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Vol: 02, Issue: 01(2021) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58669/jspga.v02.i01.04>**Pak-China Relation Post-ISAF Forces Withdrawal from the Region: A Review of Relations Post-War**

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Abstract: In the center of south-central Asia is the mountainous, multicultural nation. Imperial powers have long coveted Afghanistan due to its location along critical trading paths that link up southern and eastern Asia to Europe and the Middle East. For thousands of years, mighty armies have tried to conquer Afghanistan, deciding to leave behind grand statues that are now in ruins as a reminder of their initiatives. Afghanistan consistently emerges as a subject of disputes over political ideologies and corporate dominance. Similarly, in 2001, ISAF commanded Afghanistan to enhance the capabilities of the Afghan armed forces, notably in the battle against global terrorism, and to establish the framework for the Afghan government to work out its power all across the country. The main focus of this paper is to explore the impacts of ISAF withdrawal on the Pak-China relationship. Firstly, this research will highlight the historical background of ISAF. Then, the study will explore the withdrawal of ISAF from Afghanistan. Lastly, the interlinked between IASF withdrawal and the Pak-China relationship will be mentioned.

Keywords: Pak-China Relation, South Asia, Imperial Powers, ISAF, Afghan Armed Forces

Overview of ISAF**ISAF - Vision and Mission**

ISAF was one of the nation's most considerable forces and NATO's most challenging operation to time. The force had personnel from 51 NATO and associate countries at its apex, totaling more than 130,000 people. The objectives of NATO-ISAF are to avoid Afghanistan from turning into a place of refuge for terrorists once more, to aid in supplying security, and to assist the Afghan folk's growth in the future. NATO-ISAF is trying to build the circumstances that will allow the Government of Afghanistan to execute its power across the entire state as part of the more considerable global team effort and as directed by the United Nations Security Council. In order to fulfill its objective, ISAF collaborates with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to perform warfighting processes that are population-focused and offers assistance to the states and the central society in the restructuring of the defense sector, including coaching, support personnel, and instruction for the Afghan National Military and Police. The NATO-top ISAF's concerns in Afghanistan: 1) Give protection to the Afghan community 2) Strengthen the Afghan Security Forces' ability so they can assume primary leadership responsibility for safety in their own nation 3) Suppress the resistance and make it possible to implement better political institutions (NATO, 2013a).

Origin of ISAF

According to the Bonn Summit, SAF was established in December 2001 (Castillo, 2008). Afghan rebel groups present at the meeting started rebuilding their nation by

establishing a new governance framework, the Afghan Interim Administration. At this event, the idea of an international body with UN authorization to help the recently constituted Afghan Interim Administration was also introduced. The goal of this force would be to facilitate Afghan rebuilding while fostering security in and around Kabul. These treaties opened the way for establishing a triangular alliance involving ISAF, UNAMA, and the Afghan Interim Administration.

NATO Gain Power of ISAF

The six-month country cycle finally ended on August 11th, 2003, when NATO gained control of the ISAF action the supervision, administration, and preparation of the unit, as well as the supply of a concerned leader and offices on the field in Afghanistan, were under the purview of the Partnership. This new regime addressed issues like the need to constantly look for new countries to lead the mission and the challenges of building up a fresh office every six months in a challenging area. Ongoing NATO offices also give small nations less capable of taking on senior roles the chance to play a significant part within a global office.

Expanded ISAF involvement in Afghanistan

At first, only securing Kabul and its vicinity was part of ISAF's mandate. As a result of the UN's decision to extend the mandate of ISAF to include the entirety of Afghanistan in October 2003 (UNSCR 1510), the mission expanded throughout the nation (UNSCR, 2003).

Towards North

General James Jones, Deputy Chief for Europe, was permitted by the North Atlantic Council in December 2003 to start the development of ISAF by handing over the leadership of the German-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kunduz. Action Endless Independence, the ongoing US-led military campaign in Afghanistan, continued to be in charge of the remaining eight PRTs that were still active there in 2003. As a test program and the initial stage in the operation's growth, the army portion of the Kunduz PRT was handed over to ISAF control on December 31, 2003 (NATO, 2010b). Further PRTs would be established in the nation's north at four different locations: Mazar Sharif, Memaneh, Faizabad, and Baghlan, six months later, on June 28, 2004, at the Ministerial Conference in Turkey. The first stage of ISAF's extension was finished by the time this procedure was finished on October 1st, 2004. The task could affect security in nine northern provinces of the nation while operating in a zone of operation that was roughly 3,600 sq. km in the north.

