

China cares for peace, not vacuum in Kabul

By Liu Zhongmin

As the US' withdrawal from Afghanistan continues, those in Washington opposing the military pullout are raising their voices. They have warned against the serious consequences for the region the US's "retrograde" could bring, including China, Russia and Iran filling a power vacuum in the war-torn country. According to Japan's media outlet Nikkei Asia, David Helvey, acting assistant secretary of defense for the US's Indo-Pacific security affairs, said at a US Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on Thursday that, "China does have an interest in Afghanistan." Helvey added, "That China's influence could be used to undermine stability, instead of reinforce stability or support stability, obviously, that's something that we've got concern about."

This reflects Washington's contradictory attitude and its own dilemmas when it comes to the Afghan issue. On the one hand, Washington is eager to get rid of the Afghanistan burden despite the mess it has created. On the other hand, it views the efforts by other countries to help stabilize the situation as raw ambition to seize control in the power vacuum.

The Afghan war the US waged after

the 9/11 attacks has lasted for nearly 20 years. During this time, Washington eradicated terrorism on its own soil, but left a mess in Afghanistan. The US cannot win this war that has lasted for two decades. Any further involvement will mean that Washington will become increasingly incapable of dominating Afghan affairs. So the US is withdrawing its troops even though conditions are not ripe to do so. The irresponsible pullout has led to many deplorable results. One is recent terrorist attacks that are only intensifying.

The US is now facing a serious dilemma with its Middle East and West Asia policy. No matter the Afghan issue or the latest Israel-Palestine conflicts, Washington clearly has become increasingly unable to cope with thorny issues in the Middle East as it wished. From President Obama to Trump to Biden, there is an overall trend that Washington is shrinking its footprints in the Middle East and West Asia. With this trend continuing, many interpretations in the US hold that China is ambitious to fill the vacuum left by Washington. But Beijing has no interest in playing the role as a challenger to the US in the Middle East and West Asia.

Take the Afghan issue as a case in point. The US is the fundamental rea-

son for the turbulence in Afghanistan, while China is always a force that has been committed to fostering peace in its western neighbor. China's participation in the international society's efforts to promote the resolution of the Afghan issue is not meant to fill any power vacuum. China is willing to see stability and peace in Afghanistan because it conforms to China's national interests to maintain stability and peace on China's western border.

State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi elaborated China's position on the Afghan situation earlier this month at the second "China+Central Asia" (C+C5) Foreign Ministers' Meeting. He emphasized that the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan should first of all implement the principle of "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned." He also said that as close neighbors of Afghanistan, Central Asian countries should make due contributions to the final settlement of the Afghan issue. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) should also play its due role for the long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan, he said.

China's participation in the Afghan issue is carried out within multilateral frameworks, such as the UN and the SCO. It hopes to work with countries

concerned to jointly promote stability in Afghanistan. There is no such a strategy that China wants to dominate the Afghan issue.

However, many nervous nellys in Washington tend to overly interpret China's involvement in the region. For example, US Republican Sen. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee even raised the possibility of China using its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to gain "unfettered access" across Afghanistan to Iran – potentially connecting the two American rivals. Her wild imagination is a stereotyped malicious misinterpretation of the BRI from the geopolitical perspective. China doesn't have such strategic arrangement that is linked to Iran in Afghanistan at all.

The US' disorderly and irresponsible withdrawal from Afghanistan to relieve itself from the burden of the war has messed up the country and the region. Meanwhile, it has treated the endeavors of other countries and regional organizations to foster stability as an eyesore. The world has now known the US' petty mind well. They can see what awful mess it has left.

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Regional countries must help tackle India's pandemic emergency

By Liu Zongyi

Since mid-April, COVID-19 in India has been spreading rapidly. The insufficient medical resources and the panic caused by soaring death toll in India are creating severe sociopolitical and economic impact. This will have a serious spillover effect on the global and regional situations.

As all-weather strategic partners, China and Pakistan are regional stakeholders. Therefore, both countries must pay close attention to the impact of the development of COVID-19 in India on regional political and economic situations and carry out coordinated actions.

