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China as the all-weather Friend of Afghanistan

Today marks the 64th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Afghanistan. These two countries, have maintained an exemplary friendship during this period, no matter how the international situation and our respective domestic affairs have changed. China as a big country has consistently enjoyed positive relations with its Afghan neighbor. Even, after the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, China became one of the first nations to establish official relations with President Hamid Karzai and the Afghan Transitional Authority, reopening its embassy in Kabul in February 2002 and almost immediately provided about \$5 million in emergency humanitarian aid.

This is one of the examples showing the goodwill of China to Afghanistan and it was followed by additional promises of reconstruction aid, as well as steadfast diplomatic support, including China's participation in the Kabul Declaration on Good Neighborly Relations, and supports its peace process with the Taliban and reconstruction efforts. China and Afghanistan subsequently signed multiple bilateral agreements to advance overall relations and facilitate closer and deeper economic and technical cooperation.

Although China has not sent military troops to Afghanistan, it has provided different trainings for Afghan police and mine-clearing teams. Further, China has provided training opportunities for different Afghan institutions both in Afghanistan and China and has provided scholarships for thousands of Afghan students to study in China.

According to economic scholars, the "discovery" of mineral wealth in Afghanistan can bind more tightly the interests of Beijing and Kabul.

China's Potential Contributions

Given the troubles in Aynak, China's Afghan investments, no one expects efforts to lock down mineral resources at the direct expense of China, but as risky but welcome down payments on the future stability of Afghanistan. Indeed, China enjoys a unique position to contribute to the peace and security of the war-torn nation.

To this end, China has concentrated on investments and cultural exchanges, like the opening Confucius Institute at Kabul University, the Aynak project BRI and other major initiatives. If these projects succeed, they will provide local jobs and help put the Afghan economy on surer footing—something that all parties would like to see.

China is helping peace efforts to stabilize the country that enables Afghanistan to attract investment opportunities. Projects like Aynak, BRI, and TAPI have the potentials to generate continuing growth, create jobs, and stimulate other sectors of the economy through contract work. And as the world's single largest user of copper, iron, and almost all other metals, China is one of the most important drivers of the global mining industry. Coupled with its ambitious plans to build extensive transport and energy links with Central Asia, China, along with neighbors like India, is a natural export destination for Afghanistan's minerals. This has far greater economic implications than one-time foreign aid to build roads, for example. China constantly has been helping fill Afghanistan's economic void.

More can clearly be done to harness the potential of Chinese investment to improve the Afghan economy but, at the same time, it is important to maintain a realistic sense of the limits of the endeavor. No country can simply inject money into the right projects and fix the Afghan government, which Transparency International ranked as the fourth most corrupt in the world. Further, we should remind that Chinese investment is not a panacea; it provides just one of the many pieces needed to rebuild the Afghan economy.

Development experts have estimated that Afghanistan will need at least six to eight successful Aynak-sized investments before its economy is on the right track for the long term. Still, Chinese investment gives Afghanistan a realistic chance to begin what will inevitably be a long and arduous process of reconstruction. The outcome for Afghanistan could prove disastrous if they fail. Despite concerns to the contrary, it is in the regional and international players' interest if projects like Aynak, BRI and TAPI succeed.

China as an all-weather friend of Afghanistan has proven that it always stands with the Afghan people; based on this principle, China has been supporting Afghan peace process, different economic projects that benefit Afghanistan including TAPI, BRI, Aynak and have been providing different educational and training opportunities, to ensure sustainable peace and security and helping fill Afghanistan's economic void as well. Thus, the 64th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Afghanistan is a good opportunity to remind that countries regardless of the size and power can live in peace and harmony, and count on each other's support in all conditions.

**Forging Peace Together:
At the 64th Anniversary of Establishment of
Diplomatic Ties between China and Afghanistan**

By: Liu Jinsong

Today marks the 64th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Afghanistan. In the past 64 years, our two countries have maintained a sound friendship no matter how the international situation and our respective domestic affairs have changed. Our relationship exemplifies China's handling of its ties with neighbours and serves as an annotation for new model of international relations and community of shared future.

In China we see many different friendships. The one with Afghanistan is undoubtedly a friendship both old and new, between very different but close countries, and has gone through thick and thin.

This friendship began when our two ancient countries were young. It can go back to ancient times that was renewed and reinvigorated in 1955 with the establishment of diplomatic ties between us. Both countries blazed a trail for the ancient Silk Road. There have already frequent business exchanges and envoy missions over 2000 years ago. Buddhist arts, pomegranate, Lapis and glaze from Afghanistan produced far-reaching historical and cultural influence in China. Xuanzang's Great Tang Records on the Western Regions vividly depicted the local conditions and customs of ancient Afghanistan.

Furthermore, we are the truest and firmest friends. Although the two countries are very different in size and national conditions, we have always known each other well, respected each other and treated each other as equals. In the words of my Afghan friends: China is a big country; but unlike other big countries in the world, China has never bullied Afghanistan nor interfered in its internal affairs. The Afghan people treasure a seasoned friendship with and trust in China.

Additionally, we are the truest and firmest friends. Since modern times, both countries have fought against colonialism, imperialism and hegemony and won national independence at huge expenses. In this process, we have always sympathized with and supported each other. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Afghanistan defeated British aggressors three times. In this connection, Chairman Mao Zedong opened his meeting with King Mohammed Zahir Shah in 1964 with this statement: 'Afghanistan is a heroic country and has never surrendered.'