Towards West

NATO declared that ISAF would be extended into western Afghanistan on February 10, 2005. The first step in this procedure was when ISAF assumed control of two more PRTs in the regions of Herat and Farah as well as a Front Organizations Founded (a logistic base) in Herat on May 31, 2006. Two more ISAF-led PRTs in the west went into action at the start of September; one was in Qala-i-Naw, the headquarters of the Badghis District, and the other was in Chaghcharan, the seat of the Ghor Region. This brought an end to ISAF's western expansion. In total, nine PRTs under the expanded ISAF operation were deployed in the north and west to help secure 50% of Afghanistan. The Alliance persisted in making arrangements for the expansion of ISAF towards the nation's south. In order to promote the 18 September regional and legislative elections, the Alliance also briefly sent 2,000 more soldiers to Afghanistan in September 2005 (NATO, 2021c).

Towards South

The NATO Ambassadors approved a proposal on December 8th, 2005, paving the way for more ISAF involvement and participation in Afghanistan. The establishment of ISAF in the South in 2006 was the initial part of this strategy. This was put into action on July 31, 2006, when the US-led allied forces handed control of Afghanistan's southern area to ISAF, which then expanded its operation zone to include six more territories and took complete control of four more PRTs. Overseeing approximately 3 half of Afghanistan's land were 13 PRTs under the command of the extended ISAF. Before and after the extension, the proportion of ISAF forces in the nation more than doubled, from roughly 10,000 to about 20,000 (CRS, 2009).

Towards East

Having over leadership of the global armed units in eastern Afghanistan from the US-led alliance, ISAF completed its extension phase on October 5, 2006. The updated action plan increased the Alliance's theater of responsibility and allowed for a more extensive ISAF presence in the nation. In particular, troops of the Afghan National Army at all levels of the hierarchy received assistance from ISAF coaching and developing groups.

The Transition Era

ISAF Conversion to Afghan Lead

ISAF was initially sent to Afghanistan to provide safety around Kabul's capital. Still, by the second quarter of 2006, its mission had been steadily extended to include the entire nation. In 2007 and 2008, as ISAF's presence grew in the country's east and south, its soldiers spent more time battling an expanding insurrection while somehow attempting to aid Afghanistan's reconstruction. A new mitigate started in 2009, and an additional 40,000 soldiers were sent into the field. The Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) received technical assistance from SAF, coaching, and mentorship as part of the Afghan administration's and the global society's efforts to modernize the institutional framework (ANP). The objective was to create competent, autonomous, and long-lasting forces that could guarantee Afghan citizens' safety all across the nation.

The European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan), as well as other major national players, took this out activity along with the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) and ISAF's Joint Command (IJC). Whereas the IJC was in charge of creating fielded ANSF units through advice and assistance, NTM-A concentrated on teaching first trainees and improving the organizational education competence of the ANSF (NATO, 2021a). As the ANSF strengthened and improved, a progressive conversion to total Afghan security commitment was started in July 2011, with the intention of having Afghan forces entirely in charge of protection throughout the nation by the end of 2014. This goal was previously agreed upon with the Afghan government at the Conference Held in Lisbon in 2010 and was reiterated at the NATO Summits in Chicago in 2012 and Wales in 2014. This caused ISAF's mission to gradually shift from directing actions to empowering the Afghan security forces to carry out solo activities independently.

This means that ISAF's mandate changed from one that was mainly combat-focused to one that enabled Security Force Assistance (SFA), with a concentration on coaching and supporting its Afghan allies to have them ready to take their security responsibilities by the end of 2014 completely. As the ANSF advanced toward a specific objective, the ISAF forces progressively withdrew and began to return to their home nations. Following the ANSF's ability to control the situation in

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 the region, this withdrawal happened in a planned, careful, and progressive manner. An essential landmark occurred on June 18, 2013, when the Afghan administration declared the fifth and final set of transformation regions. With that announcement, the ANSF assumed responsibility for safety nationwide, marking a crucial step toward achieving full Afghan precautions to take by the end of 2014 (NATO, 2021d).

Effects of NATO Troops' Withdrawal from Afghanistan

At the Bonn International Conference on Afghanistan in December 2011, it was determined that all NATO forces would leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014. It was also resolved that the ANSF would be given complete control of security strategy when the international forces left. This departure plan was promoted as the cornerstone for establishing a stable Afghanistan, linked to hazy commitments for the continuation of NATO detachments in the nation and initiatives to seek a regional resolution to the conflict. The current situation, though, is very distinct. To maintain safety and peace across the nation, the ANSF still needs to be sufficiently prepared and armed. Events like the raid and hostage-taking at an opulent resort in Qarga Lake close to Kabul in June 2012 point to the persistence of Taliban forces capable of using force. The notion that it is currently unknown how often ISAF personnel will stay in the nation after 2014 and for what purposes are another factor.

