistan are modest. China is no longer a weak, autarkic state with rather limited relations with states around the world. Today, Beijing has full diplomatic ties with all major capitals and burgeoning economic relationships with virtually every country. In short, Pakistan's value to China has substantially decreased over time. Nevertheless, Pakistan remains an important partner to China, but more in a regional and negative sense than a global and positive one: Beijing is more focused on suppressing Pakistan's potential to trigger instability on China's periphery than it is in enlisting Pakistani help in accomplishing broader geopolitical aims.<sup>61</sup> And while Chinese leaders continue to view Pakistan as a useful counterweight to India, they also worry that Pakistan might provoke India into a war through bellicose actions or through its own domestic instability.<sup>62</sup>

### *What Is Driving China's Pakistan Policy?*

Geopolitically, Pakistan has been the linchpin of China's South Asia policy. This remains true, but as China's relations with India have improved, and economic interactions have dramatically expanded, Islamabad has been viewed as less of an asset and more of a liability to Beijing. Moreover, growing instability within Pakistan is very worrying to China. Beijing is also concerned about Islamabad's role in Afghanistan, although this does not approach the almost all-consuming focus that it does for Washington.<sup>63</sup>

As noted in Chapter Two, Beijing's foremost security concerns are domestic and continuing unrest in western China and ethnic separatist forces are very worrisome. Initially, these concerns focused on Tibet, with India viewed as the main supporter of Tibetan separatism. Since the 1959 Tibetan revolt, Tibetan Buddhism's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, along with the Tibetan Government-in-Exile have both been headquartered in India. A Pakistan allied with China is a useful reminder to India that if it foments unrest in Tibet, it must also keep one eye on its western flank. China also views Pakistan in the context of providing support for Uighur separatists in Xinjiang.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the significant liabilities Beijing sees in Islamabad, China believes it has no choice but to continue a policy it had adopted in the late 1990s—close cooperation with Pakistan in

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<sup>61</sup> Isaac B. Kardon, *China and Pakistan: Emerging Strains in the Entente Cordiale*, Washington, D.C.: Project 2049, March 2011, pp. 20–21.

<sup>62</sup> Thus, as Jing-dong Yuan observes: "China's support of Pakistan in recent years has more to do with the concern of Pakistan falling apart than with Pakistan's value as a strategic counterweight to India." See "The Dragon and the Elephant: Chinese-Indian Relations in the 21st Century," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Summer 2007, p. 139.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, the nuanced analysis in Michael D. Swaine, "China and the 'AfPak' Issue," pp. 1–22.

<sup>64</sup> Amir Mir, "Uyghur Militants Threaten Sino-Pak Ties," *Asia Times Online*, August 10, 2011; "Xinjiang Attack Masterminded by Overseas Trained Terrorists," Xinhua Beijing (in English), August 1, 2011, carried by *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*.

support of three main security interests: (1) ensuring Chinese internal security by stifling connections between Uighurs in Xinjiang and radical Islamists in Pakistan, (2) balancing against India by maintaining an enduring security relationship with Pakistan, and (3) diversifying China's trade routes and expanding economic opportunities.

#### Domestic Security: Containing Uighur Separatists

China's western Xinjiang region borders northwest Pakistan and is home to nearly 10 million Uighurs, a Muslim people of Turkic origin, among whom separatist sentiment has historically run high. In the 1980s, hundreds of Uighurs crossed into Pakistan, enrolled in madrassas, and, with Chinese government training and arms, fought the Soviets in Afghanistan. Upon returning to Xinjiang via Pakistan, some joined violent Uighur nationalist groups.<sup>65</sup> The 1990s were a particularly violent period in Xinjiang.<sup>66</sup> The Chinese Government claims that between 1990 and 2001 Uighur separatists carried out approximately 200 attacks that killed 162 people. The episodes included bombings, assassinations, attacks on government buildings, and more. While these statistics may be somewhat exaggerated, they are roughly consistent with data collected independently by scholar Gardiner Bovingdon, suggesting that the 1990s was a decade of growing ethnic unrest in Xinjiang.<sup>67</sup>

Pakistan has contributed to Chinese efforts to fight Uighur separatists. In 2003, Pakistani forces killed Hasan Mahsum, the founder of the Uighur East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which the Chinese government had identified as the most threatening Uighur terrorist group. China and Pakistan have signed agreements on information sharing, joint counterterrorism drills, and extradition of terrorist suspects.<sup>68</sup>

China has also pressured Pakistan to protect as many as 13,000 Chinese citizens working for some 60 companies in Pakistan.<sup>69</sup> Several Chinese workers were killed at the Gwadar Port in Baluchistan in 2004, at the Gomal Zam Dam in South Waziristan in 2006, and in the Swat Valley in 2007. The Pakistani government subsequently established a high-level committee headed by the National Crises Management Cell Director-General to ensure enhanced security for Chinese workers with some success.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> John Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism*, Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, p. 114, Table 4.1.

<sup>67</sup> Scobell, "Terrorism and Chinese Foreign Policy," p. 310.

<sup>68</sup> See Ziad Haider, "Sino-Pakistan Relations and Xinjiang's Uighurs," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 45, No. 4, July/August 2005, pp. 535–537.

<sup>69</sup> Isaac B. Kardon, *China and Pakistan: Emerging Strains*, p. 16; Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe, "Pakistan's Strategic and Foreign Policy Objectives," Future Directions International, Strategic Analysis Paper, May 5, 2011, p. 4; Syed Fazl-e-Haider, "Chinese Shun Pakistan Exodus," *Asia Times*, September 11, 2009.

<sup>70</sup> On the threat to Chinese Citizens in Pakistan, see Kardon, *China and Pakistan*, pp. 13–16.

Some experts believe rising unrest in Xinjiang will increase China-Pakistan counterterrorism cooperation and perhaps even spur China to commit significant resources to bolster Pakistani political stability.<sup>71</sup> But it is not clear China will engage in ambitious nation-building efforts in Pakistan. While some individuals targeting China have trained in Pakistan, China's strategy aims to decouple Uighurs from other terrorist organizations rather than wage a wider war on terror. China reportedly reached agreements with the Taliban before September 11, 2001, to prevent Uighur groups from using Afghan territory for training facilities. In recent years, it has compelled the Afghan Taliban, Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin, and the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal to disavow violence toward China.<sup>72</sup> Andrew Small argues that "China's main concern" in dealing with transnational terror groups "has been to ensure that it remains a secondary target" behind the United States.<sup>73</sup>

The threat posed by Uighur separatism is just as likely to drive China and Pakistan apart as to push them together. Over the past 20 years, China has often severed links with Pakistan by periodically curtailing border trade, closing the Karakoram highway, and erecting security fences along the border to insulate Xinjiang from Islamists in Pakistan. According to Ahmad Farqui, the Chinese government employs these measures "to send a strong signal to the government of Pakistan that China would not hesitate to freeze the close ties between the two neighbors if Pakistan did not stop its backing for Islamic militants."<sup>74</sup> In 1995, for example, China and Pakistan agreed to upgrade the Karakoram highway to facilitate regional trade. Yet, China displayed visible hesitancy in implementing the agreement. Describing Beijing's stance, Ahmed Rashid wrote "Beijing's reluctance stems from the fact that the proposed road would run across Xinjiang and the Chinese fear that the route would increase the traffic in fundamentalism."<sup>75</sup>

Chinese analysts openly doubt the commitment and capabilities of Pakistan's security forces, even accusing them of warning Uighur groups to disperse prior to raids.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, many Chinese leaders worry that President Zardari's regime is too weak and unstable to secure China's interests in Pakistan.<sup>77</sup> At the time of President Zardari's maiden visit to China in 2008, Chinese

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<sup>71</sup> Doherty, "Dear China: Help US Fix Pakistan"; Reidel and Singh, "U.S.-China Relations: Seeking Strategic Convergence in Pakistan"; Haider, "The China Factor in Pakistan"; Michael Kugelman, "Can China Deliver in Pakistan?" *World Politics Review*, December 2, 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan," p. 86. For overviews of these groups, their ideologies, interests, and linkages, see Mariam Mufti, *Religion and Militancy in Pakistan and Afghanistan: A Literature Review*, Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2012.

