

**CHINA'S AFGHAN POLICY: TOWARD
A "MARCH WEST" STRATEGY?**

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Executive Summary

1. Traditionally, Afghanistan was of low diplomatic priority for China which did not have strong influence there. Since the outbreak of the war in Afghanistan, China has been keeping the lowest profile among big powers on Afghanistan.
2. However, recent years found that as China's interests in Afghanistan have grown rapidly, there are signs suggesting a gradual shift in stance on Afghanistan from disinterest to growing engagement.
3. Beijing has come to realize that the American counter-terrorism war is actually favorable to China, and it will have to play a more active role in the future of Afghanistan.
4. The Obama administration has also gradually recognized the importance of China's economic role in Afghanistan. As the commander of Afghanistan said, "Economic development, especially in the area of logistics and transit support, should be an essential component of US counterinsurgency strategy. A military only solution in Afghanistan cannot succeed."
5. Given the relatively short transition period to scheduled Afghan sovereignty in 2014, the Obama administration is aware that there is an urgent need to shift from military assistance to sustainable economic development to foster an environment which can create jobs and prosperity for the Afghans.
6. Indications suggest that China is to continue its economic influence in Afghanistan. However, with its rise in national strength and strategic position, China will have to further strengthen its regional security strategy and assume greater responsibility in maintaining regional stability.
7. Indeed, Afghanistan is an ideal channel for China to expand its economic and strategic influence in Central Asia and the Middle East in its "March West"

strategy. Strategically, Washington is retreating from the area, leaving more space to be filled.

8. Unlike in East Asia, the relationship between the US and China there is more congenial, due to their shared interest in investment, anti-terrorism, non-proliferation and regional stability. Such increasing convergence of interests and strategies augurs well for further dynamic cooperation and balanced relations between China and the US.
9. Afghanistan can thus be a theater whereby China and the US can introduce a new framework for cooperation, and eventually help build a more balanced and better US-China relationship through cooperation in the west and on issues such as Afghanistan and Pakistan.