Proposals for early departures, like those made public by the newly appointed French president François Hollande at the Conference Held in Chicago in May 2012, are making the partners increasingly uneasy (GIGA, 2012). Additionally, the successful delegation of duty to key stakeholders or the settlement of local disputes that the US is looking for could only be attained over the foreseeable future due to the substantial interest conflicts that exist among all the participants. NATO, Pakistan, and the Karzai administration are all at odds with each other at this time. The Afghanistan Conference in Bonn established a 2014 deadline for ensuring a secure Afghanistan. However, it is dubious that this can be attainable. India, Iran, China, and Afghanistan's bordering countries in Central Asia are among the significant players closely observing the trends in Afghanistan. The future shifts in US tactics and the departure of Western forces from Afghanistan will primarily impact these countries.

The Shift of US Foreign Policy

A radically new US international security strategy drove the ISAF force departure and the start of the Transition era in Afghanistan in 2014. This transformation was hastened by a number of additional variables, chief among them the business and market crisis, which significantly impacted Barack Obama's victory in the US Senate. Since President Obama came into office in 2009, the US has prioritized financial stabilization, military prudence, and efforts to decentralize accountability for security strategy among partner

nations. As an illustration, all special forces were removed from Iraq in 2011, and the partners were given military command of the NATO mission in Libya the following year. Regarding the situation in Afghanistan, the shift in US security and foreign policy is especially apparent. In an address at the US Training Center at West Point in December President Obama proposed a gradual withdrawal of US forces beginning in 2011 (Hanlon, 2011).

Afterward, these departure strategies were broadly accepted by the global community during the International Conference on Afghanistan that took place in London in January 2010. The foundation of the strategic plan was the launch of brand-new "warfighting" tactics, a hazy description of delivering tasks from the ISAF to the ANSF starting in winter 2010/11 and the reentry of players who are prepared to end the terrorism - a slang term for making a deal with modest Taliban members. It was also highlighted during the London Conference that finding a global peace settlement was necessary and that Afghanistan could act as a "territory" connecting several countries, including South and Central Asia, the Near East, and East Asia. The path selected in London was taken in the preceding years. The departure of 10,000 US forces by the end of 2011 and another 33,000 by the spring of 2011 was confirmed by President Obama in a speech in June 2011. By 2014, the ISAF's security duties should have been transferred to the ANSF.

Regional Player China

China's Interest in Afghanistan

China's fears about the potential impact of Afghan volatility on separatists in its western province of Xinjiang and its commercial assets are two factors driving China's interests in Afghanistan. There is some proof that Al-Qaeda and the TTP may have recruited, equipped, and provided cover for the Uyghur separatist organization ETIM. The increased efforts by these militants to damage Chinese projects worry China as it seeks a growing financial presence in Afghanistan. Beijing also worries that ETIM terrorists may cross the challenging Sino-Afghan frontier to carry out strikes in Xinjiang and other places. As a result, Afghanistan's security is strongly related to China's plan for economic advancement. Meanwhile, contrary to demands from NATO nations, China has been hesitant to participate militarily in Afghanistan. On the other hand, after US alliances left the area in 2016, Beijing might need to reconsider its plans to protect its own objectives (Akhtar, 2015). In addition to promising to provide more developmental and financial aid to Afghanistan after the transition, China has also vowed to participate in efforts to foster improving social there. A Silk Road Economic Belt connecting China to Europe via Central Asia and the Middle East is being developed. China sees Afghanistan as a gateway for greater economic dominance in the Central Asian region.

China's national expenditures in manufacturing and rough commodities expenditures could be supplemented by the New Silk Road program, increasing its financial presence in Afghanistan. Despite China's insistence that it has no ambition to fill the U.S.'s position in Afghanistan, the designation of a special envoy for Afghan matters shows that China is committed to building a long-term duty to serve Afghanistan. China currently provides \$260 million in examples of business for Afghan enterprises (The Express Tribune, 2021). An electricity and transportation system, existing housing creation, the exploitation of mineral wealth, joint Sino-Indian schools and clinics in Afghanistan, and other minor foreign ventures are among the future growth projects. But China has come under fire for allegedly taking advantage of the security situation that has been maintained by American and ISAF troops for the past 14 years while not making any significant military contributions or providing any weapons or support to the Afghan national troops. In order to guarantee geopolitical security in the region as the United States prepares to remove its troops, China will require to work with its neighbors Pakistan.