<sup>73</sup> Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan," p. 87.

<sup>74</sup> Ahmad Faruqi, "China Card Could Yet Triumph Masharraf," *Asia Times Online*, April 5, 2003.

<sup>75</sup> Ahmed Rashid, "China and the Taliban: Some Facts," *Strategic Affairs*, April 5, 2003.

<sup>76</sup> Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan," p. 91.

<sup>77</sup> Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan," p. 92.



leaders threatened to withdraw all Chinese personnel from Pakistan because of Pakistan's failure to secure the release of Chinese telecommunication workers in Swat.<sup>78</sup>

### Geopolitics: Containing India

For China, Pakistan has proved to be a valuable friend in South Asia. This is especially because relations between Beijing and New Delhi have been tumultuous and prickly. While Beijing–New Delhi ties have improved, noticeably major problem areas persist—significant mutual distrust continues and border disputes remain unresolved. Pakistan is seen as an extremely useful counterweight to India. India is the only state on the Asian landmass that compares with China in terms of size, population, economic potential, and military power. Geopolitically, it is the only long-term rival, since Japan appears weakened by economic malaise, an aging population, and environmental crises, and Russia confronts severe demographic distress in addition to chronic economic and political problems.<sup>79</sup> In recent years, India is the only state in the Asia-Pacific to rival China's economic growth rates, and, according to a United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs report, the South Asian giant is poised to surpass the Middle Kingdom as the world's most populous country by approximately 2030.<sup>80</sup> The result is considerable wariness by Beijing of New Delhi's intentions and capabilities.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, China's main geopolitical interest in its relationship with Pakistan is, as Stephen Cohen puts it, to pursue a "classic balance of power strategy," using Pakistan to confront India with a potential two-front war.<sup>82</sup> Sino-Indian relations were not always hostile. At the time of their founding in 1948 and 1949, respectively, the Indian and Chinese governments declared a postcolonial brotherhood. But when China conquered Tibet in 1950, China and India suddenly shared an undemarcated border stretching 2,500 miles. To this day, Indian and Chinese maps of their border do not match. As a result, there exists some 400,000 square miles of disputed territory between China and India concentrated in two places: the Aksai Chin Plateau, which China controls but India claims, and Arunachal Pradesh, an Indian state that China calls "South Tibet" (Figure 4.1).

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<sup>78</sup> Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan," p. 91.

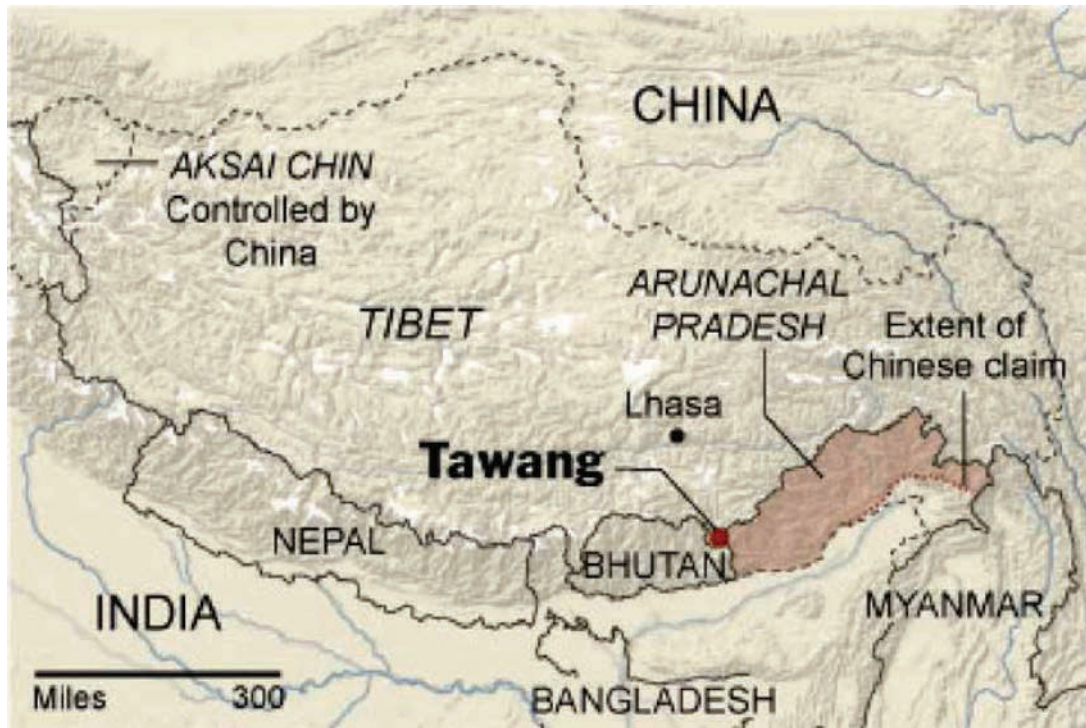
<sup>79</sup> For a systematic comparison of China and India, see George J. Gilboy and Eric Heginbotham, *Chinese and Indian Strategic Behavior: Growing Power and Alarm*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>80</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Population Challenges and Development Goals*, New York, 2005, p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> For a good overview of contemporary China-India relations, see Murray Scot Tanner with Kerry Dumbaugh and Ian Easton, *Distracted Antagonists, Wary Partners: China and India Assess their Security Relations*, Alexandria, Va.: Center for Naval Analyses, September 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, *The Future of Pakistan*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2011, p. 60.

**Figure 4.1**  
**Disputed Territories Between China and India**



SOURCE: *New York Times*.

Pakistan played a central role in the Sino-Indian conflict.<sup>83</sup> After Chinese forces defeated Indian army units in a short 1962 border war, India intensified its security and economic relationship with the Soviet Union, which had severed its own ties with China in 1960. Soon Moscow was supplying roughly three-quarters of India's imported military equipment.<sup>84</sup> Fearing Soviet-sponsored encirclement, China turned to Pakistan. In 1963, the two sides signed a border agreement that transferred 2,000 square miles of territory in Pakistan-held Kashmir to China.<sup>85</sup>

China also began selling Pakistan weapons, including tanks and fighter aircraft, and continues to do so today (Figure 4.2). Between 1978 and 2008, China sold roughly \$7 billion in military equipment to Pakistan, typically accounting for 40 percent of Pakistan's total arms purchases in any given year.<sup>86</sup> Twice, when the United States suspended arms aid to Pakistan—in 1965 and 1990—China stepped in to meet Pakistan's needs. Since the 1980s, Beijing has

<sup>83</sup> For good overviews of this relationship, see Yaacov Vertzberger, *The Enduring Entente: Sino-Pakistani Relations, 1960–1980*, New York: Praeger, 1983; Devin T. Hagerty, "China and Pakistan: Strains in the Relationship," *Current History*, Vol. 101, No. 656, September 2002, pp. 284–290.

<sup>84</sup> "Maintaining a Balance," *Newsweek*, December 8, 1986, p. 58.

<sup>85</sup> Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, pp. 116–118.

