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## Afghanistan Misperceives China as an Honest Broker in Peace Process:

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Contemporaneously, with the conflictual state of US-China relations, any speculation on emergence of China as an honest broker in Afghan peace processes in the wake of impending US Forces exit from Afghanistan is fallacious and misperceived and thus ignoring US global national security interests.

It is my firm belief that while United States may be drawing-down its US Forces presence in Afghanistan, presumably due to election year dynamics, the United States is not liquidating its vital national strategic interests on Afghanistan. In 2020, the United States can ill-afford to facilitate China's political, economic and strategic embedment in Afghanistan.

China's demonstrated political record on Afghanistan in the last three decades stands out as heavily determined by proclivities to unreservedly support and further strategic objectives of Pakistan Army and its Afghan Taliban protégé. Any speculation therefore on China playing a positive and honest broker's role in Afghanistan is fallacious.

Some in Afghanistan misperceive that China could emerge as an honest peace broker by prevailing on Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban for return of peace and stability in Afghanistan in the wake of possible impending exit of US Military Forces from the country. Such Afghan misperceptions grossly ignore the centrality of Pakistan and Pakistan Army in China's strategic calculus.

The grim strategic historical reality which advocates such misperceptions of some in Afghanistan and in the United States need to face, is that China was virtually complicit in Pakistan Army's imposition of brutal medieval Islamic Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban was Pakistan's proxy regime in Kabul to secure Pakistan Army's strategic blueprint on Afghanistan as a servile satellite state of Pakistan

providing Pakistan with strategic depth against India.

During the decade preceding United States military intervention in Afghanistan to dislodge the Taliban regime in Kabul in wake of horrific 9/11 attacks on US Homeland's citadels of power, China was noticeably impassive in checkmating Pakistan Army's and Taliban's brutal subjugation of Afghanistan.

More noticeable and politically repulsive was that China deviating from global revulsion of Taliban regime in Kabul was the only nation other than Pakistan which maintained diplomatic relations with the Taliban regime in Kabul.

In fact, China assiduously and in a well calibrated manner cultivated links with Taliban and no one should be surprised that this included provision of military hardware and financial assistance via Pakistan Army channels.

Regrettably for Afghanistan, at a crucial juncture in its war-torn history, China as benefactor and strategic patron of Pakistan could have stepped-in to checkmate Pakistan Army's and Taliban unrestrained depraved depredations of a politically prostrate Afghanistan. China noticeably failed to do so.

China therefore stands out in not being a responsible stakeholder in Afghanistan's peace and stability when Afghanistan's citizens needed it most. On the contrary, China emerged ingloriously as tacitly complicit in Pakistan Army's subjugation of Afghanistan by proxy use of Afghan Taliban ---a creation of the Pakistan Army.

The follow-up years of 2001-20 provide no substantial evidence that China's strategic priorities according centrality to Pakistan in its South Asian policy formulations has undergone significant change vis-à-vis Afghanistan to prompt perceptions that China has recast its Afghanistan policy formulations by divorcing Pakistan and Pakistan's obsession of Afghanistan as a satellite state of Pakistan.

The geopolitical and strategic picture in 2020 obtaining of Pakistan and Afghanistan vis-à-vis China is that Pakistan today has lapsed into 'colonial bondage' of China in comprehensive terms and Afghanistan still continues to be conflictual and strife-torn due to Afghan Taliban terrorism and suicide bombings with direct support of Pakistan Army and oblique support and assistance of China.

Auditing the above reality –check of prevailing strategic realities there exist no convincing grounds that China in 2020 is inclined to ignore Pakistan Army's strategic objectives in Afghanistan and as a responsible stakeholder in regional security give primacy to Afghanistan's return to normalcy, peace, national reconciliation and stability over Pakistan's strategic objectives in Afghanistan which hardly qualify as benign.

So what are the factors that prompt some in Afghanistan and in United States to perceive that China is ready and inclined to broker a sustainable peace process in Afghanistan wherein China could nudge out Pakistan Army's disruptive role in Afghanistan's political dynamics

and positively respond to the peace yearnings of the vast multitude of Afghanistan's peoples?

Analytically, there is a strange and varying mix of political, economic and strategic reasons which come into play in divining the misperceptions of segments in Afghanistan and United States that China could play a decisive role in brokering peace in Afghanistan sheerly on the strength of its stranglehold in 2020 on Pakistan.

Admittedly, Afghanistan's policy establishment cannot ignore that China as a major and sizeably powerful nation weighs down heavily on Afghanistan's political dynamics with its geographical contiguity. Analytically also, for reasons discussed above in the foregoing paragraphs, Afghanistan cannot equally ignore that China's policy formulations on Afghanistan are secondary to China's primacy given to Pakistan Army and its strategic objectives in Afghanistan.

Politically therefore, not much merit should be accorded by Afghanistan to China's genuinely contributing honestly to materialisation of any political peace processes for Afghanistan which stand in contradiction to Pakistan's interests. Need it to be said that there exists gross political distrust that dominates thinking and perceptions of all right-thinking Afghanistan policy makers on Pakistan's intentions and deeds which any amount of efforts by China or Chinese inducements can sway Afghanistan's thinking.

Economic factors do induce some in Afghanistan that China rich and overflowing in cash surpluses could contribute handsomely to economic reconstruction of war-ravaged Afghanistan. On the face of it such a perception is logical but Chinese economic munificence will be governed by a multitude of factors, chief of which is Pakistan's acquiescence to China's financial investments in Afghanistan.

Pakistan will certainly frown on such Chinese economic initiatives which contribute to emergence of politically stable and economically viable Afghanistan. Additionally in 2020 China's own economic growth stand stalled and will further downslide with the impact of the Corona Virus pandemic which originated from China and has played havoc on Chinese economy.

China's flagship project in Pakistan which was to contribute heavily to Pakistan's economic revival is floundering in 2020 financially and creating misgivings within Pakistan and even strident criticism of Pakistan policy-makers. Would those in Afghanistan who seem to get induced by the economic factors that China could bring to Afghanistan would now not be revising their perceptions?

Moving to the strategic factor, suffice it to say assuredly that the United States even after a military drawdown of US Forces from Afghanistan would not be jettisoning its legitimate strategic interests in Afghanistan. Going by the current state of severe strategic distrust that permeates US-China relations today coupled with the ongoing US-China Trade War which has strategic overtones, the United States would now not be inclined to allow China to get a strategic and economic stranglehold on Afghanistan through the backdoor of heavy economic investments in Afghanistan's post-war reconstruction.

Concluding, one can safely observe that the United States may be planning a military exit from Afghanistan but not a strategic exit from Afghanistan. Contemporaneously, China politically and economically embedded in Afghanistan in a misperceived vacuum that may occur with US Forces drawdown would not be in the best interests of US national security interest. The United States can be expected to impede such an eventuality with its traditional instruments of power. If that be so, then where do any grounds of optimism exist for some in Afghanistan and United States to perceive that China could play the role of an honest broker in bringing back peace to Afghanistan?

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