Pak-China Relation After ISAF

Pakistan's importance to China

The closer political relations between China and Pakistan are the main benefit for China in coordinating its Afghan strategies with that nation. China considers Pakistan's extensive experience managing Afghan affairs a great asset. Pakistan stepped along to contribute its expertise once China started to pay heed to Afghanistan, which sparked mutual trust. In marked contradiction to this, Pakistan and the United States have poor relations concerning Afghanistan. The U.S.-Pakistan relationship has been hampered by mistrust and suspicion of each other's loyalty and intentions, even though Islamabad has benefited greatly militarily and economically from its alliance with Washington. Comparatively, their more substantial strategic planning has made China and Pakistan's cooperation in Afghanistan easier. Since Joe Biden's inauguration as president, Pakistan has started making deliberate efforts to reestablish its connection with the United States (KHAN, 2021). Pakistan's geopolitical conundrum was simply outlined in an article in Dawn the day following Qureishi's phone talk with Blinken.

Through the CPEC, Pakistan has made significant recent investments in its partnership with China. The U.S. is currently embroiled in a challenging relationship with China, which makes Pakistan precarious. The article also stressed the necessity for Islamabad to "find the correct ratio" when it comes to Pakistan's relations with China and the United States and to avoid "enlarging one relation at the detriment of the other." (Aslam & Lodhi, 2021) In other words, Islamabad would find it challenging to maintain cordial relations with the Biden

government if it did not work with the White House to ensure a peaceful transition in Kabul.

Conflict with India

China views Pakistan as a more trustworthy partner due to their shared conflict with India's neighbor, even though China and Russia are reviving their strategic cooperation on several problems, including Afghanistan. No other nation is as pertinent to Beijing's regional concerns or as eager to advance them as Pakistan. This aspect of India-Pakistan ties has been continuous and is connected to Pakistan's continued ambition to "reverse" Jammu and Kashmir's integration into India. Regarding dealing with India, Pakistan's governing system had only a few general notions before Pakistan's loss to India in 1971 and the consequent creation of Bangladesh. However, under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan's answer to its setback in 1971 was to embark on the nuclear road and fortify relations with China. Since then, powerful factions within the command of the Pakistan Army have believed that using undercover action over India may be a successful strategy for forcing India to submit. Furthermore, Pakistan's geopolitical stance toward India has benefited China primarily (Wenbin & Kaura, 2021).

Pakistan - The Mediator

In the 1990s and more subtly after 9/11, Pakistan actively endorsed the Taliban. According to this, China asserted that it opposed religious extremism and considered it a danger to its own domestic security. These disagreements did not, however, impact their diplomatic ties because China declined to put in doubt Pakistan's justification for backing the Taliban. Additionally, Pakistan ensured that its anti-Taliban policies' unfavorable effects did not harm China's objectives. In order to prevent Uyghur separatists from finding refuge in Afghanistan during the Taliban's control from 1996 to 2001, Pakistan encouraged China's close communication with the group (Rubin, 2021). As a mediator between China and the Taliban, Pakistan persisted in its position. China started to establish direct ties with the Taliban afterward when foreign politics acquired impetus to resolve issues between the Taliban and the Kabul administration. If that happens, the Taliban are likely to secure that Chinese assets are undisturbed once they regain power. Pakistan continues to be the critical element pulling the Taliban and the West closer, despite China's good relations with the latter. Furthermore, Pakistan is the sole nation that can help China with other goals, including the BRI's implementation, connectivity projects, development needs, diplomatic requirements, economic support, commerce, investments, etc.

Conclusion

The U.S. ultimately left Afghanistan after multiple failed operations, leaving the country in a dilemma. China's diplomatic and economic benefits make it quite concerned about potential threats as, Afghanistan is most likely to stay an insecure nation. Beijing's policy will be prompted by the need to keep peace in and around Afghanistan, which implies that its

primary strategy will be to keep enhancing cooperation with Pakistan and the Taliban and co-opting the Afghan security forces. China's defense strategy is severely impeded by the fact that Afghanistan's ongoing volatility continues at the core of numerous non-traditional international security problems. For China to accomplish its diplomatic and economic aims,

different initiatives that not only allow China's economic transition and somewhat help Afghanistan would be required.

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