<sup>86</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Arms Transfers Database, 1978–2008.



supplied Islamabad with considerable quantities of weaponry, including several hundred jet fighters, well more than 1,000 main battle tanks and large quantities of surface-to-air and anti-tank missiles.<sup>87</sup>

During the mid-1970s, China began covertly assisting Pakistan's nuclear program. Beijing's help was aimed at countering New Delhi's nuclear program, which advanced with a nuclear test in 1974. This assistance reportedly included the design of a nuclear weapon and fissile material.<sup>88</sup>

During the 1980s, China also supplied assistance to Pakistan's efforts to develop missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. In 1988, China agreed to supply and train Pakistanis in the operation of the M-11 solid-fuel rocket, with a 185-mile range and carrying a 1,100-pound warhead.<sup>89</sup> The missiles arrived in 1995. In subsequent decades, China has sold Pakistan hundreds of jet fighters and signed agreements to sell frigates and submarines to Pakistan.<sup>90</sup>

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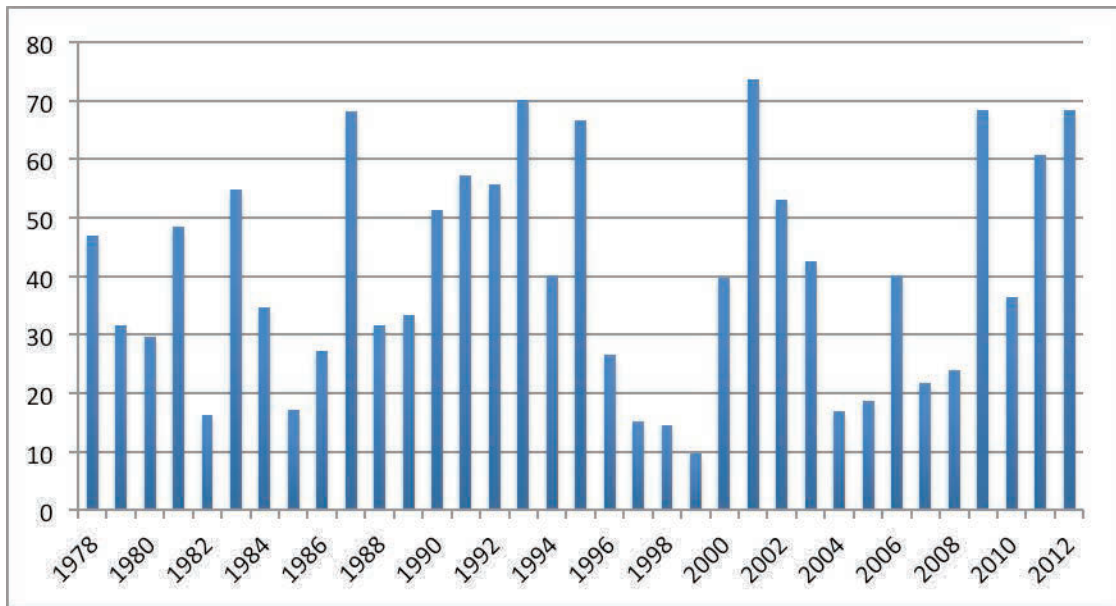
<sup>87</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 1989: World Armaments and Disarmament*, London: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 259; Aabha Dixit, "Enduring Sino-Pak Relations: The Military Dimension," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 12, No. 9, December 1989, pp. 981–990; *SIPRI Yearbook 1994*, pp. 535–536; *SIPRI Yearbook 1998: Armaments, Disarmament, and International Security*, p. 350; *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1997–1998*, pp. 485–489.

<sup>88</sup> Garver, *Protracted Contest*, pp. 324–331. Pakistan, of course, carried out its own nuclear tests in 1998 and is currently believed to possess a small but significant nuclear arsenal.

<sup>89</sup> Garver, *Protracted Contest*, p. 237.

<sup>90</sup> Jeremy Scahill, "U.S. Delivering F-16s to Pakistan This Weekend," *The Nation*, June 24, 2010; Jeremy Page, "China to Fast-Track Jets for Pakistan," *Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 2011, p. 12; "Pakistan to Buy American F-16s, Chinese FC-10 Fighter Jets," *AFX News Limited*, April 13, 2006; Usman Ansari, "China Officially Offers Pakistan J-10 Variant," *Defense News*, August 3, 2011; "Pakistan Politics: Pakistan Tests a New Missile," *Economist Intelligence Unit ViewsWire*, April 8, 2011; Farhan Bokhari, Leslie Hook, and James Lamont, "A History of Military and Commercial Ties," *Financial Times*, December 20, 2010, p. 3.

**Figure 4.2**  
**China's Share of Pakistan's Arms Purchases, 1978–2012 (%)**



SOURCE: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Arms Transfers Database.

In recent years, tensions between India and China have resurfaced. In 2006, China's ambassador to India declared "the whole state of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory . . . we are claiming all of that. That is our position."<sup>91</sup> India responded by declaring Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh to be "core interests" and deploying two additional army mountain divisions of 25,000 troops each to the northeastern state of Assam, directly below Arunachal Pradesh, bringing India's troop levels in the region to more than 100,000.<sup>92</sup> China then attempted to block a \$2.9 billion loan from the Asian Development Bank for projects in Arunachal Pradesh and began issuing visas to Indian residents of Jammu and Kashmir on a separate paper stapled to their passports instead of the customary stamping. In August 2010, China denied a visa to the head of the Indian delegation to the 4th China-India defense dialogue, Lieutenant General B. S. Jaswal, because he commanded forces in the "disputed area" of Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>93</sup> In response, India canceled defense exchanges with China.

Tensions emerged again in early 2013, when a small detachment of Chinese troops reportedly crossed into remote territory claimed and controlled by India, pitched tents, and remained encamped for weeks even after being discovered by Indian forces. The Chinese detachment withdrew in May prior to a visit to New Delhi by PRC Premier Li Keqiang. The

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Jeff M. Smith, "The China-India Border Brawl," *Wall Street Journal Asia*, June 24, 2009, p. 13.

<sup>92</sup> Jeffrey Reeves, "Arunachal Pradesh: A Crux of Sino-India Rivalry," *Small Wars Journal*, May 27, 2011, p. 10.

<sup>93</sup> "China Denies Visa to Top General in Charge of J&K," *Times of India*, August 27, 2010.

governments of both countries stressed cooperation and resolving differences through negotiation. Incursions such as these occur periodically, as one side seeks to signal its resolve on territorial claims and probes to test the resolve and detection capabilities of the other side.<sup>94</sup>

Some analysts believe such tensions cement an already robust China-Pakistan alliance.<sup>95</sup> In this view, India's efforts to improve ties with the United States, Japan, Australia, and Vietnam push China closer to Pakistan.<sup>96</sup> There appears to be some constituencies in China that support a more robust anti-India policy in collaboration with Pakistan. Reportedly, a recent study published by a PLA think tank, the China International Institute of Strategic Studies, advocated partnering with Pakistan to split India into 30 independent nation-states by funneling support to Tamil, Kashmiri, and other separatist groups in India.<sup>97</sup>

This view, however, overestimates the strength of the China-Pakistan partnership during the Cold War, and underestimates how changes since the end of the Cold War have diluted China's interest in Pakistan. China has never formally guaranteed Pakistan's security. In both the 1965 and 1971 India-Pakistan wars, Chinese leaders condemned Indian aggression and funneled military and economic aid to Pakistan, but declined Pakistani requests for direct military support.<sup>98</sup> Such limited support was ultimately insufficient to protect Pakistan's territorial integrity: In 1971, India literally tore Pakistan apart, lopping off East Pakistan and turning it into the independent state of Bangladesh. This experience set the tone for the Sino-Pakistani relationship: China would extend Pakistan every form of diplomatic and moral support and provide it with weapons, but would neither provide a formal security guarantee nor prepare joint defenses against India.

The China-Pakistan relationship therefore has never been an alliance, but rather a "subtle partnership" in which China does "the minimum necessary to preserve Pakistani security from a distance but has sought to avoid all overt entanglements in Islamabad's challenges to Indian

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<sup>94</sup> Gardiner Harris, "India and China Vow to Cooperate on Border," *New York Times*, May 21, 2013.

<sup>95</sup> Small, "China's Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan," pp. 88–90.

<sup>96</sup> Jingdong Yuan, "Beijing's Balancing Act: Courting New Delhi, Reassuring Islamabad," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 2, Spring 2011, pp. 37–54; Sujit Dutta, "Managing and Engaging Rising China: India's Evolving Posture," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Spring 2011, pp. 127–144; Francine Frankel, "The Breakout of China-India Strategic Rivalry in Asia and the Indian Ocean," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 2, Spring 2011, pp. 1–17; Li Hongmei, "India's 'Look East Policy' Means 'Look to Encircle China'?" *China Daily*, October 27, 2010; Mohan Malik, "India-China Competition Revealed in Ongoing Border Disputes," *Power and Interest News Report*, October 9, 2007; Brahma Chellaney, "India's Growing China Angst," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 2009, pp. 31–35.

<sup>97</sup> "Chinese Report Sparks India Anger," *BBC*, August 12, 2009.