We are also friends in need. Whenever Afghanistan was suffering hardships and bullies, China always stood by the side of international justice and the Afghan people, sparing no efforts in offering timely help. In return, Afghanistan was among the first Asian countries to recognize New China. It firmly supported the restoration of New China's legitimate seat in the United Nations and voted in our favor. Successive Afghan governments have abided by the one-China principle, understood and supported the Chinese efforts to safeguard its sovereign security in Xinjiang and Tibet.

This year we are celebrating the hundredth anniversary of Afghan independence and seventieth anniversary of the founding of PRC. The two important festivals highlight the value of independence and peace, which are also shared diplomatic objectives of our two countries.

While presenting the Letter of Credence to King Mohammed Zahir Shah in May 1955, General Ding Guoyu, the first Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan, stated in his eulogy that 'both China and Afghanistan are peace-loving countries and the establishment and development of diplomatic relations between the two countries will certainly contribute to peace in Asia and the world.' Ambassador Ding's first report back to Beijing expressed appreciation of the peace, tranquility and development level in Kabul and talked about 'the many nice houses with a garden'.

Mr. Ma Xinghan, Ambassador Ding's attache, recalled that in the 1950s Kabul was neat and elegant, with smooth roads and shops full of specialty goods. Every year, the Afghan government invited song and dance troupes from friendly countries to Afghanistan. With military parade in the daytime and performance in the evenings, Kabul bustled with colorful decorations and human activities in celebration of peace.

Mr. Ma visited Afghanistan again in 2002. This time he saw a city half ruined, with scorched earth and broken walls everywhere. The lonely skeleton of the Darul Aman Palace stood silently on the hillside, with bullet holes on its walls.

Today, Afghanistan is the only country around China still suffering from chaos caused by war. There were 4260 civilian casualties in Afghanistan last year. Severe terrorist attacks took place in Kabul, the capital, with dull explosions and ear-piercing ambulance sirens heard from time to time. We in the Chinese Embassy went to aid refugee camps and orphanages. Expressions in the eyes of refugees and orphans brought us to tears and deep thoughts.

Peace is just like the air and sunshine. People benefit from it without being aware but will hardly survive when it is absent. Without peace, there may be no construction or devel-

opment, let alone dignity or human rights for the ordinary people. After over a century of war and chaos, China won peace at the expense of millions of lives. It is in the peaceful environment that we have been able to advance reform and opening up and pursue a moderately well-off society. Therefore, the Chinese people have deep empathy for the Afghan people with regard to the bitterness of war and the dream for peace.

As President Xi Jinping describes it, the Chinese people always have a sense of justice and compassion, see their future and destiny as linked to the future and destiny of other peoples, pay close attention to and have selflessly helped people still in war, turbulence, hunger or poverty, and stand ready to do their utmost for mankind towards peace and development.

As the new year began, the Chinese lunar probe showed people on Earth for the first time images from the moon's dark side, demonstrating China's ability to innovate and create as well as its will to peacefully use the space. China will, as always, follow the path of peaceful development, pursue an opening-up strategy for win-win and mutual benefit, develop a new model of state-to-state relations, work for a community of shared future for mankind, and promote an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world of lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity.

At the beginning of the year, the Chinese Foreign Minister by convention visited Africa to strengthen strategic communication with our developing brothers, share with them opportunities and experiences of China's development and advance multilateralism and the Belt and Road Initiative. China has developed from being poor and weak into the world's second largest economy not by external expansion or colonial loot and plunder but through hard work and by maintaining peace. No matter how developed it will be in the future, China will never seek hegemony, expansion or sphere of influence.

At the beginning of the year, the DPRK leaders visited China and the Afghan President's National Security Adviser also went to Beijing for very timely and fruitful talks with our leaders. To fulfill the role of a major country, we are carrying out the Chinese way of addressing hotspot issues by adhering to the principle of peace, legitimacy and constructiveness and putting forward our proposals for tough problems with regard to the Korean Peninsula, Afghanistan.

China hopes that the Afghan people will embrace peace in the new year. It maintains that all political forces in Afghanistan should put the interests of the state and the nation first, move closer towards one another, arrive at an early ceasefire and peace talks and pursue inclusive political solutions. The Chinese have been working for peace and facilitating talks. Believing that the Afghan question should ultimately be decided by all Afghans and that all relevant parties should respect the Afghan sovereignty, the Afghan people's will and the Afghan government's role, we firmly support the Afghan government in maintaining national security and stability and advancing the 'Afghan-led, Afghan-owned' political reconciliation process.

Both victims of terrorism, China and Afghanistan stand side by side on the front line of international anti-terror effort. The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and other international terrorist forces threaten both countries. China opposes terrorism in all its forms and stands for combating terrorism by tackling its symptoms and root causes at the same and through strengthened international cooperation. Chinese law enforcement and security agencies stand ready to deepen cooperation with Afghanistan in counter-terrorism, border security, institutional and personnel security.

China maintains that Afghanistan should become a place of cooperation rather than gaming among major countries. We support Afghanistan to improve relations with its neighbors and enhance interconnectivity. China advocates and champions the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue, the second of which was successfully held last December. The three parties signed a memorandum of understanding on anti-terror cooperation, laying down the foundation for further enhancing mutual trust and deepening cooperation. The anti-terror cooperation and coordination mechanism between the militaries of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and Tajikistan, and the China-India plus Afghanistan cooperation all contribute to the peaceful development of Afghanistan.

In the 64 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations, China and Afghanistan have been of the same mind and worked together for peace. In the new year, we will deepen the strategic partnership of cooperation and jointly advance the Belt and Road Initiative, thus introducing more stabilizing factors to Afghanistan and for regional peace and bringing more peace dividends to our two peoples.

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