First of all, Beijing and Islamabad should further strengthen cooperation in the fight against the pandemic, since the spread of the pandemic in India will worsen the epidemic prevention in neighboring countries. The epidemic in India is spilling over to neighboring countries, and the number of patients in other South Asia countries is rising. China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh have established joint epidemic prevention mechanisms and carried out cooperation to fight against the epidemic.

In the future, this multi-lateral anti-epidemic mechanism should be extended to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and other regional organizations. China and Pakistan can work together to expand vaccine production and inoculation.

India's epidemic may not be ended in a short time. It requires China and Pakistan to strengthen cooperation to deal with the regional economic uncertainty and stabilize the regional industrial chain.

Second, Pakistan can use the current timing to promote the development of its advantageous industries.

India is a major country in textile production and exports. Now the epidemic has disrupted its textile industry. The textile industry is a traditional advantageous industry of Pakistan. Now, China's textile industry is moving outward due to labor costs, and this trend is irreversible. Pakistan should seize the opportunity to learn from the experience accumulated by China in brand building, enterprise management, capital operation, talent cultivation and industrial facilitation to upgrade its domestic textile industry and take international orders.

The epidemic has exerted

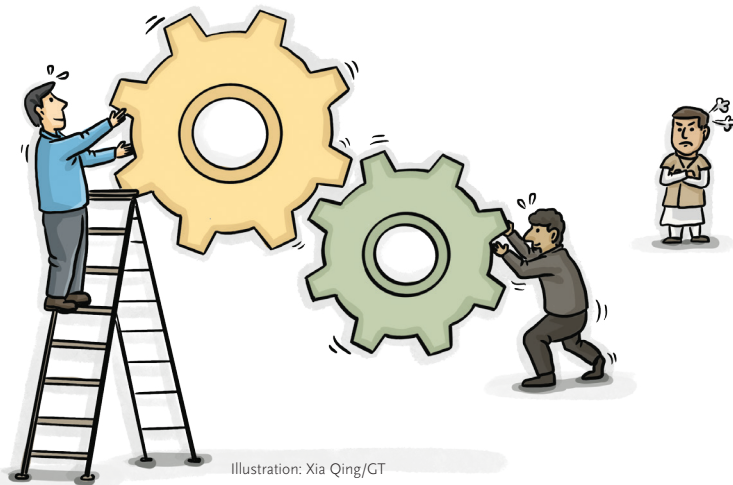


Illustration: Xia Qing/CT

great pressure on the Modi administration, which may result to social, political and economic uncertainty in India. However, there is no political leader in India who can compete with Modi, and the opposition forces cannot unite against Modi and his BJP. If the Modi government doesn't change its current domestic and foreign policies, a possible trend of India's political development will be to continue spreading Hindu nationalism. In this case, policies that are hostile to China, Pakistan and the Muslims may continue in India.

After the outbreak of the second wave of the epidemic, India didn't appreciate China's supply of anti-epidemic

materials, such as oxygen generators. New Delhi instead slandered China and enhanced its combat readiness in the border areas. China and Pakistan should keep an eye on India's domestic political trends and its regional foreign policy.

COVID-19 has struck a blow to the geopolitical ambitions of India to some extent. Beijing and Islamabad should endeavor to maintain regional stability together and plan for the long-term development of the region. At the end of 2020 and the beginning of this year, when the US government proposed to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, some strategists in New Delhi advocated that India should

send troops into Afghanistan to fill the vacancy. It is a major strategic challenge for both China and Pakistan to help maintain the stability of Afghanistan and the region. Pakistan has an important traditional influence on the Afghan issue. China recognizes and appreciates Pakistan's efforts to help realize peace to Afghanistan. Meanwhile, China and Pakistan should have closer cooperation to combat terrorist organizations such as East Turkestan, and have a better communication with other neighboring countries of Afghanistan. This can help prompt the UN and the SCO to play their due role and advance the peace process in Afghanistan in the long run.

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