<sup>98</sup> For an authoritative assessment of the Sino-Pakistani relationship, see Garver, *Protracted Contest*, chap. 7. For China's role in the 1965 and 1971 wars, see pp. 194–215.

primacy in South Asia.”<sup>99</sup> This Chinese disposition vis-à-vis Pakistan has been further reinforced by Beijing’s national priority of economic modernization and the end of the Cold War. As a result, China has reduced interest in a state of heightened tensions or conflict in South Asia.<sup>100</sup>

Although, by any quantitative measure of national power, China has increased its lead over India,<sup>101</sup> New Delhi’s growing comprehensive national power and rising ambitions have seized Beijing’s attention. India’s modest nuclear arsenal is of limited concern to China, but its China threat rhetoric is worrisome. Thus, when India conducted a nuclear test in 1998, Chinese leaders were more focused on the anti-China justification of the tests than on the tests themselves.<sup>102</sup> China is sensitive to the unresolved territorial disputes with India along their extended common border and feels extremely vulnerable because these areas are remote and inaccessible. Moreover, Beijing perceived that New Delhi has nefarious designs on Chinese territory, notably Tibet, because of its apparent support for the Tibetan Government-in-Exile based in India. Although communication and transportation links between the Tibetan plateau and China proper have improved, the region remains difficult to reinforce and resupply.<sup>103</sup> And forces deployed near the international boundary are limited. The PLA maintains 13 Border Defense Regiments, including the 149th Division of the 13th Group Army near Arunachal Pradesh, and has

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<sup>99</sup> Ashley Tellis, “The Changing Political-Military Environment: South Asia,” in Zalmay Khalilzad et al., *The United States and Asia: Toward a New U.S. Strategy and Force Posture*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1315-AF, 2001, pp. 225–226. On this point, see also Leo E. Rose, “India and China: Forging a New Relationship,” in Shalendra D. Sharma, ed., *The Asia-Pacific in the New Millennium: Geopolitics, Security, and Foreign Policy*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000; and Gary Klintworth, “Chinese Perspectives on India as a Great Power,” in Ross Babbage and Sandy Gordon, eds., *India’s Strategic Future*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992, p. 96.

<sup>100</sup> Hagerty, “China and Pakistan: Strains in the Relationship,” pp. 288–290.

<sup>101</sup> In 1990, the size of China’s gross domestic product (GDP) was roughly equivalent to India’s; today, it is nearly four times the size of India’s, according to the IMF. At the end of the Cold War, China’s military budget was slightly smaller than India’s; now it is more than three times as large. The conventional wisdom among Chinese analysts today is that “India’s aggregate strength is not sufficient for a contest with China.” Zhang Wenben, “Shijie diyuan zhengzhi tixi you yindu weilai anquan [The World Geopolitical System and India’s Future Security],” *Zhanlue yu Guanli*, No. 3, 2001, pp. 43–52; “Yindu junshi yexin de baoguang [Expose of India’s Military Ambitions],” *Hefei Wanbao*, April 4, 2000. China, therefore, can “be patient at the negotiating table because time is on China’s side.” Liu Silu, “Zhongyin Bianjie Tanpan, Beijing Bu Neng Ji, [Beijing Should Not Lose Patience in Chinese-Indian Border Talks],” *Wen Wei Po*, June 1, 2007.

<sup>102</sup> Ye Zhengjia, “Wushi Nianlai de Zhong-Yin Guanxi: Jingyan he Jiaoxun [Experience and Lessons in 40 years of Sino-Indian Relations],” *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu*, No. 4, 1999, pp. 17–23; John Garver, “The Restoration of Sino-Indian Comity Following India’s Nuclear Tests,” *China Quarterly*, No. 168, December 2001b, pp. 879–880. Chinese analysts have identified India as a major proponent of the “China Threat” theory. See, for example, Yong Deng, *China’s Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 108.

<sup>103</sup> Vijay Sakhuja, “Military Buildup Across the Himalayas: A Shaky Balance,” *China Brief*, Vol. 9, No. 18, September 10, 2009. The PLA has constructed a long-distance rail link between Beijing and Lhasa that helps force projection and logistics deployment on the border. The PLA has also built five airfields capable of supporting fighter aircraft in the region.

established signals intelligence aimed at India.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile most of 400,000 troops and long-range fighter-bombers in the Chengdu and Lanzhou MRs are far removed from Tibet.

As long as tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad persist, then India cannot turn its full attention toward China. The major issues in the relationship include the territorial dispute over Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistani support of terrorism inside India.<sup>105</sup> As a result, Pakistan remains a valuable counterweight to India in Chinese eyes. Although Beijing and many Chinese tend to be dismissive of New Delhi,<sup>106</sup> underlying concern about India's rise are discernible in China, and this is likely to heighten as China develops its far west. Although China's southwestern borders are protected by the Himalayas and the large, sparsely populated buffer provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang, this does not diminish Beijing's fears.<sup>107</sup> Both sides have massed forces on the border, and there have been periodic skirmishes along the border.

Burgeoning economic ties between China and India have altered China's calculus, at least in the short run. Chinese economic interests strongly favor improved ties with India, which is now an engine of regional growth and a major Chinese trading partner; China's two-way trade with India now dwarfs that with Pakistan. Between 2000 and 2012, Sino-Indian two-way trade jumped 20-fold to more than US\$66 billion. In contrast, Sino-Pakistani two-way trade has increased very slowly over the same period to reach a modest US\$12.5 billion in 2012 (see Figure 4.3). Moreover, the composition of China-India trade heavily favors China: Seventy percent of China's imports from India are raw materials, whereas the majority of China's exports to India are manufactured goods. This situation supports employment and profits in China and helps Chinese manufacturers move up the value chain faster than their Indian competitors.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Vijay Sakhuja, "Military Buildup Across the Himalayas: A Shaky Balance"; Jonathan Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 6, 2009.

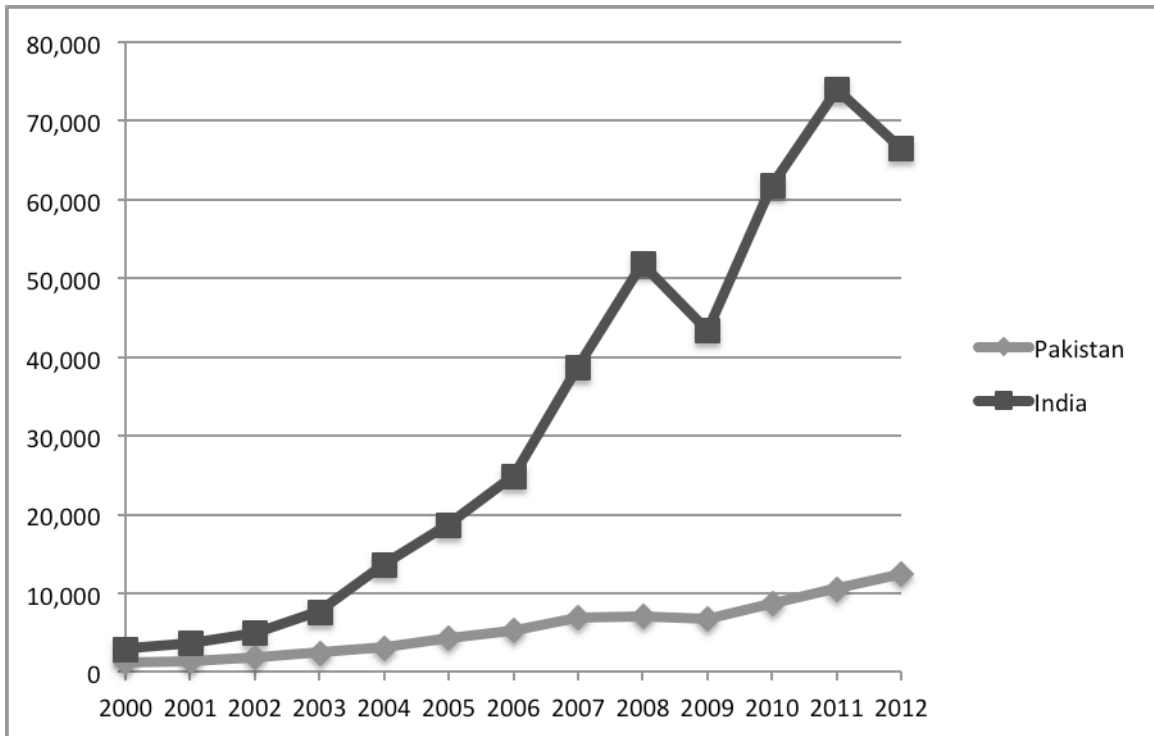
<sup>105</sup> The latter is of more recent concern, while the former has simmered since the partition of the British Raj. For a good historical overview of these tensions, see Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions since 1947*, Columbia University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001.

<sup>106</sup> Stanley A. Weiss, "Rivals and Partners," *International Herald Tribune*, January 9, 2010, p. 6. According to Evan Feigenbaum, "China considers India a third-tier security priority at best—far behind internal insecurity and challenges in the East Asian Littoral." Evan A. Feigenbaum, "India's Rise, America's Interest," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 2, March/April 2010, p. 88.

<sup>107</sup> Mutual suspicions run deep and disruptive technologies have shrunk distances. See Mohan Malik, *China and India: Great Power Rivals*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2011; and Paul Bracken, *Fire in the East: The Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age*, New York: HarperCollins, 1999, chapter 1.

<sup>108</sup> James Lamont and Kathrin Hille, "China Offers to Accelerate Trade Talks with India," *Financial Times*, April 3, 2010.

**Figure 4.3**  
**China's Trade with India and Pakistan, 2000–2012 (U.S. dollars, current prices, millions)**



SOURCE: UN Comtrade Database.

Economic interdependence does not preclude future conflicts between China and India, but the evolution of China's position on Kashmir suggests that it has dampened historical rivalries. In 1990, after a re-escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan, China withdrew its support for a United Nations plebiscite on Kashmir. This amounted to an implicit endorsement of India's position that the conflict should be resolved bilaterally.<sup>109</sup> During the Kargil War in 1999, in which Pakistani soldiers infiltrated Indian-Kashmir, Chinese leaders remained neutral and rejected direct requests for support from Pakistani leaders, telling them to seek a peaceful settlement with India.<sup>110</sup>

On the other hand, the thaw in China-India relations will not stop China from hedging by selling arms to Pakistan.<sup>111</sup> If China were to cut off arms sales to Pakistan in order to improve

<sup>109</sup> John Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement and the Sino-Pakistan Entente," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 111, No. 2, Summer 1996, p. 331.

<sup>110</sup> Ashley J. Tellis, C. Christine Fair, and Jamison Jo Medby, *Limited Conflicts Under the Nuclear Umbrella: Indian and Pakistani Lessons from the Kargil Crisis*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1450-USCA, 2001, ch. 2; John Garver, "China's Kashmir Policies," *India Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January 2004, pp. 1–24.

<sup>111</sup> John W. Garver, "The Future of the Sino-Pakistani Entente Cordiale," in Michael R. Chambers, ed., *South Asia in 2020*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, 2002b, ch. 15.



relations with India, it would not only lose an important source of income, but also a valuable source of strategic advantage, allowing India to strengthen its military resources on the Sino-Indian border. China will likely continue to provide military and financial support to maintain Pakistan as a viable military counter to India.

Two developments have the potential to reverse the trend of China's expanding set of overlapping interests with India and push China and Pakistan closer together in the future. First, some analysts believe China will respond to India's growing partnership with the United States by tightening its relationship with Pakistan.<sup>112</sup> At present, however, U.S.-Indian cooperation remains quite modest, and Chinese analysts seem confident that it will remain so for the foreseeable future.<sup>113</sup> But increasing U.S.-Indian cooperation would alarm Beijing and could lead China to take a deeper interest in enhancing direct military cooperation with Pakistan.

The second potential driver of a closer China-Pakistan relationship is China-India competition in the Indian Ocean. Chinese observers worry about India's dominant position astride China's most important oil routes, and Chinese naval and maritime affairs publications closely track Indian naval developments.<sup>114</sup> The stage is set for Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indian Ocean.<sup>115</sup> Underlying relations between Beijing and New Delhi is mutual suspicion and "ambivalence."<sup>116</sup> In any conflict between China and India, Pakistan could be a key player.<sup>117</sup>

#### Protecting Chinese Prosperity: Building an Energy and Trade Corridor

China's demand for energy has grown substantially in the past decade. In 2000, China's total energy consumption was half that of the United States; in 2010, China surpassed the United States to become the world's biggest energy consumer, a milestone that testifies both to the massive size of China's population and the speed at which its economy has grown. China, despite its attempts to develop domestic sources of energy, such as coal, nuclear power, and renewable energy, is becoming more dependent on foreign oil and natural gas. China's hydrocarbon use has more than doubled in the past two decades even as domestic oil production

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<sup>112</sup> Ashutosh Varshney, "A New Triangle: India, China, and the U.S.," *Seminar*, No. 557, January 2006.

<sup>113</sup> One analyst writes: India "will come into conflict with the United States over its many interests." Qian Feng, "Behind the Warming Up of India-U.S. Relations," *Renmin Ribao*, May 14, 2001.

<sup>114</sup> See, for example, the essays in the November 2005 issue of *Dangdai Haishi* [Modern Navy].

<sup>115</sup> Jonathan Holslag, *China and India: Prospects for Peace*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, pp. 129–138; and Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, New York: Random House, 2011.

<sup>116</sup> Holslag, *China and India*, p. 116.

<sup>117</sup> Robert Kaplan, "Center Stage for the 21st Century," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2009a; Zhang Yuncheng, "Nengyuan Anquan yu Haishang Tongdao [Energy Security and Sea Lanes,]" in Yang Mingjie, ed., *Haishang Tongdao Anquan yu Guoji Hezuo* [Sea Lane Security and International Cooperation], Beijing: Current Affairs, 2005; Chen Angang and Wu Ming, "Maliudan: Meiguo Jiyu de Zhanlue QianShao" ["Malacca Strait: The U.S. Covets a Strategic Outpost"], *Xiandai Jianchuan* [Modern Ships], December 2004.

has stagnated since 1993. China's hydrocarbon use is projected to double again in the next decade, and as much as 85 percent of that oil and natural gas will pass through the Indian Ocean, the Malacca Strait, and the South China Sea en route to China's Pacific Ocean ports.<sup>118</sup> This is what Chinese President Hu Jintao refers to as China's "Malacca Dilemma"—the fear that China's dependence on the flow of energy resources through narrow sea lines of communication creates a pressure point that adversaries can exploit.<sup>119</sup>

China is developing two solutions to this dilemma: bolstering its presence in the Indian Ocean and developing overland trade and energy corridors through Central Asia. The former has been dubbed by American analysts as China's "String of Pearls" strategy.<sup>120</sup> Pakistan could be the key to both of these plans. In 2001, China agreed to provide one-fifth of the cost for the first phase of construction of a port at Gwadar, a remote fishing village 72 km from the Iranian border and approximately 400 km from the strait of Hormuz. China also reportedly sent 450 engineers to provide technical expertise. China has committed \$200 million to build a 725 km highway connecting Gwadar with Pakistan's largest city, Karachi, which is itself connected to the North of Pakistan via railway.<sup>121</sup>

One Chinese vision is to link Gwadar to Xinjiang with railways and an oil pipeline.<sup>122</sup> Pakistan has drawn up plans to build a railway between Havellian, a Pakistani city close to Islamabad, and Kashgar in Xinjiang. This railway would roughly parallel the Karakoram highway. In 2006, Pakistan awarded a \$1.2 million contract to an international consortium to carry out a feasibility study for establishing this rail link. But so far no plans have been finalized to begin construction. In 2006, the Pakistani government presented plans for a 3,300 km oil pipeline between Gwadar and Kashgar. The pipe would be 30 inches thick and be capable of

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<sup>118</sup> Joshua W. Busby, "The Need for Power: Implications of Chinese Energy Security and Climate Change Policies for Sino-American Relations," in Abraham Denmark and Nirav Patel, eds., *China's Arrival: A Strategic Framework for a Global Relationship*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Century, 2009, pp. 21–42; Mikhail Herberg, "China's Search for Energy Security: Implications for U.S. Policy," *NBR Analysis*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2006, p. 12; Mike Boyer, "China's Oil Import Scheme Is Far from Crude," *Foreign Policy*, October 4, 2006. On the South China Sea, see Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, pp. 141–146.

<sup>119</sup> You Ji, "Dealing with the Malacca Dilemma: China's Effort to Protect its Energy Supply," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 31, No. 3, May 2007, pp. 467–489; Zhang Wenmu, "Sea Power and China's Strategic Choice," *China Security*, No. 2, Summer 2006, p. 23. See also the Chinese sources cited in Andrew Erickson, "China's Future Nuclear Submarine Force: Insights from Chinese Writings," *Naval War College Review*, Winter 2007, pp. 57–60.

<sup>120</sup> Christopher Pehrson, *String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Growing Power Across the Asian Littoral*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2006. These ports, including Gwadar, have everyday economic value and in the event of a conflict, considerable military value.

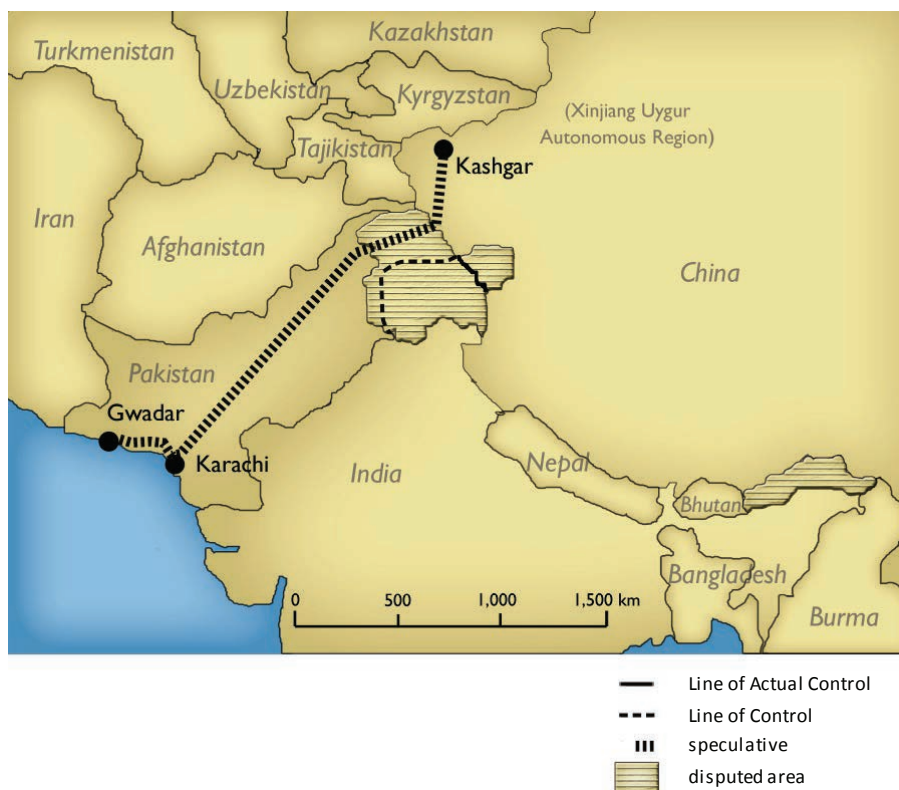
<sup>121</sup> Pehrson, *String of Pearls*, p. 4; and Sudha Ramachandran, "China's Pearl in Pakistan's Waters," *Asia Times Online*, March 4, 2005.

<sup>122</sup> For an overview of these developments, see, Vijay Sakhuja, "The Karakoram Corridor: China's Transportation Networks in Pakistan," *China Brief*, Vol. 10, No. 20, October 8, 2010, pp. 5–7; Fazal-ur-Rahman, "Prospects of Pakistan Becoming a Trade and Energy Corridor for China," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Summer 2007.



handling 12 million tons of oil per year. The cost of the pipeline is estimated at \$4.5–5 billion.<sup>123</sup> See Figure 4.4.

**Figure 4.4**  
**Karakoram Highway and Proposed Railway and Gas Pipeline**



SOURCE: Andrew S. Erickson and Gabriel B. Collins, "China's Oil Security Pipe Dream: The Reality, and Strategic Consequences, of Seaborne Imports," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2, Spring 2010, p. 102.

Yet many Chinese analysts argue that geographic and security barriers render a Pakistan–China energy corridor unfeasible.<sup>124</sup> Pakistan is politically unstable. Indeed, Chinese workers have been kidnapped and killed in at least three separate incidents in the regions that would be traversed by the proposed Pakistan–China pipelines and railways.<sup>125</sup> These overland corridors would also transit a part of Kashmir that, while controlled by Pakistan, is also claimed by India. In addition to political problems and security risks, there would also be serious financial barriers.

<sup>123</sup> Fazal-ur-Rahman, 2007.

<sup>124</sup> See, for example, Wu Yongnian, "Lun Zhong-Ba Xin Maoyi Nengyuan Zoulang [A Discussion of China and Pakistan Opening up a New Trade-Energy Corridor]," *Shijie Jingji Yanjiu [World Economic Research]*, No. 11, 2006, p. 86.

<sup>125</sup> "Three Chinese Dead in Pakistan Terrorist Attack," *Reuters*, July 8, 2007.

By one assessment, if a Chinese oil company chose to move 250,000 bpd overland through Pakistan, it might lose as much as \$1 billion per year compared with moving the oil by sea.<sup>126</sup> Most importantly, the railways and pipelines would have to be constructed over some of the world's most treacherous terrain. Oil would have to be transported or pumped from sea level at Gwadar to 15,000 feet over the Khunjerab Pass, a feat that would require massive amounts of energy.

In January 2010, the Karakoram Highway was severed due to a massive landslide in the Hunza valley in the northern areas of Gilgit-Baltistan. This resulted in the formation of a 20 kilometer-long artificial lake over the highway that contained over 132 million cubic meters of water, causing a major disruption of traffic between China and Pakistan. By June, the lake had overflowed and, according to the Indian Army, "It could take one-and-a-half years for normalcy to be restored to the functioning of the highway."<sup>127</sup> As of this writing (May 2014), the road remained closed.

Even if the overland railways and pipeline between Gwadar and China came to fruition, it would not significantly alleviate China's "Malacca Dilemma." According to the government of Pakistan, the proposed Gwadar-Xinjiang pipeline would carry 12 million tons of oil every year. This is equivalent to 2–3 percent of China's annual oil consumption.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, offloading seaborne crude in Pakistan would be problematic because it is far from China's mainland economic and military centers. James Holmes of the U.S. Naval War College argues that the United States would easily be able to prevent the unloading of oil at Gwadar and that it would be easier than blockading the Strait of Malacca.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, many Chinese analysts argue that China should seek international cooperation to manage oil transport in the Indian Ocean because China is not strong enough to secure its own supplies or provide for them via overland pipelines.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Erickson and Collins, "China's Oil Security Pipe Dream," p. 101; Robert Kaplan, "Pakistan's Fatal Shore," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 2009b; Ji, "Dealing with the Malacca Dilemma," p. 475. The bottom line is that "pipelines are far more expensive than tankers in terms of what must be spent to move a given volume of oil a given distance." Erickson and Collins, p. 92.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Sakhuja, "The Karakoram Corridor," p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> According to the International Energy Association, in 2010 China consumed 407 million tons of oil; in 2020 it is projected to consume 563 million tons.

<sup>129</sup> James Holmes, testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, June 14, 2007.

<sup>130</sup> Feng Liang and Duan Tingzhi, "Characteristics of China's Sea Geostrategic Security and Sea Security Strategy in the New Century," *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* [China Military Science], January 2007, p. 27; Ling Yun, "Longmai [Dragon's Arteries]," *Xiandai Jianchuan* [Modern Ships], October 2006, p. 17; Zhao Hongtu, "Maliudan Kunju yu Zhongguo Nengyuan Anquan Zai Sikao [The Malacca Dilemma and Rethinking China's Energy Security]," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations], No. 6, 2007, pp. 36–42; Zhang, "Energy Security and Sea Lanes," p. 117; Li Jie, "Shiyou, Zhongguo Yaoqiu yu Haidao Anquan [Oil, China's Requirements, and Sea Lane Security]," *Jianchuan Zhishi* [Naval and Merchant Ships], September 2004, p. 12.

For all these reasons it appears that, as Andrew Erickson and Gabriel Collins argue, China's attempt to reduce its dependence on seaborne trade is a "pipe dream."<sup>131</sup> The main impetus for establishing an "energy corridor" is coming from the Pakistani side, not from China. Former president Pervez Musharraf broached the idea in Beijing in June 2006 and raised the issue again during talks with President Hu Jintao in 2008, but with no apparent results to date.

Of far greater importance to China strategically and economically are Pakistan's sea ports. In particular, the new port facility at Gwadar is a useful "pearl" for Chinese commercial or military vessels. This port was built to be 14 meters deep, enough to accommodate submarines and aircraft carriers, and can already function as a "listening post" to monitor U.S. naval activity in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.<sup>132</sup> But even if China were to turn Gwadar into a naval base, it would likely not undermine American and Indian dominance of the Indian Ocean. India's navy has seven bases and three listening posts along the shores of the Indian Ocean, and the U.S. Navy maintains a large naval presence at Diego Garcia.

## Conclusion

Afghanistan and Pakistan hold greater importance for Beijing than might be expected given that both of these countries are well removed from China's political and economic heartland far to the east. Beijing's national security priorities are focused on this eastern heartland, where its defenses are strongest and Han Chinese are the overwhelmingly dominant ethnic group. As noted in Chapter Two and this chapter, the far west is where China defenses are weakest and ethnic minority groups such as the Uighurs and Tibetans are concentrated and Han are less numerous. The frontiers of western China—in Central and South Asia—are where Beijing feels extremely vulnerable. In spite of this weakness, China projects an image of strength through an Empty Fortress strategy.

China has viewed Afghanistan with concern since at least the Soviet invasion of that country in 1979. And since the 1990s, Beijing has seen Afghanistan as the terrorist epicenter of Central Asia. China fears a spillover of Islamic extremism into the Central Asian states and Xinjiang. Beijing has been ambivalent regarding ongoing U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan and standoffish about contributing Chinese resources to helping stabilize the country.

China views Pakistan as a pivotal state, influential in determining the fate of Afghanistan and situated on a geostrategic fault line between Central and South Asia. Beijing has enjoyed a warm relationship with Islamabad for more than five decades, and Chinese and Pakistani leaders often refer to their countries' relationship as an "all-weather friendship." Yet, the analysis in this

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<sup>131</sup> Erickson and Collins, 2010, pp. 89–111.

<sup>132</sup> See, for example, Sanjeev Miglani, "In Pakistan's Gwadar Port, Chinese Whispers Grow," Reuters, May 26, 2011.

chapter casts doubt on such statements. Chinese support is more restrained than in the past. China's interests in Pakistan are increasingly regional and aimed at restraining Islamabad.

Pakistan remains an important ally and a major arms market for Chinese defense firms, but Islamabad's value as China's conduit to the Islamic world or a Chinese facilitator on the global stage is greatly reduced. In the 21st century, China has robust relationships with a variety of countries in the Middle East and full diplomatic ties with all but approximately two dozen small countries in the world (which maintain ambassador-level relations with Taiwan), and the vast majority of these can be best described as micro-states.<sup>133</sup>

In 2014, China's foreign policy toward Pakistan centers on a set of narrow but key interests that can be satisfied without robust Sino-Pakistani ties. Beijing's interests in domestic stability and energy security can be realized as long as Islamabad maintains a modest degree of political stability within its own borders and limits its meddling into the affairs of its neighbors (i.e., Afghanistan and India). And China's interest in checking India can be satisfied as long as Pakistan maintains some semblance of offensive military power. Moreover, many of Islamabad's problems seem to defy solutions, and Beijing has more pressing priorities. Therefore, China is unlikely to invest significant additional resources in propping up Pakistan's political institutions and economy or to mediate its conflict with India.

China is increasingly concerned about trends in Pakistan, instability, and the inability of Islamabad to control extremists who infiltrate into Xinjiang. But Beijing cannot afford to pull away. China finds its relationship with Pakistan extremely frustrating and troublesome. But abandonment does not seem to be an option because Beijing fears it would likely create more headaches and potentially even greater security problems for China.

Meanwhile, Pakistan will continue to embrace China for the simple reason that Islamabad lacks any powerful and trusted friends except for Beijing. Pakistan views the United States as fickle and unreliable. In 2011, the relationship between Islamabad and Washington was seriously strained by the Navy SEAL raid that killed Osama bin Laden and the high-profile criticism by U.S. officials of Pakistani intelligence links to an extremist Afghani group that attacked U.S. targets.<sup>134</sup> Ties between the United States and Pakistan continue to be strained.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Micro-states are those with populations of less than 500,000 people. For a list of countries that continue to formally recognize Taipei as the Republic of China, see Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*, p. 218.

<sup>134</sup> See, for example, Pamela Constable, "In Sign of U.S.-Pakistan Strain, Military Chiefs Exchange Barbs," *Washington Post*, April 22, 2011, p. A8; Anna Fifield, "Pakistan lets China see U.S. helicopter," *Financial Times*, August 14, 2011; James Blitz, "Pakistan Warns US It Could 'Lose An Ally,'" *Financial Times*, September 23, 2011.

<sup>135</sup> For insights on this complex and tumultuous relationship, see the interview with Husain Haqqani, former Pakistan ambassador to Washington: Mark Landler, "Seeing Misunderstandings on both sides of U.S-Pakistan Ties," *New York Times*, October 23, 2013. For more detail, see Haqqani's book: *Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding*, New York: Public Affairs, 2013.

## 5. China's Empty Fortress and U.S. Strategy

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China's expanding influence in Central and South Asia has significant implications for the United States. Washington confronts a wide range of daunting security challenges abroad and tight fiscal constraints on defense spending at home. Whatever the future might hold, China will continue to be a major challenge for the United States. As part of the U.S. "rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific," proclaimed in 2012,<sup>1</sup> Washington seeks a constructive partnership with the most potent emerging power in the region. But such a relationship cannot be assumed.

Much of the attention to China's growing power and influence has focused on Northeast and Southeast Asia. As the preceding chapters reveal, China's star is also rising in Central and South Asia. Nevertheless, Beijing's strategy is driven by deep-seated insecurities. China's Communist Party rulers are preoccupied by perceived threats to domestic stability and national unity and acutely sensitive to the potential for ethnic and extremist instability on the periphery to spill over into China. Beijing thus places a premium on maintaining stability just beyond its borders. China seeks peaceful, predictable, and secular regimes as neighbors. Moreover, China desires to expand its influence in neighboring states and limit the influence of other great powers, notably the United States and India. Beijing tends to be intensely suspicious of the designs of Washington and New Delhi. Lastly, China is focused on sustaining economic growth in China and fears that a slowdown will threaten domestic stability. Continued robust economic growth in China means nurturing and expanding economic relationships with other countries, especially neighboring states.

### Understanding China's Empty Fortress Strategy

In spite of deep-seated insecurities and weaknesses, Beijing has skillfully feigned confidence and strength by adopting a highly successful Empty Fortress strategy. All countries of the region perceive China as a great power with ever-increasing influence. This is also how Washington views Beijing. Yet China's activist diplomatic, economic, and military initiatives in Central and South Asia mask inner anxiety. Beijing feels especially vulnerable in western China, where its defenses are weak, distances are vast, the intentions of other powers are suspect, and the allegiances of indigenous populations are uncertain.

Almost certainly, the growing impact of China is the most significant ongoing trend in great power politics in Asia. China's influence is expanding in particular in countries around its

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, Washington, D.C., January 2012, p. 2; Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011.

periphery. Since the 1990s, China's diplomatic, economic, and even military clout has grown in Central and South Asia. China's relations with Afghanistan have been somewhat erratic since the 1980s, with Beijing viewing Kabul as a serious source of instability, first as a Soviet satellite and later as a focal point for Islamic radicalism. Meanwhile, China has maintained a very close, warm, and enduring relationship with Pakistan since the early 1960s. But the most notable improvement and growth in Beijing's influence in recent decades has been with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. After the demise of the Soviet Union, China focused considerable attention on the five newly independent states of Central Asia. Beijing in particular concentrated on resolving border disputes and on developing an overarching security architecture to manage its policy toward Inner Asia—the SCO.

While these developments are significant, China's increased power and influence in Central Asia is as much about skillfully managed perception as it is about reality. This does not mean there have been no tangible increases in China's clout in the region; rather, it is to underscore the fact that Beijing has deftly played the very weak hand it has been dealt. In other words, China's Empty Fortress strategy has been successfully implemented.

The centerpiece of China's Empty Fortress strategy in Central Asia and AfPak is the SCO (and its predecessor, the "Shanghai Five," established in 1996), which has evolved over the past 15 years from a focus on border security to counterterrorism into a multifaceted, multilateral organization involved not only with security issues but also with energy and economic cooperation. The organization has been institutionalized with regular summit meetings and military exercises. The SCO's performance to date has proved disappointing—the organization has been disengaged from the domestic political crises of member countries and been little more than a bystander on Afghanistan.

But measured by the yardstick of Beijing's Empty Fortress strategy, the SCO has proved to be a success promoting the image of a strong and secure China in a region where the Middle Kingdom is actually very weak and insecure. Merely by demonstrating its staying power and weathering the influx of U.S. military forces since 2001, the SCO has survived beyond its 13th birthday and appears durable for the foreseeable future. What would constitute failure in China's Empty Fortress strategy? Probably the only development that would be viewed as such by Beijing would be the disintegration of the SCO. Thus, the bar for success is very low.

By another yardstick, the SCO bears up less impressively—whether the organization is "relevant."<sup>2</sup> In other words, can the SCO address the real problems of the region in practical and meaningful ways? Whatever the answer to this question may be, the SCO appears to be alive and in reasonably good health. It has proved surprisingly vigorous and resilient, especially considering that three months after its birth the attacks of September 11, 2001, paved the way for U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan and expanded U.S. security cooperation with Central

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<sup>2</sup> Discussion with Chinese analyst, spring 2011.



Asian states. Indeed, the organization seemed strangely aloof from the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism and in danger of disappearing into oblivion.<sup>3</sup> Yet some Chinese analysts openly express their frustration with the SCO's limited progress.<sup>4</sup> There are built-in limitations on its capabilities and potential because of loose organizational structure and cohesion and little economic and military compatibility. Moreover, other members are wary of Chinese hegemony.

The SCO is an enigmatic organization that defies easy categorization.<sup>5</sup> It has a diplomatic component, with annual meetings of heads of state, heads of governments, and other multilateral governmental meetings. Although the SCO has a key military component, it is not a military alliance—certainly it is no “Asian NATO.”<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the significance of the SCO should not be exaggerated. While the organization is useful as a mechanism to manage tension and disputes among member states, it has proved less successful at resolving problems. In this sense it may be akin to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a regional organization that is often derided as little more than a “talk shop.”<sup>7</sup>

While the SCO has minimal power as a regional organization, it is clearly a Chinese creature in the sense that it would not exist without Beijing's initiative and funding. But the SCO is not Beijing's lapdog, nor is it Beijing's attack dog. Moreover, the SCO is by no means anti-American, but neither is the SCO by any stretch of the imagination a pro-American entity. These foregoing characteristics should not give the United States any cause for undue alarm. But the fact that the SCO has raised concerns in the United States is testament to China's successful implementation of the Empty Fortress strategy.

While China has been successful in expanding its influence in Afghanistan and the Central Asian states, and cultivating its friendship with Pakistan, China nevertheless perceives all these countries in threatening terms: as breeding grounds for Islamic radicals, sympathetic foreign bases of support for separatist forces in Xinjiang, and vulnerable to manipulation by other great powers. Beijing's strategy is to integrate Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan with western China and China proper so that common economic and political interests trump the terrorist-separatist challenge.

Beijing feels very vulnerable in western China in part because of the threat of terrorism. But Beijing also feels extremely vulnerable on its western flank because of the very U.S. military forces that are engaged in battling this common threat. China cannot help but be suspicious of

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<sup>3</sup> Lanteigne, “In Medias Res,” p. 612.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Sun Zhuangzhi, “SCO Summit in Tashkent Opens ‘New Chapter,’” *People's Daily Online* (in English), June 12, 2010; author conversations with Chinese analysts, spring 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Malik, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” pp. 72–86.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, “SCO's Purpose Is Not to Challenge NATO,” *Global Times*, June 7, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Michael J. Green and Bates Gill, “Unbundling Asia's New Multilateralism,” in Green and Gill, eds., *Asia's New Multilateralism: Cooperation, Competition, and the Search for Community*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, p. 3. Green and Gill note that is a common criticism leveled at many Asian multilateral fora.

this U.S. presence on its periphery in locations such as Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. Beijing is particularly worried about U.S. air power, for reasons explained in Chapter Two.

### *U.S. Strategy in the Absence of a “Great Game”*

While the “Great Game” may have been an apt characterization of contestations over Central Asia or Afghanistan or Pakistan in an earlier age of empires, this is no longer an appropriate metaphor to use for the region today. In the early 21st century, there is no great power rivalry. Of course, the United States has significant interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which are focused on defeating al Qa’ida. However, the United States is not engaged in a zero-sum contest with other great powers. Rather, America’s adversaries are nonstate actors. That said, the absence of a “great game” does not mean the United States concedes the region to a Chinese (or Russian) sphere of influence. Moreover, countries of the region have proven quite adept at managing the influence of powerful states on their periphery. While the states of the region are weak, especially compared with the major powers that seek influence in the region, none of them are powerless.

China, along with Russia and other great powers, will continue to play key roles in shaping the security environment in Central Asia. Chinese activities and aspirations also directly impact U.S. interests and initiatives in the region. And China, along with other great powers, will also affect the security situation and ongoing U.S. operations in Afghanistan and influence the state of play in Pakistan.

But China is not currently a major threat to U.S. interests in Central Asia or AfPak and is unlikely to pose one in the near future. Therefore, at present, China is not a decisive factor in determining U.S. policy, military strategy, or posture in this region.

As the United States continues to shrink its footprint in Afghanistan, the U.S. military will face difficult decisions about an appropriate and realistic posture in Central Asia and AfPak. Some modest continued presence in this region may be prudent. Moreover, a continued presence in the neighborhood provides the United States maximum flexibility to either cooperate with or counter China depending on Beijing’s policies and actions. Although Washington should not expect significant expansion of Chinese cooperation with U.S.-led efforts to defeat violent extremists in the region, such an eventuality should not be completely ruled out. While China has demonstrated extreme reluctance to work side-by-side with the United States and its allies in Afghanistan, as noted in Chapter Four, there has been an unprecedentedly lively debate among Chinese analysts about the pros and cons of such a move. This is not to suggest that such a development might be imminent but rather to underscore how far Chinese elites have come in their willingness to consider a wide range of possibilities that would not so long ago have been completely dismissed out of hand.

On the other hand, in the event of a more hostile China, a U.S. military presence would be useful. Beijing’s greatest national security priorities lie in its eastern and coastal provinces—China’s political and economic heartland. This is where its armed forces are concentrated.



China's PLA has concentrated on warfighting scenarios with the U.S. armed forces in East Asia. An enduring U.S. presence on its western flank, however modest, would raise the specter of any military conflict with the United States becoming a two-front war. Such a realization, given China's feelings of vulnerability in the far west—albeit skillfully masked by the Empty Fortress strategy—would significantly alter Beijing's security calculus and perhaps even its willingness to go to war.

While Central Asia and AfPak are not vital to the national security interests of the United States, these areas do have considerable strategic value and should not be conceded to China or any other great power. Moreover, there are significant issues of common interest between the United States and China, including countering violent extremist organizations in Central and South Asia and promoting economic development and competent governance. Lastly, trends in the Asia-Pacific and the “rebalance” to the region suggest that the United States should think in broader geostrategic terms about the challenges of a rising China beyond East Asia to other theaters, including Central and South Asia.



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